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УДК 81'25

Types of Decompression
in Simultaneous Interpreting

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In the article the notion of decompression is defined and explained as distinct from the notion of compression. It is argued that the term "decompression" is more applicable to the operation used in simultaneous interpreting than the term "expansion". Two categories of decompression are differentiated between: justified decompression and unjustified decompression. Six types of justified decompression are discussed and the reasons for them are analyzed.

Keywords: simultaneous interpreting, decompression, compression, expansion.

Introduction

Simultaneous interpreting (SI) is believed to be one of the most extreme and exhausting activities. With its unprecedented mental and psychological press on an interpreter, SI remains the top quality way to interpret in terms of time, correctness and amount of info to be transferred. It has been proved that, at least, two factors make SI possible: the one is the probability prediction mechanism underlying simultaneous interpreting; the other one is the mechanism of compression applied by a skillful simultaneous interpreter (Chernov, 1978, 1987, 2004; Shirayev, 1979).

I do not intend to dwell in detail on the essence of the two mechanisms. But it can be mentioned, in passing, that types of compression have been exhaustively described and even classified (Chernov, 1987; Sdobnikov, 2016;

Shirayev, 1979), and the use of compression is viewed as an important precondition of quality interpretation. B. Moser-Mercer argues that "optimum quality in professional interpreting implies that an interpreter provides a complete and accurate rendition of the original that does not distort the original message and tries to capture any and all extralinguistic information that the speaker might have provided subject to the constraints imposed by certain external conditions" (Moser-Mercer, 1996:44).

My intention is to draw attention to the phenomenon that has hardly been noticed by scholars engaged in the investigation of SI. Yet, the phenomenon deserves close attention as, in my opinion, the interpretation quality largely depends upon whether this mechanism is used in the process of interpretation or not. This

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mechanism (still obscure to the readers) can be termed conventionally as "decompression". The term implies that the mechanism is opposite to what is known as compression. Below I shall discuss whether this is really a case.

The main goal is to define the essence of decompression, to describe its types as well as the factors that make decompression necessary or possible.

Decompression Defined

The mere term "decompression" might seem innovative and, at the same time, unhappy. First of all, it has been introduced into scientific discourse quite recently. Moreover, according to my observations, it is mainly used in Russian Translatology and is practically out of use in Western Translatology. This can be explained by the fact that the English term "decompression" is widely used in the field of technology in the meanings that have nothing to do with SI. Apparently, the application of the English term "decompression" in scientific writing on SI might cause misunderstanding and unnecessary associations with the fields irrelevant to the subject matter. It is not surprising that when there is the need to name the mechanism opposed to compression, not the word "decompression" is used but the word "expansion". See, e.g., (Chernov, 1987:156) where the Russian term «экспансия» (expansion) is employed.

Still, it is hardly possible to ouster the term "decompression" from the scientific discourse now, at least, from the Russian scientific discourse. It is too well established to be replaced by any of its synonyms. Accordingly, a definition of "decompression" would help both define the crux of the matter precisely and avoid any misunderstanding among translation scholars.

I have mentioned above, that decompression is understood as something opposite to compression. If compression is viewed as any

shortening of the linguistic form used to express a notion or an idea in SI, then decompression might be defined as any expansion of the linguistic forms as compared to those in the source text (ST). But such definition would be too vague and limited: shortening and expansion are relative notions, and can be identified only in comparison with some benchmark, or "reference value". Thus, a question arises: what is the reference value for decompression?

At least two answers to the question can be offered. The first one is most obvious: a syntagma (a sense-group) in the ST may serve as a benchmark for identifying decompression. In other word, if the linguistic form used to express the notion or idea in the target text (TT) is longer than the linguistic form in the SL used to denote the same idea, we deal with decompression. Usually, a syllable is used as a unit of measuring the length of utterances in the source language (SL) and the target language (TL).

I believe that this opinion would contradict the nature and essence of simultaneous interpreting. Doing his/her job, a qualified interpreter is constantly searching for the most compact linguistic forms of expressing ideas, which helps him/her save time and effort, express the meaning (sense) of the utterance in the most precise way sticking to the rules of the TL. It is compression that always underlies simultaneous interpreting and ensures the desirable quality. It means that a compressed version of rendering the meaning is always possible, provided the interpreter has proper skills of compression. It should be noted that to produce a compressed version of interpretation, an interpreter must first decipher the meaning of the utterance. James Nolan justly argues that "the first step in good interpreting is to 'get beyond the words'. The words are nothing more than a container for the ideas. The interpreter must pour those ideas into a new container: the target language" (Nolan, 2005:39).

Under some circumstances the interpreter may or must decline the compressed version that would be the best in another situation, and can use a more "expanded" version. Thus, the second answer to the question of interest is: a potentially compressed version of translation that might be used in "normal" interpretation conditions serves as a benchmark for decompression.

The idea may be illustrated in the following way (see Figure 1):

Thus, we may define **decompression** in SI as a result of a longer/expanded idea formulating vs. the probable compressed version we might use in the normal conditions of interpretation.

The definition is made with some reservations. First, the probable version to be used in the "normal" interpretation conditions is not always "compressed". When conditions allow, a segment of the ST may be interpreted "as it is", i.e. preserving the form and the content of the original syntagma. Second, unlike compression, decompression is always a tool that is used intentionally to solve some tasks faced by the interpreter in the given situation, while compression is mostly applied unconsciously, and only in simultaneous interpreters training it becomes an intentional target. Third, the "normal conditions" of interpretation imply a situation in which compression is most desirable to ensure the transfer the relevant information in the most compact form that, at the same time, does not violate the rules of the TL.

The definition suggests that the term "decompression" is more appropriate than the term "expansion" which is traditionally used in Western Translatology to denote the phenomenon. "Expansion" implies some enlargement of the target text in comparison with the ST. I insist that it is not a ST segment which is "enlarged" or "expanded". We cannot even say that anything is expanded in simultaneous interpreting at all. Decompression as a term denotes the phenomenon more precisely: decompression is revealed as a result of comparing the final version of translation with a probable compressed version that could be used by the interpreter but has not been used for some reasons which will be discussed below.

It is noteworthy that decompression (expansion) is assigned the status of an interpreting strategy in many studies. Valentina Donato places it among reformulation strategies (Donato, 2003:107), Konstantina Liontou reckons it among target-text conditioned strategies (Liontou, 2011:41) while Alessandra Riccardi mentions it among production strategies (Riccardi, 2005:765). The terminology differs while the idea behind it remains the same: (*we use*) decompression while producing the TT based on interpreter's decision. In this connection I would disagree that the term "strategy" can be applied to decompression. In my opinion, translation strategy is a general program of the translator's activity worked out on the basis of the general approach to translation in a specific communicative situation (CST) determined by the particular parameters of the situation and the translation goal and, in its turn, determining the character of the translator's professional behavior (Sdobnikov, 2011:1450). Decompression can
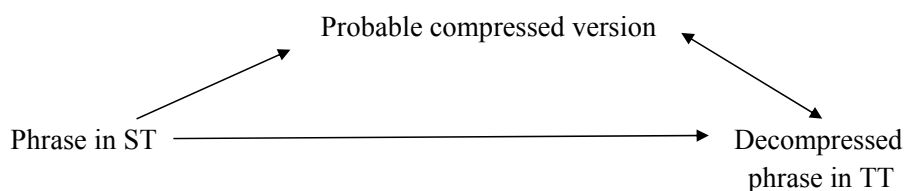

Fig. 1

hardly be viewed as a general program of the translator's/interpreter's activity. It is rather an operation performed by the interpreter to solve a specific task in specific circumstances.

Types of Decompression

Texts Analyzed

Translations of two texts made simultaneously have been analyzed to figure out types of decompression as well as the reasons for it. The first one is the speech made by Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission, at the Saint-Petersburg International Economic Forum on 16 June 2016. The other one is the opening address by Vladimir Putin to the All-Russian People's Front Forum devoted to education developing in Russia. Thus, the first speech was interpreted from English into Russian while the second one was interpreted from Russian into English. Russian is language A (a mother tongue) for the interpreter while English is language B (the first foreign language). I presume that interpreting from A into B and reverse might have different results in terms of the applied tactics and operations. But more extensive studies are required to find out whether there is any link to directionality between the language pair.

Both interpretations have been made by the same simultaneous interpreter in a setting that simulated the actual environment of the events.

Methodological Approach

Following the provisions stated above, I refused to compare directly the TT with the ST or any segments thereof. Instead, I compared specific TT segments the wording of which seemed to be superfluous with the probable compressed versions of interpretation to establish whether decompression really occurred in interpreting as well as to determine the factors that made decompression necessary. In the both cases the speed delivery rates (SDRs) were moderate or even less than average. The delivery rates were kept moderate intentionally to press the interpreter to use decompression. If measured in words per minute, SDR was 95.2 words per minute for Jean-Claude Juncker's speech and 78.2 words per minute for Putin's speech. I fully agree with Athil Khaleel Farhan who states that using words as an index for SDRs is imprecise because, among other factors, "words vary in length within the same language and vary even more greatly from one language to another" (Farhan). It fully applies to the English-Russian pair: it is well-known that an average Russian word is longer than an average English word. Moreover, different numbers of words are required to express an idea in English and Russian. English seems to be more laconic than Russian. Yet, in our study SDRs were measured in words per minute just to give the readers an approximate idea of the pace with which the texts were pronounced.

General Observations

A general analysis of the two interpretations demonstrated that the interpreter used a complex of interpreting tactics combining compression with decompression. It also showed that compression was a prevalent tactic in comparison with decompression, especially in interpreting from Russian into English. The fact explains why the Russian target text is smaller than the English original if measured in words: the length of the English text is 1714 words vs. 1535 words in the Russian translation. Yet, the Russian original seems to be shorter than the English translation: 782 words vs. 956 words. But we should take into account the articles used in English and non-existent in Russian. It is obvious that with allowance for the number of the articles in the English texts, the rate of the target texts delivery might come down to almost the same figures

as the source texts rates of delivery. Indeed, the overall time of the ST and TT delivery is always the same, which is just natural in SI.

Two other facts are also worth mentioning. First, the rate of the TT delivery never changed significantly during the performance. Second, no omissions of important information have been noticed in the interpretations. There are some distortions of information, mainly, in rendering figures and numbers but they are irrelevant to the topic of our study.

Discussion

First of all, attention should be paid to those cases of decompression which can hardly be explained by any lingual or extralinguistic factors. For example:

Putin: Именно поэтому считаю очень востребованным обсуждение серьёзных ини- циатив в сфере образования на площадке Общероссийского народного фронта с уча- стием представителей профессионального сообщества, общественных организаций, родителей, потенциальных работодателей, что очень важно.

*Interpreter: And that's why I firmly believe that it is important and urgent to discuss those initiatives in education in the framework of the All-Russian People's Front with the involvement of the professional community, public organizations, families and future employers. **This is another important point here.***

Interpreting a clause by a complete sentence is certainly superfluous, especially when compared to a literary translation ("which is very important") which is also most appropriate in this case.

Therefore, it is important to differentiate between **justified decompression** and **unjustified decompression**. I presume that justified decompression breaks into specific types while the term "unjustified decompression" does not imply any categorization as the reasons

for unjustified decompression are not obvious and may be of purely psychological nature.

One may say that decompression is always justified by the slow pace of the ST delivery and that decompression is only possible when the SDR is low or moderate. It is true. Yet, I propose to distinguish the type of decompression caused by only the low SDR, while other lingual or extralinguistic factors are not applicable. It can be termed as ***SDR conditioned decompression***. Using it, an interpreter is governed by the intention to produce a TT that sounds smoothly and naturally, without unnecessary pauses. SDR conditioned decompression is achieved by means of filling in the gaps that otherwise might segment the interpreter's speech. Examples:

Juncker: But even before these dramatic events, our ties were strained.

*Interpreter: Но даже до этих напряженных событий наши отношения **были не в лучшем состоянии**. (Compare: «Наши отношения были сложными»).*

Juncker: But if our relationship today is troubled and marked by mistrust, it is not broken beyond repair. We need to mend it, and I believe we can.

*Interpreter: Даже несмотря на то, что наши отношения сегодня не в лучшем состоянии и отмечены недоверием, мы можем их восстановить и **мы должны это сделать, и я уверен, что мы можем этого достигнуть**. (Compare: «...и мы можем и должны это сделать»).*

Juncker: We can have no illusions about the problems weighing on our relationship today. They exist.

*Interpreter: Мы не можем позволить себе иллюзий о тех проблемах, которые омрачают наши отношения сегодня. **Эти проблемы существуют**. (Compare: «Они есть»).*

Thus, the interpreter feels that he has some time to spend for decompression of a segment of

the text in order to fill in the gaps in his speech and in this way to ensure a better quality of the interpretation.

A large number of factors that force an interpreter to use decompression are of purely linguistic nature. To be more precise, it is the differences in the SL and TL systems and specific rules and traditions of using words in speech that matter as well as the character of the linguistic units themselves. Indeed, the specific character of the SL system is revealed only when the two languages collide in the process of translation or interpreting. Yet, I propose to name the next type of decompression *SL conditioned decompression*. Example:

Juncker: Today, and in spite of our differences, the European Union works with Russia to tackle a number of global issues and regional conflicts...

Interpreter: Сегодня, несмотря на все наши разногласия, Европейский Союз сотрудничает с Россией в решении ряда мировых проблем и местных конфликтов...

At least two words deserve our attention: the polysemantic verb "to work" that may be rendered into Russian in a number of ways, and the adjective "global" that has at least two Russian correspondences («мировой», «глобальный»). In any case, the final variant will be always longer than the word in the original (work – сотрудничает, взаимодействует, работает) if measured in the number of syllables. I could adduce many examples of the kind but I do not think they are really necessary. Moreover, as has been mentioned above, the average length of Russian words is greater than that of English words, which conditions the decompression in interpreting from English into Russian balanced by the extensive use of compression.

Specific traditions of using SL words in speech can also present a problem for an interpreter. It is known that expression of an idea in English is usually more laconic than in Russian which requires more words to express it. Examples:

Juncker: Over the last two decades, this Forum has become a meeting point for business and politics.

Interpreter: За последние двадцать лет этот форум стал местом встречи представителей бизнеса и политики.

English "business" and "politics" both have generalizing meanings implying not only specific areas of activity but also those who are engaged in these activities (i.e., businesspeople and politicians). Russian correspondences have only one meaning each ("area of activity"), thus requiring some additional words to render the second meaning (literally: "representatives of business and politics"). The possible compressed version «бизнесмены и политики» might be used but the final version, in my opinion, is more appropriate in the solemn address.

Another cause for decompression is the rules of using words in speech in the target language. An interpreter is expected to express the idea in the way that does not violate the rules and to produce a text that would be perceived by the audience as "the most natural". I shall call decompression of this type *TL conditioned decompression*. Example:

Juncker: The EU's efforts to engage and explain were not always welcomed or accepted.

Interpreter: И все попытки Евросоюза открыть диалог и обсуждать позиции не находили ответов.

Any infinitive used in the Russian interpretation would be insufficient without a direct object the usage of which is compulsory with certain Russian verbs. (*What about "подружиться" и "объясниться"?*). Other examples:

Juncker: Millions of people communicate and trade each day.

Interpreter: Миллионы людей общаются и **ведут торговлю** *каждый день.*

The English verb is better rendered by the Russian phrase though the Russian correspondence «торговать» is also at hand and may be treated as a nucleus of the probable compressed version of interpretation. It seems that the phrase is more appropriate for the task of expressing the idea of peoples' interaction and interdependence in trading with each other than the ambiguous verb «торговать» (to trade). Thus, choosing between the two variants the interpreter prefers the one which is more precise but at the same time more expanded.

Juncker: The past 25 years have shown it is not an easy task.

Interpreter: За последние 25 лет **мы убедились**, *что это непросто.*

In an English sentence, as distinct from a Russian one, almost any notion can perform the function of the agent, or subject in the purely syntactical sense. It is not the case in Russian. In this example the English sentence had to be transformed so that its subject ("the past 25 years") would become an adverbial modifier of time in the Russian sentence. True, a more compressed version not requiring any significant transformation is also possible: «Последние 25 лет показали…». It would not violate any norm of the Russian grammar but would sound slightly unnatural for the Russian audience as it would preserve some traces of the English grammar.

There are cases when some bits of information are not made explicit in the ST. The information is only implied, and the interpreter's task is to guess what the ST author really means. Thus, some explanation is required to make the idea fully understandable for the audience, which leads to the expansion of the narration if compared with a literary or compressed rendition. This type of decompression may be called **ST conditioned decompression**. Example:

Juncker: In the aftermath of the global economic crisis, our recovery is on track…

Interpreter: В период после всемирного экономического кризиса **2008 года** *наше восстановление продолжается…*

The interpreter decided that the "global economic crisis" mentioned by the speaker is the crisis of 2008. The information might not be obvious to the Russian audience that still remembers the crisis of 1998 and the one that began a couple years ago. To specify the idea the interpreter used the clarifying addition «2008 года» (the crisis of 2008). It is true that the interpreter could do without it, using a more compressed version. But the audience might be puzzled by the need to guess which of the crises was meant.

Strange as it might seem, but sometimes (though quite rarely) the composition of the TT itself forces the interpreter to use decompression. I mean the cases when the composition of a phrase, a sentence or any other TT segment already voiced by the interpreter requires that the following text segment be formulated in a certain, decompressed way. I would call this type of decompression **the TT conditioned decompression**. Example:

Juncker: Russia's actions have shaken the very principles of the European security order. Sovereign equality, the non-use of force and territorial integrity matter. They cannot be ignored.

Interpreter: Действия России подрывают основополагающие принципы безопасности в Европе, равенства, неиспользования силы, уважение к территориальной целостности, **и это такие принципы**, **которые** *нельзя игнорировать.*

The interpreter combined the first two sentences in his interpretation though in the ST the second sentence is a nominative one and is not connected syntactically with the first. Certainly, it is not an exact rendition of the speaker's idea.

Pronouncing the second sentence the speaker just wanted to clarify what exactly the "principles of the security order" imply (sovereign equality, the non-use of force, territorial integrity). The interpreter presented the "principles of the security order" and what they imply as equal notions instead. Having made this mistake, he had nothing to do but to combine the third sentence with the previous part by means of the additional phrase "и это такие принципы, которые…". The compressed version of the interpretation could be as follows: "Действия России подрывают основополагающие принципы европейской безопасности, такие как суверенное равенство, неприменение силы и территориальная целостность. А их игнорировать нельзя / Они не могут быть проигнорированы / Их никто не должен игнорировать».

Not infrequently the ST can have elements or components that may be called culture-specific. These components are easily perceived by the ST recipients but can be obscure for the TT recipients due to the lack of information about the speaker's culture. With due account of the background knowledge of the TT recipients or, better to speak, of the insufficiency of their background knowledge, the interpreter provides some additional information expanding the text. The decompression of this type can be called *audience conditioned decompression*. Example:

Putin: Сегодня 200 лет со дня рождения Михаила Юрьевича Лермонтова. Я сподобился, как говорят в таких случаях, – наконец посетил Тарханы, посмотрел, в каких условиях жил, воспитывался наш великий поэт.

*Interpreter: Today it's the 200ᵗʰ anniversary of Mikhail Lermontov's birthday, **a Russian poet**. And I used the occasion to visit Tarkhany **mansion** to see the atmosphere of our great poet's upbringing.*

The interpreter thought it to be necessary to explain who Lermontov was and what Tarkhany is (an estate in the village of Tarkhany that belonged to Lermontov's grandmother, the place where the poet spent his childhood). The compressed version of the interpretation could be as follows: "It's the 200ᵗʰ birthday of Mikhail Lermontov. At last I have visited Tarkhany to see where the great poet lived and was brought up." While the second sentence contains the indication that Lermontov was a great Russian poet, the meaning of Tarkhany would still remain obscure to the English-speaking audience if the compressed version were used.

Conclusion

Based on the observations of the causes for decompression, we can classify it as follows:

I. Unjustified decompression.

II. Justified decompression.

1. SDR conditioned decompression;
2. SL conditioned decompression.
3. TL conditioned decompression.
4. ST conditioned decompression.
5. TT conditioned decompression.
6. Audience conditioned decompression.

The classification presents the major types of decompression. Certainly, more extended investigation into the reasons for and types of decompression is needed, though the classification reveals the main factors that underlie decompression in SI, making it both necessary and possible.

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Виды декомпрессии
в синхронном переводе

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В статье дается определение декомпрессии в синхронном переводе, раскрывается содержание этого понятия в противопоставлении понятию «компрессия», доказывается, что термин «декомпрессия» более точно отражает суть данного понятия, чем используемый в западном переводоведении термин «экспансия/расширение» (expansion). Рассматриваются два типа декомпрессии – оправданная и неоправданная. На основе анализа причин декомпрессии выделяются шесть видов оправданной декомпрессии.

Ключевые слова: синхронный перевод, декомпрессия, компрессия, расширение.

Научная специальность: 10.00.00 – филологические науки.