

CULTURAL SPECIFICS OF FICTION TEXTS: THE CASE OF RUSSIAN LITERATURE

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Abstract. Authors have considered a special stage in the life and its reflection on the works of the world-famous Russian poet, novelist, and the Nobel Prize winner in literature Boris Pasternak in his three year evacuation period during the World War II in Chistopol – a small town on the Kama River. During that time Boris Pasternak was mostly translating. The study is focused on the cultural specifics of fiction texts, i.e. texts translated or created by B. Pasternak. Within the first two months staying in Chistopol the poet translated the play ‘Romeo and Juliet’ by Shakespeare, and then the great cycle of poems by Juliusz Slowacki, poems and the tragedy ‘Mary Stuart’ written by Shiller. At the same time he implements a great idea he had planned long before –

he translates ‘Antony and Cleopatra’. The study highlights cultural peculiarities of Pasternak’s translations and his own style reflected in fiction. The research states the ambiguous attitude of critics to Pasternak’s translations. He was both considered as the brilliant translator and criticized for liberty, inadequacy and excessive individuality.

Keywords: fiction texts, Boris Pasternak, translations, Russian language.

1. Introduction

The analysis of B. Pasternak’s fiction works and translations written during the World War II may help to explain controversial and complex views

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on his works, which may be still currently considered as a research niche. During this period Pasternak was mostly involved in translations. ‘Personal creativity is over. I proceed with the translations’, – Pasternak wrote about this time many years later.

The beginning of the XX century was the peak of translation studies. During that time new horizons were marked, new views on translation intertwined with traditional ones, the richest practical experience was obtained, and new ideas about the language and the translated texts were formed.

As the state controlled entire publishing at those times, translations rested on the principles of equivalence and equilinearity. Given principles were implemented to make translation as accurate as possible. Therefore language was too ‘heavy’ and had little artistic value.

Translations which broke official dogmas were the best ones for this period. These are translations of Marshak, Pasternak, Lozinsky and others. M. Lozinsky prioritized identification of systemic

correspondences in the languages of translation.

The poetic translations of S. Marshak represent various adaptations of the verse and changes in the social and cultural aspects of the text. Boris Pasternak did not follow the official concept of translation. He managed to combine accurate poetic form and modernization, which involved individual poetic language in translation. Pasternak is known as both poet and translator.

An extensive translation work of Boris Pasternak – the world-famous poet, novelist, the Nobel prize winner in literature received scientific regards. However, many aspects of such a complex creative work have been only covered in fragments.

2. Methods

The issue under study is researched by literature review of works of the Russian and foreign linguists and critics who analysed translations of B. Pasternak in the XX century. Method of comparison rested on historical and biographical aspects and analysed basic stages of Pasternak’s work in Chistopol during the Great Patriotic War.

Sociological methods allowed to study literature traditions, cultural ones in particular, followed during war times in the Soviet Union.

3. Results and discussion

The translations of fiction and translations of B. Pasternak, in particular, were researched within literature, philology, linguistics and philosophy in the XX century.

Linguists studied the poetics of translations of Pasternak, Marshak, Lozinsky [1, 2, 3, 4] and other works which aimed at conveying cultural, stylistic, metrical, phonetic peculiarities of source texts within development of Russian poetry in XX century.

The translations of fiction works are also mostly studied within works on philosophy [5], literature, philology, linguistics [6, 7, 8, 9]. At present, studies focus on the attitude of B. Pasternak towards his own works. Thus, Dobronravova et al. argue that Pasternak developed his own view on literary translation [7]. He believed translation to be an independent work of art, to strive for the artistic and to convey the subject matter.

Views on translations of B.

Pasternak

There are controversial opinions on Pasternak's translations, despite common positive public attitude. It is due to the fact that the tragedies of Shakespeare have always received polar interpretations. Some people criticized Pasternak for the liberty, inadequacy and inconsistency of the era, others disapproved excessive individuality, oddity and incomprehensibility of his works which did not correspond to the ideology of the time.

Maurice Fridberg, one of the pioneers of historical and cultural research of translation in Russia, argues that professional translators depended on the party ideology. Following the view on literary translations and the nature of creative writing peculiar for the Stalin era there should be the ideological and political context of the formation of the Soviet society. Thus, translations, poetry in particular, were mainly deprived of creativity. All spheres of culture and translations in particular were affected by Soviet censorship and dominant ideology of the Communist party [10].

Susanna Witt, associate Professor at Uppsala University

(Sweden), argues that the ‘accurate’ translation was rejected in the Soviet official discourse in the Stalin era due to the ideologization of translation standards [11]. The doctrine of the Soviet theory of translation was introduced at the ‘first all-Union conference of translators’, held in early January in 1936 in Moscow. It was predetermined by the following essential, but different approaches to translation, ‘accuracy’ and ‘liberty, ‘letters’ and ‘spirit’. Pasternak was a member of the conference Presidium. The following translation method was justified – the principle of ‘liberty as a conscious deviation from the ‘rules’ and a violation of the convention pertains to the collective project of Soviet culture, only the Soviet team can either approve or disapprove the quality of translation’ [12].

Pasternak provided theoretical groundings for his principles of translation and tasks of the translator in numerous researches and correspondence with relatives and friends sharing his thoughts on translations [13].

A. Navrozov, a writer, translator and journalist argued that

despite judgmental issues regarding the works of Pasternak, he had still pursued a deep study of a unique style of his own works and translations. Navrozov admired works of Pasternak, in particular his huge unpredictable lexicon and cultural specifics reflected in translations: ‘... the rhyme lies not only in the spirit of Pasternak, but in his writing style’ [14]. Max Hayward, a British teacher and translator of Russian literature, states that it was due to perfect Russian language that Pasternak managed to brighten and bring sensuality to his translations, poetry and novels: ‘It was quite simple for a poet of Pasternak’s temperament to operate such a ‘plastic’ language as Russian and to be obsessed with sensual pleasures achieved through works’ processing’ [15]. An American writer Gifford argues that Pasternak was an outstanding translator. He translated well known foreign works from about twelve languages and, thus, introduced them to his Soviet readers [16].

‘Provincial pages of Boris Pasternak’s biography’

In 2005 the creative team of Kazan innovative University named

after V. G. Timiryasov conducted a study on the Chistopol period of Boris Pasternak works during the Great Patriotic War. A research and literary book ‘Provincial pages of Boris Pasternak’s biography’ [17] was written with respect to the obtained results. The book highlights creativity in history of the Soviet literature during the Great Patriotic War and crucial stages in life and creativity of Boris Pasternak during his evacuation period in Chistopol. The research revealed the ambiguous attitude of critics to the translations of Pasternak during three years of evacuation in Chistopol.

The Chistopol Period in Boris Pasternak’s Life

Pasternak was translating in a small provincial town Chistopol located on the Kama river during his evacuation period of the World War II. ‘Personal creativity is over. I proceed with the translations’, – Pasternak wrote about this time many years later. Primarily, it was for personal reasons – works of Pasternak were banned from publishing as he refused to proclaim collective creativity. Only his translations were published, with much effort though.

During the war, for some reasons, the city of Chistopol hosted over two hundred refuges, namely, workers of culture, literature, art, and their families. Boris Pasternak had gained a special value in the military and literary epos of Chistopol.

Boris Pasternak translated a lot in Chistopol during the evacuation times of the Great Patriotic War. In this town he was translating two significant works: ‘Romeo and Juliet’ and a collection of poems of the Polish romantic poet Juliusz Slovak. At the same time, he was implementing a brilliant idea planned long before the evacuation to Chistopol – he translated ‘Antonia and Cleopatra’ by Shakespeare, which was requested by the Small art theater.

The text specifics studied in a number of research works [18, 19,27,28] contributed to the analysis of Pasternak’s translations as well as fiction works.

Galimova et al. suggest that Pasternak’s translations are of high artistic quality, he managed to capture and reflect the inner strength of the action [8]. He brought new colors and combinations into the texts of Shakespeare. Probably, the translations were influenced by Pasternak’s life in

Chistopol, as this provincial city was free from the hustle and ambitions of the country's capital. The environment introduced 'exceptional simplicity' and cultural value into his work. When translating Shakespeare's tragedies, Pasternak aimed to convey them to every reader and, thus, made translation clear for everyone. The language of Shakespeare may be a little pompous and embellished, whereas in the translations Pasternak mainly uses simple 'provincial' language which reflects the national and ethnic mentality, involves a lot of colloquial expressions of lower register.

The style of Pasternak's translations maintains the spirit and culture of Russian poetry and strictly follows the source text at the same time. The creative belief of Pasternak as a translator was as follows 'Like the source text, the translation should reflect life, not literature' ('Notes to the translations from Shakespeare').

Pasternak's translations of Shakespeare are widely known. He was accused of 'hiding behind Shakespeare' form tragic war reality. Martynov I. states: 'Of course I don't want to accuse Pasternak. I have always loved his

works. He is an outstanding and true poet... Present days are quite angry, long and hard for Romeo, and Russian literature is not rich enough'. Pasternak was dreaming of writing a true book – real prose, when staying in Chistopol. 'I dream of creating real drama in prose, and quite mundane one, within the war...' (extracts from letters to Gladkov). He managed to implement his dream after the Great Patriotic war in 1945, when he began writing the novel 'Doctor Zhivago' – the top of his work. Pasternak has been working on it for about 10 years.

4. Summary

Boris Pasternak managed to follow his inner freedom, he maintained and secured his moral beliefs. Unlike many evacuated writers Pasternak regarded the provincial imprisonment not as punishment, but as poetry: 'Here we are all much closer to the truth than in Moscow. Morally, we all refused buskin, removed the masks and looked much younger, but physically, we are exhausted ...'. This statement reminds of his mission, i.e. to serve the truth, not to be obliging [20,22,23,24].

The special stage in life and creative work of Pasternak was marked by the years of the Great Patriotic War and the three-year evacuation period in Chistopol, in a small provincial town on the Kama river. Pasternak was staying in Chistopol in autumn and winter of 1941, almost whole year in 1942 (he went to Moscow in winter 1942, but soon returned). He left the town in summer of 1943. From that moment Pasternak decided to cease translating. He believed that his true vocation was his own works, not translations – he did find an ‘inner freedom, which was ‘impossible’ during those times’ [16,21,25,26]. As a member of writers’ team B. Pasternak joined the army. He reflected ‘horrible war-time reality’ in the ‘Battle-field diaries’ (1943). The war-time poems, ‘Zarevo’ (Fire reflection on the sky) in particular, represent authors’ determination to write the novel ‘Doctor Zhivago’.

5. Conclusions

Despite constant constructive criticism, Boris Pasternak was a genius writer and outstanding translator. His works and translations did not meet the Soviet ideology as he followed his own concept of fiction translations, which in

particular rested on cultural specifics of Russian texts. Pasternak did not retell Shakespeare and did not create so-called ‘romantic’ style which might be assigned to works by Shakespeare. Pasternak argued that translation is an independent work of fiction that deeply reflects the reality. The translations of Pasternak rest on a specific approach to source text: primarily, translator aims at text interpreting and adaptation to readers’ national and cultural specifics, but not giving word-for-word calques. For this reason many literature critics consider Pasternak’s translations as his own texts.

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