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A SACRAL TEXT IN THE FOCUS OF DIACHRONY: LOST IN TRANSLATION? (As exemplified by the material of Latin, Old Greek and Germanic languages)

The article concerns the research of functional and linguistic peculiarities of religious discourse in different historical periods. The author considers the religious discourse as a method, consistently reproduced in time and space, of transmitting the complex of meanings of a sacral text with account of the mentality, religious experience and objective reality of people speaking a certain language in a certain phase of history. The contrastive analysis of polyglot sacral texts appearing as a significant part of religious discourse and being a subject of rendering into different languages is worthwhile only when historical, chronological, sociocultural and situative factors which have an impact on the meaning of a sacral text are taken into consideration. Since translators were expected to observe the compulsory rules of rendering the meaning and structure of the source text, translations appeared that distorted the text meaning or did not reproduce it accurately.

Key words: *religious discourse, the Gospel of St. Matthew, sacral text, diachronic approach, contrastive-comparative analysis, translation.*

1. Introduction

Nowadays communicative linguistics expands the scope of its research by integrating various viewpoints, concepts and perspectives united by either a single subject matter or a common approach or an innovation research method. Students of communicative linguistics focus on many types of discourse the importance of which in the organization of any communication type can hardly be overestimated. Recent foreground studies investigate religious language and style, sacral texts and religious culture as a whole.

A sacral communicative act is the subject of those studies that investigate devoutness and the sacral language from the discourse perspective. The objectives of a sacral communicative act include administration of church services by human beings and organization of the system of religious views that must inculcate faith in people.

Being the “central point of human life in language” and the “lingual manifestation of existence” (Gasparov, 1996: 10), discourse embraces all human activities. Any act of language usage – whether it be a product of high value or a trifling remark in a dialogue – is a particle in the continuous flow of human experience. As such it coopts and reflects in itself the unique set of circumstances under which and for which it has been produced (Karasik, 2002: 39).

Now discourse is treated as a complex communicative phenomenon determined by socio-cultural, historical chronological and situational factors. In addition to a text itself, discourse comprises extralingual information about, first and foremost, the communicants’ knowledge of the world, various opinions and concepts, the addresser’s pragmatic assumptions and goals the knowledge of which is required for comprehensive understanding of a text, etc. For this reason, discourse implies analysis of the addressers’ qualifications and their utterances as well as classification of genres and speech types, description of the significant and the signified, research of the communicants’ goals and aspirations.

2. Diachronic Aspect of Religious Discourse

The problem of the comparative discourse investigation from the perspective of diachrony vs. synchrony is multidimensional. First of all, it implies linguistic research proper that includes analysis of the correlation of meanings of words and the balance of using linguistic structures and expressions

in different phases of history. Moreover, a question arises frequently: whose linguistic view of the world is expressed by the given source of religious discourse (*hereinafter* – RD)? Since the Bible and the Gospels, in particular, are translated texts, they are results of some interpretations, and express the viewpoint of a man or a group of people engaged in the proliferation of the text and, essentially, of its sense. In addition, the Hebrew view of the world expressed in the source text has been reinterpreted many times. As a result, the sacral texts represent not so much the world perception of Hebrews as views of the world of people who belonged to various nations, confessions and epochs.

When the issue of the RD development is treated, we should understand that the discourse incorporates national, social, cultural and historic phenomena of the past as well as their subsequent description and interpretation: they form the background against which mentality and world perception of people participating in the RD develop in a certain phase of history. One may state that RD is a method (and means), consistently reproduced in time and space, of transmitting the complex of meanings of a sacral text with account of the mentality, religious experience and objective reality of people speaking a certain language in a certain phase of history. This explains why the evangelistic texts have been translated many times in various languages, each of them expressing the world view typical of the translator's contemporaries and compatriots and different from the world view of ancient Hebrews and other ancient peoples that professed Christianity.

Diachronic research of RD clearly reveals a change of viewpoints on facts and events combined with a diversification of ways and means of reflecting the reality of a certain epoch as well as variability of approaches to the analysis and description of the reality.

Diachronic investigation of discourse practices allows to algorithmize the process of ancient sacral communication, to reveal its peculiarity, to feel the spirit of that epoch through the mediation of sacral texts and to understand, even though intuitively, the philosophy of ancient rituals and customs.

At present RD contains less information about intuitive or psychological matters; it is more typical for it to reflect exegetical, hermeneutical and philosophical approaches to religious literature, customs and rituals, since in the modern age, with its plurality of worlds, there is not a single confessional spirit. Therefore, it is argued that the modern discourse is less independent and unique and more structured and schematic (Schwarz, 1964: 106).

Based on the foregoing, the novelty of the research can be formulated as the following:

- the object of the study is authentic parallel texts written in different historical periods in languages belonging to different language groups;
- the research tends to interpret the meaning of the gospel text with particular reference to its form and expression mediated by external factors of objective and subjective properties;
- the research exposes approaches to a comprehensive description of authentic sacred texts and develops an algorithm for their multifaceted analysis;
- the study lays the theoretical and practical groundwork for making the gospel polyglot in languages of different language groups to be provided with the detailed historical, linguistic and cross-cultural comments.

3. Sacral Communication and Hardships of Translation

When the problem of structural and semantic relations between ancient texts and their modern translations is considered, it is undeniable that a modern text is a translation from an ancient language to a modern one. In this respect, the physical nature of that world, the society and the cultural and historic situation in which an ancient text was produced are perceived as another, different extralingual reality. Since the language of the source text changes or entirely disappears (though the text itself still exists), the exactness of the target text's meaning remains a challenging open problem. Here it is instructive to recall the words of St. Jerome, the creator of the Vulgate: "I can translate only what I have understood" (cit. acc. to Beekman & Callow, 1994: 32).

Thus, a source text and a target text appear in different discourse conditions, which results in the interference of discourses of different ages. The multidimensionality and counterpoint of the linguistic view of the world even within the same language space implies the necessity to investigate in the national-cultural and socio-historic context in which the discourse emerges and develops. During such investigation the target text is presented as an existing entity, and “not the imaging object (a ‘referent’, in this case – the source text) is analyzed but a constructional whole as a “thingish” entity, a “structure” that incorporates some aspects of the imaging and estranged “referent” (Kristeva, 2004: 9). As a result, there is a discrepancy between situations in the text and real situations.

Comparative studies of theological literature reveal some differences between ancient texts and their translations. The differences come down to textual inexactness and distortions of the text meaning. The meaning distortions, in their turn, include incomplete information, additional information and distinctive information.

Incomplete information is defined as the information contained in the source text and made implicit in the target text. This type of the meaning distortion is a result of approximate translation of the text. Another case of information incompleteness is a lack of important information that is presented implicitly in the source text, and is revealed by means of the second or third layer of the text underlay meaning.

Additional information is another type of the meaning distortion. It may be exemplified by automatic preservation of the grammatical categories that are obligatory in the source language but are irrelevant for the source text. At the sphere of lexis, such distortions are manifested through excessive use of certain words or by the descriptive translation of a word, which results in the unjustified strengthening or weakening of the word meaning or distortion of the text rhythm.

Apparently, the most serious distortion of the source text is adding the distinctive information to the target text as a result of a false exegesis. On the one hand, it is very difficult to reveal this type of distortion of the author’s intention. On the other hand, it is distinctive information that distorts the text completely. Due to such distortion, a sacral text obtains new connotations while the recipients lose the most important thing, i.e. a possibility to hear the author’s voice.

4. A Sample of Contrastive-Comparative Analysis

Since ancient books in Greek, Latin and Hebrew were used as source texts for translations in that historic period, and translators were expected to observe the compulsory rules of rendering the meaning and structure of the source text, translations appeared that distorted the text meaning or did not reproduce it accurately.

Let us compare some fragments of the 19th verse of the fifth chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew in Latin, Gothic, Old High German, Early New High German and modern German.

Lat. (4th c.; Vulgata): *Qui ergo solverit unum de mandatis istis minimis et docuerit sic homines minimus vocabitur in regno caelorum. Qui autem fecerit et docuerit hic magnus vocabitur in regno caelorum.*

Go. (c. 360; Vulfila): *īþ saei nu gatairiþ aina anabusne þizo minnistono, jah laisjai swa mans, minnista haitada in þiudangardjai himine; īþ saei taujiþ, jah laisjai swa, sah mikils haitada in þiudangardjai himine.*

OHG (c. 830; Tatian): *Ther thie zilosit einaz fon then minnistun bibotun inti lerit so man, minnisto ist giheizan in himilo rihhe. Thie thar tuot inti lerit thie ist mihhil giheizan in himilo rihhe.*

ENHG (1545; Luther): *Wer nun eins von diesen kleinsten Geboten auflöset und lehret die Leute also, der wird der Kleinste heißen im Himmelreich; wer es aber tut und lehret, der wird groß heißen im Himmelreich.*

MG (“Schlachter 2000”): *Wer nun eines von diesen kleinsten Geboten auflöst und die Leute so lehrt, der wird der Kleinste genannt werden im Reich der Himmel; wer sie aber tut und lehrt, der wird groß genannt werden im Reich der Himmel (Schlachter, 1951).*

In the Latin version that is obviously close to the Greek text, the word *ergo* has the meaning of final estimate (“consequently, therefore”). This meaning is lost in the Gothic version because Vulfila uses the word *nu* that has the meaning of “now, presently” in addition to that of estimation (Feist, 1923: 286). This word, with its meaning that would correspond to the Latin text and, at least, partially, to the Gothic version, is absent in Tatian’s OHG translation. In Luther’s translation and in the MG version by Schlachter based on Luther’s text the modal meaning ‘summarizing, making conclusions’ is not rendered either because the modern word *nun* designates identification with the reality (“jetzt, da”) (Wahrig, 1989: 946).

Making comparative analysis of this part of the text, we should pay attention to the Latin and German verbs that mean “to violate”. In the Vulgate, the use of the tense-aspect form “perf. conj. act.” of the verb *solverit* one of the semantic variants of which is “to break, abolish, liquidate, cancel” darkens the meaning of the Old Greek verb *lūo* the main meaning of which is rendered by the seme “to violate” in the Gospel of St. Matthew. It is most probable that the meaning of the Latin verb dominates over that of the Old Greek equivalent in later German translations of the New Testament. For example, the meaning of the Gothic verb *gatairan* used in the form opt. pl. *gatairiþ* contains such semes as “to break, destroy, terminate”, and the seme “to violate” is missing, while the OHG verb *zilōsen* contains semes “lösen, auflösen, zerstören, brechen” (Köbler, 1994: 243). In this case the seme “brechen” that corresponds to the meaning of the Greek verb *lūo* is not the main component of the meaning of the verb *zilōsen*. It is noteworthy that G. Köbler in his “Old High German Dictionary” lists such Latin equivalents of this verb as *destruere, dirumpere, dissolvere, dividere, resolvere, solve*, and only the verb *resolvere* in its eighth (!) meaning (Dvoretzky, 2002: 667) corresponds to the Greek verb *lūo* and the OHG verb *zilōsen*. A MHG successor of *zilōsen* is the obsolete verb *zerlösen* that has the meaning of “auflösen; abtun, berichtigen; auseinandersetzen, beilegen; beruhigen” (Ziemann, 1836: 683) and is gradually disappearing from the German word-stock. A. Ziemann does not include “brechen” that dates back to the OHG as a correspondence of *zerlösen* in his dictionary. This information is found in an appropriate entry of “Deutsches Wörterbuch” (1854–1960) by the brothers Grimm (cf.: “übertr. ein gesetz, vorschrift brechen, nach der lat. vorlage: thaz ni sî zilōsit Moyseses êwa (Joh, 7, 23; gebrochen LUTHER)”) (Grimm, 1854–1960: Bd. 31, Sp. 721, 1 b)). Due to the absence of the verb *zerlösen* and the use of its ENHG equivalent *auflösen* (“to abolish, liquidate, cancel”) in M. Luther’s translation, since that time and till now (cf. the example from Schlachter’s translation) the meaning of “brechen” (to violate) is not rendered (cf. the MG *sein Wort / einen Eid brechen*). Here we can state that the content of this part of the text is rendered approximately, in its modern interpretation, and the original meaning, rendered by means of the verb *lūo* in the Greek translation, is lost.

Now it is worth addressing the concept of commandment, one of the key concepts of the religious continuum. In combination with the concept “to violate”, the word is not only a part of the organic whole. It also plays a very important role in the life of any Christian. Adequate rendition of its meaning is essential for understanding of the RD as a whole.

In the Latin text, the concept is designated by the word *mandatum* derived from the verb stem *mando* that means “to hand, deliver, trust, point out, commission, order”. The meaning of the verb *mando* is related to the Lat. *manus* “hand” + root *dō- (dare) “to give” (Walde, 1910: 460).

Other etyma are used in the German texts. They are derived from Proto-Germanic stems. In his Gothic translation, Vulfila uses the word *ana-busns* “bodement, premonition, augury, miracle” < German *būsni-* (cf.: Old English *būsen, bisn* “example, model” and Old Norse *būsn* “miracle”) (Feist, 1923: 30; Lehmann, 1986: 31). In the OHG text, one can see the word *bibot* “Gebot” (= OHG *gibot*; cf.: *gibod*, Old Saxon (*ge*)*bod*) that is an abstract verbal noun derived from the verbs *bieten* or *gebieten* by means of ablaut. Originally, the word had the meaning “Befehl, Erlass” (c. 800) in the OHG; then, with addition of semes “Vorschrift, Gesetz, Grundsatz”, its meaning expanded (Paul, 2002: 375; EWD, 2012: 407).

The word *entolē* (< *entéllō*) that had semes “order, assignment, guidance” in the classic Greek and only later, i.e. in the New Testament, acquired additional semes “instruction, commandment”, seems to be translated literally into Latin: the classic Lat. *mandatum* does not have the meaning “commandment” (see the above etymology). It acquired this seme only in the sacral text of the Gospel. The system of meanings of the corresponding German words has developed similarly. In this sense, the Gothic translation is somewhat peculiar semantically: the word *ana-busn* used in it reproduces the sacral meaning of a commandment, an important concept of the RD, more distinctly since it has such semes as “an example for imitation, a model, a legend, a narration”, which makes the meaning of the Gothic word closer to that of the Russian equivalent.

The usage of adjective forms deserves special attention. In the fragment analyzed, annomination, i.e. a repetition of the same form (in this case, superlative), is a distinct phenomenon: Lat. *minimis*, *minimus*; Go. *minnistono*, *minnista*; OHG *minnistun*, *minnisto*; MHG/ENHG/MG *kleinsten*, (*der*) *Kleinste*. The stylistic device imparts the rhythmicity that is perceptible in any context and that penetrates the whole text of the Gospel. Moreover, due to a repetition of the same word a reader/listener is forced to focus on understanding of that specific fragment of the sacral text that contains the main meaning of the verse.

The usage of the adjective *magnus*, with its semes “large, great”, in the Latin version, and its German counterparts is of some interest, too. In the German versions, the main component of the meaning of Go. *mikils*; OHG *mihhil*; MHG *groß* is the seme “great” that expands the semantic structure of the adjectives and imparts a new shade of meaning to the sentence as a whole. Obviously, the sentence contains the antithesis manifested in the opposition of the minimum of the property expressed by the superlative degree of the adjective to the maximum of the property expressed by the positive degree of the adjective (cf.: Lat. *minimis*, *minimus* — *magnus*; Go. *minnistono*, *minnista* — *mikils*; OHG *minnistun*, *minnisto* — *mihhil*; MHG/ENHG/MG *kleinsten*, (*der*) *Kleinste* — *groß*).

5. Conclusions

A comprehensive contrastive analysis of sacral texts to be undertaken on the material of languages with different structure and with account of different belief systems, adherents of which the speakers of these languages were and are, helps to identify common and specific properties of polyglot sacral texts. It can be carried out from the standpoint of semiotics, logic, hermeneutics and other modern scientific disciplines engaged in varying degrees in the study of individual or group religious experience.

The Gospel texts are translated, that makes them somewhat interpretive in nature. Because of this they can manifest the views of the individual or group of people involved in translation and dissemination of these texts, i.e., these texts are in fact a reflection of the worldview of people of different nationalities, ages and faiths.

Modern RD developed under the influence of antique traditions presents an obvious evidence that “any sentence, even a complex one, can be repeated numerously in the same form in speech; but as an utterance (or a part of an utterance) no sentence, even a one-word sentence, can ever be repeated: it is always a new utterance, even when it is a quotation” (Bakhtin, 1986: 345). Translations of ancient sacral texts prompt us to think again and again how adequately they reproduce the meaning of the original, whether this meaning is perceived fully and correctly by the modern readership, how old commandments and rituals are “felt and perceived” in the constant flow of events, which signs of the past become more conspicuous and prominent and which traces of the past are erased forever.

The contrastive analysis of the semantic structure of a number of lexical units in the studied fragment in Latin, Gothic, Old High German, Early New High German and modern German suggests that the translations into Germanic languages are largely focused on the Latin text of the Gospel of St. Matthew than on its chronologically earliest Old Greek counterpart.

The translators' focus on the Latin version of the Gospel results in loss or significant distortion of the individual elements in the semantic structure of the studied vocabulary, which is found in the Old Greek text. In its turn this allows us to draw a cautious conclusion that in the process of rendering the Gospel verse into Germanic languages some part of its original semantic content was somewhat loosely transmitted by translators.

Multilingual sacral texts comparison shows that their apparent sameness seems, however, not to represent a hermeneutic universe in lexical, grammatical and semantic aspects by them. In the course of the semantic and linguistic interpretation of the Gospel texts written in different languages a really vast number of semantic discrepancies are revealed that are to be explained at least by the following reasons:

- 1) different time of making the translated sacral texts;
- 2) degree of their semantic proximity to the original;
- 3) different methods and techniques of translation;
- 4) translators' personal preferences;
- 5) translators' different cultural experience and educational qualification;
- 6) historical and socio-cultural peculiarities of the while, when the text translation was done.

Abbreviations

ENHG = Early New High German; Go. = Gothic; Lat. = Latin; MG = modern German; MHG = Middle High German; OHG = Old High German; RD = religious discourse.

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**САКРАЛЬНЫЙ ТЕКСТ В ФОКУСЕ ДИАХРОНИИ: ТРУДНОСТИ ПЕРЕВОДА?
(На материале латинского, древнегреческого и германского языков)**

Статья посвящена изучению функциональных и языковых особенностей разноязычного религиозного дискурса с диахронических позиций. Автор рассматривает религиозный дискурс как постоянно воспроизводимый во времени и пространстве способ передачи всей совокупности смыслов сакрального текста с учетом ментальности, религиозного опыта и особенностей физического бытия носителей какого-либо языка в ту или иную историческую эпоху. Сопоставительное исследование разноязычных сакральных текстов, выступающих в качестве значимой составной части религиозного дискурса, имеет смысл, по мнению автора, только в том случае, если в расчет принимаются исторические, хронологические, социокультурные и ситуативные факторы, оказавшие непосредственное влияние на смысл и содержание сакрального текста, являющегося объектом перевода на тот или иной язык. Поскольку традиционная переводческая техника требовала обязательного соблюдения определенных правил следования смыслу и структуре оригинала, возникали варианты перевода, искажавшие или не в полной мере передававшие смысл оригинала.

Ключевые слова: религиозный дискурс, Евангелие от Матфея, сакральный текст, диахронический аспект, сравнительно-сопоставительный анализ, перевод.

Сокращения

ENHG = Early New High German; Go. = Gothic; Lat. = Latin; MG = modern German; MHG = Middle High German; OHG = Old High German; RD = religious discourse

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