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POETRY TRANSLATION AND IDENTIFIED FEATURES OF LANGUAGES IN THE TRANSLATION OF MAYAKOVSKII'S "LEFT MARCH"

It would seem that translation in general continues to baffle even the professional but, even more so, the task of translating poetry.

Firstly, we must determine what a poem is - how it differs from prose. As F.G. Lorka said of poetry, "(it is) the union of two words, which no-one thought could be combined but that once they were, they would express something completely different each time they were said." (Encyclopedic Dictionary of Linguistics, P609). What is perhaps meant by this is that each person interprets a poem in different ways. This is where the first problem appears. In addition, many translators have different opinions of what translation actually is. If a single definition of translation cannot be established, how then can a constant be established? The debate of keeping strictly to the original or developing autonomous alternatives is on-going and it appears that conflict exists between translators. While some translators insist on keeping faithful to the original in order to preserve the poet's words, others argue that in doing this, the translator does not necessarily convey what the poet wants to say. Either way, it seems that something has to be lost in one way and compensated for in another. The most skilled translators have branched away from the original in order to preserve its overall tone. The translator, however, must have the skill of understanding exactly what the poet intended. Once this has been established, he must find a way of translating this meaning. This can be difficult as cultural differences between countries play a part in each language. Preserving this meaning as well as accurately capturing style is a hard task.

Poetry further differs from prose because it is rhythmic. It also, as Mayakovskii suggested, allows a poet to work freely with language, meaning that there are fewer language constraints when writing a poem. This report aims to discuss in particular the difficulty of translating rhyme and rhythm of Russian poetry into German, English and French using Mayakovskii's poem "Левый Марш" as an example because of its unusual style.

Evidently, the rhythm of Mayakovskii's poems was emphasized at the end of the line. He considered "suddenness" to be important in his poems, which contributed to his style. The beginning of each line of his poem "Левый Марш" is considered as calm, contrasting with an abrupt finish, where we notice how both the meaning and tone change. Mayakovskii was not afraid to experiment with words and sounds. As a result, he developed his own unique rhyme. When we start to analyse its translation into German, English and French, the features of each language become apparent. The differences between Russian, German, English and French in terms of language are great. The Russian language, being inflectional, means that word order is more flexible than that of English or French, facilitating both rhyme and meter. Rhyme comes almost naturally in Russian because of its flexibility. English and French, not being inflectional languages, may appear over-elaborate in their attempts to keep the rhyme. However, "the translator does not have the right to forget about rhyme and rhythm because these happen to be more difficult in English than they are in Russian" (Mc.Duff. D, Modern Poetry in Translation, Exeter 1982, P38).

When studying Mayakovskii's "Левый Марш" in the original, we see that there is literally a "march" in its style, giving the poem a definite beat. Mayakovskii also played freely with sounds and therefore not everything in "Левый Марш" rhymes perfectly, e.g. "орлий - горле, пляиться - пальцы". As rhyme contributes towards the style or effete of a poem, and style may contribute to meaning, is it not therefore essential to retain rhyme?

In studying the German translation, we notice that the actual sound of the German language assists the "marching" beat of the poem, which immediately reminds us of the original. The German translation also contains rhyme, almost every time in exactly the same line as the original. Of course, the translation did deviate from the original in order to preserve rhyme and rhythm but, in general, the overall tone and meaning of the Russian original was maintained.

The English translation too kept well to the original, deep meaning of "Левый Марш" even though the translator considered rhyme to be of more importance than a direct translation of the poem, meaning he decided to branch away from the original.

The French translation did not rhyme at all except in verse 3, "imprimez - d'acier". Instead, it kept quite strictly to the original. The French translation does not translate successfully the beat of the original, most likely because French itself is not a language with appropriate intonation or sounds to achieve such a beat and therefore loses the original's rhythm.

Having analysed all three translations, it would appear that the German translation is the most successful in terms of sound, rhythm, rhyme and meaning, and therefore capturing entirely the mood of Mayakovskii's original. We also notice that there is much more to translating than just the translation of words. Translating successfully involves a number of processes as is evident from having studied the translation of Mayakovskii's poem "Левый Марш" into German, English and French.