

# ON TRANSLATING METAPHORS. PROBLEMS OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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The article presents the analysis of three Russian translations of the poem *The Sea* by Croatian poet Josip Pupačić and seeks to point out some aspects of the translation and reception of poetic texts and to develop a new methodology of research of the reception of poetic texts. Two groups of respondents completed a questionnaire: the first group was represented by native speakers of the Russian language; the second group contains Croatian native speakers. This research proves that questionnaires can be used in researching the semantic equivalence of poetic translation to the original text. Both groups pointed out the same two most important elements of the poem: *the personification of the sea* as well as *the rhythm of the poem*. The survey method proves to be adequate to reveal the problems of equivalence between the original and translation of specific elements of text, especially problems in the translation of metaphors.

## **KEYWORDS:**

*literary text, translation, translating metaphors*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The problems of translating metaphors have been widely discussed within the discipline of Translation Studies (Schäffner, 2004) and recognized as a translation problem since transferring metaphors from one language and culture to another can be hampered by linguistic and cultural differences. But it is only recently that a cognitive approach to metaphor has been applied to Translation Studies (Schäffner, 2004). As pointed out by C. Schäffner, the cognitive approach to metaphor, largely initiated by Lakoff and Johnson's book *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), can contribute new insights

into translation.

Although many cross-linguistic studies have concluded that not all metaphors are language-specific and that metaphors may be shared among many nations and cultures<sup>1</sup>, there are still many metaphors that are strongly culturally conditioned, as pointed out by Dobrzynska (1995: 597).

Sometimes it is easy to avoid the problem (simply by “deleting” the metaphor in the target language), but it is not always possible to do so because some metaphors have significant semantic importance in a particular text. I adhere to the cognitive approach considering metaphors “basic resources for thought processes in human society” (C. Schäffner 2004: 1257). I also agree with A. Jensen when she says that “when paraphrasing a metaphor, the translator, and not the target reader, disambiguates the text by selecting one ‘right’ interpretation of the metaphor. If the translator infers a meaning not intended by the source text writer, the text as a whole may create a different meaning and effect in the target text than in the source text” (Jensen, 2005).

In this research the starting point was the following cognitive approach basic statement: metaphors add semantic value to the text. The analysis (through the form of questionnaire) of three Russian translations of the poem *The Sea*<sup>2</sup> by Croatian poet Josip Pupačić is given in order to point out some aspects of the translation and reception of poetic texts and to develop a new methodology of research of the reception of poetic texts. Two groups of respondents completed a questionnaire: the first group was represented by native speakers of the Russian language; the second group contains Croatian native speakers.

I share Joseph Brodsky’s view: poets write differently from prose writers only because the poetic style enables them to put more meaning in less text (less verbal mass). Researching poetry as semantically most potent and most economical use of language is very important – because in poetry semantic and aesthetic potentials of language are at their highest level. This is the reason why translating metaphors is particularly important.

Research of this type is also necessary because it can help to minimize the impact of translators’ “intuition” on translation – which sometimes poses a significant problem

<sup>1</sup> For example, Stienstra (1993) differentiates between universal, culture-overlapping, and culture-specific metaphors (Schäffner, 2004: 1264). She argues that a large amount of human experience is universal, or at least shared by several cultures. The source culture and the target culture sometimes employ identical, sometimes different conceptual metaphors. One of the consequences of such a view is that translation procedures that are traditionally suggested in literature would need to be reconsidered as regards their validity for dealing with conceptual metaphors.

<sup>2</sup> The translations are given in the Appendix.

and can lead to communication failure. That is to say – some translations do not give the same message that the poet was communicating. We are not talking about the fact that poetic translations do not have the same multiple levels of meaning as the original. That is usually so, but although the message is less rich it can still basically be the same message. Of course, some (bad) translations do not carry the same message at all<sup>3</sup>.

It is also essential to compare different translations because such research can give a unique insight into some processes in the minds of translators in the act of translation (the choices that translators have to make during the translation). In this particular case, translations are interesting because the translators have different “types” of knowledge of the Russian language<sup>4</sup>.

The readers also engage in specific mental processes while reading and understanding the literary text.

The paper aims to answer the following questions:

- a) Will the difference in translators’ language competences have any influence on the translations?
- b) Will the readers have the same notion of the most important elements of the poem in both languages?
- c) Will the readers understand certain phrases from this poem in the same way?
- d) Could we, therefore, consider the message transferred across the barriers of different language and different cultural background?

And most importantly

- e) Can we use questionnaires; and what sort of questionnaires (what kind of methodology) can we use to answer these questions?

<sup>3</sup> As an example of communicative failure, we can state R. Venturin’s translation of A. Pushkin’s poem *Winter Evening* (*Зимний вечер*) into the Croatian language. Although the translation is in other elements correct (meter, rhyme, strophic organization etc.) there is one (and only one!) change in lexis which completely changes the meaning of the poem. The word *starushka* (an old woman) was translated as a *grandmother*. Although *old woman* and *grandmother* can both be old women, this change shows an entirely different relationship between the lyrical subject and this old woman. The translation *grandmother* makes the realization of the metaphor old woman = goddess of faith Parca impossible. In the original text the lyrical subject is sitting in the room together with the goddess that decides his faith. The important and mythical encounter with a goddess is made banal: the lyrical subject complains about his destiny to his old and tired grandmother.

<sup>4</sup> Fikret Cacan translated the poem first – in 2008. He is a native speaker of Croatian. He is one of the best translators of Russian poetry into the Croatian language. Boris Orekhov is a native speaker of the Russian language. He is a linguist and a lecturer at universities of Ufa and Moscow. The third translation was done in 2009 (but has never been published) by Olga Ostrogorski-Jakšić, who was bilingual. She was born in Belgrade into a Russian family. For many years she has been living in Zadar, Croatia, where she had been a long life teacher of the Russian language at the University of Zadar.

## METHOD

A preliminary review of the relevant literature has revealed a lack of studies in which survey methods are employed for researching the reception of translated poetry, so I decided to develop my own questionnaire. Since then I have learned about the research of E. A. Salihova, N. N. Aleksandrova and B. V. Orehov (2011). In their study, they compared different translations from the viewpoint of “stereoscopic” view to a text – influenced by M. L. Gasparov’s article *On the New Translation of the Hell* (*О новом переводе Ада*: <http://nevmenandr.net/scientia/gasparov-marancman.php>). However, their research is much different, since the translations they analysed and the questions they were interested in were different. The translations that were a part of their study differ very much from one another, while the translations in this research are very similar.

This can be proven by Gasparov’s methodology of measuring equivalence which Gasparov has shown in his article *Literal translation and the Measure of Accuracy* (*Подстрочник и мера точности*).<sup>5</sup> The poem in Croatian has 22 full words. These numbers show the great precision of all three Russian: F. Cacan’s translation has 21 words, 14 words are the same, new or morphologically changed words 7. The factor of equivalence is, therefore, (according to Gasparov’s methodology)  $14:22 = 63\%$ , of freedom  $7:21 = 33\%$ . B. Orekhov’s translation has 18 words, 15 words are the same, three new or morphologically changed. The factor of equivalence is  $15:22 = 68\%$ , the factor of freedom is  $3:18 = 16\%$ . Olga Ostrogorski-Jakšić’s translation has 23 words, 14 words are the same, nine new or morphologically changed. The factor of equivalence is  $14:22 = 63\%$ , of freedom  $9:23 = 39\%$ . If we compare that with the translations of P. B. Shelly used in Aleksandrova, Orehov and Salihova research, (The factor of equivalence: 44%, 23%, 56%, 37%, 25%, 25%, 37%, 30%) we see that these three translations of Pupačić’s poem have much higher factors of equivalence – all above 60%).

The primary interest of the study by E. A. Salihova, N. N. Aleksandrova and B. V. Orehov was to investigate what really happens with the reception of texts if the readers know several translations, but in my research subtle differences in semantics, which are often found in the process of transferring texts from one language to another (and how these differences influence the reception of this poem), are of the main interest.

<sup>5</sup> I don’t believe that the number of the same words in the original and the translation show the only measure of equivalence, but this methodology can prove certain points. (I talk about it in more extensively further in the text.)

So, the first problem was that this type of research is rare, which means that contributions about it are not frequent. Most analyses considering the translated texts are based on the knowledge of translators or scholars that analyse translations. The reception of translation usually aims to describe translations (more as products than as processes) and to explain why translators act in certain ways (and what is “wrong” or “right” with it).

Of course, there are a number of reasons which explain a lack of survey method studies. Such studies are complicated because the meaning of poetic texts is highly multifaceted and sometimes it is difficult to entirely understand even texts written in our mother tongue. Nevertheless, we should try to develop the instruments to conduct such studies.

The idea was to conduct a survey among both Russian and Croatian readers by asking them about the most important metaphors in the poem. In this preliminary study, 20 Russian readers completed the questionnaire.<sup>6</sup> The same number of readers completed the Croatian questionnaire. Even the study on such a small scale allowed to see some tendencies and gave good points for further developing the method of reception research<sup>7</sup>.

## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The analysed poem, *The Sea*, is relatively simple, but because of this simplicity, it is extremely complex. It uses simple lexis and simple syntactic structures, but the rhythm of its repetition makes it special. There is no rhyme; the verse is syllabic, belonging to a very strong tradition of Croatian folk poems. Its lexical simplicity and theme – love and connection to the sea – resulted in the fact that the poem was included in the primary school curriculum and is one of the most known and beautiful

<sup>6</sup> The questionnaire basically consists of the translations and these questions:

Read these translations and choose the one that to you seems:

|                            |   |   |   |      |
|----------------------------|---|---|---|------|
| A) the most beautiful      | 1 | 2 | 3 | none |
| B) the most understandable | 1 | 2 | 3 | none |
| C) the strangest           | 1 | 2 | 3 | none |
| D) the most rhythmical     | 1 | 2 | 3 | none |

Explain these syntagmas: *море движется ко мне, море что в движении, море утром набегает*. Are these greetings poetic or everyday greetings: *говорит мне море с добрым утром, море здравствуй* говорит, *моря утренний привет*? What type of relationship do these adjectives show: *золотое, дорогое, золотистое*?

<sup>7</sup> There were some unexpected problems, for example some readers did not answer all the questions or their answers were too vague.

poems in Croatian.

One faces its complexity when translating it. Not only is it difficult to capture its enchanting rhythm and recreate it in another language, but there are also linguistic and cultural differences between the two languages and cultures that “contaminate” the process.

Some seemingly purely linguistic differences pose a problem in translating literary texts because using different words results in different sets of associations and metaphors. We can say that such differences “gain” a quality of stylistic device, which even more complicates the process of translation. For example, Croats hug each other around “the neck”, while Russians hug each other around “the shoulders”.

These differences tell us that lexis is only one element of the poem/text and it reflects only one level of the poem/text. The conservation of same lexical units does not necessarily mean the preservation of same semantic elements – because we have to take into consideration the problems of metaphor, different cultural heritage and so on. So, a high factor of equivalence is important, but the distribution of equivalence is more important. For example, in the phrase *and the sea hugged me around the neck* (*i zagrlji me more oko vrata*) losing the word *vrata* (*neck*) does not influence the semantics of the poem – although the phrase in the Russian language uses the word *shoulder*, the difference is irrelevant because it is basically the same phrase.

But in the expression *the sea climbs towards me* (*I gledam more gdje se k meni penje*), which is metaphorical, the subtle lexical change results in important semantic changes. The poet uses the verb *to climb* (*penje*) to describe the movement of the sea towards the lyrical subject. Although it is not common to use this verb for the movement of the sea in Croatian – it is possible to do so (therefore it cannot be considered an individual metaphor of the author), but for Russian speakers it would be unusual to say *the sea climbs towards me* (*море взбирается ко мне*). The strangeness of the expression would prevail over the strength of the poetic image.

This phrase has the following semantic and stylistic elements:

1. The lyrical subject watches the sea,
2. The sea is moving toward the lyrical subject,
3. The verb *to climb* (*penje*) is rarely used in this function in Croatian (the verbs *diže*, *približava*, *primiče* would have been used). So by using this verb, the translator would offer a very strong personification of the sea and visualisation of the lyrical subject which is above the sea. Croatian respondents confirm these elements of semantics and style: 16 out of 20 of them perceived this expression like “movement of the sea toward the lyrical subject” (one respondent did not

answer the question and only two of the respondents understood the phrase as the neutral movement of waves).

Translations of this verse/phrase into the Russian language are made according to these elements different (which is also proven by the Russian readers).

In the first translation, the phrase is translated as *moves towards me* (*движется ко мне*).

1. The lyrical subject watches the sea – the verb points out the continuity of the action.
2. The movement of the sea towards the lyrical subject is preserved. However, it seems that Russian readers do not perceive that as strongly as Croatian since only four of them stated that it is the meaning of this phrase, while seven of them considered this phrase the same as the phrase *rises in the morning* (*утром набегаем*) from the third translation, which was perceived as a picture of the morning tide by all readers.
3. The verticality of the movement is not pointed out.

In the second translation *sea in motion* (*море что в движении*) we have:

1. The lyrical subject watches the sea.
2. The sea is in motion – but it is not pointed out that the movement is towards the lyrical subject. The lyrical subject watches the sea which is, as one of the Russian readers (1) says, “A way of conveying a general idea of the sea as a phenomenon, which is in constant motion” (“образ, передающий общее понятие о море как о явлении, находящемся в непрерывном движении” (all Russian readers perceive this verse/phrase in the same way).
3. The translator uses the noun *motion* (*движение*) instead of the verb and it does not stress the personification of the sea. The verticality of movement is also not conveyed.

In the third translation the phrase is given as *rises in the morning* (*утром набегаем*):

1. The lyrical subject watches the sea – the verb *I see* (*вижу*) is used, and it points out the continuity of the action.
2. The movement of the sea makes associations to the morning tide (*утренний прилив*) (which is confirmed by nine readers) or sea waves (which is approved

by five readers), two answers are not clear “the movement only in the mornings, all is clear” (*движение только утром, все ясно*)<sup>8</sup>. Although the movement of the sea is towards the shore – the phrase does not stress the importance of the movement toward the lyrical subject, although we can deduce it. The vertical movement is self-evident because of the association to the tide.

3. The personification of the phrase in Russian is also weaker than in Croatian because the verb that is used, *набегает*, is more common to this movement in Russian than the verb *penje* is in Croatian.

From these examples we see that the change from the Croatian verb *penje* to Russian verbs *движется* or *набегает* or even with the noun *движение* – results in some changes in the semantics and stylistics of the poem. The translation of Boris Orekhov, which has the highest rate of equivalence to the original, in this particular phrase, is semantically the furthest from the original. The readers also confirm this – more than half of the Russian readers consider that the meaning of this phrase is “*image or concept of the sea as a phenomenon, which is in constant movement*” (“*образ, понятие о море как о явлении, находящемся в непрерывном движении*”), but such a characterisation of the sea in the poem is nowhere to be found. However, this movement of the sea towards the lyrical subject is significant since (from the first verse) it points out the connection between the sea and the lyrical subject.

The use of the adjective *gold* in the original is also interesting. In Croatian, the phrase *my gold* (*zlato moje*) – is used to express love and affection towards a child or a loved one. Such an expression is not specific to the Russian language. In translations 1 and 2, we encounter a literal translation with the same adjective, but it is perceived more often only as a visual image by Russian readers (11 answers – *the sea that reflects the Sun*). Six answers pointed out the emotional element of the phrase (*dear*), and three answers pointed out feelings of respect (*respect and admiration*). This is probably the reason why the third (bilingual) translator changed this adjective to *dear* (*дорогое*) – which is more precise when conveying an emotional message, while it lacks the visual element and the element of association which is also found in the noun *gold*. Croatian readers in 18 cases point out the emotional element as the meaning of the phrase (the sea is very dear to the lyrical subject), and only two of them point out the visual element as the meaning of the phrase (*golden – because of the reflection of the sea*). We see that in both languages both semantic elements of the phrase are available but it is evident that in Croatian the emotional facet prevails over the visual one.

<sup>8</sup> And one reader did not answer the question.



As to the greeting *good morning* (*dobrojutro*) it has been translated in the three translations differently. In contemporary standard Croatian *dobrojutro*, written together, is associated with the folk form and is pronounced in an “old fashioned way” (i.e. like in some rural parts of the country). This is the reason why Croatian respondents see it both as a poetic greeting, and as an everyday greeting. The same situation is with Russian readers. Ten of them consider greetings *моря утренний привет* and *говорит мне море с добрым утром* – as poetic (i.e. they characterize them the same), but only four of them consider the greeting *здравствуй* also poetic.

Such differences between the original poem and its translations can often be found. They are mostly compensated in some other place in the text and in some other way. In this case readers do get the message that the poem is about friendship and close relationship between the sea and the poetic subject (personification of the sea), although in translations it is not realised so directly as in the original text.

When we asked both groups of readers to point out the most important elements of the poem they pointed out the same elements: the most important of which are the *personification of the sea*, as well as *the rhythm*. *Lexical repetition* is considered more important than *repetition of phonemes*. Other elements got a minimal number of votes.

## CONCLUSION

The questions that this research tried to answer were:

- Will the difference in language competences (native vs non-native, vs bilingual) have any influence on the translation?

The answer is: yes and no. The first translation by a non-native speaker of Russian (although a great connoisseur of the Russian language and literature) was an inspiration for the second and third translations. Both B. Orekhov and O. Ostrogorski-Jakšić wanted to make the poem more understandable for Russian readers. The bilingual translator (also a teacher) more often chose to “explain” the Croatian phrase or to substitute the metaphor with the expression common to Russians, but it seems that in this case, such an approach did not significantly improve the understanding of the poem – although this translation was voted as the most understandable.

- Will the readers have the same notion of the essential elements of the poem in both languages?

The answer is: in this case – yes. Both groups marked the importance of personification of the sea (which was used to express the love towards the sea by the lyrical

subject), the importance of rhythm and lexical repetition.

- Will the readers understand certain phrases from this poem in the same way?

The answer is: no. Croatian readers understand the first verse as the movement towards the poetic subject – Russian readers view it as a general characteristic of the sea. Also, the usage of the noun gold in Croatian is unquestionably an expression of love and affection, while Russian readers perceive it more often as a visual image.

- Can we consider the message transferred across the barriers of a different language and different cultural heritage?

Although some of the elements of the message were not transferred, the general message was – love, closeness and friendship of the lyrical subject and the sea.

Although the research was conducted on a small number of readers, it showed relevant tendencies in the reception of the poem. Also, it gave some excellent principles which could be used in future studies and revealed some rather severe problems that we meet when we try to analyse elements that are hard to measure. For example, although the notion of love and friendship is transferred – the complete magical enchantment of the poem – wasn't (the same message but in a different degree). What is the reason? Is it because of language differences, cultural background or translational skills? The answer is yet to be found.

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## PREVOĐENJE METAFORA.

## PROBLEMI METODOLOGIJE ZA ISTRAŽIVANJE RECEPCIJE POETSKOGA TEKSTA

U članku je predstavljena analiza tri prijevoda pjesme More Josipa Pupačića na ruski jezik te su istaknuti neki aspekti problematike prijevoda i recepcije poetskog teksta. Također je predstavljen i prijedlog nove metodologije za istraživanje recepcije poetskoga teksta. Dvije grupe ispitanika ispunjavala su upitnik: prvu grupu činili su izvorni govornici ruskoga jezika, a drugu grupu izvorni govornici hrvatskoga jezika. Istraživanje je dokazalo da se upitnik može koristiti kako bi se istražila semantička ekvivalencija poetskog prijevoda i izvornika. Obje grupe istaknule su ista dva elementa pjesme: *personifikacija mora* i *ritam pjesme* kao najvažnija. Ova metoda istraživanja dokazala se adekvatnom da otkrije problem ekvivalencije između originala i prijevoda određenih elemenata teksta, posebno problema prijevoda metafora.

## KLJUČNE RIJEČI:

*poetski tekst, prijevod, prijevod  
metafora*

## Море

И вижу море движется ко мне  
и слышу моря утренний привет  
и море внемлет тихий шёпот мой  
и *утро доброе* я тихо молвлю морю  
свои приветы тихо повторяю  
а море слышит слышит и смеётся  
молчит смеётся ближе придвигаясь  
и вижу море море золотое смотрю  
и вижу море движется ко мне  
и *утро доброе* златому морю молвлю  
и *утро доброе* мне отвечает море  
меня покамест море обнимает  
и я и море с морем золотистым  
сидим на той скале береговой  
и мы смеёмся и смеётся море  
(translation F. Sacan)

## Море

и я смотрю на море что в движеньи  
и говорит мне море *с добрым утром*  
и слушает оно ему шепчу я  
о *с добрым утром* море говорю я  
и снова морю повторяю чуть тише  
внимает море и смеётся  
и помолчит и засмеётся море

и я смотрю на море золотое  
и я смотрю на море что в движеньи  
о *с добрым утром* море золотое  
*с добрым утром* море море скажет  
меня обнимет трепетное море  
и я и море море золотое  
сидим на берегу друг с другом  
и мы смеёмся и смеёмся морю  
(translation B. Orekhov)

## Море

я вижу море утром набегаёт  
я слышу море *здравствуй* говорит  
я морю тихо отвечаю  
а море слушает мой шёпот  
я *здравствуй* морю повторяю  
а море слушает смеется  
молчит и смеется приближаясь  
смотрю на море море дорогое  
и вижу море снова набегаёт  
и *здравствуй море* море вторит мне  
и обнимает крепко дорогое  
и мы с ним вместе с море дорогим  
сидим на берегу на гальке  
и радуемся радуемся морю  
(translation O. Ostrogorski-Jakšić)

