

# TRANSLATION OF SOCIOLECT TEXTS

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*A moment's reflection suffices to convince one that no language is homogeneous, being represented by a set of language variants or language existential forms, reflecting the heterogeneous character of the national culture. Notwithstanding variable nature of language, linguistic theorizing has been mostly based on standardized languages forms, rather than on natural speech dialects. The present research addresses the fundamental issue of variability within a language and aims at studying the specific fragment of the Russian language of the XXth century – Soviet camp sociolect within the frameworks of contrastive sociolectology. Sociolect nature of the source text is viewed as one of the factors increasing the degree of text untranslatability. The author dwells on the nature of adaptation interventions, which a translator needs to perform to render the specificity of the Soviet camp social dialect in English. The analysis of the ways in which translators processed the source texts under consideration reveals the twofold strategy aimed at maintaining a proper balance between replicating the sociolect text specificity and making the translation readable to the target recipients. Combining explanatory translation, loose translation, occasional equivalents with loan translation translators achieve clarity of the translation, preserving at the same time apparent non-nativeness of the target text, which helps to avoid leveling the sociolect nature of the source texts.*

**Keywords:** *sociolect, translation, untranslatability, camp jargon, adaptation.*

## 1. Introduction

Overcoming language and culture barriers in translation has long been an overriding concern for practitioners and interpreting researchers alike. Studies of the 'ethnos – language – culture' triad led to the emergence of diametrically opposite points of view on the objective possibility of translation: from proclaiming the dogma of untranslatability (translation is nothing more than an approximation to the original) to ultimate translatability, based on the idea of the existence of a certain universal language. Later attempts were made to synthesize both of these approaches, in the result of which such concepts as "relative translatability", "partial translatability", "decreasing translatability", etc. were introduced (Koller 1997, 164–167). Without going into the details of the discussion about the ontological essence of translatability/untranslatability, we will dwell on the dynamic nature of these categories. According to the German translator W. Koller, the degree of translatability/untranslatability may decrease or increase depending on the nature of the relationship between language, mode of thinking, perception of reality, reality itself, the uniqueness of each language, and



many other factors (*ibidem*). In other words, the category of untranslatability may lose its absolute character, and turn to the category of probable translatability, and then into potential and real translatability. In this regard, the urgent task of modern translation studies, in our opinion, is to identify and systematize linguistic and extralinguistic barriers, cultural bumps and other hindrances that increase the degree of untranslatability of texts and, thereby, impede full-fledged intercultural communication.

There are different criteria, permitting to evaluate the degree of translatability/untranslatability of texts. According to A. Neubert, the degree of translatability of literary texts depends on the genre of the work: "... fiction and drama have a higher degree of translatability than lyrical poetry" (Neubert 1968, 30–31). M. Pavlova identifies the place of bilingual literary texts in the paradigm of translatability/untranslatability, noting that single foreign inclusions are easier to translate than extensive text fragments that have bilingual characteristics (Pavlova 2017, 22). E. Maslennikova states, that texts may be steeped in context of cultures, opposing each other, which leads to cultural bumps or clashes, when the original and its translation, embodying two alien cultural worlds, come up against each other as "opposing" or even "mutually exclusive", thus increasing the degree of text untranslatability (Maslennikova, 2014: 152, 156).

The present article aims to contribute, however modestly, to supplementing the list of factors, influencing the degree of translatability/untranslatability of literary texts by identifying the role of sociolect nature of the source text, which is viewed as one of the barriers in the translation process.

Perhaps it would not be an exaggeration to say that the study of a language from a social perspective is one of the distinguishing features of linguistics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But despite the fact that hundreds of research papers and books on the relations between language and society have been published, and "the sociolinguistic enterprise has grown so much that it is difficult to keep up with developments in its various subfields" (Coulmas 1998) there is still a number of sociolinguistic phenomena requiring theoretical explanation. One of such underresearched areas is contrastive sociolectology, the sphere of sociolinguistics, which is diagnosed with "theoretical deficit" (Korovushkin 2005).

## 2. On the polysociolect nature of the national language

Contrastive sociolectology is an important branch of sociolinguistics, the task of which is to address the problem of translation of social dialects. K. Azhezh wrote: "... beyond the infinite variety of languages, lies the enchanting diversity of cultures" (Azhezh 2003, 278). This thought is applicable to the national language, which consists of a set of various language variants or social dialects, reflecting the heterogeneous character of the national culture. Thus, the existence of social dialects is caused by the properties of the national language itself, which exists not as a homogenous indiscreet entity, but as a complex combination of dialectically related language forms (variants), predetermined by various extralinguistic factors, such as the heterogeneity of the social structure of society (diastatic formations), the situa-



tion of communication (diasituational lexical groups) and territorial differentiation (diatopic variants). The situation is further complicated by the fact that, as T. Kryuchkova writes, in themselves, linguistic variants never exist "in pure form", correlated with only one extra-linguistic parameter (Kryuchkova 2016, 431). As a result, there is a huge variety of linguistic forms: besides traditionally distinguished sociological notions, such as jargon, argot, slang, professional languages, etc., the researchers identify various kinds of 'lects': 'familylects' – social dialect of a family (Lipatov 2010, 31), 'religiolects' – language varieties used by the representatives of a certain religious confession (Bugayeva 2010), 'geolects' are regionally, territorially and locally limited forms of the existence of the national language (Korovushkin 2005, 12), 'genderlects' – male and female speech (Medvedeva 2012), etc. It would be appropriate to refer here to R. Barthes, who wrote that each of us is included into a peculiar "game of sociolects", as no language can exist outside the sociolect sphere: the speech of every individual is inevitably included in one of the sociolect dialects (Barthes 1989, 526).

A means of communication of cultures (and subcultures, in particular) is the text, which acts as a unique cultural code that requires special interpretation, since its constituent language signs, along with the denotative meaning, are imbued with many changeable social meanings, which they acquire in the context of their use. In other words, the text is the most important representation of culture (subculture). R. Barthes figuratively compared the social characteristics of a text with its shadow, which the text can only get rid of "by consistent self-depletion": "Some would like the text (artwork, painting) not to have a shadow; not to be affected by the "dominant ideology". In the meantime, to demand this means to demand a fruitless, unproductive, well-polished text" (Barthes 1989, 486 – 487).

Further on we intend to illustrate the fact that taking into account sociolect specificity of the original text is extremely important in the process of its translation and that there are certain translation strategies, allowing doing this in a most effective way.

### 3. The study material

The linguistic situation that occurred in the former Soviet Union in the 20<sup>th</sup> century provides material for a fruitful and rewarding study on linguistic variations, as in the result of the 'nationalization' of the Russian language by the state, emerged the "Soviet language", which was later called the "newspeak", by analogy with the term coined by J. Orwell. M. Krongauz writes about the "newspeak" as a specific, separate and independent language (Krongauz 1991). It should be noted that the "newspeak" did not replace everyday language, but existed alongside with it, which led to the development of diglossia – the simultaneous existence in the society of two forms of the same language, applied in different functional spheres. Newspeak was not the only form of sociolect dialect, which emerged in response to the changes, occurred in the society. The period from the early 20s to the late 50s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by the spread of another social dialect, which served as a communication means for prisoners of the Soviet



camps – camp jargon. This social dialect was used by the former GULAG prisoners, who found the strength to remember everything that happened to them and to write about their camp experience on the pages of their memoirs, novels, narratives, plays, poems, etc. Among the outstanding Russian authors of the camp prose there are such writers as A. Solzhenitsyn, E. Ginzburg, V. Shalamov, L. Kopelev, L. Razgon and many others. Their works were translated into foreign languages and published in many countries. There is an opinion, that the camp theme is a thing of the past and though it was “vigorously debated in the 1960s-70s”, today “a much more common reaction to Stalin terror – boredom and indifference” (Epplbaum 2006, 16). Such an assessment seems to us not completely objective. The fact that today, almost a century after the publication of the first translations of Russian camp prose into English, new translations are being prepared (*Memoir of a Gulag Actress* by T. Petkevich (2010); *Children of the Gulag* by S. Vilenski and K. Frierson (2011); *My Journey: How One Woman Survived Stalin's Gulag* by O. Adamova-Sliozberg (2011); *Five Fates from a Wondrous Planet* by G. Demidov (2015), etc.), prove that the interest to this topic did not fade.

The present research is therefore designed not only to understand the properties and functions of camp speech and the differences between standard language and social dialect, but also to analyze translation strategies, which make it possible to cope with these differences and thus help to reduce intercultural bumps in the process of sociolect texts translation. The research is based on the examples taken from the works of most well-known authors of Soviet camp prose, who employed in their works the vocabulary peculiar for the Soviet camp sociolect.

#### 4. Translation of texts: from culture-sympathy to cultural bumps

The degree of translatability of sociolect texts may be different, depending on a number of factors. M. Snell-Hornby gave sufficient evidence that the possibility of the translation of the original text greatly depends on the degree of its cultural specificity: «the extent to which a text is translatable varies with the degree to which it is embedded in its own specific culture, also with the distance that separates the cultural background of source text and target audience in terms of time and place» (Snell-Hornby 1988, 41).

Analyzing the translations of *GULAG Archipelago* into English and German, a most well-known novel by A. Solzhenitsyn in which the author masterly blended the language of common people with harsh camp jargon, A. Bond came to the conclusion that the German translator enjoyed an advantage, to a degree, over the American translator, which lies outside a competence as a translator: “the German translator had a greater degree of perception of and empathy for Solzhenitsyn’s subject matter... P’s (*A. Peturnig – a translator of the GULAG Archipelago into German – my personal comment, EK*) appreciation of the kind of socio-cultural and political situations and conditions described must, one can safely say, be more attuned to her sensibilities than to those of someone whose European experience is not entirely first hand” (Bond 1983, 311 – 312). The main reason why the German translation was mainly characterized as “the most successful Solzhenitsyn translation



that had been done" (Bond 1983, 304), while the English translation, according to the reviewers, quite accurately conveyed only the content of the original, was that T. Whitney (*a translator of the GULAG Archipelago (Vol. 1 & 2) into English – my comment, EK.*) to a greater extent than A. Peturnig had to deal not only with discrepancies in the linguistic structures of the English and Russian languages, but also in the "worlds" themselves, that is, in the described objects and phenomena. The use of similar camp systems in the USSR and Germany affected the wide dissemination of specific camp vocabulary in both languages, which was not and could not be the case in English-speaking countries where there was no system of concentration camps. Thus, the possibility of 'importing' Soviet camp subculture by means of translation to English-speaking countries is significantly limited.

To render the specificity of the Soviet camp social dialect in English a translator needs to perform a certain amount of adaptation interventions<sup>2</sup>. The sociolect nature of the text is primarily revealed on the lexical level of the language. Sociolect markers of the source text include designations of subcultural realia and lexical elements reflecting peculiarities of the source subculture. An extract from a novel by a well-known Russian author L. Kopelev *Ease my Sorrows* can serve as an example of the source text, the sociolect nature of which pushes a translator to apply adaptation in the translation process:

*Dmitry Panin was a native Muscovite, an aristocrat, engineer, and theoretician of blacksmithing. He was arrested in 1940 for "conversations" and sentenced in absentia to five years by an OSO (secret "court" under the MGB)\*. And then in the camp in 1943 he was tried for "defeatist" agitation and was "given the whole spoon" – ten years.*

*He had been brought to Butyrki Prison in Moscow for Vorkuta, near the Arctic Ocean, by a special warrant.*

*There were a lot like him in the room – engineers, scientists, workers. It was from them that I first heard about sharashkas (Kopelev 1983, 3).*

In the abstract under analysis the author employs a number of lexical elements reflecting peculiarities of the Soviet subculture: realia (*спецнаряд, шарашка*), proper names (*Бутырки, Воркута*), abbreviations (*ОСО*), prison jargon (*навесить полную катушку*), which are assigned to a specific sociolect

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<sup>2</sup> Despite the profound and long-lasting research of the much-disputed question of adaptation in translation, the term is still characterized as 'elusive' (Windle 2011) and the opinion on the adaptation in the translation process remains divided: from being treated as 'unacceptable' to 'legitimate strategy' (ibidem). However, linguistic and sociocultural differences inevitably embodied in a source text make adaptational interventions a practical necessity, since translation is always target-oriented, as there is no translation without the reader. Besides, blurriness of the divisions between translation and adaptation answers the question whether adaptation is deemed acceptable or not. To stop this endless discussion on the interrelations between translation and adaptation, Y. Gambier suggested in November 2003 in the special issue of *The Translator* dealing with screen translation (p. 178) the term "Transadaptation" (in English) and "Tradaptation" (in French), to stress the idea that there is always adaptation, to a certain extent, in translation and it is a question of degree, and not a difference of nature (Gambier 2003, 178).



nature of the source text. The translation of this 'sociolect markers' requires from the translator mastering of special intralinguistic skills to handle the specificity of the original sociolect text when there are no lexical means for its rendering into the target language.

P. Toper believes that the reader's perception is the highest argument in the debate about the translation quality, as it "organizes around itself all the other criteria necessary for evaluating the translation" (Toper 2000, 226). Dealing with a sociolect text, a translator is to decide how to render the 'otherness' embedded in the source text, so that it could be perceived by the ultimate reader as a text, marked by a subcultural specificity. In fact, the sociolect nature of the source text may influence to a certain extent the translation strategy: rendering the denotative component of the sociolect unit is no more perceived as a primary task. In the case when a sociolect unit does not carry important cognitive information or has an explicit inner form, the translator may resort to various translation techniques, such as loan translation (*calques* and *half-calques*), coining terms or borrowing of a word from the source text, which might hinder the understanding of the target text by the recipient, but at the same time the target text will be perceived as a sociolect dialect, the main function of which is to serve as 'language ID' for its users. Consider the following example from L. Kopelev's book:

*Working in a camp means hauling, bending your back, pushing with your horns. But without kicking the bucket, 'floating off', earning 'a wooden jacket' – you have to goof off, shirk, pad, look like you're working, chisel, inflict wounds that will fester...*  
(Kopelev 1983, 5).

The choice of translation equivalents shows that the translator was seeking to maintain a proper balance between replicating the source text specificity and observing intelligibility of the translation for the recipients. Resorting to the terms the meanings of which overlap with the foreign terms (*haul, kick the bucket, goof off, shirk, pad, chisel*) and explanatory translation (*look like you're working, inflict wounds that will fester*), the translator at the same time preserved alienation effect by borrowing foreign terms (*'pushing with your horns', 'floating off', earning 'a wooden jacket'*), which seems to be quite justifiable. O. Rtischeva wrote that "barriers in the cross-cultural sphere are not only an obligatory, but also necessary factor for establishing interaction between language culture communities. The main function of cross-cultural barriers is not to divide, but to regulate interaction between the communicating cultures. The constructive role of cross-cultural barriers is to help keeping national originality, on the one hand, (it is especially important for globalization era and establishing multicultural community), and on the other, to stimulate interest in foreign culture society because lack of a barrier often depreciates object of knowledge. Thus, barriers aren't a barrier between cultures; they are an additional incentive to communication" (Rtischeva 2019, 129). The task of the translator is to properly assess the degree of foreignness that is acceptable and desirable to provide both the "incentive to communication" and intelligibility of the translation.



In the article *Beyond the particular* A. Chesterman provides examples of different types of what some call translation universals. According to one of the hypotheses, “translations tend to be longer than their source texts” (Chesterman 2004, 40). Amplifications in translation are indeed a characteristic feature of the translation process. However, the limitations arising from the sociolect nature of the text need to be taken into account, as excessive amplification in translation may ruin the sociolect nature of the text. For example, J. Glad, the translator of the *Kolyma Tales* by V. Shalamov in English found six different ways to translate the camp jargonism «догодяга»: *starving man; physically exhausted; emaciated prisoner; on the brink of death; goner; those who had gone through the hell of Kolyma* (Shalamov 1994: passim). It seems that the approximation ‘goner’ corresponds better to the structure of the original, as it allows recreating in translation the laconism of the form and at the same time renders the imagery inherent in the original.

A good example of an effective strategy for rendering the specificity of sociolect texts is found in H. Willets’s translation of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* by A. Solzhenitsyn. It should be noted that there were six English translations of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. Four of them were published almost simultaneously in 1963. The translation made by R. Parker, which is also provided beneath, was reprinted many times in most English-speaking countries, until H. Willets’s translation appeared in 1991. Let us consider a small fragment from the translations performed by R. Parker and H. Willets:

<b>One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich. Tr. by R. Parker</b>	<b>One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich. Tr. by H. T. Willets</b>
<i>But Shukhov had never forgotten the words of his first <u>squad leader</u>, Kuziomin – a <u>hard-bitten prisoner who had already been in for twelve years by 1943</u> – who told the newcomers, just in from the front, as they sat beside a fire in a desolate cutting in the forest: “Here, men, we live by the law of the taiga. But even here people manage to live. The <u>ones that don’t make it are those who lick other men’s leftovers</u>, those who <u>count on the doctors to pull them through</u>, and those who <u>squeal on their buddies</u>.” As for <u>squealers</u>, he was wrong there. <u>Those people were sure to get through camp all right. Only they were saving their own skin at the expense of other people’s blood.</u></i>	<i>Shukhov never for a moment forgot what his first <u>foreman</u>, Kuzyomin, had told him. <u>An old camp wolf, twelve years inside by 1943. One day around the campfire in a forest clearing he told the reinforcements fresh from the front, “It’s the law of the taiga here, men. But a man can live here, just like anywhere else. Know <u>who croaks first?</u> The guy <u>who licks out bowls, puts his faith in the sick bay, or squeals to godfather.</u>” He was stretching it a bit there, of course. <u>A stoolie will always get by, whoever else bleeds for him.</u></u></i>

The first thing you pay attention to when comparing the two replicas of the original is a lengthy and redundant character of the translation made by R. Parker. Comp.: *squad leader* (P.) – *foreman* (W.); *a hard-bitten prisoner who had already been in for twelve years by 1943* (P.) – *an old camp wolf, twelve years inside by 1943* (W.); *Those people were sure to get through camp all right. Only they were saving their own skin at the expense of other people’s blood* (P.) – *A stoolie will always get by, whoever else bleeds for him* (W.). Though both translators



conveyed the informative side of the source text, Willets's translation is more consistent with the translational characteristics of the camp sociolect text. Parker's translation is much more explicit than the source text seems to be, which reduces the adequacy of the translation since it does not correspond to the source text pragmatics. However, one should take into account that Parker's translation appeared when the camp theme was just opened up and at that time very few English-speaking readers knew about the gulag.

## 5. Concluding remarks

Ch. Barslund writes that there are "some writers whose books may not 'travel' successfully to another language, even though it is technically possible to translate them. They may be deeply rooted in their own culture, for example, and have little appeal to foreign readers, though highly regarded in their country of origin." (Barslund 2012). The authors of the Soviet camp literature may serve as a good example here. The very first attempts to make a film based on Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the life of Ivan Denisovich* came across a misunderstanding on the part of the producers, whose summaries were as follows: "Lots of snow. Lots of long Russian names. No women. No escapes. No violence. Would have to be "opened up"... Recommendation: Not for us." (Harwood 1971). However, the right choice and appropriateness of target vocabulary and structures may help to bridge cognitive dissonance of cultures and thus, overcome communication breakdowns. The above examples are intended to show that the main task of a translator when working with a sociolect text is to resist the temptation to translate only the denotative component of the semantic structure of a sociolect word, but to do everything possible to achieve an adequate communicative effect on the recipients of translation.

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*Лингвосоциокультурная гетерогенность национального языка, обусловленная консолидацией в языке различных языковых форм, отражающих неоднородный характер национальной культуры, ни у кого не вызывает сомнений. Вместе с тем, несмотря на то что вариативность рассматривается лингвистами как объективное имманентное свойство языка, значительная часть теоретических изысканий основывается на стандартном литературном языке, выступающем носителем искусственной нормы, а не на естественных социально-групповых диалектах. В статье проанализирован феномен языковой вариативности на материале специфического некодифицированного фрагмента русского языка XX в. – лагерного социолекта – в аспекте контрастивной социолектологии. Социолектная природа оригинала трактуется как один из факторов, увеличивающих степень непереводимости исходного текста. Делается вывод о характере переводческих адаптаций, необходимых для адекватной передачи лагерных социолектизмов на английский язык. Анализ способов перевода социально-маркированных единиц свидетельствует об использовании переводчиками стратегии, направленной, с одной стороны, на воссоздание социолектной специфики оригинала, с другой – на достижение адекватного коммуникативного эффекта у реципиентов перевода. Удачный выбор переводчиком способов трансляции «чужой» культуры, а именно совмещение приемов, направленных на раскрытие значения социолектизмов (описательный или «разъяснительный» перевод, приблизительный или контекстуальный перевод), а также на воссоздание их национально-культурной специфичности (калькирование) позволяет в той или иной степени передать содержательную сторону исходного текста, избежав при этом стандартизации социолектного текста.*

**Ключевые слова:** социолект, перевод, непереводимость, лагерный жаргон, адаптация.

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