

УДК 81.33

Translatability of “Robinson Crusoe”: 300 Years Adventure in Time and Space

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Received 29.03.2018, received in revised form 13.04.2018, accepted 26.04.2018

The article deals with the creation and functioning issues of the secondary versions of literary texts. The main attention is paid to interlingual and intersemiotic translations of “strong” texts of culture. The paper explores fundamental assumption of meaning production process (“semiosis”) as translation process. Film adaptations are described as the results of cultural and chronological transcoding resulting into various narrative changes. Secondary texts of “Robinson Crusoe” – an outstanding English novel – served as the present research material.

Keywords: “strong” literary text, secondary text, literary translation, film adaptation, “Robinson Crusoe”.

DOI: 10.17516/1997-1370-0272.

Research area: linguistics, culturology.

Introduction

Being a special type of translating activity, literary translation, undoubtedly, stays at the crossroads of two the most important areas of human’s creative performance – science and art. At different times this statement has been constantly voiced by translation theorists and makers (Levý, 1974; Chukovskiy, Fedorov, 1930; Etkind, 1970). Crucially contributing to creation and extension of the national and world cultural spaces, literary translation serves to build “our”, “their” and “mutual” culture in recipients and operates in the sphere of cross-lingual, cross-national and cross-cultural communication. Since this translation is conventionally focused on literary texts, it is possible to speak even

about cross-literary communication. Among all the types of translation it is the literary one that bares a remarkable resemblance to different arts and creative activities in the culture. Describing literary translation as a certain art, translation theorists have never yet denied its scientific ground. To be more precise, literary translation can be defined as a unique combination of science and art, which is hardly to be completely separated. Thus, M. Enami, a theorist of diachronic and synchronic literary translation, claims that literary translation studies represents a contemporary science that lies at the crossing point of philosophy, linguistics, psychology and sociology (Enami, 2001). This set of scientific branches, obviously, goes far

beyond the list mentioned by M. Enami and can be widened through semiotics, literary studies, systematology, psycholinguistics, theory of communication and intersystematic analysis and numerous other. Apart from these scientific areas, literary translation has productive relationship with other range of cultural studies.

Literary translation as creative process

Literary translation means science, art and translation experience – all at the same time. As for the first point, from the side of translators, the process of translation requires particularly deep knowledge of two languages, cultures and literatures involved and some basic methodological approaches implying knowledge and efficient application of universal scientific categories in general and of specific theories and translation techniques in particular. At the same time, literary translation is recognized as art, since it insists on essential creativity, literary talent and good taste to reconstruct the original information system in the target text. When it succeeds, the original aesthetics rebuilt in the secondary text, will be perceived and comprehended by the recipient who is unable to read the original text, and that to some degree (but not completely) will be similar to the native reader’s perception. Translation is reasonably necessary there owing to the fact that the recipient as a rule does not speak the language that the original text is written in. Such reader both linguistically and extra-linguistically belongs to another (“their”) culture. This fact poses a core (and extremely challenging) task for a literary translator – to create the secondary literary text which would be able to impress to the recipients that maximum of the original information scope.

Thus, in the most general manner, literary translation can be regarded as some reconstruction of the original information complex. At the same

time, it is a process of de-construction – one of the main ideas in post-modernism. In this context, W. Benjamin’s comprehension of translation, that has anticipated de-constructivism for several decades, gains significant importance. A philosopher and cultural theorist considers the target text as the most crucial life form of the original – it needs to be translated, it grows and continues living there (Benjamin, 1972). Further, J. Derrida denotes translation (and translations) as the source’s growth momentum (momenta) (Derrida, 1974). The source text keeps its life in the secondary texts generated in the process of interpretations through various sign systems (according W. Benjamin, they are language systems mainly). In that way, “strong” cultural and literary texts are most frequently subjected to such interpretations – that finally leads to emerging extensive centers of translation focus.

Robinson Crusoe as a “strong” text of literature of culture: interlingual translation review

Beyond any dispute, one of these texts can be exemplified by Daniel Defoe’s novel *“The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, Of York, Mariner: Who lived Eight and Twenty Years, all alone in an un-inhabited Island on the Coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoke; Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the Men perished but himself. With An Account how he was at last as strangely deliver’d by Pyrates”* published in April, 1719, in London. The novel has two sequels, though the world’s heritage traditionally knows the original part only. Indeed, it’s “destiny” from the perspective of translatability is our subject.

Robinson Crusoe has taken the world by storm and left a great influence on readers’ minds as well as on writers’ works. Thus, just within the first year after being publicized, the original (“island” part) was re-published for four times.

Such literary and artistic masters as T. Smollett, F. Marryat and H. Fielding tried to imitate D. Defoe’s work. Robinson’s character had a significant impact on J. Verne’s works. J. Swift created *Gulliver’s Travels* to literary compete with *Robinson*. J.-J. Rousseau recommended this novel as merely the one which should educate young people. It is noteworthy that Rousseau’s *Emile, Or On Education* has encouraged translations of *Robinson* into a number of European languages. L.N. Tolstoy as well found a great educational influence of this novel: more than once he referred to *Robinson* and one of the teachers at Yasnaya Polyana School outlined the novel to achieve academic purposes. A former student of this school remarks in his memoir on how he appreciated this book: “The 2nd and 3rd had already left the school when we stayed to spend evenings, since Lev Nikolaevich liked to read in evenings. Our favorite book that time was “Robinson Crusoe” (Verzilin, 1953).

Over its life, *Robinson* has become one of the most translated and published books in the world. Certainly, this novel can be defined as a “strong” text of the Anglophone culture which has been keeping its “strength” in the space of “our” and “their” cultures and languages for more than 300 years. In 2013 “The Guardian” noted that *Robinson* was the second in the top-100 English books (The Guardian, 1719). The “strength” of Defoe’s novel has decisively been proved by such genre as *Robinsonade* (emerged as a respond to the “island” part of the work) as well as numerous imitations and translations into various languages of the world. As early as in the year of its publishing, it was translated into French, then also almost at the same time – into German and in 1720 in Dutch. The first Italian version of *Robinson* was based on the French translation in 1720 as well. In 1835 the novel was translated into Arabic – as one of the first translation of the European literature into Arabic.

Later, *Robinson* gained popularity in the East: the first Japanese text appeared in 1848, Chinese – in 1902. At this moment, there are 146 Chinese versions of this novel (Li, Yao, 2015). The Turkish translation record of *Robinson* (including the Ottoman Turkish language) started in 1864 and contains more than 120 publications made by 30 translators (Karadağ, 2008). The novel has been translated in more than 100 foreign languages, involving Inuit, Copti, Esperanto and Latin. Importantly, such a centuries-old history of interlingual translations of *Robinson* demonstrates examples of different translation strategies used by the translators due to different reasons. Thus, the first Portuguese version (1785) lacks many episodes of religious content (“zero” translation) owing to self-censorship of the translator (Henrique Leitão) – he had troubles with the Inquisition (Monteiro, 2006).

Let’s briefly revise the history of Russian versions as well. The novel was firstly introduced to Russia through the French translation by Ya. Trusov published in 1762 – 1764 in Saint-Petersburg. This *Robinson* was considerably shortened (though the translator had added his own remarks) and oriented on children that largely determined the future for other Russian translations of this text. Ye.P. Privalova, one of the first Russian specialists of children’s literature who studies *Robinson Crusoe*’s history of publication and dissemination in the 1920s, notes: “In Russia, having immediately been recognized as the children’s literature, “Robinson Crusoe” continues developing in the same direction” (Privalova, 2012: 49). The first full translation from the original language into Russian was made by P.A. Korsakov – a Russian journalist, writer, play writer, translator and censor. The text (two volumes) was published in 1843 in Saint-Petersburg and was highly appreciated by V. Belinsky. In 1860 A.Ye. Razin introduced for the reader’s critics *The Real*

Robinson Crusoe: Adventures of Alexander Selkirk and Marimind, His Monkey, on the Desert Island in the Pacific Ocean (adapted from French). 1866 brought the translation by I.D. Belov, a teacher and writer, which was re-edited in 1874. In 1872, *Robinson* was re-adapted and published by A. Yakhontov, and in 1874 – by A.N. Annenskaya, which, in turn, was welcomed and got seven editions. A great appeal among people in Russia of the 19th century was gained by the re-translation of *Robinson* carried out by J. Campe – a German children’s writer, educator and linguist – in 1779 and titled “Robinson der Jüngere” (*Robinson the Younger*). It was a didactic treatise evangelizing a perfect obedience (“Pray and Work”). Campe’s version indeed served in the creation of the first *Robinson* in Yiddish in 1820 (Garrett, 2002). For more than a century D. Defoe’s novel re-interpreted by J. Campe was perceived as original in the European children’s literature and translated into many European languages. The version made by I. Blinov went out in 1878 followed by P.P. Konchalovsky’s (Senior) translation – in 1888; V.A. Gatsuk (a publisher, writer, translator, collector of Russian fairytales) authored another translation – in 1895; V.D. Vladimirov (Wolfsohn) made a full translation as it was mentioned in the front page of Saint-Petersburg’s editions of 1897 and 1904; another Russian version by L.A. Murakhina-Aksenova (a translator for French, German, English, Dutch, Swedish and Norwegian) was published for six times in 1904–1915. A “long-liver” among the Russian translations of *Robinson* was the one published in 1902 in “Narodnaya Polza” (*Benefit for People*), Saint-Petersburg, in the series called “Domashnaya Biblioteka” (*Home Library*). The first (“island”) part of the novel was translated by M.A. Shishmareva (1852–1939) famous for her versions of Ch. Dickens, W. Thackeray and G. Eliot; the second part was worked out by Z.N. Zhuravskaya (1867–

1937) – a “Queen of Russian translations” – who dealt with “Vsemirnaya Literatura” (*World Literature Publishing House*) since it’s establishing in 1918. Numerous editions of Shishmareva&Zhuravskaya’s translation had a number of titles. The one of 1902 – a basis for further translations – preserved the “religious” moments of the source text. In the post-revolutionary Russia this translation suffered censorship and revision under the USSR’s ideology. Such influence on the translated work can be perfectly exemplified through another Russian version by the same translators published by “Priboy” (Publishing House) in Leningrad, in 1925 and 1928. Interestingly, the communist ideology was echoed even in the title of this translation which clearly referred to its target audience: *Robinson Crusoe. New Interpretation for Young Workers and Peasants*. The book was edited and introduced by Z.I. Lilina, a party official and politician in the sphere of social education for children, Head of the Department of Children’s Books at the State Publishing Office, who had found a number of “mistakes” in the text. Without changing the translation Z.I. Lilina fed each chapter with her own annotations marked by explicit references for the readers. Those annotations channeled the way the soviet readers perceived and comprehended the text into ideologically correct track placing essential emphases in the “ideologically appropriate” novel. Even a century from its creation this translation is considered to be the most classic (canonical) one although it contains some omissions and inaccuracies. The version of 1902 underlies the majority of other translations of *Robinson* by Shishmareva&Zhuravskaya in the Soviet and Post-Soviet periods. It’s worth noting that to a great extent such translation lacunae were reconstructed as well as the inaccuracies were fixed as late as in a special edition for students and philologists in 1990 (“Vysshaya

Shkola” (*Higher School Publishing House*)). The preface of Shishmareva&Zhuravskaya’s translation brought out by “Academia” Publishing House (in “Sokrovishcha Mirovoi Literary Series” (*World Literature’s Treasures Series*)) in 1929 shares that “not the original book is widely known, but its translations and popular episodes mainly that possess a paramount interest for a wide audience. This edition represents an English – Russian translation of this amazing story...” (cited by: Vasiliev, 2017: 180). Then, there also was K. Chukovskiy’s version of *Robinson* published in 1935 (which is quite often subtitled as “narration”), where the translator significantly changed the original characters of 18th century. The Russian version was published as *Robinson Crusoe: Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, A Sailor* and edited more than 20 times. Chukovskiy’s *Robinson* still remains as one of the famous Russian translations of the original novel: one of its latest editions came out in 2013 in “Nigma” Publishing House. The book was designed with I. Il’inskiy’s pictures which had initially been created by him for the version of 1986. Il’inskiy’s pictures – results of a thorough examination of architecture and shipbuilding of that (original) epoch – were highly appreciated by the readers of all ages and, in a way, recognized as a translation of the text into the “language” of graphics. The 21st century can also be characterized by its Russian *Robinsons*: L.L. Yakhni’s translation (*Robinson Crusoe*) published in 2007 and triply edited; in 2014 the novel was for the last time translated into Russian by K Atarova.

“Robinson Crusoe” in intersemiotic perspective: film adaptations

A comprehensive history of *Robinson’s* translations (mainly of the “island” part) is, obviously, still waiting in its wings. Such history should cover all the translations of D. Defoe’s

work including intralinguistic, interlinguistic and intersemiotic ones (Jakobson, 1959) as well as the cases of complementary translation (a foreign text accompanied by graphics; a film version and dubbing, etc.). The authors of “spin-offs” make use of the source’s popularity to promote their products. The novel has more than 700 secondary versions represented by foreign-language translations, music, computer games, alternatives, parodies, poems and children’s picture-books (without texts) (Daniel Defoe). Outlining a flexible nature of Robinson’s story and defining it as an adventure chronotope (following M. Bakhtin), the analysts emphasize a high degree of adaptability of D. Defoe’s text in various historical, cultural, social and ideological contexts (Öz, 2015).

A separate branch in the analysis of *Robinson’s* translations can be found in cinema and TV-versions of a many-faced *Robinson* (Nikoleishvili, 2007). As a desirable object for intersemiotic translation the novel has more than once been filmed: 1902 – “*Les Aventures de Robinson Crusoe*”, a silent short fiction film (France); 1913 – “*Robinson Crusoe*” a silent short fiction film (USA); 1922 – “*The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*”, silent short fiction film (USA); 1924 – “*Little Robinson Crusoe*”, silent short fiction film (USA); 1927 – “*Robinson Crusoe*”, silent fiction film (UK); 1932 – “*Mr. Robinson Crusoe*”, comedy (USA); 1946 – “*Robinson Crusoe*” (USSR); 1951 – “*His Mouse Friday*”, cartoon (USA); 1954 – “*Miss Robinson Crusoe*” (USA); 1954 – “*Las Aventuras de Robinson Crusoe*” (Mexico); 1956 – “*Rabbitson Crusoe*”, parody cartoon (USA); 1964 – “*Robinson Crusoe on Mars*”, sci-fi film (USA); 1972 – “*Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*” (USSR); 1973 – “*Robinson y Viernes en la isla encantada*” (Mexico); 1974 – “*Robinson Crusoe*” (UK); 1975 – “*Man Friday*”, parody, TV-piece (USA, UK); 1976 – “*Il signor Robinson, mostruosa*

storia d'amore e d'avventure”, parody (Italia); 1982 – *“Dobrodružství Robinsona Crusoe, námořníka z Yorku”* / *“Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, a Sailor from York”*, animated feature film (Czechoslovakia); 1989 – *“Crusoe”*, drama (USA, UK); 1997 – *“Robinson Crusoe”* (USA); 2003 – *“Robinson Crusoe”* (France); 2009 – *“Crusoe”*, TV-series (USA); 2016 – *“Robinson Crusoe”*, computer animated film (France, Belgium). Importantly, the novel’s film versions began to appear just in the earliest days of cinema.

Thus, as it has been exemplified, the secondary texts of *Robinson* (hardly the whole list of “translations” of Defoe’s novel), undoubtedly, prove that permanent attraction towards this strong text – a part of the English literature – which is remaining now for three centuries. Just owing to its untranslatedness the English “strong” text has become an iconic text for different cultures of this world. In the essays *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* U. Eco states that the main reason why such cult is formed around particular work or character is its “extraneity” or “movability” (Eco, 2002). An iconic book, according to the Italian analysts, is the one which is created by several authors independently of each other (it may have various sources); that is what makes an impression of fragmentation within one work and provides a basis for intertextuality. The tercentenary history of *Robinson* demonstrates that cycle of its “authors” belonging to different cultures and epochs. As such, it is extremely important, that an iconic character should be the one who has not only the future, but the past as well. Robinson, in turn, is fully in keeping with this requirement. A. Bolad describes the genre of *Robinson* as an example of Menippean satire – a type of cynic parody (following M. Bakhtin – burlesque genre): “*Robinson* is an amazing book. Perhaps, it has a postmodernist “citationality” as well as a delicate Menippean satire – either of the Ancient or Medieval time,

or even timeless – not a genre, but a form of the literary genius’s creative whim” (Bolad). Exactly that Defoe’s character lives outside the time and space makes it easier to “transport” the novel into different times and cultures through various semiotic systems. Pointing out many alternatives for the plot, A. Bolad also classifies *Robinson* as an interactive novel: “Innumerable imitations, interpretations and continuations of *Robinson Crusoe* are not a coincidence, but rather a determined phenomenon; indeed, it is just a realization of another crazy idea either consciously or not put behind Defoe’s book – the idea of interactivity between literary schools and generations; *Robinson Crusoe* is a text originally designed to bring cooperation between the writers” (Bolad). For more than 300 years already *Robinson* has been continued in various versions ensuring its own “infinity” and “integrity”.

Under the contemporary scientific discourse film and stage versions of literary texts are defined as a process of intersemiotic translation and explained through the notions of adaptation and transposition (Krebs, 2014). Within the process of adaptation considered as a deliberate transformation determined by cultural or pragmatic context towards the target text, the source literary text is used as a framework for creating a film text. Traditionally it involves elision (information compressing) of the verbal original and comes with its national, cultural and chronological transcoding, i.e. information transfer into other cultural and time spaces. In this way, one has to agree with P. Cattrysse that adaptation of the source text for movies which would change the plot should in no way be considered as its simplification (Cattrysse, 1992: 57). Entering such complex and multidimensional non-verbal cultural space the analysts of intersemiotic translation inevitably face the problems typical for interlinguistic translation as well – mainly with the problems of translatability

measurement. In that connection, we should recall about interpretation limits – a key problem of U. Eco’s idea (Eco, 1994). To understand the way how “strong” texts are translated, it’s extremely important that U. Eco highlights the difference between interpretation of the text and its exploitation, and also assumes that the notions of sign and semiosis do not challenge, but rather complement each other since the sign’s nature reveals if being interpreted. Nevertheless, the analysis of *Robinson*’s translations has not been enough to clearly answer the questions on the way the secondary texts relate to the original. This issue has by no means lost its relevance in the sphere of interlinguistic translation, though it is especially popular for intersemiotic translation. Let’s take some examples. Whether the American sci-fi film of 1964 “*Robinson Crusoe on Mars*” does mean an interpretation of the original novel or it was exploited to create a new text (following U. Eco). In this case, the hero’s name was reflected in the film’s title. Another link to Defoe’s text was the alien’s name (“Friday”, for sure) rescued by the main character. A thick question about the source – target text relation is placed by another American movie – “*Cast Away*” (2000) with Tom Hanks in the lead role.

Following Yu.M. Lotman, P. Fabbri maintains that every sign system can be translated into another one (Fabbri, 1998) illustrating this statement by the fact that a novel can be transformed into a TV-series or film. As such, an Italian semiotician notes that in the case of untranslatability, if any, it is necessary to change the translation strategy resulting in each fundamental element reconstructed in the translation. Thus, the idea of higher capabilities of intersemiotic translation in contrast to the interlinguistic one is being advocated. The film text broadens literary text’s translatability owing to its “translation tooling” (sound, color, video, montage). As perceived by P. Fabbri, literary

translation is not only intersemiotic, but inter-sensible as well (let’s add – and inter-emotional) process. Indeed, the film “language” has a great potential to express feelings and emotions described in the original.

Addressing the phenomenon of screen adaptation, O.V. Aronson observes that “if we touch upon the screen adaptation, we can’t help but speculate using the terms of translation” (Aronson, 2002: 128). Considering film versions as if the literary language is translated into the visual one (as a literary work being translated by the cinematographic means), a Russian theoretician of cinema and television time and again refers to the work by W. Benjamin mentioned above and notes that the subject of screen adaptation allows accentuating a number of major points of his (W. Benjamin’s) famous article. Most significantly, O.V. Aronson thinks over the essence and reasons of Benjamin’s “untranslatability” explained by the German philosopher not as inability to translate, but as the most crucial way to identify linguistic deficit of the source text. The researcher highlights W. Benjamin’s assumption on that the higher the level of literary work is, the better it can be translated. N. Dusi notes that emotions means a core problem in the literary – audiovisual texts relation and can be translated through music, color, light or a combination of different “languages” (Dusi, 2010). Thus, the transfer of literary information through the film language enhances translatability of the source text. Still, one cannot avoid some losses during intersemiotic translation. In that way, through the films themed on certain novels, considering the importance and necessity to “say almost the same thing” U. Eco says that the film also involves storylines, psychological features of the characters and some sort of a novel atmosphere, but lacks the author’s individual style (Eco, 2003). Given that, alongside with the problem of translatability limits we face another challenge of intersemiotic translation – translation

unit identification. Such units may mainly include literary image. In the case of D. Defoe’s iconic text – it is the image of Robinson which is transformed in the “translations” into different heroes belonging to different nationalities and times, but maintaining (to various extents) the features of the original character.

Conclusion

Considering numerous secondary “texts” of the novel having arisen from interlingual

and intersemiotic translations within 300 years after *Robinson Crusoe*’s initial publication enables us to find the reasons and mechanisms of interpretation secondariness of the “strong text” along with “survival capacities” of the iconic literary image in different cultures, epochs and semiotic forms. Over its life, Robinson has become an iconic, many-faced and syncretic by having got its voice on the most languages of the world and being visualized by the means of graphics, cinema and theatre.

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Переводимость «Робинзона Крузо»:

трехсотлетнее приключение во времени и пространстве

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В статье рассматриваются вопросы создания и функционирования вторичных версий литературных текстов. Основное внимание уделяется межъязыковому и межсемiotическому переводу «сильных» текстов культуры. Статья посвящена изучению фундаментального предположения о процессе создания значения («семиозисе») как процессе перевода. Киноадаптации описываются как результаты культурного и хронологического транскодирования, что приводит к различным изменениям повествования. Материалом настоящего исследования послужили вторичные тексты «Робинзона Крузо» – выдающегося английского романа.

Ключевые слова: «сильный» художественный текст, вторичный текст, художественный перевод, киноадаптация, «Робинзон Крузо».

Научная специальность: 10.02.00 – лингвистика, 24.00.00 – культурология.
