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## Stylistic Peculiarities in Self-Translation

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**Abstract:**

*The paper deals with stylistic peculiarities which are characteristic of V. Nabokov's self-translation of "Lolita", his most famous novel. We analyze how the writer translates phraseological units that, on the one hand, are widely used in the source text and, on the other hand, present a real challenge for translators.*

*The research identifies the reasons that caused the writer to translate his novel himself and studies the translation techniques employed by V. Nabokov. Reproducing "Lolita" in the Russian language the writer creates a new text targeting at the Russian reader. He overcomes the asymmetry of the positions in artistic freedom and creative independence of an author and a professional translator.*

*His auto-translation represents "ideal" translation since the author is in a better position than any ordinary translator because he knows his creation as nobody else and has the authority to allow himself shifts in the translation which might not have been 'allowed' by another translator. The results of V. Nabokov's self-translation can be regarded as certain "gold standards" for others to make use of.*

**Keywords:** *Applied Linguistics, Self-Translation, University Education, Language Education, Migration, Culture, Phraseological Units, Transformed Phraseological Units, Nabokov.*

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## **1. Introduction**

Self-translation (ST) has recently become an object of close attention in linguistics in general and in translation theory. Most experts agree that self-translation is the translation of an original work into another language by the author himself. On the one hand, it is a rather rare phenomenon. Therefore, it attracts attention of researchers. On the other hand, ST represents “ideal” translation since the author is in a better position than any ordinary translator because he knows his creation as nobody else and has the authority to allow himself shifts in the translation which might not have been ‘allowed’ by another translator. The results of self-translation can be regarded as certain “gold standards” for others to make use of. Therefore, the issue is very important and relevant.

The most famous writers who’ve translated their own works are Samuel Beckett (French-English), Karen Blixen (Danish-English), Jorge Luis Borges (Spanish-English), André Brink (Afrikaans-English), Italo Calvino (Italian-English), Julien Green (French-English), Nancy Huston (French-English), Vladimir Nabokov (Russian-English), Rabindranath Tagore (Bengali-English), Joseph Brodsky (Russian-English). A unique position among them is held by V. Nabokov.

His works are of exceptional interest for us for a score of reasons. Firstly, his working languages were Russian and English. Secondly, he considered himself as an American writer while other bilingual writers didn't sever ties with their native languages. Thirdly, he earned fame of a splendid stylist among American literary critics (Grason, 1977). His style is elaborated and rich in phraseological units (PhU). It should be noted that PhUs present a real challenge to translators. Therefore, it would be intriguing to see how V. Nabokov reproduces phraseological units in his self-translations. This is the aim of our research.

## **2. Materials and methods**

The aim of the research defined the methods used and the materials studied. The investigation consisted of several stages. Firstly, we analyzed V. Nabokov’s self-translation activity and chose “Lolita” as the object of our study. Secondly, we identified the scope of phraseological units both in English and Russian versions of the novel. Then, we compared the two groups of PhUs to reveal the specific features of their translation.

The research was based on different theoretical and empirical methods, such as comparative analysis of research studies and scholarly works on the problem, content and quantitative analyses of the translation done by V. Nabokov from English into Russian.

### **3. Results**

Our exploration shows that the source text contains 343 units. 50 % of them are reproduced by phraseological units in the target text. 38% are rendered word for word, while 12 % were represented by means of descriptive translation. It is of interest to note that the target text contains much more PhUs than we see in the English version. It is obvious that the author uses the “excessive” idioms to compensate for other peculiarities of informal speech.

At the same time, there are some cases of inexactness in the self-translation. They can be accounted for by language interference.

Besides, there are situations when V. Nabokov does not use PhUs in translating phraseological units although there are their equivalents or analogs fixed in the Russian language.

In addition, when in the target language there exist several phraseological equivalents of PhUs of the source text the writer tends to choose units with Russian specific character (18 %), i.e. those containing Russian national realia, archaic words, etc., which is supposed to be a mistake for ordinary translators. Moreover, V. Nabokov creates his own occasional PhUs both in the source and the target texts and transforms the existing ones.

### **4. Discussion**

The issue of ST has been widely discussed recently. Many scholars studied the phenomenon of self-translation concentrating on the problem of identities, author's subjectivity and equivalence, the bilingual text, history and theory of literary self-translation (Arzhantseva, Maklakova and Khovanskaya, 2016; Baleevskikh, 2012; Bahtikireeva, 2005; Finkel, 1962; Federman, 1996; Feschenko, 2015; Fitch, 1988; Hokenson, 2007; Râbacov, 2013).

V. Nabokov's creations were studied by Appel (1991), Boyd (1990), Barabtarlo (1993), Grason (1977), Mulyarchik (1990), Nosik (1995), Parker (1987), Pifer (1980), Tchaikovsky (1997), etc. However, the analysis of the works on the topic shows that the issue demands further investigation. Most of the studies are devoted to the literary analysis of his works, while the linguistic aspect is underestimated. Our interest to the linguistic peculiarities of “Lolita” is even more enforced by the fact that V. Nabokov translated it into Russian by himself.

Why did he do it? There are different reasons that cause bilingual writers to translate their works, both linguistic (interest to languages, wish to create and use new expressive means, dissatisfaction with existing translations, etc.) and extra-linguistic (emigration, challenge to check one's gift in new conditions, paying tribute to

motherland, etc.). It is obvious that some reasons are objective, but others can be considered subjective, the latter being more powerful and stimulating.

In his interviews and memoirs V. Nabokov mentioned several reasons that caused him to translate "Lolita" into Russian (*Nabokov about Nabokov and others: Interview, reviews, essays, 2002*). To begin with, he was disappointed by the translations performed by other people. Secondly, he felt that he is Russian, and his works are some kind of tribute paid to his motherland. Furthermore, the writer was eager to check his talent in new circumstances. In fact, V. Nabokov breaks basic translation traditions and creates a new literary work in the Russian language. These trends can be traced if we analyze how the author translates PhUs.

His style is elaborated and rich in phraseological units and he uses different techniques to reproduce them in the target text.

*Traditional techniques:*

- by means of full equivalents:

I *put an end* to his gibberish by suggesting Valeria pack up her few belongings immediately, upon which the platitudinous colonel gallantly offered to carry them into the car (Nabokov, 1994, p. 28). *Я положил конец его жужжанию тем, что предложил Валерии уложить жалкие пожитки немедленно, на что пошляк полковник галантно заявил, что охотно сам перенесет их в свою машину* (Nabokov, 1997, p. 57).

With a *heavy heart* I left the house and walked through the spotted blaze of the sun to my car (Nabokov, 1994, 305). *С тяжелым сердцем я покинул этот деревянный замок и пошел сквозь петлистый огонь солнца к своему Икару* (Nabokov, 1997, p. 423).

- by means of relative/partial equivalents:

We were to go to Our Glass Lake this afternoon, and bath, and bask; but nacreous morn degenerated at noon into rain, and Lo *made a scene* (Nabokov, 1994, p. 43). *Мы должны были ехать после завтрака на Очковое озеро и там купаться и валяться на песке; но перламутровое утро выродилось в дождливый полдень, и Ло закатила сцену* (Nabokov, 1997, p. 76).

The "studio bed" in my former room had long been converted into sofa it had always been *at heart*, and Charlotte had warned me since the very beginning of our cohabitation that gradually the room would be turned into a regular "writer's den" (Nabokov, 1994, p. 91). *Кровать-кушетка в моей бывшей комнате давно была превращена просто в кушетку, чем, впрочем, всегда оставалась в душе, и Шарлотта предупредила меня в самом начале нашего сожительства, что постепенно комната будет переделана в настоящий писательский кабинет* (Nabokov, 1997, p. 140).

- by means of analogs:

Was it Grace Angel?" I asked. She shook her head. No, it wasn't, it was the daughter of a *bid shot* (Nabokov, 1994, p. 136). *Это была, может быть, Грация Анджел?», спросил я. Она отрицательно покачала головой. «Нет, совсем другая. Ее отец – большая шишка»* (Nabokov, 1997, p. 198).

The destination was itself a perfectly arbitrary one, and I *shook in my shoes* as I wondered how to keep the whole arrangement plausible <...> (Nabokov, 1994, p.139). *План был вполне произвольным, и у меня дрожали поджилки, когда я спрашивал себя, как сделать, чтобы все предприятие оставалось правдоподобным <...>* (Nabokov, 1997, p. 203).

- by means of descriptive translation:

"Not that I know of, I think we are going to have some rain. Don't you want to tell me those little pranks of you in camp?" "You *talk like a book*, Dad." (Nabokov, 1994, p. 114). *«Никак нет. Погона что-то опять портится. Не желаешь ли ты мне рассказать про эти твои маленькие проказы в лагере». «Ты что-то очень книжно выражаешься, милый папаша»* (Nabokov, 1997, p. 170).

Finally, I heaved myself font my narrow margin of bed, steal they pulled at the *odd sand ends* of sheets piled up to the south of my stone-cold heels — and Lolita lifted her head and gaped at me (Nabokov, 1994, p. 128). *Наконец я взгромоздился на оставленную мне узкую часть постели; осторожно потянул к себе концы и края простынь, сбитых в кучу на юге от моих каменно-холодных пяток; Лолита подняла голову и на меня уставилась* (Nabokov, 1997, p. 189).

You will laugh — but really and truly I somehow never managed to find our quite exactly what the legal situation was. I do not know it yet. Oh, I have learned a few *odds and ends* (Nabokov, 1994, p. 171). *Вы будете смеяться — но, если сказать всю правду, мне как-то никогда не удалось в точности выяснить юридическую сторону положения. Не знаю до сих пор. О, разумеется, кое-какие случайные сведения до меня дошли* (Nabokov, 1997, p. 243).

- by means of word-for-word translation:

And so we lay, when with one of those jolts that have ended by *knocking my poor heart out of its groove*, I met the unblinking dark eyes of two beautiful children, faunlet and nymphet, whom their identical flat hair and bloodless cheeks proclaimed siblings if not twins (Nabokov, 1994, p. 169). *И вот так мы лежали, когда я испытал одну из тех встрясок, которые, в конце концов, выбили мое бедное сердце из колеи, ибо я вдруг встретился с темными, немигающими глазами двух странных и прекрасных детей, фавненка и нимфетки — близнецов, судя по их совершенно одинаково плоским черным волосами бескровным личикам»* (Nabokov, 1997, p. 241).

However, V. Nabokov as a self-translator often uses unconventional approaches. For instance, when in the target language there exist several phraseological equivalents of PhUs of the source text the writer tends to choose units with Russian specific character, i.e. those containing Russian national realia, archaic words, etc., which is supposed to be a mistake for ordinary translators. The author feels free choosing expressive means in dealing with the Russian language which is native for him.

Minnesota, to whom I *take off my hat*, provides that when a relative assumes permanent care and custody of any child under fourteen, the authority of a court does not come into play (Nabokov, 1994, p. 171). *Миннесота, которой низко кланяюсь, предусматривает, что, если родственник принимает на себя защиту и опеку дитяти, не достигшего четырнадцатилетнего возраста, авторитет суда не пускается в ход* (Nabokov, 1997, p. 244).

After coughing myself inside out, I rested a while on a boulder, and then, thinking the sweet air might *do me good*, walked a little away towards a low stone parapet on the precipice side of the highway (Nabokov, 1994, p. 307). *После судорог рвоты, вывернувшей меня наизнанку, я сел отдохнуть на валун, а затем, думая, что свежий горный воздух пойдет мне впрок, прошел несколько шагов по направлению к низкому каменному парапету стремнинной полосе шоссе* (Nabokov, 1997, p. 426).

In addition, sometimes V. Nabokov does not translate PhUs, but creates new ones for the Russian version. As a result, we have a new PhU which blends seamlessly into the Russian context and does not look strange. We may call it a relative analog. Such units have relative equality in meaning but different components and structure.

I snatched away the stool she was rocking with her heel and her foot fell with a thud on the floor. 'Hey, 'shecried, '*take it easy*' (Nabokov, 1994, p. 205). *Я отпихнул табурет, который она все раскачивала пяткой, и нога глухо ударилась об пол. «Эй», крикнула она, «легче на поворотах»* (Nabokov, 1997, p. 289).

And perhaps afterwards she would say to somebody or other: "The poor guy *looked like his own ghost*" (Nabokov, 1994, p. 110). *Может быть, потом Шерли Хольмс расскажет кому-нибудь: на бедняге просто лица не было* (Nabokov, 1997, p. 165).

One more specific feature of Nabokov's self-translation is the use of so-called "transformed/distorted" PhUs.

We had left the car in a parking area not far from the road and were making our way down a path cut through the pine forest to the lake, when Charlotte remarked that Jean Farlow, in quest of rare light effected (Jean belonged to the old school of painting), had seen Leslie taking a dip '*in the ebony*' (as John had quipped) at five o'clock in the morning last Sunday (Nabokov, 1994, p. 82). *Оставив автомобиль в специально*

отведенном для этого месте, недалеко от шоссе, мы направлялись к озеру по тропинке, проложенной через новый лес, когда Шарлотта сказала, что Джоана Фарло, в погоне за редкостными световыми эффектами (Джоана принадлежала к старой школе живописи) в воскресенье видела, как Лесли Томсон купался, «в чем ночь родила» (как сострил Джон), в пять часов утра» (Nabokov, 1997, p. 128).

And today, *putting my hand on my ailing heart*, I really do not think of them ever surprised her in desirability <...> (Nabokov, 1994, p. 161). *И нынче, положив руку на больное сердце, я, право, не скажу, чтобы кто-нибудь из них возбудил во мне более острое влечение, чем она*<...> (Nabokov, 1997, p. 231).

The cynic may say that commercial pornography makes the same claim; the learned may counter by asserting that "H. H."’s impassioned confession is *a tempest in a test tube*; that at least 12 % of American adult males <...> enjoy yearly, in one way or another, the special experience "H. H." describes with such despair<...> (Nabokov, 1994, p. 5). *Циник скажет, что на тоже претендует и профессиональный порнограф; эрудит возразит, что страстная исповедь «Г. Г.» сводится к буре в пробирке, что каждый год не меньше 12 % американцев мужского пола<...> проходит через тот самый опыт, который «Г. Г.» описывает с таким отчаянием*<...> (Nabokov, 1997, p. 29).

Oh, just Pupils. Vitamin X. *Make so strong as an oxoranax* (Nabokov, 1994, p. 122). *Ах, это просто Фиалкокапсули. Витамин Икс. Делает тебя сильным, как бык-с или штык-с* (Nabokov, 1997, p. 181).

As we have already mentioned there are some cases of inexactness in the self-translation that can be accounted for by language interference. For example, from the very beginning of our concourse, I was clever enough to realize that I must secure her complete cooperation in keeping our relation secret, that it should become a *second nature* with her. No matter what grudge might bear me, no matter what other pleasures he might seek (Nabokov, 1994, p. 149). *У меня достало ума, с самого начала нашего сожителства, учесть, что мне необходимо заручиться ее полным содействием для того, чтобы держать нами отношения в тайне; что это содействие должно стать для нее как бы второй природой, невзирая ни на какое озлобление против меня и ни на какие другие находимые ею утехи* (Nabokov, 1997, p. 231).

All these examples show that V. Nabokov creates a new novel into the Russian language since he is aimed at the Russian reader. Therefore, he “cleans it up” to make the target text more Russian.

## 5. Conclusion

Self-translation of phraseological units, on the one hand, follows traditional rules of translation based on the concept of equivalence, which are considered by Arzhantseva (2016), Gilmutdinova and Fakhrutdinova (2016), Evseeva and Kozlova (2016), etc.

As a rule, a translator excludes his/her own subjectivity and tends to explicit the author's subjectivity. The liberties a translator takes with the original work of a writer are severely criticized. On the other hand, auto-translation is a new work that possesses many distinctions from the source text because it may contain new stylistic devices which are not present in the source text. One more important feature of ST is its uniqueness and originality to compare with the source text for a self-translator strives to create a new text in the target language.

All these ideas are reflected in Nabokov's self-translating activity. Reproducing "Lolita" in the Russian language the writer is targeting at the Russian reader. Thus, he overcomes the asymmetry of the positions in artistic freedom and creative independence of an author and a professional translator.

His auto-translation represents "ideal" translation since the author is in a better position than any ordinary translator because he knows his creation as nobody else and has the authority to allow himself shifts in the translation which might not have been 'allowed' by another translator. The results of V. Nabokov's self-translation can be regarded as certain "gold standards" for others to make use of.

## **6. Recommendations**

Since the paper analyses both theoretical and practical aspects of V. Nabokov's self-translation (auto-translation) it can be recommended to experts who study the creative activity of bilingual writers that translated their works, as well to translators and students of applied linguistics departments.

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