

Grzegorz A. KLEPARSKI, Marta PIKOR-NIEDZIAŁEK

**A NOTE ON PRAGMATICALLY AND STYLISTICALLY
CONDITIONED SEMANTIC CHANGES – THE CASE
STUDY OF *NEWSWEEK POLSKA***

Introduction

The main purpose of this paper is to outline certain linguistic phenomena which seem to be cases of pragmatically and stylistically conditioned **semantic alterations** that are frequently implemented by translators in the process of rendering English language articles published in the American weekly magazine *Newsweek* into Polish in its counterpart *Newsweek Polska*. The material that will be discussed seems to visualise the cases of translator-stimulated changes of semantic content of words, titles and longer stretches of text.

It has become almost a truism in contemporary translation theory to say that a matter of primary importance in the process of translating is to make every possible attempt to determine the discourse type of the source text, which, in turn, implies the choice of appropriate target language units conforming to the linguistic and cultural conventions of the receptor culture. At the same time, it should be emphasized that mass media publications seem to presuppose a specific kind of discourse in the written mode of communication that is characterized by its semantic, pragmatic and stylistic peculiarities. From this it follows that there seem to emerge certain features which distinguish the process of translating newspaper and/or magazine articles from other forms of mediated bilingual communication. The preliminary results presented in this paper have been obtained in the course of analysis of a well-defined corpus comprising original articles previously published in the American weekly magazine *Newsweek* and further translated into Polish for its corresponding local periodical *Newsweek Polska*.

Semantic changes and translation techniques

Present-day translation practice shows that in a number of articles translators have implemented the notion of the so-called **interlingual synonyms**. In short, the translation operation at issue presupposes the use of the target-language lexical item whose scope of meaning and usage does not seem to be exactly the same as the scope of meaning and usage of the source-language unit. Not infrequently, however, there emerges a better candidate for the status of equivalent characterized by a greater cross-linguistic correspondence with the original target-language unit. In such cases the choice of an interlingual synonym is most frequently motivated by either stylistic considerations, possible unfavourable homophonous effects or the phenomenon of phonetic symbolism, to mention but a few factors (see Catford 1965).

Practice shows that in some troublesome cases translators either tend to coin a new lexical item or make use of a rare word in the course of rendering a text into a foreign language. For instance, in the article titled “No Fellow Too Strange” in *Newsweek* August 25/September 1, 2003 the semantically complex expression *multiplex strategy* was translated into Polish as *kinowa strategia* (see the paper titled „Gubernator” in *Newsweek Polska* 34/2003). By all means, the adjective *kinowy* ‘cinematographic; of, connected with, the cinema’ used to render the semantic content of the lexical item *multiplex* (*a multiplex cinema shows several different films at the same time* (see *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* 2000) in the target text, firstly, drastically differs in its meaning scope from the possible Polish translation equivalents suggested by the same bilingual dictionary, such as, for example, *wieloraki* ‘multiple, multiplex’ (*wielorakie kształty, funkcje, rola [...]*), *złożony* ‘complex, complicated’ (*złożone słowo, zdanie, liczba [...]*) (see Stanisławski *Dictionary* 1964). Secondly, it must be stressed that the adjective discussed has a very much limited collocability, rather rare usage and lesser frequency compared to its Polish synonym *filmowy* (*filmowy aktor, reżyser, szkoła*) (see Linde-Usiekniewicz *PWN Oxford Dictionary* 2004), conditioned mainly by the fact that the motivating noun *kino* had not been characterized by declination, hence not fully adapted by the language, until recently.

Another interesting example of interlingual lexical substitution implemented in the process of translating is to be found in the article titled “Too Much Money” published in *Newsweek* August 18, 2003, where the author resorts to the following linguistic expression: *The most hyped American Internet survivor is eBay [...]*. In the edition of *Newsweek Polska* 33/2003 (the article titled „Świat skąpany w forsie”), this original text sequence is rendered in the following manner: *Najsławniejszym pogrobowcem amerykańskiej internetowej gorączki jest serwis aukcyjny eBay*. Thus, the noun *survivor* (*He was the lone survivor of the crash*, see *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* 2000), which does

not seem to have a one-word synonym in the Polish language was rendered by the translator by means of *pogrobowiec*, (*dziecko urodzone po śmierci ojca*, or figuratively *pogrobowiec romantyzmu*, see Doroszewski *Dictionary* 1980), which in Polish normally refers to a child who was born after his or her father had died. Of course, this lexical item is used in a purely metaphorical sense in the quoted extract of the target text.

In this particular example, however, this choice seems to be stylistically justified, although, one could think of the word *relikt* (English *relic*), as the closest translation equivalent (*relikt – pozostałość*, for example: *relikt glacialny*, see Linde-Usiekiewicz *PWN Oxford Dictionary* 2004). The translation technique employed here may be referred to as the change of **axiological polarity**. Both the lexical element of the source language, that is *survivor* and that of the target language, that is *pogrobowiec* are characterized by the presence of a fair amount of expressive meaning. Nevertheless, while in the former case the axiological load must be qualified as positive, that is *John is a survivor*, in the latter, that is *pogrobowiec* one may point to a decisively negative evaluative charge that may be rendered by means of such semantically related lexical units as, for example, *orphan* (*the plight of thousands of war orphans*, see *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* 2000), *poor relative*, etc.

Yet another technique often employed in the process of translation is making use of the so called **equivalent collocations** or **pragmatemes**. The term *collocation* introduced into language studies by Firth (1957) and then further elaborated on by a number of linguists (see, for example, Greenbaum 1970, Sinclair 1987, etc.) is often defined as a characteristic word combination whose lexical constituents have developed an idiomatic relation based on their frequent co-occurrence. Firth (1957) himself advocates the use of two terms, that is collocation for semantic association on the one hand, and colligation for syntactic association of lexemes on the other hand. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that the majority of linguists tend to implement the former as a general category that encompasses both lexical-semantic and formal-syntactic relationships between words.

Sometimes the source language collocations are translated literally into the target language by means of a **calque** (this technique is based on the literal translation of morphological constituents of compound lexical items, language-specific collocations, names of various institutions, etc.), giving rise to new metaphorical uses of some collocations in the target language. Consider, for example, the sentence *Most of the zoning legislation has got the retailers by the throat* taken from the article titled “Europe’s Big Land Grab” by Chris Sulavic in *Newsweek* August 11, 2003, which in the Polish target text was translated in the following manner: *Legislacja dotycząca zagospodarowania przestrzennego chwyciła sieci handlowe za gardło* (see the article titled „Unijny hipertłok” in

Newsweek Polska 32/2003). Thus, the English collocation *to have smb. by the throat* was rendered by means of *chwycić kogoś za gardło* (*to hold someone violently by a part of their body: They had him by the throat.*, see *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* 2000). The Polish translation of this particular fragment of the text, however, sounds slightly odd, certainly for some native speakers, or at least far from being innovative or – to say the least – it may give the impression of poor style.

Another example of an attempt to translate a text fragment by means of a collocational translation loan may be found in the aforementioned article titled “Unijny hipertłok” by Chris Sulavic in *Newsweek Polska* 32/2003 in which the English original sentence *There are Safeway stores in this portfolio that will have directors of the other companies salivating* (see the article titled “Europe’s Big Land Grab” in *Newsweek* August 11/2003), was rendered into Polish as *Dyrektorzy innych firm ślinią się na myśl o sklepach Safewaya*. Thus, the English verb *to salivate* (*to have an (excessive) flow of saliva, or figuratively, to show great or excessive eagerness or excitement, for example, salivating at the prospect of great profits*, see *Dictionary of the English Language* 1995), was translated by means of the expression *ślinić się na myśl o czymś* which is, in fact, not a permissible collocation in the Polish language. The only existing (and similar in meaning) collocation in Polish *cieszyć się na coś, na myśl o czymś* (*Cieszył się na to spotkanie*, *Doroszewski Dictionary* 1980) could have been safely employed for the purpose of translation in this context.

Corpus analysis has shown that the predominance of translating by means of calques and collocational translation loans, when compared to other discourse types, is easily noticeable. This translation technique, in turn, gives rise to pragmatically and stylistically conditioned semantic changes in the target texts. The major claim of this paper has been based on the assumption that *Newsweek Polska* articles appear within the framework of a specific kind of discourse in the written mode of communication characterized by its semantic, pragmatic and stylistic peculiarities. Hence, translating press articles unavoidably differs substantially from other acts of mediated bilingual communication.

It remains highly debatable whether the fact of not implementing preexisting target-language collocations or pragmatemes instead of the actually used calque of the source-text linguistic expression should be regarded as a translation error. Notice that translation loans of a distinctly metaphorical nature condition a number of semantic changes emerging in the process of bilingual translation. Moreover, they seem to give the impression of stylistic innovation, which fits if not into the overall style of the discourse type at issue, then at least into that of American journalism of the genre in question. In sum, it is fairly obvious that the semantic changes implemented appear to have a broadly understood pragmatic function, namely to draw the readers’ attention.

Change of headings and word formation

While in the former cases one may speak of a certain alteration of the meaning content in the case of the changes in headlines there seems to take place a far-reaching shift of meaning guided – to a considerable degree – by the translator’s desire to make the headlines of the articles as catchy as possible.

One may try to formulate a general rule by saying that change of headings and/or subheadings in the translation of press articles may be employed for the purpose of putting special emphasis on the content of the message. For example, in the English edition of *Newsweek* August 25, 2003/September 1, 2003 the article by Karen Breslau about Arnold Schwarzenegger running for governor of California has the following heading: “No Fellow Too Strange”. In contrast, the heading in the Polish edition (*Newsweek Polska* 34/2003) is the following linguistic innovation „Gubernimator”.

On closer inquiry, one finds out that the Polish heading „Gubernimator” is a result of blending of two words, that is *gubernator* (governor in Polish) and *terminator*. One must say that this title is both informative and emphatic. On the one hand, it makes a strong implication that the actor who once played in *Terminator* is currently running for the position of governor. On the other hand, it seems that the use of a newly-formed blending is intended to emphasize that the situation is far from being commonplace.

This heading which has been subject to cultural and informational adaptation for the benefit of the target readership aims to clarify that: a) the person in question is Arnold Schwarzenegger; b) he is running for governor of California; and c) he played in *Terminator*. The English heading seems to be far less informative and, if translated literally, may happen to be not informative enough for the prospective Polish readership. It seems that the example discussed sufficiently illustrates the major tendencies that manifest themselves in the modification of headings. It should be noted that in the process of translating practically every heading may be – and frequently is – subject to some kind of change, varying from a mild alteration to a drastic far-reaching, sense/expressive load transformation. It goes without saying that this technique of forming new words has cultural, informative and pragmatic function of drawing the readers’ attention, at any cost.

Conclusion

Attempt has been made here to provide partial evidence that in the process of translation *calque* or *translation loans* of a distinctly metaphorical nature frequently condition semantic changes and give the impression of stylistic innovation, which fits into the overall style of the discourse type at issue. In

sum, the semantic changes implemented seem to have mainly a pragmatic and stylistic function. Similarly, the technique of forming new words by means of blending has cultural, informative and pragmatic function, the driving force behind which is to draw readers' attention.

References

- Catford, J.** 1965. *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Doroszewski, W.** 1980. *Słownik poprawnej polszczyzny*. Warszawa: PWN.
- Firth, J.** 1957. *Papers in Linguistics 1934–1951*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Greenbaum, S.** 1970. *Verb-Intensifier Collocations in English: An Experimental Approach*. (*Janua Linguarum. Studia Memoriae Nicolai Van Wijk. Series Mino. Nr. 86*. The Hague & Paris: Moulton).
- Linde-Usiekiewicz, J.** 2004. *Wielki słownik polsko-angielski*. Warszawa: PWN Oxford.
- Longman.** 1995. *Dictionary of the English Language*. New York: Viking.
- Longman Group Ltd.** 2000. *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*. Spain: Longman.
- Sinclair, J.** and **M. Coulthard** 1987. "Collocation: A progress report". [In:] Steele, R. & T. Threadgold (eds). 319–331.
- Stanisławski, J.** 1964. *Wielki słownik polsko-angielski*. Warszawa: PWN.

Source materials

- Breslau, K.** 2003. August 25/September 1. "No Fellow Too Strange". *Newsweek*. 26.
- Breslau, K.** 2003/34. „Gubernator”. *Newsweek Polska*. 48.
- Miller, K.** 2003. August 18. "Too Much Money". *Newsweek*. 32–37.
- Miller, K.** 2003/ 33. „Świat skapany w forsie”. *Newsweek Polska*. 62–64.
- Sulavic, Ch.** 2003. August 11. "Europe's Big Land Grab". *Newsweek*. 40.
- Sulavic, Ch.** 2003/32. „Unijny hipertłok”. *Newsweek Polska*. 60–61.