

Burak, Alexander (2002) *Translating Culture*: перевод и межкультурная коммуникация: Этап 1. уровень слова, Moscow R.Valent, pp. 151, Roubles 123.

Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Soviet translations of Russian books into English had a particular character all of their own. A very good Russian friend of mine used to work for Progress Publishers, the all-union state publishing house, in charge of all translations into and out of Russian. She would tell me about the cultural slips and ambiguous phrasing that sometimes caused unintended hilarity. One example was the caption for a photograph of young farmworkers having fun at a dance on a collective farm. It read "*Young men's balls in full swing*". This double entendre was not appreciated until the pamphlet, advertising the charms of collective farms to foreigners, had been printed in its thousands. Even as recently as two years ago, in Ukraine, there were similar problems with our excellent young interpreter, translating both ways, but who had little in-depth knowledge of the British education system or its specific culture. One example of a logical but erroneous translation she made was rendering '*staff development*' as 'acquiring more staff'.

But, even without these obvious gaffes, translations by Russians into English often read awkwardly. Many were stilted and obviously translated. Although Progress publishers employed native English speakers as style editors, if objections to phraseology, lexis and syntax that read awkwardly or was simply incorrect were raised, these were very often over-ruled by the Russian editors who would say, "You are wrong, this is the way we say things ..." In other words - they had a house style. The fact that it wasn't English was not important. Although there was no doubt that the Russian translators were thoroughly trained, with encyclopaedic knowledge of the English language, there was a lack of appreciation of the difficulty of producing a natural sounding text when translating *out* of one's native language, and of the importance of the cultural context. And it was difficult for Soviet translators to travel abroad or, often, to get up-to-date literature and newspapers of their working foreign language. Many had been raised on stories of Sherlock Holmes and the works of Dickens. They were convinced that London was always fog-bound or, and, wet.

But, things are changing. Although old habits die hard, and there are still many bad translations by Russians, translating literary and non-literary texts into English, there are other shining examples of collaborative work between Russians and native English speakers, that produce imaginative semantically accurate, culturally aware and satisfying translations. Among some of the reasons for these changes are, of course, the greater contact with the West, more opportunities to liaise with native speakers, and increased knowledge about non-equivalence of cultural systems. The training of Russian translators in universities is also changing in part reflecting these changes, in part accelerating them.

Recently many excellent books on translation in general and translation in specific fields, such as law, medicine and finance, have appeared in Russian bookshops. An example of the changing approach in translation practice and theory is the two-text book mentioned above. It provides plenty of well thought out practical examples of typical translation problems, with clear and extremely helpful notes, and places much emphasis on cultural concepts and authentic parallel texts.

*Translating Culture* is really a series of lectures, arranged into chapters, and looks at translation and international communication at the level of the Word, (another book will follow looking at communication at sentence level). The author is a graduate from the prestigious Linguistics University *Maurice Thorez* in Moscow, and taught translation and Linguistics at Moscow State University for 23 years. The book, however, was written after spending a year teaching at Florida University and is useful in that it combines both Western and Russian approaches to the teaching of translation. The result is a combination of the best of both worlds, comprehensive theoretical analysis, which takes in the multi-faceted difficulties of translating from one language and culture into another, together with copious practical examples. It is designed for native Russian speaking students, and is useful in defining in Russian and English the largely Western translation terminology used in the book.

Individual chapters deal with extremely useful and pertinent aspects of translation theory and practice. They are dedicated to subjects such "basic transformations in the process of translation", translation strategies such as omission, transposition, change in grammatical form, are addressed. This is followed by chapters on polysemy, collocations, non-equivalence, denotative and connotative meanings, functional translations, translating dialect, and specialist texts. In every chapter an original text is provided together with several versions of it in translation, carried out by the author's students while he was working in Florida. And this brings

me to one reservation about the book, from a British teacher's point of view: all the texts are all taken from US sources. There is also a section on dictionaries, although no web addresses are given or suggested, in spite of the fact that the author acknowledges that the dictionaries may not have all the answers. Nevertheless, this is an extremely useful addition to the literature on the theory and practice of translating from Russian into English.

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