

PROBLEMS OF MEDIATED TRANSLATION IN DANIEL DEFOE'S *ROBINSON CRUSOE*

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Abstract: Mediated translation as a linguistic and literary phenomenon is of great interest in terms of studying the linguistic, structural, and linguo-cultural aspects of languages involved in the translation process. Despite the ambiguous attitudes of translation studies theorists and practitioners, translation through an intermediate language remains significant for the representation of distinct literatures from the perspective of different cultures. In fact, mediated translation seeks to understand the dynamics between the source and target languages, cultures, and communicative contexts, and how they can influence the translation process. Overall, the main goal is to gain insights into the translation process and its implications for communication and understanding between different languages and cultures. In recent years mediated translation has become a more popular concept in translation studies research field. This growing popularity is evident from the noticeable increase in the number of academic events and scientific publications on the topic. The current study aims at conducting a comparative analysis of the mediated translations of the novel *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe in English, Russian, and Armenian. An attempt has been made to illustrate the influence of intermediary language on the adequacy and equivalence of the translation of the abovementioned work highlighting the inconsistencies in the translation process. Basing on the research several conclusions have been drawn.

Keywords: mediated translation; literary translation; idioms, stylistic devices

1. Introduction

Translation is a powerful tool used to bridge cultural and linguistic gaps; in simple terms, it is the art of converting words from one language to another. The process of translation between two different languages involves the translator transforming an original written text (the source text or ST) in an original verbal language (the source language or SL) into a written text (the target language or TL). Besides the research on translation carried out directly from a source language into a target one, in recent years

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the notion of ‘mediated translation’ has attracted special attention among scholars in the sphere of translation studies.

One of the most widespread definitions of mediated translation is suggested by Kittel and Frank: according to them, mediated translation is based on a source which is itself a translation into a language different from the original, or the target language (Kittel & Frank 1991: 3). Gambier defines it as “a translation of a translation” (Gambier 1994), whereas in Toury’s view it involves translating from languages other than the ultimate SLs (Toury 2012: 82).

Dollerup, in his turn, considers mediated translation as a process that comprises an intermediate translation and therefore involves three languages. The intervening translation does not cater to a genuine audience and exists only to transfer a message from one language to another (Dollerup 2009: 6).

Mediated translation is carried out mainly due to the lack of translators or linguistic competence in the ultimate SL, or due to the difficulties in obtaining the original text, or to the necessity of translating from a geographically and/or structurally distant language.

As it is known, literary translation involves conveying not only the literal meaning of a text but also its cultural nuances, the stylistic elements, and the literary techniques used by the original author. Mediated translation of literary works is a very important research area in translators’ work experience. It seeks to examine how translation technology affects the ability to capture and express the creative and cultural aspects of literary works. In fact, literary texts are deeply embedded in their cultural and historical contexts; thus, through mediated translation it is possible to carry out a study on how translation technique assists translators in understanding and representing the cultural and historical elements of the source text, including references to specific events, customs or traditions. Intermediary translation also explores the ethical implications of relying on technology in the translation of literary works, as well as issues related to authorship, intellectual property, and the impact on the translator’s role. It may even help to investigate the aesthetic qualities of machine-assisted translations and their comparability to metatexts produced solely by human translators. By analyzing mediated translations of literary works, researchers can gain some insights into the challenges and opportunities that arise when combining human creativity and machine assistance in the translation of complex and culturally rich texts.

Mediated translation is heavily loaded with negative connotations and it is often considered a poor “copy of a copy” that entails a loss of details with each successive passage through the process” (Landers 2001). One of the main disadvantages of intermediary translation is the translator’s unawareness of the original text, which may lead to a double meaning shift. However, despite its negative connotations, scholars state that recourse to mediated translation can also lead to positive results. According to them, had it not been for this practice, certain literary works from peripheral or distant cultures would not have been disseminated in the most spread languages and thus consecrated as world literature classics (or, at the very least, their consecration would have been delayed: see Shuttleworth & Cowie 1996; Landers 2001). Mediated translation may therefore be the most efficient- and sometimes the only means of

inclusion for cultural products from peripheral or distant cultures. Moreover, it has been claimed to be profitable to translation companies and clients alike, as it provides an opportunity to economize on translation expenses and minimize the risks” (Pięta & Bueno 2015).

2. Inconsistencies in Mediated Translation of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*

In the scope of this research, we have chosen the classic novel *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) by the British writer Daniel Defoe (1660-1731). The work had a significant impact on both the readers and writers worldwide. In fact, it is considered one of the most widely translated and published books in the world. One of its translations from English into Russian by Marija K. Yesipova was published in 1904 and the latter version was translated into Armenian by Harutyun Harutyunyan in 1948. The translation was mediated because there weren’t many translators able to do translations from English into Armenian in that period. However, the most successful and well-known Russian translations of the novel are considered the ones by K. Chukovsky (1935) and M. Shishmareva (1902) who have succeeded in preserving the definite imprint on the vital values of the original English novel.

When performing mediated translation from English to Armenian with Russian as intermediary language, several challenges and problems become apparent. Here are a few potential issues:

Language Structure: English, Armenian, and Russian have different grammatical structures, word orders, and syntax. This can lead to difficulties in accurately conveying the intended meaning from English to Armenian through the intermediation of Russian.

Vocabulary and Terminology: Each language has its unique vocabulary and terminology. When translating from English to Armenian through Russian, there might be instances in which specific English words or expressions do not have direct equivalents in Russian, and, consequently, finding appropriate Armenian equivalents can be challenging.

Cultural Nuances: Cultural nuances and idiomatic expressions can create difficulties when translating through an intermediary language. The underlying English and Armenian cultural context may not align with the Russian one, potentially leading to misinterpretations or inaccuracies in the final Armenian translation.

Loss of Precision: Using an intermediary language introduces an additional layer of interpretation, increasing the chances of losing precision or nuances from the original English text. Translating through Russian might result in certain subtleties or specific meanings being lost or altered in the final Armenian translation.

Time and Efficiency: In a way, employing an intermediary language “prolongs” the translation process, as it requires an additional translation step from the source language to the intermediary language (English into Russian) and then from the intermediary language to the target language (Russian into Armenian). This can impact the overall efficiency of the translation and potentially lead to delays.

Comparing three versions of the novel it is immediately evident that both translations are much thinner than the original one, as the Russian translator skipped many sentences which could be easily translated without making the text harder to understand. The original narrative consists of 487 pages (10 chapters), the Russian one has got 104 pages (28 chapters) and the Armenian version 222 pages (27 chapters).

At length I set three traps in one night, and going the next morning I found them, all standing, and yet the bait eaten and gone; this was very discouraging. **However, I altered my traps; and not to trouble you with particulars, going one morning to see my traps, I found in one of them a large old he-goat; and in one of the others three kids, a male and two females.** (Defoe 1719: 237)

Тогда я устроил настоящие западни и на другой же день нашел в одной яме большого старого козла, а в другой - трех козлят: одного самца и двух самок. (Defoe 1904: 72)

Այն ժամանակ իսկական թակարդ սարքեցի և հենց հետևյալ օրը փոսերից մեկում գտա մի խոշոր պառավ այծ, իսկ մյուսում երեք ուլ, մեկը արու, երկուսը էգ: (Defoe 1948: 126)

Even at first glance, it is clear that half of the text is omitted. The translators left only those parts that outline the general idea of the occurrences without deepening into details. We can see that there are two sentences in the original text while the translated versions consist of only one sentence each.

After I had been there about Ten or Twelve Days, it came into my Thoughts, that I should lose my Reckoning of Time **for want of Books and Pen and Ink.** (Defoe 1719: 89)

Вскоре после того, как я поселился на острове, мне вдруг пришло в голову, что я потеряю счет времени. (Defoe 1904: 45)

Կղզում տեղավորվելուց հետո շատ չանցած՝ հանկարծ մտքովս անցավ, որ կարող եմ կորցնել ժամանակի հաշիվը: (Defoe 1948: 68)

The last part “for want of Books and Pen and Ink” of the source text is missing in the Russian translation, therefore it is lacking in the Armenian version as well, but it can be considered an important part, as it shows how hard it was for Robinson to change his behavior in a few days, as he was so used to writing on paper with some ink, that at first he didn’t even consider trying to do the same with other materials. Besides, the omitted part indicates how miserable and pitiful the main character's situation was at first.

In the original version of the book, there are some instances where the author illustrates different aspects of Christianity and sheds light on Robinson Crusoe’s beliefs. In the Russian version, these passages are mainly omitted. Therefore, we can say that the translation suffered a lot, and as the Armenian version is translated from

Russian, there is also little mention of religion. Thus, we can state that important elements of the book's thematic contents were lost in the translation process.

The ship was no sooner out of the Humber than the wind began to blow and the sea to rise in a most frightful manner; and, as I had never been at sea before, I was most inexpressibly sick in body and terrified in mind. I began now seriously to reflect upon what I had done, and how justly I was overtaken by the **judgment of Heaven** for my wicked leaving my father's house and abandoning my duty. All the good counsels of my parents, my father's tears and my mother's entreaties, came now fresh into my mind; and my conscience, which was not yet come to the pitch of hardness to which it has since, reproached me with the contempt of advice, and the breach of **my duty to God** and my father. (Defoe 1719: 26)

Всякий раз, когда на корабль налетала большая волна, мне казалось, что мы сию минуту утонем. Всякий раз, когда корабль падал с высокого гребня волны, я был уверен, что ему уже никогда не подняться. Тысячу раз я клялся, что, если останусь жив, если нога моя снова ступит на твердую землю, я тотчас же вернусь домой к отцу и никогда за всю жизнь не взойду больше на палубу корабля. (Defoe 1904: 16)

Ամեն անգամ, երբ մի խոշոր ալիք էր գալիս նավի վրա, ինձ թվում էր, թե հիմա պիտի խեղդվեմ: Ամեն անգամ, երբ նավը իջնում էր ալիքի բարձր կատարից, ես կարծում էի, թե այլևս երբեք նա չի բարձրանա: Հազար անգամ երդվեցի, որ եթե ողջ մնամ, եթե իմ ոտքը նորից ամուր գետնի վրա դնեմ, իսկույն կվերաառնամ տուն՝ հորս մոտ, և ամբողջ կյանքումս այլևս երբեք նավի տախտակամած չեմ բարձրանա: (Defoe 1948: 35)

In the original passage, Defoe mentions the name of God and Crusoe's faith in Him, but in the Russian version, the translator preferred to omit this part. The passage is full of emotional words, but when we take a look at the Russian version we don't come across any emotional expressions. The same can be observed about the Armenian translation.

Another important factor worth mentioning is that both the source text and the translated versions of the novel are influenced by the period in which they were written. A vivid example is the use of the word "**negro**" which was well preserved in Russian and Armenian. The original novel was published in 1719 when it was used to refer with that epithet to individuals of African descent. It is important to note that the usage of this term in the narrative reflects the language and attitudes prevalent during the time it was composed. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that this word is now considered outdated and offensive. Modern terms currently used to refer to African people are "Black" or "African American", the appropriate equivalent of which in Russian is "чернокожий" while in Armenian it is "սևամորթ".

I had frequently given them an account of my two voyages to the coast of Guinea: the manner of trading with the negroes there, and how easy it was to purchase upon the coast for trifles—such as beads, toys, knives, scissors, hatchets, bits of glass, and the like—not only gold-dust, Guinea grains, elephants' teeth, &c., but negroes, for the service of the Brazils, in great numbers. (Defoe 1719: 12)

Я часто рассказывал им о двух моих поездках к берегам Гвинеи, о том, как ведется торговля с тамошними неграми и как легко там за безделицу, за какие яибудь бусы, ножи, ножницы, топоры, стекляшки и тому подобные мелочи, приобрести не только золото и слоновую кость, но даже купить у вождей негритянских племён невольников для работы на плантациях в Бразилии. (Defoe 1904: 9)

Մենք հաճախ հանդիպում էինք և, իհարկե, ես պատմում էի Գվինեական ափերին կատարածի մերկ ուղևորությունների մասին, այն մասին, թե ինչպես էի առևտուր անում այնտեղի նեգրերի հետ, ինչպես հեշտ է այն տեղ զանազան մանրուքներով, ուլունքներով, դանակներով, մկրատներով, կացիներով կամ հայելիներով ձեռք բերել ոսկու ավազ և փղոսկր: (Defoe 1948: 21)

3. Mediated translation of “Robinson Crusoe” from the Perspective of Idioms and Stylistic Devices

Different languages are characterized by unique idiomatic expressions and ‘fixed phrases’ that in most cases cannot be directly translated into other languages; these elements may create serious problems to translators due to cultural differences between the source language and the target ones. In the novel “Robinson Crusoe” we came across some idiomatic expressions which are worth being analyzed. Translating idioms from English into Russian and Armenian can be challenging as translators should be able to transfer the “flavor” of the idiomatic meaning to the destination language. In our view, in the novel *Robinson Crusoe* some idiomatic expressions are worth being analyzed:

After I had been there about Ten or Twelve Days, **it came into my Thoughts**, that I should lose my Reckoning of Time for want of Books and Pen and Ink, and should even forget the Sabbath Days from the working Days; but to prevent this I cut it with my Knife upon a large Post, in Capital Letters, and making it into a great Cross I set it up on the Shore where I first landed, viz. I came on Shore here on the 30th of Sept. 1659. (Defoe 1719: 32)

Вскоре после того, как я поселился на острове, **мне вдруг пришло в голову**, что я потеряю счет времени и даже перестану отличать воскресенье от будней, если не заведу календаря. (Defoe 1904: 16)

Կղզում տեղավորվելուց հետո շատ չանցած՝ **հանկարծ մտքովս անցավ**, որ կարող եմ կորցնել ժամանակի հաշիվը և նույնիսկ կղաղարեմ կիրակին տարբերել լի օրերից, եթե ինձ համար օրացույց չսարքեմ: (Defoe 1948: 32)

It is noticeable that the ST contains the idiom “it came into my Thoughts”, which according to the Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms means “to suddenly or immediately realize something” (Walter 1998: 77). The idiomatic expression is maintained both in the Russian and Armenian translations: “мне вдруг пришло в голову” and “հանկարծ մտքովս անցավ”. Finding effective equivalents of idioms

in the target language is essential to be able to convey the message, and it makes it easier for the arrival audience to understand.

But I am in a hot climate, where if I had Clothes **I could hardly** wear them. (Defoe 1719: 36)

Но климат здесь жаркий, и **можно обойтись** без одежды. (Defoe 1904: 18)

Բայց այստեղ կլիման տաք է, և կարելի է ամանց հագուստի **յոլա զնալ**: (Defoe 1948: 33)

In his diary, Robinson writes about all the good and evil events he had to cope with on the island. The ST includes 6 entries; however, one is skipped in the translated versions. In the diary, the protagonist talks about the positive aspects of not having more clothes. The translation of this passage appears to be interesting, as the author didn't use any idioms in the ST, but the translators added one existing in both languages to make the description more colorful, employing the verbs “обойтись” and “յոլա զնալ” which are commonly used in both target languages.

I have no Soul to speak to or **relieve me**. (Defoe 1719: 34)

Мне не с кем перемолвиться словом, **некому ободрить и** утешить меня. (Defoe 1904: 19)

Չկա մեկը, որի հետ ես մի խոսք փոխանակեմ, չկա մեկը, **որ ինձ սիրտ տա** ու մխիթարի: (Defoe 1948: 35)

Here can be noted the usage of the idiom “սիրտ տալ” meaning “to give him comfort and a feeling of safeness, which is commonly used in the Armenian language at present.

In our analysis, we also attributed great importance to the stylistic devices that characterize Defoe's novel, through the help of which the writer could provide a unique literary representation of Robinson's adventurous life.

In this distress, the mate of our vessel laid hold of the boat, and with the help of the rest of the men got **her slung over the ship's side**; getting all into **her**, let go, and committed ourselves, being eleven in number, to God's mercy and **the wild sea**; for though the storm was abated considerably, yet the **sea** ran dreadfully high upon the shore, and might be well-called **den wild zee**, as the Dutch call **the sea in a storm**. (Defoe 1719: 4)

В этот критический момент помощник капитана подбежал к шлюпке и с помощью остальных людей экипажа перебросил её через борт: мы все, четырнадцать человек, вошли в шлюпку, отчалили и, поручив себя мило сердию божию, отдались на волю **бушующих волн**; хотя шторм поутих, всё-таки на берег набегали страшные валы, и море по справедливости могло быть названо бешеным. (Defoe 1904: 16)

Նավապետի օգնականը նետվեց դեպի այդ մակույկը և նավաստիների օգնությամբ ջուրն իջեցրեց: Մենք բոլորս, տասնմեկ մարդ, մտանք այդ մակույկը և անձնատուր եղանք կատաղի ալիքների կամքին, որովհետև թեև փոթորիկն սկսել էր մեղմանալ, բայց և այնպես դեպի ափն էին թռչում վիթխարի ալիքներ և ծովը իրավացիորեն կարելի էր անվանել կատաղի: (Defoe 1948: 19)

In this excerpt the repetition of the word “sea” in different expressions as “the wild sea”, “the sea in a storm” emphasizes the imagery and creates an effect of horror. By mentioning the Dutch phrase “den wild zee”, the author alludes to the experiences and knowledge of the Dutch sailors or seafarers in dealing with stormy seas. As it can be observed, the expression “the wild sea” was translated as “бушующих волн”, while the Armenian translator rendered it directly from the Russian as “կատաղի ալիքներ”. The Dutch expression “Den wild zee” is missing in both translated versions, and this represents a deviation from the equivalence present in the original English text. In our point of view, this choice damages the paratext and has a negative impact on it. Firstly, the expression “den wild zee” in the original English text is a *metaphor* that conveys a vivid image of the sea, emphasizing its wild and untamed nature. By excluding this phrase, the translator missed the opportunity to evoke a specific sensory experience in the readers. This loss of imagery could result in a less effective portrayal of the sea. It can also impact the overall tone of the translated version. Secondly, the original phrase contributes to create the adventurous atmosphere of the story. The absence of this phrase in the Russian translation could also lead to a slight shift in tone. In fact, following the Russian version of the translation, the Armenian translator omitted the phrase “den wild zee” as well. The expression “the sea ran dreadfully” is a vivid example of metaphor which has been well preserved in the translated versions “на берег набегали страшные валы”, “դեպի ափն էին թռչում վիթխարի ալիքներ”.

In the sentences “got her slung over the ship’s side” and “getting all into her” the boat is personified, as the author employed the personal pronoun “she” instead of “it”. It is interesting to remark that in old times when referring to ships or boats, the pronoun “she” was generally used instead of “it” because when shipping became popular, only men went onboard the ship to control it, and consequently the vessels were frequently compared to women (Clark 2012). However, the use of the pronoun “she” for ships is linguistically considered inappropriate nowadays, because it sounds clearly anachronistic.

The repetition of the sound [s] in the phrase “slung over the ship’s side” creates an *alliterative* effect. This technique adds musical quality to the sentence and helps it flow more smoothly. In the translated versions the alliteration is not preserved due to the different phonetic characteristics of the words in the target languages.

Another stylistic device present in the original passage is *anaphora* based on the clauses beginning with the expressions “and” “and with the help”, “and getting all into her, “and committed ourselves... The sentence “Committed ourselves, being eleven in number” is a parenthesis, as the phrase provides extra information about the characters. This stylistic device is preserved in both translated versions “мы все, четырнадцать

человек, вошли в шлюпку”. “Մենք բոլորս, տասնմեկ մարդ, մտանք այդ մակույկը”.

The number of them broke all my measures; for seeing so many, and knowing that they always came four or six, or sometimes more in a boat, I could not tell what to think of it, or how to take my measures to attack twenty or thirty men single-handed; so lay still in my castle, perplexed and discomfited. (Defoe 1719: 68)

Так как я знал, что в каждую пирогу обыкновенно садится по шесть человек, а то и больше, признаюсь, я сильно растерялся. Я никак не ожидал, что мне придется сражаться с таким большим количеством врагов. "Их не меньше двадцати человек, а пожалуй, наберется и тридцать. Где же мне одному одолеть их!" — с беспокоеством подумал я. Я был в нерешительности и не знал, что мне делать, но все же засел в своей крепости и приготовился к бою. (Defoe 1904: 28)

Քանի որ գիտեի, թե սովորաբար յուրաքանչյուր մակույկում վեց մարդ է նստում, երբեմն նույնիսկ ավելի, ապա, խոստովանում եմ, մի փոքր շփոթվեցի: Ամեննին չէի սպասում, թե հարկ կլինի կռվի բռնվել այդքան մեծ թվով թշնամիների հետ: «Ես ինչպե՞ս կարող եմ միայնակ հաղթել այդպիսի մեծ բազմությունը», — տխուրորտում ասում էի ինքս ինձ: Ես երկմտանքի մեջ էի, չգիտեի ի՞նչ անեմ, բայց և այնպես նստեցի իմ ամրոցում և պատրաստվեցի կռվի: (Defoe 1948: 57)

In the English passage the expression “The number of them broke all my measures. . . , I could not tell what to think of it, or how to take my measures to attack twenty or thirty men single-handed” is an example of *cataphora* as the author preferred to use the personal pronoun “them” at the beginning of the sentence, later clarifying that it refers to the men. In the translated versions this stylistic device is not preserved, as the translators might have found the equivalent structure inappropriate in the translated languages.

“Attack twenty or thirty men single-handed” is *hyperbole* as it exaggerates the overwhelming odds the narrator perceives, emphasizing his fear of being outnumbered. In the Russian passage, the hyperbole is expressed through the rhetorical question “Где же мне одному одолеть их!” (“How can I defeat them alone!”) which highlights the narrator's worries and the challenge he faces. The same is apparent in the Armenian version “Ես ինչպե՞ս կարող եմ միայնակ հաղթել այդպիսի մեծ բազմությունը” (How can I conquer such a great multitude alone?) which emphasizes the narrator's doubts and uncertainty.

“So lay still in my castle, perplexed and discomfited” is an *ellipsis* as the subject of the sentence is omitted. The same stylistic device is preserved in the translated versions.

4. Conclusion

The present paper aimed to analyze the mediated translation of the novel *Robinson Crusoe* from English into Armenian via Russian, with a special focus on idiomatic

expressions and the usage of stylistic devices. We can conclude that when using an intermediary language there are some notable differences that may have a great impact on the actual translation process. *Robinson Crusoe* was written in the 18th century and contains allusions, contextual references and cultural elements that may not be directly relatable to contemporary readers or different cultures. Our research showed that the translators considered mainly preserved the less relevant parts of the prototext, or the ones that would be more suitable to the target audience in order to ensure better cultural understanding and engagement.

It is important to observe that the translators tried to transfer the meanings and essence of the idioms referring to specific cultural elements while adapting them to the target languages. For what concerns the examples of stylistic devices analyzed, we can state that some of them were preserved, while others were not, due to the characteristic features of the target languages.

Focusing on the selected Russian translation of the novel some deviations from the original can be noted. Therefore, we can draw the conclusion that the translator felt free to make a lot of changes, which resulted in the loss of some important elements of the literary work's plot. As the Armenian translation was conducted starting from the Russian one, it is very close to this intermediary version, with a number of deviations from the original English text. Even though many details were lost in the translated versions, it was due to mediated translation that in that historical period the novel was transferred between distant cultures and social communities, so its significance remains undeniable.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical Standards

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.