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A RUSSIAN GENTLEMAN BY S.T.AKSAKOV: RECEPTION AND TRANSLATION

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Abstract

The article provides the estimates of S.T. Aksakov's artistic legacy by English writers and litterateurs. It draws attention to the specifics of translating Russian literature into English language in the perceptive aspect. The problem of the research is based on understanding of the value of fiction translation for cross-cultural interaction. The starting point of the dispute is Herzen's conviction to the idea of impossibility to translate works by S. Aksakov into English language. The survey includes consideration of J. Duff's personality and the analysis of his translation of S. Aksakov's novel *Семейная хроника* published under the title *A Russian Gentleman*. A comparative method of the study combines literary and linguistic types of analysis. The results of the study proved translation to be a channel of crosslingual literary interaction. "Family Chronicle" being a challenge to translate due to the wide use of elements of vernacular, idioms, language and stylistic figures and cultural realities, helps to comprehend Russian lifestyle of the XVII-XIX centuries.

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1. Introduction

The 20th century is often regarded as the “century of translation”, since translation activity has formed an opportunity to create a common cultural space in Europe. Currently, the translation of fiction in most languages is known as “literary translation” in contrast to scientific, technical and editorial translation. This article aims to investigate the perception of Aksakov’s prose, and his book *Семейная хроника* (“The Family Chronicle”) in particular, in a foreign language environment, translation of this work into English, acknowledgement of its aesthetic value in terms of national literatures’ interaction. Goethe’s term “world literature” is used to reflect the view of free relationship of ideas, motives and images in various national literatures.

Translation represents a special form of mediation. A translator should firstly understand the internal system of a source language and the structure of a given text in this language and only then build a textual system able to have a semantic, syntactic, stylistic and the emotional impact on the reader suggested by the source text (Eco, 2015). Exploration of the translation concept and functions of the translation in the inter-literary process is an important component of comparative literary studies. Dionýz Ďurišin, a prominent Slovak literary theorist and comparatist, in his book *Systemic Theory of World Literature* pointed out that “translation refers to the sphere of genetic contacts, since its main function is to maintain the connection of domestic literature with the foreign literary process and to ensure internal co-measurement of artistic values of two or more developing literary systems” (Ďurišin, 1984, p. 27).

The genre of memoir, which is inherent in the best books of Aksakov, provided an opportunity to express the sense of life’s direct perception from its ethical side, the world of nature with its resurgent beauty, attention to the national tradition. It seems that a special interest of English researchers and translators to Aksakov’s works is caused by the proximity of spiritual principles inherent in two nations, the Russian and the English. The same apotheosis of moral purity, the same interest in everyday life poetry, the same respect for traditions. However, in the XIX century it was believed that translation of Aksakov’s works into English was extremely daunting. Thus, the translation of *A Russian Gentleman* performed by J. Duff in the early XX century, and recognized as successful, became the object of our scientific interest.

2. Problem Statement

The problem raised in the research is understanding of the aesthetic value of fiction translation from the interaction of national cultures point of view. Both the investigation of translation concepts and its functions in the cross-literary process form essential part of the comparative study of different countries literatures. The survey is based on the notion that translation activities provide opportunities to create a unified cultural European space (Klimovitch, 2015). The research disputes conviction of A. Herzen, a Russian writer and thinker, to the idea of impossibility to translate Aksakov into English.

3. Research Questions

The research tries to reveal the way a translator should choose to make the perception of the target text similar to one of the original. The article observes the means used by James Duff in *A Russian Gentleman* (his translation of S.Aksakov’s novel *Семейная Хроника*) to preserve such issues as

characteristic features of a Russian country squire, detailed specifics of the country gentry household and family pattern in the late XVIII – early XIX centuries in Russia, a variety of ethnic groups in the South Urals and their interaction, national realities and rich description of Russian nature.

4. Purpose of the Study

The study is aimed at exploring perception of S. Aksakov's prose by foreign readers through the translation of his novel *Семейная хроника* into English, entitled *A Russian Gentleman*. Another purpose is to reveal the aesthetic value of this translation from the point of view of national literatures interaction.

5. Research Methods

The key method of the study is a comparative one, which combines literary and linguistic types of analysis. This method aims to identify the role of formal linguistic elements in creating holistic and unique artistic images through the transfer of a certain ideological and artistic content and the creation of a certain aesthetic effect.

A literary analysis involves the division of an organized whole into parts, highlighting some aspects and elements in it, as well as the links between them and explores each part relatively independently. Literary analysis includes the analysis of the artwork structure, its subject matter, perspective, ideological and depicted world, artistic speech, composition and plot, as well as forms of style, genre and context. For a linguistic approach, the starting point of the study is language, while the text is considered from the point of view of the manifestation of common features. Nowadays comparative study of the original text and its translation suggests to pay main attention to the language tools, which are both a way of displaying extra-linguistic reality and a form of creating artistic images. Those additional connotations and associations, i.e. "additions of meanings" that language means regularly have in the text are defined by their semantics and their links with each other. They create the multidimensionality and expressiveness of the generated images being also organized in composite attitude (Yusupova & Nurgaleeva, 2015, p. 289).

6. Findings

When M. Meisenbug, the former mentor of A. Herzen's daughter, made a decision to translate *Семейная хроника* ("The Family Chronicle") by Aksakov into English, he warned her: "I would not advise you to take up the translation of Aksakov's memories, they are too extensive, they should be made into a little book, which is not easy ... because this is a very national work" (as cited in Herzen, 2017, 1962). Nevertheless, after more than 50 years (1916-1917) in England in Edward Arnold's publishing house the translation of Aksakov's trilogy performed by James Duff had come out: *Years of Childhood* ("The Childhood Years of Bagrov - Grandson"), *A Russian Gentleman* ("The Family Chronicle"), *A Russian Schoolboy* ("Memoirs"). J. Duff worked on Russian literature, simultaneously exploring realities of Russian life. Apart from the trilogy by Aksakov he translated *Family Happiness* by Tolstoy, *Past and Thoughts* by A. Herzen. Besides, *Russian Realities and Problems*, *Russian Lyric* and early Lermontov's works were published in 1917 in England under his editorship.

It is noteworthy that Duff was aware of German translation of *The Family Chronicle* by Sergei Rachinsky having come out in Leipzig in 1858, and of a previous English translation by a certain “Russian lady” published in Calcutta in 1871. The latter Duff considered unsuccessful, describing it as “inadequate to the original” (as cited in Duff, 1917, p, 43).

There is the only monograph dedicated to Aksakov in a whole Anglo-Saxon world nowadays: *S. Aksakov. A Russian Pastoral*. Its author, Andrew Durkin, had the opportunity to study materials of the Aksakov family in Russian archives and major libraries. In his opinion, Aksakov’s books belong to pastoral prose, which can be regarded on two levels: the aesthetic one, in which an idyllic, remote in time, natural and simple world is emerged, but still close and currently perceived in all its complexity. (The pastoral in Durkin’s monograph is researched as a general cultural ideal of rural life in harmony with nature, the essence of which is solitude and spiritual independence, creative work, strong family and patriotism) (as cited in Durkin, 1983, p. 67).

According to another famous English critic Cecil (1983) the interest of a Western reader to Aksakov “is the evidence that the Russian writer unites European cultures with universal themes, thus acquiring global significance” (p. 145).

Virginia Woolf in *The Russian point of view* noted that “Russian literature meets the hottest response from English readers” (Woolf, 1925, as cited in Woolf, 2003). Woolf speaks with gratitude about J. Duff, who allowed the British to explore Aksakov’s autobiography, which shows miraculous emotional life of a child, “Aksakov with his generous, enthusiastic nature was allowed to experience his childhood to the fullest and to preserve the pure joy of its resurrection forever” (as cited Woolf, 2003).

The personality of Stepan Mikhailovitch Bagrov is the central figure of the entire novel. It made James Duff change the title of a translation: «A Russian Gentleman seems a suitable title for this book, because the whole scene, in which a multitude of characters appear, is entirely dominated and permeated by the tremendous personality of Aksakov’s grandfather, Stepan Mihailovitch. Stepan Mihailovitch is more like a Homeric hero than a man of modern times» (as cited in Aksakov, 2015).

Researchers note the epic appearance of this character - Aksakov uses epithets and comparisons typical for a hero from Russian folklore: *необыкновенно широкие плечи, жилистые руки, правильные черты лица, прекрасные большие темно-голубые глаза, открытое и честное выражение лица, русые волосы, коренастый дуб*. Description also includes colloquial elements: *силач, в молодецких потехах*). The translator copes with comparisons and epithets, having found exact equivalents for them. The colloquialisms, however, are mostly translated by means of description (*силач - his extraordinary strength*). Trying to compensate the loss and preserve the informal tone in translation of *в молодецких потехах*, Duff adds colloquial epithet *rough-and-tumble (amusements of young men)*, but changes the connotation from positive to negative, which causes loss of the respect felt by Russian reader towards the character.

The research shows that J. Duff did not omit any behavioral detail of Stepan Bagrov’s image, preserving Aksakov’s depicting Stepan as an ambivalent personality (Selitrina, 2016, p. 88). To do it, in most cases, J. Duff used regular English correspondences, though colloquial idioms were neutralized: *неторчал деньночь - It was not his way to be present from morning to night; смотрел предко, да метко - he looked to some purpose*. Moreover, translation contains an addition making the character’s emotions

explicit to English reader: *Он весь дрожал, лицо дергалось судороги, свирепый огонь лился из его глаз, помутившихся, потемневших от ярости! ...* (Aksakov, 1991) - *It was impossible to recognise his former self. He was trembling all over and supported on each side by a servant; his face was convulsed, and a fierce fire shot from his eyes which were clouded and darkened with fury»* (Aksakov, 2015)

In his chronicle S. Aksakov tells about the morals and patriarchal family pattern typical for the Russian country gentry household (as cited in Romanov, 2016; Laskova, 2014). In this case, patriarchal means the culture of the family, headed by the father with unquestioned authority (Fedorov, 2018). In such a family, everyone knows their responsibilities, their place. Such a family is headed by Stepan Mikhailovich Bagrov in *A Russian Gentleman*. He enjoys universal respect and requires complete submission in the family to himself and the rules established by him.

From a linguistic point of view, the idea of this is realized through the vocabulary with positive or negative connotation, emphatic structures and cause-and-effect links in the sentence: *прималейшей медленности или задержке он начинал сильно гневаться* - *and the slightest delay or unpunctuality made him exceedingly angry*. In his translation J. Duff preserves both cause-and-effect links, emphasis and negative connotation and positive connotations of the original: *протянул милостиво руку сыну своему, которую тот целовал привычной почтительностью* - *gave his hand graciously to his son, who kissed it as respectfully as usual*.

Stepan Bagrov does not simply establish the patriarchal order in his own family, he believes that the families of his children should be arranged in the same way. So, when his son marries his father talks to the couple, instructing them. From the grammatical point of view, the instructive tone is transmitted both in Russian and in English by means of verbal forms in the imperative mood, so J. Duff fully reproduces them in translation, as well as real-conditional structures. However, the expressive linguistic means characterising a simple, not very educated person were again neutralized: *не балуй ее* - *don't be weak with her*; *это не годится* - *make her see her mistake*; *пути не будет* - *things will go wrong*.

Representatives of many national cultures have always lived on the territory of the South Urals, and Aksakov reflects this in his novel: *луговая мордва, черемисы, чуваша, татары и мещеряки; русских переселенцев... также было немало* - *Mordvinians, Choovashes, Tatars, and Meshchers, and plenty of Russian settlers too*. Besides, the reader learns about Germans working in Russia (a general and a doctor). J. Duff preserves the entire rich multinational palette in his translation, omitting only one ethnic group (черемисы). Notably he uses matches which are still relevant for present-day English whereas some original Russian lexemes (*башкирцы, луговая мордва, мещеряки*) have become archaic.

S. Aksakov depicts the relations between ethnic groups populating the area as friendly using various epithets: *добродушные башкирцы* - *the simple Bashkirs*, *искренние мордовцы* - *joyful greetings and compliments and good wishes, ... coming from the heart*, *слишком любезная и внимательная* Tatar family - *The family were only too kind in their attentions to her*. In contrast, German officers *отличались жестокостью и большой охотой допалок* - *were notorious for their cruelty and love of inflicting corporal punishment*. Civil servants like doctor Klaus are different: *предобрый, умный, образованный и в то же время пресмешный немец* - *a very kind man, clever and well-educated, but singularly grotesque in his appearance*. Having compared the above examples from the original text and the translation, one can conclude that J. Duff preserves all information about inter-ethnic relations in the

Urals either finding equivalent matches or applying some translation techniques. The only “inaccuracy” could be found in translating *добродушные* by *simple* – as *simple* does not imply idea of friendliness.

According to S. Aksakov, the interaction between different ethnic groups in the Urals results in acculturation when one nation adopts habits, occupation, and sometimes lifestyle of the other. The most vivid example of this process in the novel is Stepan Bagrov’s son-in-law Ivan Karatayev. J. Duff successfully reproduces Aksakov’s message – English reader finds out *a passionate lover of the Bashkirs and their wandering life — a true Bashkir himself in mind and body..., who had now adopted all the Bashkir habits...*

The surveyed novel contains national realities of different ethnic groups: Bashkirs, Mordvinians and Russians.

Bashkir national realities are represented by national drink (*кумыс*), a container for its production (*мурсук*) and a musical instrument (*чебызга*). The first is reproduced by J. Duff by transcription *koumiss* followed by explanation *Mare's milk, fermented*; the second and the third ones are clarified by Aksakov in the footnote of the original text, so for the second Duff uses its definition directly in the text - *the bags of horse-hide*; and the musical instrument is reproduced by hyperonym: *the pipe*.

The only Mordvinian national reality described in the original text is a costume for women (Sarbash, 2014): *«одежда мордвовок ... их вышитые красной шерстью белые рубахи, их черные шерстяные пояса, или хвосты, груды и спина и головные уборы, обвешанные серебряными медными колокольчиками – their white shifts embroidered with red wool, their black woollen girdles, and the silver coins and little bells which hung from their heads over their breasts and backs*. J. Duff preserves all the details in translation, omitting only one detail – *хвосты* (thick fringe of black woollen threads), which he might have considered excessive.

Russian national realities are most numerous in this novel. They include names of drinks and dishes, construction elements, measures of volume, length and money. J. Duff reproduces them in *A Russian Gentleman* by means of different translation techniques: transcription (*квас* – *kvass*; *версты* – *versts*; *десятины* – *dessyatines*), replication/calques (*зеленая ржаная каша* - *porridge made of green rye*; *раковый суп* - *crayfish soup*), approximate translation/relative equivalents (*сычуг* – *haggis*, *кипучим вином* – *sparkling wine*; *ведро* - *two or three gallons*; *десятины* – *acres*, *сажен в двенадцати футах* – *in pools fifteen feet deep*), hyperonyms (*горница* – *bedroom*) and descriptive translation (*щи* - *cabbage-soup*). Mostly J. Duff succeeds in reproducing Russian national realities; nevertheless some of his choices are hard to justify: *вино* (wine) – *whisky*, *моченые яблоки* (soused apples) - *apple chips*, etc.

The description of nature occupies a special place in the surveyed novel as in all the works by S. Aksakov. In the preface to *A Russian Gentleman* J. Duff honestly tells that he had “abridged some of the topographical detail at the beginning of the book” (as cited in Aksakov, 2015). It is, however, necessary to note that he reproduced almost all the episodes depicting Russian nature. The only exception is the poem about harmful human impact on nature, which Duff omitted giving no comments on it.

In this work nature is presented in several aspects: as a description of the area and natural beauty and as the perception of it by the characters and the author.

The description of the area and natural beauty is the richest in linguistic expressive means. The author uses epithets with positive connotations, numerous scientific and folk names of plants and animals;

synonymic and contrastingly antonymic chains, comparisons, metaphors, allusions, etc. J. Duff uses all his speech skills to preserve the picture Aksakov created in the novel.

In some episodes he manages to find accurate equivalents: *Водатакаячистая, что ... можнобыловидетьнаднеброшеннуюмеднуюденежку!»* - *The river was so transparent that, if you threw in a copper coin, you could see it resting on the bottom*. But in most cases translator has to transform lexemes and syntactic structures, using different translation techniques. Thus, translating the antonymic chain *пообеимсторонамеготянутся, тотеснясь, тоотступая... горы* Duff gives more general *varying in breadth*. The same goes with a synonymic *ровпоскатамиотрогамих* translated as *the slopes*. The epithet *непочатая* (steppe), which means “untouched, unplowed” steppe, is logically developed into *level* (steppe).

J. Duff also coped with numerous scientific and folk names of plants and animals. Some of his translator’s solutions though seem disputable: translating *осина* (trembling poplar/ asp), he drops *trembling* which may cause misunderstanding for a poplar is a different kind of a tree; or *душистая кашка* (white clover) is by some strange reason substituted by *Meadow Sweet*, and we may find several similar situations in the translation (Duff, 1917, p. 245).

Quite interesting is the way of preserving the allusion *уголокбетованный* – *a paradise for the sportsman*, which Duff expands, adapting it for English reader, making explicit author’s implications. He also reproduces poetic style of Aksakov’s narration by means of archaic word-forms: *But still hast thou power to charm, wondrous land! Bright and clear, like great deep cups, are thy lakes Kandry and Karatabyn»; «Fresh and green and mighty stand thy forests of all manner of trees»* (Selitrina, 2016, p. 88).

7. Conclusion

Translation is generally considered a channel of crosslingual literary interaction and in broad sense might be named a phenomenon of cultural transfer. “Family Chronicle” undoubtedly belongs to texts that are challenging to translate into target one due to the wide use of elements of vernacular, idioms, language and stylistic figures and cultural realities. In spite of its complexity J. Duff managed to preserve almost all national Russian literature specifics of the XIX century in his translation. Consequently, English readers keep enjoying *A Russian Gentleman* in XX – XXI centuries.

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