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THE ART OF SELF-TRANSLATION: THE LITERARY BILINGUALISM PHENOMENON OF V. NABOKOV

The article analyzes the literary bilingualism phenomenon of V. Nabokov, the Russian and American writer, literary critic and translator. The scientific research of individual (literary) bilingualism and self-translation practice as rare and understudied phenomenon seems to be important and relevant. The aim of the article is to describe unique bilingual texts as linguistic and cultural phenomena, to study details of V. Nabokov's bilingualism and biculturalism, to analyze the writer's reasons for usage self-translation as a specific artistic activity. Nabokov's bilingualism is realized in authentic texts written in different languages and in the sphere of literary translation (including self-translation). The auto-translation represents the mediation between two cultures: translation is seen rather as action between cultures than between languages. The major emphasis should be put not only on translation of one text into another, of one language into another, but on translation of one culture into another. V. Nabokov didn't trust translators and he was the strict judge for his own self-translated works. The author-translator has to mediate between the two texts so as to maintain the purpose of the translation action, he must master not only the two languages but also their cultures. A bilingual author is not merely a sum of two complete or incomplete monolinguals but rather a unique and specific linguistic and cultural configuration. This question still remains opened and new categories of analysis of the bilingual texts of self-translators must be developed. The article defines future trends in scientific development of this problem.

Key words: bilingual text, self-translation, bilingualism, biculturalism, V. Nabokov.

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МИСТЕЦТВО АВТОПЕРЕКЛАДУ: ФЕНОМЕН ХУДОЖНЬОГО БІЛІНГВІЗМУ В. НАБОКОВА

У статті проаналізовано феномен художнього білінгвізму російсько-американського письменника, літературознавця, перекладача В. Набокова. Звернення до проблем індивідуального (літературного) білінгвізму та авторського перекладу як рідкісного та недостатньо вивченого явища є актуальним і своєчасним. Доводиться думка, що робота над власним перекладом – це продовження творчої праці письменника, удосконалення і збагачення оригінального твору. Традиційні перекладознавчі методи аналізу оригіналу та перекладу не можуть бути застосовані для дослідження авторських перекладів. В роботі визначено перспективи подальших наукових розвідок у цьому напрямку.

Ключові слова: білінгвальний текст, авторський переклад, білінгвізм, бікультуралізм, В. Набоков.

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ИСКУССТВО АВТОПЕРЕВОДА: ФЕНОМЕН ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННОГО БИЛИНГВИЗМА В. НАБОКОВА

В статье анализируется феномен художественного билингвизма русско-американского писателя, литературоведа, переводчика Владимира Набокова. Обращение к проблемам индивидуального (литературного) билингвизма и авторского перевода как редкого и недостаточно изученного явления представляется актуальным о современном. Аргументируется тезис, что работа над собственным переводом – это продолжение творческой работы писателя, совершенствование и обогащение оригинального произведения. Традиционные переводоведческие методы анализа оригинала и перевода не могут применяться для изучения авторских переводов. В статье определены перспективы дальнейших научных исследований в этой области.

Ключевые слова: билингвальный текст, авторский перевод, билингвизм, бикультурализм, В. Набоков.

Introduction. As a phenomenon, self-translation has a long tradition and continues to be widespread in several cultures. It has become the special subject, the unique trend in recent translation studies. Frequently it is discussed as the marker of culture hybridization and intercultural transfers. Previous investigations of self-translation have mainly been confined to two areas. Wilson describes these areas as: one is concerned with what drives an author towards self-translation while the other considers issues of textual status and relationship, i.e., the self-translated text as having a different status to a 'proper' translation since it is instilled with the author's intention, and being a repetition rather than a reproduction [quoted in 4, p. 212]. Bibliography on self-translation peculiarities is long, but the problem still has more questions than answers, especially when we investigate a particular author's works and his/her manner of translation.

The topicality of the article. Many writers and poets, using two or more languages in varying degrees, deny self-translation for various reasons. The most common reason for that is the meaning that translating your own work you are making a copy, repeating, replicating yourself. Therefore authors prefer to create something new, unique, and their masterpieces are translated by professional translators. Another question is interrelation between self-translation and bilingualism. By its definition self-translation is synonymous to bilingual and bicultural translation. Scholars see the phenomenon more closely connected with bilingualism than to translation *per se*. In Carolyn Shread's opinion, «one consequence of the marginalization of self-translation as a practice is that it reinforces western models in which monolingualism, rather than multilingualism, is the norm» [quoted in 6, p. 66]. Self-translators have been

neglected in literary history and translation theory, and it is still often assumed that they are just rather idiosyncratic anomalies, mostly preening polyglots or maladaptive immigrants.

The works of self-translators and the works of bilingual authors are usually studied in only one of the two languages, in only one of the two cultures. As a result, an important dimension of these works remains unexplored without taking into account that the auto-translation represents the mediation between two cultures. Today, however, scholars in translation studies seem to make a greater interest in communication and culture than linguistic issues as such: translation is seen rather as action between cultures than between languages [5, p. 279]. So, the major emphasis should be put not only on translation of one text into another, of one language into another, but on translation of one culture into another.

The previous studies. As a phenomenon self-translation has a long and reach history dating for more than two thousand years and continues to be widespread in different cultures. The tradition of the bilingual writer creating a single text in two languages, smoothly spanning different audiences, is a rich and venerable one, arising in Greco-Roman antiquity and thriving in the European Middle Ages and Renaissance. Self-translation was a common practice in the ambient translanguing world of early modern Europe, when bilingualism was the norm, and writers increasingly translated between Latin and vernaculars. For centuries it has been practiced by many men of letters such as Leonardo Bruni, Etienne Dolet, Thomas More, James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, Vladimir Nabokov, Chyngyz Aitmatov, Elsa Triolet, Andrei Makine and others.

J. Hokenson and M. Munson in their work «History and Theory of Literary Self-Translation» point out that monolingual literary critics extol the writers' texts in one language while neglecting their work in the other, even as theorists in linguistics and translation studies tend to ignore self-translators altogether, in their consensual focus on cultural and linguistic difference. As several scholars have shown apropos of single writers, it has been difficult even to classify self-translation as a literary and cultural endeavor: Are the two texts both original creations? Is either text complete? Is self-translation a separate genre? Can either version belong within a single language or literary tradition? How can two linguistic versions of a text be commensurable [3, p. 2]?

The act of self-translation or auto-translation was defined by the Slovak scientists Anton Popovič as «the translation of an original work into another language by the author himself» [quoted in 6, p. 66]. Many scholars studied the phenomenon of self-translation concentrating on the problem of identities, author's subjectivity and equivalence, the bilingual text, history and theory of literary self-translation (A. Berlina, R. Federman, V. Feschenko, J. Hokenson, A. Klimkiewicz, M. Oustinoff). The problem of self-translation makes it possible to study the theory of translation from a new point of view. The traditional approach is based on the concept of equivalence when comparing the source text and the target one. And it underlines the asymmetric positions in artistic freedom and creative independence of an author and a professional translator. As a rule, a translator excludes his/her own subjectivity and tends to explicit the author's subjectivity. R. Federman brightly illustrates this thesis: We always admire the faithfulness of a translation in relation to the original, and quickly deplore and criticize the liberties a translator takes with the original work of a writer [2]. So, the remark made by V. Feschenko is very significant: Translating from one language to another the author continues to express himself/herself by the means of the second language [7, p. 202].

Self-translators do not only master but choose to create in more than one language. They try to produce a new text on the basis of the written one but involved into another cultural environment. Understanding this intention many linguists occupied in translation theory investigate self-translation not only as bilingual manifestation but also as bicultural phenomenon (G. Răbacov, E. Dzaparova, K. Balejevskikh and others).

The aim of the article is to describe the uniquely bilingual text as the phenomenon of both linguistic and cultural fields, to study the peculiarities of V. Nabokov's bilingualism and biculturalism, to determine the author's reasons to perform the self-translation.

Discussion. Many studies try to answer the question: What is the bilingual text? The most common answer is: «the bilingual text is a self-translation, authored by a writer who can compose in different languages and who translates his or her texts from one language into another» [3, p. 1]. There is no doubt that literary bilingualism of any writer positively influences his or her creative work. The situation of bilingualism gives the possibility to see an ambivalent role of the language in the literary creation. But it is still the question, sounded by R. Federman, the French-American writer: I have often wondered, as a bilingual writer and a self-translator, whether I am blessed because of this phenomenon or cursed because of it [2]?

There are many reasons for the author to make the self-translation of his or her work. E. Khovanskaya and O. Pratchenko distinguish among them the political situation, the author's desire to combine two different cultures, educational status and others [8]. As for individual factors encouraging the practice of self-translations we can mention the perfect or almost perfect bilingualism of the author-translator, the distrust or the dissatisfaction with existing translations. And this point is supposed to be the first and the most important factor which describes the history of the formation of V. Nabokov as the self-translator.

Why could Nabokov be such an exceptional translator? He read and wrote Russian, English and French by the time he was seven, as he said he had «a perfectly normal trilingual childhood». Growing up trilingual in Saint Petersburg, with Russian parents and French and English governesses, Vladimir Nabokov seems to have learned to read English poetry before he could read Russian, his native language, though he soon spoke all three languages. At age eleven, Nabokov translated Mayne Reid's «The Headless Horseman» from English to French. As a writer, he wrote almost exclusively in Russian until 1938.

B. Boyd underlines that translation helped turn V. Nabokov from a Russian writer into an English one [1, p. 7]. Living in the Russian emigration in Germany in the 1930s, V. Nabokov found the first English translation of one of his novels so bad that he translated a second himself, then rewrote from scratch in English the first novel translated, then another novel directly in English, although he was still also writing in Russian. When he moved to the US in 1940, he decided to renounce writing in Russian prose, to force himself to write English, but the best way for him to earn money as a writer was to translate from Russian. V. Nabokov translated poems by Pushkin, Lermontov, Tyutchev, and Fet, the greatest nineteenth-century Russian poets, and by his friend Vladislav Hoda-sevich, whom he thought the greatest of twentieth-century Russian poets. He found jobs in American universities teaching Russian, and translated more Russian poetry for his students. As the Professor of Russian Literature at Cornell, Nabokov found most English translations to be «the wild asses of ignorance» [quoted in 3, p. 178] (in contrast to Pushkin's words «translators are the post-horses of civilization»). He translated the greatest poem of medieval Russia, «The Song of Igor's Campaign». His translation of «Eugene Onegin», about 250 pages long, was surrounded with another 1500 pages of notes. The commentary has been called the best com-

mentary ever made to a poem; and the translation, perhaps the best translation ever made of poem. Nabokov's English notes on this Russian poem have been translated into Russian for the sake of Russian scholars. His English translation of Pushkin's poem is so accurate that the best Dutch translation of «Eugene Onegin» so far derives not from Pushkin's Russian but only from Nabokov's English version, by someone with no Russian.

V. Nabokov was the strict judge for his own self-translated works. As he once told a Japanese interviewer, who asked him what he thought of Japanese literature, «I don't trust translations,» so he hadn't read Japanese [1, p. 5]. At the end of the English version of «Lolita», Nabokov had written an afterword, which concludes: None of my American friends has read my Russian books and thus every appraisal on the strength of my English ones is bound to be out of focus. My private tragedy, which cannot, and indeed should not, be anybody's concern, is that I had to abandon my natural idiom, my untrammelled, rich, and infinitely docile Russian tongue for a second-rate brand of English, devoid of any of those apparatuses—the baffling mirror, the black velvet backdrop, the implied associations and traditions—which the native illusionist, frac-tails flying, can magically use to transcend the heritage in his own way [quoted in 1, p. 7]. Interestingly, though, when he translated «Lolita» back into Russian, he found his remembered Russian not quite as magical as he had thought. In a new Postscript to the Russian translation, he wrote: I so fervently stress to my American readers the superiority of my Russian style to my English that some Slavists might really think that my translation of *Lolita* is a hundred times better than the original, but the rattle of my rusty Russian strings only nauseates me now. The history of this translation is a history of disillusionment. Alas, that «wondrous Russian tongue» that, it seemed to me, was waiting for me somewhere, was flowering like a faithful springtime behind a tightly locked gate, whose key I had held in safekeeping for so many years, proved to be nonexistent, and there is nothing behind the gate but charred stumps and a hopeless autumnal distance [quoted in 1, p. 8].

Here we'd like to stress one more problem connected with the phenomenon of self-translation. The self-translation is not very much different from translation proper. The author-translator has to mediate between the two texts so as to maintain the purpose of the translation action, he must master not only the two languages but also their cultures. The traditional analysis of bilingual texts are concentrated on «gaps» between texts, languages, and cultures. One must start from a point closer to the common core of the bilingual text, that is, within the textual intersections and overlaps of versions. Real translators live and work not in a hypothetical gap between languages, between source and target cultures, but in the midst of them; they combine several languages and cultural competencies at once, and constitute a mid-zone of overlaps and intersections, being actively engaged in several cultures simultaneously. Hence every translator is «a minimal intercultural». In R. Federman's opinion the bilingual writer allows his readers (if he has any) to listen to the dialogue which he entertains within himself in two languages, even though in most cases the readers (who are usually not bilingual) only hear half of this internal (one should almost say infernal) dialogue [2]. Claiming that «literature» was his passport, Nabokov lamented that «Nobody can decide if I'm a middle-aged American writer or an old Russian writer – or an ageless international freak» [quoted in 3, p. 161].

Explaining his practice of self-translation R. Federman notes: Usually when I finish a novel <...>, I am immediately tempted to write (rewrite, adapt, transform, transact, transcreate – I am not sure what term I should use here, but certainly not translate) the original into the other language. Even though finished, the book feels unfinished if it does not exist in the other language [2]. In our opinion these words could be applied to Nabokov's approach to the translation. For the major period of self-translation, after 1960, he developed a method of using «subtranslators» (often his wife or son) who submitted a literal translation from which he prepared the final text for publishers: nine novels, four volumes of stories, one play, one volume of his poetry. He also checked translations of his work into French and German, and his wife learnt Italian in her sixties to check the translations of his poetry into Italian.

It should be added that the translation, or rather the self-translation often augments, enriches, and even embellishes the original text – enriches it, not only in terms of meaning, but in its music, its rhythm, its metaphoric thickness, and even in its syntactical complexity. This is so because the self-translator can take liberties with his own work since it belongs to him [2]. Two Russian scholars compiled an English-Russian dictionary of Nabokov's *Lolita*, listing only the words that Nabokov had translated in ways other than any of the existing English-Russian dictionaries—and that usually mean better, more accurately or more vividly. The dictionary was two hundred pages long, the novel itself, three hundred.

Conclusion. Nabokov's language is unique and original, native and at the same time alien for either of the readers since it made of two language world pictures that interact and enrich each other. A bilingual author is not merely a sum of two complete or incomplete monolinguals but rather a unique and specific linguistic and cultural configuration. This question still remains opened and new categories of analysis of the bilingual texts of self-translators must be developed.

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