PASSIVE VOICE IN TRANSLATION

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Abstract
The present article focuses on the analysis of the passive voice in translations from English into Russian and vice versa. The research is based on the examination of selected examples included in the parallel with the ideas and points of view of famous linguists.

Keywords: passive voice, active voice, scientific style, fiction, receptor language, conventions, differences.

Introduction

Voice is one of the linguistic categories that exist in most languages; however, there are many structural differences among individual languages which cause that the rules and conventions for the usage of the active and the passive voice are not identical in all the languages that dispose of it. As regards the differences in the use of the active and especially the passive voice between English and Russian, they are not abysmal but they do exist and should be taken into account when treating the category of voice in translation.

The differences in the system of the passive in English and in Russian concern not only its form but partly also its function and stylistic value, which results in a difference in the frequency of the use of the passive voice in the two languages. In English, the passive has more functions and is used more commonly and frequently than in Russian. As a consequence of the systemic differences between the two languages, traceable differences in the usage of the passive in original English and Russian texts and also in translations from one language into another should be found.

Materials and Methods

Although it is generally agreed that the passive voice is not used as prolifically in fiction as e.g. in the scientific style, observing the treatment of the passive in the category of fiction is highly rewarding since in fiction, there is no universal style of writing and it can be thus supposed that there are differences in the use of the passive voice among individual works. As the chosen novels represent various forms of the

genre of the novel, it can be assumed that several differences in the employment of the passive will be revealed.

The thesis comprises two main parts – a theoretical and a practical one. In the theoretical part, the system of the passive voice in English and in Russian is discussed. First, theoretical approaches concerning translation of the passive voice from one language into another are indicated. In the following chapters, differences and similarities in the form, the function and the stylistic value of the passive voice in English and Russian are implied, which provides the background for a practical analysis of the research sample.

To what extent are the linguistic differences in the system of the passive in English and Russian realized and really employed in practice by translators is the main subject of the practical corpus-based analysis. The analytical part consists of two sections. First, the frequency of the use of the passive voice in original works of fiction and translations is examined. Further, differences in the frequency of the passive in the narrative and dialogic sections of the texts and also the frequency of the two forms of the Russian passive (reflexive and periphrastic) are discussed. Second, the use of the passive in all the translations is dealt with practically and more in detail – the passive voice forms from the originals translated with the passives, the passives translated with the active forms and the passive voice structures used in translation of the active voice structures from the originals are analysed.

Research and Discussion

A passive is translated with a passive, an active with an active even when this is unnatural in the receptor language or results in wrong sense. When faced with a choice of categories in the receptor language, say active and passive, the literal approach to translation leads the translator to choose the form which corresponds to that used in the original, whereas the use of that category in the receptor language may be quite different from its use in the original [1.1].

As Beekman and Callow point out, translators sometimes translate voice automatically, not respecting the linguistic peculiarities of the source and target language, which subsequently results in the creation of clumsy, unnatural texts. This approach has been mostly rejected in the field of the translation theory; it has been generally agreed that the translation process should not be a mechanic transformation of the text from one language into another but a fully conscious and a well-thought-out process. Thus, it is important for every translator to be aware of the character and specificity of the systems of both the source and target languages he/she deals with in translation and apply this linguistic knowledge in the translation process, since, as Jiri

Levy claims, "the language of the original text and the language of the translation are not straightforwardly symmetric. The linguistic devices of the two languages are not "equivalent" and thus they cannot be translated mechanically" [3.1].

Similarly, Nida and Taber call for application of the linguistic knowledge to the translation process:

To communicate effectively one must respect the genius of each language. Rather than bemoan the lack of some feature in a language, one must respect the features of the receptor language and exploit the potentialities of the language to the greatest possible extent. Rather than force the formal structure of one language upon another, the effective translator is quite prepared to make any and all formal changes necessary to reproduce the message in the distinctive structural forms of the receptor language [5.1].

According to the translation theory by Eugene Nida, there are three stages that the translation procedure should involve:

analysis, in which the surface structure (message as given in language A) is analysed in terms of the grammatical relationships and the meanings of the words and combinations of words, transfer, in which the analysed material is transferred in the mind of the translator from language A to language B, and restructuring, in which the transferred material is restructured in order to make the final message fully acceptable in the receptor language [5.2].

This applies to all parts of the texts that are translated, i.e. also to the passive and active voice structures that appear in it.

Even though the linguistic category of voice exists in both the source and the target language, it might fulfill a different role and have a different significance in the two languages. First, the passive voice might be used with different frequency in the source and the target language, as Baker claims, "languages which have a category of voice do not always use the passive with the same frequency" [2.1]. There are even languages which simply have no passive and all the passive forms that appear in the languages with the passive voice have to be changed into active forms in the translations [5.3].

Further, the function of the passive voice in the source and the target language might be quite different. The main function of the passive in English, and similarly also in Russian, is the avoidance of the specification of the agent of an action. However, the function of the passive might be quite distinct in other languages. Baker points out that in some Eastern languages, e.g. in Japanese, Vietnamese or Chinese, the main function of the passive is to express adversity; thus, in these languages, the passive is used to report unfortunate events. In these languages, the passive therefore often carries connotations of unpleasantness although the event described is not normally

seen as unpleasant [2.2]. Translators from other languages must bear in mind the differences in function of the passive in the source and target language and respect them in translation.

Another linguistic factor that might differ in the source and the target language is the stylistic value of the passive in various text types. Baker argues that there are differences in the 10 use of the passive e.g. in formal correspondence written in English and in Russian: whereas in English, the formal correspondence "relies heavily on using the passive for distancing", Russian makes use of the active voice formulations [2.3].

Conclusion

To sum up, the passive voice should not be translated automatically with the passive and the active voice with the active into the target language, since there are several factors that should be considered first. These factors are to be sought for in the linguistic system of every single language – as Mona Baker puts it, "the most important things to bear in mind as far as voice is concerned are the frequency of use of active, passive, and similar structures in the source and target languages, their respective stylistic value in different text types, and – most important of all – the function(s) of the passive and similar structures in each language" [2.4].

Although the differences concerning the passive voice in English and in Russian are not as profound as they are between e.g. Russian and Japanese, the role of the passive in English and Russian is by no means exactly the same and has to be taken into consideration in translation [6.1]. Thus, not only the form, but also the three main factors stressed by Baker, i.e. the function, the stylistic value and the frequency of the passive in English and Russian will be discussed in the theoretical part on the use of the passive in the respective languages.

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