

Synopsis

Nabokov's "Unnatural Idiom": Exophonie or from "Foreignization" to "Defamiliarization" Shun'ichiro AKIKUSA

In her essay, Yoko Tawada, who is a bilingual Japanese and German writer, introduces the term "Exophonie" which means relativizing a language and strategically using it as a device for literature. In the same book, Tawada gives another bilingual Russian and English writer Nabokov's usage of idiom as an example for "Exophonie." This study will investigate some salient characteristics of Nabokov's usage of "unnatural idiom" mainly in his later English works.

First, in his later works, Nabokov partly altered the English idiom for stylistic effect and defamiliarization. However, this tendency has already been indicated by some researchers. Nabokov sometimes used such manipulation of idiom in his Russian works as well.

Second, Nabokov used idioms which were literally translated from Russian. For example, Nabokov occasionally used a Russian idiom "*glaza s povolokoi*" (dim eyes) in his Russian works. In later years, he not only literally translated it as "veiled eyes" in his English self-translation but also used the literal translation in Ada. Such "unnatural idiom" defamiliarized his English style.

Additionally, his literal translation of *Eugene Onegin* played a significant role in his later English style. In his translation of *Eugene Onegin*, for example, he literally translated the Russian idiom "*kak zyuzya p'janyi*" as "swine drunk." He later used this expression in his English work *Look at the Harlequins!* which points to a continuity between Nabokov the translator and Nabokov the English writer. Lawrence Venuti introduced and defended the concept of "foreignization" to refer to translations which were accurate albeit unreadable. As Vid points it, a key work that exemplifies "foreignization" is like Nabokov's *Eugene Onegin*. In his English works, "foreignization" of his translation directly causes defamiliarization. Obviously, a great deal more research is needed on the relationship between his translations and his works.

Nabokov inherited foreignization from Pushkin, who frequently used Gallicisms, as Nabokov has pointed out in his Commentary to *Eugene Onegin*. Nabokov deliberately defamiliarized his text as a linguistic strategy in his later works. His "unnatural idiom" was the result of a deliberate attempt to relativize language and keep alive the Russian language within his English idiom. Therefore, Nabokov can be considered as a writer of "Exophonie."

It is a pleasure to acknowledge my debt to Shoko Miura. She very kindly improved my synopsis. But needless to say, any inadequacies are all my own.