21ST CENTURY GEORGIAN-RUSSIAN TRANSLATION:
PRIORITIES AND INNOVATIONS IN
INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

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Abstract. Translation is an integral part of intercultural communication and one of the most actual forms of exchange of spiritual values. The evolution of literary traditions and associated changes in translation norms have a substantial impact on perceptions about the adequacy of translation. Serious fluctuations in translation priorities are fixed in post-soviet space.

This article will provide the results of research carried out for the first time that deals with the specificity of modern translation strategies through the analysis of five new translations of Shota Rustaveli’s poem. Analysis has proved that the postmodern mentality of translators at the end of the 20th century seeks to give the reader comprehension of the original – here the priority is attributed not to domestication but to hermeneutical interpretation of the text. A tendency of synthesis is outlined towards translation and publishing innovations, the main goal of which is translation of an original with preservation of the specificity of its cultural alter and decoding of a text from the position “other” is not “stranger”.

Keywords: Georgian-Russian translation, postmodern mentality, modern translation strategies, publishing innovations, Shota Rustaveli
Introduction

Since time immemorial, translation has served as a bridge uniting various cultures. Thanks to the translations over many centuries created the general field of human culture, with the foundation for mutual understanding between people was laid down and the exchange of cultural wealth was carried out. At the same time, text was transferred into the foreign-language cultural environment – the difficult communicative act: “unlike the person speaking, being in “the own” semantic sphere, a translator gets to crossing, at least, two semantic spheres: “the own” and “other’s”, provided by the text which is subject to the translation”

Translation activities determined by various semiotics models in the world firstly require the examination and overcoming of distinctions between them (cultural adaptation). N. K. Garbovsky highlights that “any translation assumes more or less considerable transformation of system of meanings of the initial speech work”. A. D. Schweitzer calls this situation “a paradox in case of which: a) the translation shall be read as the original and b) the translation shall be read as the translation. Any decision of a translator is of a compromise character”.

As a result, it is always possible to allocate a print of the translator’s own personality in the text they create – such as their world outlook and the aesthetic attitudes of his or her creative “I”. If the activity of translation was once equated to craft, in modern studies it is understood as creative art: “the new text which completely and adequately replaced the text of the original in another culture and other communicative situation”. In other words, attention is paid to the creative aspects of a translator’s activity, one priority of which is understanding and interpreting the original text. “Perceiving the text, we in a bigger or smaller measure analyse it in search of rational adaptation for system of the concepts, for own knowledge base, saved up by us when using accumulative function of the native language”.

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The process of understanding includes “historical understanding”\(^8\), the hermeneutical process of disclosure of “plurality of meanings”\(^9\) in the text being translated, and also, to use M. Weber’s term, the “urgent understanding” of an individual that is guided by his daily experience and practical life\(^10\).

1. Intercultural dialogue and fluctuations in a grid of translation priorities in the countries of the former Soviet Union

Each translation provides only one particular (and always only a partial) interpretation of the translated work. In scientific literature on translation studies, the idea that in some circumstances translations are subject to “ageing” not only in terms of language, but also with respect to interpretations of them, has been repeatedly introduced. The evolution of literary traditions and the related change in translation regulations have a key impact on the idea of adequacy of a translation\(^11\) that is firstly reflected in a grid of hierarchies of translation priorities. Since the end of the 20\(^{th}\) century in the former Soviet Union, serious fluctuations in systems of translation priorities which have in many respects been caused by changes in the general geocultural situation are fixed. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the formation of independent states, the need for intercultural dialogue increased sharply on a parity basis. Full bilateral cultural exchange became a priority, with the increasing importance of broadcasting one’s own cultural wealth requiring the development of new translation strategies.

The choice of translation strategy and criteria for the assessment of these first of all depends on in what line item this or that culture acts in each case. From the line item accepting, any national culture, aiming at inclusion of the foreign-language text in its own cultural context, domesticus – house) – that is, considerable cultural adaptation requires domestication (Latin domesticus – domestic). At the same time for the culture which is in the line item transferring a priority acquaintance of the foreign-language reader with its own cultural achievements in case of which the minimum extent of adaptation is desirable. In

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\(^8\) See: Hajdegger, M. Bytie i vremja Хайдеггер Мартин. [Martin Haidegger. Existence and time] online: http://www.gumer.info/bogoslov_Buks/Philos/Haid_BtVr/


\(^11\) Korney Chukovsky was sure: “You can’t foresee in any way that will be considered as an accurate translation in 1980, or in 2003. Every era creates the idea of what is an accurate translation” (Čukovskij K. Masterstvo perevoda [Chukovsky, K. Mastercraft of translation]. Moskva: Sovetskij pisatel’, 1970, p.11). And at the end of the 80th years of the last century M. Hutsishvili noted: “... the concept of the correct method, the right translation, isn’t steady: throughout a long time of existence of translation activities it repeatedly changed” (Hucišvili M. Problemy perevoda gruzinskoi poezii na russkiy jazyk [Hutsishvili, M. Problems of the translation of the Georgian poetry into Russian]. Тбилиси: Mecniereba, 1989, p.10).
the active dictionary of modern Georgian, the translation is called თარგმა / targmani /. The concept of this ancient word carries an essence that has steadily become fixed in the cultural mentality of people over the centuries: once, the main function of translation was to explain. At present, “to explain” is first of all to facilitate the reader’s understanding of another as other, but not the stranger in case of all their otherness. The acquaintance of another with one’s own cultural achievements thus finds a special importance that can be clearly traced when studying the specifics of the translation strategy of modern Georgian-Russian translation and innovations in that area.

It is necessary to note that Georgian-Russian translation activity for nearly two centuries has been rigidly normalised by the accepting culture. In other words, all translated texts have been exposed to considerable domestication (cultural adaptation), in line with the specifics of reception of the Russian reader. Aside from this, during the Soviet era, state publishing policy (the system of state orders) with regard to translators, as well as ideological and artistic norms determined by state ideology, made a particular impact that has also affected variability in the understanding and interpretation of original texts.

Modern translations of Shota Rustaveli’s poem into Russian may serve as a bright illustration of the current changes in a grid translation priorities. Ilia Chavchavadze (1837-1907), a leader of the national liberation movement, called the poem “a treasury of the soul of the Georgian people”, and “soul can’t be told” (M. Y. Lermontov), while only art is a language in which the communication of souls is possible. Translations of a treasury of the soul of our people therefore have special value. It should first be noted that the history of translations into Russian of Vepkhistkaosani, to them better known


as «Витязь в тигровой шкуре» / “The Knight in the Panther’s Skin” /, contains more than a century and a half. Today, more than 60 Russian-language transfers (including prosaic and partial) are known, including 10 full poetic translations\textsuperscript{14}. Most of these were created in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, but the development of Russian studies of Rustaveli still continues intensively.

“Everything that is told or written by one person shall be understood by another in the course of perception and judgment”\textsuperscript{15}, and this is the indisputable truth. But how is this apprehended, comprehended and understood? What is the main thing from semantic wealth that should not be lost when translating? Great works contain a set of meanings, and each translator first determines their priorities in interpreting the primary text to try to obtain maximum proximity to the original – and what the consider the most important elements that have escaped the attention of predecessors.

Each new translation is a cultural event – a new milestone not only in the history of a poem’s Russian-speaking life, but also a reflection of certain cultural tendencies of the time. Unlike in the Soviet era, in 21st century editions reflect the freedom of postmodern consciousness, in which “the principles of pluralism, decentralization, fragmentariness which are based on the principle of a variety deeply take roots has completely revealed. Under the influence of these processes ready standard decisions and actions are impossible” (A. A. Radugin and E. M. Gurina)\textsuperscript{16}. Now, unlike the modernist style, the postmodern does not declare refusal of the principles of the previous era in intensive searches. The leading principle is that “everything is acceptable!” Translators conduct experiments in search of a new strategy for translation and opportunities for using these techniques in modern publishing.

2. 21\textsuperscript{st} Century Studies of Rustaveli

In Georgia in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, five totally new Russian-language texts of the poem have been published: two full poetic translations (G. Devdariani – 2004, A. Halvashi – 2015), one partial translation (K. Gulisashvili – 2015), one short version (2014) and one (2011) adapted for young readers. But instead of “acquaintance of the Soviet reader with a monument of Georgian culture” that was popular in the Soviet period, text


\textsuperscript{15} Semjonov, A. L. [Semenov, A. L.], op. cit., p. 9.

interpretation and explanation – that is, an aspiration to replace knowledge of the poem with understanding of the original – has become a translation priority.

It is significant that through a desire to open up the semantic richness of the poem for the reader, Russian publishers have been open to change – in particular, with regard to the editorial initiative of writer, poet and translator Natalya Sokolovskaya, the unique Russian-Georgian project of which two reprints of the poem achieved the above results. These comprised the 2007 two-volume bilingual book «Витязь в тигровой шкуре» / “The Knight in the Panther’s Skin” (Vita Nova, St. Petersburg), and the 2014 «Вепхисткаосани (Витязь в тигровой шкуре). Подлинная история» / “Vepkhistkaosani (The Knight in the Panther’s Skin). The True Story” / (Simpozium publishing house).

What is certain is that “before recent time this book <…> in Russia remained one of the most known, but not read literary monuments because, despite the titanic work of poets-translators, many important meanings remained outside the Russian poetic versions” (from the advertising summary). Publishers have published not the poetic, but equated to the word-per-word translation prose translation. Iordanishvili (1933)17, having supplied it with a scientific device18 designed to help the reader break cultural and chronological barriers, and to open up the philosophical and religious depth of the poem’s semantic richness lost during the domination of Soviet state atheism. The publishing credo is reflected even in the title of the book – Подлинная история / The True Story / And whereas the two-volume book of 2007 appeared in an expensive gift format, the cheaper 2014 edition is focused on a much wider range of readers19.

Two new full poetic translations of the poem published in Georgia revealed that their creators, without being professional poets-translators, have been led by a single aspiration – “to break” the paradigm of perception of Rustaveli’s text created by Georgian researchers.

The scarcity of information about the 12th-century poet has surrounded his name with a secret aura that has excited the imagination and generated a set of legends and conjecture. While translating the poem, Giorgi Devdariani reflected much on Rustaveli’s identity. “I won’t hide, in operating time I had the idea of shape of the poet: I saw him as a young man with spiritual features, with the high forehead of the thinker and a radiant look, the poet able to comprehend the beauty of this frail world and to vest them with poetic stanzas”, the translator says20. In his interpretation, doubts about traditional ideas of the poet’s biography are read: carried away by a solution of a mystery of an author’s

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17 The translation has been edited and published in 1966. As the word-per-word translation (the hand-written original of “Samizdat” and the edition of 1966) many translators of the 20th century who were not knowing the old Georgian language used this text.


19 Let’s compare the cost of books by the time of writing of article: a number copy of the two-volume book in a leather cover of publishing house Vita Nova - 24 200 Rub (about $374 the USA or 335 EUR), and a copy of Simpozium publishing house - 639 Rub (about $10 the USA or 9 EUR).

pseudonym, the translator suggests that the reader might be aware of the fact that “it isn’t necessary to exclude” a very romantic, but scientifically unconfirmed hypothesis that under the pseudonym “Rustaveli”, royal prince Demna Bagrationi\textsuperscript{21}, in love with his cousin, but not a grandee of the Queen Tamar period hid himself. Interpreting the text from this perspective, the translator fixes the reader’s attention on those places that can be interpreted for the benefit of this uncanonical version\textsuperscript{22}.

Archil Halvashi’s attention was drawn by another controversial issue with regard to studies on Rustaveli: he was not satisfied by the academic text of the original verified by textual critics. It is known that only pretty late manuscripts of the poem reached us (about 180 full and fragmentary ones) in which there are many distortions created by the additions of interpolators. Over centuries, the text was constantly corrected\textsuperscript{23}. The question of authorship of some fragments or chapters of the poem was often the subject of fierce scientific debate, and naturally, its interpretation by translators in many respects was defined by which version of the text was recognised by textual critics by the time of a translation’s creation.

The professional philologist, A. Halvashi aimed to create in Russian “the full text of the poem which has remained in manuscripts of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries”\textsuperscript{24}, with respect for the rhythm of the original (16-syllabic shairi).

He has done double work: he has made the “critical text of the original”, including added fragments that were not in the original academic text, and has created his own translation. The book is published under a bilingual principle (specular reflection) and contains texts in the Georgian and Russian languages, with a difficult system of double numbering of stanzas (to denote academic and non-academic texts\textsuperscript{25}). This edition gives Russian-speaking readers the chance to study the uncanonical version of development of a plot of the poem and to make idea of variability of hand-written heritage of Rustaveli.

\textsuperscript{21} Demna Bagrationi - the son of the elder brother of the king Georgy III, the father Tamar.
\textsuperscript{23} Even by preparation of the first printing edition “Vepkhistaosani” (1712) the problem of recovery of the initial text was particularly acute for her publisher and the first commentator vakhtang VI. In 1962 at Academy of Science of Georgia “The commission on establishment of the text of Vepkhistaosani” which result of activity were so-called academic publications of the text of the poem has been founded.
\textsuperscript{25} The translator used both texts of academic publications, and the four-volume book Varianty rukopisej “Vitjazja v tigrovoj škure”, otryvki [Versions of manuscripts “Of the hero in a tiger skin”, fragments], Tbilisi, 1960-1963.
K. Gulisashvili has lived in the USA for many years. His translation of the poem’s first and second chapters\(^{26}\) is also focused on making them as close to the original text as possible and the correction of inaccuracies allowed by predecessors. In this translation, the fact that the translator goes on the way to a universalisation – adaptation of the text to the specifics of reception of Russian-speaking readers scattered across the globe – draws attention. This is first of all shown in lexical experiments, with regard to the use of synonymous ranks from lexemes – markers of various cultural areas:

- Rostevan is a king /король/, the “tsar” /царь/, the sovereign /государь/, the governor /правитель/, the master /повелитель/, the lord /владыка/;
- his daughter Tinatin is a “tsarevna” /царевна/ (but not the princess /королевна/), the empress /владычица/;
- and Avtandil is a commander /полководец/, the knight /витязь/, spaspet /спаспет/.

There are also direct replacements: amirspasalar → military minister /ратный министр/, hunters → trappers.

Emphasising the universality of a geocultural area of the poem in this way, the translator expands it from the borders of the civilised world in Rustaveli’s era to the infinite scope of the modern world – that of an era of cultural globalisation.

In 2014, the Nekeri publishing house (Tbilisi) published the book “Шота Руставели. Облаченный в шкуру тигра” /“Shota Rustaveli. Dressed in the skin of a tiger”/. This is a short retelling of the poem executed in a poetic form by writer and translator Georgy (Guguli) Keburiya. The book includes the author’s essay “Rustaveli’s World”. It is adorned with the illustrations of S. Kobuladze, I. Toidze, M. Zichi familiar to readers according to numerous editions of the 20th century and designed “to acquaint” the widest range of readers with Georgian culture.

Special attention is merited by the 2011 edition of 2011 adapted for young readers – «Витязь в тигровой шкуре. Необыкновенное путешествие в эпоху Шота Руставели» /”The Knight in the Panther’s Skin. Unusual travel to Shota Rustaveli’s era”/ (Tbilisi: Palette 1 publishing house)\(^{27}\).

We already noted that postmodern consciousness aims to be exempted from any dictatorship. However, commercialisation of the book market dictates the rules of the game, and in this edition, the experimental nature of searches of stimulation of the reader’s interest was shown. The book is designed with the use of book-building equipment and is a mix of short prose retelling the poem’s plot and fragments from known poetic translations by K. Balmont, Sh. Nutsubidze, P. Petrenko and N. Zabolotsky, and is also written in a fascinating form of all-informative inserts of an era of creation of the poem and the art world of Rustaveli, colourful illustrations, pocket insertions and inclusions in the style of children’s books that contain surprises.

This edition is expected to draw the attention of the younger generation of various age groups.

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\(^{27}\) The Author of the idea, the adapted and informative text Ramaz Chilaia. The book appeared in the Georgian, English and Russian languages.
Conclusions

Old bridges fell, and new ones will be constructed to form other ways of communication, as translators experiment in search of new techniques and strategies. Summing up this study, one may say that:

1. The postmodern consciousness of translators at the end of the 20th century aims to acquaint the reader with an understanding of the original version of the texts: the priority is not domestication, but hermeneutic interpretation of the text.
2. Translation experiments differ in type, the tendency to synthesise of translation and publishing innovations in which the main objective is to make the original available in other languages while preserving specifics of its cultural difference and a text decoding from a line item of another not the stranger is planned.
3. Time will tell which of the experiments will be most successful. Today, all of them are represented by rather shaky planked footpaths and one reason is that the books published in Georgia don’t come into the Russian market and remain inaccessible to readers there. Moreover, editions already mentioned issued by Russian publishing houses have appeared in small circulations (1500 to 2000 copies), which is a drop in the ocean of the Russian book market.

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