

The Translator's Voice in Focalization

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This article examines how the narratological consequences of systematic, focalization-related (conscious or non-conscious) linguistic choices made by literary translators can mold authorial focalization. Through focalization shifts, the translator's agency influences the macro-level artistic effect of the final translated work, and the translator's voice joins that of the original author.

Key words: translatorial style, translator's voice, translation shifts, focalization, macro-level effects

Cet article examine les conséquences narratologiques des choix linguistiques (conscients ou inconscients) faits de façon systématique par des traducteurs littéraires par rapport à la focalisation et en conclut que ces choix peuvent influencer sur la focalisation faite par l'auteur(e) dans le texte original. Par ces modifications de focalisation, le(la) traducteur(trice) influence l'effet d'ensemble de l'œuvre traduite sur le plan esthétique et sa voix s'ajoute à celle de l'auteur(e).

Mots clés: style du traducteur, voix du traducteur, modifications traductives, focalisation, effets macro-structuraux

Translatorial style has been studied so far primarily by analysing specific individual linguistic features and units predetermined by the researcher in advance. For instance, Laviosa has studied modifying phrases and words,¹ Nord descriptive adjectives,² Winters proper names or modal particles,³ and Gullin recurrent patterns of a lexical or semantic nature.⁴ A semantic approach is often applied to problems arising from cultural differences and the difficulties such differences tend to cause in the process of finding similar semantic equivalents in the target text. In discussing the motives of translators that lead to differences between the source text and the target text, Malmkjaer also predominantly deals with semantics.⁵

Syntactic units have been dealt with by Vanderauwera, who discussed simplification of syntactic adjustments involving for example non-finite clauses,⁶ and Johansson, who studied the subject of a sentence, adding a content-based angle.⁷ Content-related allusions have been analysed by Leppihalme, who has also commented on the translation of metaphors.⁸ Doherty has also discussed the beginnings of sentences and balanced information distribution.⁹

Suggestions have been made, for instance by Munday and Baker, that units extending beyond lexical issues and relating to such aspects of language as segmentation, word order and cohesive links should be used in the comparison of source and target texts.¹⁰ This paper offers another version of a more comprehensive approach. Stylistic issues are examined through a comparison of the source and the target text, but without resorting to units defined in advance or the use of a *tertium comparationis* proposed by Leuven-Zwart does in her commendable analysis of similarities and dissimilarities.¹¹

Using the Concept of Shift to Analyse the Translator's Voice

In the present approach, the comparison of source and target texts is based on the basic concept of a **shift**, i.e. the focus is on changes that have taken place in the translation process. Apart from the change of language, translatorial changes take place at various linguistic levels, at the level of sentences, phrases and words. Given linguistic differences between language systems and various other factors, particularly in less easily approachable aspects of language, changes also occur with respect to such issues as degrees of definiteness, rhythm and emphasis. With the method proposed here, it is possible to find shifts that the researcher does not expect to find, and to find which shifts are the most characteristic of each translator, i.e. those that occur the most frequently in each translator's work. The method, its advantages and disadvantages are discussed in detail in my doctoral dissertation on literary translation.¹² In this dissertation project, the Finnish translators studied could be shown to have individual, recognizable voices, or styles, that could be characterized by a number of shift categories involving structural and content-related expansion and contraction, and various changes in the order of linguistic and content-related elements.

When determining the way in which the translator's voice affects a work of fiction in its translated form, it is important to be able to distinguish shifts in which no choice is involved on the part of the translator (i.e. there is only one translation solution that is feasible in the

context) from cases in which there are two or more alternative solutions available to the translator. There are cases, for instance between two structurally different languages such as English and Finnish, where only one translation solution can be considered possible. For example, the introductory *there is/are* structure does not exist in Finnish and can only be rendered in Finnish with a certain word order. When the English text says: *there is a book on the table*, the only feasible Finnish translation is: *pöydällä on kirja* (back-translation: on the table is a book). Of course the Finnish translator is free to choose something entirely different, but for the purposes of analysing differences in translatorial style, it is not fruitful to classify the kind of mistakes not usually made by professional translators as stylistic features. The element of choice is essential in determining the extent to which the translator's voice is heard as separate from the author's voice. The agency of the translator is seen in the shifts the translator has opted for when faced with an opportunity to choose between two or more feasible alternatives. It is in these situations that the translator either takes a step further from the author's choice or decides to follow the author's voice more closely. Even in cases where shifts are obligatory because a literal translation is impossible on account of differences between the source and target languages, there are usually several alternative solutions among which the translator may choose.

The language pair of English and Finnish could be described briefly by saying that Finnish is a member of the Finno-Ugric group of languages and can be characterized as an agglutinative language with strong inflectional tendencies, while English, as an Indo-European language, tends to operate on a different structural basis.¹³ For instance, in translating prepositional phrases from English into Finnish (Finnish does not rely on prepositions in expressing referential relations), a Finnish translator may often choose between a premodifying word or phrase and a postmodifying subordinate clause. A tendency to choose one type of solution rather than the other – consistently throughout a novel – is a characteristic of the translator's

voice and affects the way in which this particular translator brings the fictional world to the reader. The idea of similar elements recurring throughout a text could be seen as parallel to the phenomenon that Nord discusses under the term vertical functional units.¹⁴

The route from local-level individual shifts to global-level stylistic effects can be illustrated through an intermediate level consisting of various narratological factors affecting style, such as degree of specification, order of presentation, focalization and rhythm.¹⁵ These 'style factors' are based on narratological concepts at play in translation as well as in the authorial process. A translation may follow authorial choices closely or choose to use shifts that produce narratological effects differing from those produced by authorial choices. In the latter case we can hear the translator's voice.

The approach taken in this article is that the translator's voice consists of idiolectal linguistic features which mingle with those of the author of the source text, thus producing a translational interpretation, which is ultimately a product of two individual voices, a duet between the translator and the author comparable to a musical performance of a composition. Naturally, the readers of the translation will not be able to tell to what extent they hear the translator's voice along with that of the author without comparing the translated text with the original. This definition of the translator's voice differs from that given by Hermans, for example.¹⁶ Hermans hears the translator's voice more as a paratextual intervention and thus separate from that of the author, and he does not differentiate between translatorially idiolectal and other features, while O'Sullivan, for instance, sees the translator's voice more or less as an intentional manipulation of the source text.¹⁷

Shifts Affecting Focalization in Translation

The purpose of this article is to illustrate how shifts resulting from frequently recurring translatorial choices, which differ from the equivalent authorial choices, affect focalization. In such an analysis, it may be useful to give focalization a wide definition: in a novel, the

narrator, the focalizer or focalizers, and the character-actors including their intersubjective relations act as filters of a kind, and it is through these filters that readers experience the fictional world. It would seem feasible to group all subfactors affecting the reader's focus and attitude towards the fictional world and events under the term focalization. Such subfactors include: *point of view*, *agency* and *transitivity*, the *distance* of the focalizer from what is being described, the degree of the focalizer's *participation* and the *emotive involvement* of the focalizer, the amount and nature of the *information* provided by the author through the focalizer, as well as *focus* and *emphasis*.¹⁸ Many of these concepts tend to overlap, however, and exert influence on the final target text through a complex network of relations.

These issues were developed in the author's dissertation, which set out to study if literary translators could be characterized through their personal translation styles.¹⁹ The translations of four literary translators were analysed by comparing the translation with the source text and recording various types of shifts that had taken place in the translation. It was hypothesized that where there was room for choice, individual literary translators would tend to opt for different alternatives, and that individual translators would tend to opt for certain types of alternatives more or less consistently in similar situations of choice. Such a tendency was described as representing their personal translation style or voice. This hypothesis was indeed supported by the findings. In order to avoid defining variations between different translation conventions as intersubjective stylistic differences, the translations studied represented a period of a few years only, thus falling within the same translation convention. Individual stylistic differences were nonetheless found. To eliminate the effect of authorial style, translations of the same author by two different translators were studied. Here, too, distinct intersubjective differences were found. Furthermore, individual translators showed a consistent preference for similar choices when translating another author's text.

In the following examples, consisting of translations of English novels into Finnish, the focus

will be on the influence of certain shifts on focalization, including point of view, agency and transitivity, distance, enhanced emotive involvement, additional information, and focus and emphasis.²⁰

Point of View

Authors tend to present their fictional content from the point of view of a narrator or a focalizer, who may or may not be a character in the novel.²¹ The following example of translational shifting in focalization is from James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (ST), which was published in 1916 and translated into Finnish in 1964 by Alex Matson (TT). A fairly literal back translation (BT) is provided below the Finnish translation.

Example 1

The sentence quoted is preceded by a longish description of the situation, in which *he* is not the subject.

ST: **He saw** her approach him...²²

TT: Tyttö tuli lähemmäksi...²³

BT: *The girl approached...*

The text then continues by repeating the phrase: **Then he saw** himself sitting...

The narrative takes place in third person, and the focalizer is himself a character in the novel.

In the source text, the readers see the events through the eyes of the man watching the girl. In the translation, the point of view shifts slightly, since the focalizer is not as clearly present in the translation as he is in the source text. The translator's choice, that is the decision to leave out the introductory *he saw*, would seem to increase the distance of the focalizer from the event and reduce the emphasis achieved through the repetition.

Could the translator have chosen a Finnish equivalent that would have kept the focalizer's role unchanged? Yes, in this case, the translator definitely had a choice. By making the choice indicated here, the translator makes his own voice heard together with that of the author. A

micro-level shift like this may not be significant if it happens once or a few times in the course of an entire novel, but if the translator keeps resorting to similar shifts of point of view frequently throughout the novel, some macro-level shifting is likely to take place.

Agency and Transitivity

Issues of point of view such as that illustrated by the example (1) above are closely connected with issues of agency and transitivity. Differences between the systems of the source language and the target language may cause translators to introduce a variety of changes in the ways in which agency and transitivity are expressed, but it would seem that such changes take place even when there is no necessity to resort to alterations, as in the example (2) given below, also taken from James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

Example 2

The man is waiting to be called in to the director of his college.

ST: ...*during the long restless time... his eyes **had wondered** from one picture to another...*²⁴

TT: ...*hän **oli antanut** katseensa **vaeltaa**...*²⁵

BT: ...he **had let** his eyes **wander**...

In this example, the translation introduces an active decision on the part of the focalizer. In the translation, the character in Joyce's novel deliberately lets his eyes wander, while in the source text his agency is not so strong, the action is involuntary. However, there is no linguistic necessity for this particular choice.

The example (3) below, taken from Ernest Hemingway's novel *The Sun Also Rises* (ST), translated into Finnish by Jouko Linturi in 1954 (TT) also shows a shift in agency:

Example 3

A group of people are travelling on a bus. The beginning *we passed* is repeated in the description, creating a rhythmic impression of progress.

ST: ***We passed** a crossroads...*²⁶

TT: *Tienristeys tuli vastaan...*²⁷

BT: **A crossroads came...**

In this example, the translator has replaced the pronoun subject *we* with the impersonal and inanimate noun *crossroads*: The point of view of the people is ignored and a more impersonal approach adopted.

In example 4 below, a description of a bullfight, Hemingway has his first-person narrator describe what he sees. The narrator starts in the first person, saying *I saw this matador*, then continues with the sentence given below, telling the reader that the hat was down low over the eyes of the matador, and finally goes on again in the first person, saying: *I could see...* The seeing takes place in the first person and the descriptive example sentence about the hat is between the two sentences indicating what the first-person narrator is observing.

Example 4

ST: *I saw this matador [...] His tri-cornered hat was low down over his eyes. I could see...*²⁸

TT: *Kolmikolkkahattunsa hän oli kiskaissut syvälle silmilleen.*²⁹

BT: **He had jerked his** tri-cornered **hat** low over his eyes.

There is a change of agency in the translation. The vision of the watching narrator-focalizer is pushed aside, and the object of observation, the matador, suddenly becomes the acting agent. He is no longer the object of Hemingway's stripped camera eye description. There is a further focalization change in the form of a shift in emotive impact. In the source text version, the description is impersonal (*the hat was*), whereas in the translation, the use of the verb *jerk* ('kiskaissut') suggests a sudden movement, as if in anger or hurry, and the reader may even start wondering what emotional stir may have caused such a sudden gesture. The eye of the camera thus takes on emotive colour and psychological implications.

Distance: Enhanced Emotive Involvement, Additional Information

The comprehensive analysis carried out in my dissertation shows that shifts enhancing

emotive impact are typical of the translator of the above example (4), Jouko Linturi. In his translation of Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, Linturi adds a considerable number of enhancing words and phrases.³⁰ This is evident both in his additions of verbs, and in his choice of verbs. To mention a few examples, the everyday source text verb *work* is translated with the Finnish verb *raataa*, which is a rough equivalent of 'toil.' The ordinary source text verb *say* is translated by *tuuskahtaa*, a rather unusual word for 'snap'; and the common verb *write* is replaced with *raapustaa*, equal to 'scribble.' Linturi also tends to add other specifying or explanatory words, for instance temporal adverbs such as *always*, *then*, *already*, *again*, which are not present in the source text. He also occasionally adds other information, making the fictional content more specific. In the following example (5), sensory information is added.

Example 5

Chapter 6 of *The Sun Also Rises* begins:

ST: *At five o'clock I was in the Hotel Crillon...*³¹

TT: *Kellon lyödessä viisi...*³²

BT: *The clock **striking** five...*

Instead of using a simple expression of time, Linturi solicits the readers' sense of hearing by referring to the actual sound of a clock striking.

Focus and Emphasis

The example below (6) illustrates how the **order** of the various actions follows the progress of a character visually, directing the reader's focus and taking the reader into the restaurant together with the characters described. The words in italics in the back translation constitute a premodifying phrase chosen by the translator.

Example 6

ST: *We went into the restaurant, passed Madame Lavigne at the desk and into a little room.*³³

TT: *Menimme sisään ravintolaan, jatkoimme matkaamme pienempään ravintolasaliin pöytänsä ääressä istuvan madame Lavignen ohitse.*³⁴

BT: We went into the restaurant, continued our journey into a smaller room past *at her desk sitting* Madame Lavigne.

In this example, the movement takes place in three phases: first the author brings the characters inside the restaurant, then they are made to pass by Madame Lavigne, and finally they enter another room. The translator changes the order in which the people do these things. He directs the reader's attention away from the continuity of the movement and disrupts the chronological process. In this particular example, the reader's attention is directed to the order of the various elements, but focus can also be redirected to various things by using a variety of syntactic and other tools. For instance, repetition and rhythmic arrangements may underline certain details and draw attention to them, as in the source text's repetition of parallel structures in the example (7) given below.

Example 7

ST: Robert Cohn was a member, **through his father**, of one of the richest Jewish families in New York, and **through his mother** of one of the oldest.³⁵

TT: Robert Cohn polveutui **isänsä kautta** New Yorkin äveriäimpiin lukeutuvasta juutalaissuvusta; hänen äitinsä taas kuului yhteen sen vanhimmista.³⁶

BT: Robert Cohn was a member **through his father** of one of the richest Jewish families in New York; his mother again was a member of one of its oldest.

In the above example, the translator has decided to leave the emphatic parallel construction out, changing the rhythmic arrangement of the sentence at the same time. Contrast, linkage, referential relations, and so on, can likewise be used to manipulate the reader's attention and participation. Even phonological emphasis may lead the reader's attention to certain things.

Macro-level Effects

The translation shifts shown above are *individual occurrences*. They result in some shifting in focus, but how should the effect of such shifts be estimated at the level of an entire novel? First of all, the criterion of *frequency* must be fulfilled: if one type of shift, for instance changing the angle of focalization, is *repeated* frequently, we may assume it has some impact at the level of the entire work of fiction. Narratologically-based style factors help in determining the nature of the global macro-level effect of such repeated individual choices. It should be underlined here that the translator must have a *choice* between at least two feasible translation alternatives. If a translator tends to make similar choices consistently, we might call such a tendency this translator's voice.

In his translation of Hemingway's novel *The Sun Also Rises*, Linturi made 515 additions, many of them adding colour, emotive impact or degree of specification, over the approximately 30 pages of translation analysed. In comparison, over the same amount of text, another translator, Pentti Saarikoski, who translated Joyce's *Dubliners*, made only 98 additions, many of which did not add colourful or emotive elements but would seem to have been made for structural convenience.³⁷

In the case of Linturi, the translator's voice is heard in increased colour and emotionally evocative narrative as shown in the above examples. Over the same number of pages, Linturi also added 24 adverbs specifying time (such as *always* and *again*, for example), 19 entire clauses and 24 phrases. Such a large number of additions over merely 30 pages suggests that over the more than two hundred pages of the entire novel, this tendency can be expected to have a considerable impact on the focalization filters in the novel. Since Hemingway is known specifically for his tendency to communicate by leaving things unsaid rather than saying them, for his bleak camera-eye view of the fictional events and for his clipped style that avoids unnecessary words, the conclusion that Linturi's interpretation of his style

becomes more specific, more colourful and emotionally more evocative would seem justified on the basis of the above figures.

It should be pointed out that it is just as easy to shift focus by *leaving out* information, colour or emotive content. While some translators tend to add, others tend to cut, and still others tend to mix both approaches. Alex Matson, who translated Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* into Finnish (1964), is an example of the latter style.³⁸

A few more figures should illustrate the macro-level impact of repeated translation shifts. Matson left out authorial repetition 51 times over the thirty pages of translation studied in my dissertation. The entire novel comprises some 230 pages of text, and if it is assumed that repetition is divided evenly throughout the book, this would mean more than 300 cases of deleted repetition. Such strong shifting can be expected to affect the emphasis placed on the repeated items, especially as repetition is known to be a significant feature in Joyce's literary style.

Also, over the 30 pages reviewed, Matson added more than 100 verbs (which would add up to some 700 verb additions in the entire novel). Closer analysis shows that some 40 per cent of these verbs were added for structural purposes, i.e. they do not actually add any new information and it is likely that they have been introduced to facilitate the formulation of readable sentences. Some 60 per cent of the added verbs, however, provide new information, and there would seem to be no immediately obvious reason for these additions. This would add up to 420 verbs providing new information in the entire novel. A closer analysis of these verbs would show in what way the added information impacts focalization and what kind of further tendencies are evident in the translation.

Concluding Remarks

In summary, we could say that there seem to be considerable *interpersonal differences between translators* in the way they apply shifts, and it would seem that *shifts indeed reflect*

translators' individual styles, or voices. Thus the translatorial voice is heard alongside the authorial voice through the choice of shift types. Although the reader may be unaware of the impact of this voice, the voice is nevertheless there and identifiable through a comparison of the target text with the source text.

It might be tempting to make value assessments on the basis of the above information and to ask whether translators have the right to interpret authorial choices to the extent exemplified by the added colour Linturi gives in his rendition of the Hemingway novel. How closely should a translator follow the author structurally, in terms of content, or in terms of overall effect? Is it possible to define closeness unambiguously? This is a complicated question, and it is extremely difficult to draw limits. The temptation exists to give prescriptive rules, but if Baroque music, instead of being performed with period instruments, can also be played with modern instruments and given a Romantic interpretation, could translators perhaps be said to be justified in choosing their approach along similar principles? For now, this question is left unanswered.

Leaving problematic value assessments aside, the usefulness of analysing shifts in order to understand focalization might lie in making translation students and practicing translators aware of the power of translation shifts and their narratological consequences. Issues of focalization are important in all writing, but they might prove particularly useful in teaching translation. A good example of this is Jääskeläinen, who was able to show that making students aware of the existence of intentional repetition in a source text results in positive changes in their translatorial decisions.³⁹

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- ²² James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: BW Huebsch, 1916), p. 198.
- ²³ James Joyce, *Taiteilijan omakuva nuoruuden vuosilta*, trans. Alex Matson (Helsinki: Tammi, 1964), p. 243.
- ²⁴ Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p.140.
- ²⁵ Joyce, *Taiteilijan omakuva nuoruuden vuosilta*, p.170.
- ²⁶ Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), p. 83.
- ²⁷ Ernest Hemingway, *Ja aurinko nousee*, trans. Jouko Linturi. (Helsinki: Tammi, 1954), p. 139.
- ²⁸ Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, p. 162.
- ²⁹ Hemingway, *Ja aurinko nousee*, p. 266.
- ³⁰ Pekkanen, *The Duet between the Author and the Translator: An Analysis of Style through Shifts in Literary Translation*.
- ³¹ Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, p. 32.
- ³² Hemingway, *Ja aurinko nousee*, p. 55.
- ³³ Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, p. 14.
- ³⁴ Hemingway, *Ja aurinko nousee*, pp. 24-25.
- ³⁵ Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, p. 5.
- ³⁶ Hemingway, *Ja aurinko nousee*, p. 10.
- ³⁷ Pekkanen, *The Duet between the Author and the Translator: An Analysis of Style through Shifts in Literary Translation*.
- ³⁸ Pekkanen, *The Duet between the Author and the Translator: An Analysis of Style through Shifts in Literary Translation*, p. 86.
- ³⁹ Riitta Jääskeläinen, "The fate of 'The Families of Medellin.' Tampering with a potential translation universal in the translation class," in *Translation Universals. Do they exist?*, eds. Anna Mauranen and Pekka Kujamäki (Amsterdam: John Benjamins 2004), pp. 205-214.