

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46991/AFA/2023.19.2.150>**MECHANISMS OF THE CULTURAL TRANSFER IN TRANSLATION****Luiza Gasparyan\***<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6023-2861>*Institute of Literature, NAS, RA*

The article is the first attempt to reveal the mechanisms of “the cultural transfer” (the notion was first introduced by the French theorist M. Espagne) of the Armenian and Russian translations of Charles Dickens’s novels. Evidently, the Armenian translations of the novels were transferred and interpreted especially from the beginning of the 1880s, in Shushi (1890-91), Tiflis (different publications in the 1890s), Constantinople (1928), Baku (1898), Athens (1928), Cairo (1892), etc. The Armenian versions of Dickens’s creativity were either paraphrased or translated from the original language or from Russian as an intermediary language. The article outlines theoretical and practical issues related to the specifics of the artistic translation through the paradigm of cultural transfer. Being at the crossroads of West and East the Armenian national culture is characterized as a unique manifestation of cultural transmission and a pivotal basis of socio-cultural and geopolitical usus. The article sketches the situation of “cultural transfer” of Charles Dickens’s novels whose literary reputation was established in the Russian literary field, that consequently made an influence on Eastern Armenia.

**Keywords:** *Ch. Dickens, cultural transfer, Russian and Armenian translations, intermediary translation, source culture, target culture.*

**Introduction**

The perceptions of cultural studies have acquired innovative essence within the scope of the interdisciplinary symbiosis with the humanitarian sciences. Previously, under the concept of culture the theorists presupposed such spheres as art creativity, literature, music, painting, etc. Nowadays, the mechanisms and methodological approach of cultural studies have acquired an innovative

---

\* [luisa.gasparyan83@gmail.com](mailto:luisa.gasparyan83@gmail.com)

Received: 28.05.2023

Revised: 10.07.2023

Accepted: 31.08.2023



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

© The Author(s) 2023

meaning which aims at the description and interpretation of the national traditions of people, their way of life, the cognitive-psychological peculiarities, way of thinking and perception of the objective world. In this connection, the priorities of literary studies have changed as well: at the present stage of its development, more and more attention is paid to the issues related to the national and cultural specificity of languages, as well as to the national originality of the image of the world that has developed among the linguo-cultural community. Translation theorists, recognizing the special importance of culture studies are keen to input the methodology of “cultural transfer” while analyzing the target text.

The aim of the study is to reveal the notion of “cultural transfer” through the paradigm of the British – Russian-Armenian triangle, which was specifically manifested in the literary creativity and its translation at the beginning of the 19th century. The research is carried out on the basis of the Armenian and Russian translations of the novels of Charles Dickens and has the following objectives:

1. to reveal the peculiarities and methodological perspectives of the “cultural transfer” and its implementation in artistic creativity;
2. to identify the range of issues related to the study of the literary translation in the light of “cultural transfer”;
3. to analyze the main vectors and accents of the process of “cultural transfer” of British classics through Russian to Armenian translations.

In addition to the implementation of the methodological spectrum of cultural transfer, the traditional philological methods such as comparative, textual and contextual analyses are also taken into consideration.

### **Theory of cultural transfer**

The theory and methodology of the "cultural transfer" originated in the mid-1980s, proposed by the French comparatist Michael Espagne within the context of the development of French-German philological studies. The effectiveness and the growing popularity of the method of the “cultural transfer” led to the development of the interdisciplinary studies, comprising such fields as the sociology of literature, the comparative history of art and science, and cultural studies, whereas the quintessential aim of M. Espagne is the phenomenon of the cultural unit transition from one spatial-temporal domain to another. Formulated on the material of philological and literary

studies, the theory of “cultural transfer” began to be applied in the multi-vector fields, including various political and cultural interconnections throughout Europe (France, Germany, Russia, Italy, English-speaking countries, countries of Central and Eastern Europe, etc.) (Espagne, 2018).

The theorists are still in the process of regulation and formulation of the “cultural transfer” mechanisms. This makes it possible to go beyond the traditional Western European theories of literary or historical comparative studies, cultural reception and diffusionism embracing world cultural heritage. Thus, the modern theory of “cultural transfer” aims at:

- identifying and selecting the elements of “source culture transfers” through the paradigm of spatial-temporal domain of “target culture”. One cannot fail to observe that the focus of the “cultural transfer” method is essentially the “target culture” with special reference to the “source culture”;
- Analyzing the process of transmission of these cultural elements through institutional relationships and interpersonal contacts (translators, merchants, soldiers, missionaries, travelers, publishers, researchers, scientific and cultural institutions such as museums, academies or universities, books, films, etc.);
- Revealing the mechanisms of “target culture perception” of source elements which does not presuppose the exact transfer of the original to a different environment (direct borrowing), but involves interpretation and innovative reformulation of “source culture” in a different cultural context - their adaptation and transformation. To be more precise, it implies a process during which the original elements are modified due to different scenario requirements. It may either pass the complex process of the “melting pot” by forming new homogeneous structures from heterogeneous original components, or may have explicit intertwining of source and target elements, where the “source culture” remains recognizable, although in some cases there is a radical change of the original meaning and formulation (Espagne, 2018).

In “cultural transfer” methodology the main attention is paid not merely to the result of cultural contacts and the need for exporting ideas and concepts into the “target culture”, but the dynamics of transmissions of cultural elements, which directly depend on the needs of the “receiving” culture, its readiness for perception. Obviously, the role of such perception aims not only at creating hybrid forms (source culture + target culture = cultural transfer), but developing

and creating qualitatively new "own" forms of expression at all levels - from technology to ideology through the prism of reformulation of "source culture" or global reverberation of objective reality. In the course of these reconstructions, it is important to take into account the multi-vector orientation of the cultural transfer (Bahman-Medik, 2017).

M. Espagne emphasized the contribution of translators in the process of "cultural transfer", particularly, when it comes to the translation of world literature as a process of permanent exchange within world culture: in other words, it represents the dynamic process of "export" and "import". One of the axioms of the study of "cultural transfer" through the light of translation studies is that translation can be perceived as legitimate as the original, and the concept of "authenticity of original" is not constant and subjected to recreation and reinterpretation (Espagne, 2018, pp. 736-739).

Dwelling upon the further observations of translation as the bearer of "target culture" it should be underlined that the text of the translation is an "open" system, as it is subject to analysis, interpretation and editing. In the article "Translation as a specific type of speech activity" Russian theorist Yu. Sorokin discusses two systems of culturological credibility in translation: 1. Automated – when certain "culturemes" of "source cultures" are not "excluded" from the target context and evaluated by the representatives of the linguo-cultural community as natural; 2. De-automated – when certain "culturemes" of the "source culture" are "excluded" from the context and evaluated by the representatives of the linguo-cultural community as unnatural (Sorokin, 1989, p. 25).

Due to geographical position and its unique cultural atmosphere Armenia is still considered to be a channel of "cultural transfer" on West-East axis in nearly all spheres of cultural life and in different historical periods. And translation activity has traditionally had metaphysical and existential significance for Armenians after the adoption of Christianity, the invention of the Armenian alphabet and the translation of the Holy Bible into Armenian, which the French theorist Le Cruise evaluated as the "Queen of Translations" (Ter-Movsesyan, 1902).

### **Charles Dickens's novels and their translations**

Not only during his lifetime, but also in different periods, Charles Dickens and his verbal creativity were widely discussed and translated in Russian and Armenian literary circles.

Charles Dickens, the representative of the world literature, devoted his works to the multifaceted essence of the Victorian era by such dichotomies as humanism vs. self-centered world, greed vs. spiritual values, immoral vs. moral. The literary critics consider Charles Dickens's verbal art "reproduces" the objective reality and have pure direction of realism. In his creative works, numerous stories and essays compiled in fifteen volumes, Charles Dickens discussed the relationship of individual and the social environment, morality and law, presenting the profound drama of the human fate of the epoch and updating the illustration of the social novel genre in a new level. The evolution of Dickens's literary creativity is directly proportional to his worldview and can be conditionally divided into four stages; the first stage (1834-1842), the second stage (1843-1848), the third (1849-1859), the fourth last (the 1860s) (Davis, 2005).

One cannot fail to observe that the optimistic shades and humoristic overtones of Charles Dickens's novels triggered the interest of Armenian readers. However, along with the changes of the author's worldview, the nuances and shades of humor acquired the tones of satire and disappointment, and, perhaps, it served the main reason why Armenian translators started to interpret Charles Dickens's earlier works. In this connection, according to the Armenian literary critic V. P'art'amyán, only the novels of the 1850s were translated into Armenian, flavored with the author's contagious optimism, bright faith towards life, such as *David Copperfield*, *Oliver Twist*, *Christmas Carols* and some excerpts from the novels and short-stories (P'art'amyán, 1975, pp. 250-255).

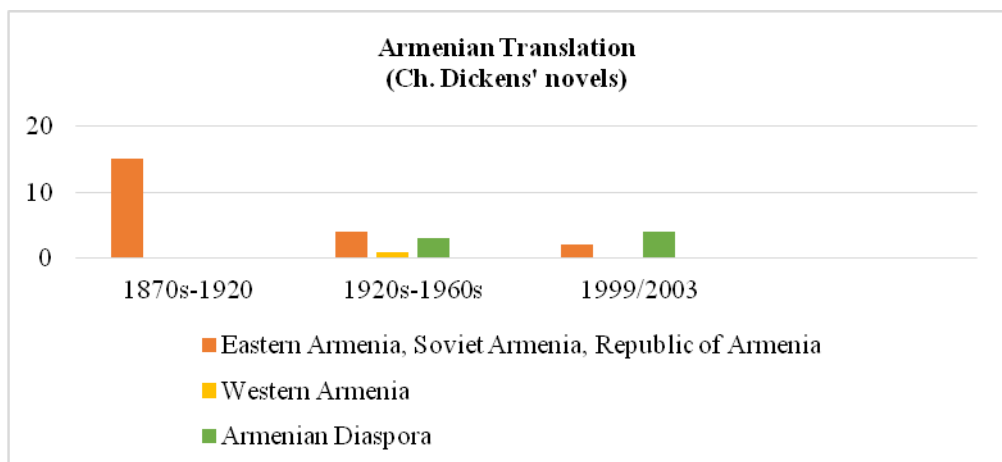
Undoubtedly, the interest of Armenian readers towards Charles Dickens was aroused through the Russian translations. In the Russian Empire Charles Dickens was popular and modern as a belletristic writer in the 1850s, his works consequently disseminated through Eastern Armenia, as a part of the Russian Empire. The given period was marked with multiple cultural shifts for Eastern Armenia which aimed at intensifying the process of cultural self-reflection, reassessment of values, the consolidation and modernization of national literature.

The Russian theorist M. Kostianova stated that there existed objective arguments why Dickens's works became popular in Russia. These were, 1. The incredible popularity and success of the writer in England (Dickens's first novel was perceived as a bestseller – 40,000 sold copies), which also attracted the attention of the Russian reader as a modern creativity; 2. The illustration of the

cultural characteristics of the English, such as the description of humor and comedy, cultural peculiarities, language and style, various adventures of characters, etc. (Kostianova, 2014).

The first Armenian translations of Dickens appeared in the 1880s-1890s, and almost half of the available translations of the novels, which are popular nowadays, were translated and published in that period. In this regard, of particular interest are the early Armenian translations done either from the original or from Russian as an intermediary language. For example, the first Armenian short paraphrasis of *Oliver Twist* with illustrations was made from the abridged Russian translation by L. Shelgunova, published in 1890, Alexandropol (now Gyumri), which, in turn, is based on the full translation of M. Tsebrikova in 1874 (Katarski, 1962; Dolotova, 2022). The early Armenian translations were done in Shushi (1891), in Tbilisi (1896-1897), in Cairo (1892), in Baku (1898) and later in many other cities where there were Armenian cultural and educational centers. One cannot fail to observe that some Armenian translations were done anonymously and the translator marked only the initials, for example, with the Armenian letter “Մ” (in English “S”), “Մ. Տ-Դ” (in English “M. T-D”), “Պ. Պ.” (P.P.), etc.

If we present a diagram of the periods of Armenian translations or paraphrases of Charles Dickens’s novels, we can see the following: obviously, there is a key historical moment here – the works were translated in Eastern Armenia and in Western Armenia and in the Armenian Diaspora centers.



On the cover of the editions of Eastern Armenian translation versions the following phrase is written: “*permitted by the censorship*” which was permitted either in Tiflis or Saint-Petersburg. That indicates that the translation underwent certain amount of editing before the targeted publication, for example, translation targeted at children, or at an average Armenian reader, who may not have fundamental historical-philological knowledge of the Western culture.

No other Victorian novelist focused on the cult of childhood than Dickens. Children in his works suffer in their quests towards a happy life, like *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, *Tim Cratchit* and others. The orphans, having experienced a hard life and suffering, retained high moral qualities and spiritual essence. Nearly all the novels, revolving around the problem of children, embody two-faceted reality of the Victorian epoch: high moral qualities of the heroes and the decay of souls from the dark quarters of the capital – the “east side” (eastern side of the city). After comprehensive analyses of the literary critics, it was obvious that some of Dickens’s novels contain autobiographical information or elements. Charles Dickens spent his childhood in the poor quarters of London, when the writer’s father spent a long time in a debtor’s prison. So, Charles Dickens was well acquainted with the negative aura of the “eastside” (Davis, 2007).

For comprehensive illustration of the “cultural transfer” mechanisms in translation, it is preferable to bring a couple of examples.

The comparative analysis of the Russian and Armenian translations of the novel *Oliver Twist* has showed that when transferring the extra-linguistic realities of the novel, translation decisions are made in favor of the principle of approximate (likening) translation, thus:

- *I tell you I won't have her put into the ground. She couldn't rest there. The worms would worry her – not eat her – she is so worn away.* (Dickens, 1866)

— *Слушайте! Я не позволю зарыть ее в землю. Там она не найдет покоя: черви будут ей мешать... Глодать ее они не могут, так она иссохла.* (Dickens, 1975)

— *Ես թույլ չեմ տա, որ նրան հողին հանձնէք: Նա չի կարող հանգչել այնտեղ: Ճիճուները ոչ թէ կուտեն, այլ կանհանգստացնեն նրան, որովհետեւ նա անչափ հյուծված է:* (Dickens, 1958)

The context refers to the depiction of the working activity of the orphan Oliver Twist, who was apprenticed to a coffin-maker. At the beginning of the paragraph Charles Dickens described the negative overtones of the densely populated quarter of the city – the narrow streets, the dirty and miserable life of the homeless. Oliver was shocked by the gruesome image of rats that were rotting and disgustingly skinny. Entering the dark room, the boy was afraid to look at the old woman and the man, because they looked too much like the rats he had seen on the street.

The extract has a sarcastic tone, illustrating the exclamation of a man who did not allow the body of his wife to be buried because she would not find rest, as the worms would disturb her body. Dickens used the negative connotation of satire to emphasize the degree of exhaustion of the homeless poor woman. Evidently, Charles Dickens drew parallels between the life of homeless people and rats and worms.

The translations successfully reproduced the “subtext” of the sarcastic utterance, which serves as an extra-linguistic source for the recipient of information about the facts and events of the industrial era of the Victorian period. The perception of the semantic elements of the context takes place on the basis of the target reader’s cognitive and fundamental information, and the descriptive characteristics of the narrative outlines the socio-historical realities of that time, which were transferred into Russian and Armenian readers.

Another marvelous series of short-novelle entitled *Christmas Carols* was published in the 1840s and had a special intention – to establish peace and harmony between people every year around Christmas, illustrating the traditions and moral ideas of the English. The story begins with the following passage:

*Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail.*

*Mind! I don't mean to say that I know, of my own knowledge, what there is particularly dead about a door-nail. I might have been inclined, myself, to regard a coffin-nail as the deadest piece of ironmongery in the trade (Dickens, 1843).*

*Итак, старик Марли был мертв, как гвоздь в притолоке. Учтите: я вовсе не утверждаю, будто на собственном опыте убедился, что гвоздь, вбитый в притолоку, как-*



*то особенно мертв, более мертв, чем все другие звезды.* (Dickens, 1959)

*Ծեր Մարլին մեռած էր դռան մեխի պէս: Ի դէպ, ես չեմ ուզում ասել՝ իբր սեփական փորձից գիտեմ, թէ դռան մեխի ինչն է յատկապէս մեռած: Անձամբ ես կ'սսէի՝ դազաղի մեխը երկաթէ բոլոր իրերից ամենամեռածն է:* (Dickens, 2003)

The expression *Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail* is not fully comprehended in Armenian culture since the notion of a *nail* and its correlation with a *dead man* is “alien” for the Armenian way of thinking. So, the “cultureme” of the “source culture” may pass the process of “exclusion”. The thorough analysis of Russian phraseological units has revealed the air of alienation as well, due to the existence of Russian phrases such as *Богу душу дать, кончить свой век, испустить дух, предстать перед Всевышним, душа вознеслась в рай*, and other phrases. So, the concepts of death in the phraseological units of English, Russian and Armenian are quite diverse in terms of the figurative component. However, in the linguistic cultures there is a common understanding of “death” as a transition from one state to another.

### Conclusion

The main conclusion of this micro-analysis can be better formulated as follows:

1. Dickens’s stories led to the process of transmission of culture into Armenian sociocultural usage, evidently through the prism of the Russian translations. In Armenian translations each phrase, quote and excerpt has its own intention, which is connected with multiple threads between its original ideology or with Russian, as the intermediary language.

2. In general, both Russian and Armenian translations aim at illustrating the tendencies of world literature, with special reference to the Victorian epoch. The translations convey the core and essence of modern belletristic literature of the period, as well as introduce the modern trends within the scope of censorship.

3. Russian and Armenian translation “receptions” belong to a common spatial-temporal domain due to the geographical (Eurasia), historical (in 1828 Eastern Armenia became part of the Russian Empire and later it became Soviet

Armenia), as well as traditional prototypical perception of Russian translations for the Armenian translation tradition.

### References

- Bahman-Medik, D. (2017). *Kul'turnye povoroty: Novye orientiry v naukah o kul'ture* [Cultural Turns: New Landmarks in the Cultural Sciences, translated from German by S. Tashkenova]. Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie (in Russian)
- [Dolotova, T. \(2022\). Annotacii k perevodam: «Oliver Tvist» Charl'za Dikkensa. Podrobno ob anglijskoj klassike, izdannoj po rusски \[Annotations to translations: "Oliver Twist" by Charles Dickens. Details about the English classics published in Russian\].](#)
- Katarski, I.M. (1962). *Charl'z Dikkens: Bibliografija russkih perevodov i kriticheskoj literatury na ruskom jazike 1838-1960* [Charles Dickens: A Bibliography of Russian Translations and Critical Literature in Russian, 1838-1960]. Moscow: Izd-vo Vsesojuz. Kn. Palaty (in Russian)
- Kostionova, M.V. (2014). *Perevod kak faktor formirovanija literaturnoj reputacii pisatelja (na materiale rannih russkih perevodov romana Ch.Dikkensa «Zapiski Pikvikskogo kluba»* [Translation as a Means of Writer's Literary Reputation Formation (Based on the Early Russian Translations of Ch. Dickens's "The Pickwick Papers")]. *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta, Teorija perevoda, 1* (22), 127-142 (in Russian)
- Sorokin, Ju.A. (1989). *Perevod kak specificheskij vid rechevoj dejatel'nosti /Perevod kak process i kak rezul'tat: jazyk, kul'tura, psihologija* [Translation as a specific type of speech activity / Translation as a process and as a result: language, culture, psychology]. Kalinin: Kalininskij Gosudarstvennyj Universitet, 24-28 (in Russian)
- Ter-Movsesyan, M. (1902). *Istorija perevoda Biblii na armjanskij jazyk* [The history of the Bible translation into Armenian]. Saint-Petersburg: Pushkinskaja Skoropechatnja, 4 (in Russian)
- Espagne, M. (2018). *Istorija civilizacij kak kul'turnyj transfer* [The history of civilizations as a cultural transfer, translated and edited from French by E. E. Dmitrievoj]. Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie (in Russian)
- P'art'amyān, V. (1975). *Hay-angliakan grakan ar'nchowt'yowwnner* [Armenian-English relations]. Yerevan: Haykakan SSH GA, hrat., 1975 (in Armenian)
- Davis, P. (2007). *Critical companion to Charles Dickens. A literary reference to his life and work*. New York: Facts On File, Inc.

### Sources of Data

[Dickens, Ch. \(1866\). \*The adventures of Oliver Twist\*. London, Chapman and Hall, Boston: Ticknor and Fields.](#)

Dickens, Ch. (1843). *A Christmas Carol*. London, Chapman and Hall.

Dickens, Ch. (1968). *Prikljuchenija Olivera Twista, tom 4* [The Adventures of Oliver Twist]. (A. V. Krivcova Trans.). Moscow: Goslitizdat, 1958 (in Russian).

Dickens, Ch. (1959). *Rozhdestvenskaja pesn' v proze* [A Christmas Carol]. Moscow: GIHL (in Russian).

[Dickens, Ch. \(1958\). \*O'river T'wist'i arkac'neri'\* \[The Adventures of Oliver Twist\] \(A. Bazaryan Trans.\). Yerevan: Haypethrat, 1958 \(in Armenian\).](#)

Dickens, Ch. (2003). *Sowrbc'ndean ergy'* [A Christmas Carol] (A. Asryan Trans.). Yerevan: «Ve'm» (in Armenian).

### ՄՇԱԿՈՒԹԱՅԻՆ ՓՈԽԱՆՑՄԱՆ ՄԵԽԱՆԻԶՄՆԵՐԸ ԹԱՐԳՄԱՆՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՄԵՁ

#### Լուիզա Գասպարյան

Հետազոտության մեջ առաջին անգամ փորձ է արվում բացահայտել «մշակութային փոխանցման» մեխանիզմները (հասկացությունը ներմուծել է ֆրանսիացի տեսաբան Մ. Էսպանը) Չ. Դիքենսի վեպերի հայերեն և ռուսերեն թարգմանություններում: Դիքենսի ստեղծագործության հայերեն տարբերակները թարգմանվել, երբեմն էլ վերապատմվել են բնօրինակից կամ միջնորդ լեզվից՝ ռուսերենից: Հոդվածում գեղարվեստական թարգմանության տեսական և գործնական հարցերը դիտարկվում են մշակութային փոխանցման լույսի ներքո: Հայ ազգային մշակույթը, գտնվելով «Արևմուտք-Արևելք» խաչմերուկում, բնութագրվում է որպես մշակութային փոխանցման յուրօրինակ առանցք, իր սոցիալ-մշակութային և պատմաքաղաքական առանձնահատկություններով: Դիքենսի գրական համբավն արդեն իսկ հաստատվել էր ռուսական գրական դաշտում սկսած 1950-ական թթ., ինչը հետևաբար իր ազդեցությունն ունեցավ Արևելյան Հայաստանի մշակութային կյանքի վրա: Հոդվածում քննվում են Չ. Դիքենսի երկերի ռուսերեն և հայերեն թարգմանություններում մշակութային տարրերի փոխանցման յուրահատկությունները:

**Բանալի բառեր՝** Չ. Դիքենս, մշակութային փոխանցում, ռուսերեն և հայերեն թարգմանություններ, միջնորդ լեզվից կատարված թարգմանություն, աղբյուր լեզու, թիրախ լեզու: