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Translation and the Accommodation of Diversity

Indian and non-Indian Perspectives

PL ACADEMIC RESEARCH

Blending Teaching with Research:
English Translations of Pushkin's Eugene Onegin

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1. Introductory Remarks: Brahma and Vishnu

Any current person specification for a Lecturer in Translation looks more like the description of the Hindu Trinity – Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva – rather than a human being. In the symbolism of Hindu beliefs, Brahma is the creator, Vishnu is the preserver and Shiva is the destroyer. In the re-incarnation of Brahma, the Lecturer in Translation is responsible for the creative process or, using academic terminology, for research. Vishnu's role demands from the profession the preservation of divine or scholarly ideas, and parallels can be easily drawn with teaching responsibilities. The Lecturer turns into Shiva, the destroyer, when he or she is doing the job of Interpreter or Translator. This re-incarnation dictates its own rules and often the provision of Translation Services to customers in everyday life contradicts all theories of Translation.

The focus of this article is only two re-incarnations, Brahma and Vishnu, out of the listed three for a Lecturer in Translation. It will be shown how the demands of the profession push these two Indian gods to live in peace and harmony with each other. In other words, it will be demonstrated how one's research might be used in one's teaching. This approach, blending teaching with research, provides opportunities to students to enhance their experiences in a lecture hall and to deepen their understanding of new material because they feel invited to participate in their lecturer's creative activities. The article highlights some themes in the author's ongoing research in Intercultural Communication which is based on English translations of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin.* It will be also argued that numerous translations of *Onegin* might be used as a companion to Pym's *Exploring Translation Theories* (2009) because they provide a unique material to illustrate various theoretical points of Pym's book.

2. Eugene Onegin in English as a companion to Pym's textbook

In every culture, there is a piece of literature, a novel, a poem or a play, which gets the attention and captures the imagination of the rest of the world, and has

been translated into many foreign languages. Moreover, the chosen piece might be re-translated many times into one language. *The Thousand and One Nights* or *The Arabian Nights* as well as Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* are just two examples of the same phenomenon. According to the bibliography of English translations of *Eugene Onegin* compiled and maintained by the York Bibliographic Society[1], at the moment there are at least twenty-four full verse translations of *Onegin* into English (without counting revised editions of the same translation). As many as eight translations appeared in the first decade of the 21st century. Hofstadter (1999), one of the translators of the Pushkin's novel, anticipating many readers' question, why people re-translate, addresses this issue in introduction to his *Onegin*:

> Did people stop climbing Everest when Hilary and Tenzing had climbed it? Does a good pianist stop playing a work simply because great recordings of it already exist? Of course not. People are driven to do their own thing precisely because of the wonderful accomplishments of others. (1999: xxix)

It appears to be admiration for the chosen subject and readiness to face the challenge are driving forces of re-translation. Numerous re-translations are not only evidence of the labour of love but they are ambitious projects too. What is more important for this research is that they are a unique teaching material.

The English translations of *Onegin* are written over the period of time which is nearly one hundred and thirty years, from 1881 to 2009. The impressive time scale of the work is in itself a guarantee of numerous variations in the interpretation of the original. It is easier to make references to one particular literary source and use its multiple metamorphoses as illustrations of translation theories. Counterarguments might be used against this claim by pointing to the emergence of Translation as an academic subject from other disciplines in the middle of the 20th century. It should not be taken seriously, because the non-existence of academic status does not stop people from doing translations, thinking and arguing about them.

Pym (2009) defines seven paradigms in translation theories. They are not bound to specific time; they might co-exist in particular periods. Each paradigm is the pool of ideas associated with one particular understanding of translation. He names the paradigms using key words which stand for their main concepts. They are:

- Natural equivalence
- Directional equivalence
- Purposes
- Descriptive
- Uncertainty

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1   For more information see http://www-users.york.ac.uk/~pml1/onegin/.

- Localisation
- Cultural Translation.

Complementary to the publication of his book *Exploring Translation Theories* Pym presented a cycle of lectures at the Rovira i Virgili University in Tarragona, Spain, which highlights and clarifies its main concepts.[2] Explaining the concept of equivalence, Pym uses an unusual but explicit example from everyday life. He describes one's approach as unrealistic if this person tries to obtain an equivalent amount of gold for American dollar banknotes because there is a sign on the banknotes about its exchange into gold and rates. In this way, Pym argues that equivalence is theoretically possible but practically impossible.

The same applies to translation. Conceptually, various equivalence models in translation theories, natural, directional, aimed at purposes and norms, sooner or later provoke a different, in some cases, even directly opposite reaction. In the paradigm "Uncertainty", it appears that equivalence empties a space for deconstruction and transformation and points to the omnipotent indeterminacy of translation. Ideas which underpin the concept are transparent: translators are simply uncertain about the meaning of what they translate. This applies to multifaceted words, idioms and word plays. Consequently the problem of choice becomes an agenda for translators. Pym points to Venuti's contribution (1995) to translation theories mentioning his work on exploring the concepts of invisibility of translators, domesticating and foreignizing approaches and "remainder". All these concepts are complicated ones. Pym's and Venuti's trains of thoughts are better understood by students if they are illustrated by examples from translations. In addition to what Venuti offers as illustrations of his points, largely based on French and Italian literature, examples from English translations of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* are helpful too.

Onegin occupies a special place in Russian literature and culture. Previously citing the whole novel by heart was considered as evidence of one's nobility and intelligence. It is still part of the National Curriculum.

In this article, Onegin's letter to Tatyana is chosen as a sample. It is an important part of the novel in which Onegin's character shows a number of essential characteristics. The translations of the following scholars are used to exemplify the concepts listed above: Elton (1937), Arndt ([1963], 2002)[3], Elton revised by Briggs (1995), and Hofstadter (1999). The choice of these four translations is personal rather than based on any particular characteristics.

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2   They are put online and are accessible at http://www.tinet.cat/~apym/publications/ETT/video_ list.html

3   The first date indicates the year of first publication, the second date is the year of publication which is used in this work.

3. Invisibility

3.1 Concept

Invisibility is a relatively new term in Translation Studies. It is not defined by Shuttleworth and Cowie in their *Dictionary of Translation Studies* (1997). Venuti's famous book on Invisibility (1995) also avoids giving a proper definition for the term; instead he suggests its associative sequence by listing fluency, transparency and domestication as members. Venutu (1995: 8) also perceives the term politically and makes a link between the unrecognized authorship of the translator's work and the rights of translators as citizens in Britain and the US. The book ends with the expression of his strong belief in the power of translation that is able to make a difference. Venuti writes, "To recognize the translator's invisibility is at once to critique the current situation and to hope for a future more hospitable to the differences that the translator must negotiate." (1995: 313)

Terminological complexity of invisibility is obvious even from the above given details. Clarification is needed. A number of crucial points relevant to the term are going to be discussed using examples from the four chosen English translations of *Onegin*. Firstly, the focus will be on the physical appearance of translation publications. Secondly, the presence of translator's name on cover and title pages will be checked. The issues of self-publicity will be discussed later, when introductory chapters are analyzed. The investigation will continue focusing on the text of translations of Onegin's letter to Tatyana.

3.2 Do covers have translators' names?

Usually publishing houses are responsible for the covers of their editions. Their choice would be approved by the team of professionals who are involved in the edition. Without any doubt, translators do take part in choosing images for the covers of their work. Covers are important because they provide first-hand information on their book's content. In the case of translations, covers stress either the strangeness or similarity of content for readers.

Professor Simmons who wrote the review of the first four published translations in verse of *Eugene Onegin* into English, is pleased with the appearance of Elton's publication. According to Simmons, "Pushkin loved beautiful books, and he would have been delighted with the handsome edition that contains Professor Elton's translation." (1938: 204) It was published in 1937, the centennial of Pushkin's death. There are only 775 copies. One of them, copy number 197, is kept in the British Library. It looks impressive, a big volume of A4 size. It looks beautiful too. Its typography is free from any eccentricity: each page is a clear,

well-balanced printed set in Monotype Walbaum type which came to England from Germany in 1925 where it was previously used to publish classical texts. The book has illustrations by M.V. Dobuzhinsky, but there is none on its front cover. It is a typically academic edition.

The design of three other translations is directed to a wider readership. Their size is common for a reading book. They have images on their covers to attract the diversity of readers. A painting, Michael's Castle, by A.P. Bogolyubov is on Arndt's work.[4] It gives an idea of the country of the novel and the architecture of the castle, built in 1797-1801, suggests the time. Briggs' revision of Elton's translation has a portrait. It is Man Reading by Lamplight by George Friedrich Kersting (1785-1847), a German painter. The way in which Kersting positions his character implies that the man is not in the natural world, but within himself, in his imagination. This suggests that the place is not important. The portrait being not culturally specific is bounded, however, by time. The man is in the nineteenth century costume. Hofstadter's work has a drawing of the Peter and Paul Fortress which symbolizes St Petersburg and the power of the Russian Tsars. As an embodiment of strong military and political control, the fortress was the place where a number of senior officers-rebels were kept after the Decembrist uprising in 1825. In this drawing the place and time of the novel are essentially represented.

If the back covers of Elton's and Briggs/Elton's work have information about the novel, Hofstadter's translation has a photo of the translator sitting in his cabinet under the portrait of Pushkin on the wall. There is also information on the previous Hofstadter's publications next to the photo.

The cover of Hofstadter's work looks unusual in the bookshops of English-speaking countries. First of all, it provides more information on the translator rather than on the author of the original. It is also requires a knowledge of Russian history in order to be understood in full. Under the guidance of Hofstadter, it sends its prospective readers to a strange and foreign land.

Translators' names are mentioned on title pages of their work but they are introduced differently. The work of Elton, Briggs/Elton and Arndt are translations. Hofstadter's work is a novel versification. Arndt's and Hofstadter's names are appeared on the covers of their work.

Cover design, information presented there as well as on the front pages direct one's attention immediately to Hofstadter's visibility. To him, making himself visible helps Pushkin's Onegin to be more accessible to an English speaking audience. He believes if the translator is not obliged to cover his or her presence in

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4   Here is a description of the second revised edition that Arndt prepared in 1981. The copy I used is a reprint of this edition published by Ardis Publishers in 2002. The first edition does not look a lot different, there is just another picture on the front cover. The Ardis publication is used as an example because it was easier accessible.

the translated text, equivalence is not an issue. To him, liberation from the original provides opportunities for the translator to communicate openly with readers.

3.3 Translator's Preface: a place for self-publicity?

Each chosen translation has an introduction or preface or both, written by the translators themselves. Again differences here are significant. Elton's introduction has twelve pages, only three out of these twelve pages are devoted to explaining the peculiarities of his translation. By pointing to the similarities and differences in English and Russian, rhymes and the linear character of Pushkin's verse, Elton assumes that there are opportunities to translate between these two languages and to produce "an original poem in English". This argument shows that Elton's translation strategy might be domestication and equivalence is considered.

Briggs edits Elton's translation in preparing a new edition of *Onegin* for Everyman Publishers. It has the introduction of eleven pages, two out of these eleven are relevant to translation issues. It has also further explanatory material, Note on the Text, which is only three pages long. Briggs, like Elton, starts with pointing to similarities between English and Russian but concludes that these advantages "will soon dissolve". The focus of his editing is to remove Elton's archaisms and to correct inaccuracies.

Arndt's work has a two-page preface with some commentaries on translation and a nine-page introduction. His major concerns are the acoustic qualities of his translation. In his text, in order to encourage his readers to pronounce correctly Russian names Arndt puts stresses on them. He also tries to sharpen his lines, so "the iambic meter should be the reader's guide." The way in which Arndt deals with Russian names suggests an element of foreignizing strategy in his translation. He has retained the sparkle of the original which can be also understood as an attempt to maintain the metric gadgetry.

All three scholars provide extremely limited or no information about themselves and how they did their translation. They share the concept of the invisibility of translators.

Reading a more than thirty-page long preface by Hofstadter, one is able to understand that invisibility is not an issue for this translator. In his preface, Hofstadter invites his readers to go along the stages of his work and to be aware of their turns and twists. Some critics might understand this approach as a self-publicity exercise. For example, according to McMillin, Hofstadter's Translator's Preface is "garrulous", "a blow-by-blow account of how he learned (some) Russian for the purpose of popularizing Pushkin's novel in verse" (2001: 313). Others might disagree with this criticism. Hofstadter is famous enough; he does not need publicity. His intention is

different, to invite readers to his theatre of mind and to see, as if from inside his brain, what is going on there. Firstly, he is a cognitive scientist, and secondly, he is a translator. To any scholar of Translation, Hofstadter's preface is a unique material which highlights the insights of one's thinking and the translation process.

4. Domesticating or Foreignizing

Venuti argues, "We can more fully understand the translators' different motives and practices by considering their translations in the context of their other work, their lives, and their different historical moments." (1995: 93) The case of *Onegin* in English proves this point. In the next part of my article, it will be highlighted how the personalities of translators impact their work and choice of strategies.

4.1 Elton: part of the noble heritage of English literature

Oliver Elton (1861-1945), an English literary scholar and the author of *A Survey of English Literature (1730-1880)*, was also a translator. He translated from Icelandic and Russian. Elton's translation of *Eugene Onegin* was among three other verse translations into English which appeared in 1937 to commemorate the centenary of Pushkin's death. Elton's work is read as good poetry in English. It is written in archaic English, the language which was used not in the 19the century but before that. It is unlikely that Elton's intention was to send his readers to another epoch to foreignize his translation of *Onegin* as one might suggest after reading Venuti's chapter on Margin where Ezra Pound's experiments, his particularly archaic English, in using foreignizing translation are explained. One of them is presented in Mayor's words, in his analysis of Pound's translation of Guido Cavalcanti, a Florentine poet of the 13th century:

> The quaint language is not a pastiche of pre-Shakespearen sonnets, or an attempt to make Cavalcanti talk Elizabethan the way Andrew Lang made Homer try to talk King James. Ezra Pound is matching Cavalcanti's early freshness with a color lifted from the early freshness of English poetry. (Cited after Venuti 1995: 202 of Mayor (1932))

By using archaic English Elton feels at home and helps his readers to feel comfortable too. It is his understanding of poetic canons. It was the poetry taught at school at that time. Evidence can be easily found Elton's other work. In his *Survey of English Literature 1730-1880* he makes a clear comment on the value of the work of the past masters:

> The reviewer of the romantic period must begin by calling for justice to the age of reason; he must, for his own sake, be fair to the first three quarters of the eighteenth century. We have not the privilege of Blake and Wordsworth and Keats, who were rebels and liberators, and whose business it was to be ungrateful. We are likely to think too little rather than too much of the writers who are termed classical, and who have long ceased to be dangerous. (Elton, 1920: 42)

Elton's translation of *Onegin* is an example of keeping "classical literature firmly in mind" (1920: 43). Elton domesticates his translation of Pushkin's 19th century novel in verse using the 18th century English poetic language. The same argument is echoed in Simmons words: "… I regard Professor Elton's translation as a genuine and lasting addition to the series of great translations which have become part of the noble heritage of English literature." (1938: 207)

4.2 Elton/Briggs: an attempt to look younger in your 60s

Anthony Briggs, a Russian scholar and translator of Tolstoi and Pushkin, revised Elton's *Onegin* in 1995. To some extent, it is a strange situation. Life, however, provides simple explanations. As a consultant editor at that time, in charge of Russian literature, for Everyman Paperback he recommended Pushkin's novel for publication, but did not have enough time to produce his own version and chose Elton's translation as it did not have copyrights. A new version is a hybrid text, a work of two translation scholars who belong to different times and use various types of English.

Briggs randomly keeps some of Elton's archaic expressions and also changes a number of them using a modern version of English. Below there are just few examples:

Elton (1937)	Elton/Briggs (1995)
(p. 231)'By chance, I met you once of old;	(p. 193) 'We once met; it was accidental.
(p. 231) Unbound, – myself from all estranging, I thought (my God! How much amiss, At what a cost!) that I was bliss For rest and freedom well exchanging.	(p. 194) An outcast, free from all restriction, I thought in freedom to possess A substitute for happiness. What a mistake! What an infliction!...
(p. 232) And yet, to shield each glance and phrase With coldness and dissimulation; To join in quite conversation, And look – on you – with cheerful gaze!...	(p. 195) Meanwhile I must appear phlegmatic, My tongue and eyes well fortified. My speech is calm, but, at your side, Glancing at you, I feel ecstatic.
(p. 232) 'So be it; I am weak, am quitting My inward struggle; all I see, It settled; do you will with me, And to my fate I am submitting.'	(p. 195) 'So be it. I decline at last To fight myself; my strength is slender. I'm in your hands; the die is cast. To destiny I now surrender.'