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How it all Began: Translating Roman Ingarden's On Translations

Abstract: In this essay, the English translator of Roman Ingarden's treatise *O tłumaczeniach*, reflects on the translation process and on her work compiling Ingarden's international bibliography.

Keywords: Roman Ingarden, translation

Abstrakt: Tłumaczka omawia proces swojej pracy nad przekładem traktatu Romana Ingardena pt. *O tłumaczeniach* i nad tworzeniem międzynarodowej bibliografii dotyczącej jego dzieł.

Słowa kluczowe: Roman Ingarden, przekład

In this brief, informal contribution, I offer a reflection on my involvement with the works of Roman Ingarden and on translating his treatise, *O tłumaczeniach* (1955). My work began in the mid-eighties during my doctoral studies in the Department of English, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. For about one year I worked as a research assistant to Professor Hans Rudnick, who was in the process of preparing a bibliography of Ingarden's works. I conducted library research at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and at Harvard University in Boston. During my stay at Harvard, I was hosted by Professor Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, a former student of Ingarden. I spent my days in the Slavic section of the Harvard library and in the underground archives, among boxes and crates full of Polish newspapers and periodicals from the interwar period (some of them undisturbed for more than half a century, still tied with ropes sticky from soot-like grime that, at the end of each day, covered my hands, face, and the whites of my eyes). My research yielded over 11,000 bibliographical items and copious amounts of notes. Upon returning to Carbondale, my job was to enter all data into the mainframe

computer, pick up and proofread printouts, translate titles into English, and, in some cases, supply short English-language descriptions of their content.

The bibliography was published in *Annalecta Husserliana* (1990) and it is described in an online portal at <https://www.ontologia.co/biblio/ingarden-biblio.htm> as follows:

A bibliography of Roman Ingarden's works for the years 1915–1989 is published in: *Annalecta Husserliana, The Yearbook of Phenomenological Research*, vol. 30: *Ingardeniana II. New studies in the philosophy of Roman Ingarden*. With a new international Ingarden bibliography, edited by Hans Rudnick and Jolanta Wawrzycka; the bibliography (pp. 225–296) contains in the first part (“primary sources”) 368 items, inclusively of translations and reprints; the second part (“secondary sources”) contains 821 references (many in Polish) concerning Ingarden.

And it was during my work on the bibliography that I came across Ingarden's treatise “On translations,” in the volume edited by Michał Rusinek (1955). Having determined that the treatise had not yet been translated into English, and with strong encouragement from Professor Tymieniecka, I undertook the task of translating it (with, I must admit, great pleasure). As I worked, I experienced a few *meta* moments, translating sentences about translation errors and catching myself in the process of committing these very errors. Attempts at faithful rendering of both the content and the style of Ingarden's text were not always easy to implement. Ingarden himself, in his discussion of scientific (“and especially philosophical”) translations, comments on the issue of “faithful” vs “literal” translations, observing that “literal translation is not at all faithful and the faithful translation is not and need not be literal” (“tłumaczenie dosłowne wcale nie jest wierne, a wierne wcale nie jest i nie musi być dosłowne,” 1955, 163). It is hard to disagree with this statement, but here is an example of Ingarden's *own* sentence that illustrates well the challenges encountered by his translators:

Okoliczność, że przy tłumaczeniu dzieł naukowych zależy przede wszystkim na o ile możliwości *dokładnej rekonstrukcji zawartości myślowej* oryginału (jako wyniku *czynności poznawczych*, które doprowadziły do powstania dzieła) i że zawartość ta pojawia się w dziele naukowym pod postacią *sensu zdań* (a nawet sensu całych *zespołów zdaniowych*), sprawia, że w ewentualnym konflikcie między wiernością tłumaczenia a jego dosłownością należy dać *pierwszeństwo postulatowi wierności*. Ale i tu nasuwa się zagadnienie, co znaczą „dokładne oddanie” sensu zdań, czy mogą być różne stopnie tej dokładności i jaka jest jej ewentualna dopuszczalna dolna granica, by tłumaczenie mogło być jeszcze „wierne” (1955, 163-164; podkreślenia w oryginale).

The circumstance that translating scientific works depends primarily on whenever possible to *accurately* reconstruct the thought content of the original (as a result of the *cognitive activities* that led to the creation of the work) and that this content appears in a scientific work in the form of the *sense of sentences* (and even the sense of whole *sentence groups*), results in [the fact that] in a possible conflict between the fidelity of the translation and its literal character, [one] should give *priority to the postulate of fidelity*. But here too the question arises as to what is meant by “accurate rendering” of the meaning of sentences, whether there can be different degrees of this accuracy and what is its possibly permissible lower limit for the translation to still be “faithful” (emphasis in the original).

The passage in Polish original is somewhat opaque in terms of syntax and phraseological formulations; I introduced a bit of clarification into my English rendition. Which brings into sharp relief the age-old question: Should one translate faithfully *what is written*? Or should one reflect accurately *the meaning* by introducing corrections/clarifications? To put it differently: Should the translation correct/clean up the original?

A different set of issues concerns Ingarden's terminology in Polish and in English. When I was translating the treatise, I knew that Ingarden's vocabulary had already existed in English, translated from the German (Ingarden 1973). Because Ingarden highlights the importance of agreement in semantic ranges of concepts in the original and in translation (Ingarden 1955, 172), I felt that in my translation from the Polish language I had to render the wording of these concepts *anew*. As an example, let's consider Ingarden's terminology regarding the four layers of a multi-phase literary work, which Ingarden presents at the very beginning of the treatise as follows:

- a) warstwa brzmień słownych i zjawisk brzmieniowo językowych;
- b) warstwa jednostek znaczeniowych i niższego i wyższego rzędu;
- c) warstwa przedmiotów przedstawionych;
- d) warstwa wyglądów uschematyzowanych (1955, 127).

I translated them as:

- a) the stratum of word sounds and phonetic linguistic phenomena;
- b) the stratum of semantic units of higher and lower orders;
- c) the stratum of represented objects;
- d) the stratum of schematized semblances/aspect.¹

I found it significant that, in his 1955 text, Ingarden describes these concepts in Polish more than twenty years after he crystallized and discussed them for the first time in German, in his work *Das Literarische Kunstwerk* (1931; translated into Polish in 1960). They also appeared in Polish in 1937 (re-issued in 1976) in his work titled *O poznawaniu dzieła literackiego*, where Ingarden asserts that literary work of art consists of ("dzieło sztuki zawiera"):

1. warstwę brzmień słownych jako też tworów i charakterów brzmieniowych wyższego rzędu;
2. warstwę jednostek znaczeniowych: sensów zdań i całych związków zdaniowych;
3. warstwę uschematyzowanych wyglądów, przez które przejawiają się różnego rodzaju przedmioty przedstawione w dziele;
4. warstwę przedmiotów przedstawionych, a mianowicie przedstawionych przez [czysto] intencjonalne stany rzeczy, które są wyznaczone przez [sen-

¹ However, my wording had been corrected by unknown editor(s) and, in print (1991, 131), it appeared as:

the stratum of word sounds and the phonetic formations;
the stratum of semantic units of various orders;
the stratum of represented objects;
the stratum of schematized aspect.

sy] zdań [wchodzących w skład dzieła] (Ingarden 1976, 19; brackets in the original).

These concepts entered the English language as follows:

1. the stratum of *word sounds* and the *phonetic formations* of higher order built on them;
2. the stratum of *meaning units* of various orders;
3. the stratum of manifold schematized *aspects* and aspect continua and series;
4. the stratum of *represented objectivities* and their vicissitudes. (Ingarden 1973, 30; emphases in the original).

Although in my own work with the 1955 text I prioritized reflecting the range of Ingarden's terminology, I was also mindful of having to match it to the terminology already present in English. In some places, however, I departed from it, for example, by replacing, "meaning units" with "semantic units;" "represented objectivities" with "represented objects," and so on.

To come back to the subject of translating faithfully vs cleaning up the original, I'd like to preface my comments by mentioning a 2015 e-mail from Professor Magda Heydel, who, with Professor de Bończa Bukowski, was just starting to work on an [English edition of their] anthology of Polish thought on translation in which they planned to include fragments from my 1991 Ingarden text, but not until it was updated. Which it needed to be, given that it was conducted in 1988–1989, just as I started working as an assistant professor at Radford University, and under rushed conditions, because Professor Tymieniecka was preparing a centennial volume of *Annalecta Husserliana* dedicated to Ingarden and wanted to include my translation in *Ingardeniana III*. I managed to finish the second draft, hoping to do another round of revisions before publication. Those revisions, however, were done by other editors/translators who, in many cases, improved my text. Nevertheless, some wording in my translation was altered, affecting the overall textual unity.

In our correspondence, Professor Heydel suggested the need for a new edition of the translation, proposing some changes that are inevitably prompted "when a text, especially a translation, is looked at by a fresh eye," by someone with a "different linguistic sensitivity" and a different "ear" – someone who can suggest lexical improvements, particularly since Ingarden's style "is not friendly to the English language and to modern scientific temperament." Thus, the proposed modifications included issues of style, syntax, and terminology, as well as a suggestion that Ingarden's language be made more accessible to the English reader – an understandable recommendation, even as Ingarden's language in the original can present multiple stylistic and syntactical challenges. Generously, the editors left it up to me how to proceed, especially in places where simplification for the sake of accessibility would not necessarily go hand in hand with semantic precision of Ingarden's thought. But they also suggested addressing some problems of terminological inconsistencies within the text and with other English translations of Ingarden. Of course, as I have already mentioned, maintaining the consistency of terminology was my top priority all along: I was acutely aware of the need to

synchronize the “Ingarden from the German” already existing in English with the “Ingarden from the Polish” I was creating. However, some inconsistencies, particularly those resulting from deployment of synonyms, snuck in during the correction process by the editors of my initial translation. Therefore, I was grateful to the new editors for pointing out such examples. They included the phrase “funkcja oddziaływania” that appeared, in some instances, as “influencing” and, in others, as “affecting.” Or “word sound” was sometimes referred to as “sound” and at other times as “resonance” etc. Professor Heydel’s additional remark that “The text is quite complicated, the sentence is long, so it is important that the reader knows what is being said, and synonyms do not serve this purpose” – gets to the very heart of the matter.

But there is also a broader issue: in the case of Ingarden’s *writing style*, the focus on the unity of his *text in translation* may border on a complete alteration of Ingarden’s individual language/expression itself. I admit that in the process of translation I was mindful of his style/vocabulary in Polish, favoring it over how it had been rendered in English translations. This still holds true, because, in my opinion, the English-language philosophical terminology of the 1970s affects in some cases the semantic fields of concepts that Ingarden formulated in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s.

Incidentally, at the time of my correspondence with the Polish editors, I was also engaged in translatorial work on a broader scale: I was co-editing a book on re-translating the works of James Joyce (Wawrzycka, Mihálycsa 2020), where translators of Joyce from around the globe tackled, among many other topics, the problem of how to handle Joyce’s *language register* in translation (for instance, Joyce’s humorously raunchy subtexts are frequently rendered /rewritten as profanity; his slang or Hiberno-English expressions, or his purposefully warped syntax tends to be rewritten as standardized language, with explicitions to help the target language readers along, etc.). Of course, “Joyce” and “Ingarden” constitute completely different “texts” but I have always believed in the translator’s obligation to preserve the specific register of formulations and syntax of the original, challenging as they can often be. And I specifically remember that, in the very first draft of my Ingarden translation, I worked to convey his thought clearly and legibly while also preserving some of the idiosyncrasies of his style. So, in the new Ingarden text published in the anthology (de Bończa Bukowski, Heydel 2019), I both accepted and left out some of the editors’ suggestions, staying, for instance, with “volition” rather than “will;” with “psychological” instead of the suggested “mental;” changing the word “influence” to “affect/affected” in some instances, but keeping “influence” in other cases. These and many other examples I could offer mean next to nothing without a context, but they illustrate the truth about the great value of the “fresh eye” and a different “ear” in the evaluating and editing translations.

A word of closing: I am by no means an expert on Ingarden. Having nothing scholarly to say about his oeuvre and influence, I was hesitant to accept the invitation to participate in jubilee celebrations. But I am grateful for the opportunity to look back and reflect on my encounter with Ingarden’s oeuvre, because the pro-

cess of translating his treatise so many years ago has deepened my own translational interests to such an extent that I even declared myself an “Ingardenian at heart” (Wawrzycka 2004, 155; Wawrzycka 2007, 44). Indeed, Ingarden’s theories on translating literature have greatly influenced my approach to translation and to my own translatorial workshop. And, although this is not always possible, in my translations I invariably prioritize rendering as faithfully as possible Ingarden’s four layers of a literary work: the sounds, the meanings, the vision, and the idea of the original.

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