

## Translating a Non-Native Speaker...

Zoya G. Proshina, Far Eastern National University, Russia

Translation and interpretation from English as a Lingua Franca used by non-native communicators often requires specific knowledge of transference phenomena from the speaker/writer's native language into English, as well as of contrastive typology of the two languages. This type of translation can be labeled an intermediary translation. Though in this case English seems to be a source language, in fact it is not, it is in-between a native language of a speaker/writer and a target language of a reader/listener. The text that undergoes an indirect translation can contain various deviations from standard English based on the norms of English from the so-called Inner Circle countries (Kachru, 1985/2006).

For the text to be intelligible, comprehensive, and interpretable (Smith, 1992), a translator has to know these deviations on all language levels – in phonetics, graphics, grammar, and lexis. I will illustrate it by samples of translation from China English into Russian, focusing attention on the problems of this translation. To help students cope with translation and interpretation challenges, a course of East Asian Englishes has been introduced at Far Eastern National University (Vladivostok, Russia).

It is common knowledge that today English is used in communication among non-native speakers much more often than in communication with native speakers. That is why it is called English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) – the term probably put into wide use by Jennifer Jenkins (2004-5). Having emerged in a narrower sense as the jargon of the maritime contacts of Arabs with Europeans, *lingua franca* originally meant the language of commerce in the Adriatic Sea. It was a primitive language without much individual variation. Today the term is redefined. It lacks its original connotations (Kachru, 1996) and, though sometimes criticized<sup>1</sup>, it is used instead of the term English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the latter accompanied by negative associations (“foreign” as “alien,” “odd,” and “strange”). Without going deeply into a terminology debate<sup>2</sup>, in this work I consider the terms “English as a Lingua Franca” and “a world English” synonymous and define this phenomenon in the following way: ELF / WE is a localized variety of English used as a language intermediary in communication among speakers of various ethnic cultures. Tom McArthur (2002) defines a lingua franca as “a language common to, or shared by, many cultures and communities at any or all social and educational levels, and used as an international tool” (p. 2). This definition seems to be lacking the feature of localization, very important for this research, as it is the localization of an English variety that presents major difficulties for translators and interpreters.

---

<sup>1</sup> The criticism of the term is due mostly to its restriction to pidgin English.

<sup>2</sup> The difference between Jenkins's and Kachru's approaches to the concept of a variety of English lies mainly in the acceptance/non-acceptance of the idea of the standard core that is shared by all varieties. Kachru (1984/2006) argues that all Englishes are equal, no matter whether native or non-native ones, while Jenkins's (2003) conceptualization relies on the dominance of native Englishes making the core.

Being spoken or written by a non-native speaker, the English language undergoes a number of changes that can be accounted for by transference from the speaker's or writer's native language. The problem is that this transference happens to be double – on the part of a speaker and on the part of a listener. When hearing new sounds we hear them as if they were like those of our own language and we articulate them in a manner we pronounce sounds of our own language. In a word, we adapt the perceived phonetics of our interlocutor (who also transfers his/her own language features to English) to our own language system. Depending on a type of our lectal English<sup>3</sup>, we structure sentences due to our logic and mental frames, which are influenced to a certain degree by our native culture. We often substitute English words for their equivalents to the words of our native language, either blueprinting them or directly borrowing and trying to explain them as we understand them. This is what interference, or more politically correct, transference is.

In a new situational context, transference is responsible for innovations and deviations in English as a Lingua Franca. These deviations are regarded as a kind of “linguistic price” (Kachru, 1992, p. 309) paid by English for being used in a new cultural setting. Innovations and deviations are forms rather regularly used by educated speakers of a certain localized variety of English. They can be observed in lexis, grammar, and in phonetic accent. They represent the speaker's cultural mentality and are codified in literature, mass media, and later in dictionaries and textbooks. Though typical of the variety they belong to, deviations and innovations can present a serious challenge for those international communicators who are unfamiliar with the specifics of this variety.

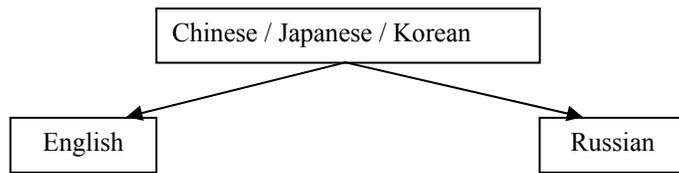
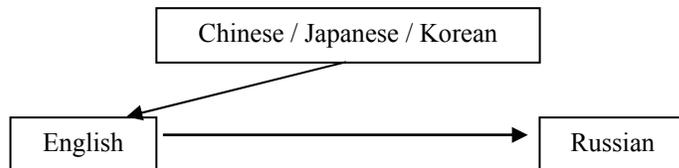
#### Intermediate Translation

When translating and interpreting from English as a Lingua Franca, used by non-native communicators, we have to take into consideration the speaker's phonetic accent and other transference phenomena from his/her native language to English, as well as the contrastive typology of the two languages. In this case we deal with an intermediary translation as opposed to direct translation. Translation from Chinese into Russian, for example, is labeled as direct, whereas translation from China/Chinese English into Russian is intermediary. Though in the latter case English seems to be a source language, in fact it is not, it is in-between a native (e.g., Chinese) language of a speaker/writer and a target language of a reader/listener (Russian, in our case). The difference between a direct and an intermediary translation can be seen in the following schemes:

Deviations and innovations a translator encounters in an intermediary translation may puzzle a translator unless s/he is anticipating them. However, features deviant from the standards and norms of English traditionally are not studied by students of translation departments. For speakers of the Expanding Circle standard English is usually an

---

<sup>3</sup> Any regional variety of English is a functional continuum of language proficiency levels (Kachru 1983), consisting of the acrolect, the upper point of the continuum, characteristic of educated speech users; the basilect, the lowest point of the speech continuum typical of users with low levels of education and is outstandingly marked by language transfer from the vernacular; and the mesolect, a sub-variety in between, based on the communicative norm of spoken speech and used by people that have incomplete education or by educated people in informal situations (Platt & Weber 1980).

Direct translationIntermediary translation:

exonormative model<sup>4</sup> (Kachru, 1985/2006) of British or American English. It is obvious that in order to work successfully with ELF users, would-be translators are to be familiar with the major virtual deviations of the Englishes they most probably will deal with, and these, perhaps, will be geographically neighboring Englishes. Russian Far Eastern students, for instance, are most likely to deal with Asian (Chinese, Japanese, and Korean) Englishes.

Larry Smith (1992) pointed out that we have to take into consideration three dimensions of successful communication—intelligibility, comprehensibility, and interpretability. Intelligibility means ability to single out a word or phrase in the speech flow. Comprehensibility implies understanding the word meaning. And interpretability suggests the background knowledge and the author’s intention of the speech act. In the next part of the article I will discuss the challenges of intelligibility, comprehensibility, and interpretability for Russian students translating Asian Englishes.

#### Challenges to Intermediary Translation

When communicating with non-native speakers, we often face form-recognition, or **intelligibility** challenges – sounds may be substituted, long words reduced, and epenthetic vowels introduced between consonant clusters: for example, for an unprepared Russian listener it is difficult to recognize *Vladivostok* in *Burabosotoku* as sometimes pronounced by a Japanese speaker; or *spring* in *suffering* as pronounced by a Korean speaker. A colleague of mine, whose name is *Lebedko*, was taken for *Rebecca* by the receptionists of a Korean hotel. These difficulties in understanding a word can occur not only in oral speech but also in writing. For instance, a Chinese journalist from the *China Daily* put down a Russian place

<sup>4</sup> The term “exonormative” (from Greek *exo-* “outside”) implies external norms developed in some other variety of language used as a model in teaching and learning practice.

name exactly as he heard it (according to the rules of his Chinese phonetics) and it became next to impossible to recognize the settlement of *Pogranichnyi* in his transcribed name of *Bogelaniqinei*. Though, if we come to know the regularities of Chinese transference in English – phonemic irrelevance of voiced and voiceless consonants in Chinese, the allophemic nature of the [l-r] sounds, and epenthetic vowels between consonant clusters, our guess will be much easier.

For a Russian who has a certain command of English but who is unprepared for reading or hearing China English, it is quite a shock to find out that *qigong* – with its Q letter – is pronounced with the affricate [j (judge)] rather than [k] and, moreover, is translated into Russian as *чужун* [tʃʊn] while the English Q (*Queensland*) regularly corresponds to the Russian [k] rather than [ts]. Similarly, in *Xianggang*, the letter X is pronounced as [ʃh] rather than [ks] and translated into Russian by neither *III* nor *KC*, which might be expected in direct translation, but by the palatalized *C*.

Word stress is another problem for intelligibility. Since Asian languages have a tone stress, their speakers, especially of mesolectal level, tend to stress each syllable, thus changing sentence rhythm (Pivovarova, 2005; Uytova, 2004; Zavyalova 2001) and making word recognition difficult. It is also difficult to recognize loan words that have become truly international, for they can be stressed on different syllables in various languages. So in the flow of speech their recognition may be hampered. For example, the Japanese loan *karate* in English is stressed on the second syllable, while in Russian on the final one (*каратэ* [kara`te])

**Comprehensibility** is ability to comprehend the meaning of a word. In non-native Englishes the meaning can be changed for different reasons – either under the influence of the word semantics in the native language, or a word can be created anew by a speaker because s/he thinks it suits the named thing better, or sometimes it may mistakenly be confused with some other word. For example, an article in the *China Daily* speaks about *Suifenhé-Bogelaniqinei port*, which is a place on the Russian-Chinese borderline far from the ocean, river or lake; or quite often in this newspaper we come across the expression *to ink a deal* with an evident influence of the Chinese expression. In the sentence *He lives in the stable*, we deal with the semantic calque from Japanese. To the meaning “a building in which horses are kept,” the word *stable* has added another meaning – that of “a place where sumo fighters live and train.” A person who does not know this can be taken aback by hearing the phrase *He lives in the stable*.

A text is **interpretable** when we know the culture that is hidden in it. Without knowing Chinese culture, it is difficult to say what stands behind the following culture-loaded words, and what connotations are implied - *During every major festival, like Duan Wu Jie, Dragon Boat Festival, or Zhong Qiu Jie, Moon Festival, my parents and I would go to Grandma's house for a short stay*. Both direct borrowings and their calque translations require ethnic cultural comments. And to translate or interpret texts like this one, we have to know the background information about Chinese holidays, customs, and celebrations.

#### Student Training

So, translation and interpretation from non-native Englishes requires special preparation. And when training future translators and interpreters, we are to take into account our students'

possible interlocutors. In the Russian Far East we are to train our students to communicate, first and foremost, with our geographical neighbors – the Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans. This means we have to explain our students all possible challenges of both oral communication (interpretation) and written translation.

For example, translation from China English, as I have mentioned, is not an easy job, for translating from Chinese Pinyin is sometimes in sharp contrast with regular translation of the same letters from English into Russian:

China English (Pinyin)	Russian	British/American English > Russian
J (jia)	ЦЗЪ	ДЖ
R (ren)	Ж	Р
Q (qi)	ЦЪ	К
X (Xianggang)	СЪ	КС
-N (yin)	-НЪ	Н

This need for special training of future translators and interpreters stimulated a new academic course introduced at Far Eastern National University – that of East Asian English Translation. This course lays emphasis on raising the students' awareness of diversity of Englishes in the paradigm of World Englishes, the specific features of Asian Englishes and their translation and interpretation. The outline of the course includes the following topics:

- The spread of English: causes and results. Theory of Three Circles (B.Kachru). EIL, ELF, WE.
- East Asian Englishes. Their functions. Phonetic transference in oral speech.
- East Asian loans in English. Home-made English. Phonetic, graphic, grammatical, and semantic adaptation of Asian words in English.
- Romanization systems for Chinese, Korean, and Japanese words in English.
- Intermediary translation into Russian. English-Russian letter correlations. Spelling variations.
- Translation from English into Russian (practice).
- Translation from Russian into English (practice).

#### Conclusion

Training students who are going to embark on a career of a translator or interpreter requires the application of the ideas and concepts of the World Englishes paradigm in the curriculum. Students of translation and interpretation should be taught both standard English typical of native speakers and World Englishes they are most probable to deal with. A special

course on intermediary translation can be recommended for schools of translation and interpretation. This course will show the role of English as a Lingua Franca in their region, reveal some local features of neighboring Englishes, and make the students understand the assimilation of localized loanwords in English and the trend of enriching the English language by loans. The primary goal of this course is to introduce students to translating and interpreting non-native speakers of English and help them not to feel helpless when communicating with them.

#### References

- Jenkins, J. (2003). *World Englishes*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Jenkins, J. (2004-2005). The ABC of ELT... "ELF." *IATEFL Issues*, 182, 9.
- Kachru, B. B. (1983). Models for non-native Englishes. In L. E. Smith (Ed.), *Readings in English as an international language* (pp.69-86). Oxford, New York, Toronto, a.o.: Pergamon Press.
- Kachru, B. B. (2006). Regional norms for English. In K. Bolton & B. B. Kachru (Eds.), *World Englishes: Critical concepts in linguistics* (Vol. 3, pp. 434-455). London and New York: Routledge. (Reprinted from *Initiatives in communicative language teaching*, pp. 55-78, by S. J. Savignon & M. S. Berns, Eds., 1984, Reading: Addison-Wesley Company)
- Kachru, B. B. (2006). Standards, codification and sociolinguistic realism. The English language in the outer circle. In K. Bolton & B. B. Kachru (Eds.), *World Englishes: Critical concepts in linguistics*, (Vol. 3, pp. 241-269). London and New York: Routledge. (Reprinted from *English in the world: teaching and learning the language and literatures*, pp.11-30, by R. Quirk & H. G. Widdowson, Eds., 1985, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
- Kachru, B. B. (1992). Meaning in deviation: Toward understanding non-native English texts. In B. Kachru (Ed.), *The other tongue: English across cultures* (2nd ed., pp. 301-326). Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Kachru, B. B. (1996). English as a lingua franca. In H. Goebel, P. H. Nelde, Z. Stary, W. Wolck (Eds), *Kontaktlinguistik. Contact linguistics. Linguistique de contact. An international handbook of contemporary research* (Vol. 1, pp. 906-913). Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- McArthur, T. (2002). *Oxford guide to world English*. Oxford University Press.
- Pivovarova, M. O. (2005). *Slogo-ritmicheskaya organizatsiya angliiskoi rechi nositelei vietnamskogo yazyka* [Syllabic and rhythmical organization of Vietnamese English speech]. Candidate of Philology Thesis. Vladivostok
- Platt, J. T., & Weber, H. (1980). *English in Singapore and Malaysia: Status, features, functions*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.
- Smith, L. (1992) Spread of English and issues of intelligibility. In B. Kachru (Ed.), *The other tongue: English across cultures* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 75-90). Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Uyutova, E. V. (2004). *Slogo-ritmicheskaya struktura angliiskoi rechi nositelei koreiskogo yazyka* [Syllabic and rhythmical structure of Korean English speech / In Russian]. Candidate of Philology Thesis. Vladivostok.

Zavyalova, V. L. (2001). *Specifics of the syllabic and rhythmic structure of Chinese English speech*. Candidate of Philology Thesis. Vladivostok. [Syllabical and rhythmical organization of Chinese English speech / In Russian]