# "Metaphoric Displacement" - a Reliable Guide in Literary Translation

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We have to agree that reading literature, in the real sense of the word, is a very difficult task, for it presupposes the reader's ability to see more in a text than directly catches the eye. The question of reading and understanding literature can never be divorced from the all-important problem of literary translation since a translator is first and foremost a reader. Moreover, it is through translation that people try to find their way in the enormous sphere of world literature and use it as a key to studying the nature of human experience, familiarizing themselves with other cultures and other world-views, thus identifying the specific features of their own mentality and psychology. In view of all this, it is not surprising at all that translation is as old as recorded history and, admittedly, if it were not for translation, the people of the world would be as helpless as in the time of the Tower of Babel.

The study of the development of translation theory from its earliest steps up to the present time reveals a considerable shift in the evaluation of its role and status transforming it from a kind of stylistic exercise to a philological discipline in its own right. However, one thing is obvious: the main principle of translation has more or less remained unchanged, and that consists in the statement that the most accepted and balanced way of translating, especially when what we deal with is a piece of literature, is the one that not only conveys the literary message in the best way but also tries to keep as close to the formal peculiarities of the literary text as possible.

The question concerning the status of translation has been discussed time and again by leading philologists and answered in different ways. Some theorists, such as Eric Jacobson, have put forward the idea that translation is a craft, others, like Theodore Savory have evaluated it as art, but there are still others, such as Horst Frenz, who have always believed it to be a scientifically grounded process. John Dryden has claimed that translation is really an art, but it is neither creative, nor imitative. Its place should be found somewhere in between[1].

To be able to evaluate this variety of view-points, we have to draw a distinct line between functionally different texts. It has been established that the two main functional styles are the intellective, which is aimed at conveying factological information, and the

functional style of imaginative writing, which presents a very specific reverberation of the objective reality, arousing in the mind of the reader a certain expressive-emotional-evaluative attitude towards what he reads.

It is common knowledge that verbal creativity is based on imagination. Its highly complicated and specific character presupposes the ability of the reader to perceive the objective reality imaginatively, to penetrate into the intention of the author, to understand the particular and original way of expressing the subtle and original content which, in fact, is the basis of all verbal aesthetic creativity. As distinct from the so called "science of speaking", where the rational and scientifically regulated process is based on the speaker's ability to manipulate ready-made material, in verbal art words are chosen and stringed together in such a way as to suit the aesthetic image which has been engendered in the writer's mind[2]. Even the existence of a whole range of terms and terminological word combinations, such as "fiction", "imaginative writing", "verbal art", "belles lettres", etc. (and among these I would especially bring out the terms "fiction" and "imaginative writing") witness the invented, fictive, imaginative character of a work of verbal art, the main task of which is to produce an aesthetic impact on the reader. Thus, the essential difference between the two main functional styles can be presented as an opposition – "real" vs "unreal", "factive" vs "fictive".

If we proceed from this point, it is not difficult to see that the question "What is translation?" can never be answered straightforwardly, for it is always a matter of what is being translated. The thing is that the translation of factive texts, where there is a one-to-one correspondence of the content plane and the expression plane of the linguistic units, is rationally regulated and presupposes the ability of the translator to find the appropriate **words** in the target language. Thus, what he actually does is choosing the verbal way of expressing the ideas of the original text.

We face a completely different picture in a work of verbal art where the author conveys his thoughts and feelings using word combinations in an unusual way. Here linguistic elements are never used at random. Their choice and arrangement is always pragmatically conditioned. Being aimed at the elucidation of the general purport of the global artistic whole, they become an indispensable part of the large context of the work, realizing the author's intention.

If this is taken for granted, then the most natural question arises here: "Is it just and appropriate to apply verbal translation to a work of fiction, or to draw a parallel between the literary type of translation and the so-called process of "metonymic displacement", which is the case with some contemporary theorists of translation?" Here, in particular, we mean the International Conference on Literary Translation in 1981 in New Delhi, where the terminological word combination "metonymic displacement" was introduced to define the translation of literature.[3]

It is our firm belief that this question should be answered with a very definite "no!", for if, largely speaking, by metonymy the substitution of one name for another on the *basis of contiguity is* meant, then the process of translation of a work of verbal art can never be described as "metonymic displacement" as it is never a simple substitution of the target language names, for the source language names of objects. It is a process of

recreation which presupposes "decoding" and "recoding" of the literary message contained in the original text for the multifariousness of a literary work, which is often achieved by the ambiguity of linguistic elements, the multiple meanings and shades of meanings attached to them in different historical periods and very often placed "below-the-surface", do make the translation of a work of verbal creativity rather a complicated process. In other words, when translating fiction, to be able to perceive and express what the author of the original wants to convey to his reader, the translator, alongside with other very important qualities, should have a great power of imagination in order to recreate the images, the melody, the rhythm and rhyme and all the other effects of the original text.

On the other hand, there are no two languages which are identical in all respects, such as the semantic structure of words, ways of creating images, rules of rhythming and rhyming, etc. The inevitable differences in the source culture and the target culture, the literary traditions and national world-views as reflected in both languages and the peculiar features of national mentalities as a whole should also be taken into account, for translation is, in fact, "communication across cultures".

Thus, we have to agree with those theorists of literary translation who think it will be impossible to translate "King Lear" into another language (say Hindi), proceeding from the principle of "metonymic displacement". As a matter of fact, it is difficult to imagine that Hindus will readily perceive Cordelia, for example, who disobeys her father, as a positive personage.

In order to be able to translate a work of verbal creativity adequately, the translator must have a good command of both languages - the source language and the target language. In addition to this, good knowledge concerning the global vertical context of the work (i.e. the information of historical-philological, social, political, geographical, etc. character, the work of verbal art has been impregnated with[4]), as well as artistic flair is salient in the process of translation. The latter will help the translator to choose appropriate metaphors in the target language not only to convey the writer's intention but also to be perceived by the readers of the translation adequately.

To illustrate this point, we could refer to the uniqueness of Shakespearean texts the originality of which brings about enormous difficulties in the process of translation. One of the most intricate and complicated aspects of translating Shakespeare is his vocabulary, which is often so polyphonic that the translator finds it almost impossible to convey the semantic, stylistic, emotive and associative globality of his words into the target language. In fact, every linguistic unit, (words first and foremost) becomes an inseparable part of the author's literary conception and the scheme of his work.

When, for example, the translation of the word *temporal* is studied in different Russian translations of Portia's monologue (*His sceptre shows the force of temporal power*) it turns out that the word has not been adequately perceived and understood by more than five Russian translators of the original. Almost all of them have translated it *временный* (provisional - smth. that can be changed or replaced later), proceeding from the meaning of "time relations" in the semantic structure of the word, whereas in the monologue in combination with *power* the word implies a completely different meaning

(secular, worldly). This is borne out by the context which is based on the opposition of "heavenly" and "divine" (i.e. perfect) and "earthly" (i.e. imperfect). The word combination *temporal power* is directly related to *sceptre* and *throned monarch* in the context, thus actually appearing as a synonym to "earthly power". And though the meaning "provisional" is not excluded from the semantic globality of the word, it cannot be considered to be the best and the most adequate variant of translation.[5]

In contrast to this, in the Armenian translation done by H.Masehian, the Armenian word-equivalent is so appropriate that it successfully recreates the original image of the worldly power which symbolizes awe and majesty.

Likewise, let us consider the well-known metaphor *to be or not to be*. Will it be right to think that it is used in the famous soliloque to indicate that Hamlet merely questions his physical existence? Of course not! In fact, this metaphor is extremely condensed and contains so many different shades of meanings that it will be inadequate to apply the principle of "metonymic displacement" to its translation, singling out one of the aspects in the semantic structure of the verb "to be" and presenting only the variant ապրել, թե չապրել, meaning "to live or not to live".

If we try to look into the monologue of the King of France in King Lear, we shall face the same difficulty here. In almost all the Armenian translations of the lines *Gods, Gods! - 'tis strange that from their cold'st neglect/ My love should kindle to inflamed respect* the word *respect*, which is usually defined in dictionaries as "admiration, feeling of honour, attention to or care for", turns to be one of the most difficult words in this context. Surely enough, this is not due to the fact that we do not have the concept of respect in the Armenian mentality. Simply the semantic structure of this word is extremely rich and ramified on the emic level. Furthermore, in this particular context the polyphonic globality of its semantic and stylistic features is realized to the full. In view of all this, the occasional word combination *inflamed respect* causes a lot of trouble in choosing an Armenian word-equivalent for the particular situation. This is thought to be the reason why the word is dropped in the Armenian translations.

Research work along Shakespearean lines has shown that metasemiotic word combinations, which cannot be taken at their face value, may cause greater difficulties in the process of translation. Thus, in the same monologue of the King of France we read:

*Thy dowerless daughter, king, thrown to my chance,*
*Is queen of us, of ours, and our fair France:*
*Not all the dukes of waterish Burgundy,*
*Can buy this unprized precious maid of me.*

The analysis of the word combination *waterish Burgundy* shows that the word *waterish* is smth. like a touchstone for the translators. This difficulty can be accounted for by the rich associative plane of the word. On the one hand, it has inherently positive connotations and is associated with the fact that Burgundy is rich in water. On the other hand, in his speech the King of France does not tend to conceal his contempt towards the mercenary motives in the behaviour of the Duke of Burgundy, who refuses to marry Cordelia after she is declared dowerless. Thus, it is natural to suppose that the word

*waterish* acquires negative connotations in this context. Proceeding from this, we may treat *waterish* as a Shakespearean coinage based on the phrase "to have watery blood" (to be a coward). Reading between the lines, it may even seem possible to draw inference that the King is teasing the Duke of Burgundy, qualifying the famous Burgundy wine as waterish.

The Armenian translations in the prevailing majority of cases introduce positive shades of meaning in the word, whereas the analysis of the larger context reveals the prevalence of negative connotations.

Thus, even the few examples adduced, show that the translator cannot be guided by the principle of "metonymic displacement" when translating a literary text, for it will never give him the possibility to convey the semantic, stylistic and associative globality of literary words and images. It is here that the translator must be aware of literary translation being a "metaphoric displacement" which is the only optimum way to achieve adequate translation. The translator here is expected not to merely concentrate on words as language units but also dig out their inner resources and the semantic, stylistic and associative connotations acquired by them in this or that particular context, very often even changing the words, if necessary, and introducing equivalent images into the translation.

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## «Փոխաբերական տեղաշարժ»՝ հուսալի ուղեցույց գեղարվեստական թարգմանություն կատարելիս


Աշխատանքը նվիրված է գրական-գեղարվեստական թարգմանության խնդիրների քննությանը: Հեղինակը, մասնավորապես, նշում է գործառական մոտեցման կարևորությունը և առաջադրում «փոխաբերական տեղաշարժի» սկզբունքը, որպես համարժեք գեղարվեստական թարգմանության հասնելու լավագույն միջոց: Հոդվածում առանձնակի ուշադրության է արժանանում բառամիավորների, հատկապես բազմաձայն բառերի, թարգմանության հարցը: