

The role of dominant cultural ideas in Russian translation tradition

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Abstract

Within the culture and power turns in translation studies that consider translation not simply as a linguistic transfer but rather a cross-cultural event, the paper introduces the notion of the dominant cultural idea, a common way to see and perceive the world, that consolidates the society and provides for its cultural consistency. Two types of dominant cultural ideas are identified, i.e. national and individual ones. It is shown how Russian cultural traditions and dominant poetics impelled the translator's choice and influenced translation practices in diachronic and synchronic perspectives. The author presents a logical reconstruction of the shifts in translation techniques throughout history based on national dominating ideas, as well as individual cultural idiosyncrasies. Rich cultural heritage of the Russian translation school provides many examples of either faithfulness to the original or its alterations and distortions to conform to the existing cultural norms or individual tastes.

Keywords: dominant cultural idea, Russian culture, Russian translation studies, culture turn, power turn, translation techniques

Introduction: Theoretical background

Translation issues are usually investigated within a broader context of cross cultural communication, translation itself being understood as one of its means and a translator as a mediator in the dialog of cultures. However, communication during translation differs markedly from natural communication. The difference is that the source text and the target text function in unequal conditions and, in case of written translation, even in different time periods. Besides, the original and its translation belong to different cultures, so their functions may not always coincide. For example, the function of the source text may be to inform the reader about an event, while the target text is also used to acquaint the reader with customs and traditions of another culture. In this context it is interesting to explore translation from a different angle – not as a specific form of cross cultural communication, but rather to see how this means of interlingual mediation works *inside* communication and copes with cross cultural problems.

This broader approach to translation is typical of the culture and power turns in translation studies. Accepting the fact that the translation process is not just translation of lexical units and grammar constructions, but rather a cross-cultural event (Vermeer, 1996), marked the “cultural turn” in translation theory and made it obvious that language cannot be seen “as an isolated phenomenon suspended in a vacuum but as an integral part of culture” (Snell-Hornby, 1988: 39). Therefore, it follows from this assumption that a translator “needs not only proficiency in two languages, he must also be at home in two cultures. In other words, he must be bilingual and bicultural” (Ibid.: 40-42). Interaction between translation and culture became the focus in translation studies (e.g. Lefevere, 1992a; Bassnett, Lefevere, 1998; Itamar-Even-Zohar, 2000), and scholarly attention has shifted from the micro level of categorization of linguistic facts to the macro level analysis of broader socio cultural context. In this framework translation was considered “a deliberate and conscious act of selection,

assemblage, structuring, and fabrication –and even, in some cases, of falsification” (Tymoczko, Gentzler, 2002: xxi). Accordingly, the question “what texts may be counted as translations and which of them represent other forms of interlingual communication?” that had been hotly debated time and again, was answered. Translation started to be understood in a broader sense and included omissions and additions done by a translator for a certain purpose which e.g. within the discourse and communication translation model were termed “sociocultural adaptation strategies” (Volkova, Zubenina, 2015).

The influence of culture can occur in various forms. For example, culture creates the basis for people’s mental models (van Dijk, 2008) or worldviews (Underhill, 2013). In the Russian linguistic and intercultural studies, the notion of the “conceptual picture of the world” is used which has a similar meaning. It may be defined as aggregate knowledge about the world reflected by public conscience (Popova, 2007: 51). Human thought, reflecting the mental model formed by one’s perception and image of the real world, is both recorded and interpreted by language units. This mental model of the world may be reflected in people’s minds and have specific characteristic features at an individual level, as well as features and inputs influenced by a social or professional group.

The central place in the conceptual picture of the world is occupied by the notion of a dominant cultural idea - defined as the governing idea, main distinguishing feature and part of culture that constitutes the common way to see and perceive the world (Kononenko, 2003). The dominant cultural idea consolidates the society and provides for its cultural consistency. Similar to mental models, dominant cultural ideas may express both national and individual idiosyncrasies. In certain time periods the dominant cultural idea may become an important benchmark for the society, for example during historical periods such as humanism during the Renaissance or Catholicism during Europe’s Middle Ages. This general manner of understanding the world, typical for a given time period, creates the basis for stylistic unity of culture. In its turn, these stylistic values form axiological perceptions of an individual as the bearer of this culture. Thus, dominant cultural ideas influence individual preferences of translators and create their individual cultural ideas.

Dominant cultural ideas, both national and individual, play an important role in the translation process as they influence the general translation strategies and the choice of translation techniques. The role of dominant cultural ideas will be analyzed from diachronic and synchronic perspectives.

The influence of national dominant cultural ideas on the choice of a translation mode

Diachronic perspective

Dominant cultural ideas change over time and, as such, constantly challenge the opinions and views as to the best translation method. Fluctuations in literary tastes mostly occurred along the axis of “free - faithful” translation which corresponds to oft-cited dichotomy “foreignization vs. domestication” where “domesticated” translation is free from the influence of the source text and demonstrates “adherence to domestic literary canons,” while its “foreignized” counterpart transfers the formal features of the original into the target text at the expense of its transparency (Venuti, 1995).

During some periods, the dominant translation ideology was to please the public and translators introduced alterations to the target text. The situation may be best described by a quotation from the research of the 18th century translation tradition in England and France:

“...it was common enough for translators not only to alter the text but also to add some original work to it. John Lockman, a well-known eighteenth-century translator of several works from French, wrote in the preface to his translation of Desfontaines’ *Le Nouveau Gulliver*: ‘With regard to my Version, I’ve endeavour’d . . . to infuse a little of that spirit, which is the life of translations’”. (McMurran, 2009: 5).

Then the dominant values of the society changed, and the term “translation” was associated only with literal transfer of elements from the original to the target text. Both trends followed each other over the course of history and each time theorists and practicing translators soundly justified their choice.

A similar process was under way in Russia, though the time periods of the domination of a particular cultural idea may not coincide with West European trends. The late 18th – early 19th centuries was a period of the rule of free translation. This period is represented by Nikolay Karamzin and Vasily Zhukovsky. Nikolay Karamzin, a poet and historian, will remain in Russian history as a reform figure of the Russian literary language. He transferred the traditions of the European sentimentalist school into Russian and added some Gallic elegance and lightness to it. Vasily Zhukovsky was a famous translator who introduced the Russian public to a wide range of ancient and West European classical poets including Homer, Byron, Goethe, and Schiller; his choices pre-determined by his adherence to the Romantic literary tradition. He opened up many of the best examples of German and English poetry which was especially important since before that only translations from French had prevailed in Russian literature. In their translations, both Karamzin and Zhukovsky strove not so much to keep the spirit or the letter of the original to express themselves. At that time, translations could be published without attribution signed solely by a translator.

For example, Zhukovsky’s ballades “Ludmila” (1808) and “Svetlana” (1813), which brought him great success and made him extremely popular, are in reality two different interpretations of “Lenore” - a famous ballade written by the German poet Gottfried August Burger. Zhukovsky’s contemporaries were highly appreciative and had the highest regard for his legacy, calling him “our Schiller”; moreover, they believed his translations were of higher quality than the originals. Oddly enough, Zhukovsky wrote his own lyrics, but they never gained the same popularity as his translations.

Later in the 19th century, new approaches towards the treatment of the source text took shape. Within this shift, two names are of note: prince Peter Vyazemsky and Nikolay Gnedich who declared faithfulness to the original text as their main translation method. Vyazemsky was brought up on the classical French literature of the 17th – 18th centuries and his views were strongly influenced by the French Classicism and the Enlightenment ideas. A typical quotation by Vyazemsky reads: “Deviation from the author’s expressions, often even from the symmetry of words, seemed to me an unnatural change of his thought” (As cited in: *Russkie pisateli o perevode*, 1960: 129). Another symptomatic quotation from his letter: “To imitate Byron is impossible: translate him literally or even do not approach” (Ibid.: 134).

The aspiration to transfer the letter of the original as closely as possible often led to situations when Vyazemsky, a great poet himself, refused to translate verse by verse and used

prose instead, because he considered that prose translation more appropriately complies with his theoretical principles.

A poet and translator Nikolay Gnedich, who lived and worked at the same time period as Vyazemsky, became famous due to his translation of *the Iliad* (1807–29). This translation is written in sonorous style and abounds with archaic expressions. The main merit of it is its faithfulness to the original text. In Russian translation studies this trend was called “naïve romantic literalism” and is considered to be a growth crisis that preceded a transition to a new, more advanced stage of development (Levin, 1985: 38).

The next benchmark when the dominant ideology of translation changed again is typically associated with the translator Irinarkh Vvedensky. However, his works were not translations in the proper sense of the word, due to the numerous additions, omissions and other alterations of the original. Vvedensky was fascinated by novels by Thackeray and Dickens, considering the latter to be the greatest novelist of all times, and translated almost all of Dickens novels into Russian. In his colourful translations, Vvedensky moved Dickens’s characters onto Russian soil, rejected the slightest possibility of accurate translation and grounded it theoretically. He spelled out his translation method the following way: “Transpose the writer under those skies and into the society in which you live, and ask yourself the following question. How would the writer express his ideas if he were to live and write in your circumstances?” (As cited in: Fiedberg, 1997: 47).

On the one hand, Vvedensky was severely criticized for distortions of the originals, and rewriting the beginnings and endings of chapters, but on the other hand, even his critics had to admit that the alterations were in the spirit of the author and looked like something Dickens himself could have written. Consequently, for a long time his works had remained a model example of a true translation and some of them were even republished in the 20th century as part of Dickens collected edition. Can we assume that Vvedensky’s innovative approach to translation manifested progress in translation theory and practice? The positive answer will be in line with “translation as manipulation” approach that highlighted progressive and innovative aspects of alterations to the source text in the sense that “rewritings can introduce new concepts, new genres, new devices and the history of translation is the history also of literary innovation, of the shaping power of one culture upon another” (Lefevere, 1992b: vii), as well as with literary historian Yuri Levin who believes that every new change of dominant translation mode represents a step forward (cf. quotation above). Other scholars fail to see the positive effect of the source culture on the development of the target culture and express a contrary opinion on Vvedensky’s contribution: “Coming after Romanticism’s relatively faithful translations, Irinarkh Vvedensky’s free-wheeling and wildly ‘creative’ renditions represented a throwback to Neoclassicism” (Fiedberg, 1997: 46).

Subjective opinions may differ, but for the purposes of this research it is important, to answer the following questions: (i) why translation meant different, and often contrary, things in different historical periods; and (ii) why tastes repeatedly change on a regular basis.

Russian literary translator Gasparov has offered a hypothesis - fluctuations of literary tastes, and thus the domination of a particular cultural idea, coincide with two types of cultural expansion - in scope and in depth. For example, when in the 19th century more people became literate, reading books started to gain popularity and there appeared demand for free, simplified renditions of popular novels (Gasparov, 1972). Even a free and inaccurate interpretation of Hamlet was justified by Russian intellectuals at that time because they were ready to sacrifice faithfulness to Shakespeare for the chance to popularize his works among the general public. A similar situation developed in Soviet Russia after the revolution when

the newly literate working class received access to culture. Coincidentally, this is precisely the time when the aforementioned Vvedensky's Dickens translations were republished.

When culture expanded "in depth", that is, cultural issues began to become interesting only to a relatively small circle of nobles, other translations were sought after. Educated people wished to understand better the peculiarities of an unfamiliar culture, they could appreciate stylistic differences of languages, and thus more attention was paid to the linguistic and structural characteristics of the translated texts. This happened, for example, during Pushkin's period in Russian history (early 19th century) when Vyazemsky and Gnedich created their very faithful, but obscure and not easily comprehensible, translations. Another example is the trend of "technological accuracy of translation" in the Soviet Union in 1930s. It was the time of Modernist style, the time of denial of old traditions and conventions and introduction of new approaches. The problem of the illiteracy of the population had been successfully solved, and "in depth" cultural expansion started. Eugene Lann was one of the originators and theorists of "technologically accurate translations". Lann, with a background of a modernist poet, presented "literalist" translations of Dickens' novels to the Russian public where he tried to preserve all stylistic peculiarities of the original (For more details, see: Hollington, 2013). For more than twenty years 'formal accuracy' remained a widely accepted translation style. It was advocated and promoted by the Publishing House «Academia» that published over 200 books translated by highly educated professionals.

This short historical overview proves that there is no such thing as an ideal translation, one translation suitable for all simply does not exist. A diachronic approach to translation explains how dominant cultural ideas influence the choice of a translation mode in the course of time, but similar trends may also be traced in the modern history of Russian translation.

Synchronic perspective

To see how the contemporary dominant cultural idea may influence the translation style, one may study the translations from Shakespeare done by a renowned Russian poet-translator Samuil Marshak. In Russia Marshak is famous for his translations of William Shakespeare's sonnets and children's songs and nursery rhymes. Thanks to Marshak, Russian children know about Humpty Dumpty, Jack and Jill, and the house that Jack Built. Generations of Soviet children were brought up with these rhymes and never guessed that they were translations from English. As for his translations of Shakespeare's sonnets, they have grown so popular that many of them were put to music and became famous Russian songs. Many of Shakespeare's lines became part of Russian culture as widely quoted idioms or set expressions. Consequently, in the mid-20th century Marshak was regarded as the foremost authority on literary translation.

Marshak's renditions of sonnets were critically analyzed in the paper "Shakespeare's sonnets - Marshak's translations" (Avtonomova, 2008: 595-611). The aim of the research was not to criticize or put in doubt the gift of the translator, but to reveal the differences between the source and target texts and explain the translator's choice. The author made a detailed comparative analysis of texts with regard to lexis, grammatical constructions, syntax, and style. The comparison of linguistic tools used by Marshak has shown that he translated not only from one language to another, but from one style to another. Avtonomova provides an example:

Full many a glorious morning have I seen
 Flatter the mountain-tops with sovereign eye,
 Kissing with golden face the meadows green,
 Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy;
 Anon permit the basest clouds to ride
 With ugly rack on his celestial face,
 And from the forlorn world his visage hide,
 Stealing unseen to west with this disgrace:
 Even so my sun one early morn did shine
 With all triumphant splendour on my brow;
 But out, alack! he was but one hour mine;
 The region cloud hath mask'd him from me now.
 Yet him for this my love no whit disdaineth;
 Suns of the world may stain when heaven's sun
 staineth.
 (Shakespeare, Sonnet # 33)

As we can see, the sonnet is written in a very energetic and powerful language. Shakespeare, who was a Renaissance man, uses passionate and impressive images; his epithets are mighty and sometimes robust. Now let us look at the translator's lexical changes. Shakespeare describes the Sun as a mighty king who has a "sovereign eye" and shines "with all triumphant splendour". The clouds that shade the Sun are portrayed as his mean enemies ("ugly", "basest clouds") who act "with disgrace". In the Russian language the use of diminutive suffixes is a wide-spread stylistic device. The translator employs it in the sonnet and creates a pet form of the Russian equivalent for the word "sun" that can be back translated as "little dear sun":

Solnze (Russ.) – sun
 Solnyshko (Russ.) - little dear sun

The Russian equivalent sounds so nice and sweet that it is often used to address a sweetheart. So, the images of the Sun in the original and its translation are absolutely different. In the Russian variant the Sun is not glorious, but "kind", "soft" and "gentle". There are other lexical and structural changes that make the rendition sound much milder and "nicer". Having analyzed translations of more than 10 sonnets, Avtonomova singled out translation techniques that completely change Shakespeare's style.

Abstract images instead of concrete and real ones.

The Renaissance era brought back the interest to man who is "the measure of all things", human emotions and passions. That is why all Shakespeare's sonnets are addressed to a friend or a dame. For example, sonnet #77 ("Thy glass will show thee how thy beauties wear..."), presumably written in a friend's notebook, is written in the second person singular form where we find "you" and its derivatives (thou, thy, thee) in every line. In the translation the form of a personal address was not used even once. Instead of talking to a real person, the poet intellectualizes on abstract ideas about life and death:

The wrinkles which thy glass will truly show,
Of mouthed graves will give thee memory
(Shakespeare)

Wrinkle lines reflected by a truthful glass
Help all of us count our losses
(back translation from Marshak)

The translator also tries to lessen two of the distinguishing features of the Renaissance period, the cult of human body and earthly love. In sonnet # 106 (“When in the chronicle of wasted time...”) Shakespeare writes:

“...then in the blazon of sweet beauty's best,
Of hand, of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow ...”

Marshak translates it:

“... of eyes, of smile, of hair, and of brow”
(back translation).

Hands and feet seemed to be too material and inappropriate for elevated poetry. The struggle with excessive “earthliness” of Shakespeare’s vocabulary may be observed in other translations as well.

Emotions instead of logical reasoning

Images from politics, economics and law were favoured stylistic literary tools of the Renaissance, and Shakespeare used them all to the full extent. His sonnets contain much “professional” vocabulary, for example in sonnet # 46 (“Mine eye and heart are at a mortal war...”) the relationships between heart and eyes allegorically demonstrate a legal battle. Thoughts act as a jury (“a quest of thoughts is impanneled”), listen to the plaintiff and defendant, and pass a sentence (“their verdict is determined”). The heart appeals to the court (“My heart doth plead that...”), but eyes challenge the appeal (“the defendant doth that plea deny”). As we see, the whole sonnet is built on legal terminology. The translator cannot avoid the allegory altogether but tries to diminish the use of specific vocabulary as much as possible, limiting himself to only general litigation references:

To solve the internecine dispute
Thoughts gathered in the courtroom
(back translation from Marshak)

Here is another example. In sonnet #2 the poet opted for military images:

“When forty winters shall beseige thy brow,
And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field...”
(Shakespeare)

“When forty winters cover thy brow with furrows...”

(back translation from Marshak)

In both examples the translator tried to avoid professional terms that were too down-to-earth and not emotional enough. Marshak had a very clear understanding of how classical lyrics should sound and adopted the translated text to conform with his conception. For instance, to increase the emotional intensity of the text, Marshak often resorted to exclamation marks and rhetorical questions which had not been used in the originals.

Most lexical transformations lead consistently to the desired result, that is, to substitute Shakespeare's strong and lively images with images that seemed milder, more neutral and more customary to Russian readers. Brilliance of the Renaissance expression, its vigorous and fleshly language might be regarded to be in doubtful taste. From the point of view of contemporary ideas about good taste such excessiveness looked unnecessary. Besides, we should not forget that William Shakespeare holds a unique position in Russian culture being perceived (along with Alexander Pushkin) one of the world's greatest classics. This may offer an explanation why the translator had chosen this very translation method.

For his translations Marshak chose the style of Russian Romanticism which was wide-spread in Russia in the early 19th century and is reminiscent of the German romantic tradition. This style was used by Vasily Zhukovsky and by the young Alexander Pushkin. The language of Russian Romanticism is emotional and elaborate. Speaking about Zhukovsky's contribution to Russian literature, Pushkin mentioned the "delightful sweetness of his verse" (As cited in: Chiževsky, 2000: 32), and this is the best description of Russian romantic poetry. Following this tradition, poets used refined expressions, decorative metaphors and typically romantic images: mad anxiety of love, eternity, fiery heart, rebellious soul, a rose, a polar star, bewitching deception, etc.

Marshak consistently applied structural elements and modes of expression typical of Russian Romanticism in his translations of Shakespeare's sonnets. At the time in Russian society this style was associated with great Pushkin and the Golden Age of Russian literature (19th century) and perceived as emotional, graceful and pleasant. On the other hand, this poetic language sounds like a classical language, formal, dignified and grand enough, to match the public's idea of what Shakespeare could have written if he were Russian. In this value system Shakespeare is perceived by the Russian public as an "English Pushkin". The fact that two literary giants represent very different time periods was immaterial in that context.

Marshak created a beautiful poetic world of romantic, "delightful sweetness" which is valuable in itself, but has little to do with the passionate and powerful world of the Renaissance and Shakespeare. As a result, we have excellent lyrics reflecting the understanding of beauty that prevailed in the time when Marshak was translating Shakespeare's sonnets; however, they do not open up Shakespeare's world for us. In discourse about translation much has been said about its educational role in bringing other cultures closer to the target text culture and about the influence foreign culture exerts. In this case, by contrast, we encounter the situation when the receiving literature suppresses cultural traditions of the original. Marshak took the liberty to make stylistic alterations thus having proved that much power is vested in translators who may decide to "subvert traditional allegiances of translation, interjecting their own worldviews and politics into their work" (Tymoczko, Gentzler, 2002: 197).

The influence of individual dominant cultural ideas on the choice of the translation mode

Bible Translations

It is well known that the Bible's translators have always adhered to the principles of the highest possible faithfulness to the source text. Many translators premised their biblical renditions not as ordinary text, but as a supernatural revelation ("All words from my mouth are righteous"). This led to the greatest admiration, not only for the meaning of the text, but also for the mode of its expression and required word-for-word translation. The Bible was too sacred to judge it by earthly standards. People called it the Word of God and refused to see human words in it. In Russian translation studies such a translation technique is called "Christian literalism" (Kopanev, 2002). When Saint Jerome (Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus) was translating the Bible into Latin, he wanted to preserve "supernatural revelation" and resorted to element-by-element translation.

Further Saint Jerome, a well-known campaigner against literalism in translation, still used more or less free literary translation when translating original Greek commentaries on Scripture and some Chronicles. As a theoretical justification of using two translation techniques he offered the contrast of supernatural revelation vs. everything written by people. Even incomprehensible and "dark" parts of Scripture ascend to its author – God - and we should accept them rigorously.

In the 9th-century two Byzantine brothers Cyril and Methodius followed in Saint Jerome's steps and very accurately translated the Bible into Slavic. Their respect for the original text was so great that they transferred into their translation numerous elements of the Greek language without omitting prepositions and even particles which made the target text obscure and acroamatic. This caused the emergence of a special language – 'translatese' - that subsequently became known as Old Church Slavonic. In the absence of developed Slavic literature, Old Church Slavonic became the first official literary language of the Slavs and was used for writing documents, hagiography and chronicles.

Some researchers believe that the wide acceptance of Old Church Slavonic held back the development of the modern Slavic language until "The Lay of Igor's Campaign" ("The song of Prince Igor") that didn't appear until the late 12th century. Much time was required to neutralize the negative effects of Cyril and Methodius' 9th century translation (Kundzich, 1959).

Curiously, in present day Old Church Slavonic is still used during public worship in some Eastern Orthodox churches, including Russia. Why do people use this hardly understandable rendition now, when there are so many Bible translations done in modern Russian? Traditional "faithful" Bible translation has always been used by a closed group of brothers in faith, has been connected with religious practices and used mostly in ecclesiastical context. The "dark" parts of the Old Church Slavonic translation were elucidated and spelled out inside this context – in church, during worship or preaching. Churchgoers had and still have the feeling of belonging to something exceptional, not open to everyone. This is the dominant ecclesiastical idea that explains the relevance of Old Church Slavonic in the context of today's Russia.

Translations of ancient Greek and Roman texts

Another case when individual cultural preferences helped to choose a method of translation is translations of ancient Greek and Roman texts. The most popular approach to this translation type is great respect and faithfulness to the original. Tactful and careful treatment of ancient texts was theoretically grounded by many translators including the Russian poet Valery Bryusov, the translator of *Aeneid* by Virgil. Bryusov believed that a translator of ancient texts should not adapt them to the literary tastes of the general public (contrary to what Marshak did when translating Shakespeare's sonnets). In his translations we can find an equivalent to each and every word or grammatical construction of the original. The unusual and extravagant tone of his *Aeneid* was a deliberately applied translation technique which aimed to create "distance effect". Even the names of popular mythological and historical heroes were presented in an unexpected form (Kikeron instead of Cicero) to distinguish them from characters well known from our school years. In such a manner the translator reconstructed the feeling of distance between a reader and ancient culture. It was necessary to create this because ancient texts belong to a period far removed and different from our time. To us ancient ideas and values seem strange and alien, that is why a translation of an ancient text can not be written in modern language. One of Bryusov's favourite principles was "Translation must be suitable for quoting", and his *Aeneid* has remained a gigantic quotation from another culture and another spiritual reality (Gasparov, 1971: 103-107).

Similar views on translating pieces of literary heritage were expressed by other Russian poets and translators, such as the aforementioned Vyazemsky and Gnedich. The latter produced an acroamatic translation of Homer's *Iliad*, which to this day remains the gold standard of how to tactfully treat literary masterpieces. Even Zhukovsky, known for his liberal attitude towards the original and "translator as creator" ideas, departed from his principles when he embarked upon translating *the Odyssey*.

Not many people find these translations suitable or informative. For most of us they are too complicated and would require much intellectual effort. This is why there are other translations of classic works for less demanding audiences. In this case the translation ideology is not to invite readers to travel to a foreign country, but rather bring foreign guests to their home, adjusting an ancient text to an unsophisticated reader. Such was the *Iliad* translation done by the Russian poet Veresaev for the contemporary reader. Undoubtedly, the translation by Gnedich gives a much better insight into Homer's universe, but Veresaev's *Iliad* is very well suited for the first encounter with the ancient world.

Concluding remarks

Language and culture are closely interconnected: no language can exist outside the cultural context, and there is no culture that is not based on the structures of a natural language. Culture and power turns in translation studies, prioritizing socio cultural aspects of translation over its lexical accuracy, have put cultural issues of translation in the center of scholars' attention. In line with the claim that translation is "a literary tool [...] to construct the kind of culture desired" (Hermans, 1985: xiii), this paper has introduced the notion of the dominant cultural idea as a driving force that governs translation practices in a particular culture. Through the example of Russian translation tradition, it has been shown how

dominant cultural ideas influenced the dominant translation ideology throughout history and led to the shifts in translation techniques in terms of poetic or aesthetic devices.

As long as “a translation always takes place in a continuum, never in a void” (Bassnett, Lefevere, 1998: 123), dominant cultural ideas, whether they be at the national or individual level, sanctioned some translations as more justified than others. If an individual dominant cultural idea came into antagonism with the dominant translation ideology, the translation could hardly have been accepted by the general public, as was the case with Valery Bryusov’s translation of *Aeneid*. If national tastes and individual preferences of a translator were in harmony, then the translator became an inspirational person and his translations, irrespective of the translation method used, served as models to emulate. This is exactly what happened to Marshak’s translations of Shakespeare. Thus, translation turns out to be one of the ways to learn about the time it is done, and deviations from the source text act like a mirror reflecting cultural and ideological values of the target society.

The notion of a dominant cultural idea reveals the underlying logic behind translators’ decisions and provides a relatively firm ground for the evaluation of translations adding some sociocultural criteria to purely linguistic norms. It proves that translation cannot be timeless, instead there are translations designed in different periods and for different audiences.

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