

Literary Translation Practices in Ancient and Medieval Europe

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Abstract. This article analyses the evolution of literary translation practices in ancient and medieval Europe. It traces the development of translation from early examples, such as the translation of Homer's "Odyssey" into Latin by Livius Andronicus, to the significant efforts in medieval Europe, including the translation of religious and secular texts. The study highlights key milestones, such as the translation of the Bible by John Wycliffe and Geoffrey Chaucer's adaptation of Italian and French literary sources in his "Canterbury Tales". The article also examines the role of translation in preserving and transmitting cultural and literary heritage, emphasizing its impact on the intellectual and spiritual life of European societies. By focusing on the historical practices and contributions of translators in these periods, the article sheds light on the foundations of literary translation as an essential tool for cultural exchange and intellectual development.

Keywords: literary translation, ancient translation practices, medieval translation, cultural exchange, Bible translation, Livius Andronicus, Geoffrey Chaucer, Wycliffe Bible, classical texts, translation history in Europe.

INTRODUCTION

It can be said that artistic translation and translation studies are one of the old creative fields that have been formed and developed for centuries. Today, talking about the importance of translation is equivalent to talking about the incomparable role of water in human life, because humanity cannot live without literature. It is not for nothing that Chulpan said: "If literature lives, so does the nation. A nation whose literature has not died and which has not been involved in the development of its literature and which has not been cultivated by writers will one day be deprived of feeling, thought, and thought, and will gradually decline. This cannot be denied. The nation that denies it declares itself in crisis" [1]. Literary translation can be understood as the process of translating works from one language to another. The peculiarity of literary translation lies in the fact that even if its language changes, the aesthetic phenomenon, the event of artistry and emotions are preserved. Before writing about the history of literary translation practices, we decided to analyze the etymology of the words "tarjimon" and "translator". In ancient times, in Central Asia and Iran, orators were called "tarzaban". "Tar" in Persian means new, delicate, elegant. "Zabon" means language [2]. Except the skills of speaking in a beautiful manner, a "tarzaban" knew a lot of languages, and could employ their oratory skills across these languages. After the conquest of the Arab, the Persian word "tarzaban" began to be pronounced according Arab phonetics as "tarjamon" [3].

The English word "translation" was originally borrowed from old French or Latin word "translatio" meaning "carried over" ("trans" – over, "latus" - past participle of Latin verb "ferre" – to carry or to bring) [4]. Based on the original meaning of the word, we may create its definition as follows: translation is the action of carrying or bringing across a text from one language into another.

Literary translation, as one of the types of translation, is the art of making a literary work understandable for the readers of foreign language background by preserving the formal and

intentional characteristics of the original. Since humankind was created, it has felt the need to communicate with others by applying various means to do so. One of the oldest methods of meeting this need is language. However, language can only be understood and spoken by those who have acquired it, for which reason the need to translate literary works for the speakers of other languages arose.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a historical and comparative approach to analyze the development of literary translation throughout the history. The research's focus is historical texts and scholarly sources, examining the evolution of translation practices from ancient civilizations to the present day. Various perspectives from different periods, such as the Greek translation of "The Odyssey", the Bible translations of the Middle Ages, and the contributions of Renaissance and Enlightenment thinkers, are compared. Secondary sources, including scholarly articles and books on translation theory and history, provide further insights into the changing role of translation in global literary culture.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are different points of view about the first accomplished translation of a literary work. In her paper "Tarjima tarixi va uning badiiy adabiyotdagi o'rni", Aliyeva B.B. writes that the first work of literary translation belongs to Greek philosopher Livius Andronicus, who lived two thousand years ago. He translated Homer's "Odyssei" [5] into Latin, and since those times artistic translation has been flourishing. A Venezuelan blogger Pacheco V. in her article "Literary translation: an age-old profession", has written that "the earliest examples of literary translation date back to the 3rd century BC, with the Greek version of the epic Babylonian poems of Genesis" [6]. Another earliest example is the translation of Sumerian epos "Epic of Gilgamesh" (earlier it was read as "Bilgames" [7] into Akkadian language. It was translated for creating a combined Akkadian epos "Shūtur eli sharrī" ("Surpassing all other kings"). Similarly ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic texts, including the *Book of the Dead*, were rendered into Greek, when it became the dominant language amongst Egyptian scholars, especially during the Hellenistic era [8].

The medieval period underwent significant developments in the sphere of literary translation. In medieval Europe, translation activities were predominantly centered on the texts of Bible, as the priority of those times' population of Europe was their religion and spiritual values. A popular example of literary translation efforts in Europe is the Wycliffe Bible, completed in 1382 that is known as the first translation of Bible into English by an English scholastic philosopher John Wycliffe. Moreover, a father of English language, Geoffrey Chaucer used secular literary translation in the creation of his work "The Canterbury tales". In other words, he incorporated Italian and French literary sources in his work. The idea of pilgrimage in the narrative was inspired by Italian writer Dante Alighieri's "The divine comedy" [9]. Additionally, most stories of Chaucer's were borrowed and directly translated from the stories of Boccaccio's "Decameron" [10].

The era of Renaissance (XV-XVII centuries) saw a big expansion of literary translation in Europe. During the Renaissance scholars and philosophers had renewed interest in classical texts and made efforts to rediscover ancient Greek and Roman works. In this era also humanism rose. Humanism is defined as a movement emphasizing the study of ancient languages and literature that led to a greater demand for translations of classical texts into the vernacular (the language spoken by ordinary people of a particular country). For example, during this period the Bible was translated into several languages. One of the most notable milestones in the history of the study and interpretation of the Bible was Martin Luther's German translation, which made the Bible more accessible to the general population. Martin Luther's Bible was first published in 1522 that consisted of only New Testament. Its edited variant which included also Old Testament and Apocrypha was published in 1534 [11]. Luther's Bible played a crucial role in the Protestant Reformation. He worked on the development of the texts until 1545. Similarly, the King James Bible translated in the year of 1611, became one of the most influential English translations, helping to shape the English language and literature for centuries. During the Renaissance, literary translation also flourished in the arts and sciences.

Outstanding ancient works such as the writings of Aristotle, Homer, and Virgil were translated from Greek and Latin into the vernacular languages by enriching literature and ideology across Europe. Furthermore, figures like Sir Thomas More and William Shakespeare also contributed to translation efforts, both directly and indirectly, by adapting foreign works into their own plays and writings.

The Enlightenment period (XVIII century) is referred with a significant change in the intellectual life of Europe. In this period there was the increasing importance of print culture that led to the development in the translation of philosophical, political, and scientific works. We may call Voltaire as the key contributor to the field of translation during the Enlightenment, who not only translated works of British literature and philosophy but also contributed significantly to the translation of works on science and politics. His translations of works by English thinkers like John Locke and Isaac Newton were instrumental in introducing Enlightenment ideas to the French-speaking world. Other important figures like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Denis Diderot also contributed to the flourishing of literary translation. The *Encyclopédie*, edited by Diderot and d'Alembert, was itself a major translation project, bringing together knowledge from across Europe and beyond [12]. Translations during this period were often not just linguistic but also involved reinterpretation, as many translators took liberties to adapt and revise foreign works to suit the cultural context of the target audience.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the history of literary translation in ancient and medieval Europe reveals its essential role in the preservation and transmission of knowledge, culture, and religious thought. From the early translations of Homer's *Odyssey* by Livius Andronicus to the Bible translations by John Wycliffe, literary translation served as a crucial bridge between cultures and intellectual traditions. The work of figures such as Geoffrey Chaucer, who adapted foreign literary sources, and the Renaissance scholars who revitalized classical texts, highlights the dynamic nature of translation practices in these periods. Literary translation not only made texts accessible to broader audiences but also facilitated cultural exchange and intellectual development across Europe. As the study of literary translation continues to evolve, it is clear that these early efforts laid the groundwork for the vital role translation plays in today's globalized world, ensuring the continuity and expansion of cultural and literary heritage.

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