

English to English: American Reflections on Editing Translations in Ukraine

In reading student translations, one occasionally has the feeling that something is not quite right. Something is missing in one sentence, and in the next sentence, something is there that should not be. Finding and eliminating these points of confusion allows the reader to focus on the importance of the ideas being communicated, and not the difficulties of the communication process itself.

Sometimes these problems arise from simple mistakes, common errors like verbs landing in the wrong tense or inappropriate translation choices that do not take into account multiple meanings of either or both words. Still other difficulties may not be apparent to non-native speakers, such as language that is academically correct but perhaps archaic. Finally, language that has been transferred through the original language to one version of the target language may or may not appear clear to a reader who is familiar with another version of the target language. In this case, when Ukrainian translators choose British stylistic devices, the American reader may be uncertain of the origin of the confusion.

As an American reader, I approach the task of editing translations as a semi-professional. Of course, I am a native speaker of the English language, which is greatly beneficial. Also, I am professionally trained as an English teacher, and have seven years of teaching experience in American classrooms. Additionally, I have a Master's degree in Writing, which allows me to feel some expertise in the field. However, my experience in the field of translation is very limited. While studying Spanish at the university level, I completed coursework on direct translations, and my basic knowledge of Ukrainian allows me to read only simple texts without difficulty. I have no training in the field of linguistics, nor advanced or specialized translation techniques.

With this perspective, I have worked on three different translation projects while serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Ukraine. The first was *From Ukrainian Antiquity: An Illustrated History of the Cossack Past*, written by Dmytro Yavornytsky. The second was the subtitles for *Neptune's Trident*, a short film written and directed by Ivan Kanivets. The third project was the official website for Lesia Ukrainka Volyn National University. In each of these projects, "first-stage" translation was completed by students or recent graduates. My task for each was originally identified as editing the texts to ensure accuracy.

As I worked on each project, however, it became clear to me that my task was not simply to be certain that appropriate punctuation and spelling were used. Yes, there were some basic and obvious errors, but there were also some complicated article issues, an overuse of too many descriptors before nouns, British versus American English, historical terms, formatting, and other problems to consider. In short, it was harder than I had thought it would be.

Simple errors were easy to fix, including homophone errors and spelling mistakes. One of the categories that students seemed to have the most trouble with overall was the use of articles. Naturally, in moving from a system without articles to a system with them, students must know not only many grammar rules, but also must be familiar with context, as well as common usage.

To say that someone is "a Head of a branch of Ukrainian Historical Society named after Myhailo Hrushevskyyi at VNU" makes me wonder: Is there more than one head of this organization? Is there more than one branch? Is this the Ukrainian Historical Society, or is there more than one such organization, and this is the one named after Myhailo Hrushevskyyi? Are other branches also named after the same gentleman?

Using articles appropriately also enhances parallel structure. If the author writes "The beginning of the twentieth century was an astonishing time," then this must be followed up with "An age of Empires. An age of inventions."

The most striking article usage—or perhaps misuse—that bothered me repeatedly throughout these projects was the way the Autonomous Republic of Crimea is referred to. Coming from America, I would call this peninsula Crimea. In Ukrainian English, however, I find references such as the title *Lesia Ukrainka and the Crimea*. Throughout Ukrainian-to-English translations of historical and modern texts, Crimea is referred to as the Crimea. Perhaps this decision reflects its official title "The Autonomous Republic of Crimea," but I would never turn "The United States of America" into *the* America. Yes, Crimea belongs to Ukraine. In America, many people refer to Ukraine as *the* Ukraine. I believe that this is a holdover from the time of the Soviet Union, when this usage relegated Ukraine to the status of a dependent and constituent part of the USSR. In Ukraine, of course, I'm told, it's Ukraine, not *the* Ukraine. Fine, but then it seems to me it should be Crimea, and not *the* Crimea. I have not been able to change any minds on this point, and every translation has gone to final publication with this *the* firmly in place. In a land and language without definite articles, this is a point on which Ukrainian English-speakers are very definite.

Another common problem in translating Ukrainian to English seems to be the use of too many descriptors before a noun. Maybe it's fine to say so in Ukrainian, but in English, it's often awkward to wait until the very end of a phrase or sentence to find out who or what is being described. Clarifying these phrases requires a reshuffling of syntax and often an insertion or removal of prepositions.

"Upcoming in the University events" can easily become "Upcoming University events" or "Upcoming events on campus," if it's more important to emphasize the location of these events than their affiliation.

"On December 17th, 1917, the first *in the twentieth century* Soviet-Ukrainian War began." My revision: "On December 17th, 1917, the first Soviet-Ukrainian War of the twentieth century began."

At a fair, "one can hear fine sounds of the nice reed pipe and *loved by the Ukrainians tambourine.*" One might hear, instead, "the tambourine, beloved by Ukrainians."

"*Hidden for a long time feeling of love* of a girl to a Cossack at last becomes known to her father and mother, and to the whole village." Instead: "A girl's love for her/ a Cossack, long hidden, eventually/ finally becomes clear to all."

A similar delay is also used with names. Introducing names at the very end of a list of titles or degrees may be appropriate in an awards ceremony or some other formal speech of recognition. However, in such cases, the identity of this honoree is generally already known, and the use of the slight delay in stating his or her name serves to emphasize accomplishment and build a sort of dramatic suspense. In written texts, however, clarity should prevail, and the name should precede the description. An article might say that a text was "represented by an authoress – Candidate of philological sciences, research worker of Shevchenko Institute of Literature of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine L. Demska-Budzuliak." In this situation, we not only have to wait to find out the name of this author, but we are forced to be content with a first initial. My preferred translation would state that this representation was by "L[full name] Demska-Budzuliak, Candidate of Philological Sciences and researcher of Shevchenko Insitute of Literature of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine."

This last example prompts me to note an additional point about feminizing professions. In modern American English, calling a female author an authoress or a female poet a poetess is simply not done. In the Ukrainian language, the term is simply a way to show that the writer is a woman, but in English, this is an outdated use of language. In the same way that I would not identify someone as "a male nurse" or "a lady doctor," but as a nurse or a doctor, I would not use the terms authoress or poetess. These terms generally seem to indicate a diminutive form of this profession, or at the very least an old-fashioned context.

Considering correct English translation in Ukraine has often led me to question whether I should be reading as an American or as a British reader. Of course, I'm American, but I find myself having to second-guess unusual usages, wondering if they are actually British, and therefore acceptable to Ukrainian English readers. Spelling is the most obvious of these differences— with the addition of the letter "u" or a switch from a "z" to an "s"—and I find myself questioning why I should be ensuring the use of British English. Read the following example:

The main goal of the European Union Information Centres is to spread information about the European Union and its policies, to provide assistance to universities and research centres for the students' studies and research on European integration and to favor students' participation in debates on European questions.

As I read this, I note the use of "centres" instead of "centers" and recognize this as the British choice, but stop short at "favor". Why should the same translator choose the British version for one word and the American version [as opposed to "favour"] for another? Of course Ukrainians have access to texts and other media from all over the world, and it's perfectly reasonable that non-British choices should be considered. The issue for teachers and translators, then, is consistency. For me, however, the issue in the back of my mind is wondering what's wrong with American English. Throughout the year and a half I've spent in Ukraine, I've never met any native speakers of English who were British. Canadians, yes, and many Americans—of course my membership in Peace Corps enhances the chance that I'll meet other Americans—but never a citizen of England or even the United Kingdom. How long will Ukraine continue to use exclusively British English? Certainly a question beyond the scope of my qualification, but definitely a point of regular reflection, as I encounter plenty of "got" in my students' writing, and wonder where it comes from. Americans don't use "got" nearly as often, we say "version" and rarely "variant", and the words "revision" and "review" have different meanings. As a side note, this last pair occasionally causes confusion when I talk about the writing process with teachers or students. In British English, "to revise" and "to review" a text both seem to mean the same thing: to look over it briefly. Thus, when students are asked to prepare for a test, they're asked to revise their textbooks. In American English, "to review" also means to look over, but "to revise" means to make changes. A student reviews for a test by looking over a textbook, but revises an essay by developing the ideas and correcting errors.

Historical terms, especially those that were simply transliterated, posed a challenge, as well. First, consistency in spelling is necessary. Also, how can transliterated words be pluralized to help the English-speaking reader? Should the plural of "duma" be "dumas" or "dumy"? Students took a variety of approaches, and so I occasionally read about both "haydamaks" and "haydamaky" as well as "pans" and "pany". Does more than one "hetman" create "hetmany" or "hetmans" or "hetmen"?

Formatting is another area in which clarity and consistency are needed. In American English, quotation marks are used for dialogue, for titles of articles, and for a few other purposes, occasionally to introduce a skeptical or sarcastic tone. In Ukrainian-to-English translations, I feel that these same rules should apply in use of quotation marks. A stadium does not need to be referred to as stadium "Sport Shot" and a camp does not need to be referred to as training camp "Hart" any more than a hotel needs to be called hotel "Ukraine". Sport Shot Stadium, Camp Hart, and Hotel Ukraine are more in line with American usage. Also, consider time. If a text reads, "At 14.00 p.m. the launch of fictional and scientific editions began," one wonders if there is a 14.00 a.m. Choosing to write 2:00 p.m. is the more American option, but writing 14.00 is fine, too. Centuries might be referred to as the 19th and early 20th centuries, not "XIX-begin. XX c."

Titles of individual positions [Hetman, Rector], departments [Philological Sciences], or names of organizations lead to confusion when not appropriately capitalized. Capitalize each important word of the title to ensure clarity. For example:

Also at the plenary meeting took place the solemn transfer by the State Service of the control over the conveyance of cultural values across the national boundary of the documents and memoirs of Lesia Ukrainka and the Kosach family to Lesia Ukrainka Research Institute of Volyn National University.

It helps to know that an organization of this sort exists, as well as to know its title.

Some concerns resulted from students choosing words that are not commonly used English words. A group is more likely to be in charge of "recording" Board meetings than in charge of "recording" of these meetings. It is unlikely that an organization has a goal of carrying out "informization", as such a word does not exist.

Some words are real words, but do not fit the situation. If a webpage invites, "Travel through our page and please ask for elucidation," it does sound very sophisticated, but "Browse" and ask for "clarification" or "further information" would work better. When reading "The staff of the college believes that the right education, development of physical, mental and moral health is an absolutely realized goal," it is understood that the staff thinks this goal has already been achieved. An "achievable" goal means that the process is still ongoing. The difference in meaning between methodical and methodological, both real words, is often neglected. Some of these errors are no doubt because of an incorrect choice of meaning of the translated word. For example, someone who is identified as "co-author of ... several course books in Psychology, including that with the vulture MES of Ukraine" probably has little to do with a large carrion-eating bird and more to do with another translation of гриф.

The errors that I found most endearing—although, of course, still incorrect—were the ones that offered interesting but probably incorrect interpretations. A department may in fact organize "pretentious activity", but it would hardly be advertised as such. The job title "Sound Producer" is most entertaining with a literal interpretation—a child could fill this role. The phrase "tender rejection" brings to mind a kind-hearted break-up, not a refusal to accept money.

In future projects, I will keep these concerns in mind, and will never again underestimate the difficulty of "translating" English to English.