

21

Russian language-specific words in the light of parallel corpora

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The starting point for this chapter is the hypothesis that one may regard translation equivalents and paraphrases of a linguistic unit extracted from real translated texts as a source of information about its semantics (cf. the approach developed in Anderman and Rogers 2008). This may be especially useful for the so-called language-specific words since the great variety of possible translations is an indicator of the high language specificity of a word. The multiplicity of translations may be used as a quantitative measure of language specificity: the greater the number of different translations of a single lexical unit in existing translations, the higher its language specificity (Shmelev 2015: 562–63). As is known, language-specific linguistic expressions are often culture-specific as well and can be linked to the notion of ‘cultural keywords’ (Wierzbicka 1997); therefore, one may assume that culture-specific words often have several translations and their translation counterparts may emphasise different aspects of their meaning. In what follows, I will concentrate on Russian words that are language-specific with respect to English.¹ I will pay special attention to some Russian discourse markers—that is, words or

1 For a discussion of language specificity as a relative notion, see Shmelev (2015).

a phrases that play a role in managing the flow and structure of discourse (in particular, *eščé, že, razve, neuželi, avos'* and *nebos'*) as well as the specific 'Russian' emotion *toska*.

Russian linguists traditionally employ language data taken from original Russian texts or artificial examples specially created by native speakers (usually the linguist themselves). Examples taken from translated texts are usually viewed with distrust, and, when I cited such texts in my publications of the 1980s, some colleagues asserted that these examples were not indicative of Russian usage, as they were created under the influence of a foreign language. I believe, in contrast, that translated texts provide highly valuable material for studying the specifics of the target language (Russian in this case). When Russian is the source language, the choice of translation may depend on the translator's metalinguistic reflection, while an occurrence of a Russian language-specific expression in the target text, more often than not, reflects a 'naïve' choice of words. These translations are usually (although not invariably) produced by native target language speakers who should understand the original text; that is, they encode the semantic representation given in the original text into a text in the target language, which may be treated as a model of 'natural' linguistic activity.

Translated texts are especially useful for studying the semantics of language-specific words and expressions that have no direct equivalents in other languages. The very appearance of such words in translated texts may seem paradoxical. Indeed, if a word or expression expresses a configuration of meanings that is specific to the target language, then one may ask what aspects of the original text made the translator use this expression. The answer to this question often helps to describe the semantics of the language-specific word or expression.

The development of corpus linguistics and the appearance of electronic parallel corpora of the Russian language have made it possible to study the usage of language-specific words and expressions in translated texts in a systematic fashion. The identification of elements of original texts that incite translators to use language-specific expressions in the target language helps not only to verify the descriptions of these words obtained without the use of electronic corpora but also, in some cases, to take a new look at certain language-specific words. In this respect, translations into Russian tend to be even more revealing than translations from Russian.

However, the study of different ways of translating language-specific words in the original text may also prove interesting, and so let us begin by looking at them.

1. Language-specific expressions in the Russian original and their translations

When Russian is the original language, the translation of language-specific words poses a problem that is solved differently by different translators. One of the biggest difficulties is the translation of expressions of the original language whose ‘presumptions’ or ‘hidden meanings’ (presuppositions, connotations, background aspects of meaning, etc.) contain notions that do not lie in the ‘presumptions’ of the expressions of the target language (indeed, these semantic and pragmatic elements are precisely what constitutes the language specificity of a word). These elements are taken for granted by native speakers of the original language but not of the target language. Such linguistic expressions often create the impression of ‘untranslatability’. Indeed, if we try to make such presumptions explicit in the target language, they will lose their ‘presumptive’ status; however, if we fail to do so, the underlying meaning will not be expressed. As a rule, the translator tries first and foremost to bring across the aspects of meaning that are the focus of attention. They often do not notice the background aspects at all or, if they do, are frequently ready to sacrifice them. At the same time, if they try to express such expressions in the target language, they almost always attract attention to them, shifting them from the quasi-invisible ‘background’ into the focus of attention, which is also a distortion of the original semantic task.

However, individual translator solutions with respect to language-specific words may be based on different considerations depending on the goals that the translator sets. Generally speaking, one can distinguish between two approaches (and, correspondingly, two strategies) of translation. One is predominantly source-oriented and tries to bring across everything that the author ‘meant’ (‘had in mind’, ‘wanted to say’). To this end, a translator may insert notes, commentaries, etc. Such a translation gives the readers a more or less complete understanding of the semantic content of the original yet does not give them a direct impression of the text. The other approach is predominantly oriented towards the reader, and strives to make the translation create the same impression on the foreign-

language speaker that the original has on the native speaker. The dynamic approach is used by certain translators of fiction (yet not only of fiction: also drama, verse, non-fiction and many non-literary genres).

The choice of strategy is determined by the translator's aims, and there is no universal strategy that is applicable in all cases. This is particularly true of literary translations. When a translator comes across a language-specific expression, they can try to select an equivalent that will best bring across the meaning of the original in a given context ('meaning strategy'), or they can choose a single equivalent of the expression and try to use it in all contexts ('form strategy'). In the case of the meaning strategy, there often arises a variety of different translations of a single language-specific word, as the latter has no single equivalent in the target language, and the translator must choose each time an equivalent that best expresses, in their opinion, the aspects of meaning that are the most significant in the given context.

For example, the Russian language-specific word *avos*² has a considerable variation of translation in the principal European languages. The range of translations of *avos* in those languages shows its high language specificity with respect to the target languages and helps to verify its semantic analysis. The inevitable loss of meaning during the translation of this word leads to the emphasis of specific aspects of meaning. The fact that this word is usually translated by a word with the meaning 'maybe, possibly' indicates that *avos* marks a hypothesis that is made without sufficient grounds (with the exception of the speaker's desire for it to be true). The use of words and expressions with the meaning 'hope' in some cases reflects the relation of utterances with the word *avos* to the future, the desire for the corresponding situation to occur, and the lack of guarantees that it will indeed do so. The addition of words with the meaning 'luck' emphasises the aspect 'X wants the situation to occur yet cannot influence it in any way'; the lack of guarantees that the desirable will occur is emphasised by the addition of expressions with the meaning 'no one knows ahead of time whether the situation will occur'.

Wierzbicka (1992: 169–74) has also made a subtle analysis of the Russian language-specific word *toska*. As expected, translations of this word into the principal European languages also vary greatly—often within a single

2 Anna Wierzbicka (1992: 435) has proposed an explication of this word, which was subsequently made more precise in Shmelev (1996).

translation. This shows that translators follow the meaning strategy, and provides additional evidence for the high language specificity of the word *toska*. Let us take a look at English translations in the Russian National Corpus (RNC); in particular, Constance Garnett's translations of Dostoyevsky's works.³ Her translation of *White Nights* contains the equivalents 'despondency', 'anguish', 'misery', 'depression'. Her translation of *Crime and Punishment* (a novel in which the motif of *toska* plays a major role) also makes use of different equivalents. The most common equivalent in this translation (used 5 times out of the 22 occurrences of the word *toska* in the original) is 'misery'; at other times, 'wretchedness' is used. Another equivalent used by Garnett is 'anguish'. However, she also employs other equivalents in this translation: 'dismay', 'depression', 'dejection', 'distress', 'agony', 'restlessness', 'misgivings'. The novel *Demons* is also represented in the RNC by Garnett's translation (under the title *The Possessed* or *The Devils*), which contains a similar variety of translations. The words 'yearning' and, most often, 'distress' are repeatedly used as translations, yet other equivalents also occur: 'trouble', 'anguish', 'misery'. It should be said that in the novel *The Possessed* the word *toska* is sometimes used with the non-standard meaning 'grief, suffering' (as in the phrase *v ètu nesčastnuju nedelju ja vynes mnogo toski*, which Garnett translates as 'I suffered a great deal during that unhappy week'). This leads to such translations as 'grief' and 'woe'. For the collocation *bajronovskaja toska*, which occurs in *The Possessed*, the translation is 'Byronic spleen', as expected.

Let us consider how Wierzbicka defines the word *toska*. In a nutshell, *toska* means that a person wants something without knowing exactly what. At the same time, s/he has a feeling that it cannot be attained and feels something (bad) as a result.⁴ In different cases, one of these aspects may predominate: the desire for something ('yearning'), the lack of a precise idea of what it is (this aspect is absent in Constance Garnett's

3 The Russian National Corpus is available at: www.ruscorpora.ru/en/.

4 Consider the explication in the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM):

toska

X thinks something like this

I want something good to happen

I don't know what

I know: it cannot happen

Because of this, X feels something (Wierzbicka 1992: 172).

translations, as a rule), the impossibility of attaining it, and the ensuing feeling that something bad has happened or is happening now⁵ (this aspect predominates in most translation equivalents used by Garnett).

The Brothers Karamazov is also represented in the RNC by Constance Garnett's translation. Just as in *The Possessed*, the word *toska* in *The Brothers Karamazov* sometimes has the predominant connotation of grief or suffering, and Garnett uses precisely these words (in addition to other equivalents such as 'anguish' that we already know from her translations of *Crime and Punishment* and *The Possessed*). However, the most common translation of *toska* in this work is the word 'depression'. One sometimes even gets the impression that Garnett overuses it in her translation. The following example shows a clear predominance of the aspect 'the subject wants something very much yet does not know what exactly' (as can be seen from the context):

(1) *Toska do tošnoty, a opredelit' ne v silax, čego xoču.*

I feel sick with depression and yet I can't tell what I want.

Garnett's use of the word 'depression' in her translation is not entirely equivalent to the meaning of *toska* here: the latter points to a strong desire, while 'depression', as Anna Wierzbicka (1999: 309) notes, presupposes that all desires have already waned ('one is already past wanting', as she puts it). The translation of the word *toska* by 'depression' in the following example, in which Ivan Karamazov wants to embark on a new and totally unknown path, experiencing a great feeling of hope without knowing where precisely he is heading, subsequently leads Garnett to translate the word *toska* in the expression *toska novogo i nevedomogo* by the word 'apprehension', replacing the original meaning by almost its opposite: Dostoyevsky speaks of Ivan's strong desire for something new and unknown to occur, while the word 'apprehension' points to a fear or presentiment of something dangerous; hence the translation may be confusing:⁶

5 Some English words with the aspect 'something bad occurred' ('sadness', 'unhappiness', 'distress', 'sorrow', 'grief', 'despair') were analysed and interpreted in (Wierzbicka 1999: 60–70).

6 The English word 'apprehension' is described in (Wierzbicka 1999: 86–87). As one of the reviewers of this chapter pointed out, older senses of this word don't necessarily imply fear or danger.

- (2) *No strannoe delo, na nego napala vdrug toska nesterpimaja i, glavnoe, s každym šagom, po mere približenija k domu, vsě bolee i bolee narastavšaja. Ne v toske byla strannost', a v tom, čto Ivan Fedorovič nikak ne mog opredelit', v čem toska sostojala. Toskovat' emu slučaloš' často i prežde ... I vse-taki v ètu minutu, xotja toska novogo i nevedomogo dejstvitel'no byla v duše ego, mučilo ego vovse ne to.*

But, strange to say, he was overcome by insufferable depression, which grew greater at every step he took towards the house. There was nothing strange in his being depressed; what was strange was that Ivan could not have said what was the cause of it. He had often been depressed before ... Yet at that moment, though the apprehension of the new and unknown certainly found place in his heart, what was worrying him was something quite different.

However, when the word *toska* unambiguously signifies a striving or strong desire for contentment, Garnett translates it as 'craving' (rather than even 'yearning').

The translation 'depression' is also clearly impossible with regard to the following words of the Elder addressed to the visiting lady: *Ja vpolne veruju v iskrennost' vašej toski*. Here the key parameter is *iskrennost'*, which is poorly compatible with 'depression'. Garnett translates this expression as 'the sincerity of your suffering'.⁷

Of course, one may say that Garnett's translations are far from perfect and even contain numerous misleading literalisms. However, this does not contradict the thesis that the variety of translations serves as an indicator of language specificity. Indeed, the presence of calques may show that the translator is taking the formal equivalence approach,⁸ at least in part. If one and the same linguistic expression is, nevertheless, translated in different ways, one can conclude that there is no clear equivalent to the original expression in the target language and thus that it is language-specific at least with respect to the target language.

A study of translations of other Russian texts made by different translators shows an even greater variety of equivalents: 'sadness', 'yearning', 'depression', 'restlessness', 'wretchedness', 'despondency', 'anguish', 'misery', 'distress', 'dismay', 'dejection', etc.

7 The Russian word *iskrennost'* and the English word 'sincerity' do not have the same meaning either (Wierzbicka 2002: 25–27).

8 Formal equivalence approach, a term coined by Eugene Nida, tends to emphasise fidelity to the lexical details and grammatical structure of the original language (Nida and Taber 1969: 200).

Let us also note that translators often change parts of speech and the sentence structure, as the following translation by Constance Garnett of an excerpt from *The Possessed* shows: *v ètu nešťastnuju nedelju ja vynes mnogo toski*—‘I suffered a great deal during that unhappy week’. When making such changes, they can use words such as ‘sadly’, ‘depressed’, ‘dejectedly’, ‘worried’, ‘miserable’, etc.

A case apart is special types of usage (possibly, special lexical meanings) of the word *toska* in such expressions as *toska po rodine* or *toska po ušedšim godam mladosti* and also in cases when the connotation of *skuka*⁹ comes to the fore. The expression *toska po rodine* is usually translated by ‘homesickness’, while the word *skuka* is rendered with the word ‘boredom’ or the verb ‘to bore’.

At the same time, some translators choose unusual equivalents, and this may be considered their individual stylistic trait. For example, Franklin Abbott in his translation of Ivan Turgenev’s short story *Asya* renders the expression *toska po rodine* as ‘enthusiasm towards my country’, where the connotation of strong desire comes to the fore (such a translation may seem odd to some speakers of English though).

Richard Pevar and Larissa Volokhonsky’s translation of Mikhail Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita* (also included in the RNC) is particularly interesting in this context. The word *toska* is one of the key words of this novel (with 17 occurrences). The translators, sticking to the formal equivalence approach, and as hardliners of this approach, consistently render it as ‘anguish’, although its meaning clearly shifts in some cases. The word ‘anguish’ is a fairly imprecise equivalent of *toska*. It is no coincidence that in the English–Russian subcorpus of the RNC, Russian translators seldom translate ‘anguish’ by *toska*, preferring words with the connotation ‘pain, torment, suffering’.¹⁰

9 Note that *toska* may be directly opposed to *skuka*. As a character in Dostoyevsky’s *The Possessed* said, *Toska ne skuka* (in Constance Garnett’s translation, ‘Sadness is not dullness’).

10 Note that, in one of her translations, Garnett renders the word *toska* by the same word throughout. I am referring to Chekhov’s short story *Toska* (included in the RNC). Here, this emotion is at the centre of attention (in this short work, the word occurs six times, not counting the title), and a variation of translations would have disrupted the author’s intentions. Garnett translated the story’s title as *Misery*, and this is also the translation that she gives in five cases out of six. In the remaining case, she slightly changes the syntactic structure and uses the related adjective ‘miserable’.

It should be said that small shifts also occur when translators take the meaning approach. In each individual case, they have to decide (assuming that they correctly understand the original text) what implicit aspects of meaning can be sacrificed and what aspects are important for the meaning of the phrase or the text as a whole. These shifts help us to see where the specificity of the language-specific expression lies.

2. Language-specific expressions in translations into Russian

The appearance of language-specific expressions in translations may seem paradoxical. After all, if a text is translated, then it should express only the meanings that were present in the original text, whereas language-specific expressions, as we know, express a configuration of meanings that are specific to a given language (in our case, the target language, that is, Russian). Language-specific expressions used in translated texts may be separated into two classes: discourse markers, for which there are usually no immediate equivalents in the original text and which seem to arise ‘out of nowhere’; and autosemantic units that usually formally correspond to some expressions in the original text yet contain additional meaning components that are implicitly present in the original text. Let us examine these cases separately.

2.1. Discourse markers in the target text

Speaking of discourse markers that can be used in the target text, it is useful to distinguish between cases in which the discourse marker has to be employed in the Russian translation of a foreign text and cases in which the use of the discourse marker in the Russian translation is at the translator’s discretion. In the former case, one must identify the characteristics that make it necessary to use a given discourse marker; in the latter, one should examine the characteristics that incited the translator to use a given discourse marker, although it was possible to do without it.

In Levontina and Shmelev (2005), we introduced the notion of the ‘pragmatic necessity’ of a particle. We are referring to a situation in which the absence of a certain discourse expression engenders a false implicature or violates the coherence of the text without leading to grammatical error. For example, the particle *э́ще* that is described in the aforementioned article

is pragmatically obligatory in one of its meanings that is implemented in the future context: *Ja ešče vernus'* (this—and not simply *Ja vernus'*—would be the most natural translation into Russian of the Terminator's phrase 'I'll be back'). Depending on the context, this meaning may be implemented as a threat or, conversely, as a consolation.

Here are a few conditions for the use of the particle *ešče* in this sense:

1. There exists a different hypothesis about how things will turn out; in many cases, the phrase containing the particle *ešče* begins with the conjunction 'no'.
2. The event that one is speaking about will not occur immediately after the moment of speech (the phrase *My ešče pogovorim ob ètom* is often used to cut short a conversation on a given subject).
3. At the time of speaking, the situation is developing in such a fashion that it does not suggest the predicted outcome in any way.

The use of the particle *ešče* is necessary if a person is obliged to refrain from doing something at the present time (or if they were unable to do what they wanted) and consoles themselves by the fact that this is not definitive and that the situation may change some time in the (possibly distant) future.

On the other hand, the use of *ešče* is impossible if the utterance specifies a condition for a situation to occur, as this contradicts the meaning implied by *ešče* that 'at the present time, nothing indicates that this situation will occur': *Stučite, i (*ešče) otvorjat vam* 'Knock, and it shall be opened unto you'.

When the conditions for the use of the particle *ešče* with the meaning considered here are fulfilled, it almost inevitably appears in Russian translation, although it has no equivalent in the original text (some examples are given in Shmelev and Zalizniak (2017)).

Another example of a pragmatically necessary particle that is quasi-automatically (and, most likely, unconsciously) used by translators is the 'emphatic' particle *že*. Examples of the usage of *že* in Russian translation are quite numerous (I should emphasise that I am not speaking here of the particle *že* in an 'identifying' sense, i.e. in such collocations as *tot že, takoj že, tam že*, etc.).

The interrogative particles *razve* and *neuželi* are also close to being pragmatically necessary; they have been examined by numerous linguists (e.g. Apresjan 1980: 51–52; Bulygina and Shmelev 1982, 1987; Baranov 1986). Bulygina and Shmelev (1982, 1987) described the particles *razve* and *neuželi* as follows:

Razve p?

I previously thought that not p
 Now I see or hear something that could not be true if not p
 I want you to tell me whether p or not p

Neuželi p?

I thought that p is impossible
 Something makes me think that perhaps p
 I'm telling you that I have trouble believing that p
 I want you to tell me whether p or not p

The material of the English subcorpus of the RNC confirms this description on the whole: the particles in question are used with a high degree of likelihood in Russian translations of questions in which the aforementioned conditions are met, although the original texts contain only general questions without particles of any kind (some examples are cited in Shmelev 2015).

An example of discourse markers that are used in Russian translations at the translator's discretion is the aforementioned particle *avos'* (and also *nebos'*). With regard to *avos'*, one should say that it seldom occurs in translation, which is undoubtedly linked to the fact that it is gradually disappearing from the Russian language and that most native speakers disapprove of the attitude that it conveys. Nevertheless, certain translators use it occasionally. In particular, it is sometimes used when the original contains a word that indicates hope (this word itself may be omitted in the translation).

The word *nebos'* occurs a lot more frequently in Russian translation. However, the use of *nebos'* is never the only possible solution: one can always use a different modal marker, even if it is not entirely identical stylistically: *naverno*, *dolžno byt'*, *dumaju*, *verojatno*, etc. All the occurrences of the discourse word *nebos'* in translation pertain to informal

speech. In literary translations, the word *nebos*' occurs almost exclusively in direct or free indirect speech. However, informal speech is a necessary yet not a sufficient incentive for using *nebos*'. The parallel subcorpora of the RNC show that *nebos*' is used in contemporary Russian in situations when a speaker voices a confident assumption (usually with a note of familiarity or contempt) based on their experience that allows them to pass a judgement on things about which they have no direct information. The word *nebos*' also has a parallel usage in which the speaker mentions reliably known facts that show that someone's behaviour was silly, inconsistent or hypocritical. On the whole, these data make it possible to formulate a more precise description of the conditions that allow the appearance of the word *nebos*' in contemporary Russian discourse.¹¹

An example of an autosemantic language-specific expression used in Russian translations is the word *toska*, which was examined in the first part of this chapter. It turns out that this word is not all that rare in translations into Russian. This naturally leads us to ask about the factors responsible for the appearance of the word *toska* in Russian translations, as we know that the English language has no word or expression for which this word would be a precise equivalent.

The list of words and expressions that are translated as *toska* partially coincides with the list of English translations of this Russian word: 'distress', 'depression', 'despair', 'anguish', 'grief', 'agony', etc., as well as 'sadness'; however, the word *toska* often corresponds to other words as well.¹² For example, some translators regularly use it to translate the word 'melancholy' (which also occurs in English translations of Russian texts, yet more often as the equivalent of *grust*, *pečal'* or even *melanzolija*). In some cases, *toska* corresponds to 'nostalgia' although the Russian word *nostalgia* is a more common equivalent.

The study of the incentives that lead Russian translators to use the word *toska* often reveals important aspects of the semantics of this word; indeed, the most important aspect is often the overall context in which one speaks about this emotion.

11 For a further discussion of the words *avos*' and *nebos*' in the parallel subcorpora of the NRC, see Shmelev (2017).

12 In a few (rare) cases, the word *toska* is used to translate the word *boredom*.

The word *toska* often appears when the original speaks about a strong desire for something. It can be used as an equivalent not only of the word ‘yearning’ but also (no surprise) of the word ‘longing’, for example:

- (3) the world of longing and baffled common-sense

mir nastojčivoj toski i nedoumevajuščego rassudka

The object of desire is sometimes well defined, yet this is not the most typical context of the usage of the word *toska* in translation:

- (4) I don't think I ever in my life, before or since, felt I wanted mustard as badly as I felt I wanted it then.

Nikogda v žizni, ni prežde, ni potom, ja ne ispytyval takoj toski po gorčice, kak v tu minutu.

The word *toska* is most often used when the desire is vague and poorly defined (the subject has trouble saying exactly what they want). This is the most common context of the use of the word *toska* in translation:

- (5) A sort of undefined longing crept upon them.

Kakaja-to smutnaja toska napala na nix.

- (6) It caused him to feel a vague, sweet gladness, and he was aware of wild yearnings and stirrings for he knew not what.

Bèk ispytyval kakuju-to smutnuju radost', i bespokojstvo, i bujnuju tosku nevedomo o čem.

In certain cases, the object of desire turns out to be variable, while the feeling of *toska* stays constant:

- (7) She longed and longed and longed. It was now for the old cottage room in Columbia City, now the mansion upon the Shore Drive, now the fine dress of some lady, now the elegance of some scene.

Ee snedala toska, toska, toska. Ona toskovala to po staromu domiku v Kolumbii-siti, to po osobnjakam na naberežnoj, to po izyskannomu plat'ju, zamečennomu na kakoj-to dame, to po krasivomu pejzažu, brosvšemusja ej v glaza dnem.

In addition, the word *toska* often corresponds to a vague and ill-defined emotion that can be designated by such words as *languor*.

Toska frequently implies that the subject feels lonely:

- (8) I felt so lonesome I most wished I was dead.

Takaja napala toska, xot' pomiraj.

- (9) ... Dorothy built a splendid fire that warmed her and made her feel less lonely.

... Doroti razožgla bol'šoj koster, vozle kotorogo bystro sogrelas' i zabyla uže podstupivšuju k serdcu tosku.

- (10) He wanted to be alone—to be lonely.

Emu xotelos' byt' odnomu, otdat'sja svoej toske.

- (11) During these days he got immensely lonely.

V èti dni ego gryzla toska.

- (12) But he felt lonely.

No na duše u nego byla toska.

- (13) fear and loneliness goaded him.

podstreknuli strax i toska.

This emotion is sometimes not even explicitly designated in the English original, which uses descriptive constructions such as *broken heart*, *sinking heart* or *sinking of heart*:

- (14) Jane will die of a broken heart

Džejn umret ot toski

- (15) ... I felt a sinking in my heart.

... toska snova šžimala mne serdce.

When the original speaks of a morose or despondent state of mind (e.g. it uses such words as *gloom*, *mope* or simply *excruciating feelings*), translators tend to describe this state with the word *toska*:

- (16) The gloom which had oppressed him on the previous night had disappeared ...

Toska, ugnetašaja ego noč'ju, rassejalas' ...

- (17) I gazed on it with gloom and pain.

Ja smotrela na nego s nevyrazimoj toskoj.

In general, when the original describes some bad feelings, Russian translators often use the word *toska*. The latter often appears when the original speaks of a subject's unsatisfied desire. This desire may be vague and not well understood and, in any case, it usually cannot be satisfied. We see that this largely conforms to the description of the semantics of *toska* given by Anna Wierzbicka. Data from the parallel English–Russian subcorpus of the RNC show that another aspect may be added to this description: the subject is unable to tell anyone about what they feel. This impossibility may stem from the vague and ill-defined nature of the emotion itself or from the solitude of the subject.

In most cases, the choice of the word *toska* is not the sole possible solution. Nevertheless, its usage by translators seems indicative.

With regard to the word *toska* and its English equivalents, one should also mention V. Apresjan's incisive article (2011), which conjectures that the closest English equivalent of the Russian word *toska* is 'blues' (it even formulates a semantic invariant of *toska* and 'blues'). Nevertheless, it is notable that real translations (in particular, the translations included in the RNC) virtually never use the word 'blues' for *toska*,¹³ while 'blues', even when it is an emotion rather than a shade of colour or a musical genre, is rarely translated as *toska* (Nadezhda Volpin in her translation of Galsworthy renders 'blues' by *zelenaja toska*, changing the colour, amusingly enough: '... this country will give me the blues'—... *èta strana nagonit na menja zelenuju tosku*).

As we see, the analysis of the occurrence of such words as *toska* in Russian translations helps to verify their descriptions or make the latter more precise and is thus an effective research tool. The translation of language-specific words is a problem that the translator, as a rule, reflects on, and thus the translator's individual preferences play a great role in the solution of such problems. Moreover, the translator's grounds for choosing a particular solution may be superficial understanding, the influence of bilingual dictionaries or even the desire to give the translated text a veneer of 'foreignness' to make the reader perceive the text as a translation (Mihailov 2005: 381); consider the notion of foreignisation in Venuti (2008). Thus, when the original language is Russian, the parallel corpus often gives us insufficient information about the semantic specificity of Russian

13 In general, its frequency with reference to an emotion is much lower than that of *toska*, and this itself reduces its serviceability as a translation.

language-specific lexical units. In contrast, the appearance of language-specific words in a translation most often results from an unconscious decision of the translator that reflects their spontaneous speech activity. By studying why a translator uses a given language-specific word, we are often able to uncover some of the latter's semantic characteristics that went unnoticed during the analysis of original texts.

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