

Title of paper : Translation as a Mirror of Civilizations

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Abstract

1. The dialogue of civilizations is the perennial scene of social and historical conflicts (along the lines of Bourdieu's field concept), which belongs to the subject area and theory of translating (cf. Salevsky/Müller 2011). Translating is both an act of experience of otherness and a depiction of the other in the self. The different ways in which this happens cannot only be seen from translations of the same original for different civilizations and into different languages, but also from different translations for the same civilization and into the same language, and also from the fact that a specific translation may encounter opposition at a given time in a given civilization.

2. If civilization is regarded as a hierarchy of particular (semiotic) systems, as the sum of the texts and the set of functions correlated with them, or as a certain mechanism which generates these texts, it is possible to differentiate four aspects: the extra-cultural aspect (completely unknown to the members of the society concerned); the non-cultural aspect (known to the members of the society concerned, but perceived as antithetical to their own civilization); the culturally peripheral aspect (recognized by the members of the society concerned as part of their civilization, but not regarded as central); and the culturally central aspect (recognized by the members of the society concerned as part of their civilization and regarded as essential for their identity). This classification makes it possible to point out approaches to former and present-day segments of reality.

To what extent translations reflect a given civilization (with its communicative communities) and the relationship between the source and target text civilization can be gauged above all from concepts, persons, quotations, events and places with historical and cultural connotations. We are dealing here with processes of social and economic interconnection, with freedom, guilt and responsibility of the individual, with the legitimatization of a specific perspective on history and

the present, which govern the translation.

3. This will be illustrated by translations of the story “Vse tečĕt” by the Ukrainian writer Vasilij Grossman (1905-1964) into German (“Alles fließt”) and into English (“Forever flowing”).

The first manuscript of the story was seized in Moscow in 1961, not least it would seem because of its portrayal of four types of Judas. The second version was circulated as a samizdat publication, which found its way into the West on microfilm and provided the basis for the first publication of the Russian original (1970) and for the first German translation (1972), both brought out by the Possev-Verlag in Frankfurt am Main. The second German translation was published in 1990 by Volk und Welt, formerly an East German publishing house. This was based on the first version to come out in the Soviet Union, which appeared in 1989 in the periodical Oktjabr (No. 6), i.e. 25 years after Grossman’s death. The third German translation was published by Ullstein in 2010, 20 years after German reunification. Each of the three translations into German had to take into account a different context with different prerequisites for understanding. Examples drawn from the three German translations (1972, 1990 and 2010) and from the American version (by Harper & Row, New York, 1972) are to illustrate how each of these translations is a mirror of the dialogue of the civilizations at a given point in time and at a given place.