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Neutralisation of Non-Standard Language in Literary Translation and Its Influence on the Character's Image: a Cognitive Perspective

Abstract

Neutralisation is a recurrent translation strategy. When applied to a literary translation, neutralisation poses a threat to a literary character's authenticity. The subject of the research is the influence of the literary character's idiolect on the character's image created in the text, as well as the consequences of neutralisation of non-standard language spoken by the character in translation. The problem is approached from the point of view of cognitive linguistics and cognitive poetics. The applied methodology draws on the dimensions of construal, differentiated within cognitive grammar. The paper is based on the analysis of the Polish novel *Wojna-polsko ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną* by Dorota Masłowska and its Spanish and English translations. It has been found that non-standard language spoken by the protagonist concerns different dimensions of construal, and neutralisation of the language has an impact on them. The research indicates the utility of cognitive methodology in the study of language variation in literary translation.

Keywords: literary translation, non-standard, language variation, neutralisation, cognitive linguistics, idiolect, characterisation

Introduction

One of the translation strategies differentiated and discussed in translation studies is *neutralisation* (e.g. Berezowski 1997; Tello Fons 2011; Hejwowski 2015), which consists of the replacement of non-standard, marked language that characterises the original text with its standard equivalents in translation¹. This

1 To be precise, Hejwowski (2015: 226) speaks of "linguistic allusions translation techniques" (orig. "techniki tłumaczenia aluzji językowych"), Berezowski (1997: 47) proposes "dialect translation strategies", and Tello Fons (2011: 134) uses the

particular translation strategy is frequently used in practice. As Dębska noticed, translation of language variation is commonly considered to be difficult and translators are reluctant to reconstruct it in the target text (Dębska 2012: 67). Toury postulated the existence of *the law of standardisation*, as one of the few discovered indisputable laws of translation, according to which linguistic innovations present in the original text are often replaced with more conventional linguistic means in the target text (Toury 1995: 267–268). In this sense, standardisation is synonymous with neutralisation. When applied in a literary translation, neutralisation poses a threat to a literary character's authenticity, since language with its social, geographical, historical, and situational diversity is a powerful characterisation tool. The language used by literary characters influences the way we perceive them while reading a novel, it contributes to the image of the character created in our mind in the process of reading. As explained by Sánchez Alonso (1998: 99–101), information about a character is provided not only by means of direct descriptions by the narrator and through the presentation of the conduct of the character, but also through the interventions of the character in different communicative situations. Estébanez Calderón ([1996] 2016: 185) also includes dialogue as one of the means of characterisation. Authors of novels make use of the implicit information hidden in a language as they stylise characters' language in different ways. Readers grasp information about the character; with neutralisation, part of this information is lost. As Coupland notices (2007: 149), stylisation is a concept identified with the literary criticism of Bakhtin who described it as "an artistic image of another's language". Now, how does the stylised language of a literary character transform into an "image" and how does the grip of the hidden information about the character occur on the part of the reader? These are the issues that are going to be approached in this paper.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. Firstly, to explain how the language, which could be generally classified as *non-standard*, used by a literary character influences the image of this character created in the novel, in other words, why readers picture a literary character in a certain way based on how the character speaks. The second is to show how the translation strategy of neutralisation of linguistic variety affects the image of the character created in the translation, in comparison to the original.

The problem is addressed from the cognitive point of view; the theoretical framework is based on cognitive linguistics, partly also on cognitive poetics and works that represent a cognitive approach to translation. The methodology of the analysis draws on the dimensions of construal differentiated within cognitive grammar, adapted for the purposes of the research. The first sections of the paper describe the theoretical framework and methodology, whereas section 3 illustrates the problem with examples selected from the novel *Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną* by Dorota Masłowska. In the analysis, the original novel written in Polish was compared with two translations, in Spanish and English.

1. Conceptualisation of Standard and Non-Standard Varieties

As we get to know the world, our human experience is conceptualised in our minds, creating mental representations of the way the world is organised. These mental representations of the world are called

term "dialect translation techniques" (orig. "técnicas de traducción del 'dialecto'"). Regardless of the label, though, all the classifications in essence refer to practical solutions used in translation to deal with non-standard variants of a language.

cognitive domains, frames, or cognitive idealised models (Croft, Cruse 2004: 28–29)². Throughout this paper, though, I will adhere to the term *domain*. The cognitive domains might include a variety of information, from facts proven empirically to superstitions (Cuenca, Hilferty [1999] 2007: 70), and they involve our knowledge of various relations, actions, processes, states, *etc.* The processes of categorisation enable us to understand and mentally organise the information obtained (Cuenca, Hilferty [1999] 2007: 32). As Kristiansen (2003: 73) notices, we categorise our social and natural environments. These natural and social environments are linked to different language variants since there is a close relation between different social groups and the language used by their members.³ Through experience we might get to know the language of the youth or other specific social groups, professional jargons, we might encounter regional dialects or come across texts written in an outdated language, which is subjected to the processes of categorisation and conceptualisation in our minds. Our social and linguistic experience is cognitively organised into domains that also include *scripts* of typical situations characterised by typical phrases said in given circumstances, for example, during a visit to a doctor, buying an ice cream at a kiosk, making a reservation, *etc.* As pointed out by Croft and Cruse (2004: 17), the term *script* is used by some scholars in reference to a *frame / domain* “with a canonical sequence of events presupposed by a social activity such as going to a restaurant”. Croft and Cruse (2004) themselves do not opt for a purposeful differentiation of scripts from domains but rather subscribe scripts into domains / frames. The present paper refers to scripts in order to emphasise the sequential character of events, and script is understood as a subtype of domain.

1.1. Basic Attitudes Towards Language Variation

Categorisation and conceptualisation, being cognitive processes, occur individually in each person’s mind. However, since we share some social experiences as humans, we also happen to categorise certain phenomena in the same way that other people do, and conversely, there might be some differences in the ways we perceive them. As pointed out by Stockwell (2002: 33), cognitive models that are shared become cultural models. Taking the distinction between standard language and non-standard variations into account, some general underlying patterns of thought that shape our conception of language as a social phenomenon have been differentiated, which we would rather discuss in this paper, instead of imposing any prescriptive definitions of standard and non-standard variants. Geeraerts (2003: 26) describes two basic cultural models that summarise basic attitudes towards language variation, that is to say, indicate how the users of language commonly perceive it. The first of the described models, the “rationalist” one, emphasises the generality of standard languages. Standard languages, in contrast to *lects*, are perceived to be geographically, socially, and thematically general. That is to say, they are seen as a common language in broader areas, available to all social groups, and “equipped to deal with any semantic domain” Geeraerts (2003: 29). Because of their generality, they are also perceived to be neutral (*ibidem*). The second of the described models, the “romantic” one, points out the fact that standard language is actually a dialect of

2 As Langacker explains, the concepts are often interchangeable but not exactly equivalent. In his own words: “*Domain* has the greatest generality since neither *frame* nor *ICM* applies very well to basic domains (e.g. time or color space). A *frame* may be roughly comparable to a *nonbasic domain*. If the words *idealized* and *model* are taken seriously, *idealized cognitive model* has the narrowest range of application” (Langacker 2013: 46–47).

3 This has been the object of interest of sociolinguistics and is described in several sociolinguistic studies, see, for example: Hudson ([1981] 2001); Alvarez González (2006); Penny (2000).

a certain, economically or politically dominant region, that was chosen as the standard, which presupposes domination of a certain language variant over another one. What is more, standard languages are typically used in cultural, educational, scientific, administrative, and political contexts. By contrast, non-standard variants 'acquire contrastive overtones' and are seen as the language of intimacy, familiarity, emotions, and naturalness. The first of the described models emphasises the accessibility and universality of the linguistic standard, and the second concentrates on the expressive role of language, which is perceived as a manifestation of identity Geeraerts (2003: 35). Taking the two models into account, we might conclude that standard language is perceived as neutral, whereas non-standard variants of a language are seen as natural forms of expression. We are considering here the characteristics attributed to the standard language and the totality of non-standard variants. On an individual level, there might be differences in our perception of particular lects, depending on our individual experience.

1.2. Variants of a Language as a Source of Information

As has been indicated by Kristiansen (2003), linguistic variation is socially diagnostic⁴ and, from a semiotic point of view, the association between a linguistic form and its social meaning is not direct, but there is an intermediate structure of cognitive constructions in between, which enables the speaker and hearer to "locate each other and position themselves" (Kristiansen 2003: 69). In other words, when meeting new people, we draw conclusions about them based on the way they speak. The social meaning ascribed to other people is drawn from our own linguistic experience, stored in our minds in the form of domains and scripts, and might refer to the speaker's geographical and social provenance, level of education, professional background, *etc.* The knowledge of certain domains and linguistic scripts is indicative of the person's experience, for example, somebody who uses legal terminology appropriately is thought to possess adequate education. Conversely, if somebody's way of speaking does not match the circumstances in some way and diverges from the expected script, it provides information about the speaker's lack of knowledge of an appropriate register, lack of certain experience, or indifference to the "rules" and "proper" behaviour. This way, non-standard language is determined by circumstances and divergence from the expected script which includes the expected register. This informative linguistic potential is exploited actively by language users, which finds its confirmation in modern sociolinguistic research. As Schilling-Estes indicates, linguistic variation is seen as "a resource in the active creation, presentation, and recreation of speaker identity" (Schilling-Estes 2002: 388). Coupland (2003) speaks of the projection of identity through language style (2007: 109) and Kristiansen discusses the active use of stereotypes related to language variation (Coupland 2003: 110). In other words, speakers make intentional use of language variation in order to convey social meaning. Authors of novels create characters and provide them with a social identity manifested through their way of speaking. Communicative situations in a literary work are fictional; however, they have a social character since they refer to social models of speaking and therefore they enable the reader to situate them in the linguistic practice of the real world (Głowiński [1979] 1997: 235). Hence, readers tend to perceive literary characters in the same way they perceive real people; they judge them by the same values, relying on their own linguistic experience.

4 Kristiansen concentrated on accents; however, her remarks apply not only to the phonological level but to all manifestations of linguistic variation.

2. Construal of a Literary Character – Methodology

A cognitive approach to translation requires attention to conceptualisation. Conceptualisation is one of the most important mental capacities that we humans possess and it pertains to the creation of mental representations, that is, mental images (Cuenca, Hilferty [1999] 2007: 79). The psychological process of mental image creation is related to language and language use (Tabakowska [1993] 2001: 47). To put things simply, we express our thoughts using language and understand the ideas of others expressed by means of language. An author expresses their ideas through language, readers create mental representations of the described world and people they read about, and the language the author uses to describe the character determines the way in which the implied reader “sees” the character.⁵ Authors construe literary characters by describing them directly, by presenting their behaviour in different situations, and also by providing them with their own particular voice. The way a literary character speaks affects their image, but the relationship between the two goes beyond simple connotations with certain social groups or specific regions. The character’s way of speaking, as one of the elements of characterisation, relates to the rest of the information provided about the character in the text, and that relationship is complex. Let us now describe a tool that might be useful in understanding the complexity of this relationship.

Langacker, in his conception of cognitive grammar, likens conceptual content to an image, that is, a scene, and construal to a way of viewing it (2013: 55). The key idea here is that speakers select linguistic means to symbolise particular semantic content (Tabakowska [1993] 2001: 42) and that language choices directly impose a certain construal (Langacker 2013: 43). In other words, as Tabakowska explains it, construal is “a specific linguistic organization of a scene” (Tabakowska 2014: 134). The choice of a particular form of expression reflects the speaker’s subjective choice of a given conceptualisation from the repertoire of possibilities offered by a given language’s conventions (Tabakowska [1993] 2001: 30) and imposes a certain construal. Langacker (1987, 2013, 2017) differentiates several parameters that determine all conceptualised images, that is to say, conceptualised content, and calls them *focal adjustments* or *dimensions of construal*, depending on the year of the publication we look at. As Tabakowska explains, a scene construal results from the speaker’s choice regarding different dimensions (2001 [1993]: 105). We propose to apply these parameters in order to study the role of the non-standard language spoken by a literary character in the character’s image. The dimensions of construal offer the possibility of a more complex insight into the relationship between the language spoken by a character and the other elements that make up the image of the character.

Tabakowska postulates that adopting a cognitive approach towards translation requires seeking equivalence between the author’s, the translator’s, and the reader’s conceptualisations, that is the mental images (Tabakowska 2014: 135), and seeking translation equivalence involves comparing construal (Tabakowska 2014: 134). When applied to literary characters, the image of the character created in translation should correspond to the image created in the original novel. The methodology of the present paper draws on Tabakowska ([1993] 2001) who first postulated the application of Langacker’s cognitive grammar in poetic imagery and literary translation, updated in certain aspects in view of more recent

⁵ While talking about an “implied reader”, I refer to studies that see prose fiction as a complex act of communication where entities involved, among others, are those of the implied and real reader and the implied and real author (see: Stoppel 2022). As Stoppel puts it: “Readers routinely identify or take up a role that is implied by the text, which suggests how to properly respond to it” (Stoppel 2022: 399).

Langacker's works (2013, 2017). The paper also utilises ideas presented by Wilk-Racińska (2023), Harrison (2016), and Stockwell (2002). However, none of these scholars focused specifically on literary characters; therefore, their methods cannot be implemented in the study of a literary character's language and its influence on the character's image without being complemented and modified first.

Tabakowska's work ([1993] 2001) concentrates on static images, the so-called "scenes", she repeatedly uses the metaphor of "painting an image" in a translation. Let us think of how an image of a literary character is created in our mind while reading. We realise that we picture the character in action, we picture what they do, how they interact with others. The reader witnesses how the characters interact in communicative situations. The very notions of scene and image have to be specified because, in our case, the overall image of the character will be the result of many scenes in which the character participates; simultaneously the character forms an element of each scene. Therefore, for the purposes of our study, 'image' is not synonymous with 'scene' as it was in Tabakowska's work (*ibid*). As Harrison points out, the model of cognitive grammar is scalable and can be applied as a framework to the analysis of the discourse as a whole and not be limited to the clausal level of language (Harrison 2016: 25). Let us now present the dimensions of construal and explain how they relate to the question of literary characterisation and translation.

2.1. Selection

As has already been said, our social and linguistic experience is cognitively organised into domains in our human minds. *Selection* is the basic dimension of construal and refers to the choice of cognitive domains that compose a given image, made by the conceptualiser (Tabakowska [1993] 2001: 53). As Langacker puts it in his work from 2013:

One facet of selection is the access an expression affords to a particular set of cognitive domains [...]. A second facet is the extent of an expression's "coverage" in the domains accessed: which portions of these domains it actually evokes and utilizes as the basis for its meaning. For each domain in its matrix, an expression has a scope consisting of its coverage in that domain. (Langacker 2013: 62)

The second facet of selection described here refers to the distinction between *profile* and *base* described in more detail in Langacker's earlier works (e.g. 1987) as well as by Tabakowska ([1993] 2001). Profile, in this distinction, is the referent of a term, and base is the context necessary to understand the profile (Tabakowska [1993] 2001: 54).

Cognitive linguistics insists on the encyclopaedic nature of the meaning equated to conceptualisation. As pointed out by Wilk-Racińska (2023), words not only denote their referents but also open access to a series of connotations and associations (Wilk-Racińska 2023: 22), and the connotations of a given word can be personal or shared by a community. In the latter case, they become part of the evocative meaning (Wilk-Racińska 2023: 21). A conceptualisation consists of various domains, including the ones concerning social, geographical, and historical uses of expressions, as well as other typical contexts of their use. Take the Spanish word "chamba", for example, which denotes the same thing as "work" but its meaning evokes the domain of MEXICO, as it is where the word is used; the expression "OMG" has the domain of YOUTH inscribed in its meaning, whereas "thee" evokes the domains of HISTORY and LITERATURE. Non-standard language used as an element of characterisation evokes different domains that influence the construal of the character, adding more elements to the image of the character.

2.2. Focus

This relates to the *figure* and *ground* alignment which is derived from perceptual psychology and means that people always perceive certain elements of a scene as more salient and visible than others. The element given special prominence is called the *figure*, while the less prominent elements form the *ground*. The cognitive ability of the human mind to differentiate between figures and ground is reflected in the language in the scene construal (Tabakowska [1993] 2001: 69–70). Psychology differentiates a principle according to which strong and clear-cut stimuli (such as bright light or shrill sounds) are perceived as figures. People tend to treat the well-known environment as a background against which new elements are perceived as figures (Tabakowska [1993] 2001: 70). Langacker in his work from 2013 applies the terms “foreground” and “background” to discuss the dimension of focus and, as he himself notices while referring to his own previous work: “Foreground and background have numerous manifestations in discourse” (Langacker 2013: 58). One of the manifestations of focus directing in literature is attention to language. As Stockwell points out in his conception of cognitive poetics, creative use of language and “all deviations from the expected and ordinary use of language” draw the reader’s attention and are linguistic means of foregrounding within a text (Stockwell 2002: 14). Non-standard language used by a literary character might play the role of the figure in the characterisation in general and in individual scenes in particular, and if that is the case it definitely requires the translator’s attention.

2.3. Specificity

This dimension pertains to the level of precision and detail by which something is depicted; it is also often described as “granularity” or “resolution”.⁶ A “specific” expression provides a fine-grained description, whereas a less specific expression provides a coarse-grained description. A low resolution, that is, a low specificity level, reveals only general features and no detail. The opposite of specificity is schematicity (Langacker 2013: 55). In the context of a literary character’s construal, specificity refers to the detail of the description of the character, that is, the pieces of information about the character that the reader obtains from the text. Bearing in mind that the language of a literary character provides information about the character and is one of the elements of characterisation, the translation strategy of neutralisation of the character’s language deprives the description of the character of some details, it narrows the number of attributes in the description of the character, that is, the pieces of information and qualities ascribed to the character. As a result, the image of the character becomes less specific, more coarse-grained, general, and simplified.

2.4. Perspective

As Langacker explains, perspective means the viewing arrangement and, in particular, it refers to the vantage point assumed in viewing a certain scene (Langacker 2013: 73), in other words, it is the position of the viewer with respect to the scene that is being observed. In the context of non-standard language as an element of the characterisation and the translation of such language in a novel, perspective has some interesting implications.

⁶ This, not without reason, brings to mind the number of pixels that exist within a digital image and the level of detail contained in such an image.

First of all, it concerns the viewpoint of the reader with respect to the literary character presented in a given novel and the idea that the perspective of the translation's reader is different from that of the original work's reader. The reader of the translation's default perspective is different because they might have different knowledge and experience, in other words, they might have a distinct set of cognitive domains stored in their minds. In particular, L2⁷ might not have an "equivalent" language variant and readers of the translation might not have an "equivalent" experience. This difference in the context and "lack of equivalent" is what some scholars interested in the translation of non-standard language point out, sometimes drawing a conclusion about the untranslatability of non-standard language (*e.g.* Wojtasiewicz [1957] 1992). Nevertheless, the first step is to determine how the language affects the image of the character in question in each case and what information it conveys, only then to seek ways of conveying this information. Translation of the character's idiolect and its role in the characterisation is not about the pursuit of the exact denotative equivalent of a variant of a language, which in many cases is unlikely to be found, but about the qualities and information implied by the character's language that influence the characterisation.

Readers are capable of adopting the perspective of others, they do it in the very process of reading. As Langacker puts it: "we can recognize alternative vantage points and even adopt them by mental simulation" (Langacker 2017: 22), which means that we can adopt the perspective of others and follow the events from their perspective. While reading, depending on the structure of the narration, we may get to know the events from the perspective of one of the characters. We simulate the described world, we perceive the events from a somewhat internal perspective, as if we were witnessing them directly. Taking into account that capability of adopting the perspective of others on the part of readers, we should consider the possibility of the readers of the translation being capable of adopting the perspective of the implied reader, that is to say, understanding the context of the original work without adaptation to the reality of L2⁸.

Another important aspect of perspective worth mentioning here is the individual perspective adopted by the reader regarding the character described. Readers might identify with the character, view the character as a member of the same regional or social group they belong to, based on their way of speaking, or they might not. And it is true for both the original work's readers and the translation's readers. In the process of reading, we also "assess" the attitude of literary characters according to the scripts of typical situations and ways of speaking related to them that readers have; they might, for example, think that a character spoke rudely to an old lady and not like him or her because of that for the rest of the novel. If a reader identifies with the character and their way of speaking, they approach them mentally in a way. Obviously, the translator cannot influence the individual perspective of a reader but they can provide the reader with the opportunity to get to know the literary character without any simplification and decide for themselves the perspective they adopt towards the character.

7 The second language, the language the novel is translated to.

8 This would correspond to Venuti's concept of "domestication", as opposed to "foreignisation" (Venuti [1995] 2008). A methodology of cognitive approach joined with Venuti's concept of the translator's visibility is proposed by Wilk-Racińska (2023).

2.5. Axiological Commitment

Axiological commitment is not included as a dimension of construal proposed by Langacker; however, Tabakowska ([1993] 2001) discusses it in her work on imagery and the poetics of translation as a factor that affects construal. A speaker reveals their axiological views by their choice of particular linguistic means from the gamut of possibilities offered by their languages (Tabakowska [1993] 2001: 83). Natural languages offer their users linguistic units that might contain elements of axiological and epistemic judgement (Tabakowska [1993] 2001: 84). In the context of the language of a literary character that we are dealing with in this paper, one aspect of axiological commitment refers to the question of perspective that individual readers adopt towards the characters they read about, as discussed in the previous paragraph. The second aspect of axiological commitment is the judgement reflected in the language that describes the literary character. A third-person narrator might express a view on the literary character while describing them directly, for example, by adjectives such as “crass” and influence the image of the character by suggesting a certain view. This aspect does not strictly concern the language of a character; however, it affects the overall image of the character; therefore, it should not be neglected.

2.6. Imagination

Imagination was differentiated as a dimension of construal in 2017 (Langacker 2017: 34). This common rubric includes metaphor and conceptual blending, two concepts that aim to explain a mechanism for the creation of mental images.

Cognitive linguistics argues that metaphor is not only a rhetorical figure in poetry but rather a basic cognitive mechanism that permeates our language and everyday thinking. It is a mechanism used to explain more complicated situations by means of more basic and known concepts (Cuenca, Hilferty [1999] 2007: 98). In other words, metaphor is a projection of certain concepts from one cognitive domain into another (Cuenca, Hilferty [1999] 2007: 101). We use metaphors every day, sometimes even without noticing. Some of the metaphors we use are conventionalised in the language, they function as fixed expressions or idioms (Cuenca, Hilferty [1999] 2007: 116) or simply extended meanings of words. Some are “creative”, which means they have not gained the status of conventional linguistic means (Tabakowska [1993] 2001: 94).

Conceptual blending, apart from the source and target domains,⁹ draws attention to a *generic space*, which includes the properties that the source and target share. Moreover, it accentuates the *blended space*, in which the selected content from the source and target mental spaces is blended into a new structure (Croft, Cruse 2004: 207). As Croft and Cruse explain:

The blended space does not only contain a selection of properties drawn from the two input domains: it also contains new conceptual material that arises from an elaboration of the conceptual blend on the basis of encyclopedic knowledge. (Croft, Cruse 2004: 208)

In the context of literary character’s idiolect which we are concentrating on, non-standard language used by a character might include expressions based on metaphors and conceptual blends that are not conventionalised in the general language. Non-conventional expressions used by a character will result in mental images in the reader’s mind that might be helpful in understanding a more complicated concept,

⁹ That is to say, “mental spaces”, if we want to adhere to the original terminology proposed in the blending theory.

but they might as well be surprising, puzzling, or amusing. The novelty of the character's language might be indicative of the character's way of thinking, and as a consequence affect the reader's perception of the character.

2.7. Dynamicity

Dynamicity is an aspect of construal that was added by Langacker to the inventory only in 2017. In the words of Langacker, dynamicity refers to the fact that "things develop over time" and, as he continues to explain, "conception develops over time" (Langacker 2017: 26). Now, how conceptualisation develops over time is an essential part of linguistic meaning (Langacker 2017: 31), in other words, the level of dynamicity influences the mental images. The dimension of dynamicity seems crucial in consideration of the image of a literary character, which we are dealing with here, since the overall image of a character that we read about develops over time, over the course of the story that progresses. While reading, we piece together information about the character that composes the image of the character, as we get to know how he or she interacts with other people in different communicative situations or scenes.

Wilk-Racińska (2023) discusses yet another aspect of the dimension of dynamicity with relation to mental images. She points out that a conceptualiser can choose to represent a scene as dynamic or static (Wilk-Racińska 2023: 46) and the dynamicity of a given conceptualisation, apart from more typical resources such as dynamic verbs, might be achieved by means of surprising visual effects (Wilk-Racińska 2023: 47). Surprising and heterogeneous language of a literary character evokes surprising mental images which in turn affect the overall image of the character and make it more dynamic. We are going to see an example of such a case in the following section.

3. Example of the Construal of a Literary Character

The following examples come from a Polish novel published in 2002 entitled *Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną* by Dorota Masłowska, its Spanish translation by Joanna Orzechowska, and its English translation by Benjamin Paloff. The novel is known in English as *Snow White and Russian Red*, whereas its Spanish title is *Blanco nieve, rojo Rusia*. The choice of this particular text is due to the complexity and innovation of the language of the novel. The language was precisely the reason why the novel became a literary scandal in its time; some praised the *creative use of colloquial language*, and others felt outraged by its vulgarity.¹⁰ In any case, the language of the novel is the key to its understanding.

The reader gets to know the story through a monologue by the protagonist that goes by the nickname "Silny", which translates literally as "Strong". The nickname itself is meaningful as the character appears to be a "tough guy"; however, his characterisation is much more complex. As has been said before, characterisation is achieved in a novel by means of what a character does, what the narrator says about the character, and what the character says. In this particular case, there is no third-person narrator to describe the character for us. Silny is the narrator, he tells the story through his subjective monologue with the occasional citing of the words of his interlocutors. What we learn about Silny, based on his actions, is that he does not work nor study and he lives with his mother. He spends his days going to a bar, the seaside

¹⁰ Many of these opposing opinions can be read on the cover of the Polish edition of the novel.

or a town fair and meeting various girls. He steals from one of the girls he meets, gets arrested, all the while being under the influence of drugs or looking for them. This part of the characterisation does not constitute a translation problem; however, the creation of Silny is dominated by his language which is very peculiar and does constitute a translation challenge. In what follows, we will see a few fragments extracted from the novel and we will refer to the particular dimensions of construal in order to discuss the consequences of neutralisation which is a recurring strategy in one of the analysed translations.

3.1. Selection and Focus

The scope of the domains evoked by Silny's way of speaking is very broad. The idiolect of Silny is full of phrases from teenage slang, colloquial expressions, vocabulary typical for groups of drug users, as well as swear words. However, alongside all this, the character also uses sophisticated expressions, formal vocabulary and verbal forms, as well as archaisms nowadays only encountered in fiction. On the one hand, his language is stylised for a spoken account by means of phonetic simplifications, repetitions, and ellipsis, on the other hand, he uses conjunctions typical for written communication. Let us consider a few examples that illustrate the range of domains evoked by the character's language.

1. *Idziemy do dworca, choć byśmy mogli wziąć takse. Ale raczej jest to niemożliwe, **gdyż** istnieje możliwość **pawia** ze strony Magdy, **rzygania** ziemią ogrodową być może, gdyż tak ona w tej chwili wygląda* (Masłowska 2003: 33).
- 1a. *Seguimos andando hasta la estación, aunque podríamos coger un taxi. Pero esto más bien es imposible, **porque** existe la posibilidad de que Magda **vomite**, puede que **vomite** al mantillo, porque ahora tiene precisamente esta pinta* (Masłowska [2003] 2005: 38)¹¹.
- 1b. *We walk to the station, though we could have taken a taxi. But that's rather impossible, **since** there's the possibility of **throwing up** on Magda's end, maybe of **spewing** garden soil, because that's how she looks at that moment* (Masłowska [2003] 2005: 40)¹².
2. *Dupa mu odżyła, mówi, **wskazywawszy** na mnie, po czym szybko mówi: idziemy stąd do tamtych ich oczywiście* (Masłowska 2003: 22).
- 2a. *Le ha resucitado el culo, dice **señalándome**, y luego añade deprisa: Vámonos de aquí, por supuesto, a ver a esos de allí* (Masłowska [2003] 2005: 26).
- 2b. *His ass's come back to life, he says, **pointing** at me, then he says quickly: So then let's go over to them* (Masłowska [2003] 2005: 25).
3. *Andżela była dziewczcą. Okazało się to później. Gdy już **zbrukała** tapczan mych rodziców* (Masłowska 2003: 56).
- 3a. *Andżela era virgen. Me di cuenta después. Después de que **manchara** la cama de mis padres.* (Masłowska [2003] 2005: 64).
- 3b. *Angela was a virgin. That came out later. When she'd already **soiled** my parents' pullout* (Masłowska [2003] 2005: 72).

Fragment 1 is a description of Silny's girlfriend who is suffering from the effects of drug withdrawal. A Polish reader uses their encyclopaedic knowledge; understanding of this utterance requires the domains

¹¹ Translation of the novel to Spanish by Joanna Orzechowska.

¹² Translation of the novel to English by Benjamin Paloff.

of FORMALITY, WRITTEN LANGUAGE, as well as those of YOUTH and COLLOQUIALISM. The Polish text contains the conjunction typical for formal register and written texts “gdyż” (“since”, “given that”), classified as “literary” by Zok-Smoła (2015), juxtaposed with the colloquial verb “rzygać”¹³ (“to puke”) and “puszczać pawia” (“to rolf”, “to woof”), characteristic of juvenile slang (Czeszewski 2001). In this case, the atypical mix of registers catches the reader’s attention and functions as the figure against the background of what the character says. The Spanish translation in fragment 1a neutralises the non-standard tone of the utterance and modifies the figure and ground alignment since the neutral equivalents “porque” and “vomitar” are used. The utterance is stylistically homogeneous and does not evoke the domains of FORMALITY, WRITTEN LANGUAGE and COLLOQUIALISM, whereas the English translation in fragment 1b manages this by means of the conjunction “since”,¹⁴ the verb “spew” and the phrasal verb “throw up”¹⁵.

The character eagerly reaches for the anterior adverbial participle on numerous occasions, which evokes the domain of FORMALITY as it is used almost exclusively in formal written style and, as Swan remarks, “even there it is encountered less and less frequently” (Swan, 2002: 301). In fragment 2 the character uses the form “wskazywawszy” which is incorrect because anterior adverbial participles can only be formed from perfective verbs, as explained by Bańko (2002), and here the character has attempted to form it based on the imperfective form of the verb (“wskazywać”, “to point”). The perfective form of the verb is “wskazać”; therefore, the correct form of the anterior adverbial participle is “wskazawszy”. The participle catches the reader’s attention as the figure because of its formality that stands out against the informal style of the rest of the utterance and because of its unusual (incorrect) form. Neither of the translations has managed to convey this attempted formalism.

The protagonist of the novel often reaches for sophisticated vocabulary, not typical in everyday communication. In fragment 3, he opts for the verb “zbrukać” which means “to make something dirty” or “dishonour somebody or something”¹⁶. The verb evokes the domains of LITERATURE, HISTORY, and SOPHISTICATED LANGUAGE which is confirmed in dictionaries since the verb is labelled as an outdated form in *Słownik Języka Polskiego PWN* [the PWN Dictionary of the Polish Language] and as a “literary” form in *Wielki Słownik Języka Polskiego PAN* [Polish Academy of Sciences’ Great Dictionary of Polish]. The Spanish translation in fragment 3a neutralises the original archaism as the verb “manchar” is used instead. The English translation in 3b manages it better as the verb “to soil” elicits the domain of FORMALITY that stands out against the informal style of the whole utterance, even though the original domain of ARCHAISM is not conveyed. Interestingly, the English translation conveys also the meaning of “dishonour”, whereas the Spanish one ignores it.

The selection of different domains evoked in the utterances cited above indicates some literary experience on the part of the main character and his confusion, as the character reaches for formal grammatical resources and in some cases uses them incorrectly. The mix of linguistic elements

13 Classified as colloquial, common, and vulgar by *Słownik Języka Polskiego PWN* [the PWN Dictionary of the Polish Language] <https://sjp.pwn.pl/slowniki/rzyga%C4%87.html> [date of access: 10 Jan. 2023].

14 As indicated in the *Cambridge Dictionary*, “since” used as a causal conjunction is characterised by a higher level of formality than the conjunction “because” <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/pl/grammar/british-grammar/as-because-or-since> [date of access: 10 Jan. 2023].

15 Both “spew” and “throw up” are labelled as “informal” in the *Collins Dictionary*.

16 As indicated in *Wielki Słownik Języka Polskiego PAN* [Polish Academy of Sciences’ Great Dictionary of Polish].

characteristic for different registers, whose small sample is presented in the above examples, is recurrent and characteristic for the protagonist's idiolect. We would expect him to speak differently when talking to his peers, his girlfriend or a cashier at McDonald's. Meanwhile, Silny keeps mixing different registers in his utterances, regardless of whom he is talking to, which produces a surprising effect since it disagrees with the scripts of communicative situations a reader probably has. The peculiar mix of registers is characteristic of Silny throughout the whole novel, and constitutes the focus of his utterances. Neutralisation narrows the scope of the domains evoked in Silny's utterances, deprives the image of the character of associations with "literariness" and the manifestation of his attempts at formal language, as well as modifying the general focus of the characterisation.

3.2. Specificity

Neutralisation as a recurrent translation strategy affects the level of specificity in the character's image since part of the information about the character is lost in translation. In the original version of the novel, the language of the analysed character strongly affects his characterisation. His language is atypical, rife with juxtaposed elements of different registers and neologisms. Neutralisation of these characteristics of the character's idiolect results in a less specific image of the character. The information about the character that the reader pieces together is less detailed, and consequently, the image of the character created in the translation is less accurate and less specific. Now, a less specific image of the character might become a non-equivalent image, in other words, the authenticity of the image of the character created in the translation is questionable.

3.3. Imagination

The character manifests his creativity by forming neologisms and metaphors that are not conventionalised in the Polish language.

4. *Ja tego nie powiedziałam - mówi szybko, zasłaniając rękami swą pustą do ostatniej nitki głowę – to Lewy powiedział* (Masłowska 2003: 29).
- 4a. *Yo no lo dije, dice rápidamente, cubriéndose con las manos su cabeza sin una sola neurona, fue el Zurdo quien lo dijo* (Masłowska [2003] 2005: 33).
- 4b. *I didn't say that – she says quickly, shielding her empty-to-the-last-drop head with her hands – Lefty said it* (Masłowska [2003] 2005: 34).

It is customary for the protagonist to modify the forms of idioms and phrases that have a fixed structure in the Polish language. In fragment 4 he creates a conceptual blend based on the idiom conventionalised in the Polish language "zmoknąć do suchej nitki", which means "to get wet to the bone" and translates literally as "to get wet to the (last) dry thread". The part "do suchej nitki" (to the dry thread) means "completely" and this is the sense the character makes use of. The original conventional expression evokes a picture of a person who has got completely wet, their clothes, made of threads, are all wet till the last thread. In the case of Silny's new metaphor, he pictures his girlfriend's head as made of thread and tries to emphasise its complete emptiness; he pictures emptiness as a liquid that permeates and soaks the girl's head. In this case, the effect is surprising as we receive an expression that is not conventionalised in the language that creates a grotesque image and catches the reader's attention as the figure. The Spanish translation uses standard linguistic means and does not opt for any metaphor, instead, the picture is

described directly as “cabeza sin una sola neurona”, which means a “head without any single neuron”; therefore, the non-standard property of the utterance is neutralised. The English translation creates a new metaphor in place of the original one based on a popular coffee commercial slogan “good to the last drop”, which emphasises that the coffee is so good it makes one want to drink it *completely* (the key word here), to the last drop that is left in the cup and that every drop of it is equally good. The metaphor used in the translation pictures emptiness as coffee (ergo a liquid) and the girl’s head as a container (a cup). In this case, the figure and ground alignment has been maintained in the translation. The dimension of imagination and the mechanisms of metaphor and conceptual blending function as an auxiliary tool in this case that indicate the character’s creativity. Neutralisation of a non-standard expression in this case conveys the gist of the image, that is the emptiness of the referred person’s head; however, it nullifies the unconventional blend that was responsible for its creation and the surprising effect in the original text.

3.4. Perspective and Axiological Commitment

In *Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną* we get to know about the events from the perspective of the main character, we have insight into his reflections, we can evaluate the language of his thoughts and compare it with the kind of language that he uses in direct dialogues. In the case of Silny, there is no particular difference between the language spoken in different situations and the language of his reflections. The direct utterances of the character, cited in the dialogues, contain the atypical mix of registers as well, the focus remaining the same. This can be observed in the fragment below which is an extract from a direct dialogue in the novel. The character mixes vulgarisms “kurwa” and “szmata” with the verb “wyrzec” (to say) which is qualified as an archaism in *Słownik Języka Polskiego PWN* [The PWN Dictionary of the Polish Language]. The mix of vulgarisms and an archaism in this fragment is neutralised in both translations.

5. *Co Lewy, co **kurwa** Lewy, skoroś ty to powiedziała, **szmato**, tu i teraz i ja jestem świadkiem koronnym, żeś to **wyrzekła** prosto z twoich ust?* (Masłowska 2002: 29).
- 5a. *¿El Zurdo? ¿Qué **coño** quieres decir con el Zurdo, **hija de puta**? Si lo has dicho tú misma, guarra, aquí y ahora, y yo soy el testigo principal de que estas palabras **han salido** directamente de tu boca* (Masłowska [2003] 2005: 34).
- 5b. *What Lefty, what the **fuck** Lefty, you just said it, you **slut**, here and now, and I am the key witness that you just **said** it right out of your mouth?* (Masłowska [2003] 2005: 34).

The character’s idiolect is based on different registers and sociolects processed in his own, unique way. The protagonist does not use any linguistic variant exclusive for L1¹⁷ which would prevent understanding from the perspective of the reader of the translation. What is needed in the translation is the courage to draw away from the linguistic norm. The reader of the translation can adopt the perspective of the implied reader, that is, understand the context of the original work without adaptation to the reality of L2, as has been said in the previous section.

As far as the individual perspective of a reader is concerned, it is not possible for the translator to predict it. However, the image of the character created in the translation should remain the same as it is in the original work; in this way the readers of the translation would be given the chance to adopt their own perspective towards the character, the same way a reader of the original work does. Any reader evaluates

17 The first language, the language of the original novel.

the characters they read about according to their values and experience. Another aspect of axiological commitment, that is, the judgement reflected in the language that describes the literary character does not apply in the case of the analysed text, as there is no third-person narrator whose language could contain elements of judgement aimed at the character.

3.5. Dynamicity

The overall image of a literary character develops over time, over the course of the story, which was linked to the dimension of dynamicity in the previous sections. The dynamicity of the character's image might be viewed as a chance for a translator to compensate the qualities of the original idiolect that the translator found untranslatable in one fragment and render them in other fragments of the text. In other words, if L2 does not have an equivalent word that would evoke similar domains of social or historical use and the translation uses neutralisation, then the domains of historical use or certain social groups could be evoked in a different fragment of the text, whenever possible, in order to add information to the overall image of the character. In the case of the analysed text, we have not studied cases of compensation strategy, as it goes beyond the limits of this paper. However, studies in this respect are underway by the present author.

It has been said in the previous sections that a mental scene might be represented as dynamic due to surprising visual effects, as discussed by Wilk-Racińska (2023: 47). The idiolect of Silny is uneven, surprising and innovative. It creates unexpected images, in particular by metaphors and conceptual blends that are not conventionalised in the language, but also by the syntax of his utterances which does not follow the established rules and the vocabulary that constitutes a mix of registers and styles. All this influences the overall image of the character and makes it more dynamic and heterogeneous owing to the fact that the overall image of the character is based on individual scenes in which the character takes part and which he also creates himself by means of his language. On the other hand, the image of the character created by means of the translation strategy of neutralisation becomes more homogeneous and therefore more static.

Conclusions

The main premise of the current paper has been that language and its diversity is an element of characterisation and non-standard language spoken by a literary character must affect the overall image of the character created in the text. The paper has intended, on the one hand, to explore how non-standard language used by a literary character influences the image of the character created in the text and, on the other hand, to discuss how the translation strategy of neutralisation affects the image of the character. The topic has been approached with the methodology of cognitive linguistics. The paper has proposed the application of dimensions of construal to the study of the image of a literary character.

It has been demonstrated that non-standard language spoken by a literary character influences different dimensions of construal, particularly selection, focus, specificity, imagination and dynamicity. The translation strategy of neutralisation of the character's language alters the image of the character with regard to these dimensions. The selection of cognitive domains evoked in L2 becomes narrower, and the focus of the image might change depending on a particular text. Consequently, the image of the character becomes less specific, more simplified and less dynamic; such as in the case of the main character in

Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną. The character's language provides additional information about him. Silny's idiolect indicates some literary experience, as he uses formal expressions and grammar structures, refined vocabulary only used in literature, and creativity manifested through the formation of neologisms and unconventional metaphors. The peculiar mix of elements of different registers and styles, the incorrect use of formal linguistic elements, as well as the innovative use of language resulting in atypical and somewhat grotesque images function as the focus of the characterisation and are indicative of the character's confusion. Neutralisation narrows the scope of the domains evoked in Silny's utterances which makes his image less specific and detailed, and it also modifies the focus in the image of the character created in the Spanish translation. Although the cases of neutralisation strategy in the texts have not been counted precisely, a tendency towards neutralisation is visible in the Spanish translation and as such poses a threat to the authenticity of the character's image. The translation cannot influence the dimension of perspective directly since it is the reader's point of view. However, instead of providing a simplified picture of the character, the translation can try to convey the image of the character in terms of other dimensions and give the translation's readers the same chance that the readers of the original version have, namely the chance to adopt the perspective of the implied reader, to understand who the character is, and then decide for themselves how they feel about the character.

Another conclusion drawn from the study concerns the usefulness of the applied model itself in the analysis of the role of language in the overall image of a literary character. This exploratory study indicates that dimensions of construal might be useful in determining the importance of a character's idiolect in the overall character construal, created as an effect of characterisation, and as a consequence in finding an appropriate translation strategy. However, the model requires more research and further specification in terms of the dimension of dynamicity and the possibilities offered by the strategy of compensation, as well as the axiological commitment that might be an element of characterisation contained in the third-person narrator's descriptions. Studies in these respects are due to be published by the author. This paper illustrates the role of language in character construal and signals how neutralisation may affect the image of the character. Quantitative analysis and corpus methods will be added to the methodology as a development of the model in order to assess the image of the character on a larger scale, in the whole text.

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