

Charles Marlow: Narration in Translation

Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to examine selected issues concerning the differences in the reception of specific narratorial features as regards the original literary text and its translation. The analysis focuses on a unique narrator created by Joseph Conrad – a story teller and yarn spinner Charles Marlow. Marlow as a first-person narrator, who recounts his experiences to his intradiegetic addressees, employs characteristic techniques to communicate with his listeners, to make them involved in his stories, and to re-live his experiences. If ignored or overlooked by a translator, narrative techniques and linguistic features typical of him disappear, thus changing the reception of him as a narrator. This shift in reception and the very image of Marlow is exemplified by ignoring such features as Marlow's phatic communication with his intradiegetic addressees (the use of such expressions as "you see", "you understand"), interpretive markers that indicate Marlow's imperfect knowledge or hesitation (expressions such as "I think", "I believe"), linguistic patterning (repetitions) and cases of delayed decoding.

Keywords: Charles Marlow, Joseph Conrad, first person narrator, intradiegetic communication, translation

Marlow as narrator and character

Charles Marlow appears in four works written by Joseph Conrad (1857–1924): a short story *Youth* (1902), a novella *Heart of Darkness* (1899), and two novels – *Lord Jim* (1899–1900) and *Chance* (1912). These works are characterised by complex narrative structures, including stories within stories (frame narratives) and multiple narrators. In each of them an anonymous frame narrator introduces an intradiegetic narrator, Marlow, who spins his yarns but also permits others to tell their stories. Conrad privileged the diegetic aspect of his works: the very act of storytelling. Thus, the context of the narrative situation never allows both the narratees and actual readers to forget that they are being presented with a version of events mediated by particular narrators.

With respect to Conrad's novella, Stephen Ross observed that

Heart of Darkness is by now so familiar to us, so studied, commented upon, written about, argued over, appropriated, liberated, vilified, recuperated, rehashed, taught and retaught that it might seem as though there can hardly be anything left worth saying about it. [...] the virtual industry of criticism [...] has sprung up around *Heart of Darkness* in the century since its publication¹.

¹ Stephen Ross, "Desire in *Heart of Darkness*", *Conradiana* 2004, vol. 36, no 1–2, p. 65.

Similar comments can be made about Marlow and yet new analyses continue to emerge. My aim is to look at him from a translatorial perspective to indicate those narratorial aspects which should not disappear if Marlow in target texts is to remain equivalent to Conrad's original creation². I also intend to examine the actual translatorial practice and comment on one Polish version of *Heart of Darkness* that distorts this specific narrator. Given the complexity of issues connected with Marlow and his narrative strategies, my discussion will need to be limited to only selected aspects.

First, however, Marlow should be placed in a critical perspective. Initially, historical readers criticised him for being too garrulous and poetic and questioned his authenticity and orality: "He [Conrad] has also occasionally made his spokesman employ phrases such as no oral story-teller would be likely to compass. It is not thus that men speak"³. This was correlative to seeing Marlow as an actual sailor spinning his yarns, or even as Conrad from his sailing days. Virginia Woolf, perhaps unintentionally, paved the way for perceiving Marlow as Conrad's alter ego: "Conrad was a compound of two men; together with the sea captain dwelt that subtle, refined, and fastidious analyst whom he called Marlow"⁴. Many commentators equated Conrad with Marlow and confused the author with his creation, which led to interpretative fallacies and ungrounded accusations of racism, misogyny, anti-feminism etc. In the light of modern narratology and its principles this is no longer acceptable, yet still continues to happen.

Other earlier critics noticed an important function of Marlow: that of providing multiple points of view with which one situation may be considered⁵. This was proposed by Joseph Warren Beach who observed: "Conrad's problem was to secure the advantage of the many points of view without losing that of coherence. It was to make a real composite of these many pictures taken from so many diverse angles, to make a *synthesis* of material so disparate. And he solved that problem most successfully through the help of Captain Marlow"⁶. This multiplication of points of view is least evident in *Youth* and most strongly pronounced in *Lord Jim*, where not only several narrators are introduced (including the omniscient one in the initial chapters), but also various types of narration

² This refers to the notion of the semantic dominant as understood by Stanisław Barańczak. He defines it as a primary semantic element of a poem, its inefaceable and irremovable "formal" element that is the key to the poem's "content". In other words, this is an element that must be recreated if the translation is to function as an equivalent to the original text. See: Stanisław Barańczak, *Ocalone w tłumaczeniu*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo a5 1992, p. 21.

³ Review of *Lord Jim*, *Academy*, 10 November 1900, in: *Conrad: The Critical Heritage*, ed. N. Sherry, London – Boston: Routledge 1973, p. 117.

⁴ Virginia Woolf, "Joseph Conrad", *Times Literary Supplement*, 14 August 1924, p. 493.

⁵ This was understood traditionally as providing different perceptions (and assessment) of the same situation depending on the person involved. The idea was that Marlow expressed his views, recounted stories told by others and also allowed other characters speak for themselves (who changed from his narratees to narrators themselves, just as his status was a double one). This might be compared to Gérard Genette's multiple focalisation, where "the change in focus is manifestly accompanied [...] by a change in narrator, and there the translocalization may seem simply a consequence of the transvocalization" (Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1988, p. 66). In stories with Marlow the situation is, however, complicated because what is communicated by "new voices" (new narrators) is nevertheless still embedded in his story, thus mediated by him. He is the one who chooses how to recount the stories told by others (which information to provide and which to withhold).

⁶ Joseph Warren Beach, *The Twentieth Century Novel: Studies in Technique*, New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts 1931, p. 353.

are employed (Marlow's narration is both oral and written – in an epistolary form). Initially the obsessive emphasis on the very mechanics of storytelling was misunderstood by readers and critics alike; yet with the increased body of theoretical considerations, critics have come to appreciate the innovative nature of multiple points of view and temporal shifts, including analepsis, syllepsis, prolepsis and anachronies as well as such narrative techniques as delayed decoding (including symbolic deciphering), thematic apposition, and *progression d'effet* that collectively contribute to the mosaic structure of narration in this novel⁷.

Marlow was also considered as a tool for Conrad to create an authorial distance and achieve an illusion of objectivity. This point was made by Edward Crankshaw: "Marlow we find indeed a creature of necessity. For it was he among other aids who enabled Conrad to illuminate with subjective comment states of mind which he could never have rendered objectively because he could not invent, because he could not visualise what he had never seen"⁸. Marlow served as an intermediary: this invented narrator allowed the author to mediate his personal experiences and transform them creatively, while distancing himself from the opinions presented.

Over the years Marlow has continued to puzzle critics who have analysed him both in functional terms and as a character. Richard Curle saw Marlow predominately as "a literary device whereby the narrative can be carried on"⁹. He further stated that Marlow is not "a participant" (one who is both a character and a narrator, and participates in the action) but "an historian", implying that his role is limited to that of re-telling others' stories. A similar point was made by Paul Kirschner for whom Marlow is an "imaginative interpreter, not protagonist"¹⁰. Marlow is then perceived as an entity providing interpretations of events that he witnessed, but according to Kirschner, readers "are finally not so much interested in what the experience has done for Marlow personally as in the alarming potentialities of human nature"¹¹. This universalising quality of Marlow's narratives is stressed by those critics who see him as allowing Conrad to create the distance necessary to discuss moral issues without running the risk of being accused of moralising as an author. They focus more on Marlow's functions as a narrator than on him as a character. Ian Watt, for instance, finds Marlow "difficult to believe in as a fictional character"¹². This is a correlative of insufficient information provided to make him a traditional character equipped with individualised biography: Marlow "belongs to a class of one, a class composed of British ship's officers [...]; he emerges

⁷ For a detailed discussion of the narrative structure of *Lord Jim* and narrative effects, see the section "Struktura narracji" [Narrative Structure] in Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech, *Lord Jim Conrad. Interpretacje*, Kraków: Universitas 2007, pp. 139–153. Adamowicz-Pośpiech refers to several critics who analysed Conradian narrative techniques, in particular: Joseph Warren Beach, Ian Watt, and Jakob Lothe.

⁸ Edward Crankshaw, *Joseph Conrad: Some Aspects of the Art of the Novel*, London: John Lane 1936, p. 119.

⁹ Richard Curle, *Joseph Conrad and His Characters*, New York: Russell & Russell 1968, p. 62.

¹⁰ Paul Kirschner, *Conrad: The Psychologist as Artist*, Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd 1968, p. 48.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Ian Watt, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press 1981, p. 206.

before us weighed down by the knowledge and experience of a lifetime, and yet devoid of a biography – no birthplace, no home, no school, no fixed social or domestic ties”¹³. Even if critics refer to him as a character, as Harold Bloom for whom “Marlow is one of the most curious and fascinating of modern literary characters”¹⁴, they still consider him in functional terms. Bloom continues by stating that Marlow is “rather more a voice than an active being”¹⁵. He is enigmatic; one will only know about him as much as he wishes to reveal (except for scant comments offered by the frame narrator).

A different perspective was proposed by those critics who not only separated the author and the narrator, but also moved beyond perceiving Marlow as a functional device. For W. Y. Tindall, Marlow is “an embodied point of view” and “a personified observer” whose credibility is secured owing to his individuality and uniqueness: “[e]quipped with personality, character, limits, attitude, and tone – in a word, with body – Charlie Marlow and his conspiring voice become authentic”¹⁶. Developing on these assumptions, modern critics interpret Marlow as a full-fledged character (while not ignoring his formal and thematic functions). Bernard J. Paris sees Marlow as “one of the most remarkable psychological portraits in literature”¹⁷ and approaches Marlow as

an imagined human being whose thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, including his story telling, are expressions of his personality and experience. [...] as a continuously evolving individual, at different stages of life, whose disturbing experiences and involvements with other characters generate anxieties and inner conflicts from which he seeks relief through his narratives¹⁸.

This leads Paris to conclude that Marlow the narrator cannot be separated from Marlow the character as his narration is an integral part of a highly developed mimetic portrait, whereby the act of storytelling is an attempt to grasp the meaning of his experience. Thus producing an effect on his narratees is tightly linked with the achievement of certain gratifications for himself, whether relieving emotional stress or reestablishing “a conception of existence with which he can live”¹⁹. This echoes Tindall’s assessment that “whatever his apparent commitments, Marlow has Marlow in mind”²⁰. The narratives enable Marlow to learn something about himself as well as the world and essentially become “an epistemological quest for the truth about oneself”²¹. This is effected by what

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Harold Bloom, *Major Literary Characters: Marlow*, New York: Chelsea House Publishers 1992, p. 1.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ William Y. Tindall, “Apology for Marlow”, in: *From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad: Essays Collected in Memory of James T. Hillhouse*, ed. R. C. Rathburn and M. Steinmann, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1967, p. 276.

¹⁷ Bernard J. Paris, *Conrad’s Charlie Marlow: A New Approach to Heart of Darkness and Lord Jim*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2005, p. VIII.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 55.

²⁰ Tindall, op. cit., p. 277.

²¹ Agata Kowal, “It Seemed Somehow to Throw a Kind of Light on Everything about Me – and Into My Thoughts’ – Knowledge of the Self and the Other in *Heart of Darkness*”, *Yearbook of Conrad Studies (Poland)* 2014, vol. IX, p. 95.

Jakob Lothe calls a “searching narrative method”²². Psychological considerations help explain tensions, gaps, inconsistencies, differences in texture of Marlow’s various modes of narration²³. Psychological dimension is also linked to the manner in which he arranges and rearranges facts, selects and orders them in accordance to what he is trying to achieve in terms of impact on his addressees.

Another aspect to be clarified is that Marlow is a transtextual figure who is a “fluid” narrator/character. Marlow changes: he grows older from *Youth to Chance*; he gathers new experiences and collects new perspectives on life and himself. He develops as “a discursive commentator” and in his methods of presentation²⁴, introducing novel narrative techniques or mastering the ones already used. Although critics notice Marlow’s transformation, they disagree as to its reliability. Some, like J. W. Johnson, see this development as internally consistent, with Marlow evolving from a youthful participant in the adventures described in *Youth*, to participant but much less idealistic narrator in *Heart of Darkness*, as observer rather than participant in *Lord Jim* seeing life as complex, to the older, tolerant narrator in *Chance*, who comes to realise that life is governed by the eponymous chance²⁵. This consistency is questioned by John J. Peters who argues that the Marlow who narrates *Chance* differs essentially in his employment of language, his method of storytelling and world view, and thus “[b]ears little resemblance to the Marlow of Conrad’s earlier work”²⁶. Marlow’s transformation is not a linear one. He is, obviously, a superordinate entity that organises the four texts, though his involvement and status differ as his development progresses, leading Jakob Lothe to observe that “[t]he Marlow of *Chance* is, in fact, so different from the Marlow of ‘Heart of Darkness’ that the identical name is misleading”²⁷. In terms of his psychological development, the most significant moment is his meeting with Kurtz, the turning point in his life. In the opening sections of *Chance* he returns through explicit references to his youth, as if closing a life circle. Yet, the tone of his comments is definitely different: more ironic, more sarcastic perhaps; his views change, and as Peters argues, these developments are not really consistent with Marlow becoming more mature. Thus, “Conrad simply asks his readers to accept the remarkably different narrator”, quite unlike his previous incarnations²⁸.

²² Jakob Lothe, *Conrad’s Narrative Method*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1989, p. 43.

²³ Differences between Marlow’s oral and written narratives in *Lord Jim* as stemming from his psychology as a character are discussed in detail by Yusuke Takahata (Y. Takahata, “Marlow’s Psychology and His Two Narrative Perspectives in *Lord Jim*”, *Yearbook of Conrad Studies (Poland)* 2016, vol. 11, pp. 43–58).

²⁴ Tindall, “Apology...”, op. cit., 278.

²⁵ J. W. Johnson, “Marlow and *Chance*: A Reappraisal”, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 1968, vol. 1, no 1, pp. 93–95.

²⁶ John G. Peters, “‘Let that Marlow talk’: *Chance* and the Narrative Problem of Marlow”, *The Conradian* 2014, vol. 39, no 1, p. 131.

²⁷ Jakob Lothe, *Conrad’s Narrative Method*, op. cit., p. 38. For more on the difference between the methodology of narration in four Marlowian narratives, see: Peters, op. cit., pp. 134–139.

²⁸ Peters, op. cit., p. 143.

Marlow in translation

Conrad's works have been translated and retranslated in many languages and continue to generate new interpretations through translations. *Youth* was translated into Polish once²⁹; *Heart of Darkness* was retranslated six times³⁰; *Lord Jim* has four Polish translations³¹; and *Chance* was translated twice³². Given the diachronic distance between the translations of over a century and translatorial strategies and individual solutions, Polish versions of Conrad's works differ (sometimes significantly) from the originals as well as between each other. Here my point will not be to compare them all and their qualities, but rather to point to specific aspects inherent in Marlow's narrative method that influence the reception of him as a narrator if the translator is either unaware of those narratorial methods or not careful enough to reconstruct them closely. Due to the scope of this paper, I will focus only on a few examples from *Heart of Darkness* translated by Ireneusz Socha as this text most radically deforms the original³³.

1. Phatic Communication

In each tale once the frame narrator (extradiegetic narrator) introduces him, Marlow spins his yarns to his narratees (intradiegetic addressees). They, including the frame narrator, remain rather inactive: in *Youth* and *Lord Jim* they do not respond, in *Heart of Darkness* the frame narrator interrupts Marlow's narration a few times; the most active one is the frame narrator in *Chance*, who actually converses with Marlow. Nevertheless, Marlow, especially in the first two tales, despite the apparent indifference of his listeners, constantly stresses the narrative situation and communicates with his narratees. In *Youth* he resorts to the phrase "Pass the bottle" (directly related to the narrative situation: Marlow and his friends are sitting round a mahogany table that reflects the bottle), which reminds readers that they are dealing with an orally produced tale – a tale told in the company of others. This obviously does not pose a challenge in translation, and Aniela Zagórska

²⁹ Joseph Conrad, *Młodość*, trans. A. Zagórska, Warszawa: Dom Książki Polskiej 1930. This translation reappeared in its corrected version in the edition of Conrad's works edited by Z. Najder: Joseph Conrad, *Młodość i inne opowiadania*, trans. A. Zagórska, in: Joseph Conrad, *Dzieła*, vol. 6, Warszawa: PIW 1972.

³⁰ Joseph Conrad, *Jądro ciemności*, trans. A. Zagórska, Warszawa: Dom Książki Polskiej 1930; corrected version: Joseph Conrad, *Jądro ciemności*, trans. A. Zagórska, in: J. Conrad, *Dzieła*, vol. 6, Warszawa: PIW 1972; Joseph Conrad, *Jądro ciemności*, trans. J. Polak, Poznań: SAWW 1994; Joseph Conrad, *Jądro ciemności*, trans. B. Koc, Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza 2000; Joseph Conrad, *Jądro ciemności*, trans. I. Socha, Kraków: Wyd. Zielona Sowa 2004; Joseph Conrad, *Jądro ciemności*, trans. P. Jabłońska, Kraków: Greg 2006; Joseph Conrad, *Jądro ciemności*, trans. M. Heydel: Znak 2011; additionally, a transmutation (free adaptation) appeared – *Serce ciemności* by J. Dukaj, but its status as translation is questionable (Joseph Conrad, *Serce ciemności*, trans. J. Dukaj, Kraków: Wyd. Literackie 2017).

³¹ Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, trans. E. Węśławska, Warszawa: Druk Józefa Sikorskiego 1904; Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, trans. Aniela Zagórska, Warszawa: Dom Książki Polskiej 1933; corrected version: Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, trans. A. Zagórska, in: Joseph Conrad, *Dzieła*, vol. 5, Warszawa: PIW 1972; Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, trans. M. Kłobukowski, Kraków: Znak 2001; J. Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, trans. M. Filipczuk, Kraków: Wyd. Zielona Sowa 2003.

³² Joseph Conrad, *Los* (installments), trans. B. Beaupre, Kraków: Czas 1921/1922; Joseph Conrad, *Los*, trans. T. Tatarkiewiczowa, Warszawa: PIW 1961; corrected version: Joseph Conrad, *Gra losu*, trans. T. Tatarkiewiczowa, in: Joseph Conrad, *Dzieła*, vol. 15, Warszawa: PIW 1973.

³³ A comprehensive comparison of Polish translations (except for that of Magda Heydel and Patrycja Jabłońska) featuring Marlow is conducted in my book. See: Ewa Kujawska-Lis, *Marlow pod polską banderą. Tetralogia Josepha Conrada w przekładach z lat 1904–2004*, Olsztyn: Wyd. UWM 2011.

quite consistently reconstructs this feature. The situation changes in *Heart of Darkness*, where Marlow employs a variety of phatic expressions to maintain contact with his intradiegetic addressees, such as: “you know”, “you see”, “you say”, “you remember”, “you ought to know”, “you understand”, “I tell you”. Apparently insignificant, these expressions appear to have three functions. First, Marlow uses them in the most basic socio-pragmatic function to establish, maintain, and manage bonds of sociality between himself and his narratees as participants in the communicative situation. Second, they often accompany those fragments of narration when Marlow is particularly disturbed or searches for an understanding of his experience. Thus, they contribute to his act of storytelling as a quest for his self-knowledge and for the pursuit of the elusive truth behind the facts. Third, these expressions indicate Marlow’s need to be listened to – a form of gratification for his narrative effort. As Ross Chambers observes:

It is plausible to assume that at the bottom the narrator’s motivation is like that of the narratee and rests on the assumption of exchanging a gain for a loss. Where the narratee offers attention in exchange for information, the narrator sacrifices the information for some form of attention. Consequently, there is a sense in which the maintenance of narrative authority implies an act of seduction, and a certain transfer of interest (on the narratee’s part) from the information content to the narrating instance itself³⁴.

Lothe relates this contention to the change of narration from the omniscient one in the first five chapters of *Lord Jim* to first-person narration provided by Marlow and sees “the affinity of Marlow’s motivation to narrate and the narratees’ motivation to listen, indeed to remain listening for a long time”³⁵. He thus sees a certain form of narrative seduction thanks to which Marlow attracts attention when he addresses his narratees directly that seems more powerful than in the case of the initial omniscient narration.

In *Heart of Darkness* the transfer of interest is painfully aborted and communication seems one-sided. Marlow’s phatic expressions emphasise his motivation to tell his story – he needs his narratees to be as involved in it as he is. He is trying to come to terms with his Congo experience and make sense of it through the very act of relating it. But he also seeks attention and, perhaps, some sort of confirmation as to the significance of the story. Yet, in the end his attempts to maintain this contact with his narratees are futile as, apart from the frame narrator (and another person for a while), others are asleep, signifying their lack of interest in what Marlow is struggling to communicate to them.

Thus, expressions with which Marlow directly addresses his narratees are important markers of his narrative authority as well as of his internal motivations (psychological needs as a character) and consequently should be carefully reconstructed in translation if Marlow in target versions is to possess analogical features to the original creation.

³⁴ Ross Chambers, *Story and Situation: Narrative Seduction and the Power of Fiction*, Manchester: Manchester UP 1984, p. 51.

³⁵ Jakob Lothe, “Repetition in Conrad’s *Lord Jim*”, in: *L’Époque Conradienne*, Numéro special: *Lord Jim*, vol. 30, Limoges: Pulim 2004, p. 102.

Most translators recreate phatic expressions. However, in the translation offered by Ireneusz Socha Marlow's efforts to maintain contact with his narratees are diminished as such are largely ignored:

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| <i>Heart of Darkness</i> ³⁶ | <i>Jądro ciemności</i> , trans. I. Socha |
| Being hungry, you know , and kept on my feet too, I was getting savage. (p. 75) | Znów mu przerwałem, bo z głodu i ze zmęczenia byłem już wściekły. (p. 26) |
| You see I rather chummed with the few mechanics. (p. 85) | Kumplowałem się z nielicznymi, przebywającymi w stacji, mechanikami. (p. 33) |
| His name, you understand , had not been pronounced once. (p. 90) | Naturalnie, jego nazwisko nie padło ani raz. (p. 37) |

Such losses eliminate a characteristic feature of Marlow. If occasionally implied, they do not fundamentally change the image of this narrator as in translations of *Lord Jim* where phatic phrases are also now and again omitted; however, when accumulated (the case of Socha's translation of *Heart of Darkness*) omissions deprive Polish readers of an important aspect of narration. Omissions largely efface the narrator's orality – the original Marlow is both self-conscious and conscious of his status as a teller of a tale. As such, he employs various means to attract his listeners and tries to make his narratees involved in his story rather than ignoring their presence by not addressing them directly.

This deformation of Marlow in translation is the result of translators' desires to create fluent target texts. Phatic expressions interrupt the flow of speech and, although perfectly natural in English, may sometimes sound artificial in Polish. Hence some translators omit them (Socha most glaringly), thus changing the discursive level of the text. At the same time such an approach demonstrates the misunderstanding of the nature of Marlow as a narrator who constantly tries to maintain contact with his narratees even if to no avail.

2. Interpretive markers

Since the act of telling serves Marlow to understand the nature of his experience and gain some self-knowledge, he signifies that he is not necessarily certain of the meaning of particular situations and their aftermaths by interspersing his narrative with expressions such "I think" or "I believe". Although Marlow is familiar with the events (after all his stories are retrospections), his narration is highly interpretative. He organises the story, selecting the order in which particular scenes are described, while imposing a particular level of uncertainty with expressions that are meant to indicate that he is still processing the information content he is communicating. In order to reconstruct this narratorial feature, it is sufficient not to omit such phrases (there are no vast systemic

³⁶ J. Conrad, *Youth, Heart of Darkness, The End of the Tether: Three Stories*, London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd. 1948 [emphasis mine].

differences between languages that would preclude the employment of such phrases). Most translators do not ignore them, yet Socha again, aiming perhaps at conciseness, omits interjections. Consider for instance the sentence: "I think it had whispered to him"³⁷ that refers to the influence of the jungle on Kurtz. Marlow speculates on what happened to Kurtz; he himself strives to comprehend what lay behind Kurtz's transgression even years later when he recounts the story. Thus he eschews imposing one definitive interpretation and allows for various interpretive possibilities by quantifications that signify his uncertainty. Such phrases as "I think" in this example contribute to the inconclusiveness of Marlow's narration since what he thinks does not need to be accepted unquestioningly. In Socha's translation Marlow's image changes (or the image of him formed by both his narratees and real readers) since he emerges as much more confident in his interpretation of events. He is unfaltering in his pronouncements: "Pierwotny szept odkrywał przed Kurtzem [...]" [the primal whisper uncovered before Kurtz]³⁸. The loss of the interpretive interjection illustrates quantitative impoverishment in translation³⁹, but in the case of this narrative significantly effaces Marlow's quest for signification. As Cedric Watts observes with reference to Conrad's oblique narrative method, covert and overt plots, it is actually during the telling of the story that Marlow begins to understand⁴⁰. This is exemplified with the wrecking of the steamer: "I did not see the real significance of that wreck at once. I fancy I see it now, but I am not sure – not at all"⁴¹. At issue here is the interpretive mode of telling and the notion of delayed decoding, both significant features of Marlow's narration that should by no means be ignored for the sake of naturalness of the target text.

3. Delayed decoding

The term "delayed decoding" was introduced by Ian Watt to indicate the narrative strategy which involves the postponing of the interpretive process. The narrator provides sensory data, but then it takes a while for the narratees (as well as the narrator himself and the readers) to correctly interpret or decode them. The narrator offers first impressions which will be clarified later and according to Watt, this "takes us directly into the observer's consciousness at the very moment of the perception, before it has been translated into its cause"⁴². Delayed decoding has been a well-established notion in the Conradian criticism, linked directly to Conrad's impressionism, "whereby the text produces small narrative secrets through close attention to sense impressions"⁴³. This method is not unique

³⁷ Ibid., p. 131.

³⁸ Conrad, *Jądro ciemności*, trans. I. Socha, op. cit., p. 65.

³⁹ Quantitative impoverishment is one of the twelve tendencies deforming the translated text with respect to its original differentiated by Antoine Berman and refers to a lexical loss (A. Berman, "Translation and the Trials of the Foreign" (1985), trans. L. Venuti, in: *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. L. Venuti, London and New York: Routledge 2003, p. 291).

⁴⁰ See Robert Gavin Hampson, *Conrad's Secrets*, New York: Palgrave 2012, p. 22.

⁴¹ Conrad, *Three Stories*, op. cit., p. 72.

⁴² Watt, op. cit., p. 175.

⁴³ Hampson, op. cit., p. 21.

to Marlow and can be found also in Conrad's other earlier texts, yet by the time *Heart of Darkness* appeared, the writer had mastered the technique "to present a sense impression and to withhold naming it or explaining its meaning until later", thus "as readers we witness every step by which the gap between the individual perception and its cause is belatedly closed within the consciousness of the protagonist"⁴⁴. John G. Peters emphasises a double purpose of this narrative device:

First, it places the reader in the position of the character viewing the event so that the reader experiences what the character does at the very moment that character experiences it, thus providing a realism and immediacy to the reader's experience. Second, delayed decoding emphasizes the tenuous nature of human perception, demonstrating that what one experiences filters through one's consciousness and hence is subjective and not objective⁴⁵.

Marlow's narratees, along with real readers, are presented with information; they form some suppositions, but these formulations are either defective or the addressees (both at the extradiegetic and intradiegetic levels) are unable to create a coherent whole as the data available at the time of the event and offered by Marlow are insufficient. Marlow, being a homodiegetic narrator (both a narrator and a character in the stories), furnishes information in a manner perceived by him as a character and participant in the events recounted. Thus his addressees process the data as if from his internal focalising perspective. This could be linked to what Genette termed paralipsis: "the holding back of information that would be logically produced under the type of focalisation selected"⁴⁶. Given that Marlow the narrator retells his own experience years later, he knows the facts, but he either withholds them or presents the incidents obliquely to create an impression that he is processing their significance during the act of telling.

This emphasis on the perceptions of the subjective viewer, "the verbal equivalent of the impressionist painter's attempt to render visual sensations directly" that makes "the reader aware of the gap between impression and understanding"⁴⁷, seems difficult to destroy in translation if one follows the textual level of the source text carefully (with particular attention given to the lexis). While most Polish translators manage to reconstruct this specific narrative technique, Socha tends to fill in the semantic gaps too quickly to make delayed decoding effective. This happens in the description of Kurtz's dwelling, where Marlow withholds information referring to the human heads on stakes as long as possible, inviting his narratees to formulate their own interpretations, even if such are initially defective:

These **round knobs** were not ornamental but symbolic; they were expressive and puzzling, striking and disturbing – food for thought and also for vultures if there had been any looking down from the sky; but at all events for such ants as were industrious enough to ascend the pole.

⁴⁴ Watt, op. cit., p. 175.

⁴⁵ John G. Peters, *The Cambridge Introduction to Joseph Conrad*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2006, p. 48.

⁴⁶ Genette, op. cit., p. 66.

⁴⁷ Watt, op. cit., p. 176–177.

They would have been even more impressive, **those heads on the stakes**, if their faces had not been turned to the house⁴⁸.

This is part of a longer passage and obviously when describing the dwelling Marlow might straightforwardly state that the house was surrounded by skulls of people killed or made to kill by Kurtz. Yet, he needs his narratees intrigued; he needs to bolster their motivation to remain listening, so he describes the phenomenon the way he perceived it when he saw it and thus he allows them to interpret the clues to clarify the meaning finally. He produces an uncanny effect of disturbing his narratees and making them realise that comprehension is a cognitive process based on making judgments and this is only possible if all data about a situation is available, while impressions may be deceptive. In Socha's translation the substitution of "knob" with "head" destroys the effect of delayed decoding: "Natknięte na końce słupów **głowy** miały coś symbolizować, a nie zdobić"⁴⁹. This tendency for clarification⁵⁰ runs counter to the very intention of delayed decoding and indicates that despite a vast body of critical literature available, the translator did not create sufficient meta-contexts to adequately render the narratorial feature that manipulates "the reader into a position approximating to that of the frame narrator as narratee"⁵¹. Through delayed decoding Conrad makes the implied audience (and also real readers) respond to the tale in the way Marlow apparently reacted to witnessed events. Although the reactions of neither the frame narrator nor other narratees are explicitly recorded, one can assume that while in the Congo Marlow was shocked and shaken by his experience, he continues to be shaken while telling his story and this shock is shared by the frame narrator (and the other narratee who is not asleep). If translated properly, without reducing the effect of delayed decoding, the real audience should also be shaken.

4. Repetitions

Although Marlow's narration is both provided orally and in a written form, the former mode predominates and his orality is strongly emphasised. His status as a story teller has been linked to the tradition of Polish *gawęda* and the English yarn⁵². Among various features contributing to Marlow's orality are different types of repetitions: syntactic parallelisms, anaphoric links between paragraphs, lexical repetitions, and sound repetitions (alliterations)⁵³. At this point, I would like to indicate only one type of repetition

⁴⁸ Conrad, *Three Stories*, op. cit., p. 130 [emphasis mine].

⁴⁹ Conrad, *Jądro ciemności*, trans. Socha, op. cit., p. 65 [emphasis mine].

⁵⁰ Clarification is another deforming tendency, "which particularly concerns the level of 'clarity' perceptible in words and their meanings" (Berman, op. cit., p. 289).

⁵¹ Jacob Lothe, "From Narrator to Narratee and from Author to Reader: Conrad and His Audience", *Yearbook of Conrad Studies* 2007, vol. 3, p. 27.

⁵² This is discussed in more detail in my paper "Alliteration as a means to reinforce orality in Conrad's early Marlow narratives" to be published shortly, and also with respect to narration in *Lord Jim* by Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pospiech, op. cit., pp. 112–120.

⁵³ These aspects in relation to Polish translations are discussed in my *Marlow pod polską banderą...: anaphors* (pp. 146-163), alliterations (pp. 261–274).

problematic for translators – linguistic patterning that functions as a verbal echo when Marlow begins a new paragraph with his comment on the words spoken (and quoted by him) by other characters.

In *Heart of Darkness* this verbal echo appears in the fog episode and illustrates the manner in which Marlow reflects on the manager's question (who actually repeats the question asked by someone else), deliberately "parroting" the original utterance: "**Will they attack?**" whispered an awed voice⁵⁴; "**Will they attack, do you think?**" asked the manager, in a confidential tone. "**I did not think they would attack**, for several obvious reasons"⁵⁵. The change in the grammatical tense stresses the narrative situation: the past tense in Marlow's comment is apt for his reminiscence, while the future form in the quoted utterances contributes to the dramatic tension of the situation perceived as if in the moment of happening. By the verbal repetition Marlow effortlessly moves between the "here and now" and the "afterwards", while linking the two levels. Though he changes the word order (as is required due to the embedded question structure), he nevertheless retains the evident parallelism. Grammatical correctness in his comment seems to stress Marlow's calm. He remains collected unlike his white companions who begin to panic. Marlow in a matter-of-fact manner explains to his narratees why the steamship would not be attacked and his composure distances him from the other whites. He becomes the centre of self-possession and assuredness in the midst of the unpredictable. Later, of course, the boat is attacked and Marlow seems to have been wrong in his evaluation, yet this happens only after the fog has lifted, so his initial arguments were sound enough. His repetition also reveals his ironic attitude towards the pilgrims who are unable to assess the situation, whereas he can consider it pragmatically.

No significant differences between English and Polish make this repetition impossible in the target texts. Especially lexical parallelism is easily achievable. Surprisingly, only the last translation by Magda Heydel reconstructs the repetition⁵⁶, while the others more or less significantly deform the original narrative intention of creating the verbal echo. The translators select synonymic verbs referring to the cognitive processes, as can be seen in Socha's translation: "Sądzi pan, że zaatakują? [...] Nie wydawało mi się, żeby mogli zaatakować"⁵⁷ and sometimes also words referring to the attack⁵⁸. The changed syntactic structure and different lexical elements in Marlow's reflection preclude establishing the notion of his echoing words spoken by others and thus linking closely two different deictic levels of the text in translation. When remembering the words spoken

⁵⁴ Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, op. cit., p. 102 [emphasis mine].

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 106 [emphasis mine].

⁵⁶ "Zaatakują? Jak pan sądzi?" [...] Nie sądziłem, żeby mieli zaatakować" (Conrad, *Jądro ciemności*, trans. Heydel, op. cit., p. 57.)

⁵⁷ Conrad, *Jądro ciemności*, trans. Socha, op. cit., p. 48.

⁵⁸ "Czy napadną nas, jak pan myśli?" [...]. – Nie sądziłem aby nas zaatakowali" (Conrad, *Jądro ciemności*, trans. Zagórska, op. cit., p. 138); "Jak pan myślisz, czy zaatakują? [...] – Nie uważałem, że zaatakują" (Conrad, *Jądro ciemności*, trans. Polak, op. cit., p. 93); "Jak pan myśli, będą nas atakować?" Nie sądziłem, by chcieli nas atakować" (Conrad, *Jądro ciemności*, trans. Koc, p. 83).

by the manager, Marlow makes a deictic shift to the moment of attack; when commenting upon them he returns to the past perspective on the events told from a different time mindset. This deictic shift is obviously noticeable in translations (marked both by punctuation and the change in tenses); however, the specific feature of Marlow's narrative is lost in all cases except for one. The reason is – most likely – the reluctance with which the Polish language greets repetitions; yet repetitions are an inherent aspect of Marlow's manner of storytelling.

Conclusions

It is virtually impossible to change the narrative situation in those works featuring Marlow, unless translators decide to introduce abridgements and, for instance, omit the frame narrator's comments and begin immediately with Marlow's narrative, thus removing the frame narration. Such texts, however, should not be qualified as translations *sensu stricte*. From the narratological perspective, adequate translation does not influence the structure of narration with the frame narrator introducing Marlow as the narrator of stories told to his narratees (with the frame narrator being one of them). In a similar vein, temporal shifts in Marlow's narrations, especially analepsis and prolepsis, are fully reconstructable if translators follow the original texts without rearranging the order of events to make them chronological. In not one Polish translation can such modifications be found. Thus globally, the narrative situation can be reproduced in translation without any loss.

However, depending on the translator's local decisions, Marlow's features as narrator and character may be quite drastically deformed, thus changing his image and limiting interpretive possibilities both as regards his psychological needs, his orality and storytelling skills. While some of his characteristic oratorical features are difficult to reconstruct and thus might be treated as secondary issues for translators (for instance alliteration which is always problematic in translation owing to sound differences between languages or creative employment of polysemy when different meanings of one lexeme are activated); other inherent aspects of Marlow's narration are generally translatable since they are not language-dependent in the sense of systemic obstacles. Such primary features to be reconstructed would definitely include delayed decoding, phatic expressions that serve to maintain contact with the narratees, expressions indicating Marlow's interpretive processes while narrating the stories, and (perhaps to a lesser extent) anaphoric structures. Deformations with respect to these aspects may stem either from the translator's lack of knowledge as regards narrative techniques introduced by Conrad or from the translator's wish to create a linguistically domesticated text that would read fluently and thus imposing target language discursive preferences (for instance resistance to repetitions, avoidance of interjections). Whatever the underlying causes, the result is a new Marlow: one whose unique features are diminished, effaced or removed.

W. Y. Tyndall begins his "Apology for Marlow" with referring to F. R. Leavis's misappreciation of Marlow: "The trouble with Conrad, indeed, the only trouble, says F. R. Leavis,

is Marlow⁵⁹. The trouble with Marlow from a translatorial perspective is that in order to reconstruct this fictional creation the translator must be acutely aware of his functions and specificities. In his case, even seemingly insignificant discursive aspects matter and need to be considered. Striving for an apparently fluently told tale is thus counter-productive because breaks in the narration, interjections, inconsistencies and repetitions have specific functions. In the case of this narrator even typographical markers are important (these are obviously introduced by the author, but represent graphically Marlow's silences, hesitations, uncertainties, changes in tone, etc.). As observed by Josiane Paccaud-Huguet, "Conrad's use of inverted commas, dashes and dots or colons is no mere rhetoric: it often produces rhythmical leaps between narrative levels, sudden twists of the strip making you hear, feel and see otherwise" and have "the value of truly performative acts"⁶⁰. This demonstrates the vast array of narrative aspects the translator must account for if the offered translation is to be interpretively comparable to the original. Unfortunately, as seen in Socha's translation, target texts do not always offer equivalent effects.

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⁵⁹ Tindall, op. cit., p. 274.

⁶⁰ Josiane Paccaud-Huguet, "'Those Broken Phrases': The Conradian Voice Effect", *Yearbook of Conrad Studies* 2007, vol. III, p. 65.

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