

Conference Paper

Literary and Digital Translation As a Form of Intercultural Communication in the Epoch of Social Transformations

Alyona Aleksandrovna Ustinovskaya

Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology, Moscow, Russian Federation

Abstract

This article is devoted to the transformation of models of literary translation in the era of digitalization. The first translations in Russian practice tended to “retell” events, and the text was made “based on” the original rather than being a translation in the modern sense. Examples of such approaches to translation can be seen in the work of V.A. Zhukovsky, A.S. Pushkin and other authors of the early nineteenth century. At the same time, it was at the beginning of the 19th century that the first attempts were made to contrast the translation with their own, Russian literature: “the same subject in Russian” was replaced by a translated text close to the modern concept of translation. The beginning of the twentieth century was marked by mass translations of poetic texts and, in the vast majority of cases, the authors who translated them were also poets: V.Ya. Bryusov; N.S. Gumilev; A.A. Akhmatova; B.L. Pasternak; and others. The translation of the poem was understood as the transfer of the original poetic experience to Russian soil, and high demands were placed on the quality of the poetic text, often leading to significant semantic differences between the original text and the translated one. With the advent of machine translation and the expansion of digitalization, translation has become available to almost everyone. At the same time, there are areas in which literal translation almost does not interfere with the perception of the text (for example, in an official business style or when translating texts of instructions) and requires minimal stylistic editing. However, literary translation can radically lose its meaning, and in the case of a poetic translation, it can deprive the text of its aesthetic characteristics (rhythmic organization, rhyme), which poses new challenges for translators in the digitalization era. Translation gaps in the text of fiction should be considered not yet completely solved by the task of the modern digitalization society.

Keywords: Translation, literary text, Silver Age, digital age.

Corresponding Author:

Alyona Aleksandrovna

Ustinovskaya

alyonau1@yandex.ru

Published: 21 January 2021

Publishing services provided by
Knowledge E

© Alyona Aleksandrovna Ustinovskaya. This article is distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](#), which permits unrestricted use and redistribution provided that the original author and source are credited.

Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the XXIII International Conference Conference Committee.

1. Introduction

Translation is a fairly young type of speech activity, inextricably linked with existing methods of transmitting and storing information. We can only hypothetically assume the existence of translation in the preliterate era, however, the need for translators arose during international negotiations, and in this case people demanded that, due to

 **OPEN ACCESS**

their travels or after a long stay in the country of the studied language, they were able to communicate in two languages.

The appearance of writing and fixing texts expanded the possibilities of translation, associated primarily with the translation of liturgical texts. The oldest known source is the translation of the Holy Scriptures and related texts, the interpretation of which gave an impetus to the development of translation activities.

The next turning point in the history of translation should recognize the emergence and distribution of printed texts, which raised the question of the mass translation of fiction. It was in the “Guttenberg era” that theories of literary translation arose and took shape, and a large layer of translated literature was formed in all cultural paradigms.

The emergence of a new way of information — electronic — inevitably made adjustments to the translation technique. Machine translation algorithms have made it possible for compact electronic translators to function, which, although they still cannot completely replace a human translator, largely take over its functions and provide communication at least at the household level (which greatly simplifies the life of tourists and travelers and allows us to talk about the blurring of intercultural boundaries, at least at the level of everyday life: a person who does not know the language is no longer trapped within the limits of his culture and is independent of the one who knows the language). Thus, in the realities of 2020, it is possible to form a translation-substring of any text that broadly conveys its meaning. Two important consequences follow from this: firstly, the work of a translator of fiction cannot now be associated with knowledge of the language alone, which brings us back to the practice of the early twentieth century, when many Russian-speaking poets worked with interlocutors prepared by linguistic translators. Secondly, this, on the contrary, makes a deep knowledge of the language more popular: an electronic translator may not pick up connotative connections, or convey shades of meaning or artistic images. The approach to translation as a transfer of aesthetic experience, characteristic of the school of acmeists, reaches a new level, and superficial knowledge of the language in this case may not be enough.

The observed trend brings forward the necessary to consider the history of the translation technique and the prospects for its further development.

2. Methods and Methodology

The general trend of the translation of books in the XVIII–XIX centuries was not so much a translation but rather an adaptation: a translator often transferred the events of a book to Russian land, gave the heroes Russian names, etc. For example, the translation of

“Alice in Wonderland” by V.V. Nabokov (under the pseudonym Sirin) came out under the title “Anya in Wonderland”. “At the earlier stages of the development of literature, there is no fundamental difference between the original and translated works: the latter are included in national literature as its full members.... The classic translator sought not so much to recreate an individual foreign-language work in his own language, but to create a kind of impersonal work approaching the ideal” [9, 10]. N.M. Demurova, describing a similar approach to translation on the example of “Alice in Wonderland”, writes: “Not only names changed, but also everyday and historical realities, poems and parodies. Alice turned into Sonya, the maid Mary-Ann into Marfushka, the Cheshire Cat into the Siberian” [4, 87].

However, the attitude towards the translation gradually changed. If, for example, many works by V.A. Zhukovsky, to this day, are still not perceived as translated (they are, as a rule, inspired by the content of a poem of a foreign author; Zhukovsky introduced a lot of his own to them), the development of literature leads to the emergence of a juxtaposition of foreign and “his” literature, and the translation is interpreted just like a translation. “At the same time, with the development of Russian literature, the attitude to translation has changed. The need for active assimilation of the achievements of foreign literature gradually disappeared. By the middle of the last century, Russian literature caught up with the leading European literature and entered the international arena itself” [10, 23].

Thus, by the beginning of the 19th century, translation did not turn into a mere retelling, but rather into a literal transference of a text. The role of the translator was reduced to craft work: the translator (especially in prose) was considered a slave of the source text [9]. V.G. Belinsky wrote: “In literary translation, neither additions, nor changes are allowed. Translation should truthfully convey the spirit of the source text. The purpose of such translations is to replace, as far as possible, the original for those for whom it is inaccessible due to the lack language knowledge, and to give them a means and an opportunity to enjoy it and judge it” [2, 427]. Commenting on this statement, Yu. D. Levin points out that this principle extended even to poetic translations. “Belinsky strongly condemned all the arbitrariness of the translator in dealing with the original, even in such a subjective genre as lyrics. The translator should not overshadow the author he is translating, his creative personality must submit to the task of the true embodiment of the original” [10, 101].

By the middle of the XIX century, a tradition was established to translate texts with the above-mentioned “slavery of interlinear” that inherited the ideas of the natural school. The translator was not perceived as the creator of the text, as, for example, the description of V.A. Gilyarovsky in the book of essays “Moscow and Muscovites” of

the work of the so-called “playwrights from the “Dog Hall” — who worked for a penny translating the text “turning” the original play so that it could not be recognized: “Yes, it’s very simple: you need to make it so that the play remains the same, but so that the author and translator do not recognize it. I would do it myself, but there is no time... As you do this, I’ll give another one right away” [6]. The activities of such copywriters were “translation from translation”, which depreciated the work of the original translator.

3. Results and Discussion

At the beginning of the 20th century, trends in translation began to be determined by the activities of translators who themselves wrote poetry, and in most cases were known primarily as poets. A large number of translated poems are in the poetic heritage of V.Ya. Bryusov, K.D. Balmont, N.S. Gumilev, A.A. Akhmatova, B.L. Pasternak. Their work with translated texts returns the translation to the traditions of V.A. Zhukovskiy: the personality of the translator becomes identical with the author’s. Referring to the original and mentioning that the poem is translated, poets often radically reworked the text of the original, introducing their images and ideas into it.

As an example, we consider the translation of a little children’s poem by Robert Lewis Stevenson “The land of counterpane” [11] by Valeriy Bryusov, who titled his translation “The land of bed” [3]. The author of the translation has preserved the rhythm and plot of the original, a pair of rhymes with a male rhyme and division into stanzas. The text is based on the image of a boy who, while lying in bed sick, plays with soldiers and boats as well as makes a city with a blanket and sheets. In the very beginning, in the first line “When I was sick and lay in bed”, Bryusov writes “I have been ill for many days” [“Kogda ya mnogo dnei khvoral”], missing the connotation of the original text. Stevenson’s boy is not in pain, the text does not mention anywhere that he lay in bed for many days, and this is a one-time illness. Throughout the original text, Past Simple is used: I had, I watched, sent, brought, planted, etc. There is no indication in the boy’s speech in English that this action is multiple or long, and in the text of Bryusov an image appears from the first line in pain, sick boy, which makes the reader feel sorry for the boy.

Bryusov uses imperfect verbs: “was ill”, “arranged”, “led”, “took”, “let out” [“khvoral”, “rastavlyal”, “vel”, “bral”, “puskal”] — a series of such verbs makes the reader think that the boy’s actions are continuous, long, repeating, which is consistent with the original “I have been ill for many days” [“ya mnogo dnei khvoral”].

Bryusov, trying to convey a similar picture, firstly, makes the giant lay down: in his text he is described as “lying”, and the location of this giant is important — he lies

“above the huge rocks / From the sheet and blankets” [“nad gromadoi skal / Iz prostyni i odeyal”]. At the same time, the image of a lying giant differently illuminates the initial allusion: Swift’s text mentions a lying Gulliver surrounded by Lilliputians, but this is a helpless Gulliver who has just come to the shore and is hardly recovered, and the Lilliputians surrounding him initially arose negative emotions in him. Biographer of V.Ya. Bryusov, M.V. Kuropatkina, mentions his poor health, which explained why he did not even attend gymnasium from the first grade, like all children normally did, but from the second. The first grade program was covered by him from home, because of which he could not immediately find contact with other children at school: “Unfortunately, the boy could not boast of great physical strength, so he did not try to give a worthy rebuff to his offenders. However, Bryusov, having received an unusual education in his father’s house, developed his artistic talent, that later found a way out.

And even if none of the teachers and peers could prove that the thin, weak and sickly boy could quietly and quickly remove all classmates’ textbooks from the classroom and hide them in the attic, thus disrupting the lesson, his reputation improved significantly” [8]. Thus, describing the experience of a sick boy, Bryusov obviously appeals to his own experience, placing it in the last stanza “above” the bed, refers to the image of death, the idea which involves the soul leaving the body, which is often described by patients who survived the clinical death; for example, contemplation of one’s body and one’s bed as if from a height, being “above” the picture. T. Ventslova writes about this manner of translating from her personal experience: “In the translation practice of the beginning of the 20th century, two lines collided, which, however, can be traced nowadays: the Annensky line (later Pasternak) and the Bryusov line and Gumilyov (later Lozinsky). Annensky’s translations are understandable only in the context of his own work, as its complement. They are extremely subjective and suggest serious deviations from the original text. Bryusov and Gumilyov strove for greater objectivity, even science. But they also included translations into the context of their own creativity (simply this creativity was different, its internal structure was more “objective”)” [12].

In general, the translation of Bryusov examined above reflects the general trend of Silver Age translations: the introduction of personality traits into the text, up to a complete alteration of the original plan. The authors of many pre-revolutionary translations often did not even mention that their works are translations. An interesting example of a translation tendency that inherits Annensky’s practice is the translation of Beatrix Potter’s fairy tale “On Two Bad Mice” [“O dvukh nekhoroshikh myshkakh”] by Poliksena Solovyeva, the sister of the philosopher Vladimir Solovyov and the daughter of the historian Sergei Solovyov. A researcher of two texts, translated and original, M. Ionova,

indicates that, in fact, the translation of P. Solovyeva is a poetic retelling “based on”: her work is much larger than the original, and she has new characters: for example, only Potter two dolls, a resident of the house, and a mouse family, while Solovyeva also has a true mistress of the house — the girl Sasha and her nanny. However, this is not the main thing: the spirit of a fairy tale, its idea, is completely deviated. “Where Beatrix Potter, according to the British literary tradition, is triumphant in psychology, at Poliksena Solovyova, in glorious Russian, morality triumphs. If the matter did not concern mice, it would be possible to speak with confidence about the humanistic messenger. The last line of “Doll’s home” [“Kuklin dom”] is the phrase of the nanny “The mouse is also God’s beast!” [“Mysh ved tozhe Bozhiy zver!”] in its pathos of mercy, it is worthy of Dostoevsky. The Englishwoman Potter would never do anything like this:... carefully, to the logical end, develop the moral torment of the mouse family and, finally, when the guilt is atoned for, the conclusions are made and there is no doubt that each side has learned from the immoral act a lesson of love, to reconcile everyone. But Solovyova’s mice, which from the very beginning evoke much more sympathy than dolls, and endowed with the contradictory charm of truly bright heroes, led from plebeian egoism through crime and torment of conscience to a spiritual crisis and a new, enlightened work for the benefit of the near life” [7].

The text of Potter takes on an almost utopian orientation in the translation-retelling of Solovyeva: mice, people, and dolls unite, justice triumphs. This contrast is indicative: Potter’s fairy tale was just a fairy tale, interesting, and perhaps a slightly instructive story with an intriguing plot (will the housewives see the mess? Will they punish the mice?) and a happy ending. The original fairy tale is an entertaining story in prose; the translation is a moralizing story in verse, which probably would not have been associated with the original at all if Solovyeva’s text were not accompanied by illustrations made by Potter herself to the original fairy tale.

“... a fairy tale Potter judiciously states: class envy is the aunt of all vices; you can cover, cover up, sweep and clean up the consequences, but as long as there is a mouse tribe, our sinful mouse nature has pushed, pushes and will push us to baseness. Here is a Protestant view. Call it “sober” — as you wish, the essence is one. The psychology of English literature — unlike the psychology of Russian literature — is implicated in English sobriety, as well as in English composure, which allows looking into the eyes of a Bengal tiger, or an angry proletarian, or human imperfection without hysteria” [7].

No less has changed in the translation-retelling by Solovyeva and a fairy tale dedicated to the adventures of another hero Beatrix Potter, a rabbit. Peter Rabbit, one of the most famous characters in English literature, turned into a Krolya. His adventures,

like those of the mouse family, are also set out in verse, not prose. The translations “Doll House” [“Kuklin dom”] and “The Adventures of Krolya” [“Priklyucheniya Kroli”], which lost not only the story line, but also the unity of the pictures and the story itself, were not even recognized by P. Solovyeva who created them as translations. “In the publication of the work by P. Solovyeva, Beatrix Potter is mentioned, but as the author of... illustrations. Yes, Potter made drawings for her works, in her books almost every phrase is accompanied by a picture. There is no doubt that these pictures were reprinted in the Russian edition without the slightest thought about the existence of the very concept of “copyright”. Solovyova not once turned to Potter for stories (or themes for variations), but she never referred to her as her inspiration. It is incorrect to talk about plagiarism, it is just pointless — that was the usual practice of translating children’s literature in Tsarist Russia” [7].

Thus, at the beginning of the twentieth century the tendency of translation-retelling dominated, in which the translator realized himself as a person equal to the author, and sometimes even more significant (especially if the author was little known). Subsequently, this trend was changed by mass translations of foreign literature in the USSR — the publication of such multi-volume series as “Literary Monuments” [“Literaturnye pamyatniki”], “Library of World Literature” [“Biblioteka vsemirnoi literatury”], etc., during the preparation of which the careful work on the translation text, editing and verification over the original prevailed.

The beginning of the 21st century was marked by the advent of machine translation, the technology of which largely determines the formation of a single transformational society: “A transformational (transitional) society can only be called a society in which radical, revolutionary in nature changes take place in all spheres of public life (economic, political, legal, social, moral, religious, aesthetic, ethical, scientific, etc.). At the same time, radical changes in the economy, politics, law, and the social sphere are decisive for all other areas” [1]. The emergence of fast electronic translation facilitates the tasks of intercultural communication, at least at the simple everyday level, allows you to provide a superficial understanding of any text in a foreign language and not be geographically limited in activity: a person is no longer limited by the language and, figuratively speaking, “will not get into trouble” in a foreign country.

Regarding the technology of literary translation, the advent of machine translation has not yet led to the complete replacement of the human translator by a machine translator. Digital translation provides a primary understanding of meaning, but does not convey deep semantic connections, images used by the author of sound means,

etc. [5] Transferring meaning to another language, it is deprived of the ability to transfer an aesthetic experience that only a human translator can do.

The described tendency leads to a return of interest in the personality of the translator: being no longer connected with knowledge of the language, he can, like the translators of the early twentieth century, take advantage of the interlinear and create a masterpiece based on it. The expansion of the possibilities of automatic translation in the future will lead to an increase of interest specifically in translations of fiction, particularly in poems, the text of which is more difficult to translate than a prosaic text.

4. Conclusions

Translation activities are changing along with trends in the transference and storage of information and largely reflect the vector of development of society. The massive “blurring of boundaries”, the ability and need to communicate with speakers of different languages and cultures gave rise to demand for quick translation, not related to a specific person, and the supply for such demand was found in the emergence of machine translation technology, which makes it possible to quickly communicate with people elsewhere both virtually (electronically), as well as face to face.

The least promising technology of machine translation seems to be in relation to fiction, especially lyrics, since in a lyric work the author conveys not the plot, but the experience, and the aesthetic means of transferring it are difficult to translate into another language. This raises the question of the need for interaction between the human translator and the interlinear performed by the machine or the work of the person in the traditional way, without any connection to machine translation.

In this regard, it seems worth analyzing the translation practice of the Silver Age in Russia, when the translation was not just a retelling “based on the work”, but combined the intention of the author of the original with the personality and creative biography of the author of the translation, leading to the creation of a masterpiece at a new level: the merger of two personalities in the text.

References

- [1] Agafonov, V. D. (November 2019) Transformational Society at the Present Stage as an Object of Legal Transformation. Retrieved February 16, 2020 from <http://elib.bsu.by/bitstream/123456789/177515/1/196-198.pdf>

- [2] Belinskiy, V. G. (1982). *Collected Works*. In 9 volumes. (vol. 2). Moscow: Publishing House of Science Academy, 1982. 783 pp.
- [3] Bryusov, V. Y. (May 1924) *The Land of Bed*. Retrieved February 16, 2020 from <http://bryusov.lit-info.ru/bryusov/perevod/stivenson-strana-krovati.htm>
- [4] Demurova N. M. (2010). Sonya, Anya, Alisa... Notes on Russian translations of Lewis Carroll's fairy tale "Alice in Wonderland". In Carroll, L. *Alice in Wonderland. Alice Through the Looking Glass*. Moscow: Editorial, 2010. pp. 5-19.
- [5] Gere, C. (2008). *Digital Culture*. London: Reaction Books. Publ., p. 248.
- [6] Gilyarovskiy, V. A. (1926) *Moscow and Moscovites*. Retrieved February 16, 2020 from http://lib.ru/RUSSLIT/GILQROWSKIJ/gilqrowskij.txt_with-big-pictures.html.
- [7] Ionova, M. I. (2008). About Dolls, Mice and Men. *Literary Newspaper*, issue 12-13, p. 7.
- [8] Kuropatkina, M. V. (2008) *Valeriy Yakovlevich Bryusov - The Evil Demon*. Retrieved from <https://history.wikireading.ru/353006>.
- [9] Lanier, J. (2012). *You Are Not a Gadget*. London: Penguin Books Publ., p. 240.
- [10] Levin, Y. D. (1985). Russian Translators of the 19th Century and the Development of Literary Translation. London: Publishing house "Fiction", p. 356.
- [11] Stevenson, R. L. (1885) *The Land of Counterpane*. https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/A_Child{27}s_Garden_of_Verses/The_Land_of_Counterpane.
- [12] Venclova, T. (November 1991) *Vyacheslav Ivanov and Osip Mandelstam — Petrarch translators (On the example of the CCCXI sonnet)*. Retrieved from <https://lit.wikireading.ru/46073>.