

Insights into Translations of Ancient Historiography

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Abstract

The article is a special reference to the translation principles of historic texts of the 5th century Armenian historiography and its English translation. The focus of the paper are the extracts of the invention of the Armenian alphabet, which like impeccable gems decorate and reveal the outstanding parts of Armenian history. The article outlines both the theoretical and practical principles of the translation of ancient historic texts into modern languages, which from philological point of view is a complicated procedure.

Keywords: *Armenian alphabet; historiography; Mesrop Mashtoc; translation; natural translation.*

1. Introduction

The art of translation remains on the agenda of modern scientists and theorists attempting to bridge the gap between theory and practice, thus providing insight into the usefulness of current academic research to the practical needs of the profession. It is a well-known fact that translation is pivotal for the development of national culture where the crucial role is given to the cross-cultural communication of source and target languages. One cannot fail to observe that translation is a complex and difficult procedure which excited even the antique theorists and philosophers who attempted to formulate the peculiarities of the art of translation, among them were Herodotus (The origin of the class of Egyptian interpreters, *Istoria*, mid-5th century B.C.), Cicero (*De Oratore*, Translating Greek orations into Latin), Jerome (The best kind of Translator), etc. In this vein Goethe formulated tripartite scheme of translation considering that every literature should pass these phases. The first phase presupposes the acquaintance of foreign linguo-cultural peculiarities, which is actual in today's globalized world, in the second phase the translator tries to enter the foreign consciousness and reconstruct it in the translation, in other words "parodistic" translation. The third phase is the highest phase as there should be perfect identity between the source text and the target text. An example was Johann Heinrich Voss - the translator of Homer and whose work Goethe considered to be an impeccable gem and an essential work in bringing German Hellenism (Латышев, Семенов 2005, Goethe 1819, Steiner 1976, Lefever 1977). Russian theorists formulated a special link between original and translation by establishing the communicative opportunities of the source and target readers which has logical transition like: $a=b$, $b=c$ thus $a=c$ (Латышев, Семенов 2005), where a – is the source reader, b - is the translator, c -is the target reader.

Nowadays translation is considered as a cross-cultural communication, which bridges the gap between the source culture and the target culture. In this connection Becker (1979: 2) describes the translation from pragmatic point of view.

Translation, as every translator learns quickly, is not just a matter of imitation, or finding our words to imitate their words, but it is also the recreation of the context of the foreign text Lawrence Venuti (2018: xii-xvi) underlines three theses about translation.

1. All translation, regardless of genre or text type, including translation that seeks to register linguistic and cultural differences, is an interpretation that fundamentally domesticates the source text.
2. The terms “domesticating” and “foreignizing” do not describe specific verbal choices or discursive strategies used in translation, but rather the ethical effects of translated texts that depend for their force and recognition on the receiving culture.
3. Not only does the translator perform an interpretive act, but readers must also learn how to interpret translations as translations, as texts in their own right, to perceive the ethical effects of translated texts.

Ernst-August Gutt (2014: 5) makes his own contribution in the theory of translation thus underlying the problem of determining the domain of the theory. He stated that it is not clear a priori what translation itself is. In this connection he pointed out major approaches of the domain of the theory. Gutt underlines that the process of translation is based on intuition and cannot be characterized in a systematic way, however as he points: “Translation will be what a culture takes it to be”.

Translation is pivotal for bridging the gap between two cultures and especially the translation of historic texts has its own value and appreciation in the sphere. Historic texts are culture – oriented, which intertwine the identity of nation, its spiritual values and cognitive procedures. As cross-cultural communication the translation of historic texts reflects and combines two cultures: the source culture and the target culture. The translation of Armenian historic texts is pivotal for disseminating the cultural, historical treasures of the Armenian nation, as one of the ancient civilization of the world (Lang 1970: 3-10, 58-59). The Armenians are an ancient people who live in an ancient land. Their home lies in the highlands surrounding the biblical mountains of Ararat, upon which tradition tells us Noah’s ark came to rest after the flood. (Gen. 8:4).

2. Methods and Materials

Dwelling upon the observations of historiography, the present paper is carried out along the material of the 5th century historians Koryun and Movses Khorenats’s and their translations into English. The extract under discussion is the invention of the Armenian alphabet, which has peculiar importance for the Armenian people.

Koryun was the earliest 5th century Armenian historian who wrote about the invention of the Armenian alphabet by Mesrop Mashtots. After the death of Mashtots, Koryun initiated to write the biography of Mesrop Mashtots by the order of Hovsep Hoghotsmetsi, one of the spiritual leaders at that time. Now his work is known as "Varq Mashtotsi" (Life of Mashtots). In the modern period it was translated into Russian, English, French and German. The English translator of historic text is Bedros Norehad (1981).

The next historian who mentioned the invention of the Armenian alphabet was Movses Khorenatsi - a prominent 5th century Armenian historian who wrote “The History of Armenia”. The history was written at the behest of Prince Sahak of the Bagratuni dynasty and has had an enormous impact on Armenian historiography. It was used and quoted extensively by later medieval Armenian authors. “The History of Armenia” was translated into many languages as well as in English (translator was Robert Thomson (1978/2006)).

The methodological approach is multifaceted, as it may comprise the comparative and descriptive analysis of historical events.

3. Literature review

The translation of historic texts is not an easy procedure it presupposes the awareness of theory and practice of translation studies in general. Touching upon the question of theoretical approach of translation studies T. Givon underlined that the perfect translation is an illusion, moreover the theorist entertained the hypothesis of perfect translatability, which is; a) translating from one language to another can only be done by a bilingual individual, therefore, b) translation from one culture to another can be done by a bi-cultural individual, c) being bi-cultural means holding two incompatible world-views, d) in translating words from one world view into another, one changes their meaning by embedding them in a different context. Nonetheless, Givon admitted that cross-cultural translation is a matter of degree and rough approximation, as it is an illusion to share an identical viewpoint in the same context. For successful cross-cultural communication there should be a reasonable degree of context-negotiation, which aims at realizing a reasonable degree of overlap in points of view. So, the exact or complete translation is a mirage. (Givon 1989: 11-19).

Pym carried out his own assumptions about the concept of equivalence by underlying that there is always assumed equivalence between two languages and texts and perfect equivalence is just an illusion. He distinguishes between natural and directional equivalence. Natural equivalence exists between languages prior to the act of translating, and, secondly, it is not affected by directionality. Directionality on the other hand is optional as the translator has the freedom to choose between various translational strategies, which may be dictated either by source language norms or by target language norms (Pym 2010: 26-37).

As P. Newmark (1988: 3-10) stated a satisfactory translation is always possible, but a good translator is never satisfied with it. It can usually be improved. There is no such thing as a perfect, ideal or “correct” translation. The “sixth sense”, which often comes into play during the final revision, tells the translator when to translate literally and also instinctively and the translation of Armenian historiographical text of the 5th century is not an exception.

The 5th century was the Golden Age for Armenians, as many prominent historians, theorists and theologians lived and created historiography, which decorates and emphasizes the national identity of the Armenians. It was in the Golden Age that the Bible was translated for the first time, which was qualified by the 18th century Armenologist La Crose as the “Queen of Translations”. The fifth century historians were inspired with the biblical themes and on the basis of biblical canons, morals and wisdom was created the 5th century Armenian historiography - a unique piece of historical literature, which gives valuable information of historical, cultural, geographical, religious and political peculiarities not only of the Armenian people, but also of the neighbors’ civilizations.

The focal interest of the research will also be based on the target text reader perception and the relevance of “naturalness” in translation (Nida, Taber 1969: 35-60). The “natural” target text should meet the following requirements 1) the translation should make sense, 2) the target reader should perceive the language of translation in an ordinary way. However, the essential principle of translation process is based on a pivotal procedure; there should be a dialectical unity between the original and the translation. According to Russian theorists the bridge between the original and translation can be established not only by transferring the meaning, but also the impression; both the source reader and the target reader

should perceive the inner context of the work, its atmosphere and spirit. There should be the influence on the same nerves (Латышев, Семенов 2005: 5-26).

In general, the translation of historical text is a multifunctional procedure, which involves linguistic and extra-linguistic awareness, the possibility to interpret and perceive the entire gist of the content and the author's intention. The Armenian historiography has exclusive stylistic peculiarities it is not only the pure utterance of information, facts and data, but also a unique piece of literature where the function of impact of language predominates. Consequently, for natural translation the translator should observe and analyze the vertical and horizontal context of the source text, penetrate the author's style and language thus revealing and reverberating it in the target text. The notion of "natural" translation of historical texts essentially presupposes 1) the existence of universal conceptual "code" between the source text and the target text, 2) the natural flow of utterance in target text with the possible preservation of source culture and way of thinking (Newmark 1988: 75).

Based on the theorists' assumptions there is a special procedure for text interpretation and by applying this procedure the translator can be ready for the initial step of historical text translation. The first step presupposes a thorough evaluation of the historiographical text, i.e. the epoch of the text, the author's intention, the geopolitical and cultural situation of the country or kingdom. Naturally, the translator concerns the all-important question of understanding of extra-linguistic factors of the text. The second step is philological interpretation. The theorists Spencer and Gregory connect the process of text interpretation with two-stage activity. 1. Cognition or the diagnosis of the text - the underlying principle of which is the illustration of linguistic and stylistic peculiarities of the text, in this case the historic text, 2. Description- where the texture of the text is revealed through cultural realia, toponyms, proper names, stylistic devices, allegory, etc. (Spencer, Gregory 1970: 73-95).

But there is another important circumstance, which cannot be ignored in the process of translation of the historiography of the 5th century: the time and space between the author/historian and the translator, thus the synchronic / diachronic principles should be considered in translation. The translator should be guided by the diachronic principle, as the translator is in a certain time distance and in a different social, historical, cultural atmosphere. Of paramount importance is the accumulation of the "background knowledge", "global vertical context" and "awareness of the linguo-cultural aspects" of the 5th century historiography (Виноградов, 2006: 55-98).

4. Discussions

The Armenian historian Koriun dedicated his work to the description of the life, activity, and a light doctrine of the creator of the Armenian letters and literature - Mesrop Mashtots. Koriun was the pupil of Mesrop Mashtots and the first historian who aimed at depicting the honorable lifeline of the creator of the Armenian alphabet (Armenian Philology in Modern Era: From Manuscript to Digital Text, 2014: 231-232). The history of Koriun is based on the truthful facts and events, as he wrote about his teacher not from the ancient storytellers, but as his contemporary and the witness of his spiritual works, as an associate "satellite" of Mashtot's life and activity. The theorist M. Abeghyan stated that the exact date of the history is not known, probably it was written between 443-451 by the order of Mashot's apprentice Hovsep. The value of Koriun's history is enormous, as the Armenian people will know little about the invention of the Armenian letters, its creator and its further

impact on the Armenian cultural, historical, political events. Mesrop Mashtots was the first who undertook the role of the invention of the Armenian letters, as well as made translations, opened schools in various sections of the country, established monasteries, wrote sermons and epistles. (Abeghyan 1968: 9 -20, Delisle, Woodsworth 2012: 6-9)

Therefore, taking with him a group of young men Mashtots, by the consent of the King Vramshapouh and Saint Sahak (Armenian Catholicos), came to the region of Aram and assigned one group of his pupils to the Assyrian school in the city of Edessa, and the other to the Hellenic school in Samosata. And through prayers he invented the Armenian alphabet. Here are the ancient Armenian, English extracts from Koriun.

- (1) *Եվ նորա իրրովք հաւասարօք զսովորականն առաջի եղևայ զաղօթս և զտքնութիւնս և զպատասանս արտասուայից, զհաստանբերուիւնս, զհոգս զաշխարհահեծոս, յիշելով զասացեալսն մարգարէին, ելօէ՝ “Յորժամ հեծեծեցես, յայնժամ կեցցես”:*
Եվ այնպէս բազում աշխատութեանց համբերեալ վասն իրոյ ազգին բարեաց ինչ օճան գտանելոյ: Որում պարգևէի իսկ վիճակ յանենաշնորոդէն Աստծոյ. հայկական չափուն ծնեալ ծնունդս նորոգ և սրանչելի՝ սուրբ աջովն իրով. նշանագիրս հայերէն լեզուին: Եվ անդ վարվադակի նշանակեալ, անուանեալ և կարգեալ, յօրինէր սիրորայիք կապօք (Կորիուն “Վարք Մեսրոպ Մաշտոցի”, էջ 90):

He then resumed, with his co-workers, his usual prayerful labors, his tearful pleadings, his life of austerity and his anxieties, remembering the word of the prophet: “In retiring and rest shalt thou live”.

Thus, he experienced many tribulations in order to serve his nation. And God the All-Bountiful finally granted him that good fortune; for with his holy hand he became the father of new and wonderful offsprings-letters of the Armenian language, and then and there quickly designed, named, determined, their order and devised the syllabication (Koriun “The Life of Mashtots” translated by Bedros Norehad, 1964).

According to historian Koriun, Mashtots invented the Alphabet through prayers and a divine vision helped him to become the father of impeccable gems of the Armenian nation – the letters. According to Dum-Tragut and Winker monasticism is the essential notion of Armenian clergymen, it is a life of simplicity, isolation from others. Spiritually it is expressed through prayers and meditations, secluded life in hermit places (Dum-Tragut, Winker 2018: 25-45). Miracle occurred which in the proceeding centuries would unite the whole nation, its culture and tradition. Koriun described the divine vision with the help of the following pattern *սուրբ աջովն իրով* (word for word translation is; *his holy right*), which in the target text is displayed as *with his holy hand*. One cannot fail to observe that the translation of historiography requires both factual and fictional interpretation, as the original text is a dialectical unity of heterogeneous functions (the informative function and the function of impact). Facts cannot be neglected, however the 5th century Armenian historiography is flavored with expressive-emotive-evaluative overtones and stylistically colored words and combinations. It is well known that the basic feature of any piece of speech consists in the possibility of combining linguistic elements due to the established rules of language and combinability of the word patterns, nevertheless the Armenian historians used the language material in a unique way by arousing the emotive feeling of the readers. Consequently, the translator of the historic texts should bridge the gap between the original in classical Armenian and its translation in modern languages. In classical Armenian the word *աջովն*

comprises the combinability of two words and has the following structure: *right hand*. The English translation depicts the semantic field of the context thus applying the widely used expression *holy hand*. The combination condenses and makes parallels with semantically and stylistically close meanings in English like, *holy Lord, holy Soul, holy Spirit, holy Ghost*, etc. which sounds ‘natural’ in English. The research has shown that in some versions of the Bible we may come across with the following expression as well: *O sing unto the Lord a new song; for he hath done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm, hath gotten him the victory (Psalm 98: 1)*.

If we draw parallel with the Biblical themes of the divine vision and its miracle influence on humanity we can recall the story of Moses the prophet who saved the Israelites from slavery and became a lawgiver. The principles of the Ten Commandments known as Decalogue were told to Moses by the Lord; *And the Lord said unto Moses, come up to me into the mount, and be there, and I will give thee three tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written; that thou mayest teach them (Exodus 24:12)*. After passing forty days and forty nights in the mount Moses declared that the Lord gave him two tablets of stones *written with the finger of God (Deuteronomy 9:10)*. As the embodiment of the creation of the Ten Commandments, the image of Moses was referred and analyzed by Hellenistic literature and became crucial for different religions as Judaism, Christianity.

If we draw a parallel between Moses and Mashtoc both reached the divine grace through lent, prayers, repentance of sins and at that period they both led a hermit life. Mashtoc was glorified and was accorded great honors by the Bishop, the Church and the people so with proud joy he arrived in Armenia. Mashtoc began the translation of the Bible, first with the Proverbs of Solomon;

- (2) *Ճանաչել զիմաստութիւն և զիրատ, իմանալ զբանս հանճարոյ – To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding.*

The next step is the discussion of the extract from the other Armenian historian M. Khoretantsi’s “History of Armenia” translated by R. Thomson. Based on scientific objectivity and truthful facts the historian presents the history of the Armenian nation (up to the 5th century). The originality of the author’s imaginative thinking and aesthetic taste make the peculiarities of Armenian national identity more vivid and bring out the value of its cultural treasures.

- (3) *Առ սս երթեալ Մեսրոպայ, և յայսմ ևս անշտ անացեալ՝ յաղօթս սպաւիմի: Եւ տեսանէ ոչ ի քուն երագ և ոչ յարթնութեան տեսիլ, այլ ի սրտին գործարանի երևութեացեալ հոգւոյն ասաց թայժ ձեռին ատյ՝ գրելոյ ի վերայ վիմի. Չի որպէս ի ձեան վերջը գծին՝ կուտեալ ունէր քարն (Մովսիսի Խորենացիոյ Պատմութիւն Հայոց, 1981: 404):*

Mesrop went to him, but still gaining no result in this matter, he took refuge in prayer. And he saw not a dream in sleep, not a vision while awake, but in depths of his heart there appeared to his eyes of his soul a right-hand writing on rock; for the stone retained (the shapes) as tracks are traced in snow (Moses Khorenats’i “History of Armenians /translation and commentary on the literary sources by Robert W. Thomson, Caravan Books, Ann Arbor, 2006: 315).

The extract of the invention of the alphabet carries expressive-emotive-evaluative overtones, which help the reader believe in the magical power of divine vision. The style of M. Khorenatsi is rich with high and exuberant expressions, like *նչ ի քննիւ երեսց և նչ յարթնարթաւն տեսիլի* - *not a dream in sleep, not a vision while awake*, *հոգւոյնիւ սրտաց* - *his eyes of his soul*, which are translated both in English word-for-word and express the semantic meaning of the alphabet invention. Perhaps the mechanisms of translating the informative texts of historical genre made the translator transmit the concrete representation of the original. The same picture is in the case of *լաւր ձեռնիւ սջոյ* - *a right hand*. The expression is translated straightforwardly and there is no ambivalence from the original. Naturally, for adequate and full perception of the context the target reader should have “background knowledge”, so called “the necessity of going deep into the essence”. The elaboration upon the theme and a key moment of the role of heaven in the invention of the alphabet is crucial for understanding the role of Christianity in the life of the 5th century Armenians and in the further centuries.

Passing to further observations of the divine vision in the Armenian historiography we may refer to the description of St. Echmiadzin Cathedral, the spiritual center of Armenia. According to the Armenian historiographer Agathangelos, Echmiadzin is the embodiment of Paradise in the Earth, its spiritual atmosphere, its position and the unique architectural solutions inspired the humanity and the Armenian people. The architect who formed the plan of this Cathedral, according to the tradition, which prevails among the Armenians, was Jesus Christ, who drew the plan in the presence of St. Gregory (the preacher with the help of which in 301 Christianity was adopted in Armenia) using a ray of light instead of a pencil. Agathangelos in his “History of Armenia” described the divine vision as following:

- (4) *And (there was) an awesome vision of a man, tall and fearful, who governed the front and the rear guards and, descending from above, advanced as leader. And in his hand was a great hammer of gold, and they all followed him. He himself flew swiftly in the likeness of a fleet-winged eagle. And he descended and came down near to the ground, and great and immeasurable rumblings sounded in the depths of hell. And the whole earth as far as the eye could see was stuck as level as a plain. “And I saw in the middle of the city, near the royal palace, a circular base of gold, as great as a hill, and on it an exceedingly tall column of fire, and on top of that a capital of cloud, and on top of that again a cross of light (Agathangelos History of the Armenians, translation and commentary by R. W. Thomson, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1976).*

Conclusions

There are few materials dedicated to the principles of translation of ancient historic texts, especially in the sphere of Armenian studies. However, the accumulation of certain theoretical and practical materials gives an opportunity to conclude that the translation can be based on the principle of diachronic approach of translation when there is a time distance between translator and the historian. The role of translator is the preservation of style and language of the historians, thus highlighting the overtones of the ancient Armenian versions. Yet, as we have seen the English translations have their own undeniable merits. Preserving the semantic peculiarities of the original the translators transmitted the interplay of words and

made the reader perceive and interpret the essence of the historical context passage. At the same time, it has valuable essence as the translators help the target reader in natural cognizing of a work of historical creativity in the axiological estimation and appreciation thus putting the mechanisms of the modern target reader's "global vertical context", "shared world-view" and the historians' perception of the epoch.

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