

TRANSLATING BEYOND ENGLISH AND CZECH**W. Golding's *The Inheritors* in a Czech Translation****RENATA KAMENICKÁ**

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses mind-style in the novel *The Inheritors* (1955) by W. Golding and its Czech translation *Dědicové* (1996, Šimon Pellar). The source text, which has itself triggered a number of treatises focusing on its style (e.g. Halliday 1971, and many others after him), is a bold stylistic experiment: most of the novel is focalized through the mind of a young Neanderthal man, who watches himself and “his people” coming to an end in a prolonged encounter with a new tribe whose difference from themselves they are able to recognize but not fully understand due to their cognitive limitation. Golding offers a narrative told in language characterized by a peculiar distribution of syntactic and lexical choices, through which the underlying theme of the novel, which has a prehistoric setting, is communicated. The translator was thus faced with a very specific translation task: translating from English which is not quite English into Czech which is not quite Czech. The paper discusses where the translation succeeds and where it fails, drawing, among other things, on a contrastive analysis of English and Czech on the background of the mind-language of the Neanderthal men as constructed by Golding. The rather unique literary source-target pair is also found to provide some non-trivial insights into the more general problems of re-creating the style of the source text in translation.

As a unique experiment in mind-style construction and juxtaposition and a deeply disturbing work of literature, the novel *The Inheritors* by William Golding (1955) has attracted the attention of a number of scholars interested in studying style in fiction. As such, and for other reasons which will be explained below, it seems to present an intriguing challenge to its translators, which is perhaps even truer for some target languages than for others.

William Golding opens the novel with a quote from *The Outline of History* (1919), a volume of over 1,000 pages in which Herbert George Wells retells “the story of man”:

... We know very little of the appearance of the Neanderthal man, but this [...] seems to suggest an extreme hairiness, an ugliness, or a repulsive strangeness in his appearance over and above his low forehead, his beetle brows, his ape neck, and his inferior stature [...] Says Sir Harry Johnston, in a survey of the rise of modern man in his *Views and Reviews*: “The dim remembrance of such gorilla-like monsters, with cunning brains, shambling gait, hairy bodies, strong teeth, and possibly cannibalistic tendencies, may be the germ of the orge in folklore [...]” (H. G. Wells, *The Outline of History*, Wells 1919/1925: 52)

The readers, unless they have skipped the quote, thus read the novel against this statement. Since the novel and its style have been discussed many times¹, a brief summary of the plot and the conclusions of the previous stylistic analyses will be used as a starting point for the author's own translation analysis and consideration of how it can benefit understanding of the stylistics of *The Inheritors*.

The plot is roughly the following: Lok, a young Neanderthal man, and his band – referred to as “people” in the novel – experience a prolonged encounter with another group of prehistoric people – referred to as “the new people” and very different from them – whom they manage only to half-understand before they are wiped out by this tribe, their inheritors – and our distant ancestors, as we come to understand.

Whatever the details of their individual analyses, the authors who have studied this peculiar novel all observed that the text consists of several parts of unequal length in which the points of view or mind-styles sharply differ. They basically agree about the divisions between these contrasting narratives but they somewhat differ as to the nature and boundaries of what is referred to here as part B. The interpretation outlined here follows that of Hoover (2002) and Clark (2009).

The first, longest part of the novel (Part A), encompassing nearly eleven chapters and about 200 pages long, is written in a 3rd person narrative and bears features of what we can call Lok's mind-style. It is followed by a short section of about five pages, which does not even take up a self-contained chapter, of a much more objective and distanced 3rd person narrative in which Lok – by that time more or less the last survivor among the people – is observed by a rather detached quasi-20th century narrator mind (Part B). The switch between the mind-styles of Part A and Part B is a very important point in the novel, marking a peak of emotional involvement of the reader, as the accumulated readings testify. Chapter 12 (Part C) is then another type of 3rd person narrative, focalized through one particular character among the new people whose mind-style, as we discover, rather uncannily resembles ours. The very conflict between the reader's emotional identification with the main protagonist on the verge of extinction which is gradually built up in Part A and the rational realization that there are reasons we should feel related to “the new people” which comes about in Part C provokes the many questions the reader is left with after finishing the book.

Halliday, in his paper “Linguistic function and literary style: an inquiry into the language of William Golding's *The Inheritors*” (1971), uses passages from the three above-mentioned parts of the book to demonstrate how foregrounded syntactic patterns of an ideational nature can both express the subject-matter and convey an underlying theme. This analysis contributes towards his more general concern with criteria of relevance in stylistic analysis and the distinction between linguistic prominence and stylistic prominence. The conclusion of his analysis of transitivity patterns in three sample passages taken from the three parts of the book is that passages A and C differ in rather significant ways while passage B, in his interpretation spanning only two paragraphs from the beginning of Part B in the reading endorsed here, blends features of both.

¹ For a full list, see Clark (2009).

What Halliday calls Language A – the language he observes in the passage taken from the main body of the novel – is, in his view, characterized by a predominance of intransitive verbs and processes which have only one participant. This predominance reflects, in Halliday’s interpretation, firstly, the limitations of the people’s actions and secondly, their cognitive limitations, which are evident especially in the passage where Lok the focalizer, hidden in a tree, is observing the activities of the other tribe (Halliday 1971: 350–1).

The main features of Language A are found to be the following: a high proportion of clauses with one participant only, describing actions using mainly intransitive verbs; intransitive use of normally transitive verbs such as *grab: he grabbed at the branches, he smelled along the shaft of the twig*; and a high proportion of non-human grammatical subjects: parts of the body and inanimate objects (Halliday 1971: 349–53).

This grammatical patterning, Halliday argues, creates a picture of the people acting, but not acting on things, and moving, but moving themselves rather than other objects – a picture of ineffectual action. Halliday sums up the transitivity structure of Language A by saying that there is no cause and effect. Where Language A is used, processes are seldom represented as having an external cause (Halliday 1971: 349–353).

Halliday’s thorough analysis of selected extracts with the focus on transitivity was followed by a corpus study by D. L. Hoover (1999). Following his unsuccessful attempt to replicate Halliday’s analysis, Hoover criticizes Halliday for not being explicit enough in the description of his analysis and, even more importantly, for having misclassified certain phenomena, which has led to a misguided conclusion regarding Languages A and C and their alleged contrast based on transitivity patterns. He concludes that “There is no monolithic Language A, at least not with respect to transitivity” (Hoover, 1999: 26).

My close reading supports the idea that Halliday’s interpretation of Language A and Language C based on his samples was wishful thinking which created a myth in literary stylistics rather than anything else. His transitivity hypothesis may work locally in some sections in the first eleven chapters but does not characterize the mind-style globally.

Halliday himself, after all, lists some exceptions from the observed transitivity pattern: *the man was holding a stick, as though someone had clapped a hand over her mouth, he threw himself forward, the echo of Liku’s voice in his head sent him trembling at this perilous way of bushes towards the island* (Halliday 1971: 349). They are not so few given that the relatively short passage spans just over one page of text, and many other examples from the rest of the eleven chapters in Language A can be supplied. To my mind, what has to be taken very seriously is the rather significant distribution of transitive verbs in the very first paragraph of the novel, introducing Lok and his girl protégé Liku. Transitive uses of verbs have been highlighted by the author of this paper:

Lok was running as fast as he could. His head was down and **he carried his thorn bush** horizontally for balance and **smacked the drifts of vivid buds** aside with his free hand. **Liku rode him** laughing, one hand clutched in the chestnut curls that lay

on his neck and down his spine, the other **holding the little Oa** tucked under his chin. Lok's feet were clever. They saw. **They threw him** round the displayed roots of the beeches, leapt when a puddle of water lay across the trail. **Liku beat his belly** with her feet. (Golding 1955/1975: 11)

The passage – the very first paragraph of the novel – can hardly convince us that Golding intended to present Lok's world as one from which transitivity and the idea of acting on things are missing. Halliday's own argument about the difference between linguistic prominence and stylistic prominence can be used against him here (Halliday 1971: 339–41) for what can be stylistically more prominent than the beginning of the literary text where readers' expectations are created and negotiated? The extract quoted above contains just one intransitive use of a transitive verb, *clutched in the chestnut curls*.

Having thrown one of Halliday's chief observations into doubt, what are we left with?

Hoover's corpus analysis has shown that the main linguistic characteristics of *The Inheritors* (mainly Language A) are the following:

1. short, simple sentences, mainly in simple past tense;
2. body parts and inanimate objects as agents and as subjects of mental process and perception verbs, and intransitive verbs of motion;
3. body parts and inanimate objects with attributes normally associated with animate beings;
4. a limited, concentrated, peculiarly distributed vocabulary based on short words;
5. a high proportion of very frequent concrete, physical nouns and verbs;
6. natural object words used to refer to artefacts, buildings and boats;
7. words referring to modern cultural phenomena and activities and names of known places and people are absent (Hoover 1999, in Clark 2009: 190).

While both Halliday and Hoover approach the style of *The Inheritors* mainly statically, mapping the overall distribution of certain phenomena in the text, Billy Clark's relevance theory approach (2009) supplements their insights by highlighting the *process* of inferencing as the readers work their way through the text and outlining the questions the readers are likely to ask about Lok's world and the answers to them they are likely to arrive at.

This is roughly what functional systemic linguistics, corpus linguistics, and relevance theory had to say about *The Inheritors*. Is there anything yet to add?

Besides comparing the translation with its original in order to see how the translational challenge implied by the stylistic analysis was met, the question which motivated this paper was: Is there anything to be added yet from the translational point of view, or are translators just to follow their best judgment and what they have inherited from their linguistically minded colleagues?

What is nearly immediately evident to a translator considering translating *The Inheritors* from English into a language such as Czech, or we should perhaps say

from English into its Czech counterpart – and what has been left unexplored by the above-mentioned authors – is that the construction of Language A partly depends on English being a predominantly analytical language. This feature of the mind-style is only latently present in Hoover’s observations listed above under numbers 2, 4, and 5.

The instrumentality of the analytical nature of English for modelling the world perception of the Neanderthals in *The Inheritors* becomes evident when we compare the texture with the Czech translation (Šimon Pellar, 1996). The peculiar nature of the vocabulary of Language A as identified by Hoover, which might otherwise easily escape the reader’s conscious attention, is especially salient in direct speech as a relatively “direct” means of access to the mental world of the Neanderthals, and above all with verbs:

The log has **gone** away.

I did not **move** the log to **make** the people **laugh**.

It has **gone**.

Swing me.

Look!

Why did you **leave** me?

Let the log **swim**.

The trunk **is** across the water.

Will she **carry** it across now?

Will you **cross**? (12–19)

Kláda **utekla**.

Já ji **neschoval**, aby se ostatní **smáli**.

Zmizela sama.

Houpej.

Podívej!

Proč jsi na mě **nepočkal**?

Strom musí **přeplovat**.

Kláda **přešla** přes vodu.

Přenesesh ho?

Přejdeš sama? (11–18)

It is fair to say that all the English sentences are grammatical and that it is this very act of using the means available in standard English in grammatical ways while weaving them into patterns conveying a sense of strangeness that gives the texture its edge. Thanks to the analytical tense formation, all these utterances manage to convey a sense of simplicity by virtue of the use of basic verbs as salient elements of their relatively uncomplicated analytical linguistic forms. If the sentences are to remain grammatical in Czech, a part of this effect is lost. The synthetic verb forms with their prefixes and affixes strike one as requiring much more linguistic sophistication. Compare, for instance, the forms used in the above-quoted utterances with the infinitives and the verbs they are derived from by affixation, respectively:

verb form used	infinitive	no prefix
utekla	utéct	–
neschoval	neschovat	schovat
zmizela	zmizet	mizet
houpej	houpat	–
podívej	podívat se	dívat se
nepočkal	nepočkat	počkat
–	přeplovat	plavat
přešla	přejít	jít
přenesesh	přenést	nést

A similar issue arises with verbs used outside direct speech, in the focalized 3rd person narrative. The crudeness and starkness of Language A are hard to achieve when the use of affixed verbs cannot be avoided to produce grammatical and reasonably natural-sounding sentences.

The translator tried to make up for this increase in linguistic sophistication by dividing some of the sentences in direct speech into two. In Chapter 1, for instance, he used this strategy five times while two sentences were combined into one only once. Examples follow:

1>2

I came quickly to see the log.

Šel jsem rychle. Chtěl jsem vidět kládu.

[I walked fast. I wanted to see the log.]

Mal is not old but clinging to his mother's back.

Mal není velký. Matka ho ještě nosí na zádech.

[Mal is not big. Mother still carries him on her back.]

There is more water not only here but along the trail where we came. (14–15)

Vody je všude víc. I tady na stezce.

[There is more water everywhere. Here along the trail too.] (14–15)

2>1

A man is wise. He makes men take a tree that has fallen and ... (15)

Jeden moudrý muž říká ostatním, ať vezmou padlý strom a ...

[A wise man tells others to take a fallen tree and ...] (15)

There are lexical obstacles, too. One of them becomes apparent already in reading the first scene against the source text.

Fa came trotting along the trail. The new one was sleeping on her back. She did not fear that he would fall because she felt his hands gripping her **hair at the neck** and his feet holding the **hair** farther down her back but she trotted softly so that he should not wake.

Po stezce se klusem blížila Fa. Na zádech jí spal ten nový. Ačkoli se nemusela nijak bát, že spadne, protože cítila, jak se jí rukama pevně drží nahoře na krku a nohama jí svírá **chlupy na hřbetě**, našlapovala co nejopatrněji, aby se neprobudil. [hairs on her back]

Now they could hear the last of the people coming along the trail. It was Mal, coming slowly and coughing every now and then. He came round the last tree-trunk, stopped in the beginning of the open space, leaned heavily on the torn end of his thorn bush and began to cough. As he bent over they could see where **the white hair had fallen away in a track that led from behind his eyebrows over his head and down into the mat of hair that lay across his shoulders**. (12)

Uslyšeli, že po stezce přichází Mal. Šel poslední, kráčet pomalu a co chvíli se rozkašlal. Když obešel krajní kmen, zastavil se, ztěžka se opřel o rozštěpený konec svého kyje a znovu se rozkašlal. Jak skláněl hlavu a hrbil se, bylo vidět, že **srstí se mu od obočí přes temeno až do změti chlupů na zádech táhne bílý pruh**.

[... they could see that a white stripe was running in his fur from his eyebrows through the crown of his head down to the tangle of hairs on his back] (12)

In Czech, *hair* is lexicalized depending on whether it is human hair covering the scalp or whether it is bodily hair (animal or human). While the *hair* in the source

text remains potentially ambiguous, and open to interpretation like the human-like nature of Lok's tribe, the lexical choices in the Czech translation classify the characters as much more animal-like. Both *chlupy* (especially with the female character) and *srst* evoke animal-like rather than human nature of their bearers. Another feature supporting this image is the translation of *the neck* in the first example as *hřbet* [back], again a choice associated with animals rather than people (even though human *hřbet* has been fossilized in some Czech idioms). This is the more salient that the use of *záda*, a choice referring to a human back, has been avoided.

A specific part of this same extract will now illustrate another interesting lexical detail in the Czech translation compromising the ambiguous nature of the texture with respect to the axis of the human vs. animal-like nature of the people.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>He came round the last tree-trunk, stopped in the beginning of the open space, leaned heavily on the torn end of his thorn bush and began to cough. (12)</p> | <p>Když obešel krajní kmen, zastavil se, ztěžka se opřel o roztřepený konec svého kyje a znovu se rozkašlal.
[... he leaned heavily on the torn end of his club] (12)</p> |
|--|---|

The object carried by Mal, the old man, and by Lok after Mal's death as a token of his new role in the small tribe is referred to as "thorn bush" by Golding and it is up to the reader to decide whether they want to interpret the reference as one to a natural object used to denote an artefact (one of the features of the style noticed by Hoover) or to an unprocessed simple natural object. The Czech translation, however, mentions a "club" – an artifact whose use is marked by intentionality and an object fitting the stereotypical notion of something prehistoric people might be carrying around. As for intentionality, although the thorn bush is mentioned relatively often in the source text, as one of the few objects associated with people from Lok's tribe, it is subjected mainly to different versions of holding and not much more:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>A he <u>carried</u> his thorn bush horizontally for balance [of Lok running] (11)</p> | <p>kyj s trny na konci držel uprostřed [he held the club with thorns at its end in the middle] (11)</p> |
| <p>B He began to straighten himself by <u>bearing down on</u> the thorn bush and by making his hands walk over each other up the stick. (15)</p> | <p>Opřel se o kyj a střídavě po něm ručkoval, dokud se pomalu nenapřímil. [club] (15)</p> |
| <p>C his two hands now <u>holding</u> the thorn bush again (17)</p> | <p>kteřý se už zase musel o kyj opírat oběma rukama [club] (17)</p> |
| <p>D Mal <u>pointed</u> his thorn bush at Fa. (18)</p> | <p>Mal ukázal kyjem na Fa. [club] (17)</p> |
| <p>E He <u>picked up</u> his thorn bush and crouched. (17)</p> | <p>... sebral svůj klacek a přikrčil se. [stick] (17)</p> |
| <p>F He <u>held</u> his thorn bush crossways for balance. (20)</p> | <p>Zdvihl svůj kyj, aby s jeho pomocí udržoval rovnováhu. [club] (20)</p> |
| <p>G only when he was sure of safety did he put down his thorn bush (13)</p> | <p>Teprve když se ujistil, že odnikud nehrozí nebezpečí, odložil svůj klacek s trny [stick with thorns] (13)</p> |

Apart from the inconsistent reference to the object with a clear identification in English, the translation yields to criticism as syntactically rather clumsy (example A) and lacking logic (example F): a club, an object with an essentially asymmetrical distribution of matter and weight, is hard to picture as an aid to maintaining balance.

One of the linguistic features of *The Inheritors* which was noticed by Hoover presents the translator with another difficulty; this is the case of phrases where body parts and inanimate objects act as agents and as subjects with mental process and perception verbs. While this is a phenomenon generally known to English (e.g. *his fingers twitched, his brows frowned, her lips puckered, the trees darkened*), the frequency and distribution of these phrases in the novel are quite salient and they contribute to the sense of fragmentedness of action and disorientatedness that the reader experiences while reading. Since the relation between the semantics of the verb and the grammatical subject is different in Czech (see e.g. Dušková 1994: 397), such phrases often have to be translated in a way which breaks this pattern (*zaškubalo mu v prstech, svraštil obočí, našpulila rty – it twitched in his fingers, he frowned his brows, she puckered her lips*²).

It would seem from what has been written on the novel that different individual readers who empathize with the characters need some time to get used to this mode of fictional existence in which a number of changes in one's body and the external environment are imposed on the self. *The Inheritors* is not an easy read. But this pattern, among the other things which have been mentioned, helps build up the effect the readers experience when Language A switches to Language B for several pages and then to Language C, so close to our cognition. The problem is that in many of these phrases with body parts and inanimate objects as agents, where Czech prefers a different grammatical arrangement, normalizations were at hand and rarely avoided.

His feet stabbed, he swerved and slowed. (11)

Ucítel v chodidlech bodavou bolest, zapotácel se a zvolnil. [He felt stabbing pain in his feet, swerved and slowed down.] (11)

The text is rich in metaphor as an important feature of the mind-style. The metaphors counterbalance and at the same time are an aspect of the underlexicalization mediating the cognitive world of the Neanderthals. The translation is however not always as figurative as the source text. This can be illustrated with a scene from the beginning of the novel:

Lok's feet were clever. They saw. They threw him round the displayed roots of the beeches, leapt when a puddle of water lay across the trail. (11)

Nohy ho nesly s takovou jistotou, jako kdyby se samy koukaly, kam šlapou. Obratně se vyhýbaly změti vystouplých bukových kořenů a kdykoli se na stezce objevila kaluž, vynesly ho do vzduchu. [(His) feet carried him with such certainty as if they themselves saw where they touched the ground.] (11)

² Literal glosses to illustrate the linguistic difference.

Another example rich in metaphors describes an arduous ascent of the small band. The people are overwhelmed by the powerful scenery, which is reflected in the texture of the narrative. The Czech translation, however, shows a tendency towards explicit descriptiveness (*black flakes of ash fluttering above the fire* vs. *black scraps from a fire*) and intellectualization (*seemed just as unattainable/out of reach as the moon* vs. *was separate as the moon*). Moreover, while in the English paragraph the focus is clearly on the rich, awe-inspiring environment, with the climbing people just a tiny part of it, the human subjects partly stay within the narrative focus in the Czech translation, appearing as the grammatical subject of one of the sentences.

Here the ravens floated below them like black scraps from a fire, the weed-tails wavered with only a faint glister over them to show where the water was: and **the island**, reared against the fall, interrupting the sill of dropping water, **was separate as the moon**. The cliff leaned out as if looking for its own feet in the water. The weed-tails were very long, longer than many men, and they moved backwards and forwards beneath **the climbing people** as regularly as the beat of a heart or the breaking of the sea. (25)

... zela jen prázdnota, v níž **jako černé lupínky popela poletujícího nad ohněm kroužili havrani** [where ravens circled like black flakes of ash fluttering above the fire] a voda se převalovala tak hluboko, že ji prozrazovaly jen nezřetelné záblesky, jak v ní povlávaly dlouhé chvosty vodních travin. **Ostrov** [the island], který dělil vodní proud a vzpínal se k vodopádu, **se zdál stejně nedosažitelný jako měsíc** [seemed just as unattainable/out of reach as the moon]. Útes se skláněl nad řeku, jako kdyby ve vodě pátral po svých nohou. **Šplhali výš** [they kept climbing] a traviny, delší než mnoho vzrostlých mužů za sebou, se pod nimi pohybovaly s pravidelností tlukoucího srdce nebo mořského příboje. (24)

Last but not least, Golding's novel contains subtle inferential hints that people in Lok's tribe use verbal communication alongside direct consciousness-to-consciousness communication. This layer of the text is also lost in the Czech translation.

To conclude, firstly, we could see that despite the previous analyses, the translational point of view yields some more insights into the linguistic features of the source text. "Language A" in *The Inheritors* is based on the analytical nature of English more than Halliday or Hoover realized. Apart from enriching the previous stylistic analyses, these observations are extremely important for a translator facing the difficult task of translating this text from English which is not English into what would be Czech beyond Czech.

Secondly, our study has revealed a lot of occurrences of what might be summed up by the word normalization. Despite these, the Czech text *is* a legitimate translation. Some of the normalizations were necessary, others were less necessary (and could have been avoided by skilful treatment) and yet other normalizations could obviously have been avoided. This situation leads one to suspect that once a translator has to normalize at some level, this normalization exerts a pull towards other normalizations which are conditioned psychologically rather than linguistically. Practice-oriented theory informs us that there is a translation strategy called *compensation*. But to what

extent is it used in practice? What is the *syntax* of compensation – how is it distributed in translations? Apart from dividing longer sentences into several shorter ones in direct speech, the author of this paper has found no translation solutions in the Czech translation of *The Inheritors* which could be labelled as compensations. Translational compensation certainly calls for more study, in translations as products as well as in translation as a process.

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