

**THE LINGUISTIC FEATURES AND TRANSLATION SPECIFICATIONS OF THE
NOVEL GENERATION “P” BY VICTOR PELEVIN**

**AS CARACTERÍSTICAS LINGÜÍSTICAS E ESPECIFICAÇÕES DE TRADUÇÃO DA
GERAÇÃO DE NOVIDADE “P” DE VICTOR PELEVIN**

**LAS CARACTERÍSTICAS LINGÜÍSTICAS Y LAS ESPECIFICACIONES DE
TRADUCCIÓN DE LA NUEVA GENERACIÓN “P” DE VICTOR PELEVIN**

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ABSTRACT: The authors focus on the linguistic features characterising a postmodern novel on the example of the literary work Generation “P” by Victor Pelevin. Firstly, the impossibility of new style invention and the idea of the necessity of different styles combination are highlighted: stylistically marked words such as jargon words, low-colloquial lexis, poetic and archaic words, idioms, and even scientific terms all together create a unique style of the novel. Secondly, the implementation levels of the language game are considered. Two levels of language game representation are analysed: the mix of styles and the loss of figurativeness by phraseological units. The intertextual context of the novel and a common method of postmodernism known as “rewriting” are regarded in the article. A phenomenon of language game and intertextuality are analyzed based on the translation of the novel by Andrew Bromfield.

KEYWORDS: Language. Translation. Postmodernism. Victor Pelevin. Language game.

RESUMO: Os autores concentram-se nas características linguísticas que caracterizam um romance pós-moderno a partir do exemplo da obra literária Geração “P” de Victor Pelevin. Em primeiro lugar, a impossibilidade de invenção de um novo estilo e a ideia da necessidade de combinação de diferentes estilos são destacadas: palavras marcadas estilisticamente, como jargões, léxico coloquial baixo, palavras poéticas e arcaicas, expressões idiomáticas e até termos científicos, todos juntos criam um ambiente único estilo do romance. Em segundo lugar, os níveis de implementação do jogo de linguagem são considerados. Dois níveis de representação de jogos de linguagem são analisados: a mistura de estilos e a perda de figuratividade por unidades fraseológicas. O contexto intertextual do romance e um método comum de pós-modernismo conhecido como “reescrita” são considerados no artigo. Um fenômeno de jogo de linguagem e intertextualidade são analisados a partir da tradução do romance de Andrew Bromfield.

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Idioma. Tradução. Pós-modernismo. Victor Pelevin. Jogo de linguagem.

RESUMEN: Los autores se centran en los rasgos lingüísticos que caracterizan una novela posmoderna sobre el ejemplo de la obra literaria Generación “P” de Victor Pelevin. En primer lugar, se destaca la imposibilidad de la invención de nuevos estilos y la idea de la necesidad de una combinación de diferentes estilos: palabras marcadas estilísticamente como palabras de jerga, léxico poco coloquial, palabras poéticas y arcaicas, modismos e incluso términos científicos, todos juntos crean una singularidad. estilo de la novela. En segundo lugar, se consideran los niveles de implementación del juego del lenguaje. Se analizan dos niveles de representación de juegos de lenguaje: la mezcla de estilos y la pérdida de figuratividad por unidades fraseológicas. En el artículo se examinan el contexto intertextual de la novela y un método común de posmodernismo conocido como "reescritura". Se analiza un fenómeno de juego de lenguaje e intertextualidad a partir de la traducción de la novela de Andrew Bromfield.

PALABRAS CLAVE: El idioma. La traducción. Postmodernismo. Victor Pelevin. El juego del lenguaje.

Introduction

One of the main features of a postmodern novel is its intertextuality, in other words, the postmodern text is connected with and have references with hundreds of other writings. In this regard, many researchers note that “the main task of a translator in the case of translating postmodern texts is the recognition of various types of intertextual links, their decoding, and transmission using a translation language” (NESTEROVA; POPOVA, 2017, p. 151) Besides, the language game, which is an integral part of this literary movement, may also be challenging for the translator. Postmodern works of Russian authors attract the attention of translators primarily in connection with the “dissimilarity” of the Russian language from any European language (Different Grammar, Completely Different Phraseological Units, Etc.), and secondly, due to the extensive cultural base.

One of the most prominent representatives of Russian postmodernism is considered to be Victor Pelevin, whose novel Generation “P” became widely known abroad. In England, this work was first published in 2000 in the translation of Andrew Bromfield, who introduced the English-speaking world to Bulgakov, Harms, Voinovich and many other representatives of Russian literature.

Methods

In order to investigate the novel the methods of empirical and theoretical researches are used, for instance analysis, synthesis, comparison, generalization and componential, contextual and comparative methods of investigation. Moreover, the interpretative method is useful while studying the novel.

Results and discussions

There are many works devoted to the translation and adaptation of different novels (GOLIKOVA; POMORTSEVA, 2014; KHISAMOVA; MOTYGOULLINA; MOULLAGALIEV, 2015). However, there is no recommendations how to translate and adopt postmodernism novels. Moreover, among problems interesting for researchers there are problems of translation (SOBOLEVA; ZUBKOVA, 2019; VASILOVA *et al.*, 2019).

As one of the researches of postmodernism literature notes, “postmodernism is characterised by total irony and gaming essence, as well as the eschatological mood of the end of the millennium and “*déjà vu*”, the effect of which is based on “literary memory”, that is on intertextual strategy” (POPOVA, 2011, p. 10). All these features find their expression in the works by Pelevin.

It should be noted speaking about the language game that it appears in the novel by Victor Pelevin, for example, in the mixing of styles and free treatment of phraseological units. Fixed expressions are repeatedly used in scripts and slogans written by the main character of the novel – Vavilen (Babylon) Tatarskiy. It can be illustrated by the following statement: “One generation passeth away and another generation cometh,” which is organically included in the commercial of the confectionery plant in order to emphasize the fragility of the existing world and the presence of only a limited number of permanent and stable things (in the original statement, the land can be attributed to such stable items and in the commercial it is the confectionery plant).

However, after the client who ordered the commercial is killed, the following transformation occurs with this assertion: “One generation passeth away and another generation cometh but”, Tatarskiy thought philosophically, “close is the shirt but closer is the skin” (PELEVIN, 2011, p. 29). Thus, there is a combination of the statement about the generation / family and the proverb “Close is the shirt but closer is the skin”. In this particular case, the assertion intensifies the meaning of the saying: aspirations and desires of an individual predominate over the wishes and desires of others.

The translation made by Andrew Bromfield conveys the essence of this merger of phraseological units: “One generation passeth away and another generation cometh”, Tatarsky thought philosophically, “but thou lookest out always for number one” (PELEVIN, 2001). In this case, not only the merging of idioms is worth considering, but also the fact that they belong to different stylistic layers and this fact is manifested both in the Russian and English languages. The expression “one generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth forever” is very ancient and characteristic of a high style, that is evidenced by the use of archaic forms “passeth”, “cometh”, “abideth”. The second part combines the obsolete words “thou” (‘you’ is the modern equivalent), the obsolete form “lookest” and the expression “look out for number one”, which is given in dictionaries marked “colloquial”.

The language game reveals itself on several levels in this translated extract - the free treatment of phraseological units and the mixture of styles. It means that the translator managed to convey the essence of the original text.

Another example of the use of phraseological units in advertising is the phrase “Money does not smell”. Created by Tatarskiy advertising of new flavor by “Hugo Boss” interferes with the imagery of this phraseological unit which is transformed into a diametrically opposite statement: “Money smells”. In this case, this unit is not about the fact that the method of obtaining money is not essential, but about the availability of new cologne from a well-known company only to rich and famous people. The destruction of the imagery of a phraseological unit is also preserved during translation: “MONEY DOES SMELL! “BENJAMIN” THE NEW COLOGNE FROM HUGO BOSS”. In this case, Andrew Bromfield just literally translates the text, since the phrase “Money does not smell”, attributed to Emperor Vespasian, can be found in a general cultural context and is familiar to representatives of any nationality.

It is significant that the popular expression, referring to the high style, is used in advertising cologne - an everyday household item. The collision of the meaning and the denotatum helps to create a specific comic effect and to emphasise the absurdity of the consumer society: “The absurdity, the ridiculousness of advertising texts inscribed in a plot-story line no less strange from pre-postmodern logic, allows the reader to see and understand the absurdity of withdrawing from the spiritual foundations towards inanimate objects supposedly capable of solving all problems and making the owner happy” (KUGAEVSKIJ, 2006, p. 155).

However, it is worth noting that, when translated into English, this contrast between the everyday subject and the widespread expression of the high style used in its advertising is somewhat eroded, since the grammatical form “does smell” is used. On the one hand, it helps

to increase emotionality, and on the other hand, it can be labeled as colloquial, in contrast to the form “smells.”

The destruction of the imagery is also present when using the phraseological unit “deaf as in a tank,” which in the Russian language characterises a hopeless case or question/request that was unanswered. In Victor Pelevin’s novel, we meet only the first part of it “as in a tank” when describing a stall in which Tatarskiy worked before joining the advertising business: “It was dim and cool in a stall like in a tank [...]” (PELEVIN, 2011, p. 15). As a result, a direct meaning is highlighted, whereas a figurative meaning is hidden, and we see a comparison of a small, inconvenient room with a tank. Translating the following part, Andrew Bromfield fails to convey this culturological context, associated not only with closeness, but also with despair, and English-speaking readers can see the next version: “Inside the kiosk it was half-dark and cool, like inside a tank [...]” (PELEVIN, 2001).

Tatarskiy, speaking of a considerable number of advertising agencies, does not use a popular expression “kak griby posle dozhdia” (“like mushrooms after the rain”), but his own idea “kak groby poslevozhdia” (“like coffins after the leader”) (PELEVIN, 2011, p. 31). Indeed, in the Soviet Union, which existence began with revolution and civil war, and then was marked by Stalinist repression, the comparison with a large number of deaths caused by authorities and people in power was quite understandable, but in the 90s of the XX century, a lot of people, especially city dwellers, almost did not gather mushrooms.

This part is omitted in the translation since it is possible to transfer the historical context of this phrase to foreigners only after a long story about the history of Russia. Moreover, while speaking about the Soviet mentality, Victor Pelevin uses the word “leader”, hoping for the reader’s understanding, while Andrew Bromfield presents a proper name “Lenin” in his translation: “And the leader was finally leaving Russia long-occupied by him. His statues were being taken out of town by military trucks” (PELEVIN, 2011, p. 31) – “Lenin’s statues were gradually carted out of town on military trucks [...]” (PELEVIN, 2001).

Thus, when translating a language game related to the use of phraseological units and popular expressions, several strategies are usually used:

1. Finding a similar phraseological unit and its further transformation making it closer to the meaning of the original (“One generation passeth away and another generation cometh, but thou lookest out always for number one”).

2. Using the literal translation if the popular expression belongs to the general cultural context (“Money does smell”).

3. Using literal, word-for-word translation if the expression is used both in the direct and in the figurative sense; however, it may lead to the loss of meaning of the expression “like inside a tank” in the Russian language – “with little space” (direct meaning) and ‘hopeless’ (figurative). The meaning of hopelessness is lost when translating.

4. Referring to paralipsis (“like coffins after the leader”).

As it was already mentioned, the mixture of styles (or more precisely, even different genres) is of a great interest in the novel. The main character of the novel –Tatarskiy – makes up commercials and works in this rapidly developing area. And it is the scripts of these commercials that make up most of the novel. One of the “creations” of the main character is given below: “The next shot: two packs of powder. There is an inscription “Ariel” on one of them. On the other, faded gray, the inscription is “Ordinary Caliban.” Behind the scenes Miranda pronounces: “I have heard about Ariel from a friend” (PELEVIN, 2011, p. 75).

In addition to commercials, he creates advertising slogans, a considerable number of which are also represented in the novel:

Money smells!

“Benjamin”

New cologne from HUGO BOSS (PELEVIN, 2011, p. 82).

Another genre that lays the foundation of this work is a legend. The main character, sorting out old papers, finds notes with the myth of the goddess Ishtar and her mysteries: “The tradition of the three Chaldean riddles said that any inhabitant of Babylon could become the husband of the goddess. For this, he had to drink a special drink and ascend to her ziggurat” (PELEVIN, 2011, p. 43). Tatarskiy himself turns out to be Ishtar’s husband at the end of the novel.

The passages devoted to the legend includes a number of words belonging to the high style (“goddess”, “peak”, “ritual”) and even historicisms (“chaldey”, “priests”). At the same time, examples of commercials and slogans include everyday language words, and it is not surprising, since cigarettes, powder, eau de cologne, sportswear are things that a common consumer uses every day. However, it is interesting that common words coexist in advertising with quotations from Russian and foreign classics, proverbs and sayings. This metatextuality is the subject of further consideration.

In the novel by Victor Pelevin, the elements of such styles as a scientific article and a prayer can be observed. In one of the stores, the main character buys a tablet, which, as a

saleswoman asserts, can give answers to any questions. For example, on Tatarskiy’s request to tell something new about advertising the tablet writes the following: “Previously, Oranus only had a vegetative nervous system; the emergence of electronic media means that in the process of evolution, he developed a central [...]” (PELEVIN, 2011, p. 126).

And it is precisely the prayer that Tatarskiy says when he realises that he becomes sick of drugs. This prayer includes both features of the canonical prayer, for example, the ancient form of “cries” and low-colloquial lexis (“trash” / “junk”, “it is clear even to a horse”).

The stylistic features of a particular genre are also taken into account by Andrew Bromfield when translating. Short and meaningful phrases are used when translating advertising slogans, historicisms (for example, “ziggurat”) - in the legend of Ishtar, scientific terms (“exaggeration”, “vegetative nervous system”) - in the comments of the “magic tablet”. The passage with the prayer of Tatarskiy is of particular interest: just like the original, the translation presents the mixture of ancient forms (“thou”) and slang expressions (“junk”).

Another level at which a language game appears in Victor Pelevin’s novel is a mixture of Russian and English languages when the characters in their dialogues use a vast number of foreign words. Indeed, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Europe and the USA became a kind of ideal for the Russian people, and English, which was previously considered only as a useless school subject, suddenly burst into the lives of people. But, unfortunately, knowledge of the language was often limited to only a few phrases that they sought to insert into the conversation.

Moreover, the sphere of advertising became entirely new for Russia in the 90s, and people wanted to get some information about it by reading the literature published in Europe and the USA. Thus, the reference book of Tatarskiy is “Positioning: a battle for your mind”, which becomes a source of foreign borrowings for the main character. Such expressions as “freelance”, “cultural references”, “identity”, and others are found in the dialogues of the characters.

It is significant that a foreign word “generation” is used in the title of the novel (instead of the Russian word with the same meaning) in combination with the Russian letter “P”. This confusion can be interpreted as an attempt to show that the generation to which Babel Tatar belongs is situated between the two worlds, the “Russian” and the “Western.”

Another fact is interesting from this point of view: the name of the main character - Vavilen - was made up of the words “Vasily Aksenov” and “Vladimir Ilyich Lenin”, but several times during the course of the novel it correlates with Babylon (in Russian language Vavilen

and Babylon start with one letter), which, as it is known, collapsed, because people living there began to speak different languages.

Of course, it is difficult to achieve such effect when translating; however, Andrew Bromfield, to a certain extent, managed to approach the meaning of the original and reflect the idea of mixing languages. From this point of view, the fact that the translation of the novel is called “Babylon” by analogy with the name of the main character - Babylen (Vavilen) is quite indicative. The name of the Babylon city has the same spelling in English. Thus, in the English version of the novel, there is a reference to the Tower of Babel. It is also noteworthy that in the translation a strange name of the main character is explained somewhat differently: as the compounding of the words “Babiy Yar” (“Babiy Yar” – a famous poem by Yevgeny Yevtushenko) and “Lenin”. It is quite simple to explain this deviation from the original text made by the translator. The name “Vasily”, as it was in the original, being transliterated into Cyrillic would start with “V” and would have nothing similar with the word “Babylon”. The parallel between “Babylon” and “Babylen” is indeed more significant for conveying the main idea of the novel than such a minor digression.

As it is mentioned earlier, postmodern works are challenging for translators because of their intertextuality. Many researchers, both Russian (ZHOLKOVSKIY, 2016; LIPOVECKIJ, 1997) and foreign (GENETTE, 1997; MACÉ, 2008), refer to the subject of meta-textuality (intertextuality).

As for the novel Generation “P” by Victor Pelevin, a considerable number of references to the works of Russian and foreign literature are given here. The already mentioned script of the Ariel washing powder commercial is based on the images of Shakespeare’s play *The Tempest*, and a famous line from A.S. Griboyedov *Woe from Wit* “And the smoke of the Motherland is sweet and pleasant for us” is used as a slogan for “Parliament” cigarettes.

If, in the above cases, Victor Pelevin clearly indicates the authorship of the quotations, then, for example, the name of one of the pubs (and of one of the chapter headings of the novel Generation “P”) - “Poor folk”- will become familiar only to readers acquainted with Russian literature and knowing about the existence of the work of F.M. Dostoevsky with the same name.

In general, writers and poets such as Orwell, Chekhov, Shakespeare, Griboyedov, Mayakovsky, Aksyonov, Pasternak are mentioned in the work of Victor Pelevin. The author refers to the film industry, in particular, Darth Vader - the central character of the *Star Wars* is noted, as well as music (a reference to the work of the famous DDT group takes place).

The translator tries to keep to these cultural realities, and the famous phrase of A.S. Griboedov is translated literally: “Sweet and dear is the smoke of our Motherland”. However,

indirect quotes are not commented, and, for example, the chapter heading is translated as “Poor folk”. With no reference to Dostoevsky, this expression may not cause any associations for foreign readers. Moreover, reference, for example, to the songs of the DDT group is also omitted by the translator, since foreigners are hardly familiar with this cultural reality.

If we are talking about the translation of quotations from the Russian classics, then in most cases we mean a word-subscript, which does not imply the transfer of an emotional state. As an example, the famous quatrain of Marina Tsvetaeva (“For my poems, written so early”) in the translation of Andrew Bromfield, looks like the following: “Scattered along the dusty shelves of shops (No one has bought them and no one buys!) My poems, like precious wines, will have their day”. It can be noted that the literary expression “will have their turn” is replaced by a completely traditional, modern English phrase “will have their day”. So, in this case, the depth of the phrase is lost, as well as the feeling of anticipation of some miracle.

Conclusion

Thus, in Victor Pelevin’s novel, there are all the signs typical for a postmodernist work: a language game, manifested in a mixture of styles and free treatment of phraseological units, intertextuality – the reference to other works of literature, painting and music. And Andrew Bromfield tried, using all the means available in English, to convey these features.

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