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## Ethnic Translation as a Key to Indigenous Cultures (Research and Educational Aspects)

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**Abstract.** The change in the paradigm of humanitarian knowledge, currently observed and reflected in the emergence of new objects and research goals, is a combination of turns, among which the cultural turn is recognized as a dominant one in modern scientific discourse. The cultural turn “metanarrative” presents a translation turn that has an obvious dual nature and polyfunctionality. Thus, along with the intensive development of culturally oriented Translation Studies, special Translation Cultural Studies have gained a foothold in humanities, where translation not only provides intercultural interaction, but also becomes a perspective for considering complex cultural structures, unique phenomena and multiple forms of diverse intercultural contacts. Having gained an important status of an effective tool for analysing cultural differences, translation is moving into the Cultural Studies core area. Ethnic text is becoming a neo-object of humanitarian research with Ethnic Translation Studies as one of the promising vectors of its study.

**Keywords:** ethnic cultural information and memory, “near” and “far” anthropology, languages and cultures of the indigenous peoples of the world, “other” as a unit of translation, Ethnic Translation Studies.

Research area: Theory and History of Culture and Art (Cultural Studies); Ethnography; Theoretical, Applied, Comparative and Contrastive Linguistics.

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## Этноперевод – ключ к культурам коренных народов (исследовательский и образовательный аспекты)

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**Аннотация.** Изменение парадигмы гуманитарных знаний, наблюдаемое в настоящее время и находящее отражение в новых объектах и целях исследований, представляет собой совокупность поворотов, среди которых в современном научном дискурсе доминирующим признается поворот культурный. В «метанарративе» культурного поворота представлен и переводческий поворот, характеризующийся двойственной природой и полифункциональностью. Так, наряду с интенсивным развитием культурно-ориентированного переводоведения в гуманитаристике формируется «переводная» культурология, в рамках которой перевод не только обеспечивает межкультурное взаимодействие, но также становится перспективой рассмотрения и описания сложных культурных структур, уникальных явлений, а также форм разнообразных межкультурных контактов. Обретя важный статус эффективного инструмента анализа культурных различий, перевод перемещается в центральную область культурологии. Неообъектом гуманитарных исследований становится этнотекст, одним из перспективных векторов изучения которого является этнопереводоведение.

**Ключевые слова:** культурная информация и память этноса, «ближняя» и «дальняя» антропология, языки и культуры коренных народов мира, «чужое» как единица перевода, этнопереводоведение.

Научная специальность: 5.10.1. Теория и история культуры, искусства; 5.6.4. Этнология, антропология и этнография; 5.9.8. Теоретическая, прикладная и сравнительно-сопоставительная лингвистика.

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### **Development of modern humanities as a set of various turns**

Each period of human history and, accordingly, each civilisation stage associated with a particular period, put forward special requirements to the scientific knowledge generated and used at that time, and, above all, to the area of the humanities, which determine the basic principles of humanitarianism and its methodology. Meanwhile, the human being remains the central and traditional subject of humanitarian cognition, due to which the research paradigms are not only exposed to the influence

of the scientific worldview prevalent at a certain moment, but also take into account the systems of values, rules and norms of behaviour, traditions, ideologies, mythologies and other known forms of human consciousness characteristic of each period. It is noted that analysing the current state of humanitarian knowledge and trends of its development in the near future is extremely complicated due to the diversity and multifaceted nature of humanitarian knowledge itself, as different fields of science have differing bases, mechanisms and vectors of their development (Vorobyeva, 2016). At the same time, it is

important to remark that civilisation periods and the corresponding humanitarian knowledge paradigm do not always smoothly replace each other. Thus, the centuries-long history of humanitarian knowledge presents cases of abrupt changes, reflecting civilisational leaps and leading not only to quantitative but also qualitative changes in the understanding of the surrounding world and, accordingly, culture. “At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> centuries, the character of the modern world and culture is changing dramatically. Their significant feature is the movement towards global, informational, communicational, bio-technical development, which evokes a stable feeling of not just development in science, but the event of change in the very structure of thought (set by the previously established and ordered thought configurations), with this change not directly derived from the previous intellectual situation and so requiring increased reflection” (Vorobyeva, 2019: 30).

The modern stage of humanities development in the broad scientific discourse is defined as the transition to a qualitatively new era, which is characterised both by rapid and radical changes in the content and structure of knowledge about human, and by scientists’ plunge in qualitatively new research and socio-cultural paradigms and practices based on new knowledge. Since the last third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, researchers have regularly referred to the notion of cultural turn, occurring primarily in the humanities and representing an attempt to integrate four major paradigms oriented towards the study of the world’s cultures – cultural anthropology, critical theory, phenomenology, and poststructuralism. One of the first to point out the importance of the cultural turn for the study of processes going on in society, as well as to highlight, understand, and interpret qualitative and quantitative changes in complex sociocultural dynamics, were representatives of American cultural sociology (Alexander, 1990). The cultural turn, which is grounded in the recognition of the autonomy of culture, has had an undeniable impact on the emergence of new tools in sociological theories and practices, which allowed scientists to explore the mechanisms of producing meaning in a new way, to define and describe its impact on various aspects and numerous parameters of

society. The turn under consideration, first of all, implies a shift from positivist epistemology, which is rooted in empirical facts and addresses objective reality devoid of value, towards meaning and its value parameters. In the course of the ongoing changes, culture and, above all, the cultural processes that shape the possibilities and limits of meaning-making have become the focus of attention of researchers, who analyse new emphases that contribute to understanding the causal meaning of culture and reconsider the influence of cultural institutions on broader cultural processes (Jacobs, Spillman, 2005).

### **Translation turn as cultural turn subvariety**

The monograph by the German literary and cultural scholar D. Bachmann-Medick argues for the existence of not one but several (cultural) turns that have happened in recent decades in the humanities. The researcher expresses the view that there are seven turns in the “metanarrative” of a comprehensive cultural turn. Thus, the cultural turn, which has a widely recognised hyperstatus, is defined by the author as a complex (heterogeneous) process with the following “hypoturns” in its structure: interpretive, reflexive, performative, postcolonial, spatial, iconic, and translational. Bachmann-Medick convincingly defends the view that the above chain of turns is fully conditioned by the problematics of cultural anthropology and the rapidly growing interest of scholars specifically in cultural differences (Bachmann-Medick, 2017: 31). It should be stated that the above list of hypotheticals highlighted in the space of cultural “hyperturn” is not complete and final. Most researchers share the opinion that cultural anthropology, which led to the cultural turn, also became the basis for the anthropological turn, which is seen simultaneously as a medium and a programme of research and development in the field of socio-humanitarian practices of the coming new epoch of the Anthropocene represented by several vectors (Asmolov et al., 2023). Thereby, the cultural turn is by no means a homogeneous and unchanging (static) process. For understanding the complex processes of modern sociodynamics, it is vital to take that the cultural turn has triggered the emergence of other types of turns

in various fields of humanitarian knowledge. Consequently, there appeared another hypothesis – the civilizational turn, analysing which researchers “point to the unjustified mixing of different versions of the civilizational approach in the model of self-sufficient local civilisations, exaggerating the cultural homogeneity and closedness of each individual civilisation and ignoring the history of their transformations and interactions” (Braslavsky, 2024: 38). In this respect, this turn and the corresponding model describing the correlation of dimensions and spheres of society life presuppose a combination of both autonomy and mutual constitution of cultures.

### **Cultural turn in Translation Studies and translation turn in Cultural Sciences**

A modification of cultural turn is an ethnocultural turn, according to which the object of study is by no means culture in the broad sense and in all its many forms and manifestations (in the sense of ethnologist E. Taylor, who considers culture as a complete list of phenomena that make up the existence of society and people). In the case of an ethnocultural turn, the object is ethnic culture, the concept of which is inseparable from the complex process of ethnogenesis and includes the cultural experience acquired by a historically specific ethnos in its exploration of a particular territory and adaptation to the specific conditions of existence. The cultural experience of each individual ethnos is reflected in the cultural information and memory it generates and preserves throughout the history of its existence. This cultural experience is represented in the form of ethnos’s material and spiritual values, norms and stereotypes of behaviour of representatives of the entire ethnocultural community and embodies the internal and external interactions of the ethnos, which are necessary for its successful and full-fledged actions. The cultural experience of each ethnos is directly related to the ethnic identity of its representatives and is understood as the result of the cognitive-emotional process of self-determination of an individual in the social space in relation to “other” ethnoses (Stefanenko, 2009). Hence, one can rightfully assert that an ethnocultural turn lays a separate

vector of the cultural turn that is taking place in modern humanitarianism and implies the strengthening of its ethnic component.

For each ethnos involved in the ethnocultural turn, the “scenario” of such turn combines both invariant and variable (often unique) characteristics. For instance, throughout the post-Soviet space, the ethnic groups of the former Soviet Union (above all, small-numbered ethnic groups) are experiencing a qualitatively new stage of development at the crossroads of millennia, called the “ethnic renaissance”, characterised by the growth of ethnic self-consciousness and an intensified attention to the preservation and development of national cultures, languages, traditions, customs and other attributes of ethnicity and ethnic identity. There is a continuous process of revitalisation of key elements of traditional culture, which are undoubtedly representative attributes of ethnicity. The theme of “ethnic revival” has quickly got high relevance and continues to maintain it today. This theme is not an exclusively Russian phenomenon as it is widely represented in the world humanitarian studies. One of the significant achievements in the study of this ethnic theme has been a radical revision of views on the solution of problems faced by ethnic groups, and, above all, small ethnic groups. The revision of approaches to ethnic problematics is found in the rejection of the preference for assimilation and acculturation as the most effective and universal socio-cultural tools (practices) in relation to small-numbered indigenous peoples, as well as in the change of course for the real support of indigenous peoples’ aspirations to preserve their unique ethnicity and national characteristics.

As it has already been mentioned, the dominant and comprehensive cultural turn includes the translation turn, which, according to D. Bachmann-Medick, is currently at the initial stage still waiting for its full deployment. The researcher believes that translation, which emerged because of the urgent need and necessity to ensure communication of multicultural and multilingual humanity and which has a centuries-old history, has recently acquired the status of one of the fundamental concepts of sciences studying culture and society. In hu-

manities, it is reasoned that the most important prerequisite for the translation turn was the emergence and intensive development of the cultural trend in translation studies, which implies the change and expansion of the categorical paradigm of translation science by means of such culturally marked categories as cultural representation and transformation, foreignness and alterity, cultural displacement, cultural differences, cultural translatability and untranslatability. As a result, traditional philological-linguistic translation studies have attained pronounced culture-oriented features, while Translation Studies have been culturally expanded, which directly led to the emergence of new objects, units and, consequently, translation techniques and strategies. "In contrast to the traditional linguistic approach in which a word, a phrase, a sentence and a text are the units of translation, the cultural approach makes culture the basic unit of translation. It emphasises the imperative role that culture has played in translation and views translation as a micro-graphic cultural shift in which the focus of study shifts from the source text to the translated text, from the author to the translator, and from the source culture to the receiving culture" (Yan, Huang, 2014: 491).

The American linguist E. Nida was one of the first to resort to the development of cultural issues in Translation Studies, believing that differences in cultures cause much more difficulties in translation than differences in linguistic structures (Nida, 1978). The change of Translation Studies' goals and its reorientation to the cultural space, also called "cultural turn", is explicated in the book "Translation, History and Culture" (Bassnett, Lefevere, 1990). "In accordance with S. Bassnett's assertions, in the 1980s, Translation Studies <...> which had begun to take shape as an independent discipline, saw a shift away from methodologies based on linguistic and/or literary translation analysis of the text in favour of the tools offered by another scientific discipline – Cultural History and Cultural Studies" (Fefelov, 2014: 94). Later on, the translation process began to be predominantly described in the context of intercultural communication problems, as regards the situation of interaction of cultural spaces.

It is noteworthy that simultaneously with the emergence of culture-oriented Translation Studies, which addresses the complex and important issues of translation of cultures and translation between cultures, the concepts of "translation" Cultural Studies and Cultural Anthropology are being formed, for which translation becomes a possible prospect for considering the complex structures of the surrounding world and complex forms of intercultural contacts, as well as for conducting comparative studies of cultures in the context of a new approach to their comparison. It is also telling that, in line with the designated translation turn, culture itself has come to be regarded as a process of translation (Bachmann-Medick, 2017: 293). Thanks to this approach, the category of translation has unlocked its cultural potential, moving to the centre of cultural studies and providing a new perspective on the nature and mechanism of the existing dialogue of cultures, their permanent intersection and interaction. This results in a new impetus and a new methodology to comprehend cultural similarities and differences. Acknowledging the obvious metaphorization of the category of translation, the author of the study devoted to new orientations in the science of culture stresses that the translational nature of cultures and their multi-layered character are denoted by the concept of hybridity, which, in turn, is understood as the active space of translation processes (Ibid: 296–297).

#### **Ethnic text as a universal object of humanities**

The cultural turn has determined the emergence of a universal object of study in modern scientific discourse. For example, ethnic text is comprehensively functioning in the space of translation processes, as it has become a universal object of humanities and is examined in most of its sections (folklore and culture studies, ethnology, ethno-linguistics, anthropology, etc.). The concept of ethnic text and the corresponding term were coined by French linguists and anthropologists J.C. Bouvier and X. Ravier, who considered its most important distinguishing feature to be the presence of ethnological, historical, and linguistic information (Bouvier and Ravier, 1976). The concept

of ethnic text was a direct result of the development of discourse theory, according to which speech was considered as a social action and revealed an obligatory subjective aspect. In its infancy, the concept of ethnic text was seen as a type of oral global discourse of a rural/urban community about that community itself. Later on, a broader definition was used, according to which ethnic text came to be understood as “discourse of the group about itself” (discours qu’une collectivité tient sur elle-même). The concept of ethnic text is based on the idea that language is the repository of the collective experience and culture of each people (ethnos). The authors of the concept alleged that knowledge and values significant for the community are fixed in the collective memory of the ethnic community and passed on to its generations in the form of various ethnic texts (fairy tales, legends, songs, riddles, etc.).

Thus, ethnic text reveals a close connection with the traditionally “eternal” problem of linguistics, cultural studies and humanities in general, the problem of the relationship between language and culture, which entails the consideration of cultural and linguistic information of ethnic text in an inseparable unity. In addition, the linguistic information of an ethnic text has pronounced epilinguistic characteristics, suggesting, first of all, the subject’s speech about “one’s own” language. The concept “epilinguistic” was proposed in the late 1960s by the French linguist A. Culioli and assumed conscious and unconscious meta-linguistic activity of the speaker (Culioli, 1990: 41). Later, the concept of epilinguistic discourse was extrapolated specifically to ethnic texts and presumed the connection of the author (either known or unknown, individual or collective) of an ethnic text with “his / her” territorial society, the author’s attitude to “his / her” language and culture (Bulot, 2005). Since language is one of the most important ethno-formative factors, the epilinguistic character of the ethnic text fully reflects its perception as the collective’s speech about itself and, consequently, about its language. Later on, epilinguistic discourse acquired the status of a pivotal object (component) of sociolinguistic analysis, which happened due to the fact that it is extremely im-

portant for understanding the general linguistic situation in different areas of language distribution (Nevezhina, 2019).

The analysis of ethnic text in various fields of humanities, first of all, involves the study of cultural information and memory represented in its content. While cultural information infers the reflection (recording) in the text of information about spiritual and material culture (and not only “one’s own” but also “someone else’s, other”), cultural memory (as a special type of cultural information preserved and transmitted over many generations of an ethnic group and closely related to the ethnicity of its representatives) is traditionally defined as intensified, artificial forms of collective cultural recollection, cultural mnemotechnics, the purpose of which is to generate and maintain a non-temporal memory of an ethnic text (Assmann, 1992). Cultural memory, which has become the central object of an evolving interdisciplinary field of knowledge that combines independent views on memory from the positions of various sciences (united by the Memory Studies term), is understood as a sub-individual memory that accumulates collective memories of value for the cultural community to be preserved and passed on in various mytho-symbolic forms.

One of such forms is the ethnic text considered in this article. The study of the cultural memory of a particular ethnos personified in its ethnic texts is directly related to the issues of ethnic identity and addresses the factors that ensure the formation of this kind of identity, which is based on the ideas about “one’s” ethnocultural community and the main ways of joining it in intra- and inter-ethnic communication at the socio-cultural and psychological levels.

As a consequence, ethnic text can be rightly recognised as a universal object of linguistics, cultural studies, anthropology and many other fields of humanitarian knowledge. At the same time, the works of French scholars, who pioneered the study of ethnic texts, distinguish between “distant anthropology” (anthropologie lointain), which focuses on cultures abroad, and “near anthropology” (anthropologie proche), which addresses the cultural traditions of the country of origin of an ethnic text (Abélès and

Rogers, 1992). In a review devoted to the birth and development of anthropology in France, M. Abélès summarises that since the 1980s (this period coincides with the emergence of culturally oriented translation studies and the cultural turn in general), there has been an obvious shift of ethnographic interest towards the study of close cultures and modernity (Abélès, 2005).

### From ethnic text to Ethnic Translation Studies

It should be admitted that the leadership in ethnic texts research belongs to ethnology, anthropology and cultural studies. The understanding of ethnic text as a regular object of translation promotes this type of translation into a separate type of translation activity – ethnic translation. As a result, ethno-translation studies can become a separate section of translation studies, the necessity of which has been pointed out by Romanian translation scholars (Lungu-Badea, 2012; Stefanink, 1999). The translation of ethnic texts (primarily those belonging to small indigenous ethnic groups), which became especially relevant at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries and was called ethno-translation, can be called the frontier zone of modern translation studies.

Empirical data obtained throughout the history of translation of ethnic texts of various peoples of the world (for example, the accumulated experience of translating *olonkho*, the epic folk art of the Yakuts and the Dolgans) allow us to affirm that familiarity with ethnic texts through their secondary translated versions enables readers to get closer to the culture of an ethnos (often small in number and which only recently received a written alphabet), to get acquainted with its ethno-cultural information and memory. The ideas of philosophical hermeneutics are prolegomena to the theory of ethno-translation. To name a few, French translation scholar A. Berman came to the essential methodological conclusion that translation is a test by the *alien* (“other”) and drew attention to the necessity of moving towards the alien in translating certain categories of texts, to the endeavour to comprehend the alien and to preserve “traces” of the language of the original text in the secondary texts of its transla-

tions (Berman, 1984). This unconventional conclusion is the result of a reflection on the relationship between the “own” and the “other” in literary translation. For Berman, translation is an experience of comprehending the “other”, which involves mastering the difficult art of differences. Concomitantly the problem of the “other” in translation is confined not only to the lexical and semantic differences of the texts entering into the translation relationship. One cannot but agree with E. S. Gribanovskaya, who proposes a definition of “other” from the point of view of translation theory and with the obligatory consideration of cultural differences of the texts of translation: it is “that other that translation constantly encounters, it is that which is not expressed in the target language, phenomena of the source language culture that are absent in the culture of the target language” (Gribanovskaya, 2012: 152). The mentioned understanding of the culturally “other” requires the use of effective strategies to convey in the translation process. Taking into account the cultural turn in translation studies and following L. Venuti, the strategies of domestication and foreignization are usually singled out. Along with these traditional culture-oriented strategies, the strategy of estrangement has been used in this regard (Razumovskaya, 2022). The translator is faced with a supercomplex task: to preserve in the translated text the imprint of the “other” presented in the original, but at the same time to make the secondary text as comprehensible to the reader as possible: “...the translation is either ‘estranged’, i.e. it comes as close as possible to the original, retaining the ‘foreignness’ inherent in a work created in another language and culture; or it is ‘domesticated’, i.e. it comes closer to the host culture, making the work close to the reader. In diachronic terms, to ‘domesticate’ means to make the text understandable to the translator’s contemporary, and to ‘ estrange’ stands for translation in such a way that the text is read as contemporary to the original. The choice in favour of one or the other option, just as one or the other strategy, can hardly be made unambiguously...” (Gribanovskaya, 2014: 234).

Specifically, the universality of ethnic text as an object of ethno-translation, as an object

of theoretical study in various sections of humanities, and as an object functioning in “own” and “other” cultural spaces, is shown in its polyfunctionality. For other ethnic groups, the translation of an ethnic text becomes a “key” to acquaintance and cognition of the “other” culture. And for members of their own ethnic group who do not speak their native language (which is typical for small-numbered peoples whose languages have only recently got written texts and are in danger of extinction), ethno-translation provides access to their own culture. So translated texts are valuable material for reflection, actualising their own cultural information and memory and contributing to the formation of personal and collective identity. Through familiarity with “one’s own” ethnic texts (even in secondary, translated form), cultural identity is recreated and cherished, and ethno-translation becomes an effective device that ensures the success of these processes. “To sum up, identity is the result of knowledge, consciousness and reflection. Culture is the substantive and formal expression of this knowledge. Identity issues reflect the state and dynamics of cultural memory and forms of its organisation. Thus, changes in the organisation of cultural memory can bring about extremely profound changes in the field of collective identities. The blurring and loss of identity is the result of collective and cultural oblivion” (Alekminskaya, 2022: 156).

As follows, ethno-translation is closely related to ethno-hermeneutics and has various fields of application, the most important of which are research and social and practical usage. While for researchers of “own” and “other” cultures ethno-translation is an important means for analysing ethnic texts, the cultural information and memory contained in them, for the representatives of the ethnic groups to which the ethnic texts belong, ethno-translation is able to actualise the cultural information and memory that is significant for them, which plays a decisive role in the formation and preservation of the cultural identity of the ethnic group.

### **Conclusion**

There is no doubt that at the moment ethno-translation studies are only at the ini-

tial stage of their formation and require a more precise definition of their goal, tasks, subject, object, units and effective techniques and strategies (Razumovskaya, 2021). Ethnic translation studies as a new integrative field of humanities have at their core the concepts of general, special and private translation studies, basic ethnic theories and ethnic disciplines (ethnology, ethnography, ethno-linguistics, etc.), which allows us to speak about obvious interdisciplinary nature, and to consider subjects (translators) as specialists possessing a unique set of not only translation but also ethnic competences. The history and accumulated experience of translating ethnic texts in Russia and in the world allows us to distinguish several categories of subjects who are capable of conducting ethnic translation activities (professional translators with and without ethnic language skills; scholars with or without ethnic language skills and translation competences; specialists with their native language skills (natural bilinguals or polylinguals) and using ethnic language in their professional activities (educational, creative, cultural and educational); representatives of the ethnic community who speak “their own” language and know their culture (natural bilinguals or polylinguals) and actively use ethno-language in everyday life and in professional activities” (Razumovskaya, 2023). At the same time, ethnic translators can be both cultural insiders and outsiders.

The above-mentioned translation turn of modern humanities necessitates the creation of special educational programmes, development and application of new didactic principles of training an (ethnic)translator capable of ethnic translation, a special type of translation activity that ensures successful cultural interaction between the world’s ethnic groups, involving decoding, interpretation and translation of cultural information and memory of different ethnic groups. It is ethnic translation that can become an effective tool for the preservation of rare languages and indigenous cultures of the world, as well as an effective means of revitalising endangered, threatened and already extinct world languages.



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