

ON THE PRINCIPLE OF TRADUCTOLOGICAL RELATIVITY: RE-INTERPRETING SCHLEIERMACHER¹⁾

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Abstract. The translation is a multidimensional phenomenon. All the theories stress the diversity of its types and strategies. Aspects described as an unexplainable deviation within one theory can form the foundation for another. This may lead to the idea of replacing a theory of translation with its empiric version. However, a different approach is also possible. The outlines of the theory of translational and traductological relativity can be derived from the ideas firstly voiced by Schleiermacher in his lecture On the different methods of translation (1813) and Quine's theory of indeterminacy of translation.

Keywords: Schleiermacher's lecture on the different methods of translating; traductological relativity; indeterminacy of translation; general theory of translation

1. Introduction

Translation is a multidimensional and heterogenous phenomenon; it is studied in various disciplines. All the theories point out the multifaceted nature translation, the variety, and diversity of different types and strategies of translation. As it happens, the same phenomenon can be described as an unexplainable deviation within one theory, but it will appear as a basic entity in another one. Therefore, it is logical that over the past half-century (at least!), translation theory has developed through demarcating types of translation and differentiating the underlying semiotic operations and areas of their application. The very concept of *theory of translation* was replaced with a designation to the area of research: *translation studies*. This innovation suggested in 1975 (Holmes 1988) has already become a commonly accepted term since the 90s. The question is: whether the various translation theories themselves are translatable?

Such a situation may lead to the idea to replace the theory of translation by its empiric counterpart:

«Instead of speaking of theories of translation, we should perhaps speak more about various approaches to the task of translating, different orientations which provide helpful insight, and diverse ways of talking about how a message can be transferred from one language to another» (Nida, 1991: 21)

Since then, such feelings have only deepened – summing them up, one can refer to Andrew Chesterman’s skeptical reflections:

“...there is no agreement on what a coherent “General Theory of All Translation” might look like, nor even that such a theory would be desirable or useful, or indeed possible.. Perhaps this does not matter, as long as heterogeneous views can be openly discussed” – (Chesterman, 2019:15) .

Disputes begin with the very basics – what exactly is to be translated: words, texts, meanings, intentions, contexts? Not only lexical or syntactic units, but also whole texts, and even semiotic systems can be considered as a subject of interlinguistic correlation and translation. At the same time, theoretically mutually exclusive points of view are paradoxically confirmed by practices. Opposite understandings are acceptable as different types of semiotic equivalence and its representations, and all of them can coexist even within the same conception.

Thus, in L. Wittgenstein’s “Tractatus” two different definitions of equivalence are given. The first relates to the translation and is quite traditional. The translation is defined as a correlation between lexical elements of two languages (Tractatus, 4.025; see also 3.343):

4.025 The translation of one language into another is not a process of translating each proposition of the one into a proposition of the other, but only the constituent parts of propositions are translated. = TLP, p. 42

However, according to the second, the translation is a holistic mapping based on the relation of inner iconicity between semiotically different texts and systems:

4.013 And if we penetrate to the essence of this pictorial nature we see that this is not disturbed by apparent irregularities (like the use of Sharp and Flat in the score). For these irregularities also picture what they are to express; only in another way.

4.0141 In the fact that there is a general rule by which the musician is able to read the symphony out of the score, and that there is a rule by which one could reconstruct the symphony from the line on a gramophone record and from this again—by means of the first rule—construct the score, herein lies the internal similarity between these things which at first sight seem to be entirely different. And the rule is the law of projection which projects the symphony into the language of the musical score. It is the rule of translation of this language into the language of the gramophone record. – TLP, p. 39 – 40

This ambiguity and incongruence (mutual non-translatability) of these definitions of translation reflect a variety of its hypostases depending on which entity is thought to be translated: is an original source text understood as a set of

syntactically related lexical units, (and then it is possible to establish element-by-element correspondences between an original text and its translation) or as some integral pragmasemantic structure, and then a translation turns out to be a holistic picture, some elements of which will have no correspondences (for example, the referred by Wittgenstein signs Flat and Sharp do not correspond with any sound).

At the same time it is crucial that both of understandings, however, actually are interrelated - as different aspects, operations and types of translation, considered both as a process and as a product. We have already written about the possibility of a theory based on the relativity of the evaluation criteria for translation, where we tried to develop some ideas earlier suggested by N. Avtonomova and M. Gasparov:

“There are no good and bad translations as such, no perfect ones, no canonical ones. Any translation does not transfer the original completely: each translator chooses only the main thing in the original, subordinates to it the minor, omits or replaces the third. What exactly he considers to be the main thing and what is third-rate – this tells him his own taste, the taste of his literary school, the taste of his historical epoch” (Avtonomova & Gasparov, 1969: 112].

We identified this approach as a principle of relativity of translation. Here we will try to develop it in a different direction: by presenting the contours of the theory of the traductological relativity. The basis for this extension can be Schleiermacher’s conception of a multiplicity of translation methods and Quine’s theory of indeterminacy of translation uncertainty.

2. Indeterminacy of translation and criteria of its evaluation

W. Quine’s notion of indeterminacy of translation is well known, but it is mainly mentioned in connection with the problem of meaning. This principle does not refer to translation as such, but to theories describing criteria of its acceptability. The “indeterminacy of translation” does not mean the impossibility of an acceptable translation, but the multiplicity and incompatibility of possible theories (“manuals”): *“Manuals for translating one language into another can be set up in divergent ways, all compatible with the totality of speech dispositions, yet incompatible with one another”* (Quine, 1960, 27); *“Indeterminacy means not that there is no acceptable translation, but that there are many”* (Quine, 1987,9). The assumption of the uniqueness of an acceptable translation Quine considered as an absurd.

Pointing to the existence of various theories and criteria, Quine nonetheless avoided the question: how can they relate to each other? Instead, he brings the problem to a different plane, putting forward the concept of “radical translation”, which implies the abandonment of metalinguistic reflection, whether it is an experience of translators, or bilingual native speakers, or reference to dictionaries: *“the translation of the language of a hitherto untouched people” ... without a benefit of dictionaries or bilinguals... I shall imagine that all help of interpreters is excluded*” (Quine, 1960: 28). In the situation of “unknown language” when the “translator” does not speak the speaker’s language and is forced to understand it

through direct perception of objects and situations the model of “radical translation” really can be the only solution, observed facts act as an intermediary between languages, but this situation has nothing common with the theory of linguistic translation. Moving away from the situation of direct observation, then, according to Quine, the less reason there is to speak about meaningful criteria for evaluating and comparing translations.

However, the thesis about indeterminacy of translation can be developed in the opposite direction: without departing from the linguistic components but finding functional and structural correspondences with them. “Radicalism,” that is... a direct reference to facts and situations (if this is possible), may turn out to be useless. If a translation, *based on observation and perception of objects and situations*, is not being mediated by linguistic structures, it not only does not eliminate indeterminacy but also generates it. If one abandon s Quine’s “radicalism” and assume that the sentences nevertheless also contain meanings²⁾, and they at least partially can be expressed through sentences of another language, the question will again be reduced to translation methods and criteria for its evaluation. Another thing is that one should leave a fallacy of the uniqueness of translation, as well as its weakened version – an idea that there may be criteria according to which one can select the “best” from a variety of translations – it is possible only to speak about degrees of adequacy in respect to some contexts and circumstances.

But it can be supposed that in addition to the two incompatible “manuals”, there is also a third one - describing why they are possible, why they are not compatible, and in what respect they complement each other. Quine’s principle points to two different aspects: one relates to the multiplicity of translation, and the other to the relativity of its evaluation criteria. The principle of indeterminacy of translation, in this case, is divided into two – the principle of the multiplicity of translations and the principle of translational relativity. It is not limited by stating that both the evaluation of translations and the criteria on which it is based can be fluid and “relative”, but is considered as a correlation mechanism and, where it is possible, patterns of convertation and navigation between alternative theories of translation.

3. Re-interpreting Schleiermacher: on the relativity of translation theories

Quine’s theory became fundamental in the philosophy of language and semantics, but it has a modest impact on the theory of translation. However, the conception of indeterminacy of translation may be developed. Although it is paradoxical from both the chronological and conceptual points of view, the idea of indeterminacy of translation can get interesting traductological solutions, not through the notion of “radical translation”, but by the other classical work, coming from quite another philosophical tradition and discipline – that is Schleiermacher’s lecture “On the different methods of translation” (Schleiermacher, 1813) 2012). Schleiermacher put forward a concept of the diversity of translation methods and indicated an incompatibility of criteria by which translations can or should be evaluated.

The main idea of this Lecture was explicitly expressed in its title, and, as it seems, it can be re-interpreted within the context of ideas expressed already in the twentieth century. One can find here instrument for correlating various aspects of translation and, accordingly, various translation theories:

So whatever else one hears said about translations that adhere to the letter or to the meaning of a work, that are faithful or free, and whatever other expressions now be in common use – if these two are supposed to be different methods, it must be possible to derive them from the original two; but if failings and virtues are to be described in these terms, then what is faithful and true-to-meaning in the one method, will differ in the other Ibid, p 50

Schleiermacher not only demonstrates the diversity of methods of translation and indeterminacy of the criteria for its evaluating, but also reveals causes for this phenomenon - this is not more or less arbitrary discrepancy in tastes, but is rooted in the very nature of translation as language activity. According to his main idea, the typology of translations does not depend on the modus (oral interpretation or written translation) or the sphere (science, art, law, etc.), but on the degree of creativity and individuality of translated original text. The terms “oral” and “written,” or an opposition between *interpretation* and *translation*, as Schleiermacher himself notes, are only arbitrary designations of two fundamentally different types (ibid, p. 47), the main difference between them is determined by the character and degree of the author’s “presense” in the original text (*Ibid, 49*).

For Schleiermacher, these differences between types of discourses (in Schleiermacher’s terminology – “rhetorical genres” – p. 50), primarily, depending on what is dominant in a source text – *a thought or a fact*. Therefore, “In the case in the art and sciences, and indeed in every sphere in which thought that is one with speech predominates and it is not the facts that make of the word a perhaps arbitrary determined and then irrevocably fixed sign” (ibid., p. 46). This distinction is valid not only in respect to an artistic work but also to some scientific or legal texts, – in all these cases, the method that Schleiermacher calls a “*written translation*” will be adequate.

Like Quine did later, Schleiermacher pointed out the incompatibility of criteria by which translations should be evaluated. Accordingly, instead of a universal theory, he proposed to outline something like Quine’s “manuals”:

“...To provide a more general understanding of the characteristics of these two methods... advantages and difficulties of each, the extent to which each most fully achieves the goals of translation and the limits of applicability in each case... For each of the two methods one might outline a set of instructions referring to the different rhetorical genres...” – Ibid, 50.

In these “instructions sets”, such characteristics as faithfulness and translatability will be evaluated differently Proximity of translation to its source is a characteristic of a trivial translation mechanically determined by interlanguage correspondences:

“... thus is translation in this realm little more than a mechanical task which can be performed by anyone who has moderate knowledge of the two languages, with little difference to be found between better and lesser efforts as long as obvious efforts are avoided – Ibid, 45.

Paradoxically, interlanguage precision may turn out to be the “highest degree of humiliation” for a translator: the question of the limits of translation and translatability develops into the problem of its otherness and even foreignness. Any translation can only be a partial reflection or projection of an original text, therefore a translator “will have to be content to achieve in particular what he cannot on the whole” (p.52) According to Schleiermacher,

“For if any two languages each word in the one were to correspond perfectly to the word in the other, expressing the same idea with the same range of meaning...the translations in the area of art and science...would be as purely mechanical, as in business transactions,...one might claim of any given translation that it placed the foreign reader in the same relationship to the author and his work as was the reader of original” – Ibid, 45

On this occasion, it is suitable to recall the theory of translation by Walter Benjamin and its continuation in postmodern philosophy; Benjamin, as it were, continued for Schleiermacher: “Translation is so far removed from being the sterile equation of two dead languages that of all literary forms it is the one charged with the special mission of watching over the maturing process of the original language and the birth pangs of its own. (Benjamin, 2012, p. 18.) Interlanguage correspondences, according to Benjamin, do not duplicate, but exclude each other, and therefore cannot be considered equivalents: a plurality of complementary translations of the original is a manifestation of a plurality of complementary languages (ibid).

Schleiermacher envisaged the possibility of a translator’s influence on language: he is not only a hostage of intra-language cognitive models and their interlanguage correspondences but also their reformer. From one side,

“Every human being is... in the power of the language he speaks, he and all his thought are its product. He cannot think with complete certainty anything that lies outside its boundaries” – Ibid, 46.

This can be considered as a antecedent analog of E. Sapir’s and B. Whorf’s theory of linguistic relativity but at the same time opposing it: the effect of language on the thought of its speaker is complemented or balanced by his/her ability to create “new emerging forms”:

“... every free thinking, intellectually independent individual shapes the language in his turn... in this sense, then, it is the living form of the individual, that causes new forms to emerge from language in each case with the initial aim of passing on a fleeting state of consciousness, but leaving behind now a greater, now a fainter trace in the language” Ibid, 46.

Such a vision opens up an opportunity for a hermeneutic approach when translation is also viewed as a problem of (self-) understanding and explanation:

“Even contemporaries who are not separated by dialects but who come from different social classes ... can often communicate with each other only through a similar process of translation. Are we not often compelled, after all, to translate for ourselves the words of another person who is quite like us, but of a different temperament and mind?... We must sometimes translate our own utterances; would we make them truly our own again”. – Ibid, p. 44.

This, maybe, is the most hermeneutic idea from the Lecture, and it is reflected in the approach of Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur picks up George Steiner’s formula – “to understand is to translate” (Steiner, 1998 (1975)). Differences *within* language complement differences *between* languages. Understanding and translation are based on the representation of Himself as the Other:

“Thinking and talking are always translating, even when someone speaks to himself when a person finds traces of the Other in himself (and no one can exist without it)” (Ricoeur, 2006: XX). “Internal translation” (intra-language paraphrasing) as a process of understanding is complemented by the concept of “language hospitality” - the ability to accept and settle the word of the Other in your own home (Ricoeur, 2006: 10 – 11).

Schleiermacher’s “Lecture” contains a range of possible developments in translation theory. Of course, it would be a hyperbole to assert that, in a potential form, it represents the whole diversity of translational thought of the twentieth century (for example, there is no such important characteristic as a contextualism). Nevertheless, it is clear that he at least predicted the ultimate types of basic translational theories including some intermediate forms (the structuralist theory of “oral” translation as the establishment of interlanguage correspondences, the concept of translation determinacy close to the analytical philosophy of language, but without Quine’s “radicalism”; the hermeneutical concept of “written” translation). What is especially important, all these possible developments in Schleiermacher, although being mutually incompatible, are nevertheless cemented by a common conceptual framework - this is the idea of diversity and multiplicity of translation, determined by dependence on such variables as language, type of text, author’s and translator’s attitudes. This can be considered as a foundation for the theory of traductological relativity, understood not as some kind of invariant, but as a possibility of correlating various theories based on the variation of the abovementioned variables.

CONCLUSION

1. “Against Proteus be Protei!” – this appeal of Vyacheslav Ivanov to translators (from his poem “To Translator,” 1904) can serve as a starting point also for translation theorists. Translation, like Proteus, can take various forms and exists in the variety of these manifestations. Therefore, the question – what is the true

essence of Proteus, the main feature that should reproduce the translation? – is not applicable to this case. It is this property of protease-transformability that is to be described.

2. The relativity of translation finds its correlate in the multiplicity and incommensurability of the theories describing it. Instead of some universal typology one can suggest an approach where theories would differ not by domains of description, but by their axiomatics. It will be a family of interconnected linguistic, semiotic and hermeneutic theories of translation.

NOTES

1. This research is supported by the grant from the Russian Science Foundation (project No. 17–18.01536 at the Institute of Scientific Information on Social Sciences of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow.
2. Cf.: “A sentence has a meaning, people thought, and another sentence is its translation if it has the same meaning. This, we see, will not do”. – [Quine, 1987: 9)

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