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Precedent Phenomena in M. Bulgakov's Works as Reflected in Their English and German Translations

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Abstract
The aim of this article is to study precedent phenomena to be found in the works by M. Bulgakov, as taken in their translation into the English and the German languages. During that, the author focuses on the specifics of depicting the semiotic culture codes in the target text, which allow evaluating the adequacy related to communicating the meaning of the source text in its translated versions. It has been shown that many of the losses in the connotative information describing the precedent phenomena in M. Bulgakov's works are of objective nature and are due to the asymmetry in the culture-bound realities both in the source and in the target languages. However, a particular translation solution is more than in the least determined by subjective factors, i.e. the translator's ability to properly decode the pragmatics conveyed through precedent phenomena, which does not run contrary to the author's intention.

Keywords*: precedent phenomena; semiotic culture code; English and German translations of works by M. Bulgakov

1. Introduction

The contemporary research into translation theory reveals special relevance of semiotic and linguoculturological aspects of this type of verbal communication act. The semiotic model of understanding translation is based on the principles similar to those of the communication process described by Ch. Peirce. The information obtained by the translator is coded into symbols in the target language. The symbol shall be directed to someone so that it creates in the other person's mind a symbol that is an equivalent or may even be an improved one. This process is especially relevant when applied to literary translation because a literary text contains numerous types of implicatures, which should not result in "translation" perception of the text as a purely linguistic phenomenon, and ignoring important issues like the culture-related background of the work and the text's semiotic richness. N. A. Nikolaenko notes that "the hard part for the translator is, above all, that each move within the plot and every single image must be transferred on the semiotic level as correctly as possible" (2004, p. 160). Given that approach, the target-language culture comes to the foreground as the factor that determines the perception of the target text:

> Translation activity is part of a more extensive system of activities aimed at creating texts, and it is largely determined by this system, which means that the target culture, its literature poly-system, become more important than the link between the translation and the original (Torop, 1995, p. 15).

We believe that the semiotic and the culturological aspects of translation are interrelated closely. This was mentioned by P. Torop (2000):

> In contemporary translation studies, semiotics is approached by certain tendencies that are characterized by connecting translation activity with cultural studies or placing the whole of translation studies, as a discipline of intercultural studies, into the context of the analysis of cultural contacts (p. 598).

The concept of semiotic culture code may help better understand the mechanism of interaction among translation, semiosis, and culture. N. F. Alefirenko (2002) defines **culture code** in the linguosemiotics of culture as system of symbolizing, i.e. developed with stereotypes of ethnic and cultural mind a configurative corpus of symbols and mechanisms for their employment aiming at performing two interrelated processes – "(a) developing and structuring pre-verbal meanings and (b) their verbalization through processing, transforming, storing and transmitting of extragenetic information within a certain communication-pragmatics paradigm" (pp. 61-62).

All this allows accepting the views expressed by D. B. Gudkov and M. L. Kovshova (2007) stating that "culture code is a system of symbols belonging to the tangible and intangible world, which have become bearers of culture-bound meanings; through Man's mastering of the environment, these have incorporated cultural meanings, which can be read in such symbols" (pp. 7-9). In my opinion, it is semantics explication and pragmatics of semiotic culture codes that constitute the major element in the communicative adequacy of a literary work as adequacy… relies on the real translation practice, which often fails to deliver all the communicative-functional content of the original. Adequacy rests on the fact that the solution employed by the translator will often imply some compromise; translation involves some sacrifice, and while translating the translator will often have to put up with certain losses, which he/she does in order to communicate the major and the most relevant part (functional dominants) of the source text. Therefore, translation adequacy, as we see it, implies the primacy of communicating the semiotic meaning and not the formal language features of the source text.

The aim of this article is to study the precedent phenomena to be found in English and German translations of M. Bulgakov's works. During that, the research also focuses on specific issues related to explication of semiotic culture codes in the target texts, which allows making judgment regarding the communicative adequacy of conveying the meaning of the source text through translation. This article is another item within a series of research into translation specifics of works by M. Bulgakov (Milostivaya & Marchenko, 2014; Milostivaya & Marchenko, 2015).

2. Research Methods

The current research is based on the method of hermeneutical interpretation for description of the functional features pertaining to the precedent phenomena found in M. Bulgakov's works, both in the source texts and in their English and German translations. Besides, we also turned to contextual and distributive analysis when studying the semiotic culture codes that are expressed through precedent texts, precedent utterances, precedent situations, and precedent names. The national and cultural specifics of the object in question were analyzed using entries from explanatory and dialectological dictionaries.

The major methods for the translatological study described herein were:

- descriptive method, which included observation, generalization, interpretation, and classification of translation units (in this case – precedent phenomena), description of their specific signs and features;

- contextual method aiming at studying the semantics and pragmatics of the precedent

phenomena within a particular sociocultural situation, both in the source and in the target languages;

- definition analysis that implies analysis of definitions from various lexicographical sources when translating precedent phenomena in order to identify transformations performed at the level of the vocabulary;

- contrastive analysis, which entails description of units within one language through their comparison with the units of another language based on the source and the target texts;

- component analysis, the purpose of that being identifying the connotative meaning within the lexemes under study.

3. Analysis

Now we shall turn to the translatology interpretation of precedent phenomena in M. Bulgakov's works and their English and German translations. The basic definition for precedent phenomenon that we stick to is the rendering offered for precedent text by Yu. N. Karaulov (1987):

> (1) meaningful, for a particular person, both in the cognitive and in the emotional aspect, (2) of extra-personal nature, i.e. well known to a wide environment of a particular person including his/her predecessors and contemporaries, and, finally (3), which are referred to repeatedly within a discourse of a particular language personality (p. 216).

Since Yu. N. Karaulov offered a wider understanding text we find it possible to expand the above-mentioned definition upon a more extensive range of linguistically marked units, i.e. precedent phenomena. Precedents shall include here "sample facts that stand models for further reproduction of similar facts, represented in speech with certain verbal signals that evoke some conventional content, which will not be created anew yet will be reproduced" (Gudkov, 2003, p. 105).

As we see it, precedent phenomena are most common and expressive in literary texts that describe ambivalent historical epochs. Given that, the two works by M. Bulgakov (*The Master and Margarita* and *The Heart of a Dog*), which reveal a specific social orientation, were taken here for investigation. Most research projects point at social criticism in Bulgakov's works, which is seen as their functional dominant (Merrill, 2015; Piper, 1971; Curtis, 1996; Vyleta, 2000; Haber, 1992).

Further on we will have a look at the major types of precedent phenomena (precedent texts, precedent utterances, precedent names, and precedent situations) in the original texts by M. Bulgakov and in their English and German translations. The focus of our study is, first of all, on the ways of achieving communicative adequacy when translating the objects under study here, which is related to the extent to which the semiotic culture codes conveyed through the source text are rendered in the target languages.

We shall first study specific features in relation to translating precedent texts. A precedent text is a "complete and an all-sufficient product of a speech-cognitive activity; a (poly)predicative unit; a complex symbol where the sum total of its components is not equal to its meaning" (Krasnykh, 2002, p. 47). Precedent texts include literary works (e.g. Evgeny Onegin, War and Peace), songs, advertisements, anecdotes, political publicist texts, etc.

The examples below offer the titles of some Russian classics – *Inspector General* and *Dead Souls* (by N. Gogol); *Evgeny Onegin* (by A. Pushkin), as well as some of the best foreign works, namely *Don Quixote* (by. Miguel de Cervantes), and Goethe's *Faust*:

Ty predstavljaesh' sebe, kakoj podnimetsja shum, kogda kto-nibud' iz nih dlja nachala prepodneset chitajushhej publike "**Revizora**" ili, na samyj hudoj konec, "**Evgenija Onegina**"! (Bulgakov, 1999, p. 481) – You can imagine the noise that will arise when one of them, for starters, offers the reading public The **Inspector General** or, if worse comes to worst, **Evgeny Onegin**. (Bulgakov, 1997, p. 361). – Stell dir vor, was für ein Lärm sich erheben wird, wenn einer von ihnen dem Leserpublikum für den Anfang einen '**Revisor**' oder zur Not einen '**Eugen Onegin**' vorlegt! (Bulgakow, 2008, p. 438).

– Sovershenno verno, – soglasilsja so svoim nerazluchnym sputnikom Korov'ev, – i sladkaja zhut' podkatyvaet k serdcu, kogda dumaesh' o tom, chto v jetom dome sejchas pospevaet budushhij avtor "**Don Kihota**", ili "**Fausta**", ili, chert menja noberi, "**Mertvyh dush**"! (Bulgakov, 1999, p. 481). – 'Perfectly correct,' Koroviev agreed with his inseparable companion, 'and a sweet awe creeps into one's heart at the thought that in this house there is now ripening the future author of a **Don Quixote** or a **Faust**, or, devil take me, a **Dead Souls**. Eh?' (Bulgakov, 1997, pp. 360-361). – "Völlig richtig", pflichtete Korowjew seinem unzertrennlichen Begleiter bei, "und ein süßes Erschauern rieselt zum Herzen, wenn man daran denkt, daß in diesem Haus der künftige Autor eines '**Don Quijote**' heranreift oder eines '**Faust**' oder, hol mich der Teufel, der '**Toten Seelen**'! Nicht?" (Bulgakow, 2008, p. 438).

M. Bulgakov used these text precedents for stressing the talent of a true writer. The characters in Voland's retinue admit ironically that one of the contemporary Soviet writers may rise up to reach their level. That skeptical attitude stems from the fact the writers of the Griboedov House referred to in *The Master and Margarita* had become slaves to the Soviet ideology due to which they had lost their capacity to make critical judgment concerning the surroundings. The English translator just like his/her the German counterpart used translation equivalents for the titles of both the Russian and the foreign literary works, which we would consider the right approach from the functional stance as the books in question have already become part of the international Literature and Culture Hall of Fame, so to say, and, therefore, they have become precedent texts that act on the super-national scale and in any culture they shall stand for the semiotic code of "Quality Classical Literature". The irony expressed towards the Soviet literature mainstream is also tangible in the English as well as in the German translation of this excerpt, which allows us talking about complete communicative adequacy between the source and the target texts.

The precedent text in the passage below is *Pravda* – the leading Soviet pro-government newspaper that was the major print issue for the Communist Party as well as for the Soviet Union:

Pacienty, ne chitajushhie gazet, chuvstvovali sebja prevoshodno. Te zhe, kotoryh ja special'no zastavljal chitat' "**Pravdu**", terjali v vese (Bulgakov, 1995, p. 69). – The patients who read no newspapers felt fine. The ones whom I especially ordered to read ***Pravda*** lost weight (Bulgakov, 1990, p. 298). – Alle Patienten, die keine Zeitungen lesen, fühlen sich ausgezeichnet, die andern dagegen, die ich die "**Prawda**" lesen ließ, verloren Gewicht (Bulgakow, 1988, p. 43).

Professor Preobrazhensky, the main character in M. Bulgakov's *The Heart of a Dog* expressed irony when talking of his experiment where patients, when plunged in the Soviet reality, would lose weight. With the prism of that character, the writer imposed his criticism on the Soviet world of the 1920/30s. Neither the English nor the German translator, however, employed any other device than just transliteration when referring to the periodical mentioned in this novel by M. Bulgakov; the translators offered no extra information that might explain the pro-Soviet propaganda circulated in *Pravda*, while that might help more adequate deciphering of the

ideological connotation in the passage above, which thus remains elusive to most of the recipients belonging to cultures not native to the original version of The *Heart of a Dog*. We can say, therefore, that to transfer the semiotic culture code of "Soviet pro-government press" more explicitly the translators should have specified the type of the periodical that Professor Preobrazhensky's patients used to read.

Another type of precedent phenomena represented in M. Buylgakov's works is precedent utterances:

> Precedent utterance is a reproducible product of a speech-cognitive activity; a complete and an all-sufficient unit that may or may not be predicative; a complex symbol where the sum total of its components is not equal to its meaning the latter always surpassing the sum of the basic meanings; the cognitive basis includes the precedent utterance itself. Precedent utterances include quotations from various texts (e.g. Ne spitsja, njanja! Kto vinovat? Chto delat'?Zhdem-s!), as well as proverbs (e.g. Tishe edesh' – dal'she budesh') (Krasnykh, 2002, pp. 48-49).

The episode offered below contains a precedent utterance from Leo Tolstoy's novel *Anna Karenina*:

> **Vse smeshalos' v dome Oblonskih**, kak spravedlivo vyrazilsja znamenityj pisatel' Lev Tolstoj. Imenno tak i skazal by on v dannom sluchae. Da! Vse smeshalos' v glazah u Poplavskogo. Dlinnaja iskra proneslas' u nego pered glazami, zatem smenilas' kakoj-to traurnoj zmeej, pogasivshej na mgnoven'e majskij den', – i Poplavskij poletel vniz po lestnice, derzha v ruke pasport (Bulgakov, 1999, pp. 339-340). – '**Everything was confusion in the Oblonskys' home,**' as the famous writer Leo Tolstoy correctly put it. Precisely so he might have said on this occasion. Yes, everything was confusion in Poplavsky's eyes. A long spark flew before his eyes, then gave place to some funereal snake that momentarily extinguished the May day, and Poplavsky went hurtling down the stairs, clutching his passport in his hand (Bulgakov, 1997, p. 212). – „**Im Hause der Oblonskis war alles aus dem Geleise geraten**", wie es der berühmte Schriftsteller Lew Tolstoi sehr richtig ausgedrückt hat. Das gleiche hätte er in diesem Falle gesagt. Jawohl! Vor Poplawskis Augen war alles aus dem Geleise geraten. Ein langer Funke zuckte an seinen Augen vorüber, gefolgt von einem Trauerflor, der den Maitag für einen Moment verdunkelte, dann flog Poplawski, den Ausweis in der Hand, die Treppe hinunter (Bulgakow, 2008, p. 252).

The prototext of this utterance is filled with highest-level emotions expressing the semiotic code "Confusion and fuss in personal relationships". M. Bulgakov quotes L. Tolstoy in order to depict the emotional status of his character Poplavsky who came to Moscow to claim the property left by Berlioz who, in turn, died mysteriously having encountered Voland's retinue. Poplavsky, however, once again ran again into that magician and got a sound beating. The English translator did realize the precedent point in the utterance, which he/she described in the following footnote: 'Everything was confusion...' – The second sentence of Tolstoy's Anna Karenina, proverbial in Russia (Bulgakov, 1989, p. 212). Yet, the translator fails to specify the functional meaning in this precedent utterance, which, as we see it, reduced the communicative adequacy of the target text. The German translator, meanwhile, did nothing to reveal that the utterance highlighted in bold print belongs to precedent phenomena of the Russian linguoculture, while it distorted the original meaning as the potential reader of the German translation in this case shall not

understand the coherence of the ties linking L. Tolstoy's utterance and the particular topic in M. Bulgakov's work.

From here on we shall have a look at precedent names, which are viewed as an individual name linked to either widely known texts typically belonging to the category of precedent ones (e.g. Pechorin, Terkin) or to a precedent situation (e.g. Ivan Susanin); this is some type of a "complex symbol, which, when used in communication, determines an appeal not to the denotation (referent) itself yet to a set of differential features of this precedent name" (Krasnykh, 2002, p. 48). It may include one (e.g. Lomonosov) or more elements (e.g. Kulikovo Field, Flying Dutchman) still denoting just one concept.

The example offered below contains a reference to a Great Russian poet's name, which is a precedent phenomenon:

> Nikanor Ivanovich do svoego sna sovershenno ne znal proizvedenij pojeta Pushkina, no samogo ego znal prekrasno i ezhednevno po neskol'ku raz proiznosil frazy vrode: "A za kvartiru **Pushkin** platit' budet?" ili "Lampochku na lestnice, stalo byt', **Pushkin** vyvintil?", "Neft', stalo byt', **Pushkin** pokupat' budet?"(Bulgakov, 1999, p. 307). – Before his dream, Nikanor Ivanovich had been completely ignorant of the poet **Pushkin**'s works, but the man himself he knew perfectly well and several times a day used to say phrases like: 'And who's going to pay the rent – **Pushkin**?' or 'Then who did unscrew the bulb on the stairway –Pushkin?' or 'So who's going to buy the fuel – **Pushkin**?' (Bulgakov, 1997, pp. 176-177). – Nikanor Iwanowitsch hatte vor seinem Traum keine Ahnung von den Werken des Dichters **Puschkin** gehabt, doch ihn selber hatte er genau gekannt und täglich ein paarmal Sätze gesprochen wie: „Soll vielleicht **Puschkin** Ihre Miete bezahlen?" oder „Die Birne im Treppenhaus hat wohl Puschkin rausgeschraubt?" oder „Wer soll denn das Öl kaufen, vielleicht **Puschkin**?" (Bulgakow, 2008, p. 208).

The English translator here delivers perfectly the communicative function of the precedent name, which he does through a footnote:

> And who's going to pay the rent – Pushkin?: This 'household' way of referring to Pushkin is common in Russia, showing how far the poet has entered into people's everyday life, though without necessarily bringing a knowledge of his works with him (Bulgakov, 1997, p. 176).

However, this translation fails to explicitly deliver the top degree of emotional stress, which resides in the Russian source text. The German translation does not come accompanied with such a footnote and therefore it lacks the information as to why the Great Russian poet's name was so relevant in that context.

Now we shall pass onto analyzing the linguocultural connotations of the name Matrena in an excerpt taken from *The Heart of a Dog*:

> Do chego ty ne izjashhna! Nadoela mne moja **Matrena**, namuchilsja ja s flanelevymi shtanami, teper' prishlo moe vremechko (Bulgakov, 1995, p. 48). –You're so inelegant. I'm sick of my **Matryona**, I'm fed up with flannel knickers, from now on things are going to go my way (Bulgakov, 1990, p. 263). – Du bist kein bißchen elegant! Ich hab dich satt, ich hab genug von Barchenthosen, jetzt ist meine Zeit gekommen (Bulgakow, 1988, p. 8).

In the example here above Matrena is not the respective character's proper name but a precedent Russian slang expression used to refer to a sloppy woman (*Dictionary of Russian Dialects of the Middle Urals*, 1971, pp. 120-121). The English translation offers no such detail to explain the

transliteration of the proper name, which may result in misleading should it come to interpreting the semiotic code "Sloppiness". The German translator dropped the precedent name in question (Matrena), which reduced the character's speech expression in the target language.

Now let us view some precedent situations from works by M. Bulgakov, as well as some ways to reflect those in English and in German. The precedent situation here is "some model situation related to a set of "certain connotations the differential features of which are part of the cognitive basis; the signifier for precedent situations may be a precedent utterance or a precedent name (e.g. Khodynka, Time of Troubles / Smutnoe Vremia)" (Krasnykh, 2002, p. 47). A precedent situation may be expressed not directly but through an indication of the place, time or some bright details of the respective event. Symbols of a precedent situation often include commonly used items, artifacts, or objects of nature.

Our next example focuses on a precedent situation linked to the semiotic culture code "Official forms of addressing people in the USSR":

> Imenno **grazhdanin**, a ne **tovarishh** i dazhe – vernee vsego – **gospodin**. Blizhe – jasnee – **gospodin** (Bulgakov, 1995, pp. 48-49). – A **citizen**, note, and not a **comrade** – or even, to be still more precise, a **gentleman**. The nearer he came the more clearly was this to be seen: a **gentleman** (Bulgakov, 1990, p. 265). – Kein **Genosse**, sondern ein **Bürger**, vielleicht gar ein **Herr**. Je näher er kam, desto deutlicher sah man : es war ein **Herr** (Bulgakow, 1988, p. 10).

In the USSR of the 1920/30s the words "grazhdanin" and "tovarishh" was a common communicative practice. The 1920/30s saw the rise of a tradition of using not the word *tovarishh* yet *grazhdanin* only (*grazhdanin podsledstvennyj, grazhdanin sud'ja, grazhdanin prokuror*) when the prisoners, inmates, and people who served their terms addressed those employed in the law enforcement system, and the other way round. As a result of this, the word *grazhdanin* turned for many into something associated with detention, arrest, police or prosecution. Gradually, the negative association grew to become an inevitable part of the word's meaning.

The described connotative shade of the lexeme *grazhdanin* did not get included into the Soviet explanatory dictionaries dating to the time when the novel was issued (this might be accounted for by some ideological reasons). *The Explanatory Dictionary of the Russian language* offers only the following meanings for the word:

1. A national of a certain country.

2. A decent member of the society; a person controlling his own interest to serve the social one (rhetor.).

3. A grown-up person, male (new), an expression to address a male human being (Ushakov, 1935, pp. 613-614).

The word "tovarishh", in contrast, became common among Zaporozhye Cossacks in the XVII Century. The term used to denote a colleague or an ally had not acquired any political hue before the times of the USSR where it turned into a common address for Communists. The use of this word was supposed to stress the solidarity and mutual trust shared by the ideological friends. As the Soviet Union collapsed and the Communist Party is not the leading one, the word "tovarishh" has lost its official status in all areas, the only exception being the Communist Party of Russian Federation.

During the time of Soviets, the address "gospodin", once employed to denote someone belonging to the privileged upper-class nobility, was viewed as a foul term, if not an insult. That time it was associated with emigrant-enemies, which was mentioned by one of M. Bulgakov's characters:

Esli vam ugodno, chtoby vas perestali nazyvat' famil'jarno "Sharikov", i ja, i doktor Bormental' budem nazyvat' vas "**gospodin** Sharikov".

– Ja ne gospodin, **gospoda** vse v Parizhe! – otlajal Sharikov (Bulgakov, 1995, p. 116). –

"If you wish that we should address you with less familiarity and stop calling you Sharikov, we will call you '**Mister Sharikov**'."

"I'm no mister, **all the misters are in Paris**!" Sharikov barked (Bulgakov, 1990, pp. 376-377). –

"Wenn Sie etwas gegen die familiäre Anrede "Moppel" haben, werden Doktor Bormental und ich Sie '**Herr Moppel**' titulieren."

"Ich bin kein **Herr**, **die Herren sind alle in Paris**!" kläffte Moppel (Bulgakow, 1988, p. 118).

The English translation reveals communicatively adequate addresses typical of the Soviet era, while the German translator, as I see it, failed to deliver the author's original communicative intention through using the translation equivalent "Herr" as this German word is a standard routine address possessing none of the semes bearing the features indicative of some noble origin.

4. Conclusion

This research of the precedent phenomena rendered in English and German translations of works by M. Bulgakov allows concluding that the thesaurus of the precedent phenomena used by the writer remains stable in the target texts as the translators could generally retain the communicative adequacy of the source text, and depicted the text representants of the basic values dominant in the Soviet national-linguocultural society in the 1920/30s. The English and German translation of the precedent lexis in M. Bulgakov's works is determined by the context-bound background information as well as by the intentional element that is typical of literary text. In case of the works mentioned here the dominant communicative intention was a literary impact to be imposed on the recipient, which is related to political satire mocking the Soviet reality.

We believe that further potential study of precedent phenomena offered in English and German translations of M. Bulgakov's works is related to:

- study of precedent phenomena in the discourse of certain Soviet and Russian writers in view of the nation-, age-, gender-, religion-related as well as other features, including from the translation stance;

- research projects dwelling on the specifics of employing and translating precedent phenomena in various genres of the literary discourse (novel; story; short story; anecdote);

- exploration of perception of precedent phenomena in the source and in the target languages.

Generally, such research may allow identifying the thesaurus and the functions of precedent phenomena, both in the source and in the target texts, as used by the members of different linguocultural communities.

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