

DOI: 10.24412/2470-1262-2022-1-17-27

УДК (UDC) 82-311.4

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For citation: Bouilov Vassili V. (2023).

On Some Difficulties in Translating Andrei Platonov's Prose
Cross-Cultural Studies: Education and Science,
Vol. 8, Issue 1 (2023), pp. 17-27 (in USA)

Manuscript received 21/02/2023

Accepted for publication: 26/03/2023

The author has read and approved the final manuscript.

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ON SOME DIFFICULTIES IN TRANSLATING ANDREI PLATONOV'S PROSE

О НЕКОТОРЫХ ТРУДНОСТЯХ ПЕРЕВОДА ПРОЗЫ АНДРЕЯ ПЛАТОНОВА

Abstract:

Andrey Platonov's idiostyle, built on an artistic mixture of different styles, the two-dimensionality, ambivalence and implicativity of the author's discourse, the intentional linguistic coding of hidden meanings, the connotative nature of the text are the main challenges for the translator of Platonov's prosaic text. In this connection, it would be appropriate for the translator to consider the problem of the translatability of literary "encoded" Platonov's text. In the process of translating this text, it should be considered not only its linguistic side, but also all other extralinguistic and cultural components that predetermine Andrei Platonov's idiostyle. *The analysis of Thomas Whitney's English translation of Andrei Platonov's short novel The Foundation Pit* presented in the article assumes a detailed lingua-translatological consideration of short novel's text and the ways and means of expressing in Whitney's translation the functions of the source text, determined by Platonov's creative method and his idiostyle.

Keywords: translation strategy, foreignizing, quasi-language of Utopia, Novoyaz, diglossia, ideological clichés, Andrei Platonov's idiostyle, literary collision of Utopia and Dystopia, implicativity, metonymy, hypernymic synecdoche, hypernyms, hyponyms, amphibolia

Аннотация:

Идиостиль Андрея Платонова, построенный на художественном смешении разных стилей, двуплановость, амбивалентность и имплицативность авторского дискурса, намеренная языковая закодированность скрытых смыслов, коннотативная природа этого текста являются вызовами для переводчика платоновского прозаического текста. В этой связи переводчику приходится принимать во внимание проблему переводимости литературно «закодированного» платоновского текста. При осуществлении перевода этого текста должна учитываться не только лингвистическая сторона, но и все другие экстралингвистические и культурные составляющие, предопределяющие идиостиль Андрея Платонова. Представленный в статье анализ перевода Томаса Уитни на английский язык повести Андрея Платонова «Котлован» предполагает детальное лингво-переводоведческое рассмотрение текста «Котлована» и способов и средств выражения в переводе Уитни функций исходного текста, обусловленных творческим методом Платонова и его идиостилем.

Ключевые слова: Переводческая стратегия, форенизация, квазиязык Утопии, Новояз, диглоссия, идеологические клише, идиостиль Андрея Платонова, художественное столкновение Утопии и Антиутопии, имплицативность, метонимия, гиперонимическая синекдоха, гиперонимы, гипонимы, амфиболия

Introduction

The material of the study in this article is the text of A. Platonov's short novel *The Foundation Pit*. The original text is quoted from the source: [17]. The text of the English translation of *The Foundation Pit* made in 1973 by Thomas P. Whitney is taken for carrying out a translational comparative analysis of the original text and the translation. The English translation of the short novel is cited according to the source: [15].

In the *Preface* written by Joseph Brodsky to the publication by Ardis Publishing House in 1973, Thomas Whitney, the author of the English translation of Andrey Platonov's short novel *The Foundation Pit* is presented as an experienced translator of Russian literature who worked in the Soviet Union many years as a correspondent. His publications include two significant anthologies, *The New Writing in Russia* and *The Young Russians*, and also an English translation of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's novel *In the First Circle*.

In the following years after the translation by Thomas Whitney, several translations of *The Foundation Pit* into English were made: Platonov 1975, *Tr. M. Ginsburg* [16]; Platonov 1996, *Tr. R. Chandler, G. Smith* [18]; Platonov 2009, *Tr. R. Chandler, E. Chandler, O. Meerson* [19].

The special translational interest in this article in Thomas Whitney's translation is based on the important fact that the *Preface* to the publication of *The Foundation Pit's* Bilingual Edition was written by the poet and the outstanding master of literary expression Joseph Brodsky, who fully supported and blessed the publication of this first and only translation of the short novel at that time, in 1973. Another reason for the special translational interest in Thomas Whitney's translation is the fact that it was a *bi-lingual edition with publishing the original text of The Foundation Pit and its English linguistically*

oriented translation. For its part, *Ardis Publishing House* is a well-known American and the largest foreign publishing house specializing in publishing Russian literature in the original language and in English translation.

Discussion

The lingua-translatological analysis of *The Foundation Pit's* text carried out in this article includes the lingua-stylistic part of the research, conducted simultaneously with the translational research. In this analysis the special attention is paid to the linguistic factors that underlie the saturation of *The Foundation Pit's* text with vivid and often occasional author's figures of speech and forms of artistic expressiveness.

The presence of many apparently objective elements of future postmodern poetics in *The Foundation Pit* allows to classify this Platonov's key literary work as peculiar Russian, or more precisely, Platonov's forerunner of European postmodernism of the 50-60s [6, p. 46; 9, p. 106]. These features of postmodernism are such properties of Platonov's text as the concentrated Menippean nature of its entire artistic space, genre versatility, fragmentation, ambivalence, implicativeness of the narrative, the widespread use of allegorical means and Aesopian language, allegorism, grotesqueness, radical carnivalization of the plot, a special poignant and bitter self-irony, which miraculously developed into a unique Platonic creative worldview [9, p. 108].

Andrei Platonov's partial refusal to conform to the norms of the Russian literary language can be considered as the most serious complication and a special object of interest for translators. Platonov deliberately brings varieties of radical semantic and syntactic deformations into the text. In the case of *The Foundation Pit* a starting point for a possible translation strategy could be what Lawrence Venuti [24] calls 'foreignizing' translation – the registering of linguistic and cultural values of the foreign text in the target culture.

The present analysis thus tries to assess whether Whitney's translation has preserved the foreign elements: Platonov's idiosyncrasy and the nature of his mixed language of Utopia and Anti-Utopia. The analysis of different translator's decisions in the process of translating *The Foundation Pit* will most likely shed some light on the problematics of translation studies in general.

Novoyaz As the Language of Utopia, And Its Translation

Thomas Whitney succeeded in the main in accomplishing a task in the transmission of one of the basic peculiarities of Platonov's language, which is based on the reflection in this "language" of all the typical features of the language of the Soviet epoch [22; 10]. The Soviet era, as a dramatic process of creation and implementation of a social Utopia, is notable for the birth of a new, transformed, "Soviet language" modified in comparison with the Russian literary language and called "Novoyaz". Its main task was to represent and defend the prevailing political dogma. This "quasi-language of Utopia" was used in a certain social and speech sphere as an annex to the national language created by a politically dominant social group [7, pp. 6-7]. This language is encouraged by the state, shaped by the state, whose existence is based on declarative utopianism [13, p. 273].

The "language of utopia" in Platonov's prose encompasses the rhetoric of Marxist-Leninist political dogma and Soviet bureaucratism [23, p. 11; 20; 21]. Andrei Platonov uses the language and semiotics of the totalitarian system to fight the system. This "quasi-language" of utopia can be relatively distinguished as one of two basic components of the *Russian national linguistic diglossia* [12; 14; 2, p. 30; 3; 4, p. 8; 5, p. 96], as a secondary semiotic system – "an annex" to the literary Russian language created for an exceptional use in a certain political and ideological socium. It acts as a lexically and stylistically marked signal which helps to select "their people" from ideological and political aliens. This "language" acts as "a blotting", "a ticket" for passing into the determined, isolated zone of class and ideological communication. By creating "the language of utopia" they indirectly, or more often attentively, frustrated the national literary language.

In the process of translation Thomas Whitney successfully reproduces the language of ideology reflected by Platonov in *The Foundation Pit* – the language of declarations and prescriptions, slogans, and propaganda posters – a convenient language for the proclamation of new "ideal society" [13, p. 275]. The new Soviet language was generated by the usage of a limited set of communicative and ideological clichés. Only selected people can think, but all others must work. Only certain people can contrive ideas and thoughts: others must learn and use them mechanically. In a totalitarian society people are forced to use ready phrases "stored up" by their political leaders. In "this "language of Utopia" the natural cognitive process of creating thoughts is replaced by a mechanical substitution of "ready-made" clichéd semanticized images and planned behaviorist clichés. By compelling people to act and think in that manner the ideologists succeed in the formation of a human "normalized" (the expression of A. Platonov) mass that is vulnerable to any kind of manipulation and directed programming [10, p. 165].

Thomas Whitney mostly uses *a literal translation strategy* to reflect this clichéd nature of the Novoyaz. In so doing, he produces a 'broken language' effect in English, thus producing the same effect as the original. In trying to find exact denotations (denotative meanings) for the words of the source text in English he often breaks the norms of the target language. Sometimes he obtains the equivalence of such degree when the source and the target texts are equal to each other [here and later the source and target text quotations, and their page numbers, will be taken from the following publications: [17; 15]. For example:

Около кузни висел на плетне возглас, нарисованный по флагу: "За партию, за верность ей, за ударный труд, пробивающий пролетариату двери в будущее..." [17, p. 86]

Next to the smithy hung a slogan on a banner: "For the Party, for loyalty to it, for shock labour which is breaking open the door into the future for the proletariat." [15, p. 136]

In Platonov's attributive construction *ударный труд* (*shock labour*) we can see the "reviving" of the internal form of the attribute *ударный* (*shock – striking*). *The actualization of the latent predicativity of the verbal adjective ударный* (*shock*), made by Platonov, results

in a radical semantic expansion of the expression. Thus, here we have ударный труд (*shock labour*) which is literally "striking and breaking open the doors into the future for the proletariat".

The literal translation of this sentence by Thomas Whitney does not conform to the norms of the English language. Neither does Platonov's source text conform to the norms of the Russian language. Here, Thomas Whitney employs the very same grammatical model which Platonov uses in his text for the grammatical realization of his pragmatical intentions and which is based on activating the constructions *shock labour – to break open*.

Thus, the use of the literal translation by Thomas Whitney leads to a complete reconstruction of the peculiarities of the poetics of Utopia in the target text. The poetics of utopia is characterized in the source and the target texts by artificial and stylistically incorrect confusion of clichés (*shock labour*) and words of high style (*the door into the future*). It expresses the connotations of the original text in the target text and the emotional and logical substance of Soviet propaganda slogans. It also helps to recreate the distinctive features of Platonov's idiosyncrasy as well as to demonstrate the author's critical and ironic interpretation of the quasi-language of Utopia.

Platonov's use of the ideological clichés in the capacity of the stylistic device gives rise to a considerable satirical effect. In using them, Platonov severely criticizes the primitiveness of the propaganda, the mythologization of ideology, the collectivist, stereotyped, clichéd way of speaking and thinking:

Сафронов, заметив пассивное молчание, стал *действовать вместо радио*:

– Поставим вопрос: откуда взялся русский народ? И ответим: из *буржуазной мелочи*. Он бы и еще откуда-нибудь родился, да больше места не было. А потому мы должны *бросить каждого в рассол социализма, чтоб с него слезла шкура капитализма и сердце обратило внимание на жар жизни вокруг костра классовой борьбы и произошел бы энтузиазм...* [17, p. 47]

Safronov, observing the passive silence, began *to act in place of the radio*:

"Let us put the question; where did the Russian people originate from? And let us reply: from out of *bourgeois small fry*! The Russian people might have been born from somewhere else, but there was other place. And therefore we *must hurl everyone into the brine of socialism so that the hide of capitalism will come off them easily and so their hearts will pay attention to the heat of life around the bonfire of class struggle, and so enthusiasm should take place!..*" [15, p. 63]

The literal translation of this fragment by Thomas Whitney does not conform to the norms of the English language. Neither does Platonov's source text conform to the norms of the Russian language. Whitney uses here the word for word type of translation. As usual, he does not change the disposition of the sentences, nor does he make abridgements in the translation. The target text does not correspond to the norms of English, but all connotations of the source text are preserved in full measure.

All the translated fragment is "impregnated" with the same ideological, absurd falsity as the fragment of the source text. *The irrelevant and redundant confusion of the words of the different styles* transferred from the original text into the translation produces the sharp satirical effect. Thus, in the process of translation Thomas Whitney comes across the problem of expressing the features of the epoch described by Andrei Platonov in *The Foundation Pit*. For the translation he selects lexical and grammatical elements which are specific to the Soviet Novoyaz of that time, and which allow him to keep the necessary historical perspective.

In many cases, because of the appearance of serious linguistic differences, Thomas Whitney could not reproduce the linguistic peculiarities of the original text in the translation without radical semantic and lexical changes. Then he has to take into account the fact that the conformity of the target text with the norms of the target language is inapplicable, owing to the known distinctive features of Platonov's language. All these circumstances make him to resort to a *renovative (recreative) translation strategy*. By using this type of translation, he succeeds in forming new occasional words, since, in his language and culture, many notions, national and ideological realities and views represented in Platonov's work are lacking [1, p. 14].

Thus, Thomas Whitney tries to solve the most important translating task, which is directed towards reproducing the distinctive features of Platonov's unique style. He changes the traditional word usage in the system of the English language by expanding the frames of lexical combinatorial capacity. Here he goes from the formally precise reproduction of certain elements of the source text despite the norms of the target language. As a result, he achieves a higher degree of expressiveness by creating *extra-linear lexical meanings of words* and reproducing with the help of his imagination *new occasional words and terms in English*. This approach of Thomas Whitney can be considered as a success for a valuable reconstruction of the individual originality of the source text. His method helps him to reproduce in the translation Platonov's "broken" word usage and the stylistic "incorrectness" of his idiostyle.

Metonymy: Hypernymic Synecdoche (Гиперонимическая синекдоха)

Along with the consideration of the general figurativeness of the source and target texts, the important role in the analysis of Thomas Whitney's translation presented in the article is played by the study of such a characteristic trope for the writer's style as *metonymy* and the ways of its expression in the translation, and specifically *some of its forms* used by Platonov as occasional author's constructions, grammatical models and means of artistic expression. Used for the purpose of artistically embodying the idea of this literary work, they urgently require the translator not only to creatively develop ways of expressing the emotional and expressive impact inherent in them in the translated text, but also, to the possible extent, to more accurately conveying the formal linguistic features inherent in the writer's idiostyle [8, p. 43].

In working with Platonov's prose, a translator has to activate such features of the target language as polysemy and lexical and semantic variance. Very often such semantic

deformations have an occasional and artificial character which practically presupposes a need for the translator's active and creative personal interference and *foreignizing contribution*.

However, sometimes *the semantic ambiguity of Platonov's text* [11, p. 94] puts Thomas Whitney as a translator in a very difficult position. Andrei Platonov uses *hyponymic synecdoche* to express his special writer's approach to the entire system of existing generic relations in a literary text. For instance, in the following fragment text of *The Foundation Pit*, *hyponyms*, organized according to the principle of subordination of meanings, and corresponding to specific concepts, are often replaced by *hypernyms* corresponding to the generic concept *to bring the species under the genus*, as can be seen in the following example:

Чиклин, желая отдыха *ребёнку*, стал ждать *его* пробуждения <...> [17, p. 46]

Chiklin, wanting *the child* to rest, began to wait for *her* awakening <...> [15, p. 62]

The noun *ребёнок/child* in the specific context of "The Foundation Pit" is a hypernym in relation to the hyponym *девочка/girl*. Platonov's use of certain deictic elements (in this sentence, *ego/his*) also serves to implement the Platonov's setting for the widespread subsuming of species under genus. Whitney's translation complies with the norms of the English language. Here can be stated only a partial transmission of the semiotic expansion implied by Platonov.

The translator's mistake here lies in the fact that despite the use in the translation, as in the original, of the hypernym *the child*, the possible conceptual Platonov's connotation is removed due to the unforeseen presence of the deictic word *her* in the text of the translation, which determines the *child's* belonging to the female sex and which is purposefully omitted by Platonov. Such a conceptual miscalculation brings the translation strategy to naught when solving a specific translation task in this translation fragment.

In the following example, Platonov uses the same position of hypernymy, according to which the noun *ребёнок/child* is a hypernym in relation to the hyponym *девочка/girl*. At the same time, Platonov also includes deictic elements in the text for the *author's deliberate subsuming of species under genus*. Deictic vocabulary is represented here by the pronouns *он/he* and *его/his*:

Чиклин внимательно всмотрелся в *ребенка* – *не поврежден ли он* в чем со вчерашнего дня, цело ли полностью *его* тело; но *ребенок* был весь исправен, только лицо *его* горело от внутренних младенческих сил. [17, p. 89]

Chiklin looked at *the girl* attentively – to see, if somehow *she* had been harmed since the day before, but *the child* was quite intact and in running order; only *her* face burned with the inner power of youth. [15, p. 143]

It is possible to hypothetically state that the norms of the English language would allow in this case the *use of the deictic words it and its* in translation, which do not directly indicate gender. However, in Whitney's translation, the deictic words *she* and *her*, contrary to Platonov's authorial intention, clearly indicate that the child belongs to the female sex.

Thus, if Whitney's translation complies with the norms of the English language, *the translator's conceptual error* again comes to the fore here, caused by use of *the hyponym the girl* in the translation to translate *the hypernym* of the original text *ребёнок/child*, and the use of *clarifying deictic words she and her*, directly pointing to the child's belonging to the female sex. As in the previous case, this insufficiently careful reading of the original by the translator destroys the author's conceptual discourse, which is concretely embedded in this fragment of Platonov's text.

In the following fragment of *The Foundation Pit*, Platonov, by using the technique of hyperonymic synecdoche, skilfully creates an artistic generic characterization of a certain animated subject, devoid of any specificity: not a bird, a cow or a dog, but *маленькое животное/a small animal*:

<...> и только одно маленькое животное кричало где-то на светлеющем теплом горизонте, тоскуя или радуясь. [17, p. 37]

<...> and only one *small animal* was crying somewhere out on the brightening warm horizon, being sad or being glad. [15, p. 45]

The noun *животное/animal* acts as a *hypernym* in relation to *the hyponyms птица, корова, собака/bird, cow, dog*, etc. It is paradoxical that if the reader of *The Foundation Pit* wanted to understand what kind of animal he is talking about, the reverse transition in the text from *the hypernym* to *the hyponym* would be impossible without obtaining additional information and specifying the signified, since the meaning of *the hyponym* is semantically more complicated.

Whitney's translation was carried out in accordance with the norms of the English language. The hypernym *животное* is translated literally as *animal* – and this is equivalent to the Platonov's context. We must state that the translator's mistake, which again crept into the translation of this fragment, is caused by the fact that he "falls into a trap" here, not related to the use of hyperonymic metonymy in the translation, but *due to completely different circumstances*. The fact is that the phrase of the original *одно маленькое животное кричало* here is translated as *one small animal was crying*.

If one carefully reads the English translation of this phrase, then from the context it is impossible to understand what this *одно маленькое животное/one small animal* is doing – whether it is *кричит/screaming* or *плачет/crying, тоскуя или радуясь/longing or rejoicing*. The English verb *to cry* is polysemic and, depending on the context, can have two different meanings: *to cry – кричать* and *to cry – плакать*. For complete meaningful clarity, excluding such a semantic dualism, in this Platonov's philosophical and existential context, the Russian verb *кричать* should be translated by the English verb *to scream*.

The deep semantic transformations carried out by Platonov through the author's inclusion of the mechanism of *hyperonymic synecdoche* leads to the creation of an artistic effect of *amphibolia* (*Амфиболія*: from the Greek ἀμφιβολία – *ambiguity, obscurity*), that is, a deliberate confusion of concepts, ambiguity, and duality of the author's figurative description with the predominance of the conceptual, generic over specific, specific. In the context of *The Foundation Pit*, this means the birth of broad philosophical generalizations based on the humanistic vision of life by Platonov, its global philosophical and spiritual context.

Conclusion

The methods used in the analysis of Thomas Whitney's translation are in full accordance with the following theoretical translational provisions derived by Lawrence Venuti [25]. According to Venuti, the translation is aimed at the active reconstruction of a foreign language text burdened with untranslatable linguistic, discursive and ideological differences with the target language of culture. These differences can be formulated using two types of the in-depth translational analysis: firstly, a comparison of the source and translated texts, during which the ratio of losses and successes in translation is examined and the discursive strategy of the translator and any unforeseen circumstances are considered; and, secondly, the study of inconsistencies in the translation itself, a heterogeneous textual work with the aim of cultural assimilation of the materials of the target language, intended to reconstruct the text of the source language, but inevitably supplementing it [25, p. 10].

The adoption of such conditions as the basis for analysing Thomas Whitney's translation raises the demand for observing the reflection of the individual creative originality of the original text in the analysed translation, which finds its expression in the system of using language means and is associated with the author's worldview and his aesthetics. An important characteristic feature of *The Foundation Pit* is an artistic synthesis and collision of Utopia and Dystopia. The biggest difficulty for a translator is Platonov's partial refusal to follow the norms of the Russian literary language.

Using mainly *the foreignizing translation strategy*, Thomas Whitney has to act in his target English text *in defiance of accepted translating norms*. The reasons for such an approach can be found in the individual peculiarities of Platonov's texts, such as formal integrity and indivisibility. The destruction of this integrity could produce a displacement of the whole system of intratextual relations and an infringement of the artistic exclusiveness of Andrei Platonov's idiosyncrasy and ontology.

Therefore, Thomas Whitney's reflecting the national colouring of *The Foundation Pit* takes place primarily at the level of transferring the idiomatic components of Platonov's writing style, combined with the national specificity of images and situations. He, for the most part, succeeds in this task in translation. From the point of view of conveying national colouring, Whitney's translation can be considered successful, since in the most of cases, in addition to the particularly difficult cases considered in this article, it conveys and reflects the idiomatic means of the Platonov's Russian text with a sufficient degree of adequacy.

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Author's contribution: *The work is solely that of the author.*