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The Bilingual Memory and Self-Translation: the Impact of the Relationship between
Language and Memory on the Autobiographical Self-Translation

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Table of Contents:

Introduction	3
Chapter I : Nabokov: Life and Language	6
Chapter II : Language and Memory	14
Chapter III : Memory Recall in “Mademoiselle O”/Chapter Five	24
Chapter IV : The Recall of Trauma in “Mademoiselle O”/Chapter Five	37
Conclusion	51
Bibliography	53

Introduction

Nabokov's autobiography is an interesting example of a rare genre of non-fiction writing: the self-translated autobiography. The self-translated autobiography is exceedingly rare in and of itself, naturally limited by the number of authors who are sufficiently bilingual and interested in writing an autobiography. However, Nabokov's is exceptional even beyond this: it exists in three complete editions written in English and Russian, along with autobiographical short stories written before the autobiography that were developed into chapters of the autobiography (including one, a short story called "Mademoiselle O," that was written in French). These texts, written over a period of thirty years, allow for a unique glimpse into Nabokov's writing process, as well as a unique view of his life through the lens of his different languages.

A number of differences naturally exist between each of the texts. Even the self-translator, privileged, unlike the more orthodox translator, with complete access to his own intentions and his own thought process, will experience difficulties translating his own text. Many of these differences can reasonably be attributed to a desire to improve the aesthetic quality of the texts: for instance, alliterative phrases increase between texts (for examples see Grayson, 152-4). However, there are a number of changes between texts that appear to be neither linguistically nor culturally driven. The texts feature the removal and addition of entire segments of text that in and of themselves pose little difficulty in terms of translation. Both Grayson and Pavlenko propose that the use of

Russian actually led to the recall of new memories (141; 189). This is a very interesting idea and certainly has interesting implications for the field of self-translation, as it suggests an internal impetus for changes between texts rather than an external. That is, it suggests certain translation decisions are made not for the sake of the audience's understanding of the work, but rather because of a differing level of access to memories based on the language of the text.

However, as this is the explicit focus of neither of the texts the idea is not pursued to a satisfying extent. Pavlenko lays some of the groundwork for a further study by suggesting a number of psycholinguistic studies that relate to the bilingual memory but provides limited reference to the text. The object of this study is to further address the suggestion that the language of the text does not just influence how something is communicated, but also *what* is communicated. In order to address this question I will analyze Chapter Five of the autobiography, which exists alongside its short story equivalent, "Mademoiselle O". This chapter of the autobiography is particularly well suited to such an analysis as it exists in five different editions and, more importantly, in all three of the languages that Nabokov spoke (the only one of his texts that is accessible in all three languages). A more thorough explanation of the specificities of each text will be addressed in Chapter II.

Chapter I will feature a biographical review of Nabokov's life, paying particular attention to the varying importance of the languages he used. Chapter II will review studies from the field of psycholinguistics that have attempted to understand the nature of memory in

bilingual individuals. This review will consider language and its role in the recall of memory as well as language and its role in addressing trauma, and will ensure that information found in the comparison of the texts will be meaningful. Chapters III and IV feature the textual analysis. Chapter III will analyze the text in terms of quality and quantity of memory in each text and how these features relate to the language of the text. Chapter IV will address the recall of traumatic memories and attempt to understand Nabokov's handling of traumatic recall based on the language of the text.

Understanding the crossover between language, memory and the self-translated autobiography will help us to better understand the meaning behind non-semantic and non-cultural translation choices in a self-translated autobiographical text.

Chapter I : Nabokov: Life and Language

Nabokov's childhood was undoubtedly one of privilege; he was born into the incredible wealth of an old aristocratic Russian family (by the age of 17 he had already inherited his own estate) and divided his years between the family's mansion in St Petersburg, their country estate at Vyra, and travelling through Western Europe. His parents were fluent speakers of English, Russian and French and Nabokov was bilingual from the start (*Vladimir Nabokov*, 20): he learned to speak Russian alongside English. In fact in 1905 his father learned that neither Nabokov nor his brother, despite being able to read and write in English, could perform either of these tasks in Russian (Boyd, 57). This was quickly remedied, although does serve to explain Nabokov's self-identification as "an English child" (*Strong Opinions* 81). Aside from these two languages he had a limited knowledge of several household French phrases, but did not actually speak the language until the arrival, when he was 5 years old, of Cécile Miauton, his French governess and the subject of Mademoiselle O and Chapter Five.

Cécile Miauton arrived in Russia in 1905 during the first winter the Nabokov family spent at their estate in Vyra. In *Drugie Berega* Nabokov recalls this winter fondly ("все было ново и весело – и валенки, и снеговики, и гигантские синие сосульки"); "everything was new and fun – boots and snowmen and gigantic blue icicles); however, he recalls in his autobiography that the change of location for the season was the result of the "strikes, riots and police-inspired massacres" occurring in St Petersburg at the time,

and that his father felt they would be safer at their quiet country estate (*Drugie Berega*, 81; *Speak, Memory* 97). He was likely correct. Grayson writes: “Since early childhood Nabokov had lived with a parent in the public eye, in continual danger of losing his life and liberty” (*Vladimir Nabokov*, 38). For two years following their 1906 return to St Petersburg they rented a house away from their Morskaya street mansion, which was in uncomfortably close proximity to the location of the massacre of children in Mariinskaya Square on Bloody Sunday (38).

The rest of Nabokov’s childhood in Russia was characterized by books and butterflies. Though he began studies at Ternishev School, a prestigious private school in St Petersburg, in 1910, and though the Nabokov children still had a private tutor until 1915, his own reading may have had the biggest impact (Boyd 90). Nabokov devoured the books in his father’s library: “between the ages of ten and fifteen in St. Petersburg, I must have read more fiction and poetry – English, Russian and French – than in any other five-year period of my life” (*Strong Opinions* 42). By 14 and 15 he claims to have “read or re-read all Tolstoy in Russian, all Shakespeare in English, and all Flaubert in French – besides hundreds of other books” (46). In 1916 he published Стихи (Poems), a collection of 68 poems written between 1915 and 1916 (Boyd, 118). He received a mix of reviews, from enthusiastic praise that he suspected of being insincere, to the delirious laughter shared by his classmates when his teacher sarcastically read Nabokov’s lines to the class (121).

Nabokov describes these years in Russia as “probably... the happiest childhood imaginable” (Boyd, 13). However, as the years progressed the tension in Russia grew, and the happy childhood drew to a close. The violence of 1917’s October Revolution took place right outside their door, and Nabokov recalls finishing his poetry for the evening and hearing “fierce rifle fire and the foul crackle of a machine gun” from the street (qtd. in Boyd 133). It was decided that the family would seek refuge in the Crimea. The family did not expect the Bolsheviks to hold on to power for very long, and so were not aware that their departure was permanent (136-7). They stayed there until April 15, 1919, when they left Sebastopol on a ship called the *Nadezhda* (Hope) amid machine gun fire. Nabokov and his father sat on deck playing (distractedly) a game of chess (160). They would never see Russia again. His poetry, which in his childhood had been dominated by love, would begin to carry the theme of exile, a theme that would fill his literature for the rest of his life.

They finally arrived in England, where Nabokov took up study (French and Russian) at Cambridge (funded by the sale of a string of his mother’s pearls and a scholarship he claimed was “awarded more in atonement for political tribulations than in acknowledgement of actual merit”) (Boyd 166). The adjustment to life in England (or rather, in English) was not easy: he suffered from an overwhelming fear of losing his command of Russian, or having it corrupted by the other languages around him (*Vladimir Nabokov* 51). He also missed Russia terribly. In a letter to his mother in 1920 he wrote:

Mother dear, yesterday I woke up in the middle of the night, and asked someone – I don't know whom – the night, the stars, God: will I really *never return*, is it really all finished, wiped out, destroyed...? In my sleep I saw black, eye-spotted caterpillars on vines of willow herb, then those yellowy-red wooden chairs, with fretwork backs like horses' heads which, remember, stood under the stairway in *our* house (step, step, step and I would stumble, you would laugh...) – Mother, we must return, mustn't we, it cannot be that this has all died, turned to dust – such an idea could drive one mad! I would like to describe every little bush, every stalk in our divine park at Vyra – but no one can understand this... How little we valued our paradise... - we should have loved it more pointedly, more consciously... (qtd. In Boyd, 177)

During this period in his life he focused his efforts on becoming a Russian writer (*Vladimir Nabokov* 48). He entered the Russian émigré literary community as Vladimir Sirin, a name chosen less to hide his own identity than to distinguish it from his father's (54). His father died in 1922 under tragic circumstances (assassinated in Berlin). Though devastated, he finished his studies, moved to Berlin, met Véra Slonim, his future wife, and continued writing.

Unlike the years of his youth, Nabokov spent his European years struggling financially, despite his literary success; his translation of *Alice in Wonderland* (Аня в стране чудес) was considered to be “the best translation of the book into any language” (Boyd 197). Berlin in the early 1920s was the centre of Russian emigration and, though no one back

in Russia was reading his work (and they wouldn't until after he had died), there was a large Russian émigré community to appreciate it (*Vladimir Nabokov* 61). However, Berlin's dominance as the Russian émigré capital did not survive Hitler's rise to power, and by 1933 the 500,000 Russian émigrés that had lived there in 1923 had dwindled to only 10,000 (68). Unlike the other 490,000 émigrés, Nabokov's chose to stay. The choice was predominantly linguistic: he had never felt any particular affinity towards Germany or German and never made any real effort to learn the language, despite living in Berlin for so many years. He was driven by the fear of losing his Russian, a fear that he claimed "became positively morbid and considerably more harassing than the fear I was to experience decades later of my never being able to bring my English prose anywhere close to the level of my Russian." Living in Germany posed no risk of this happening (Walsh Hokenson and Munson 178). Not so in France, where he both spoke the language and appreciated the culture – though the environment in Nazi Germany was dangerous in many ways, in terms of safeguarding his Russian it was very secure (*Vladimir Nabokov* 68).

By 1936, however, the Nabokovs (now Vladimir, Véra and their son Dmitri) were desperate to get out of the country. Véra (and therefore Dmitri as well) was Jewish, and in May of that year lost her secretarial job for that reason. In addition to this, one of the men convicted of the murder of Nabokov's father was appointed as under-secretary of the Department of Émigré Affairs, which was now setting out to register those Russians remaining in Berlin to act as translators for a planned attack on Russia. This was as far as he could let things go, and he began a long series of desperate letters attempting to find a

position teaching in an American university, “no matter how provincial” (Boyd, 428). With no positive responses he attempted to use the success he had gained in Paris during his 1932, 1936 (the year he presented his short story “Mademoiselle O”) and 1937 visits to get out of the now very dangerous Germany (*Vladimir Nabokov* 69). When he set out on his 1937 reading tour he set eyes on Germany for the last time (Boyd, 431).

His Russian publications earned him very little, and with the loss of Véra’s job their financial position was desperate (430). The threats of Nazism and poverty pushed him to accept that he would need to find a new language for his writing, and even before he left for France Nabokov had been toying with the idea of letting French become his literary language: Russian émigrés had poured out of Berlin and into Paris, and the readings he had given there had been incredibly successful (Morel, Asholt and Goldschmidt 53; 60). Not only did he not write much in French, however, he also did not stay very long in France: he never managed to obtain the documents needed to work in France, and with their financial situation growing increasingly more perilous, he turned his attention instead to the English literary world and continued to seek a teaching position in the United States or England (Boyd 432; 506). In late 1939 he finally succeeded (514). The timing couldn’t have been more desperate: in April 1940 the family received the passports and visas needed to leave for America, and in May the Germans breached the French border. Many Russian émigrés living in Europe would not survive the war, among them Ilya Fondaminsky, in whose basement were stored many of Nabokov’s books and papers, and Nabokov’s younger brother Sergey. Both were to die in Nazi concentration camps (522). Fortunately for the Nabokov’s, they managed to pull out of the harbor in St.

Nazaire around May 20th, three weeks before their apartment in Paris was destroyed by a German bomb (522-3).

Though he had long searched for a way to get to the United States his attitude towards the move was initially one of “deprivation and loss” (*Vladimir Nabokov* 79). Leaving Europe also meant leaving behind the Russian émigré community, which had acted as a last stronghold of his Russian language and culture. Most of his literary success at that point occurred within this community as well, and he travelled to a country in which he was relatively unknown. He was not going to be writing in Russian anymore, either: almost everything written during his life in the United States was in English. Despite all the apprehension, however, Nabokov built a happy life for himself in America – he was a successful professor, he rebuilt the literary reputation that he had left behind in Europe, and he fell in love with the country: “In America I’m happier than in any other country. It is in America that I found my best readers, minds that are closest to mine. I feel intellectually at home in America. It is a second home in the true sense of the word” (*Strong Opinions* 10).

Clearly language played a significant role in Nabokov’s life, not only in the way he interacted with the world around him, but in how he identified himself. He did not use each language equally, even during the periods in his life when he spoke all three on a daily basis: he used “Russian as the language of every day family communication, inner speech and even poetry, yet his diary was written in English, both in America and in francophone Switzerland” (qtd. in Pavlenko 221). Though he managed to employ each of

the three languages with relatively equivalent skill (Nabokov may disagree with this statement), he undoubtedly had a different relationship with each of them. An understanding of this information provides the context necessary to understand the text as it relates to the following study. In the following chapters I intend to show the impact that these different relationships had on the self-translation of his autobiographical texts. The next chapter will address studies in the field of psycholinguistics relating to the relationship between language and memory in bilingual speakers. It will cover the nature of memory access between multiple languages as well as the way that traumatic memories are recalled between languages. This will help to develop a better understanding of the meaning behind the differences in each text.

Chapter II : Language and Memory

The text that I will be using for the analysis is a short story in a number of different editions, existing either on its own as a short story called “Mademoiselle O” or as a chapter in Nabokov’s autobiography. There are five different editions, which will be referred to as E1-E5 based on their chronological order. A summary of each text can be found on page 16.

From his final years in Germany to his contented years in America to his return to Europe, each of these texts were written during a different period of his life and directed to a different kind of audience. Considering these texts were written and self-translated over a period of several decades (from 1936 to 1966), it will come as no surprise to find that differences exist between each of the texts. These differences amount to more than just stylistic edits, however. Several scholars have observed that the Russian edition of the text features an increase in new remembered events and stronger details added to memories featured in previous editions (*Nabokov Translated* 141; Pavlenko 189). They conclude that the act of writing his autobiography in Russian actually facilitated both easier and more detailed recall of those memories (*Nabokov Translated* 141; Pavlenko 189; Yu 2014). It is important to note that bilingualism can be referred to in two different ways: simultaneous bilingualism, where the two languages were learned at the same time

(simultaneously), and consecutive bilingualism, where the two languages were learned at different times in the speaker's life. Nabokov was then simultaneously bilingual in terms of his English and Russian, but consecutively bilingual in terms of his French. Though a number of factors will have contributed to the differences that exist between the texts in their different languages, this paper will follow the suggestions presented by Grayson and Pavlenko and attempt to explain how the characteristics of the bilingual memory influenced the outcome of the self-translated texts.

Though disagreement still exists between schools of thought, the theory that language influences the recall of memory is not a new one in psycholinguistics. A prominent theory in regards to language and memory recall is that of state-dependence, that is, if the language spoken at the time of memory encoding is the same as the language spoken at the time of memory recall, the memories recalled may be "more numerous, more detailed, more emotional or more vibrant" than if they were recalled in a different language (Scrauf 388). Javier, Barroso and Muñoz performed an experiment in which Spanish-English bilingual participants were asked to speak for five minutes about an interesting personal experience. They were asked to speak first in the language in which the experience took place, and then again after a break in their second language. They found that first language monologues were more vivid, emotional and elaborate than their second language equivalents (334).

Aragno and Schlachet observed that patients in therapy had more effective access to childhood memories when they were recalled in the same language as that of encoding

(Aragno and Schlachet 32). Several studies of consecutive bilinguals (bilinguals who learned their second language separately from their mother tongue) showed that first language cues were more likely to inspire memories from earlier in the lives of the

Table 1.

Reference	Publication	Date	Language	Type	Context
E1	<i>Mesures</i>	1936	French	Short story	Written for a reading in Paris while the author was living in Germany. The piece was not advertised as being
E2	<i>Nine Stories</i>	1947	English	Short Story	Translated with the help of Hilda Ward while the author was living in America. Closest in structure to the E1.
E3	<i>Conclusive Evidence</i>	1951	English	Chapter in autobiography	First edition of the autobiography. Author living in America. Several structural changes, such as the introduction of segments, are introduced in this version.
E4	<i>Drugie Berega</i>	1954	Russian	Chapter in autobiography	Russian edition of the autobiography. Written for the Russian émigré population, as the author was still not being published in Russia. Author living in America.
E5	<i>Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited</i>	1966	English	Chapter in autobiography	Final edition of the autobiography, written to incorporate the correction of a number of details. Author living in Switzerland.

Title	"Mademoiselle O"	"Mademoiselle O"	Chapter Five	Chapter Five	Chapter Five
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participants (Schrauf and Rubin 2000; Marian and Neisser 2000; Bugelski 1977). These studies were performed primarily on individuals who had immigrated to an English speaking country after spending some part of their lives in a country where their first language was dominant. Because the earlier stages of their lives were spent in a country where their first language was primarily spoken, we can assume that earlier memories correspond with a time when their mother tongue was more likely to be the language of encoding.

Unlike earlier studies, Marian and Neisser expanded on this knowledge by focusing specifically on the connection between the language of memory encoding and the language of memory recall (Marian and Neisser 2000). In two related cued-recall experiments performed with Russian/English bilingual individuals who had immigrated to the United States during adolescence, Marian and Neisser had a number of participants tell stories from certain stages of their lives. In experiment one each participant would recount an event in their life based on words from two sets of prompts, one in English and one in Russian. They would complete one part of the interview and one part in Russian. Results showed that when the ambient language was English participants recalled notably more "English memories" (memories encoded in English), and that when the ambient language was Russian, participants recalled more "Russian memories". These results show that the language of encoding of the memory is the important factor in

language-focused memory recall (for similar studies and results see also Matsumoto and Stanny 2006; Javier, Barroso and Muñoz 1993)

In a slightly different vein, some people some people will feel that it is not just different memories or feelings that they are accessing through their different languages, but different personalities. Schrauf cites the case of a Chilean woman living in New York City who dealt with her adjustment to the new surroundings by speaking only English outside of conversations with her family: “In English, her second language, she is strong, brave, and independent. In Spanish, she is her mother’s frightened, dependent child” (qtd. in Schrauf 404). Julien Green, a French-English bilingual author, writes that he becomes a different person when writing in English: “there was so little resemblance between what I wrote in English and what I had already written in French that it might also be doubted that the same person was the author of these two pieces of work” (qtd. in Koven 20). While these accounts are anecdotal, this does lead to the alternative theory that speaking in a certain language activates what is referred to as a “language-specific self” (while a different theory, this theory can coincide with the state-dependency theory) (388). Ewing suggests that as individuals we are actually made up of multiple self-concepts, and that the way we self-represent is context dependent (Ewing 1990). If language is a “culturally embedded practice” and plays a vital role in the construction and understanding of our sociocultural context (Schrauf 389), then it can reasonably be concluded that language is a significant contextual element that influences the way we self-represent. The language that a bilingual uses will influence the presentation of certain aspects of an individual’s personality and identity (Edwards 249). Ervin’s study on bilingual French and English

speakers showed that the language of speech had measurable effects on achievement related orientations in women: results showed that female subjects were more achievement-oriented when speaking in English than when in French (Ervin 506). Prior to conducting the experiment Ervin predicted that this would be the case, citing “the ambivalence of American education for women toward the role of housewife, in contrast with the French view, and on the greater sex-role difference in France” (501). She concludes that a change in language may represent a change in social roles and attitudes, and that her bilingual subjects present two different personalities depending on the language context (506). These results support a conclusion that our “self” is language dependent. Returning to language as it relates to memory, this language-specific self will then act as a filter through which memories are both encoded and retrieved. In this case it is the language-specific self, not the language, which acts as the “state” (Schrauf 388).

The implications of the study of language and memory recall extend into the world of therapy in interesting ways. In accordance with Javier, Barroso and Muñoz’s observation that memory recall in the non-encoding language led to the recall of less emotional and detailed memories, consecutively bilingual patients in therapy were found to experience greater emotional distance from traumatic events when recalling them in their second language (or rather, in a language other than that of encoding). In fact, some patients have preferred to address these therapy sessions in their second language, using it instinctively as a self-defense mechanism (de Zulueta 187): “I don’t want to talk German. I have a feeling that in talking German I shall have to remember something that I wanted to forget” (qtd. in Schrauf 399). One patient quoted in Aragno and Schlachet would stop

speaking in Spanish and choose to continue in English because “he felt flooded and overwhelmed by the dimension of the accompanying feelings and hence would need to institute characteristic defenses” (33). However, in some instances the use of the first language in therapy normally conducted in the second led to significant advances in therapeutic progress as the emotional barrier created by the language was lifted (Aragno and Schlachet 26; Schrauf 401).

Schwanberg’s study on language and its impact on retrieval of traumatic memories demonstrated that, when recalling traumatic childhood memories in both Spanish and English, participants responded more intensely in their first language (Schwanberg, 51). She also observed that memories recounted in the native language were longer, more detailed and more vivid, and that the second language recounts seemed more detached. She highlights the story of one participant who recalled a car accident that had occurred in her childhood. She was asked to tell her story in as much detail as possible in English (her second language) and then rate her reactions in terms of PTSD symptoms and the intensity of characteristics of the traumatic memory. The responses were mild. She then switched to Spanish:

She spoke for several minutes about the memory, gradually slowing in her speech until she asked if it would be alright if she stopped. She was reassured that it was perfectly fine to stop. After a short while, the interviewer asked her if she would like to share any thoughts or feelings she might be experiencing as a result of recounting this experience. She

answered, “It was like I was seeing it, right there in front of me – the accident. It wasn’t like that when I was speaking in English.” She went on to describe the vivid visual images of the car crash – seeing her injured father next to her in the ambulance and her terror that he would die.

(Schwanberg 52)

The speaker had access to the memory of her car accident in both English and in Spanish, but the use of a second language allowed her to distance herself from the intense emotions associated with the traumatic memory, and therefore more easily speak about them. Spanish, the language in use when the memory was encoded, caused her to experience the memory more intensely and in more detail.

The majority of the studies performed feature consecutively bilingual participants (that is, they learned their second language at a later date and in a different context than their first). It would be interesting to see a similar set of experimentation performed with simultaneous bilinguals (who learn their languages at the same time) in order to verify that they experience the same effect on memory recall. While they may use both of their languages during all of the periods of their lives, they may prioritize their languages in certain contexts or for certain subjects, meaning that certain types of memory will be more likely to be encoded in one language over the other. One example of this phenomenon was recorded by García-Sánchez, who studied the language used by young Moroccan girls who had immigrated to Spain during play (2010). While Arabic was the language of the home, the girls would use Spanish at school and during their play. While

the girls would use Arabic to direct and organize their play, the names of the dolls and the actual performance of the play were Spanish. This was the established practice among the girls: when a Moroccan name was chosen or when the doll's speech was performed in Arabic the offending girl would be scolded by her peers and reminded to speak Spanish. As mentioned above, Nabokov used Russian for family communication and poetry, English for his diary, and French with his governess. While this is by no means a comprehensive view of how he used his languages it does show that there may be a correlation between type of memory and language of encoding, one that should be observable between the different language editions of his autobiographical text.

In the next chapter I aim to present how the psycholinguistic properties of memory discussed here are largely responsible for the differences we see in the self-translations of "Mademoiselle O"/Chapter Five. This text in particular serves this analysis very well as it allows a rare glimpse of Nabokov through all of the languages he spoke, thereby providing the most comprehensive view possible of the subject as it relates to him and his work.

Table 2.

N	Age	Language 1	Language 2	Results
22	M = 55	Spanish	English	First language cues prioritize first language memory, second language cues prioritize second language memory
20	M = 21.8	Russian	English	Russian language cues prioritize Russian language memory, English language cues prioritize English language memory
18	M = 22.7	Japanese	English	Japanese cues led to recall of earlier memories, Japanese cues prioritized Japanese memories, English cues English
8	M = 65.63	Spanish	English	Spanish cues prioritized Spanish memories, English cues English memories
5	29-66	Spanish	English	Recall in language of encoding led to more detailed and vivid recall
3		Spanish German	English	More effective access to childhood memories when they were recalled in the same language as that of encoding
19		Spanish	English	Participants experienced more intense reactions when remembering traumatic events in first language

Source	Bugelski 1977	Marian and Neisser 2000	Matsumoto and Stanny 2006	Schrauf and Rubin 2000	Javier, Barroso and Muñoz 1993	Aragno and Schlachtet 1996	Schwanberg 2010
Experiment	Cued recall of memory				Free recall	Recall of traumatic experience	

Chapter III : Memory Recall in “Mademoiselle O”/Chapter Five

Nabokov’s autobiography provides excellent material for an analysis of how the previously addressed studies potentially impact the recall of memory in the autobiographical dimension. Coming from such a multilingual background, in each of his texts he faced the need to translate a memory that occurred in one language into another. Nabokov himself seemed to recognize this as a factor in the difficulties he faced in writing the autobiography. He writes in *Drugie Berega* that *Conclusive Evidence* was particularly difficult as “память была настроена на один лад – музыкально недоговоренный русский, - а навязывался ей другой лад, английский и обстоятельный” (“the memory was attuned to one key - which was musical, sketchy, and Russian - but was forced to use another key - a detailed English one”) (6; translation Diment 348). This recalls the studies from Chapter II which gave a clear indication that access to memory is not equal between all languages, meaning that memories in the texts are likely to feature differences in quality or character of description (recall that memories were less detailed and vivid when remembered in the non-encoding language, and that the language of recall for traumatic memories had an impact on the emotional reaction to these memories). Both Grayson and Pavlenko theorized that Nabokov’s use of

Russian led to the recall of different memories. In this section I aim to further explore this theory and to investigate this idea and how it plays out in English and French as well with reference to the studies of bilingual memory presented in Chapter II.

Nabokov grew up in a truly multilingual household, but the languages did not play equal roles in his life. An earlier reference to Pavlenko stated that Nabokov used “Russian as the language of every day family communication, inner speech and even poetry, yet his diary was written in English, both in America and in francophone Switzerland” (qtd. in Pavlenko 221). While it is not always possible to determine what language a memory would have been encoded in, Nabokov provides several clues within the text: first, he establishes that Mademoiselle speaks no Russian at all (more on that shortly); secondly, he establishes that much of the family communication was carried out in Russian, as indicated by Mademoiselle’s desperate attempts to keep the conversation at the table from falling into “les abîmes du baragouin russe” (“the abyss of Russian gibberish,” translation mine) (*Nouvelles complètes* 672). In addition to this, despite learning English from infancy Nabokov felt a stronger emotional connection to the Russian language. Upon being asked which of the three languages he spoke he considered the most beautiful, he responded “my head says English, my heart, Russian, my ear, French” (*Strong Opinions* 49).

As the Nabokov family was unable to communicate with Mademoiselle in any other language, memories of her were most likely to have been formed in a French-language context. Extrapolating from the experiments in Chapter II, which found that remembering

something in the language of encoding resulted in more vivid and detailed memory, we can expect that segments of the text focusing on Mademoiselle will be more vivid and detailed in the French text. Evidence supporting this conclusion can be seen in a comparison of the first paragraph of each of the texts. Whereas in English and Russian (E2-E5) she is referred to only as his “old French governess”, in French she is “l’institutrice à qui je dois le plaisir d’entendre le français” (“the governess to whom I owe the pleasure of hearing French”, translation mine) (*Nouvelles complètes* 657). He goes on to explain the text as a “signe d’une gratitude posthume” for “l’exacte nuance que la langue française donnait à ma vie de russe” (“A sign of a posthumous gratitude » for « the exact nuance that the French language gave to my Russian life”, translation mine) (658). The mention of the gratitude that he feels towards Mademoiselle for having introduced her language into his life (and later in the text he does refer to it as *her* language) is present only in the French text, establishing a slightly warmer, more personal image of the character than that of the English or Russian texts, in which she is just a governess, a fixture of the lives of children in aristocratic circles of Russian society (*Nouvelles complètes* 659).

It is not only through this more detailed introduction that the French text develops a more sympathetic character. In each of the five texts Nabokov describes Mademoiselle’s first night in Russia, when she arrives at a dark country station in the traditional cold of a Russian winter:

Chacune d'elles restait dans la même famille pendant de longues années, parfois toute une vie; elle en faisait partie, tout en restant dans une position un peu fautive: toujours reléguée au bout de la table... ; ne se mariant jamais; n'apprenant jamais le russe; vivant une vie... pleine... d'un certain sentiment de dépit à l'égard du peuple qui l'avait accueillie non pas comme une personne vivante, mais plutôt comme un détail nécessaire... - pareille à ces meubles qu'on ne remarque pas avant le jour où on les emporte au grenier.

Donc c'est par un crépuscule d'hiver que Mademoiselle descend à la petite gare d'où il y a encore une dizaine de kilomètres à faire en traîneau avant d'arriver chez nous. Je m'évertue maintenant à imaginer ce qu'elle voyait et éprouvait en venant, cette vieille demoiselle dont c'était là le premier grand voyage et dont tout le vocabulaire russe consistait en un mot unique que dix ans plus tard elle devait remporter avec elle en Suisse : le mot *gdié* qui veut dire « ou cela ? », mais qui, sortant de sa bouche comme le cri rauque d'un oiseau perdu, développait une telle force interrogative qu'il subvenait à tous les besoins de Mademoiselle : « *Gdié ? Gdié ?* » répétait-elle non seulement pour connaître le lieu où elle était ou la direction à suivre, mais encore donnant à entendre par là tout un monde de souffrance : qu'elle était étrangère, à bout de ressource, et qu'elle cherchait l'eldorado où enfin elle serait comprise.

(“ Each of them stayed with the same family for many years, sometimes their whole life; she was a part of it, all the while remaining in a slightly false

position; always relegated to the end of the table... ; never marrying; never learning Russian; living a life... full... of a certain sentiment of bitterness with regard to the people that had welcomed her not as a living person, but more as a necessary detail... similar to those pieces of furniture that one does not notice before the day that they are taken to the attic.

Thus it is during a dusk in winter that Mademoiselle descends at the small station from which there are still a dozen kilometers to go by sleigh before arriving at our estate. I strive now to imagine what she saw and felt on arriving, this old maid for whom this was the first big journey and whose entire Russian vocabulary consisted of only one word that she would bring back to Switzerland with her ten years later: the word *gdié* which means “where?” but which, emerging from her mouth like the raucous cry of a lost bird, developed such interrogative force that it met all of Mademoiselle’s needs: “Gdié? Gdié?” she repeated, not only to know where she was or the direction to follow, but giving to understand by it a whole world of suffering: that she was a foreigner, without recourse, and that she was searching for the Eldorado where she would finally be understood,” translation mine) (*Nouvelles complètes* 660).

Though very similar, the initial paragraph of the French text in which Nabokov explains the plight of the governess in Russia is absent in the equivalent Russian text:

Я не поехал встречать ее на Сиверскую, железнодорожную остановку в девяти верстах от нас; но теперь высылаю туда призрачного представителя и через него вижу ясно, как она выходит из желтого вагона в сумеречную глушь небольшой оснеженной станции в глубине гиперборейской страны и что она чувствует при этом. Ее русский словарь состоял из одного короткого слова — того же, ничем не обросшего, неразменного слова, которое спустя десять лет она увезла обратно, в родную Лозанну. Это простое словечко «где» превращалось у нее в «гиди-э» и, полнясь магическим смыслом, звуча граем потерявшейся птицы, оно набирало столько вопросительной и заклинательной силы, что удовлетворяло всем ее нуждам. "Гиди-э, ги-ди-э?, -заливалась она, не только добиваясь определения места, но выражая бездну печали — одиночество, страх, бедность, болезнь и мольбу доставить ее в обетованный край, где ее наконец поймут и оценят.

(I did not go to meet her at Siverski, the railway station ten miles from us; but now I send my ghostly representative there and through him see clearly how she emerges from the yellow train car in the twilit backwoods of the small snow-covered station in the depths of that hyperborean country, and how she feels while doing so. Her Russian dictionary consisted of one short word – the same unchangeable word that ten years later she would take back to her native Lausanne. It was simply the word где, transformed by her into “gidi-eh” and which, full of a magical meaning, emerging like the cry of a lost bird, took on

such interrogative, spell-like strength that it satisfied all her needs. “Gidi-eh? Gidi-eh?” she burst, not only seeking to determine her location but also to express an abyss of sorrow – loneliness, fear, poverty, sickness and prayers to deliver her to the promised land where she would at last be understood and valued,” translation mine). (*Drugie Berega* 81-2).

The English text follows very closely with the Russian:

When she alighted at the little Siverski station, from which she still had to travel half-a-dozen miles by sleigh to Vyra, I was not there to greet her; but I do so now as I try to imagine what she saw and felt at that last stage of her fabulous and ill-timed journey. Her Russian vocabulary consisted, I know, of one short word, the same solitary word that years later she was to take back to Switzerland. This word, which in her pronunciation may be phonetically rendered as “giddy-eh” (Actually it is *gde* with *e* as in “yet”) meant “Where?” And that was a good deal. Uttered by her like the raucous cry of some lost bird, it accumulated such interrogatory force that it sufficed for all her needs. “Giddy-eh? Giddy-eh?” she would wail, not only to find out her whereabouts but also to express supreme misery: the fact that she was a stranger, shipwrecked, penniless, ailing, in search of the blessed land where at last she would be understood. (*Speak, Memory* 97).

The texts are fairly similar in each language. In each text she is reminiscent of a lost bird, her cry consisting of the only word she knows in Russian, and in each text this word, the poorly pronounced word “где,” serves to communicate her “supreme misery.” However, there are several key differences. Of a more minor nature are the additions of the name of the station at which Mademoiselle alights and the reference to her originating from Lausanne, both of which are first introduced in the Russian text. Of a more significant nature is the passage exclusive to the French text in which Nabokov describes the plight of the governess in Russia, never marrying, never learning Russian, and never really becoming more than a necessary object in the lives of her employers. This, coupled with the fact that this was the first time Mademoiselle had ever been so far from home (“cette vieille demoiselle dont c’était là le premier grand voyage”), adds further depth to her loneliness as she heads into a life in which she would always struggle to integrate, where she would become the Mademoiselle of Nabokov’s English and Russian texts: a fixture of their lives, an object, but not a person.

The French text features several other passages that develop the character of Mademoiselle further than in the English or Russian texts. In French she is proud: she insists on the title “institutrice” and not “gouvernante” though the absence of this detail may be due to the exclusively dual meaning of the word “gouvernante” in French, which refers either to a woman charged with the teaching and upbringing of children, or the care and housekeeping of an older or single man), and she takes pride in the purity of her French origins (*Nouvelles complètes* 658-9; *Nine Stories* 20). Each text features a passage in which her physical details are thoroughly described, but only in French does she have

“un aspect sévère, voire rébarbatif” (“a severe, even hostile appearance,” translation mine) (*Nouvelles complètes* 659). Only in French does he recall her insistence on heating his cold glass of milk between her palms on a hot day, her insistence that large women waltz better than small ones (664). The Russian and English texts display a decreased emphasis on Mademoiselle, becoming less about her and more about Nabokov and using her more as a mouthpiece through which to relay these years of the author’s life. He even describes his memory of her as being of different degrees of clarity between the languages: In the French text “son portrait, ou plutôt certains détails de son portrait me semblent perdus à jamais” (“her portrait, or rather certain details of her portrait seem to me to be lost forever,” translation mine) (658), but in English she is “fading fast,” or “hardly discernable” (*Conclusive Evidence* 58; *Speak, Memory* 95; *Nine Stories* 20).

These examples point to a pattern of a more detailed memory of Mademoiselle in French and, though it is difficult to prove anything definitively, lend support to the theory that remembering something in the language of formation of that memory enhances memory recall. In order to support, or at the very least not to contradict, the theory, the text needed to provide a more detailed and vivid depiction of Mademoiselle in French than in English or Russian, as her monolingual state necessitated the use of French while interacting with her. The findings display this higher level of detail and vividness. However, the French text is the most difficult of the texts with which to form an analysis. Not only was it the first autobiographical text that Nabokov ever wrote, he refused to admit that it was even that for many years (Foster 110). Further, despite its enthusiastic critical acclaim Nabokov was not particularly proud of the work: Zinaïda Shakovskoy, a close friend of

Nabokov's, recalls that "Mademoiselle O" was written in three days and that he considered it "совсем второй, если не третий сорт" ("quite second, if not third rate," translation mine) (V Poiskakh Nabokova, 19). While it remains similar in structure to E2, the subsequent texts were heavily edited from their French counterpart meaning much that exists in the French text is lost. The lack of structural similarity between texts makes it much more difficult to determine which of the differences between the texts are the result of language and memory and which are simply the result of the haste with which the original text was written. The English and Russian editions, which parallel one another quite faithfully in terms of structure, provide for a much clearer analysis of the role of memory in autobiographical self-translation. Considering the different roles that Russian and English played in Nabokov's daily life, we can expect to see differences between the texts in the way that memories are recounted. Recall that despite the multilingual nature of the household Russian was the primary language of the home and that Nabokov felt a much stronger emotional connection to the language, going so far as to isolate himself in Germany for many years in order to maintain the purity of his last link to his homeland.

A number of passages from the English and Russian texts highlight differences in memories between languages and provide evidence that language-based memory recall may be a factor in the translation differences seen between the texts. Of particular interest is the passage in E3, E4 and E5 where Nabokov describes Vyra in the summer, when visiting relatives and neighbours rarely numbered less than fifteen:

Uncles and aunts and cousins would arrive on such days from neighboring estates, and the village doctor would come in his dogcart, and the village schoolmaster would be heard blowing his nose in the cool hall, where he passed from mirror to mirror with a greenish, damp, creaking bouquet of lilies of the valley or a sky-colored, brittle one of cornflowers in his fist (*Speak, Memory* 112).

This passage parallels its Russian counterpart quite well in a number of ways: the texts describe the same events and do so in the same order, and the first and last sentences of the segments are nearly direct translations of one another. The Russian text, however, is more than twice as long as the English, owing to a significant increase in the amount of detail added to the segment. The uncles and aunts and cousins cease to be nameless and he even gives small glimpses into their personality traits, little quirks that stand out about them in his memory. The schoolmaster referenced in the English texts is identified as Vasily Martinovich. The small detail of him fixing his white silk tie in front of the mirror is added, and the flowers that he holds in the English text become the favourites of Nabokovs' parents. Nadezhda Ilinichnaya Nazimovaya, the "certain poor relative" so disliked by Mademoiselle is introduced more completely into the text (*Drugie Berega* 96). These details, Grayson notes, are among the additions to *Drugie Berega* that support the idea proposed by scholars of Nabokov that Nabokov's change in language enabled him to remember more clearly different aspects of his childhood (*Nabokov Translated* 152).

New or more detailed references appear throughout the Russian text, such as the aforementioned addition of the name of the station at which Mademoiselle arrives, or the description of the coachman that is there to pick her up. In E1 and E2 he is just the coachman, described as “un rude homme brun ceinturé de rouge, ses gants de géant sortent de la ceinture où il les a fourrés” (“a rough, dark man with a red belt, his giants’ hands emerging from the belt where he had wedged them,” translation mine) (*Nouvelles complètes* 661), but in E3 and E5 he is referred to by name (Zakhar/Zakar). Unsurprisingly, it is in Russian that Nabokov gives the most detailed description of the man: “Но вот настоящий нас спаситель, наш кучер Захар, рослый, выщербленный оспой человек, в черных усах, похожий на Петра Первого, чудака, любитель прибауток, одетый в нагольный овечий тулуп, с рукавицами, засунутыми за красный кушак” (“But here is our true savior, our coachman Zahar, a stalwart, pockmarked man with a black moustache, who looked like Peter the Great, eccentric, a lover of jokes, dressed in a sheepskin coat with gloves tucked behind a red sash,” translation mine) (*Drugie Berega* 82). In Russian he is not just her coachman but also her savior, not just burly but also eccentric and a lover of jokes.

These examples display the same results as the French: memories that were most likely to have been developed in a Russian language context are more complex and thoroughly developed in the Russian text. Of course, it is true that other factors may be at play here; Nabokov wrote to a different audience in Russian who came to his text from a much different cultural background than his English or French readers. For instance, the comparison of Zahar to Peter the Great likely meant more to his Russian readers.

However, memories tied to the Russian language are consistently more developed in Russian than in either of the other languages, which certainly suggests that the relationship between language and memory plays a role in the translation process of the bilingual autobiography, even if it does so in conjunction with other factors. In his writing Nabokov consistently provides more detailed recollections of certain memories in the languages in which they were most likely to have been encoded. Though there are a few exceptions to the pattern (recall that Zahar's name was first introduced in the English text, not the Russian) they are undoubtedly the minority.

This chapter analyzed a number of different examples from the text to examine the level of detail of memories between each of the languages. It found that the description of Mademoiselle is more detailed and more plentiful in the French text, which agrees with expectations. The examples also showed more detailed description in Russian of people in his life, from his uncle to his coachman. Results corresponded with the original expectation that memories tied to certain languages in the text would be written more vividly or in more detail. In the next chapter I will deal with the subject of memory and trauma in relation to the bilingual individual. I will attempt to build parallels between the studies of memory and trauma presented in Chapter II and with instances of reference to traumatic memory in the text in each language.

Chapter IV : The Recall of Trauma in “Mademoiselle O”/Chapter Five

Up until this point this paper has focused only on the level of development of memories between languages of text. This section will continue the analysis alongside the research presented in regards to bilingual access to traumatic memories. For many years Nabokov’s life was chaotic and uncertain and “Mademoiselle O” certainly reflects this; from references to the 1905 Revolution to the destruction of his childhood home to the death of his father, the text, which does not itself focus on particularly traumatic memories, is rife with emotion. Of particular interest to this paper is the way that Nabokov deals with these traumatic recollections in each language. As research has shown, bilingual subjects in therapy displayed more intense reactions to traumatic memories when recalling them in their first language, and that these same memories, when recalled in the speaker’s second language, were shown to be not only less vivid, but more detached. However, many patients had difficulty communicating these memories in their first language, some breaking down when attempting to recall the memories, some avoiding recalling them in their native language altogether. If the language of recall does in fact impact the intensity with which memories are recalled we can expect to see a difference in Nabokov’s handling of sensitive memories throughout the different texts.

Specifically, we can expect that Nabokov will experience more difficulty writing about these memories in Russian than in either French or English.

Mademoiselle arrived during the winter of the 1905 revolution, an uprising that put in motion a series of events that would ultimately lead to the expulsion of the Nabokov family from Russia. Feeling that the family would be safer in the countryside and away from the political turmoil occurring in St Petersburg, Nabokov's father decided to keep the family at their country estate in Vyra for the season. He had reason to trust in their safety in the countryside: the Nabokovs were well liked by the members of the local peasant class as they had been heavily involved in the development of the village and built both schools and a hospital there (Boyd 46). When he recalls the context surrounding Mademoiselle's arrival (the only winter they spent in the countryside) he recalls in English that:

The winter of 1905-1906, when Mademoiselle arrived from Switzerland, was the only one of my childhood that I spent in the country. It was a year of strikes, riots and police inspired massacres, and I suppose my father wished to keep his family away from the city, in our quiet country place, where his popularity with the peasants might mitigate, as he correctly surmised, the risk of agrarian troubles (*Speak, Memory* 98).

This passage exists in the Russian text but the focus is shifted significantly:

Зима, среди которой она приехала к нам, была единственной, проведенной нами в деревне, и все было ново и весело — и валенки, и снеговики, и гигантские синие сосульки, свисающие с крыши красного амбара, и запах мороза и смолы, и гул печек в комнатах усадьбы, где в разных приятных занятиях тихо кончалось бурное царство мисс Робинсон. Год, как известно, был революционный, с бунтами, надеждами, городскими забастовками, и отец правильно рассчитал, что семье будет покойнее в Выре.

Правда, в окрестных деревнях были, как и везде, и хулиганы и пьяницы, — а в следующем году даже так случилось, что зимние озорники вломились в запертый дом и выкрали из киотов разные безделицы, — но в общем отношения с местными крестьянами были идиллические: как и всякий бескорыстный барин-либерал, мой отец делал великое количество добра в пределах рокового неравенства.

(“The winter during which she came to us was the only one that kept us in the country, and everything was new and fun – boots and snowmen and gigantic blue icicles, hanging from the roof of the red barn, and the smell of frost and resin and the hum of stoves in the rooms of the estate, where the turbulent tsardom of Miss Robinson came to an end amongst various pleasant activities. That year, as is known, was revolutionary, with riots, expectations and strikes in the city, and my father correctly surmised that things would be calmer for the family in Vyra.

It is true that in the surrounding villages there were, as elsewhere, hooligans and drunkards – and the next year it even happened that winter rogues broke into the locked house and stole various trifles from the icon cases – but in general our relationship with the local peasants was ideal: as with any liberal gentleman, my father did a great deal of good within that fatal inequality,” translation mine). (*Drugie Berega* 81).

Nabokov adds a new set of emotions to the text in Russian in expressing the excitement the children felt at the novelty of a winter at their summer estate, and further explains the relationship the Nabokov's shared with the local peasant community. Not only is this memory more detailed, but also much more sensory than its English counterparts. Nabokov employs scents and colours to create a bright and intense image of the house that is neglected in English at this point in the text. This coincides with expectations that certain memories closely connected to the Russian language (or to his Russian childhood) will be expressed more strongly and in more detail in Russian, but also serves a second purpose. Here the reference to the political events occurring at the time is not mentioned until after he has explained how exciting this new experience was for the Nabokov children. In putting the descriptions of the children's excitement before the explanation of the political context he mitigates the effect of these negative events by minimizing their importance in the text.

Scholars have observed a tendency in the autobiography for Nabokov to distance himself emotionally from the difficult political events that surrounded his exile from his happy

childhood (*Vladimir Nabokov*; Diment 1993; Bruss 1976). Grayson states that throughout his works he takes “artistic revenge” on these events by both mocking and distancing himself from them, much in the same way that he has done here. He “[relegates] politics to the wings of the action and the servants’ quarters, while letting the illusory permanence of the endless cloudless summer days of a happy childhood hold centre stage” (*Vladimir Nabokov* 40). This certainly demonstrates one of Nabokov’s methods for dealing with trauma. It is important to recognize, however, that in this segment this method is employed only in the Russian text – even E5, written after the Russian text, does not adopt this practice. This indicates a different reaction to the recall of a traumatic memory in English. While in Russian he works to downplay the importance of the revolution, in English he is able to handle the memory straight on. This may indicate that English gives him the emotional distance required to address these memories.

Another source of difficulty for Nabokov is the recollection of the Vyra itself, and understandably so. Not only was the estate, built by his great grandfather, lost to him forever when he was exiled from Russia, but the German army used it as staff headquarters in 1942. When they left in 1944 it was burnt to the ground. In all five of the texts Nabokov provides a description of the estate, though each language deals with it slightly differently. In the French text he argues that the emotional reaction he experiences upon recalling the estate is nothing more than nostalgia, actively arguing that the political events that led to its loss have nothing to do with it: “l’angoisse que je ressens à présent lorsque je me remémore la belle maison où je vivais enfant n’a rien à voir avec ces événements politiques qui, pour employer un cliché de journaliste,

bouleversèrent ma patrie. Je m'en moque de ces évènements politiques” (“the anguish I feel now as I recall the beautiful house that I lived in as a child has nothing to do with these political events which, to use a journalist’s cliché, turned my country upside-down, I care not for these political events,” translation mine) (*Nouvelles complètes* 662). Despite his attempt to convince the reader otherwise, this segment reads quite defensively. We know from personal letters and his fictional works that Nabokov was profoundly affected by his exile from Russia, and from interviews that he never intended on returning to the country of his birth as “the grotesque shadow of a police state will not be dispelled in my lifetime” (*Strong Opinions* 10). In fact, Vyra represented Nabokov’s Russian childhood in many ways. He developed a strong emotional connection with the estate and its surrounding area, describing them as “the places I love more than any on earth” (qtd. in Boyd 45). After his departure from Russia he would never again own property, preferring instead to stay in rented homes or hotels. When asked why this was he responded, “nothing short of a replica of my childhood surroundings would have satisfied me” (*Strong Opinions* 27). This appears to be another example of the method explained by Grayson earlier, by which he attempts to relegate the political events to the sidelines.

The inaccuracy of his statement in French is further highlighted by the analysis of parallel passages in the English and Russian texts. E3 and E5 present a much sadder image:

Revealed: a warm, bright, stylish (“Russian Empire”) drawing room in a snow-muffled house – soon to be termed *le château* – built by my mother’s grandfather, who, being afraid of fires, had the staircase

fashioned of iron, so that when the house did get burned to the ground, sometime after the Soviet Revolution, those fine-wrought steps, with the sky shining through their openwork risers, remained standing, all alone but still leading up (*Speak, Memory* 100).

The defensive tone of the French text is not carried forward into the English and he instead fully acknowledges the tragic loss of his childhood home. Interestingly, when he turns to the Russian text neither the denial of the impact of political events on his emotional state of mind nor the image of the ashes and the staircase make their way into the Russian text. The equivalent passage is simply a description of the house. This passage is also another instance of Nabokov writing a traumatic passage in E3, removing it for E4, and then putting it back in E5. This image was perhaps simply too difficult to deal with in Russian. Nabokov's reaction here is reminiscent of the woman from Scwanberg's study who experienced no difficulty at all when discussing her car accident in English but broke down and was unable to finish the story in Spanish.

Yet another instance of this occurs at the very end of the text. Many years after the Nabokov family left Russia, Nabokov, finding himself in Switzerland, goes to visit the elderly Mademoiselle. At this point so hard of hearing she can scarcely hear at all, he offers her a device meant to bring some of her hearing back. When she attempts to use the device she lights up and swears she could hear everything being said to her, although Nabokov had said nothing for her to hear. Her little lie, told to make him happy, is his last memory of her before she dies. After leaving he walks along the edge of a lake and

sees a fat, awkward swan attempting, in vain, to get into a boat. He is reminded immediately of Mademoiselle and it is with this comparison in his mind that he concludes the text. In French he writes “a-t-elle vraiment vécu? Non, maintenant que j’y pense bien – elle n’a jamais vécu. Mais désormais elle est réelle, puisque je l’ai créée, et cette existence que je lui donne serait une marque de gratitude très candide, si elle avait vraiment existé” (“Had she really lived? No, now that I think about it – she never lived. But from now on she is real, because I created her, and this existence that I gave to her would be at token of my very candid gratitude if she had really existed,” translation mine) (678). In English the text ends somewhat differently. He does not, as in the French text, question whether she were ever real after all, but rather whether he ever really understood who she was. Was his judgment of her, based primarily on her appearance and her language, so shallow as to misunderstand her?

I catch myself wondering whether, during the years I knew her, I had not kept utterly missing something in her that was far more she than her chins or her ways or even her French – something perhaps akin to that last glimpse of her, to the radiant deceit she had used in order to have me depart pleased with my own kindness, or to that swan whose agony was so much closer to artistic truth than a drooping dancer’s pale arms; something, in short, that I could appreciate only after the things and beings that I had most loved in the security of my childhood, had been turned to ashes or shot through the heart (*Conclusive Evidence* 78).

He ends the text with a reference to two significant and painful parts of his life: the ashes likely reference the burnt down estate at Vyra, while the shot references his father, who died from a bullet to the heart while protecting Pavel Milyukov, an old friend and colleague, and target of a Russian reactionary (“B., P. 445). The death of Nabokov’s father was perhaps the most painful of his experiences and Boyd observes, “again and again throughout *Speak, Memory* [he] returns to his father’s death as if it were a wound he cannot leave alone but can hardly bear to touch” (8).

The Russian text reads:

За парашютом шла по воде крупная рябь, почти волна... Вглядываясь в тяжело плещущую воду, я различил что-то большое и белое. Это был старый, жирный, неуклюжий, похожий на удода, лебедь. Он пытался забраться в причаленную шлюпку, но ничего у него не получалось... Память об этой пасмурной прогулке вскоре заслонилась другими впечатлениями; но когда года два спустя я узнал о смерти сироты-старухи (удалось ли мне вызволить ее из моих сочинению, не знаю), первое, что мне представилось, было не ее подбородки, и не ее полнота, и даже не музыка ее французский речи, а именно тот бедный, поздний, тройственный образ: лодка, лебедь, волна.

(“Behind the parapet was a big ripple on the water, almost a wave... Peering into the heavy splashing water I discerned something big and white. It was an old, fat, clumsy, hoopoe-like swan. He was trying to perch on a moored boat, _____. The memory of this overcast outing was soon overshadowed by other impressions, but when two years later I learned of the death of the aging-orphan (whether I managed to rescue her from my compositions, I do not know) the first thing I imagined was not her chins, nor her rotundity, nor even the music of her French speech, but rather the poor latter triple image: boat, swan, wave,” translation mine) (*Drugie Berega* 103).

Once again, as with the passage regarding his childhood home at Vyra, the Russian text excludes information about traumatic events (the burning of his childhood home and the death of his father) in Nabokov’s life that are included in E2, E3 and E5. This is yet another instance of a traumatic memory being removed specifically for the Russian text and then rewritten into the final English edition.

The psycholinguistic studies presented earlier showed a clear difference in the way individuals react to traumatic memories between multiple languages: individuals were more able to discuss traumatic events in the non-encoding language (citation), and were in some cases afraid to even try in the encoding language (citation). The way Nabokov treated traumatic memories in this passage and others is reflective of the difficulties that patients experienced when discussing traumatic memories in therapy. This echoes what

several scholars have already written: that English provided the emotional distance that Nabokov needed in order to write about these events (citation). The three examples provided in this chapter demonstrate clearly that Nabokov addressed traumatic memories differently depending on the language being used. Through these three examples Nabokov operated primarily through three different methods: direct acknowledgement, mitigation, and avoidance. However, these methods were not used equally between the languages. Traumatic memories or events were addressed the most directly and rationally in English. Memories in Russian were either downplayed, as with his description of their winter at Vyra, or eliminated. The French text was also seen to employ mitigation tactics, however, as only one segment with a sufficient parallel in the other texts was analyzed Nabokov's methods of dealing with trauma in French remain inconclusive. In spite of this, analysis of the texts has clearly indicated that Nabokov struggles more to address these memories in Russian than in English.

One must always consider the possibility that these choices were made for reasons of language or for reasons of audience (and indeed, it is likely that the relationship between language and memory was only one factor in the decision to make changes between translations). However, there are several interesting things to consider. For one, Nabokov always struggled with what he thought was his difficulty in expressing himself in English. He mourned his English as a "stiffish, artificial thing, which may be all right for describing a sunset or an insect, but which cannot conceal poverty of syntax and paucity of domestic diction" (*Strong Opinions* 106), and laments having to abandon his "natural language, [his] natural idiom, [his] rich, infinitely rich and docile Russian tongue, for a

second-rate brand of English” (15). Despite his mastery of the English language, it never felt natural to him the way that Russian did. Considering the relative ease with which one remembers things in the language of encoding, and considering it was this language with which he wrote the most fluently, it would seem only natural then for him to have written his autobiography in Russian first. What’s more, he certainly wanted to. Though Diment states that he “obviously intended from the very beginning to write the book in English” (349), he wrote in a letter to his close friend Edmund Wilson that, though the urge to write the book was quite strong, “as I cannot do it in Russian I do not do it at all” (qtd. in Diment 349). Clearly he changed his mind, as the first edition of the autobiography was written in English, and written several years before the Russian.

Of course he experienced difficulties in writing the English text and he understood that much of this difficulty stemmed from trying to write about Russian memories in English (*Drugie Berega* 6). He struggled to capture the cadence of Russian memories in the English language and also very likely, in accordance with results from the studies in Chapter II, struggled with an access to his Russian memories that was limited while writing in English. In spite of this, however, he actually seemed to write the book with relative ease, stating that *Conclusive Evidence* and *Pnin* had been “brief sunny escapes” from the “intolerable spell” of *Lolita* (*Selected Letters* 140). It was, interestingly, the Russian text that seemed to present the greatest challenge. While writing to Wilson he wrote that *Drugie Berega* had left him “quite limp and hysterical” (*The Nabokov-Wilson Letters* 285). Why? He certainly seemed to find the act of writing fiction in English quite difficult and never felt like he had truly mastered the language. His difficulty writing his

memoirs in Russian then provides support to the idea that emotional memories are more difficult to face in the language of encoding. Though he found English more difficult at a semantic level, it allowed him to distance himself from the memories in question.

In fact, Nabokov is frequently indirect when writing about emotionally significant events from his past. Elizabeth Bruss observes that in Nabokov's autobiographical writings "the most intimate and important private moments in his life, the assassination of his father, the courtship of his wife, are merely hinted at, anticipated, or mentioned only when they have already taken place offstage" (Bruss 136). Though Bruss cites the English text of the autobiography this is certainly true of the Russian language text as well, perhaps even to a higher degree: where he merely hints at the death of his father in the English text of "Mademoiselle O"/Chapter 5, he does not address it at all in the Russian. Where in English he describes the tragic end of his beloved home, in Russian he describes the home only as he knew it in the years of his childhood.

In Russian Nabokov writes in more detail about the people that were present in his Russian childhood. He also tends to avoid the more sensitive subject matter that he writes about in the English and sometimes French texts, such as the destruction of his childhood home and the loss of his father. This indicates that English provides some emotional distance between Nabokov and those difficult memories, which is consistent with results from research with bilingual patients in therapy. As the therapy patients in the studies mentioned above preferred to discuss painful memories in the non-dominant language of that memory, so too does it seem that Nabokov struggled less with his painful memories

in English than in Russian. Despite his skills he had a much weaker emotional connection to the English language. As Diment states, “the same artificial and detached nature of the new language was of immense help when it came to his desire to assume control over his personal and often painful memories and distance himself from them” (351).

In this chapter a number of examples of reference to traumatic events were compared in each of the languages of the text through three primary examples: the recollection of the 1905 Revolution, the recollection of the estate at Vyra, and finally, the final paragraph of the text in which he reflects on Mademoiselle. Memories were consistently found to be either mitigated and reduced in importance or eliminated altogether in the Russian text, even if they were included in the English texts written before and after. This indicates that Nabokov experienced a greater amount of difficulty when addressing these memories in the Russian language. As the Russian language is the one with which he has the strongest emotional connection, and the one most strongly tied to the traumatic events that he is recalling, these results support the theory that the relationship between language and memory has an impact on the self-translated autobiographical text and can be attributed to translation differences found between these texts.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to explore the relationship between memory and language and to understand how this relationship impacts the self-translated autobiographical text. I initially provided a short biographical introduction to Nabokov, focusing on his relationship with each of the languages that he spoke. This established the context necessary to understand the text as it relates to the study. A thorough understanding of the role of each language in Nabokov's life was necessary to ensure informed conclusions from the analysis of the text. This was followed by research from the field of psycholinguistics, which analyzed how language impacts memory recall in bilinguals and the implications of this regarding trauma. This research was used to better understand the results of the comparison between the texts that occurred in chapters III and IV. Chapter III looked at instances in the text where detail of memory recall varied between languages and determined that memories of Mademoiselle were stronger and more numerous in French than in any other language, and that memories of family members were stronger in Russian. Chapter IV examined instances in the text that dealt with traumatic memories in order to understand how these were dealt with in each of the languages. Analysis of the text showed that Nabokov addressed traumatic memories the most rationally in English

while in Russian he consistently mitigated reference to these events by pushing them to the background of the text or avoided writing about them at all.

The study faced several limitations: first, it only analyzed one chapter of the text. The study would benefit from further analysis of the other chapters in the autobiography as well as the related short stories. An additional limitation was the analysis of a text from a single author. In order to establish a more definite conclusion it will be necessary to analyze other self-translated autobiographies through this lens. Unfortunately, this option is made difficult due to the incredibly limited number of such texts.

However, in spite of these limitations a large quantity of evidence was produced that displayed an observable difference between the recall of memories and the addressing of trauma in each language. Ultimately this paper has shown that language has a noticeable influence on the way that memories are remembered, or if they are even remembered at all. This knowledge could help scholars better understand changes made in the self-translated text that cannot be attributed to semantic or cultural translation difficulties. The impact of this on the self-translated autobiography is quite interesting: it provides us with an insight into the mind of the author, a deeper understanding of the impact of events on their lives than we would otherwise be able to grasp. Had we taken Nabokov at his word when he claimed in the French text that he was unaffected by the political events leading to his exile and his separation from the home he loved, we would have misunderstood a fundamental aspect of Nabokov's life. Instead, with the understanding that traumatic memories are more difficult to access in the memory of encoding, it becomes clear that

Nabokov was in fact deeply affected by these circumstances when he is unable to write about this in the Russian text. There is as much meaning in what we say as in what we do not say, and the understandings developed in this paper allow us to better understand where this meaning exists in a text.

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