Spy Novel in the Context of Stylistics and Translation

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ABSTRACT

The article studies some linguistic and stylistic peculiarities of the vocabulary that is used among the people united by common professional activities. In this respect the novel «At Risk» by the British writer Stella Rimington and its translation into the Russian language were chosen as the research material where intelligent services agents’ vocabulary is presented. Depending on the sphere of application various thematic groups of vocabulary are pointed out as well as stylistic devices that are used by the author for depicting the world of spies, creating the image of special agents and describing the peculiar secret character of their professional engagement. Special attention is focused on the translation of the novel into the Russian language, particularly defining corresponding equivalents and revealing their peculiarities. The capability of linguistic units to create associative and connotative meanings, divergences of cultural codes and preconceptions in the source and target languages, as well as the ability of the sentences to attach senses require special approach of translation, which also arouses special research interest.

Keywords: political linguistics, translation, stylistics, colloquial vocabulary, professionalism

1. Introduction

Text as the object of linguistic study and its translation into various languages can arouse particular research interest as it gives the opportunity to find out universal and specific features of the source and target languages, reveal lexical gaps, define stylistic divergences and peculiarities of the norm of one or another language. The choice of the literary genre and fictional diversity can also aid in solving a number of educational tasks in the process of foreign language and translation teaching. From this point of view the novel «At Risk» by the British writer Stella Rimington the former Director General of MI5 and its translation into the Russian language attracts special attention and can aid much in the educational process of the students who study, for example, at such departments like international relations, theory and practice of translation, linguistics and the like. The main character of the novel is a female agent of intelligence service. Stella Rimington in this sense develops the tradition when former secret agents tell about their work in a fictional manner. During her outstanding career the author of the novel managed to work in all the main fields of intelligent service including counter-terrorism and counter-espionage subdivisions and in a certain way has become an inspirational person in the eyes of other women. In this respect the author presents the synthesis of fictional and documentary, imaginary and real, though she admits that everything she is writing about is fiction, but inspiration and material for her literary works she gets from life.
At the same time the author in her novel brings into view such topical problems of the present day world as the threat of terrorism and fighting with it, the problems of extremism, issues connected with migrants', especially their illegal access to the territory of this or that country.

Methods

The research methods are defined by the theme and task of the scientific study. Comparative analysis of the vocabulary of the source and target texts is based on the semantic stylistic, synchronic comparative methods as well as the method of linguistic description of the fictional text applying the elements of componental analysis, linguistic cultural and contextual analysis.

Main part

The novel «At Risk» was first published in 2004 and was translated into Russian in 2011, though the translation was issued in a shorthand form. The novel reveals individual style of the author through the main character, i.e. a female special agent. On the one hand we can find a number of professional vocabulary (professional jargon) of special agents, i.e. a secret language that needs to be decoded both in understanding and translation. So, thematically there can be distinguished anti-terrorist vocabulary, lexical units connected with religion, and particularly vocabulary of special agents. On the other hand, following the tasks of fictional narration, the author widely refers to various stylistic devices (such as metaphors and allusions), that should find their best possible equivalents in the target text. Special work of the novel’s characters creates semantic sub-textual information hidden both in the author’s narration and in the characters’ speech. Such peculiarities of lexical units to create associative and connotative meanings and the ability of the sentences to attach senses can cause certain difficulties for a translator in deciphering such units as well as transferring their meaning into another language.

Let us focus on a number of lexical examples. Describing Thames House the headquarters of MI5, the author stresses its power and greatness comparing it with a pale ghost: “A vast and imposing edifice of Portland stone, eight stories in height, it crouches like a great pale ghost a few hundred yards south of the Palace of Westminster” [Rimington, Ch. 1]. The choice of the word edifice ‘formal’ a large impressive building’ [Hornby, p. 487] is quite reasonable here to accentuate the importance of this organization. Quite interesting is the translation into Russian: Eto obshchynoje i vnishet’noje zdanije iz portlendskogo kamnya, vos’my etazhej v ysvotu, ogromnym belym prizakom vyrastalo iz zemli v neskol’kykh сотнях yardov k jugu ot Vestminsterskogo dvortsa [Rimington 1]. The word-for-word translation of this sentence will be the following: This vast and massive building of Portland stone, eight stories in height, like a huge white ghost was growing out of the ground a few hundred yards south of the Palace of Westminster. Thus if in the source text the building crouches, i.e. ‘puts itself close to the ground’, in the target text we find a contextual antonym.

Using a number of metaphors in the next passage the author depicts the secret character of the whole MI5 organization, showing it as an object of top secrecy, security and inaccessibility. It is a specific world with its own way of life and laws hidden from ordinary people: “…(she) slotted her smart pass into the barrier. The front of one of the security capsules opened, she stepped inside, and was briefly enclosed. Then, as she travelled light years in an instant, the rear door slid open, and she stepped in another dimension. Thames House was a hive, a city of steel and frosted glass, and Liz felt a subtle shift inside herself as she crossed its security threshold and was borne noiselessly upwards to the fifth floor” [Rimington].

In the Russian target text we find the following translation: … (ona) prosunula propusk v prorez’ bar’jera i voshla v odnu iz kontrol’nykh kapsul. Na korotkoje vremya ona okazalas’ v polnosti zakrytyom prostranstve. Zatem vnutrennynaya dver’ skol’znuła v storonu, i ona, kak budto za mig preolel svetovyye gody, vstupila v drugoe izmenenie. Temz-Khaus был ul’jem, gorodom iz staly i dymchatogo stekla, i Liz pochuvstvovala, kak vnuty jejo chto-to edva zametno shevel’nulos, kogda ona peresekla porog bezopasnosti i byla bezshumno voznesena na pyatyj etazh [Rimington 1]; that can be translated into English in the following way: … (she) slotted her pass into the barrier and entered one of the controlling capsules. For a short time she found herself in a completely shut room. Then the inner door slid aside, and she as if having moved beyond the light years within an instant entered another dimension. Thames House was a hive, a city of steel and smoky-coloured glass, and Liz felt that inside her something lightly moved when she crossed the security threshold and was noiselessly lifted up to the fifth floor. The communicative task in the target text has been preserved, i.e. it expresses the same communicative message as the original one.

In the passage presented above the author focuses the readers’ attention on substantive and verbal metaphors that perform as encoding elements of the observer’s visual perception implemented in a fictional text This universal sign reflects the unique character of the person’s experience, projection of the world on a personality, perspective of the vision of perceived or imaginary objects. The intentional object, i.e. the object of perception or imagination (in our case it is Thames House) gains unique features that are a sort of increment in subjective objective relations, in correlation of the subject and the world of his reality. And, obviously, reproducing of the perceived in the consciousness is unique, because it is inscribed in the experience of a definite person. It is personal experience that creates that individual associative net or system that captures the elements or objects of the world. Such association
of similarity creates metaphorical expressions in a fictional text that perform a nominative function. In this respect we find such lexical units as *hive, a city of steel and frosted glass* that the author apparently gets from her former work in Intelligence service depicting a very busy organization with a great number of specialists but hidden from inquisitive glances. The use of such words like *security capsules, travelled light years in an instant, stepped in another dimension* also create a futuristic atmosphere.

The specific type of professional activities makes the author of the novel refer to professional vocabulary. It is known that professionalism are the words created by the people united by a common professional activity. They denote some working process or implement of the labour. Professional words give creative meaning to already-existing concepts, tools or instruments, working process, and have the typical properties of a special code. Unlike terms that belong to the literal layer of the English vocabulary, professionalism are special words of non-literary layer [Galperin, p. 113]. Representatives of a certain profession denote things referring to their work using the words of the general language reinterpreting them metaphorically or metonymically, making the semantic structure of professionalism quite dimmed. In the novel *At Risk* we can find a number of such vocabulary: *a bag man* ‘a middleman between the criminals and police’, *something nasty’s in the pipeline* ‘something illegal is under development’, *to infiltrate* ‘to enter a place or organization secretly, especially in order to get information that can be used against it’, *intelligence gathering* ‘collecting secret information’, *a walk-in* ‘a defector’, *minder* ‘a person whose job it is to look after someone or something’, *to deploy an invisible* ‘to engage someone’s service’. Further the author describes who an invisible is: “An “invisible” was CIA-speak for the ultimate intelligence nightmare: the terrorlist who, became he or she is an ethnic native of the target country, can cross its borders unchecked, move around the country unquestioned, and infiltrate its institutions with ease. An invisible was the worst possible news” [Rimington].

The translation into Russian represents the following: *Nevedimky, kak nazvyali ikh v TsRU, byly nastojasch’ym koshmarom razvedka: eto byly terroristy, kotorye, buduchy etnitcheskimi urozhentsami tselevoy strany, mogly nezametno peresekt’ jejo granitsy, bespreyatstvenno peredvigatsya po jejo territorii i legko pronikat’ v jejo uchrezhdeniya* [Rimington 1]. This stands for the following word-for-word translation: *The invisibles like they were called in CIA were a real nightmare of the intelligence: these were the terrorists that being the ethnic natives of the target country could unnoticeably cross its borders, unhampered move around its territory and easily infiltrate into its institutions. Though the Russian translation lacks the final attached sentence, where the personal evaluation of this news is given, the communicative equivalence of the original and target texts, i.e. preservation in the translation the functional dominant of the original, has been achieved. The translator also changes the category of number of the word ‘invisible’ putting it in the plural form in the target text that cannot but influence the whole sentence reporting in this sense that there may be not one but at least several persons of this secret, illegal and dangerous kind. The following word-combinations also indicate a specific character of the work of special agents: *an encrypted online file, to keep an unobtrusive watch in the corridor outside, a key staging post, undercover fighter, to recruit smug ex-public schoolboys, flash from German liaison, Six recons (i.e. no names of the agents only numbers), its invisible on the move, a spook, to debrief, security clearance, etc.*

Special character of work of intelligence service agents defines thematic choice of the vocabulary. In the novel we can distinguish certain lexical units connected with terrorism and fighting against it: the *Joint Counter-Terrorist group, to coordinate operations, terror networks, to set weekly intelligence targets, atrocity, terror-related intelligence, lack of communication, turf wars, coordinator of counter-terrorism operations, a summary of weekend reports from overseas security services, Pakistan liaison, to report a sighting, stomping ground, to deliver instructions to terrorist cells, to unleash attacks against targets*. Lexical units connected with the theme of extremism and actions against it: *ITS – the Islamic Terror Syndicate, Al Qaeda, Islamic Jihad, Children of Heaven (organizations prohibited in Russia and many other countries), UK’s militant Islamic communities, mujahidin in ‘intentions of training as mujahidin and taking up the sword of jihad against West’* [Rimington, Ch. 5].

The general style of the novel is quite simple and free, there are a lot of words of colloquial mode: *regale with the inside track on the Daily Mirror’s cover story, lurid tale, Geoffrey Fane started the ball rolling, bring into the loop, we’ll keep our ears very close to the ground, stay in constant touch with our agents this end*. A number of jargon words are also found. Mainly they denote the names of various drugs: *crack-fueled orgies at a five-star Manchester hotel, butterflies, doves, ecstasy, temazepam, methamphetamine crystal, class A drugs, a trial batch, take the jellies and the Es on trust*. Alongside the chemical names of the drugs the author uses the names that may be difficult for others to understand. Paul Simpson calls these references to proscribed drugs and other criminal underworld activities antilanguages, and to them he refers the so-called semi-secretive languages that emerge from subcultures and alternative societies. These social groups, or ‘antisocieties’ (in our case these are the people who appear to be above the law) are opposed to mainstream society as their relationship to the dominant social order happens to be one of resistance and even active hostility. The interesting point lies in the formation of these antilanguages that the scholar calls relexicalisation when established words in the language are recycled into new structures and meanings [Simpson, p. 104]. In this respect one topical question stands out, i.e. the ability of the translator to distinguish and decode these non-standardized references and try to find corresponding equivalents in the target language, or taking into account the
register of these words, we should speak about antilanguage using the term by Paul Simpson. Our linguistic material shows that this task happens to be rather difficult and unfortunately a number of lexical units of such secret and at the same time creative nominating character are left untranslated. All these create definite losses in translation and narrows Russian readers’ understanding of the text.

Like all writing, narrative fiction does not exist in a historical and social vacuum. It often echoes other texts and images, i.e. implicates intertextuality or allusion [Simpson, p. 21]. In other words it imports some literal, historic, or mythological fact implicated directly or indirectly. Such artistic device gives the opportunity to address a definite literary work, episode or character and through the prism of current state of affairs make an attempt to rationalize and analyze the topicality and foundations for such associative solution created by the author.

In the very broadest sense allusion is always present in our discourse oral or written. There always exists some fact of shared experience or some circumstance implicated in the common culture to which we may confidently allude. Allusion used in a work of fiction goes beyond the mere decoration of the text; it is a stylistic technique that is used in the development of the humorous or comic effect, sometimes it may make a criticism positive as well as negative. They can perform as a kind of test that only educated people can decode; they are a device of power that broaden the reader’s understanding. It is also important for a translator to recognize the allusion and find an optimal equivalent in a target language, so that the reader will understand the intentions implied by the author.

An attempt to refer to creative allusiveness also generates the designated style of the author and such reference to well-known things, ideas or characters from the world history and literature also forms the individual style of the author. Stella Rimington in her novel “At Risk” addresses to this stylistic device not once making the text more vivacious and at the same time meaningful and intelligent. Let us study a number of examples of this kind. In the sentence “Should he offset the morning’s stick with a bit of carrot-push a couple of fifties into his back pocket on the way out?” [Rimington] such phrases like carrot-push and morning’s stick refer the reader to the famous carrot and stick approach policy that was applied by the British Government in India in the beginning of the 20th century. The man who pronounces this sentence mildly hints whether he could deserve some kind of compensation in the form of money for the morning’s scolding that he got from his boss, still he does not say it aloud (i.e. it is inner speech) being afraid of his boss’s overstrict character. Notably, Stella Rimington chooses these rather sophisticated references to well-known historical facts describing the talk between a drug-dealer with publishing business as a cover and his employee.

The next example is the indication of Kenneth Grahame’s novel “The Wind in the Willows”: “They lived somewhere on the river-Shepperton, perhaps, or was it Sunbury? One of those Ratty, Toad and Mole places out to the west” [Rimington], showing a remote country-side. Sir Lancelot one of the Knights of the Round Table in the Arthurian legend is mentioned in the following sentence: “Mother and daughter would then live in happy companionship in the gatehouse, and in the course of time the right man – a dimly imagined Sir Lancelot-like figure – would happen along” [Rimington]. The author expresses the characters’ hope for a noble and handsome man to appear in their life and make it happier. Another interesting example is reference to Miss Moneypenny – the character of the novels and films about James Bond. Being a personal secretary to M, who is Bond’s superior officer and head of the British Secret Intelligence Service (MI6), she is entrusted all the secrets of intelligence service: “All those glamorous Foreign Office secretaries. I’ve always had a Moneypenny complex” [Rimington]. The reference to this character happens in the context of discussing the reasons of joining intelligence service. Liz’s friend Mackay says that his reason to become a member of reconnaissance was the sense of patriotism and he also adds joking that it was women, i.e. ‘those glamorous Foreign Office secretaries;’ highlighting that he has always had a Moneypenny complex. As for Liz, she never had ‘a secret agent complex’ admitting that she was one of the first intakes that answered “Waiting for Godot?” advert. The author alludes to the play of the middle of the 20th century by the Irish playwright Samuel Beckett about two vagabonds who are waiting for a Godo on the road near a scraggy tree. They do not know who he is but are definitely sure that with his coming their life will change for the best. But Godo never comes.

All these brief and indirect references to people and events of historical and literary significance relate to British realia; they are purely British and are aimed at educated people with knowledge of history and literature. Unfortunately these creative findings of the author are not translated into Russian that for sure simplifies the target text and makes it artistically poor.

Discussion

The literary genre also influences the composition of the text. Spy novel is a literary genre that thematically determined by the close tie of the main character with espionage and structurally is close to the adventurous narration with the elements and accents on the suspense of what may happen to the main characters. Spy novel is often viewed as derivation of the detective, the difference being the fact that foundation of the spy novel is usually a political intrigue that is not a peculiar feature of the detective. If in the detective the evil is the person who almost does not fall under suspicion and the task is to find him or her out, in spy novel the enemy and his plan are more or less evident from the beginning and the task of the agent is to neutralize the evil and prevent a crime. Another
characteristic is the involvement of the author of a spy novel in the work in secret services that makes the narration true to life and full of spy world details still supplementing it with fabulous compositional plot.

The novel “At Risk” is a spy novel and though it can be called the product of mass literature with its formular character and a tendency to stereotypes, it manifests at the same time deep and significant senses that is proved by the author’s choice of linguistic and stylistic devices in the organization of the narration. Meeting the demand of the majority of present day readers to escape the routine of everyday life with its monotony and daily hassles, the novel at the same time has an entertaining character. On the lexical level the comic effect is gained by addressing to world problems that are mentioned in the context of the situation. For instance, after the party and a morning hang-over one of the characters named Perry brings a cup of coffee to his wife Anne Lakeby that prompts a question why she owes such concern; to what her husband ironically remarks to put it down to global warming [Rimington, Ch. 7]. Here the author implies an undertone that many problems of our life are blamed on the global warming though they may have nothing in common with it. Or another example where the author applies to the image of Margaret Thatcher and her habit of early rising: “Perry might have been a passionate admirer of Margaret Thatcher, but he had never shared her predilection for early rising”[Rimington, Ch. 7].

Ironic effect is implied in the following phrase when Liz is asked by her colleague about her future plans and she remarks that she’s ‘defecting to North Korea’ as ‘Pyongyang’s heaven at this time of year’ [Rimington, Ch. 9]. Another interesting example is the use of such stylistic device as oxymoron in describing the policy and actions of the United States: “Perhaps his arrival meant that Britain would at last taste some of the terror inflicted by its Satanic ally, the United States” [Rimington, Ch. 5]. The free word-combination ‘Satanic ally’ is based on contextual antonyms (i.e. semantically contradictory notions) that present a strong semantic discrepancy between its members. Unfortunately the translation into Russian violates the author’s idea and in the target text the fighter named Rahman al Masri is presented as the active opponent of the US but not as the security threat to Great Britain.

The criminal genre is revealed in the inclusion in the narration the elements of different crimes connected with illegal drug trafficking, smuggling of goods and people as well as the cases of homicide of out of favour employees involved in a criminal affair. Special attention is paid by the author to the problem of migrants that at one time has become the matter of concern of almost the whole Europe. “… the Mansoor in Bremerhaven was an economic migrant who had paid for passage to Europe – probably some hellish odyssey in a container – and was now looking to make his way across the Channel” [Rimington, Ch. 9]. Metaphorical periphery is used by the author to speak about the problem of migrants and the way they get into the target country. Calling this trip ‘some hellish odyssey in a container’ the author stresses its dangerous and almost inhuman character. The endeavour that costs many their lives or health of their relatives. Describing the scene of migrants trafficking the author writes that people died en route usually of suffocation in sealed containers or trucks; border crossings had been effected at night with the help of the easiest- bribed border guards; and the old fishing boats that were used as the means of transportation could only just manage a complement of twelve, and sat terrifyingly low in the water; “the vessel pitched and rolled like a pig in bad weather”, – the author describes that dangerous journey [Rimington, Ch. 12].

Depicting the life and work of intelligence service agents Stella Rimington presents the profession of a secret agent without any evident romantic colouring. She draws a laborious and stress-filled lack-lustre world of security service (even the personal appearance of a special agent the author compares to ‘Soviet drabness’, i.e. grey and identical) calling it ‘self-deprecatory culture of Thames House’ and in the original text the reader may feel some notes of reconciliation and submission to the system. The description of special agents’ appearance and personal qualities are presented in the text in the following way. The simile “A tall, aquiline figure – like a heron in chalk stripes” shows a serious and determined character of the agent; “Reputation for unswerving ruthlessness” speaks about a forceful and relentless image of the characters involved in intelligence service. “Tanned and grey-eyed, his flannel suit murmuring unmistakably of Savile Row, he cut a glamorous figure in this generally nondescript gathering” [Rimington, Ch. 2]. The choice of the metaphorical verb ‘to murmur’ speaks about elegant and unostentatious appearance of the agent his suit being bought at Savile Row – the district known for its tailor’s shops.

The main character Liz Carlyle is portrayed by the author not as a glamorous super-agent but a young woman with everyday household and personal concerns. The specific character of her work exerts an impact on her life even in ordinary things. For example, going to work on the train she scrutinizes the passengers and tries to guess their occupation; or she searches for some reflective surfaces in sight to observe something. One of her colleagues gives her a piece of advice as a method of conspiracy to make another call before leaving and not to leave the previous one as the last number dialed. At the same time the attributes described are quite predictable that again proves the novel being the product of mass literature with its definite structure.

**Conclusion**

The genre of spy novel has got a new impulse and a certain popularity after the uprise of international criminal organizations, international terrorism networks and espionage as strong threats to the Western society. In this respect the novel “At Risk” demonstrates a nice example of fiction written by a former intelligence service agent showing the
world of secret service in a true-to-life style. The author in a fictional manner addresses to such problems like organized crime, illegal drugs trade, terrorism and extremism and fighting with them, smuggling and illegal migration.

The style of the narration is rather free and simple; the author uses a lot of colloquial vocabulary, phraseological units, sometimes slang and of course professional words. At the same time the author applies to such stylistic devices as metaphors, epithets and similes. A number of allusions can be found in the text that are of purely British character and they relate to the people and events of historical and literary significance.

Translation into Russian is shorthanded, that is why some interesting lexical creations are left untranslated. The same can be said about several allusions that are not found in the target text. Due to the structural and cultural peculiarities of the English and Russian languages, semantic volume of the words does not coincide. The source text abandons in a number of proper names like names of the buildings of MI5 and MI6, and significant places that require certain clarification for Russian readers. At the same time the novel reflects the current state of the language demonstrating elasticity of linguistic and stylistic norms as well as the individual style of the author.

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