

Translation as a Social Phenomenon

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Abstract

The article deals with the formation of phenomenon and notion of translation as a social manifestation. The translation is presented as a key point of creating and resolving hermeneutical situation. It is shown that the conversion of the translation from the verbal procedure into a social phenomenon is caused by the processes of globalization and multiculturalism of the modern world. The translation under such conditions becomes a reliable way to organize relations of understanding between two or more social actors. The method of dialectical analysis of translation as an ambivalent contradictory phenomenon that contains the potency of social mechanism of constructing society; the principle of historicism that allows the scholars to move from analysis of translation as a purely linguistic phenomenon to identification of its social opportunities; the method of using the conflict of interpretations of translation to reveal its ambivalent characteristics; the theory of social systems by N. Luhmann that allows to establish the mechanism of action of translation as a tool for constructing society, in particular, the rebuilding of social systems have been applied. The results of applying these methods: the specificity of the translation as a social relationship which consists in the fact that it allows a social actor to save his face and quality, on the one hand, and to be understood and to understand his social interlocutor, on the other hand, has been shown. The features and possibilities of translation as a social mechanism of constructing society have been revealed. The obtained results enable us to conclude that the social mission of the phenomenon of translation is constantly expanded and strengthened in the process of constructing and rebuilding the modern society. The practices of translation provide optimum of mutual relations of various social actors.

Keywords: Social philosophy, theory of translation, actor-network theory, hermeneutics.

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Introduction

There is the notion that belongs obviously not only to hermeneutics, but to the social theory as well in the famous work by Paul Ricoeur “The Conflict of Interpretations” [1]. This is the notion of hermeneutic situation. We think that this notion belongs to both hermeneutics and social philosophy, as it expresses the problematical character and the necessity of the mutual understanding of different social actors or different cultures at the same time. Moreover, it concerns not only the necessity of the understanding the problems of the past culture, but the understanding of “here and now”. What this means is the interaction of the actors who are in the same social space and time. Two extreme positions among the different ways and variants of conceiving the phenomenon of understanding are singled out. The first one is: understanding as taking (Bibikhin) [2], in other words, including something that is understood into life (Mamardashvili). This way of understanding goes far beyond the rational procedures of interpretation and is not clearly suitable for solving the problems of relations of classes, nations, and many other social groups, cultures and even individuals. All these actors of social action need to maintain their self-sufficiency and identity, and, at the same time, to understand each other. In this connection, there is the logic of language interaction at the other pole of the full range of variants of interpretation of understanding. But the actors of social action speak different languages. That doesn't matter whether we are talking about ethnic (national) linguistic systems or sociolects in this case [4], or even an individual language in the hermeneutical situation of individuals. In this context, it is possible to understand each other with a minimal condition of understanding the social interlocutor.

Language interaction in this regard implies the phenomenon of translation. There is every reason to believe that the translation today is not just a verbal practice or linguistic or philological phenomenon. Nowadays translation becomes a social phenomenon, public attitude, implying some form of power over the people. The features and possibilities of translation as a social mechanism for constructing society have been revealed. Firstly, translation acquires the status of a social institution and is able to participate in re-arrangement (rebuilding) of social system with the privileges of its organic elements; secondly, translation is capable of making social phenomena and processes, imperceptibly existing on the periphery of the life of society be visible and significant; thirdly, translation exists as the meaning transfer from one semiotic system to another; fourthly, translation as a social and aesthetic attitude provides the possibility to save the unique identity of cultures in a globalizing world.

Methods

1. Dialectical analysis of translation as an internally contradictory phenomenon, which has its own sources of development, has revealed the potency of social mechanism of constructing society contained in the phenomenon. 2. The principle of historicism has outlined the trajectory of studying from the analysis of translation as a philological, linguistic phenomenon to identifying its social functions and practices. 4. Using the situation of conflict of translation interpretations in order to reveal its ambivalent characteristics has allowed to delineate the boundaries of the translation as a phenomenon of social communication. 4. The theory of social systems by N. Luhmann has given the opportunity to present the phenomenon of translation as a social mechanism for rebuilding certain social systems, as well as the formation of society as a whole.

Results

1. In the course of investigation the notion of hermeneutic situation was introduced in the social and philosophical discourse. This notion is at the intersection of hermeneutics and social philosophy as it problematizes the need for mutual understanding of the different social actors or acting different cultures.
2. It has been proved that the phenomenon of translation in the modern social-humanitarian knowledge goes far beyond the linguistic, philological reality. In modern social conditions translation functions as an organic element of the social system, in the form of public relations implying some form of power over people.
3. The characteristics of translation as a social mechanism for the constructing society are revealed. In the history of translation the moment when it is institutionalized and able to participate in the re-arrangement (rebuilding) social system has been traced.
4. It has been shown that the translation is capable of making visible and important such social phenomena that were marginal on the periphery of public life before the contact with a space of translation relations. Translation marks such phenomena, thereby drawing them into the epicenter of the life of society.
5. It has been found out that translation works to transfer meanings from one semiotic system to another, creates social and aesthetic reality of different cultures in this process, providing an opportunity of maintaining their identity in a globalized world.

Discussion

Translation is a language of the globalizing world. Umberto Eco says that the language of Europe is the translation [5]. In the total situation of globalization and glocalization, in the situation of decentered multicultural and multi-religious world this formula can be rephrased: the language of the modern world is translation.

Naturally, in this context, translation can no longer remain a phenomenon only of philology, literature, or, even more, “the theory of translation”. It becomes a social phenomenon: “Translation is a rendering the text in one language by means of another language. Furthermore, the translation is the transference of phenomena of one culture to another. But that's not all. Translation is also an important social factor, bearing the stamp of place, time, conditions of its creation and influencing the place, time and conditions; in other words, translation is a social act”, - writes S. Tyulenev [6]. But we can add that as soon as possible we have succeeded in fixing the formation of translation as a social phenomenon, we have to take the next step and indicate the possibility of the social action “to stretch” into public attitudes. Indeed, Tyulenev himself leads sufficient number of confirmations of this simple thought. For example, he writes about the diplomatic history of Russia, when a translator (“interpreter”) became a needed link of the foreign-policy activity of the state. It means that translation is institutionalized, has become a form of professional activity, there have appeared staff translators with a set of specific duties, with a certain remuneration of labor. Interesting is also the fact that emerged as a particular social institution, translation has changed the whole system of diplomatic relations in such a way that to do without it the system can no longer. As a social institution, translation is visible, socially significant phenomenon, and, perhaps this fact exposes an important function of translation before researcher: it can display, make apparent other social phenomena. It is marked in social effects of translation as a philological process. Here is a classic example. England of Shakespeare's era is a peripheral island country, the outskirts of Europe. Just translating Shakespeare into German makes him a European author, and Europe, respectively, finds its

dramatic genius. Often, however, the translation is performed beyond philology and even beyond verbal forms. For example, Umberto Eco says about translation as “not from one natural language to another but from one semiotic system to another, different from it, when, for example, a novel is “translated” into a film, an epic - into comics or one produces a picture on the theme of the poem” [7]. In such cases “a reverse motion” also works: film adaptation brings us back to the reading of the book, so, again highlights this book in the network of public relations.

Brodsky proposes an even broader interpretation of translation, defining poetry as translation of feelings into the language [8]. Here translation goes beyond the relations of symbolic systems into the sphere of human relations, and makes the hidden in the hearts of people being visible again (audible) and socially significant.

Translations in social systems. Finally, where translation functions as a social phenomenon for the most part, it can be also observed its ability to detect, cast light upon a particular social phenomenon being on the periphery of the life of a social whole. The brilliant example of such translation in a broad sense is proposed in Bruno Latour’s work “Give me a laboratory and I will raise the world” [9]. Latour tells the story of the fight against anthrax in France at the end of the eighteenth century. While this struggle was carried on by peasants on their farms, it worked little, and the rest “urban” France did not know anything about the problem. But Pasteur creates a research laboratory, first, related in no way to the loss of cattle in the villages. Being in the field environment, Pasteur together with his assistants start creating this connection, translating the language of the farmer into the language of Veterinary Science. For example, the term “a phase of spore” is a laboratory translation of a peasant household expression “infected area”. Laboratory makes the invisible anthrax bacillus visible, the latter changes its place of location from the field to Ecole Normale’s lab. As noted by Latour, Pasteur’s translation carries not only bacteria to the laboratory but also “the attention of the interested groups”. As a result, the character of relationships between farms and laboratories and science. Social consequence of the new situation becomes a transformation of the relationships between town and village. As a result, we re-arrange, rebuild all in French society. Thus, translation that became a social phenomenon in its broad interpretation changes the whole system of social relations, it itself becomes a public attitude and eventually takes a direct part in “rebuilding” [10] (the term by B. Latour) of the construct, which is the social one.

Conclusion

In this context, the phenomenon and the process of translation can be treated through the prism of Luhmann's theory of social systems [11]. Thus, the values of one culture may be translated into the category and the values of other cultures, which is well known in the history of Russia that is always notable for “worldwide responsiveness of the Russian soul” (F. M. Dostoevsky). For Russian mentality, being hermeneutical is a normal usual state. Many of the values of Western civilization have been translated to alien Russian ground until now. Here they are transformed, acquire additional and different, “peculiar” sense. In order to translate, it is necessary for socially significant phenomenon really to get into an alien social space, to be transformed and to become “native”. Translation is possible only in foreign space, but the result of translation is appropriation and exploitation of another's space plus change of one’s own world. The meaning of translation is to be a borderline social phenomenon, providing the conversion of foreign into its present home and embedding of “home” into the world system. For example, the post-Petrine Russia was actively built into

the European social and economic system and at the same time embedded the elements of the European socio-cultural world into its structure.

How can (can't it?) the originality of cultures be preserved in this mutual embedding (rebuilding) which is characteristic of modern society? We believe that it can, and it is due to social opportunities of translation. Indeed, any translation always creates an additional esthetization of the translated. The situation when native speakers of language from which the translation was done considered the translation tuned out to be better than the original is a well-known situation. Consequently, due to esthetization of translation to the target culture, attention is drawn, an interest in the reading of its meanings is activated and catalyzed. However, esthetization of the translated has a dual, ambivalent nature. Everything that is translated as an esthetic form requires interruption, peering into, attentive listening to, and creates at that a certain barrier to unbridled penetration into a different culture, stops cultural expansion. It creates a surface, holding on and speaking with; both subjects of interaction can be by themselves and at the same time understanding each other. Thus, the translation works for solving the hermeneutic situation.

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