

## Pragmatic Potential of a Literary Text: Translational Issues

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### Abstract

*The pre-translational interpretation of a literary text recently shifted the focus of attention to the issues of extralinguistic context, which structures the conceptual texture of a literary text. Pragmatic potential of a literary text involves much implicit information representing the author's intention to represent the meaning, which can be revealed basing on the complexity of background knowledge necessary for the correct interpretation. The main concern is that the translator's role is of a double-sided nature: first, this is the reader's position and then, this the author's position, who recreates the text in the target language. Therefore, the degree of the adequacy of translation of a literary text is impacted by the integrity of a maximal interpretation of pragmatic potential of a source text. The article emphasizes the importance of adequate interpretation of pragmatic intention regarding its verbalization through the context.*

**Key words:** *literary text, literary translation, pragmatic potential, pragmatic meaning, author's intention,*

### Introduction

It is well-known that one of the main functions of literary translation, in addition to conveying reliable factual information framed by complex stylistic imagery, is the disclosure and interpretation of the author's intention, expressed not only by plot twists and turns, but also by a skillful selection of linguistic means. In this regard, over the past decades, the interest of scientists in the direction of research of the text linguistics and, in particular, the interpretation of the literary text, has grown significantly. According to many scientists, a combination of various factors, namely, "the connection of meaning with extra-linguistic reality, speech context, explicit and implicit, communicative attitude that connects the utterance with the changing participants in communication - the subject of speech and its recipients, the fund of their knowledge and opinions, the situation (place and time), in which the speech act is carried out, forms a mosaic of a widely understood context, which just opens the door to the pragmatics of related disciplines and provides it with a synthesizing mission." [1; 7] In other words, the relationship between the author's intention (pragmatic attitude) and its perception by the reader (pragmatic effect) is due to a number of factors that undoubtedly require detailed analysis when translating a literary text. According to Valgina (2004), the author of the text determines: 1) the goals and objectives of the message (for example, information, expression of will, instruction, etc.); 2) the type of speech behavior; 3) attitude to the reported, its assessment (or lack thereof); 4) accents when constructing the text of the message. While the reader 1) interprets the text, including indirect and hidden meanings, 2) experiences an impact - intellectual, emotional, aesthetic. [2; 14] Thus, pragmatic analysis reveals these interactions between the author and the reader, establishes the measure of useful information in the text, focusing on the typology of the reader's address.

### Theoretical background

Analyzing the specifics of a literary text, Devy (2002) emphasizes the following

characteristics: *expressiveness, connotation, symbolism, focusing both on form and content, subjectivity, multiple interpretations, timeless and universal phenomena, the presence of special (stylistic) means to enhance the communicative effect, and a tendency to deviate from linguistic norms.* [3; 112] Undoubtedly, this list should be supplemented by such elements as the *conceptual structure of the text, the knowledge-structures, the national-cultural and individual-author's picture of the world.* Pragmatic relations in literary translation are superimposed on semantic relations and play an equally important role in the analysis of the source text and in the creation of an adequate text in the target language. According to Komissarov and Korolova (1990), words, as semiotic signs, are not impersonal names of objects, they can acquire a different meaning, be associated with certain theories, beliefs, likes and dislikes, and people form a certain attitude towards them. [4] Moreover, Komissarov (2002) developing this idea emphasizes that any statement and any text have the ability to exert a certain pragmatic influence on the reader or listener (otherwise: the communicative effect). The nature of this impact is determined by three main factors. First, this is the content of the utterance ... Second, the perception of the message depends on the nature of the signs constituting the utterance ... Third, the pragmatic effect of the utterance depends on the receptor that perceives it. [5; 134] In other words, the perception of the text depends not only on the author's intention to produce a certain effect on the reader, but also on the reader's ability to perceive the information inherent, based on his own experience. In pragmatics, this phenomenon is characterized by the term presupposition, which refers to general knowledge of a person about the world and, on the other hand, as knowledge of a specific speech situation. From author's position, presupposition influences the choice of linguistic means when structuring utterances. From the reader's side, presupposition conditions the perception of the displayed images or situations according to his/her own experience. "To presuppose a proposition in the pragmatic sense is to take its truth for granted, and to presume that others involved in the context do the same. This does not imply that the person need have any particular mental attitude toward the proposition, or that he needs assume anything about the mental attitudes of others in the context. Presuppositions are probably best viewed as complex dispositions which are manifested in linguistic behavior." [6; 387-388]

Traditionally, it is believed that presuppositions are based on extralinguistic information, which implies not only general historical, cultural or religious stereotypes, but also the individual experience of a person. Therefore, it can serve as the main obstacle in the interpretation, since unlike stereotypical thinking, individual understanding can represent a different perception of the same fact or linguistic phenomenon, which should also be taken into account by the translator. This is what many foreign linguists paid attention to when discussing this term. Moreover, in the English-speaking linguistic tradition, the pragmatics of the text is closely related to the implementation of linguistic signs in the context, as well as the dependence of their interpretation on the context. In particular, van Dijk (1981) identified nine basic properties of the pragmatic potential of text research:

- Pragmatics is an integral component of linguistic theory with a status comparable to that of syntax and semantics.
- The competence of pragmatists includes identifying the systemic properties of using utterances as a special type of social action, i.e. speech or illocutionary acts.
- Pragmatic interpretation, i.e. specification in relation to pragmatic functions (speech acts), those statements are obtained that are syntactically correct, semantically acceptable and satisfying the truth conditions.
- Pragmatic interpretations are predetermined by the pragmatic context, i.e. a set of cognitive and social factors relevant to the use of this statement.

- The main task of pragmatics is to specify the so-called “appropriateness conditions”, i.e. those conditions under which a particular utterance functions (or is considered) as a suitable (for a certain context) speech act. These conditions are formulated in terms of structural features of the pragmatic context.

- Pragmatics in its more theorized and abstracted (in relation to the real use of the language) understanding is intended to carry out the specification of (theoretically permissible) conditions for the (theoretically permissible) suitability of (theoretically permissible) structures of statements.

- The empirical tasks of the general theory of pragmatics include the development of a cognitive model of production, understanding, memorization, etc. speech acts, as well as models of communicative interaction and the use of language in specific socio-cultural situations.

- The illocutionary functions of utterances are signaled by certain features of their morphosyntactic and semantic structure.

- Linguistic theory should not be limited to the consideration of individual isolated sentences, in the field of view should be sequences of sentences that have a textual structure and are characterized, in particular, by both global and local connectivity. [7; 26-28]

It can be noted that the pragmatic potential of the text, according to van Dijk, is closely interconnected with the grammatical level, therefore, we can conclude that extralinguistic factors are not the only ones in identifying the author's pragmatic attitude: “... The text is not limited to a sequence of local microstructures, it necessarily carries global meaning. Analysis of the “most standard” examples of connectivity - the relationship between a pronoun and its antecedent - shows that their adequate interpretation requires going into the realm of pragmatics.” [8; 71]

Nevertheless, within the framework of literary translation, it is necessary to discuss not only the pragmatic attitudes of the source text as a whole, but also such a concept as the pragmatic meaning of a linguistic unit, since sometimes one word can influence the choice of adequate correspondences for the entire micro-context, which can vary from one sentence to an entire paragraph. For example, according to Barhudarov (1975), pragmatic meaning is the relationship between a sign and a person using this sign; this is the subjective attitude of people (linguistic groups) to language units, and through them to the objects and concepts they designate; it is often fixed behind a given sign, it enters as a permanent component in its semantic structure and in this case becomes what we call the pragmatic meaning of a linguistic sign. [9] Therefore, it can be noted once again that the pragmatic meaning is purely subjective and does not have a permanent character in one and of the same lexical unit, which also proves the dependence of the pragmatic potential on the context and individual perception. However, the perception of the reader and the perception of the author may not coincide, which ultimately leads to a violation of the translation adequacy at the pragmatic level. Moreover, the pragmatic meaning is closely related to the concept of connotation, which, according to Teliya (1991), is “the mediastinum of pragmatic information in linguistic entities” [10; 27] and includes emotiveness, evaluativeness and intensity.

Considering the most recent researches in the field of text linguistics and pragmatics, the information represented in the text is traditionally specified as content-factual, content-conceptual, and content-subtextual. Content-factual information is a “the foreground of the text”. It is expressed verbally and informs about facts, events, processes (real or imaginary), that is, it is “existential”. This information is extracted from the meaning of individual words, phrases, sentences, etc., rethought as part of an integral text, and “gives an impetus” to reveal a deeper meaning referred to content-conceptual information. Content-conceptual information is, meanwhile, the most important type of information demonstrating the individual-author's understanding of what the content-factual information describes. This is “the author's intention plus his meaningful interpretation”. In a literary

text, meaningfully conceptual information has an aesthetic and artistic character and is usually not expressed explicitly, that is, it requires mental effort to decode. Subtextual information is hidden, not verbally expressed and is not always present in the text. It is extracted from content-factual information, but its extraction itself largely depends on the reader's ability to discern the "huge potential of semantic increments" appealing to reader's knowledge and experience background. For interpretation of a literary text, the level of subtextual information is the most important and meaningful as it reveals the author's intention implicitly represented in the conceptual integrity of a literary text.

## Discussion

Textual parameter of a situational context is relevant for actual communicative act reconstructed in the context of a target text. For illustration, let's turn to the example taken from the novel by K.Vonnegut "The Sirens of Titan":

*"Beware of the dog! - said a sign over the small iron door". [11]*

"Beware of the dog!" is a warning sign preventing from entering unwanted visitors. Actually, it does not really inform about the existence of a dog over the fence. Moreover, as we can understand from the context, there was no dog defending that territory. However, from pragmatic point of view here we can see very important subtextual information representing privacy of the people living there. On the other hand, in this proposition we can find cultural specificity too (which is rather important for selecting the adequate resources for translation into Russian). In English linguoculture the attitude to a dog is rather tender, while in Russian linguoculture we can find some expressions referring to negative attitude to the animal, for example, "злой как собака" (angry as a dog). From this point of view, it is rather natural for the Russian variant of a similar sign to add the word "angry" ("Beware of the angry dog!"), which was suggested by a translator of this novel Rait-Kovaleva:

*"Над низкой железной дверью висел плакатик: «Осторожно, злая собака!»" [12]*

In the Russian language the sign "Осторожно, злая собака" has similar pragmatic potential – this is not informing about the dog, but it signals: "Warning", "Dangerous", "Do not enter". Therefore, we can conclude, that addition as a translational transformation positively influence the quality of the target text as it helps to produce the same effect on the reader of translation and represent the similar perception as it was with the reader of the source text.

The key role in the interpretation of a literary text is played by the focal point of intentionality, which represents the author's deep meanings through concepts, the semantic component of which expands due to the emergence of occasional meaning, which is an integral part of the author's idiosyncrasy. We try to illustrate these principles with the following example (taken from K.Vonnegut's novel "Cat's Cradle" and two variants of its translation made by Rait-Kovaleva [a] and Biryukov [b]):

*She fired me. I shall never forget her. She believed that God liked people in **sailboats** much better than He liked people in **motorboats**. She could not bear to look at a worm. When she saw a worm, she screamed. [13]*

[a] *Она меня выгнала. Но я ее никогда не забуду. Она верила, что бог гораздо больше любит владельцев **яхт**, чем владельцев **простых моторок**. Она видеть не могла червяков. Как увидит червяка, так и завизжит. [14]*

[b] *Она уволила меня. Я никогда не забуду её. Она верила, что люди в **парусных лодках** нравятся Богу гораздо больше, нежели нравятся Ему люди в **лодках моторных**. Она не могла вынести вида червяка. Когда она видела червяка, она вопила. [15]*

In this extract we can specify two phrases: *people in sailboats* and *people in motorboats*. Having selected the lexemes *sailboats* and *motorboats*, we can notice that both of them refer to the notion “*water vehicle*”. However, the writer opposes these two words in order to indicate the social status of the owner reinforcing the context by such phrases as “*She fired me*”, “*She could not bear to look at a worm*”. In this connection, the translator has to look for appropriate equivalents with the necessary pragmatic meaning, as direct reference will not provide that pragmatic effect, which we can feel in the source text. Therefore, taking into consideration contextual signals, the translator Rait-Kovaleva gives an adequate translation “*яхта*” (a *yacht*) strengthened by the adjective “*нормой*” (*ordinary*), which will evoke the intended associations related to luxury in the Russian-speaking linguocultural perception, therefore, a similar pragmatic effect is achieved. However, Biryukov's translation is almost literal translation as the translator decided to preserve the denotational level of translation, thereby sacrificing the author's pragmatic intention, from which an important element of the implicit information was lost. Thus, in the source text, the lexeme “*sailboats*” performs the pragmatic function of presupposition, relying on the background knowledge of the potential reader, which should have been reflected in the translation.

### Conclusion

The specificity of a literary text is determined not only by such characteristics as expressiveness, polysemy, communicative effect, subjectivity, unity of form and content, deviation from linguistic norms, but also by phenomena reflecting the national and cultural specifics, as well as the individual perception of the reader. Consequently, the methods of cognitive and linguocultural analysis should be involved for an adequate interpretation of individual linguistic units.

The pragmatic potential of a literary text includes both linguistic and extralinguistic phenomena. In this regard, at the stage of pre-translation analysis of a literary text, it is necessary to consider not only dictionary versions of translation, but also to pay attention to stylistic marks, which can be signal markers of the author's pragmatic attitude and influence the choice of correspondences in a wider context (sentence, paragraph).

An adequate interpretation of the author's intention, namely, goal-setting and pragmatic attitude, contributes to the correct choice of an equivalent from a number of possible synonyms. As our analysis has shown, when choosing between equivalence at the denotative and pragmatic levels, the preference should be in favour of the pragmatic potential, since pragmatic meaning includes the activation of the hidden meanings laid down by the author of the original and its disclosure in the translation contributes to the adequate perception of the text by the reader of the translation.

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