Features of modern pandemic text translation: Psycholinguistic experiment

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Abstract

Interpretive theory of translation allows us to consider translation as a tool for studying the process of understanding. The study of the mechanisms of perception and understanding of the text in the process of English-Ukrainian translation permits to clarify the specifics of decoding information about COVID-19 in the pandemic of 2020. The article explains the basic models of understanding popular science text about COVID-19 in the process of English-Ukrainian translation. The material was a popular science text in English about COVID-19, as well as draft and final versions of the translation of answers to 5 questions obtained during a psycholinguistic experiment from 50 respondents. The methodological basis of the study is formed by psycholinguistic experiment (as the main method), quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis, comparative analysis, contextual analysis. The theoretical basis of the article consists of the works of Zimnjaja, Peshkova, Novikov, Avakjan. The comparison of draft and final versions of translations helped the authors to determine the features of understanding the content at different stages of translation, as well as the influence of subjective factors on this process: 1) subjects used two main models – expanding meaning and narrowing meaning; 2) about 30% of the subjects demonstrate the action of the mechanisms of meaning formation at the first stage; 3) the strategy of attribution or conjecture is fixed at the second stage in the subject area of 'precautionary measures'; 4) the main difficulties of translation are connected with ignorance of terms of subject areas 'symptoms of COVID-19' and 'neurological complications'.

Keywords: decoding of information; interpretive theory of translation; semantics; text; translation

1. Introduction

Interpretive theory of translation (or theory of meaning), which was developed in the second half of the XX century (see the concept of Selescovitch and Lederer (2002) about the three stages 'understanding the meaning of what is said / written – deverbalization (rejection of words and sentences that gave rise to meaning) – transferring meaning through another language'), remains relevant today and is actively discussed by translators within the framework of the methodological approach as a starting point of theoretical practice and as a regularly used translation technology (Alekseeva, 2011; Vella, 2013; Ding, 2014; Kang, 2013; Zhao, 2014; Chernovaty, Kovalchuk, 2019; Hromova, 2019; Ivanytska, Ivanytska, 2017; Jue, 2017; Korol, 2020; Kudriavtseva, 2018; Lörscher,

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2005; Neshko, El Kassem, 2019; Popova, 2019; Selivanova, 2015; Shlepnev, 2018; Vojuckaja, 2018). According to Popova, Besedin, Naumova (2017), practising translators in the framework of professional communication evaluate the interpretive theory of translation as effective (p. 68). It's allows us to consider translation as a tool for studying the process of understanding. The study of the mechanisms of perception and understanding of the text in the process of translation permits to clarify the specifics of decoding information about COVID-19 in the context of the pandemic of 2020, which determines the relevance of the work.

The purpose: to explicate models of understanding of popular science text about COVID-19 in the process of English-Ukrainian translation.

The object of the research is the stages of translation 'understanding the meaning of what is written – deverbalization – transferring meaning through another language'. The subject of the research is the mechanisms of understanding the written text in English. The material was a popular science text (551 words, 2829 characters) in English about COVID-19, as well as draft and final translations of this text. The experiment involved 50 people, 50 protocols were received and 100 translation texts were analyzed (50 at the first stage and 50 at the second stage). Before the draft base of the study, the same contexts were obtained from the revised media for 2020. The research results can be used in the development of methods for increasing the efficiency of understanding and translation of written texts, in psycholinguistics and communication theory.

A psycholinguistic experiment was chosen as the main research method, which made it possible to identify the main models of understanding the text about COVID-19 in the translation process. The work also used quantitative analysis and comparative analysis of various types of individual reactions of recipients in the form of translation options at different stages of the experiment (i.e. draft and final versions); contextual analysis to illustrate the subject area 'safeguards'; qualitative analysis that provided the ability to interpret the reactions of recipients.

2. Theoretical Background

The theoretical basis of the work is the concepts of Zimnjaja, Peshkova, Novikov, Avakjan.

The presence of variants in the semantic structure of translations is the result of the individual characteristics of the recipients, different cognitive experiences, discrepancies in assessments and emotional attitude to the reported information, which confirms the idea of this process as a hierarchical system "with an ascent from the lower sensory elementary to the highest conceptual integral level" (Zimnjaja, 2001, p. 321).

During understanding a foreign language text the recipient conditionally creates two main versions for interpreting the information presented in it – "draft" and "final". Although there may be many more, the first and the last are the most significant, since "they fix the initial image of the content of the text and its final meaning" (Peshkova, 2006, p. 55).

The external structure of the secondary text should implicitly contain "traces" of the recipients' intellectual activity (Novikov, 2007, p. 86).

During understanding a written message in a foreign language during the transition from the primary perception of the text to the final understanding (from the level of content formation to the level of meaning formation), i.e. from the "draft" version to the "final" version, the recipients use various intermediate operations to transform one text into another. The results of these transformations, according to Avakjan (2008; 2009), cannot but affect the external explicit side of the translated text being implemented. Comparative analysis of the two versions allows us to identify the operations of understanding the content by external signs, "traces" that take place in the external form

of the message. As you read a foreign language message, the process of its comprehension gradually goes beyond the framework of linguistic problems and extralinguistic components (emotional-evaluative, rational-pragmatic) come into play. The result of these components is an increase in the number of translation options for individual text elements. This is because, during the initial reading of the text, the recipients are forced to rely only on portioned information, without having a holistic view of the situation (i.e., the strategy of "extraction" from the original text is used, which leaves little room for the manifestation of the recipient's individuality). After understanding the entire content of the text and identifying the intra-textual implications, emotional-evaluative and rational-pragmatic mechanisms come into play, which creates conditions for interpreting the content, i.e. for the formation of individual meaning.

3. Method

3.1. Participants / Experiment text

The participants in the experiment were 50 applicants for higher education (educational and professional programs "Applied Linguistics" of the first (bachelor's) and second (master's) levels (specialty 035 Philology, specialization 035.10 Applied Linguistics) and educational and scientific program "Philology" of the third (educational and scientific) level (specialty 035 Philology)).

For translation a popular science text in English is proposed, consisting of answers to 5 questions (What is COVID-19?, What are the symptoms of COVID-19?, What about rapid tests?, How can we protect others and ourselves if we don't know who is infected?, What is the difference between of isolation and quarantine?) from the heading "Basic Information about COVID-19" from the WHO website (Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)).

3.2. Data collection and analysis

To the subjects were given two tasks: the first task was to translate the text without prior acquaintance with the content, sequentially translating one sentence at a time, without running ahead (stage 1); the second task was to improve the draft translation, taking into account the comprehension of the entire text (stage 2).

4. Results

Received 50 punctures and 100 translation texts (50 at the first stage and 50 at the second stage). The data of these protocols are entered in the worksheet (Table 1):

Table 1. Psycholinguistic experiment worksheet

Translation unit	Draft version (task 1)	quantity, %	Final version (task 2)	quantity, %
keeping rooms well ventilated	Ukr. тримайте приміщення у гарній вентиляції	42	Ukr. добре провітрюйте приміщення	82
	Ukr. підтримуйте вентиляцію в кімнатах	30	Ukr. добре провітрюйте кімнати	18
	Ukr. забезпечення провітрювання приміщень	14		

Ukr. забезпечуйте добре провітрювання приміщень	10
Ukr. провітрюйте кімнати	4

Comparison of the draft and final versions of translations helps to reveal the peculiarities of understanding the content at different stages of translation, as well as the influence of subjective factors on this process.

The presence of translation options is the result of the manifestation of the individual characteristics of the subjects, their different thesaurus and cognitive experience, discrepancies in the emotional attitude to the information reported. The following translation units received the largest number of variants:

1) infectious disease – Ukr. інфекційне захворювання (66%) / інфекційна хвороба (34%) (1 stage); інфекційне захворювання (100%) (2 stage);

2) caused by the coronavirus – Ukr. спричинений коронавірусом (58%) / що викликається коронавірусом (42%) (1 stage); спричинений коронавірусом (100%) (2 stage);

3) respiratory pathogen – Ukr. респіраторний патоген (58%) / респіраторний pathogen (22%) / респіраторне захворювання (16%) / распіраторно патогенний (4%) (1 stage); респіраторний патоген / збудник дихальних шляхів / збудник респіраторних захворювань (2 stage);

4) fever – Ukr. лихоманка (78%) / жар (22%) (1 stage); лихоманка (92%) / жар (8%) (2 stage);

5) conjunctivitis (also known as red eyes) – Ukr. кон'юнктивіт (також відомий як почервоніння очей) (48%) / кон'юнктивіт (також відомий як червоні очі) (30%) / кон'юнктивіт (почервоніння очей) (22%) (1 stage); кон'юнктивіт (також відомий як почервоніння очей) (56%) / кон'юнктивіт (почервоніння очей) (44%) (2 stage);

6) muscle or joint pain – Ukr. muscle or joint pain (62%) / біль у м'язах або суглобах (20%) / м'язовий або біль у суглобах (18%) (1 stage); біль у м'язах або суглобах (100%) (2 stage);

7) different types of skin rash – Ukr. різні типи of skin rash (50%) / різні типи шкірних висипань (36%) / різні типи шкіряних висипань (10%) / різні типи шкірної висипки (4%) (1 stage); різні типи висипів на шкірі (90%) / різні види висипань на шкірі (10%) (2 stage);

8) nausea or vomiting – Ukr. nausea or vomiting (80%) / нудота або блювота (20%) (1 stage); нудота або блювота (100%) (2 stage);

9) chills or dizziness – Ukr. chills or dizziness (92%) / озноб або запаморочення (8%) (1 stage); озноб або запаморочення (100%) (2 stage);

10) confusion – Ukr. confusion (90%) / сплутаність свідомості (10%) (1 stage); сплутаність свідомості (94%) / розгубленість (6%) (2 stage);

11) irritability – Ukr. дратівливість (52%) / irritability (48%) (1 stage); дратівливість (78%) / роздратованість (22%) (2 stage);

12) reduced consciousness (sometimes associated with seizures) – Ukr. reduced consciousness (іноді супроводжується судомами) (58%) / зниження свідомості (іноді супроводжується судомами) (38%) / знижена свідомість (іноді супроводжується судомами) (4%) / (1 stage); зниження свідомості (іноді супроводжується судомами) (88%) / зниження рівня свідомості (іноді супроводжується судомами) (12%) (2 stage);

13) depression – Ukr. депресія (100%) (1 stage); депресія (94%) / пригнічений стан (6%);

14) strokes – Ukr. strokes (92%) / інсульти (8%) (1 stage); інсульти (100%) (2 stage);

15) brain inflammation – Ukr. brain inflammation (64%) / запалення мозку (36%) (1 stage); запалення мозку (96%) / запальне ураження мозку (4%) (2 stage);

16) delirium and nerve damage – Ukr. марення та пошкодження нервів (68%) / delirium і пошкодження нервів (22%) / делірій і пошкодження нервів (10%) (1 stage); марення та пошкодження нервів (100%) (2 stage);

17) loss of speech or movement – Ukr. втрата мови чи руху (52%) / втрата мовлення чи рухів (48%) (1 stage); втрата мовлення чи рухів (54%) / втрата здатності говорити або здатності рухатися (34%) / оніміння або втрата здатності рухатися (10%) (2 stage);

18) call your health care provider – Ukr. зателефонуйте своєму лікарю (58%) / слід звернутися до лікаря (26%) / зателефонуйте своєму медичному працівнику (18%) (1 stage); зателефонуйте сімейному лікарю (54%) / зателефонуйте лікарю (46%) (2 stage);

19) rapid tests – Ukr. швидкі тести (74%) / експрес-тести (26%) (1 stage); Ukr. швидкі тести (58%) / експрес-тести (42%) (2 stage);

20) with a swab – Ukr. with a swab (52%) / за допомогою тампона (32%) / тампоном (14%) / мазком (2%) (1 stage); за допомогою тампона (60%) / тампоном (34%) / за допомогою тупфера (6%) (2 stage);

21) physical distancing – Ukr. фізична дистанція (72%) / дистанція (28%) (1 stage); фізична дистанція (38%) / дистанція (34%) / фізичне дистанціювання (12%) / безпечна дистанція від оточуючих (10%) / соціальна дистанція (6%) (2 stage);

22) wearing a mask – Ukr. носіть маску (54%) / одягайте маску (46%) (1 stage); носіть маску (50%) / носіть захисну маску (34%) / одягайте маску (16%) (2 stage);

23) keeping rooms well ventilated – Ukr. тримайте приміщення у гарній вентиляції (42%) / підтримуйте вентиляцію в кімнатах (30%) / забезпечення провітрювання приміщень (14%) / забезпечуйте добре провітрювання приміщень (10%) / провітрюйте кімнати (4%) (1 stage); добре провітрюйте приміщення (82%) / добре провітрюйте кімнати (18%) (2 stage);

24) avoiding crowds – Ukr. уникайте скупчення людей (90%) / уникайте натовпів (10%) (1 stage); уникайте скупчення людей (74%) / уникайте місць скупчення людей (26%) (2 stage);

25) cleaning your hands – Ukr. мийте руки (82%) / очищення рук (18%) (1 stage); мийте руки (66%) / часто мийте руки (18%) / ретельно мийте руки (16%) (2 stage);

26) coughing into a bent elbow or tissue – Ukr. кашляйте в зігнутий лікоть або тканину (100%) (1 stage); кашляйте в зігнутий лікоть або тканину (62%) / кашляйте в зігнутий лікоть або серветку (48%) (2 stage);

27) methods of preventing the spread of COVID-19 – Ukr. методи запобігання розповсюдженню COVID-19 (100%) (1 stage); методи запобігання розповсюдженню COVID-19 (86%) / заходи, спрямовані на запобігання поширенню COVID-19 (14%) (2 stage);

28) infected person – Ukr. інфікована людина (70%) / інфікований (24%) / заражена людина (6%) (1 stage); інфікована людина (62%) / інфікований (38%) (2 stage);

29) you have been exposed to the virus – Ukr. ви зазнали впливу вірусу (90%) / ви піддані дії вірусом (10%) (1 stage); ви зазнали впливу вірусу (64%) / ви контактували з вірусом (36%) (2 stage).

5. Discussion

In the process of perceiving the text, the subjects used the meaning expansion model and the meaning narrowing model. By expanding the meaning, we mean abstraction from the narrow initial version, the exit of the recipient to the semantic level (for example, 'brain inflammation' – Ukr. *запалення мозку* and Ukr. *запальне ураження мозку*; 'depression' – Ukr. *депресія* and Ukr. *пригнічений стан;* 'physical distancing' – Ukr. *фізична дистанція*, *фізичне дистанціювання* and Ukr. *безпечна дистанція від оточуючих*).

The application of the strategy of attribution or conjecture is also a manifestation of meaning-making mechanisms (for example, 'avoiding crowds' – Ukr. *уникайте скупчення людей* and Ukr. *уникайте місць великого скупчення людей* (contexts 1-2); 'cleaning your hands' – Ukr. *мийте руки* and Ukr. *часто мийте руки*, *ретельно мийте руки* (contexts 3-6); 'wearing a mask' – Ukr. *носіть маску* and Ukr. *носіть захисну маску* (contexts 7-8); 'call your health care provider' – Ukr. *зателефонуйте своєму лікарю* and Ukr. *зателефонуйте сімейному лікарю* (contexts 9-10)), which is expressed in the use of reliance on the context of COVID-discourse of modern domestic media (contexts 1-10) and the situational context of the coronavirus in the world:

(1) Avoid crowded places // Ukr. *Уникайте* <u>*місць великого скупчення людей*</u> (Poslablennia karantynu ne skasovuie pravyl bezpeky shchodo COVID-19 [The Quarantine Relaxation does not Invalidate the Safety Rules for COVID-19]);

(2) To reduce the risk of infection with COVID-19 or further spread of the infection, the following should be done: … avoid crowded places… // Ukr. *Щоб знизити ризик зараження COVID-19 або подальшого поширення інфекції слід: … уникати* <u>*місць великого скупчення людей*</u>*…* (Zarazytysia Covid-19 mozhna navit vid liudyny iz bezsymptomnym perebihom zakhvoriuvannia [Covid-19 can be Contracted Even from a Person with Asymptomatic Disease]);

(3) After returning from the store, as well as after disassembling the purchases, wash your hands thoroughly with warm soapy water for 20-40 seconds // Ukr. *Після повернення з магазину, а також після розбору принесених покупок* <u>*ретельно мийте руки*</u> *теплою водою з милом протягом 20–40 секунд* (Poslablennia karantynu ne skasovuie pravyl bezpeky shchodo COVID-19 [The Quarantine Relaxation does not Invalidate the Safety Rules for COVID-19]);

(4) Wash your hands frequently for 20 seconds with soap under running water, use antibacterial hand products with an alcohol content of at least 60% ... // Ukr. <u>*Часто мити руки*</u> *протягом 20 секунд із милом під проточною водою, використовувати антибактеріальні засоби для рук із вмістом спирту не менше 60%...* (Prus, 2020);

(5) Wash your hands often and thoroughly with soap and water // Ukr. <u>*Часто і ретельно мийте руки*</u> *водою і милом* (Suprun, 2020);

(6) Wash your hands thoroughly and often with soap or treat them with antiseptic // Ukr. <u>*Ретельно і часто мийте руки*</u> *з милом чи обробляйте їх антисептиком* (Riabtseva, 2020);

(7) If you still have to be in a crowd, use a protective mask // Ukr. *Якщо все-таки доводиться бувати серед скупчення людей, використовуйте* <u>*захисну маску*</u> (Suprun, 2020);

(8) Wash your hands, wear a protective mask and take care of yourself: tips on how to protect yourself from the coronavirus // Ukr. *Мийте руки,* <u>*носіть захисну маску*</u> *та бережіть себе: рекомендації, як вберегти себе від коронавірусу* (Riabtseva, 2020);

(9) If you have a fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, call your family doctor // Ukr. *Якщо у вас підвищилася температура, з'явилися кашель і утруднене дихання,* <u>*подзвоніть до сімейного*</u>

лікаря (Poslablennia karantynu ne skasovuie pravyl bezpeky shchodo COVID-19 [The Quarantine Relaxation does not Invalidate the Safety Rules for COVID-19]);

[10] Keep in touch with your family doctor // Ukr. *Будьте на зв'язку зі своїм сімейним лікарем* (Suprun, 2020).

The narrowing of the meaning presupposes the concretization of the original broad or abstract meaning and represents the level of content (for example, 'coughing into a bent elbow or tissue' – Ukr. *кашляйте в зігнутий лікоть або тканину* and Ukr. *кашляйте в зігнутий лікоть або серветку*; 'with a swab' – Ukr. *за допомогою тампона*, *тампоном* and Ukr. *за допомогою тупфера*).

The main reason for unsuccessful translations in the "draft" version is not language errors, but errors in understanding terms, or rather gaps associated with ignorance of the subject areas 'symptoms of COVID-19' and 'neurological complications'. Cases of ignorance were recorded:

a) term component: *different types of skin rash* – Ukr. *різні типи of skin rash*; *reduced consciousness (sometimes associated with seizures)* – Ukr. *reduced consciousness (іноді супроводжується судомами)*;

b) term: *muscle or joint pain, nausea or vomiting, chills or dizziness, confusion, irritability; strokes, brain inflammation, delirium.*

Insufficient level of subject knowledge at the first stage is observed in all protocols and ranges from 7 to 15 translation units. At the second stage, all subjects successfully coped with the task of comprehending the semantic level of the message and creating a translation text adequate to the original.

Despite the positive results of the study, 50 applicants for higher education took part in the experiment, of which 94% were girls and only 6% were boys. The study would be more accurate if the sample uniformly represented the 'gender' parameter.

6. Conclusions

In the process of perceiving a popular science text about COVID-19 in English, the subjects used two main models – expanding the meaning and narrowing the meaning, i.e. there is an explication of some general strategies used by recipients at the semantic and content levels. About 30% of the subjects demonstrate the action of the mechanisms of meaning formation already in the first stage. The strategy of attribution or conjecture is positioned as a manifestation of semantic mechanisms and is fixed at the second stage in the subject area of 'precautionary measures', which correlates with the COVID discourse of contemporary vital media and the situational context of the coronavirus in the land of the world. The main difficulties in the translation are related to the lack of knowledge of the terms of the subject areas 'symptoms of COVID-19' and 'neurological complications'. A comparative analysis of the initial and final versions of translations allows us to identify the operations of understanding the content and meaning by external signs that take place in the external form of the message of a popular science text about COVID-19.

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