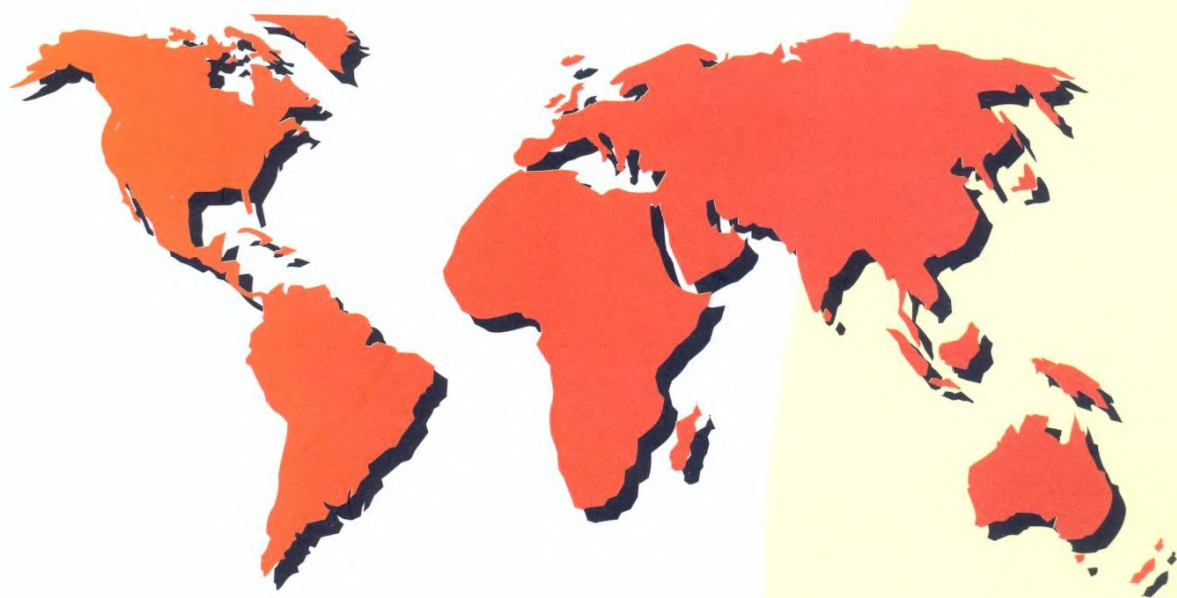


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***Loss or retention of cultural elements when translating literary works: the case of Russian literary in the books used for the teaching of literature in Secondary Education in Greece***

***1. Literature and translation***

The issue of translation in general and that of the translation of literary works in particular is essentially important. The relationship between theory and practice in literary translation has always been problematic. It could call into question even the existence of analytical models in an area of such deep emotional impact. The literary texts are acts of communication and not just an accumulation of language features. Their translation is interpretation and creation at the same time. What is of interest are not the textual features themselves, but the sub-text strategies of language use, as they appear in the features of the particular texts (Connolly: 1998, b). Jones(1989) identifies three main stages: the stage of comprehension, which includes a careful analysis of the source- text, the stage of interpretation, where the translator faces each individual problem seeking the equivalent effect with constant references to the source-text and the target-text. Finally, the stage of creation, where target-text is formulated as an end-result (an artifact), which is valued in the frame of the target-language culture and is more or less equivalent to the source-text.

A translated text is considered acceptable by most publishers, critics and readers when it «flows», when the lack of linguistic and stylistic subtleties makes it a comprehensible text, thus, giving the impression that it reflects the personality and the intent of the author or the basic meaning of the foreign text. In other words, it gives the impression that the translated text is not in fact a translation but the «original» itself (Connolly: 1998).

The translator tries to achieve the same effect on the readership of the target-text as was obtained by the readership of the source-text. This means that the receiver of the target language communicates with both the translator as to the content of the text and also with the author as to his view of the world (Sella-Mazi: 1996 a, p.855-864). The translation as an end-result affects its recipients and, as feedback, its transmitters. The translation process involves therefore two equivalent messages and not a single writing style or a version of reality (Batsalia and Sella-Mazi: 1994, p. 28).

In literature the "ethics of translation" is tested the most when the translator undertakes to help the writer of the original change the views of the readers, or simply convince them of his/her own thoughts (Robinson: 1991, p. 213). The role of the translator is very important. The translation is worth what the translator worths (Ampatzopoulou: 2000, p. 31-56).

The age of communication, of the revolution of information and of technological advancement has made the interaction between different language systems and cultures

quite familiar. In this frame we have to ask ourselves, considering that literature is a fine-flavoured wine, how the literature of a particular culture can «travel» and how much of this fine flavour will be lost or compromised (Krieger: 1996).

The main feature of a good translation is most of all its faithfulness to the original. There has long been concern about faithfulness in the translation from the source to the target language and the relation between accuracy and artistic effect (Kehagioglou: 1998, p.1). This concern for the poetic discourse, in particular, has been expressed as follows: Faithfulness to what? Of course, to the style of the poem. .... So the translator has to transfer a poem to his mother tongue while preserving its emotional impact, that is, to reproduce not only the thought, but also the feeling (Vagenas: 1989, 13-47). For some, free translation is considered preferable (Elytis: 1976, p.11). It has been said that poetry of all literary genres is untranslatable. Many have stressed the huge difficulties encountered when attempting to transfer this most artistic language, its language system and culture in a way that is accessible to others (Krieger: 1996).

Translation acts as a deterrent of the isolation of a language community, which remains strict to its own traditions. It is considered a method of bridging cultural and language barriers, and that is essential for communication. Translation is essentially a powerful cultural weapon. It defines the different constructions of national identities of foreign cultures. At the same time it is an area of linguistic, cultural, economic and ideological conflicts and definitions and therefore it can be regarded as a primarily cultural and political practice, which either manufactures identities bearing the ideological traits of foreign cultures or criticizes them, a practice that may confirm or negate values and institutions of the target language culture (Sella-Mazi b: 1996, p. 225-236).

Those languages which can be considered weak can defend themselves not only against the dominant presence of the «strong» ones but also against all emerging nationalism if they translate foreign language texts into their national language (including the greek language) and their own texts (in their mother tongue, their national language) into the dominant languages in order for their language identity to become widely known to the linguistic community (Batsalia and Sella-Mazi: 1994).

The translation process provides people in general and individuals in particular, the necessary means of communicating and sharing their natural identities, their beliefs and ideals, so that, once understood by each other, they may accept one another (ibid).

For two or three decades now, the theory of translation has been under the intense pressure of transformational grammar, general and comparative linguistics, semantics, information theory, anthropology, semiotics, psychology and discourse analysis (as well as other scientific fields/disciplines). This situation has created the right conditions for 'transfer' between language and cultural systems. The controversy which has traditionally surrounded translation, literal and free translation, has been replaced by concerns of linguistic nature (semantic vs. communicative translation, for example) (for details see Connolly, 1998, b). More specific problems such as the «false equivalence effect» can be analyzed more efficiently with the introduction of stylistic analysis without, however, being limited to the literary stylistic analysis which focuses on examining aesthetic or thematic criteria. The difficulty of the task is not only due to the differences between source-language and target-language but also to the fact that they represent variant cultures and, therefore, distinctive language, literary and sociocultural conventions (see Snell-Hornby, 1988 ).

In particular, issues relating to translating literary texts from Russian to Greek are analysed at the level of phraseologisms by P. Krimbas, who examines the different mechanisms of cohesion and coherence of the two language systems (Russian-Greek) (Krimbas: 2008, 18-19).

## **2. Literature and Culture**

When trying to define the relation between translation and culture/civilization, it should be noted that every culture resists translation although it needs it. The essential translation problem, which is of interest to the present paper, addresses ways of cultural transfer (language, history, customs, mentalities) in the text which is being translated. Every translation has a double interpretation: the translator interprets the original, but also expresses his own world (Ampazopoulou: 2000). There is always the danger that when the translator attempts to make a foreign culture known and familiar as much as possible, he or she may end up usurping the foreign text and leading the foreign cultures to such proximity that would eliminate their differences. In this case we talk about "bad" translations which on the pretext of transfer, they attempt a systematic denial of the alien nature of the foreign (literary) work (Sella-Mazi b: 1996, p. 225-236).

The socio-semiotic method is proposed today for the illustration of cultural elements in literary translation. The emergence of cultural elements in a text is found mainly in the translation of fiction, which is more complex than the translation of other genres, since it deals not only with the bilingual cross-language activity but also with cross-cultural and social transfer including the system of ideas, emotions which in a complicated way affect the languages of different nations, their lifestyles and traditions that constitute the heart of fiction. The translation of fiction includes the exchange of personal and social experiences in the fictional world of the readers in another culture or another society. The socio-semiotic approach to literary translation takes into account the various aspects of literary, linguistic, communicative and other approaches to translation and extends considerably the basis for recognizing the importance of vocabulary and content, its rhetoric and sociocultural value. This theoretical approach places the emphasis on the systematic handling of all the semiotic systems used by human societies. The theoretical basis stresses the unity of the text (language), the context (linguistic or non-linguistic) and the social structure as well as the fact that language is a unique semiotic system with a social function. In this frame, the triple entity of each sign is distinctively stressed: semantics, syntax, pragmatics (meaning notion, linguistic and factual/conceptual meaning). Most importantly, social semiotics deals not only with what people say, do or with how they do it, but it also focuses on context and reasoning, that is on large-scale social consequences of the lexis and of the actions (Yongfang: 2000).

The relation between literature and culture is undeniable and it influences literary translation in its theoretical enquiries. We must seek the ability to support intercultural dialogue in the teaching of literature. The literary text becomes a complex and multifaceted cultural space, its limits coincide with those of its social-cultural environment. Hence, it is suitable for scientific research and awareness. When approaching the text as such a complex social-cultural crossroad we consider it not as the source of spontaneous meaning (simple or not) but as the construction site of a cultural and social interpretation and within this context it should be taught as well (Paschalidis: 1999).



According to the conclusions of the research team of Aristotle University, literary texts must be treated as cultural texts and literature as a cultural subject (c. Inter-texts: 2002, p.52-53). The literary approach, the reading of international literature and the translation of foreign literature, which conveys the linguistic and cultural elements into another language, are specific ways of setting intercultural aims. Acceptance of literary diversity and of its culture-specific formations, lays the foundations for the acceptance of diversity in general as an essential dimension of humanity (Pissalidis: 2004).

It has been suggested, and we are of the same opinion, that literature as a vehicle of multiculturalism is beyond language (Akritopoulos: 2004). This is a direct result of the particular form of the language used in literature and its potential to bear symbolic meaning; this leads to shaping and adopting positive attitudes towards other cultures, which are evident in the actions of the heroes and in text structures. Besides the undeniable universality of literature, as evidenced in surveys of important scholars (Ibid) and the possibility using jointly several of its features, such as its polysemous language, its emotional impact on the human psyche, and the irrefutable link to what we call culture, render it a significant factor in the raising of intercultural awareness (Fridaki et al: 2004).

In the present paper we will not expand any further on the particular problems of translating literary texts. We will attempt to prove the extent to which translated literature can become the basis for the understanding of ethno-cultural particularities and can help preserve the linguistic imprint of the world found in the original text. In addition, we will attempt to prove how it is possible to achieve the language transfer of its cultural elements during translation. We will also attempt to contribute to the promotion of issues that concern the selection criteria: should we prefer text selection from translated literature for the ordinary reader, or "specialised" texts translated as closely to the original as possible and as linguistically faithful as possible, with the support of detailed explanations and comments? As the unit of analysis we have chosen the connotative meaning of the words with ethnographic-cultural content.

### ***3. Russian literature in the literary textbooks in Greece***

The texts from Russian literature which are included in the textbooks for the teaching of literature in junior and senior high school are:

- 1st grade junior high school: 1. The grandfather and the grandchild. Short story, L. Tolstoy (trans. P. Antaiou Oceanis). 2. Vankas Short story. Ant. Chekhov (trans. K. Simopoulos-Themelio).
- 3rd grade junior high school: 1. The fat and the thin. Short story. Ant. Chekhov (trans. B. Dinopoulos- Estia).
- 2nd grade senior high school: 1. The Brothers Karamazov-novel-excerpt, F. Dostoevsky (trans. A. Alexander -ed Gkovosti). 2. War and Peace-novel-excerpt, L. Tolstoy (ed. Gkovosti).
- 2nd grade senior high school Modern European Literature (optional): 1. Save the future-poem, See Mayakovsky (trans. G. Ricci). 2. The Aliosa and the pot- short story, L. Tolstoy (trans. M. Tsantsanoglou). 3. The work of art, short story Ant. Chekhov (trans. al. Katz). 4. In the basement- short story, Is. Babel (trans. S. Tsakni).

- 3rd grade senior high school: 1. Cloud in pants poem- excerpt, see Mayakovsky (trans. G. Ritsos - Kedros). 2. The quiet Don, novel-excerpt, M. Solochov (trans. R. Bioumi-Papa).

In terms of critical commentary on these particular options we have become aware of concerns relating not so much to the teaching of foreign literature, but to the quality of its translation, which should be taught with a «special method», since these texts reflect not only the time and the style of the author but also, and perhaps most importantly, the time and the style of the translator. It is assumed that the explanatory notes may not lead to the desired result of an appropriate literary reading. The use of older translations is suggested since they are more faithful to the genre, the content and the cultural elements of the original texts. An example of this is the translation of the novel «Crime and Punishment» made by Papadiamantis which is considered very good despite the difficulties the translator had in accessing the original language. (Tsoutsoura: 1999). The same positive comments have been made for the translation of Mayakovsky's poems by G. Ritsos, too (Vagenas: 1989). This is the translation used in two of the poems by the Russian poet, which are included in textbooks and have been researched in the present paper.

It is also interesting to see a different practice which has been used for the presentation of Ant. Chekhov's «The Work of Art» in the book used in the second grade of high school, for an optional course: In the teaching instructions, all the different translations of the short story are mentioned as well as the key elements that refer to the biography and bibliography of the author: ...as a chance coincidence the short story «The Work of Art» is the first literary work translated into Greek in 1900. As the translator Agathocles Konstantinides notes: The author of this short story Anton Chekhov is probably the most popular and most read of his contemporary Russian novelists...

The translation of the short story mentioned above is a second, an alternative translation, which is available for comparative reading with Alexander Kotzia's translation in the Anthology of translations. When we compare the two translations interesting observations can be made mainly for the language of the older translation. The use of old Greek in the short narrative parts gives its place to a mixed version in the dialogues that dominate the story. This preserves the delicate satiric tone of the episodes and for modern readers it also adds another opportunity for ironic reading because of their distance from old Greek. The comparative reading of the two translations brings to light more differences, for instance, the tendency to render proper names with their greek equivalent, which was common in older translations, and leads to the loss of cultural elements during the translation process (Vassiliadis: 1999).

There has been criticism of the textbook of Modern European Literature on the whole which varied from expressing concerns about the content to making negative comments on the selection of literary works as well as of the particular translations. It is the opinion of the writer of the present article that the specific aspects of the Russian culture presented in the particular textbook are an obvious attempt at ideological propaganda on the part of the writers (Ioannatou: 2000).

If one studies the textbooks used for the teaching of literature in secondary education, especially that of Modern European Literature they can reach the conclusion, which is also true for the works of Russian literature, that even when the place, the time, the characters or the authors change, the issues raised relate more to a universal truth, rather than to different aspects of it in the frame of another cultural situation (Fridaki,

etc.: 2004). The accompanying comments and the suggestions made for teaching implementation show the same: the effort to find and display similar and not different traits. Several expressions referring to primitive forces, determinism, proud people of the earth, existential agonies, are a recurrent theme and direct the reader's attention to perceive the human condition as a universal condition rather than as a culturally determined one (ibid).

#### ***4. Examples of literary translation and the compromise or loss of cultural elements***

##### ***4. 1. The grandfather and the grandchild. Short Story by L. Tolstoy.*** 1st grade junior high school

This is a simple text that L. Tolstoy wrote for the inexperienced readers of Russian literature. This short story, like the rest of this category, is characterized by its simplicity and multitude of descriptions which the author considered a prerequisite for its readability by his readership. These works were intended for ordinary readers or listeners, often illiterate, thus, Tolstoy used specific stylistic features in his narrative. Linguistic and stylistic choices characteristic of the folkloric narratives of local tradition can be found in his short stories.

In the short story «The grandfather and the grandchild» there is an abundant use of elements from popular myths and typical folkloric motifs: the principle of three, a traditional way of starting a story: e.g.: «... Ноги у него не ходили, глаза не видели, уши не слышали, зубов не было» [His feet couldn't move, his eyes couldn't see, his ears couldn't hear and he had no teeth], «... Снесли ему раз обедать в чашке » [once they gave him food to eat in a bowl], « Невеста стала бранить старика ... » [The bride began to scold the old man ...], « Сидят раз муж с женой ... » [once upon a time there was a man sitting with his wife ...], «Стали с тех пор ...» [ It started once upon a time.....] etc.

The translation, in theory, should not have caused particular difficulties to the translator. However, the study of the Greek translation included in the textbook of the first grade of junior high school does not have any of the aforementioned stylistic and structural elements. Perhaps the translator did not possess the prerequisite knowledge or following the principles of a faithful rendering of the meaning of the text, he subjected the translation to his own love and understanding for the elderly so that it would inevitably follow the literary «conventions» of the text.

One could read the text without any comments or attempting any explanation of its cultural elements, which the author does not interpret in the original either. For example, the word «печь» in the sentence «Сын и невеста перестали его за стол сажать, а давали ему обедать за печкой» does not require any comment or explanation in this particular context. It would be best translated simply as «heater» or «stove», since this is the intended meaning of the author when he uses this word. The translator, however, trying to convey the content and the technical-functional characteristics of the Russian word «печь», translates the above sentence as follows: «His son and his daughter-in-law did not have him sit with them at the table any more, but gave him something to eat on the large built-in rustic stove where he slept.

The stylistic simplicity of the original text was replaced with a "meticulous" interpretive translation.



To highlight the problem of translation we will attempt the reverse translation process: From Greek to Russian. The sentence that emerges is as follows: «Сын и невеста перестали сажать его с собой за стол, а давали ему обедать на большой построенной деревенской печке, на которой он спал». The translator also explains the word «heater» in a footnote stating: Heater: Russian people sat and slept in large, built-in stoves-fireplaces.»If you translate the explanation in Russian we have: в России люди сидели и спали на больших построенных печах - очагах ».

In our opinion, the translation also requires the adjustment of the translated text to the cultural differences of the target language. This requires additional information, additional explanations and interpretations of the structure of the literary work. The translated text should therefore be accompanied by supplementary material: introductory preparatory material, observations and comments. This kind of commentary aims to eliminate the «grey» area of the interpretation of the text so as to eliminate ambiguity, since any «unfamiliar» cultural element of the original text can be the starting point if one searches for correlations, allegories, etc.

#### **4.2. *Vanka. Short Story. Anton Chekhov.* 1st grade junior high school**

The translator of the short story gives the same Russian word commented in the previous story «печь» as «attic» which is semantically, technically or functionally, irrelevant to that kind of heater, since the word attic in the Greek language means a separate space on the rooftop separate from the rest of the house often used as a storeroom. Let's see the last paragraph of the short story: «Убаюканный сладкими надеждами, он час спустя крепко спал ... Ему снилась печка. На печи сидит дед, свесив босые ноги, и читает письма кухаркам ... Около печи ходит Вьюн и вертит хвостом ...».

In the textbook the passage is translated as follows:

«After an hour he was still sleeping with his little fists clenched, lulled by his sweet hopes. He dreamed of the loft in the village. His grandfather is sitting in the attic with legs hanging. He is reading the letter to the slaves ... And Helis is spinning around in the attic wagging his tail ...» In this case we find an absolute lack of equivalence the foreign (Russian) physical reality and transfer to the target language. The translator, realizing the problem but not knowing what exactly the Russian «печь», is resorts to explanations. In the comments we can read: «Attic: the peasants did not sleep in a bed but in something like an attic made from bricks and stones and was used as a sitting place.»

(Патари: мужики не спали в кроватях, а на «патари», который строили из кирпичей или камней, который использовали и как место для сидения).

It is obvious that such a comment, instead of enriching the information bank for the translated texts leads the reader of the target language to have a distorted picture and false cultural associations because of the way it portrays the basic function of the particular object.

To conclude, we consider that the use of Russian literary texts «for wide consumption» is on the whole inappropriate in the form of the specific translations. They do not contribute to any cross-cultural dialogue which can be achieved with the teaching of literature.

We would propose the use of translated literary texts with detailed notes which would bridge the gap when it comes to understanding the cultural particularities of the source language culture. Consequently, it would be possible to overcome the barriers of

lacking insight knowledge of the specific culture which constitute and formulate the ethno-cultural concepts of Russian society that need to be translated with lexical equivalence.

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