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SELF-TRANSLATION AND THE TRANSLATOR'S (IN)VISIBILITY in Nabokov's *Pnin* (1957)

MICHELE RUSSO*
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2834-9824
UNIVERSITY OF FOGGIA

Abstract: Nabokovian scholarship has consistently emphasised the plurilingual aspects in Nabokov's oeuvre. His American novels frequently include numerous sentences in Russian and French, which are often translated or discussed from a metalinguistic angle by the author. A remarkable example in this regard is the autobiography *Speak, Memory. An Autobiography Revisited* (1966), which conjures up various places where Nabokov spent different periods of his life, along with the languages overlapping in his European memoirs. Considering that the coexistence of foreign terms and expressions is common in Nabokov's works, this article aims to analyse the linguistic architecture and aspects of self-translation in one of his American novels, *Pnin*. While this study dwells on the numerous grammatical and phonetic inaccuracies that feature in the protagonist's dialogues, it also means to examine the issue pertaining to the translator's (in)visibility in the text. The analysis will be carried out in light of Venuti's (2018) theories, which foreground the crucial yet often overlooked role of the translator, particularly in contexts where translation is domesticated. By quoting various examples of self-translated expressions from the novel, as well as grammatical and phonetic mistakes, the article traces the linguistic borders in the story, shedding light on the work of the translator, whose presence becomes discernible through the foreignizing effect generated by the numerous non-English words, mistakes and inaccuracies. The work thus engages with the issue of Nabokov's (in)visibility in the story, since the translator's presence is not always detectable as the storyline progresses. The alternation of domestication and foreignization, linguistic adaptation and estrangement, is infused with the writer's investigation into his linguistic past which, in Cronin's (2013: 19) words, sheds light on the "historical sense" of the languages employed. The exploration of Nabokov's linguistic past, expressed through numerous foreignisms, paves the way for an analysis of the writer's double, thereby providing a more nuanced illustration of Nabokov's linguistic transition.

Keywords: Nabokov; Pnin; self-translation; the (in)visible translator; linguistic identity

* michele.russo@unifg.it

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1. Introduction

Self-translation has often been relegated to a marginal domain and considered an occasional practice, often limited to specific cases (Anselmi 2012). To non-experts, self-translation may appear similar to canonical translation or, to use Jakobson's (1959) words, to interlingual translation. In recent years, this form of translation has received more detailed attention, particularly after a research group from the University of Barcelona, called 'autotrad', set out to analyse a corpus of self-translated texts (Desideri 2012: 11). There are several reasons why self-translation can be distinguished from traditional, or ordinary translation. First and foremost, the concept of self-translation lends itself to different perspectives of analysis, as the author of the text and the translator are the same person, which significantly impacts the translated text. Although self-translation originates from the same principles as canonical translation, it often results in re-writing or even re-creating the source text, with remarkable changes in the target text, as the translator re-explores the source text in light of new emotional, semantic and lexical elements. This is particularly true for the self-translation of autobiographical texts, characterised by memories and events that are re-shaped as they are processed and re-processed through the author-translator's associative and cognitive lens. In view of the fact that self-translation has often been investigated from a literary perspective (Anselmi 2012), the present study analyses a work by Nabokov, characterised by an unusual plurilingual context, in which the writer devises various approaches to self-translation.

As is well known, Nabokov's oeuvre, like that of other émigré writers, offers numerous examples of autobiographical texts, that he self-translated during his linguistic transition (Russo 2021). Studies have extensively focused, for instance, on Nabokov's self-translation of his autobiography *Conclusive Evidence: A Memoir* (1951), first translated into Russian as *Drugie berega* in 1954 and then re-translated as *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited* in 1966 (Russo 2020a). This process of autobiographical re-writing, which encompassed several years, involved more than merely translating the source text. The writer re-examined his personal experiences, with inevitable changes in the versions written after *Conclusive Evidence*. Nabokov refers to the final version of his autobiography as a "re-Englishing of a Russian re-version of what had been an English re-telling of Russian memories" (Nabokov 1966: 12-13; Gorski 2010). Considering the various linguistic phases that characterised the composition of Nabokov's autobiography, the author unearthed different biographical events experienced in diverse linguistic contexts. Self-translation is, therefore, the means the author employs to access his memories (García de la Puente 2015). It is a process that expands the writer's memories, since it engages him in the exploration of his deepest thoughts and in the evocation of more detailed biographical events. Nabokov thus re-writes the later versions of his autobiography, embedding the additional information recollected through his cognitive and linguistic processes and adding emotionally charged overtones, as he retrieves his past through the language of his childhood. The biographical references in Nabokov's works emerge as the writer plays with his linguistic identities, portraying characters who recall his biographical events or introducing himself into his narratives *in medias res*. The circularity of the stories, the presence of double characters often merging into one, and the *mise en*

abyme of the author's selves are Nabokov's typical literary devices. Moreover, bilingualism and plurilingualism are the means that the Russian-American author employs to deal with the motif of doubleness, often using puns, wordplay, and self-translated words and expressions (Letka-Spychała 2020). Nabokov's fiction is characterised by the frequent translation of words, phrases and short sentences from English into Russian and from Russian into English, with the purpose of drawing the reader into the maze of plurilingual and translation issues. The steady passage from one language to another engages the reader in a process of estrangement and linguistic reflection, paving the way for a discussion on decision-making in translation and on specular and idiosyncratic relationships between the writer's source language and target language. As a result, one might take for granted that Nabokov's readers should have a sound knowledge of Russian to understand the foreign expressions that feature in his texts. This does not mean that monolingual readers are excluded, but the interference of Russian - and sometimes of French - in his English texts raises issues regarding translation approaches, particularly in relation to the cultural references involved. The author's shifting between his native language and his adopted language highlights the presence of the translator, who can be regarded as a visible translator[1]. As such, his purpose is to mark his presence in the text through non-English expressions. The translator's visibility, to recall Venuti's theory (2018), is emphasised by the linguistic boundaries that foreign words and expressions generate in the text. As the author often dwells on specific Russian and French words and expressions, readers are engaged in translation and linguistic issues.

Set against this background, *Pnin*, like other novels written by Nabokov after his emigration to the USA, includes numerous examples of self-translation, which aim to compare English and Russian from a metalinguistic perspective. What makes this novel particularly interesting is that the writer carries out a comparative analysis of the two languages with the omniscient glance of a perfect bilingual scholar, often using his irony to highlight the protagonist's linguistic mistakes. As Casmier (2004: 75) notes, "*Pnin* overflows with self-conscious instances of translation. For example, there are Pnin's own struggles with language and bizarre, verbal transliterations. These spring from the smug and quirky eye-dialect that the narrator uses to render Pnin's speech. This enables him to transform Pnin's thick accent in English into burlesque, visual malapropism".

2. Self-Translation as a Tool of Comparative Analysis

In one of his most famous works on Nabokov, Boyd (1990: 271) claims that "Of all Nabokov's novels, Pnin seems the most amusing, the most poignant, the most straightforward: a portrait of a Russian émigré whose difficulties with English and with America make him a comic legend throughout the campus, somewhere in New York State, where he teaches Russian". Known as a "campus novel", but also as a "Novel of character, roman à clef, […], epiphanic short story, postmodernist metafiction" (Lodge

[1] For further analysis on Nabokov's self-translation, in particular in *Speak. Memory: an Autobiography Revisited* (1966), see Russo 2020b.

in Nabokov 2004, xx)[2], *Pnin* describes the life of a Russian Professor, named after the title of the book, who teaches at Waindell College, in the USA, a fictional college inspired by Cornell University and Wellesley College, where Nabokov taught. The protagonist of the story is depicted as an inept and displaced person, whose awkwardness in everyday situations and interactions with others stem from his inability to adapt to a new country.

Like other American works by the author, *Pnin* can be considered an example of plurilingual text due to the numerous references to Nabokov's mother tongue, Russian, and his transitory language, French. The book narrates the difficult situations that Pnin has to deal with and contains numerous words and expressions in Russian and in French. At first glance, the frequent instances of self-translation might baffle readers, who will possibly perceive that such translated words and expressions are neither necessary nor relevant to the progress of the storyline. This story is not the author's first experiment in English and discloses his linguistic and cultural duality. As Nafisi (2019: 128) claims, "As the novel progresses, the problems that Pnin faces in exile become more familiar: his apparently never-ending conflict with a foreign environment, his so-called second homeland, and his struggles with all manner of objects, with language, and with alien customs and practices". The linguistic problems and issues of communication stand out in the first pages, bringing to light the protagonist's difficulties with his adopted language, English, while the use of Russian words stresses Pnin's bond with his native country. At the beginning of the story, the narrator reveals Pnin's unawareness of having boarded the wrong train to go to Cremona, USA, to deliver a lecture, and points out that "A special danger area in Pnin's case was the English language. Except for such not very helpful odds and ends […], he had no English at all at the time he left France for the States. […] by 1950 his English was still full of flaws" (8). Pnin's uncertain English, known in the text as Pninian, namely Pnin's mispronounced English, a language in between different linguistic realities, is explicitly revealed when the protagonist deals with predicaments and stressful situations. The narrator, for example, describes the moment in which Pnin asks for information about the bus to Cremona: "'Information, please,' […]. 'Where stops four-o'clock bus to Cremona?' […] 'And where possible to leave baggage?' […] 'Quittance' queried Pnin, Englishing the Russian for 'receipt' (*kvitantsiya*). 'What's that?' 'Number?' tried Pnin. 'You don't need a number,' said the fellow, and resumed his writing" (11). The narrator quotes Pnin's ungrammatical sentences in English and dwells on his use of the word "quittance" (an archaic term for "payment" which more closely resembles the Russian equivalent), instead of "receipt". In addition, some sentences are entirely in Russian, due to the fact that many characters in the story are Russian émigrés. When Pnin is introduced to Professor Entwistle from Goldwin University at the house of Laurence Clements, a faculty member at Waindell, Entwistle says, "*Zdrastvuyte kak pozhivaete horosho spasibo*" ("Hi, how are you, well, thanks", my translation, 24). At the same time, an ironic attitude towards Pnin is maintained throughout the novel, as well as mockery of his English mispronunciation and his grammatical and phonetic inaccuracies. When Pnin falls into desperation in front of his

[2] Hereafter, all quotations from the novel (2004 edition, with an introduction by Lodge) will refer to this edition. Page numbers are indicated in parentheses.

landlord's wife, Joan Clements, because his ex-wife, Liza, came to see him only to ask for some money for her son, he says: "I search, John, for the viscous and sawdust" (42). Pnin, who mispronounces Joan's name as "John", actually means whisky and soda. In another dialogue, Pnin's anguished words are quoted, as Liza has deserted him, and his overuse of the labiodental "f" is ironically highlighted: "I haf nofing […] I haf nofing left, nofing, nofing!" (43). With regard to Pninian, Besemeres (2000: 396) claims:

> Because Nabokov cannot reach his reading audience through Russian, he is forced constantly to translate himself, a process which, however appealing to the literary chameleon in him, in the case of *Pnin* involves a self-parody. Our access to his [Pnin's] Russian is largely through 'Pninian' English. The effect is that of a muted Russian-speaking voice echoing, or shadowing, the narrator's English.

Nabokov quotes ungrammatical expressions and mispronounced words through the narrator's voice to conjure up the foreignness and displacement endured by the protagonist (Russo 2021). Cases of self-translation are more frequent from the second chapter of the novel and provide the Russian subtext of the characters' actions and thoughts. The narrator sometimes mentions parenthetically the Russian translations of the characters' thoughts and words, as when Pnin goes to the Waindell bus stop to meet Liza who, as previously explained, intends to see Pnin to manipulate him: "Suddenly he heard her sonorous voice (*'Timofey, zdrastvuy!"*) ["Hi, Timofey", my translation] behind him" (37). In this case, by using parentheses, Nabokov places the Russian words uttered by the character in the background, thereby avoiding a slowdown in the narrative while providing the Russian subtext of the story. Numerous sentences portray the bilingual context of the story, as they suddenly switch from English to Russian. When Liza visits Pnin at the Clements', for example, she says "What a gruesome place, *kakoy zhutkiy dom*" (38). Here, as in other parts of the narrative, the translation into Russian of an English sentence enhances its meaning. The narrator foregrounds, therefore, the coexistence of the characters' Russianness and Americanness, sharing with the reader the translation of certain words and expressions into Russian.

As previously mentioned, Nabokov dwells on metalinguistic remarks resulting from a linguistic reflection on the comparison between the Russian world and the American world. Such remarks represent relevant moments in the storyline. They offer insights into different linguistic worlds and encompass the author's comments on the features of Russian and English. They include comparisons with other European languages, like French and German, which were familiar to Nabokov. The third chapter, in this regard, offers an engaging description of the phonetic features of English, along with Pnin's common mistakes in English.

> The organs concerned in the production of English speech sounds are the larynx, the velum, the lips, the tongue […], and, last but not least, the lower jaw; mainly upon its overenergetic and somewhat ruminant motion did Pnin rely when translating in class passages in the Russian grammar or some poem by Pushkin. If his Russian was music, his English was murder. He had enormous difficulty ('dzeefeecooltsee' in Pninian English) with depalatization, never managing to remove the extra Russian moisture from *t'*s and *d'*s before the vowels he so quaintly softened. His explosive 'hat' ('I never go in

> a hat even in winter') differed from the common American pronunciation of 'hot' […] only by its briefer duration, and thus sounded very much like the German verb *hat* (has). Long *o*'s with him inevitably became short ones: his 'no' sounded positively Italian, and this was accentuated by his trick of triplicating the simple negative ('May I give you a lift, Mr. Pnin?' 'No-no-no, I have only two paces from here'). He did not possess (nor was he aware of this lack) any long *oo*: all he could muster when called upon to utter 'noon' was the lax vowel of the German '*nun*'. ('I have no classes in after*nun* on Tuesday. Today is Tuesday.') (47).

This is one of the most significant passages in the novel, as it addresses the linguistic challenges the protagonist faces in the American setting. It explains Pnin's difficulty in pronouncing English sounds, often overusing certain parts of his mouth. The quotation of the Pninian word "dzeefeecooltsee" in parentheses reveals how Pnin's background permeates his English with Russian sounds. Russian and Pninian words mark linguistic boundaries in the text and evoke Pnin's Russian subtext. By citing the Russian and Pninian expressions, the narrator, and thus the author, questions himself and listens to his own voice in a foreign language. He splits himself and delves into his linguistic universe by comparing his source language and his target language. The steady dialogue between English and Russian results from the author's inner linguistic journey, enabling him to test and experience translation. The pages of the novel, therefore, represent Nabokov's laboratory, a mirror that he employs to investigate his language skills. The pages become specular spaces of an*other* linguistic reality, a bilingual, or even trilingual reality, in which the author's voice echoes, splits itself and negotiates the different meanings that the process of self-translation entails (Desideri 2012). As self-translation encompasses Nabokov's linguistic and cultural background, it engages the author in a dialogue with his *ego*, which is reflected in the mirror of his bilingual universe. The author thus interacts with his linguistic ubiquity, with his *other* that enables him to translate linguistic fragments of his bilingual conscience. In addition to metalinguistic remarks, the story contains different passages which underscore Pnin's obsession with the articulation and the pronunciation of sounds. In particular, this obsession sometimes turns out to be an egocentric attitude, especially when the protagonist points out the exact pronunciation of his name. In chapter four, Pnin meets Victor, his former wife's son, at Waindell bus station. When the protagonist introduces himself, he says: "My name is Timofey, […] second syllable pronounced as 'muff', ahksent on last syllable, 'ey' as in 'prey' but a little more protracted. 'Timofey Pavlovich Pnin', which means 'Timothy the son of Paul'. The pahtronymic has the ahksent on the first syllable and the rest is sloored – Timofey Pahlch" (76). The narrator reproduces Pnin's foreign accent by misspelling certain words. Self-translation, along with phonetic and lexical inaccuracies, is thus the tool the narrator employs to carry out a linguistic analysis from a comparative perspective.

3. Nabokov's (In)visibility through Self-Translation

On a theoretical level, the use of different languages in the work conveys the coexistence of different cultural spaces. In particular, the phonetic and lexical

comparisons between English, French and Russian (the languages that, as is known, represent Nabokov's linguistic identity during his transition towards the English-speaking world) trace specific floating territories throughout the work, namely linguistic areas that interact with one another in the author's conscience (Boyd 1990). These areas are separated, as previously noted, by linguistic boundaries that mark the presence of the translator, who is thus a visible translator. Following Venuti's (2018) theory, the translator is invisible when the translated text is domesticated and fluent and, therefore, effectively conceals any foreignizing expression, word and nuance. However, in Nabokov's work, the numerous foreign expressions increase the foreignization of the text, making the author a visible translator who emphasises the sense of foreignness in a plurilingual context. The author stresses his presence throughout the text by having his characters self-translate some of the words and sentences they utter. In other cases, he directly translates his characters' words and expressions. This visibility reminds the reader of the coexistence of different linguistic subtexts, thus highlighting the importance of such subtexts in the narrative as a means to communicate with other linguistic realities. As Venuti (2018: 7) writes, "The translator's invisibility is […] a weird self-annihilation, a way of conceiving and practicing translation that undoubtedly reinforces its marginal status". In contrast, the translator's visibility in *Pnin* helps to maintain contact with other linguistic contexts, preventing their marginalisation or suppression. His visibility also emphasises the vital role of the translator (who, as Venuti argues, is overlooked when the translator is invisible) as a mediator in a plurilingual context. Thus, Nabokov creates a foreignizing text to counteract the "ethnocentric violence" (Venuti 2018: 16) inherent in domesticating translation, which would otherwise erase valuable relationships between different cultures by recognizing only a single, predominant culture.

However, as the storyline progresses, it becomes increasingly evident that the linguistic boundaries are gradually blurred and re-designed as a consequence of the constant interaction and negotiation between different linguistic territories. This generates an osmotic process that merges the linguistic and cultural fragments of the author's background. As the examples show, various dialogues and passages in the story mingle phrases and words in Russian and French, engaging the reader in a plurilingual context. The effects of plurilingual dialogues in the text emerge in the misspelling of some English words, as in 'pahtronymic' and 'ahksent', which clearly convey the foreign interference. Examples of self-translation are so frequent that the occurrence of Russian and French words becomes progressively less alienating from the reader's perspective and less disruptive to the readability of the narrative. Self-translation in the text thus gradually sounds like an intralingual translation more than an interlingual translation, since the narrator involves the reader in his linguistic entanglements, thereby familiarising them with translation issues and language switching. Pnin's assertion, during his conversation with Victor, is emblematic in this regard: "I speak in French with much more facility than in English, […] but you – *vous comprenez le français? Bien? Assez bien? Un peu?*" (77). Pnin, like other émigré characters in the novel, embodies the author's visibility, whose constant foreignizing presence gradually fades, reducing the reader's alienation through the regular language switching in the text. The linguistic spaces are thus constantly marked in the text and,

as they gradually fade, they are, at the same time, re-marked and redefined through the plurilingual dialogues, re-designing the boundaries of different cultural realities. The author plays with the reader and with the characters, stressing his presence through foreign words. Such a presence becomes less perceptible as the reader familiarises with the plurilingual context; as a result, the author and, therefore, the translator, becomes more invisible. After mapping specific linguistic territories and highlighting his visibility and the sense of foreignness, as previously explained, the translator gradually decreases his visibility as the interlinguistic dialogue becomes more frequent and the linguistic boundaries fade and are re-designed. The reader becomes accustomed to the constant code-switching and the writer's intrusions into linguistic remarks, causing the translator's presence to be perceived as less persistent. At the same time, the passage from the translator's visibility to his gradual invisibility does not affect the cultural values of the single realities represented in the novel. If the translator's invisibility, generated by a domesticating approach to translation, leads to the dominance of the target culture over the source culture, as Venuti argues, paving the way for an ethnocentric violence, Nabokov preserves the presence of various cultural voices, even when his visibility appears to be less perceptible. The translator lets the characters talk, he listens to them, he mediates their plurilingual dialogues and ensures the coexistence of different cultural backgrounds. The continuous alternation between the translator's visibility and invisibility does not undermine the existence of alien cultures; instead, it enables the writer to focus on various aspects of the languages employed in the text. To use Cronin's (2013) words, the translator adopts both a horizontal and a vertical stance in the numerous plurilingual dialogues. Following this interpretation, as a writer and traveller, Nabokov horizontally explores, through his characters' dialogues, the languages used in the novel by traversing different geographical areas. His geographical route throughout western Europe and the USA traces a horizontal space which leads the writer to be in contact with different linguistic contexts of his time (Russo 2020b: 74-75). His vertical linguistic exploration, metaphorically evoking a descent into the depths of the past, simultaneously reveals a retrospective view, enhancing his awareness of the "historical sense" (Cronin 2013: 19) of the languages examined in the novel, which he partially practised during his passage from East to West. The vertical investigation allows the author to retrace his European past, his linguistic transition from his motherland to the English-speaking world, using in the text the languages he engaged with during this transition. Pnin embodies the writer's linguistic experience and his thoughts are, therefore, refracted through the facets of his plurilingual prism, unearthing his memories and the languages of his past.

In addition to the numerous plurilingual passages in the text which, as explained, gradually make the reader accustomed to the steady language switching, Pnin's English, flawed by frequent mistakes and inaccuracies, undergoes stylistic changes. Such changes occur in the fifth chapter, in which Pnin's English suddenly sounds more proficient. When he visits his friend at the Pines, a country mansion, Pnin discusses some issues in *Anna Karenina* with Bolotov, a Professor of history and philosophy. A long passage features Pnin's proficient English, as he points out some details of the plot during his conversation with Bolotov:

> The action of the novel starts in the beginning of 1872, namely on Friday, February the twenty-third by the New Style. In his morning paper Oblonski reads that Beust is rumored to have proceeded to Wiesbaden. […] After presenting his credentials, Beust had gone to the continent for a rather protracted Christmas vacation – had spent there two months with his family, and was now returning to London, where, according to his own memoirs in two volumes, preparations were under way for the thanksgiving service to be held in St. Paul's on February the twenty-seventh for the recovering from typhoid fever of the Prince of Wales (90).

Pnin's description reads like an encyclopaedic analysis, characterised by accurate grammar and an elevated style. To use Boyd's (1990: 275) words, "His language becomes graceful, dignified, and witty, and the pedantry he shares here with his peers no longer seems misplaced fussiness but rather the index of a well-stocked mind with a passion for accuracy". If Pnin's English is faltering and incorrect in everyday dialogues, the protagonist proves his accurate mastery of his adopted language when he discusses literary issues with his compatriots. This suggests that Pnin's uncertain English stands out in everyday situations when he interacts with the American people around him who "insist on imposing their own reality on him" as, "What torments Pnin in exile is not only his separation and distance from his heritage, […], but how trivial and unimportant this separation and distance is from any perspective other than his own" (Nafisi 2019: 131-132). Pnin's lack of adaptation to the physical and social environment impairs his proficiency in English. This difficulty abates when he engages in discussions on literary issues with his Russian friends, a domain in which he feels most at ease. In addition to showcasing his correct English, the protagonist draws the reader into his linguistic entanglements as he interrupts his description of Tolstoy's novel. Expressing his enthusiasm for being at his friend's house, he implicitly discloses his Russian vocabulary in the following lines: "However (*odnako*), it really is hot here (*i zharko zhe u vas*)! I think I shall now present myself before the most luminous orbs (*presvetlïe ochi*, jocular) of Alexandr Petrovich and then go for a dip (*okupnutsya*, also jocular) in the river he so vividly describes in his letter" (90). Despite not debating literature, Pnin's English does not falter, as he is surrounded by his compatriots in this circumstance. The parenthetical translation of some words of the dialogue into Russian, sometimes followed by a comment ("jocular"), echoes Pnin's Russian side[3]. While he talks to the hosts in English, the protagonist never stops thinking in Russian, adding the Russian translation of certain words as a paratextual resource for bilingual readers. The translation of some words into Russian seems to remain concealed in the secret corners of the protagonist's linguistic universe. In this passage, Pnin's English is correct, whereas, throughout the novel, the protagonist lets the readers into his Russian thoughts through his ungrammatical and mispronounced English. The words translated parenthetically into Russian are not uttered by the character, since the dialogue takes place in English. As paratextual elements of the story, the translated words illustrate Pnin's schemata relating to concepts previously learnt in Russian. The Russian words

[3] The double use of "jocular" in parentheses highlights, among other things, Nabokov's playful use of words. As he claims in an interview (Boyd and Tolstoy 2019, 370), "I let words play. I allow them to gambol with each other. Some of my characters have fun catching a phrase unawares, because one could define a pun as two words caught *in flagrante*".

included in parentheses in some passages underline that the writer, while expressing certain concepts or referring to specific things in English, looks back on his Russian past and retrieves special moments in his past associated with those words. The use of Russian in the novel thus brings to light crucial parts of the narrative, as it provides clues pertaining to memories that the character and, therefore, the writer, experienced in this language (García de la Puente 2015). The parenthetic translation of certain words foregrounds the translator's gradual alternation between visibility and invisibility.

As self-translation is a central element in *Pnin*, it is necessary to bear in mind the long-standing debate on self-translation – whether it is a creative re-writing of the source text or a translation constrained by the conventions of standard translation (Anselmi 2012). First and foremost, the frequently "subtitled" self-translation in the novel reinforces the foreignizing effect of the text, even though such an effect fades, as previously explained. Nabokov composed the entire work in English, carrying out an unconscious self-translation from Russian. By quoting certain words and expressions in Russian, he underscores his fidelity to the concepts originally conceived in Russian and aims to both ensure and share with the reader the effectiveness of his decision-making as a translator. However, this process does not entail any form of constraint on the translation, neither does it impose specific conventions. The interplay between English and Russian, the translator's visibility and invisibility, the linguistic blending and the protagonist's linguistic uncertainties are clues to the author's creative process while he re-writes his text in the target language (Shvabrin 2019). The translator, as the author of the work, confirms his sensitivity to new linguistic contexts, adding his creative nuances in the plurilingual world that he creates and re-creates. The translator thus re-shapes his target text by re-translating his memories and evoking the most relevant moments of his linguistic journey. At the same time, the use of French words does not serve the same purpose, likely due to his lesser confidence in the language, and may instead reflect an echo of his time in Paris[4].

Although the protagonist's confidence in English emerges in the fifth chapter, it fades in the pages that follow, once again conveying the creativity of linguistic interference which, through mistakes and inaccuracies, characterises the protagonist's linguistic universe (Boyd 2011). The environment of the Pines (his friend's mansion), whose name recalls that of the protagonist and, therefore, his subjective sphere, is the only place where Pnin feels truly at ease, surrounded by other Russian émigrés. Towards the end of the novel, Pnin finds himself isolated and excluded from the academic community in which he had hoped to secure a tenured professorship. When Pnin learns that his job position is insecure, he realises that he must "face a future more homeless than ever" (Boyd 1990: 276). This renewed sense of exile is further exacerbated by ironic remarks about his English. As Clements notes: "Our friend […] employs a nomenclature all his own. His verbal vagaries add a new thrill to life. His

[4] In this regard, Cornwell (2005: 153) writes that "French had always been regarded as the third string to his bow" and Boyd (1990: 432) claims that "Though his [Nabokov's] French was first-rate, he never felt it as supple or secure as his English. Apart from his memoir 'Mademoiselle O' and his Pushkin essay, he had composed nothing in French". Some interviews with Nabokov show his proficient use of English and his British pronunciation (Nabokov 2023).

mispronunciations are mythopeic. His slips of the tongue are oracular" (123). The (in)visible writer views himself through the lens of a mature bilingual, portraying a linguistic context in which he mixes mockery of the immigrant's frustrations with sympathy.

4. The Double in the Process of Linguistic Transition

The double is a paradigm in Nabokov's works (Boyd 1990; Nafisi 2019; Sweeney 2005; Schadewaldt 2023; Shvabrin 2019). As argued in the previous paragraph, self-translation is used by the author to split his linguistic world and his persona. Nabokov uses elements of both the Russian world and the American world to build images of an ideal plurilingual country, viewing this reality through the eyes of both an insider and an outsider or, better, of someone living between borders. As Sweeney (2005: 68) suggests, "His [Nabokov's] American works constantly correlate the two countries […] by depicting distorted reflections, scrambled pictures, unfinished maps, visionary paintings, or miniature models of one world inside another". The image of the double clearly emerges in the final part, as Nabokov reveals further memories of Pnin, providing interesting details on his life as an émigré. Meanwhile, the relationship between the author, the narrator and the protagonist becomes more ambiguous. In light of this, it is necessary to provide some plot-related information from the final chapter to better understand the linguistic architecture of the novel. The narrator now switches to the first person and informs the reader that he has known Pnin since they were both boys in Russia. He also confirms that his name is Vladimir Vladimirovich, he is an Anglo-Russian novelist and an American academic; he is Nabokov. The final chapter is also the section in which the narrator, becoming a character of the story, interacts with Pnin. The reader loses track of the storyline and is astounded to learn that the narrator had an affair with Liza before she married Pnin. The narrator accepts a position at Waindell and he arrives at the college on the day Pnin has to leave, exacerbating the ongoing disagreements with him. Pnin, who is about to be dismissed, seems to consider Nabokov a threat, the ouster of his job. The narrator thus turns out to be a character, specifically Pnin's antagonist in love, social life and work. Pnin's mispronounced English arises again when he falsely denies being at home during a phone call from the narrator and Jack Cockerell, the head of the English department. As the narrator writes, "none save my old friend, not even his best imitator, could rhyme so emphatically 'at' with the German 'hat', 'home' with the French 'homme', and 'gone' with the head of 'Goneril'" (141). As Pnin drives away in his small car, the narrator pursues him in an attempt to catch up, but Pnin vanishes on the horizon. The final lines of the novel echo the opening ones, as Cockerell is about to recount the story of Pnin, explaining that he left for Cremona to deliver a lecture only to realise he had brought the wrong one with him. The circular structure of the novel brings the reader back to the beginning and leaves them with unresolved questions. While maintaining his plurilingual narrative style, the narrator engages in a temporal interaction with his counterpart, Pnin, evoking past moments of their meetings and exposing their difficult relationship. In light of this narrative information pertaining to the final part, Nabokov's transition from Russian to

English is here analysed not only from a spatial perspective, but also from a psycho-linguistic angle, which pervades the writer's complex relationship with his linguistic *alter ego*. The conclusion provides additional details about the past, resulting from the author's self-translation and re-self-translation. The plurilingual dialogues are re-writings of memories that retrace and disclose past events through the process of self-translation.

By depicting the idiosyncratic relationship between the narrator and the protagonist, the author represents the problems pertaining to his linguistic transition. The double identity of the author is developed through a game of visibility and invisibility played out by the narrator-translator. The translator's visibility becomes apparent in various passages through the estrangement created by the use of foreign words. In the final section, the translator's *other*, his double, embodied by the protagonist, becomes metaphorically invisible as Pnin departs. The protagonist's escape reflects his need to return to his linguistic world and deliver a fluent, linear story to the reader. At the same time, the depiction of the narrator pursuing Pnin stands for the writer's attempt to capture, appropriate and maintain a dialogue with his *alter ego*. In this regard, it is worth quoting what Casmier (2004: 72) writes about the protagonist: "[…] Pnin […] seems like a horrible translation, presented by a translator with a dubious relationship to his subject. Nevertheless, amid such upheaval and devious instability, something about Pnin endures – and, whatever it is, it remains resistant to translation, misreading, and misrepresentation". In the wake of the binary path outlined throughout the novel, characterised by the opposing concepts of alienation and integration, foreignness and Americanness, visibility and invisibility, the author questions his ontological duality and, by interacting with his two halves, overcomes this duality, placing himself between multiple realities. In particular, if the final description of Pnin leaving in his car seems to symbolise the author's permanent duality and linguistic alienation, with the protagonist striving to abandon his state of frustration, the circular structure outlined in the concluding lines of the work reopens the dialogue with Pnin, creating a dynamic interplay between the translator's visibility and invisibility. By returning to the opening pages of the story, the author seeks to overcome his schizophrenic relationship with his *alter ego* through the narrator's voice. The circular structure of the story thus re-maps the writer's geographies of emigration and linguistic boundaries, enabling him to re-cross and re-explore the migrant's endless itineraries, thus maintaining the dialogue between his two linguistic identities. The linguistic and cultural schizophrenia gradually dissipates as the protagonist once again retraces his route to Cremona. Thus, the narrator's effort to appropriate the untranslated aspect of Pnin - the part of the protagonist that remains concealed - further catalyses the author's linguistic transition, although, as Boyd (1990: 271) claims, Pnin remains "an object of pathos as an exile, an ex-husband, a man alone, mocked and misunderstood".

5. Conclusion

The self-translated expressions and words in the novel represent the linguistic and cultural cartographies populating the author's memories. Translating and self-

translating entail re-mapping itineraries and unknown lands, as well as uprooting the émigré from his 'comfort zones' to confront exile, estrangement and language loss (Zaccaria 2017). Bilingualism is the means that Nabokov employs to facilitate the dialogue between the past and present, since Russian recalls the writer's past, while English is the language of the writer's present. Nabokov not only draws and translates the borders between these languages, but he also discovers a space of communication between the past and the present, a concept that permeates much of his autobiography (Trubikhina 2015). In this interplay between past and present, languages of the past and present, alienation and integration, self-translation and re-self-translation, the translator reveals both his visibility and invisibility through a game of doubles and mirrors, tracing his own linguistic route. In this game of doubles, characterised by the translator's visible and invisible presence, Nabokov leads the reader through the endless spaces of translation. The writer navigates the nuances of cultural displacement, creating a narrative that bridges his past experiences with his present identity, ultimately crafting a multifaceted self that transcends the borders of a single linguistic dimension.

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The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.