

## Evaluation Criteria for Literary Translation

*Anna Hakobyan  
Yerevan State University*

It is quite clear that no translation can be considered successful unless subjected to analysis or criticism. Since the Middle Ages the critical analysis of translation has been referred to as **judgment** (by Kant) and as **evaluation** by modern school of translation (Berman 1995:16).

Literary translation as a form of human spiritual activity is multisided. This means a translation can be evaluated from different viewpoints, among them its equivalence to the source text and evaluation of its communicative and applicative peculiarities. Thus, the different attitudes to evaluation is conditioned by the approach the translator and the evaluator adhere to.

Generally, the person (the editor or an expert in the field of translation) who evaluates the translation faces various complex problems, the solution of which requires **objective criteria** of evaluation of literary translation. According to some scholars there are two groups of criteria, the first one operates only on the linguistic level (translation equivalence), and the second one on the pragmatic level (value of the translation) (Tsvelling, Tourover 1979:5).

When we take into account changes of linguo-grammatical forms, semantic similarity, logical connections, extra-linguistic reality, the comparative analysis of the text allows us to define certain regularities of translation which reflect the knowledge of the translator mastering both languages. It is these regularities that serve as a means of an objective evaluation of some evident features of translation (Gak 1979:11).

The degree of equivalence can be objectively determined by comparing the translated text with the source text. The result of this comparative study is one of the criteria for evaluating the translation process. The deep knowledge of both texts allows the translator to work more accurately, considering what kind of changes are possible in general and which of them is acceptable for that particular translation. On the formal level these changes lead to morphological and syntactical transformations. The changes on the semantic level are far more complex and eventually lead to such logical connections as expansion and shortening of meaning, synonymic and antonymic relations, correct transmission of metaphors and metonymies (Meschonnic 1999).

Judgments concerning correctness or incorrectness of this or that part of translation i.e. the disclosure of mistakes or absence of them, are firstly made through the prism of the subjective self, and then through objective attitudes. Of course, subjectivism is inevitable and it is useless to turn to strict criteria in order to overcome it. This is because first of all no criteria can reflect each case of translation mistakes which are numerous, and secondly because criteria outline the evaluation process only generally, and the concrete usage for a particular case will still pass through the evaluator's subjective perceptions. However, it is possible and necessary to overcome individual subjectivism not through replacing the subjective criteria for the objective ones but through turning sub-

jective regularities (those underlying subjective judgments) into objective ones (Tsvelling, Tourover 1979:7).

If the problem of translation evaluation raised a lot of skepticism at the end of the last century, today, only a decade later, it is an up-to-date issue at international studies and conferences, round-table discussions, on the Internet. A number of special journal articles are already focusing on translation evaluation and problems connected with it. The reason for this interest is that, on the one hand, the criteria for evaluating translation are not yet as clearly defined as we would like them to be. And on the other hand, theory of translation, the popularity of which is constantly growing, continues looking for strong support. Translation may be honored for its true value if it makes high quality “products”. A high quality translation, like any other “product”, requires certain criteria or certain precise rules to follow.

Studies, especially in the field of pedagogy, show that it is absolutely possible to work out and systematize objective criteria for translation evaluation

- (1) if several editors (or other professionals) give the same evaluation of a certain translated text;
- (2) if the evaluations mentioned in (1) are later compared with those of other professionals, and this or that transformation in the translation is revealed;
- (3) if a reverse/backward translation is done and compared with the source text;
- (4) if a comparative analysis of the same text translated in different languages (in case there are such translations) is carried out;
- (5) if the scale of freedom of translation, i.e. to what extent the translator can feel free in the process of translation, is determined beforehand (Tsvelling, Tourover 1979:8).

The means applied by translators to maintain balance between quantitative and qualitative content of the source and target languages are the following:

1. Shorter words are preferred (in those cases when the translation is done from the language containing fewer syllables and more words into the language with more syllables and fewer words),
2. Semantic push-in (sentence condensations),
3. Omissions,
4. Lengthening of the poetical line.

Let us analyze the Armenian translation of Saint-John Perse’s poem “Rains” considering the above mentioned criteria, trying to reveal the objective value of the given translation through a comparative study.

When we speak of such a literary creation as Saint-John Perse’s unique poetry where the content is absolutely in harmony with its literary form, observation of the principle of equivalence is a necessary precondition for success. The obstacles are numerous but it is quite possible to overcome them. It is again important to remember that if the average

length of the words in the target language is more than in the source language, then following the principle of equivalence, the author must make a certain sacrifice, e.g. use elements that do not exist in the source text. Lengthening of the poetical line is done through inserting verbs, verbal combinations or adverbs.

*Le banyan* (Perse 1992) is an Indian fig-tree whose only fault is being exotic; it grows in India and has many over ground roots. The word has been totally incomprehensible for the translator, and in the Armenian translation... (Alexanyan 1993) the tree has become *անձրևի ախորժառունչը*, that is *the sweet sound of the rain...*

Misapprehended or, to be more exact, the word that has in no way been comprehended, has led to an incorrect interpretation of the whole poetical line. We come across such mistakes more often in prose, especially when the mistranslation of a word (especially in a word-combination or idiom) leads to a chain of other mistakes; incorrect and distorted translation of the word-combination, idiom, sentence and then the narrow or wide context.

The literal translation of the sentence *Le banyan de la pluie prend ses asises sur la Ville...* is *Բանյանային անձրևը իր շերտերն է թողնում քաղաքի վրա...* (*The banyan rain leaves its layers upon the town...*).

Thanks to A.Alexanyan's translator's imagination the sentence has become:

*Անձրևի ախորժառունչը, վերընձյուղվելով ծառացողունի  
հանգույն, տարածում է իր արմատ-ցողունը քաղաքի վրա:  
(The sweet sound of rain like the branch of the tree that sprouts up,  
spreads its root-stem upon the town.)*

As a rule, if the translator is not able to find a suitable equivalent, he/she turns to complex or rare words. Using one of the suggested criteria of the evaluation - **reverse/backward translation** we reveal that the sentence is not only incorrectly interpreted but also sounds absurd.

*Le retentissement agréable de la pluie, comme un tige de l'arbre,  
végétant en haut, détend sa racine-écorce sur la ville.  
(The sweet sound of rain like the branch of the tree that sprouts up,  
spreads its root-stem upon the town.)*

This is a case when too many words are added in the line, the 11 word sentence of the source text has become a 22 word sentence in the translation, i.e. the number of words is doubled, and the line has become too long. This is not accidental; this is already a consistent, purposeful process throughout the given translation; transmitting the constituent parts of the poem "into a maximum" and creating an illusion of perfection. This leads to the loss of the most important thing, unity in Perse's poetry.

"If the translator has not managed to arrange the material of the source text in such a way that extra words and lines have emerged, if the lines of the translation are longer than the corresponding lines of the source, then the translation is not a success" (Dmitriev 1965:19).

It is important that the translation should be preceded by a detailed stylistic study of the structure of the text and the disclosure of the individual characteristics of the author's poetic style. The analysis must be carried out not only from the qualitative but also from the quantitative point of view because it is very important to find out what stylistic devices are used by the author, as well as what kind of quantitative relations exist between them.

This translation method has not been used in Alexanyan's translation of Perse's poem. As a result elliptical constructions, so peculiar to the author's style, have suffered. Besides this "misdemeanor", the image has been destroyed: the wonderful metaphor *բանյանային անձրև* (*the banyan rain*) has been replaced by the unclear *անձրևի ախորժսհունչ-ով* (*the sweet sound of rain*).

Usually broadenings or narrowings initiated by the translator presuppose weakening of the poetical sentence; the application of such a technique is, of course, inevitable but it may be less noticeable depending on how correctly the stylistic shades of the source text have been revealed and how well the deviation will be in conformity with the source.

In the example below the translation is done in a naturalistic way. As a result the meaning is definitely distorted in the Armenian translation:

*Une haute licence aux flancs des Vierges prophetiques...*  
 Մի վեհ արբոնյալութուն՝ մարգարեական Կույսերի կոնքերում...  
 (*A noble privilege in the oracular hips of Virgins...*)

The translator has lengthened the line which includes only six words in the original and made it a fourteen-word line in the translation, to this a completely new idea has been added:

*Մի բարձրագույն շվայրություն կա՝ պարփակված կոնքերում  
 մարգարեական կույսերի, և քուն է իրավունքը առաջին գիշերվա:*  
 (*There is a high perversity enclosed in the oracular hips of Virgins,  
 and the right of the first night is yours.*)

The verb forms *there is* and *enclosed*, as well as the translator's interpretation *and the right of the first night is yours* have been invented and added to the line by the translator.

Here is another example, the first translation of which belongs to me, A.Hakobyan and the second one to A.Alexanyan:

*... Car telles sont vos delices, Seigneur, au seuil aride du poeme, ou  
 mon rire epouvante les paons verts de la gloire.*  
 ...Քանզի ալապիսին են քո վայելքները, Տեր, քերթվածի պապակ  
 շեմին, ուր հռհռոցն իմ տաքեկում է փառքի կանաչ սիրամարգերին:  
 (*As this is your joy, Lord, on the threshold of the unwatered poem  
 where my laughter horrifies green peacocks of glory*)

...Քանզի սրանք են քո հաճույքները, Տէր իմ, ծվարած քանասպրեղծութեան անջրդին սեմին, ուր իմ ծիծաղը դառնասպրիր անդու սարսափի ճանկերն է հանձնում փառք ու հռչակի կանաչի ու մշրտադալար սիրամարգերին:

(...As only these is your joy, my Lord, sheltered on the threshold of the unwatered poem where my laughter throws emerald and evergreen peacocks of glory and fame into the clutches of continuously bitter and illusionary horror).

The French verb *epouvanter* means *horrify, terrify, awe*. Alexanyan translates it as *դառնասպրիր անդու սարսափի ճանկերն է հանձնում (...throws into the clutches of continuously bitter and illusionary horror)*. As has already been mentioned functional equivalence presupposes the translator's freedom in choosing means of transmission. That is why the translator has to omit, add or change something. However, this rule does not work where it is not needed. In the absolutely clear and lyrical *green peacocks of glory* the word *glory* has unnecessarily become *glory and fame*, and *green* has been changed into *emerald and evergreen*.

As we see throughout the translation the translator's ego is too obvious. Is this freedom, one of the criteria of translation evaluation? How can the scale of this freedom be determined? Which is the right basis for such freedom, and moreover, what does this freedom serve for?

Nevertheless, here we cannot conclude that the poet Saint-John Perse is untranslatable. Numerous interpreters of his poetry have claimed that his poetry is translatable. Alain Bosquet notes that contrary to expectations, Saint-John Perse's poetry is quite translatable and actually, very few of the famous French poets who are considered to be "complex" have been translated as frequently as Saint-John Perse by foreign language translators. Then he adds "Saint-John Perse's poetry is multilingual itself" (Bosquet 1961:25).

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### **Գեղարվեստական գրականության թարգմանության գնահատման չափանիշները**

Գեղարվեստական թարգմանությունը, որպես մարդկային հոգևոր գործունեության ձև, բազմաբնույթ է, հետևաբար կարող է գնահատվել բնագրին համապատասխանության, թարգմանության հաղորդակցության, նրա կիրառական արժեքը գնահատելու տեսանկյուններից: Ընդ որում գնահատականները կարող են լինել շատ տարբեր, նայած՝ ինչպիսին են թարգմանչի և գնահատողի դիրքորոշումները: Գեղարվեստական թարգմանությունը գնահատողի առջև ծառանում են բազմաթիվ բարդ խնդիրներ, որոնց լուծման համար անհրաժեշտ են թարգմանության գնահատման օբյեկտիվ չափանիշներ: Այնուամենայնիվ թարգմանության գնահատումը նույնպես հիմնված է մարդկային սուբյեկտիվ զգացողության վրա, և այդ անխուսափելի սուբյեկտիվիզմը հաղթահարելու համար պետք է ոչ թե սուբյեկտիվ չափանիշները օբյեկտիվ չափանիշներով փոխարինել, այլ օբյեկտիվ դարձնել այն օրինաչափությունները, որոնք ընկած են սուբյեկտիվ դատողությունների հիմքում: Համարժեքության աստիճանի գույադողությունը թարգմանչական գործընթացի արդյունքները գնահատելու չափանիշներից մեկն է: Քննության երկլեզու նյութի իմացությունը թույլ է տալիս թարգմանչին աշխատել ավելի ճշգրիտ՝ ցույց տալով, թե ինչպիսի փոփոխություններ են հնարավոր և թույլատրելի թարգմանության ժամանակ: Ձևական մակարդակում այդ փոփոխությունները հանգում են ձևաբանական և շարահյուսական փոխակերպումների: Առավել բարդ են փոփոխությունները իմաստաբանական մակարդակում, բայց դրանք ևս կարելի է տարբերակել, քանի որ դրանք վերջիվերջո հանգում են այնպիսի հասկացությունների միջև տրամաբանական կապերի, ինչպիսիք են լայնացումն ու նեղացումը, կից և հակադիր հարաբերությունները, փոխաբերությունների և փոխանունների փոխանցումները: