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# ALEXANDER PUSHKIN'S *WINTER EVENING* IN ARMENIAN AND ENGLISH TRANSLATION

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**Abstract:** This research dwells upon prominent Russian writer Alexander Pushkin's poetry in light of translation. More specifically, one of Pushkin's most famous poems – “Winter Evening” has been selected to be analyzed with regard to its translation in Armenian and English. This study aims to reveal the major challenges that the translators have faced while rendering the poem from Russian into Armenian and English as well as to disclose the discrepancies that exist between the original and the translated texts. Also, an attempt will be made to identify the major lexical, grammatical, stylistic and syntactic shifts that have occurred in the translation process in order to assess the degree of translation accuracy and pinpoint whether or not the translated texts impact the target-language readers to the same extent as the original.

**Key words:** poetry translation, writing style, lexical transformations, stylistic shifts, translation methods

## 1. Introduction

Written poetry is said to date back as far as 4300 years and is regarded as the most ancient record of human literature. The origins of poetry are believed to reach even further into the past, to a time when literacy had not yet developed and poems were passed on from one generation to the next in oral traditions. It was in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that experimentations with the poetic form began based on the traditional forms that had appeared hundreds of years before.

Poetry is a unique form of verbal art that is able to give shape to the author's innermost feelings and emotions. The ideas that the author expresses resonate with the readers allowing them to dive into the secret recesses of their souls and explore the deep-seated feelings there. Other than eliciting strong emotional reactions, poetry is also highly valued for the aesthetic pleasure it gives to the readers. It is a salient feature that lies at the heart of human motivation to engage in art reception.

Poetry is a complex system and all the elements making up poetry are of great significance since a single word or rhyme may arouse feelings. The author constantly plays with words imbued with intricate meanings that can be revealed at a ‘deeper’ level that's why to be able to understand poetry one should have a deeper understanding of literature. It is those features that make poetry different from other genres.

With that said, it comes as no surprise that translating poetry is an uphill battle. It is hard to interpret a poem in your mother tongue let alone in a foreign language. Translating poetry is therefore needed to enjoy poetry to the fullest.

Amongst major translation issues, poetry translation is the most challenging area both for translators and specialists in translation studies. Poetry enjoys great literary prestige and it requires great stamina, time and creativity to render the structure, meter, rhyme, rhythm and the metaphorical language of poetry from one language into another. Not only should the translator strive to maintain the aesthetic value of the poem, but he/she should also make certain that the socio-cultural problems inherent in the original are adequately delivered to the target audience. It is all these elements which make up that complex system and it is the translator's job to pay equal attention to all of them. As Bassnett puts it "...the deficiencies of a translation are attributable to an overemphasis of one or more elements of a poem to the detriment of the whole" (Bassnett 1994:81-2).

There are a wide range of methods proposed by different translation theorists as far as the translation of poetry is concerned. Particularly noteworthy and apparently the most comprehensive are the seven methods suggested by Belgium theorist André Lefevere who showed quite a pragmatic approach to the issue of translation (Bassnett 1994:81-2). The seven methods of poetry translation put forth by him are as follows:

*Phonemic translation* (aims to reproduce the sound of the original text in the target language capturing the sense at the same time);

*Literal translation* (distorts both the syntax and the stylistic aspects of the original through word-for-word rendering of the source text);

*Metrical translation* (reproduces the meter, yet the stylistic qualities of the text get lost);

*Poetry into prose* (disregards the stylistic value and syntax of the text and concentrates on the sense);

*Rhymed translation* (preserves the rhyme scheme and metre of the source text to create something that will sound like the original);

*Blank verse translation* (imposes restrictions on the translator, but enables the translator to attain a high level of accuracy);

*Interpretation* (delivers the message of the original text, yet destroys the form).

Edwin Gentzler notes that Lefevere contended that the translator's task "is precisely to render the source text, the original author's interpretation of a given theme expressed in a number of variations, accessible to readers not familiar with these variations, by replacing the original author's variation with their equivalents in a different language, time place and tradition" (qtd. in Gentzler 1993).

We believe that some of the above-mentioned techniques can be picked carefully and combined to achieve a high degree of accuracy with regard to the aesthetic value and overall sense of the poem. Undoubtedly, it is easier said than done, especially if the word is about the poems penned by Alexander Pushkin. Approaching Pushkin for translation is daunting since he is one of the biggest Russian classics whom pretty much everyone knows.

The challenges that translators are confronted with result not only from the author's individual writing style but also the peculiarities of the source language itself which

allow the writer to play with words in a way that they are comprehensible to professional readers who speak that specific language as a mother tongue.

Russian words and expressions possess multiple semantic layers and stylistic overtones which at first glance may seem impossible to be fully conveyed to a target language. Pushkin's simple, yet exceptionally unique vocabulary and style of writing only add up to that. He uses words in a totally different way. He gives them new meanings, changes them with regard to their forms, however, they sound highly authentic and only enrich the Russian language.

All-Armenian writer Hovhannes Toumanian undertook the challenging task of translating one of the most famous poems penned by Pushkin. These two great minds, in fact, share much in common in terms of poetry. They both sought to portray life as it was, to enrich the language they spoke as a mother tongue and educate people through the art of writing (Hakobyan 2010:47).

## 2. Alexander Pushkin's *Winter Evening* in Light of Translation

In the scope of this paper we attempt to reveal the translation peculiarities of a famous poem by Alexander Pushkin – “Winter Evening.”

Our main goal is to highlight the transformations that the text has undergone in the translation process. Thus, let's take a look at the poem part by part and draw analogies between the original and its Armenian and English versions (rendered by Hovhannes Toumanian and Cecil Maurice Bowra, respectively).

Our primary goal is to reveal the major challenges that the translators encountered while rendering the poem into their mother tongues.

Let's take a look at the first stanza:

Буря мглою небо кроет,  
Вихри снежные крутя;  
То, как зверь, она завоет,  
То заплачет, как дитя,  
То по кровле обветшалой  
Вдруг соломой зашумит,  
То, как путник запоздалый,  
К нам в окошко застучит. (Pushkin 1974:47)

Հողմը մեզով երկինքն առնում,  
Գալարում է բուքը ձյան,  
Մին՝ մանկան պես լաց է լինում,  
Մին՝ ոռնում է գերթ գազան.  
Մին՝ վայրենի սուլում պես-պես,  
Աղմբկում է տանիքում,  
Մին՝ ուշացած ճամփորդ, ասես,  
Լուսամուտն է նա թակում: (Toumanian 1985:141)

As it can be seen certain changes have been made in the first stanza of the Armenian version of the poem with regard to structure. The third and fourth lines have swapped their places which is done for a purpose, of course, i.e. to create the perfect rhyme. The same has happened to lines five and six. Furthermore, Tumanyan has fully replaced the former (То по кровле обветшало́й) with a single word – ‘տաւնիք’ (lit. ‘roof’). The phrase ‘соломой зашумит’ has appeared in the fifth line with a totally different interpretation – ‘Մին՝ վայրենի սուլունս պէս-պէս.’ Despite the fact that much has been changed in the Armenian version of the poem, the translator has managed to depict the bitterly cold winter typical of Russia with an old shabby hut trying to survive the harsh winter. The power of Tumanyan’s pen is under no question, yet, the translated version of the poem seems to be imbued with Armenianness. His use of the vernacular is ubiquitous. In terms of his consummate skills to impeccably portray any image, he is second to none, yet the style in which the author has written the poem is slightly different to what we have in Armenian. Many typically Armenian lexical elements – the numeral ‘մին’ and the adjective ‘պէս-պէս’ have been incorporated into the Armenian text, which, other than ringing a bell in the Armenian readers, lend a new ambiance to the poem.

In black skies a storm is streaming,  
Snowy whirlwind, rude and wild,  
Like a savage beast now screaming,  
Now lamenting like a child,  
On the roof dilapidated  
Shakes the thatch with sudden shocks,  
Like a traveller belated  
Loudly on the window knocks. (RuVerses.com)

As regards the English translation of the poem it should be noted that the translator has adequately decoded and successfully imparted to the English reader Pushkin’s writing style, his multifarious, multilayered vocabulary too. Despite the huge difference between the English and Russian languages, the translator has tried to fully retain the Russianness inherent in the poem. The connotative meanings of most nouns and adjectives employed in the source text have been fully conveyed in the English version. What we mean here is that the text has not been domesticated or foreignized to conform to the target culture.

In the first line – ‘Буря...кромет’ has been rendered as ‘*the storm is streaming*’ which is an example of paraphrase. The translator has painted the same picture in other words. In the original, the author explicitly expresses the idea of the skies blanketed in the storm, whereas in the English translation this idea is just implied. In the second line we have lexical additions. The adjectives ‘*rude*’ and ‘*wild*’ have been added to make the utterance more expressive, whereas the verb ‘*кромет*’ has been left out. The same idea has been expressed through the noun ‘*whirlwind*’ where the word ‘*whirl*’ implies the meaning of moving quickly in circles. In the sixth line, ‘Вдруг соломой зашумит’ has been rendered as ‘*shakes the thatch with sudden shocks*’ where ‘зашумит’ has been replaced by ‘*shake with sudden shocks.*’ The whole sentence has been

paraphrased, although the picture of a worn-out thatched roof of a shabby hub seems to be created in the reader's mind.

Наша ветхая лачужка  
И печальна и темна.  
Что же ты, моя старушка,  
Приумолкла у окна?  
Или бури завываьем  
Ты, мой друг, утомлена,  
Или дремлешь под жужжаньем  
Своего веретена? (ibid.)

Մեր խորճիթը աղքատ ու հին,  
Ե՛վ մըթին է, և՛ տըխուր.  
— Ի՞նչ ես նըստել պատի տակին,  
Իմ պառավըս, էրպես լուռ:  
Հոգնե՞լ ես դու փոթորիկի  
Ոռնոցներից խելագար,  
Թե՞ նիհուս ես քո իլիկի  
Բըզզոցի տակ միալար: (ibid.)

Our poor hut is old and crazy,  
Melancholy and unlit.  
Why, old friend, so still and lazy,  
By the window do you sit?  
Is there nothing you remember?  
Has the loud wind struck you dumb?  
Are you dropping off to slumber  
With the spindle's drowsy hum? (ibid.)

Here, noteworthy is the stylistic interpretation of the original text. In the fourth line the word ‘старушка’ is translated as ‘պառավըս’ which seems to not have the same connotation as its Russian counterpart. In Russian the word ‘старушка’ is a diminutive and it is used as a term of endearment. Although it seems to be the only logical translation, we believe, it does not possess the same connotative overtone. Also, the use of the vernacular should be highlighted as well which presupposes the existence of multiple grammatical errors such as the use of a possessive article and a possessive pronoun at a time ‘Իմ պառավըս.’ Well, clearly Tumanyan has done it on purpose. We just contend that it somewhat contradicts the original text with regard to style. Also, the word ‘окна’ has been substituted by ‘պատ’ (Eng. ‘wall’) which is an example of domestication.

In the English version ‘моя старушка’ is rendered as ‘old friend’ which better implies the meaning of the original, yet the touch of endearment is lost again. Other than its primary meaning, ‘старушка’ is often used to mean ‘my beloved friend’ with no reference to age. Furthermore, the verb ‘приумолкла’ (Eng. ‘fall silent’) in the original text has been rendered as ‘լուռ նստել’ and ‘sit still and lazy’ into Armenian

and English, respectively. In both cases, it can be looked upon as lexical concretization through the use of the word 'sit.' Besides, in the English version the adjectives 'still and lazy' implicitly denote the fact that the character was silent.

Выпьем, добрая подружка  
Бедной юности моей,  
Выпьем с горя; где же кружка?  
Сердцу будет веселей.  
Спой мне песню, как синица  
Тихо за морем жила;  
Спой мне песню, как девица  
За водой поутру шла. (ibid.)

Արի խըմենք, բարի ընկեր  
Իմ սև, ջահել օրերի,  
Խըմենք դարդից, բաժակըդ բե՛ր,  
Միրտներըս բաց կըլինի:

Երգի՛ր, ո՞նց էր ապրում խաղաղ  
Հավքը ծովի էն ափին,  
Երգի՛ր, ո՞նց էր աղջիկը վաղ  
Ջուրը գնում մինչ արփին: (ibid.)

The third stanza is notable too in terms of the changes made in the Armenian translation. The word 'юность' has been translated into Armenian through the use of the idiom 'ջահել օրեր' to retain the rhyme. The meaning of the adjective 'бедный' has been transferred to the target language through an idiom as well – 'սև օր' meaning 'misery.' The Armenian translator has grammatically altered the third line. The interrogative sentence 'где же кружка?' in the original has turned into an imperative one: 'բաժակըդ բե՛ր' to rhyme with the last word in line one. As it can be discerned Tumanyan employs idioms quite frequently which form part of the vernacular as well. In the same fashion an idiom ('միրտը բաց լինի') has been used to render the phrase 'Сердцу будет веселей' into the target language which, being typically Armenian, foreignizes the text. In the last line, the time adverbial 'ночью' has been rendered into Armenian metaphorically – 'մինչ արփին' (lit. 'before the sun'). Furthermore, here the word 'արփի' has been employed figuratively to imply 'sunset.' Thus it can be stated that Tumanyan has played with words while translating one of Pushkin's most famous poems into Armenian. He has charged it stylistically to make it sound as poetic as it does in Russian.

Let us drink, my friend, unshrinking  
Helper in young manhood's pain.  
Where's the cup? Grief calls for drinking!  
Hearts will now be glad again!  
Sing the Tomtit ever watching  
Silently beyond the sea,



Sing the Maiden who went fetching  
Water, — in the dawn went she. (ibid.)

Also noteworthy is the English translation of the poem which has undergone multiple changes to reach its English-speaking readership. Here the word ‘*добрая подружка*’ has been translated as ‘*friend unshrinking*’ in which case not only do we have a lexical substitution but also a postpositive adjective. The latter is done to create a rhyme. The choice of the adjective ‘*unshrinking*’ seems to serve the same purpose as well. The English for ‘*добрая*’ is ‘*kind*’ which has been replaced by an adjective which more or less fits the context but does not fully convey the meaning of the original. The translator has also added the word ‘*helper*’ to convey a sense of intimacy or endearment which is already implied in the Russian word ‘*подружка*’ as a diminutive. Interesting is the translation of the fifth line where through the capitalization of the word ‘*Tomtit*’ the translator refers to it as the title of a song the author asks his friend to sing as in the case of ‘*Maiden*’ in line seven. Unlike this in the original the author describes the songs without referring to them as titles. There are also multiple alterations with regard to syntax, mostly made to retain the prosody of the original.

### 3. Conclusion

In simplicity of style and yet with great depth of meaning, Alexander Pushkin’s literary creations are chef d’oeuvre and unmatched in their kind. “*Winter Evening*” is surely a work that must be read to feel all the powerful talent of Pushkin, the general attitude, admiration and anguish. Obviously enough, it takes great talent and skill to translate Pushkin’s works. It is by no chance that all-Armenian writer Hovhannes Tumanyan has ventured to translate Pushkin.

Our in-depth analysis enables us to infer that in case of both the Armenian and English translation of “*Winter Evening*” the translators have fully decoded and successfully imparted to the readers Pushkin’s writing style, his multifarious, multilayered vocabulary. Despite the huge difference between the source and target languages, the translators have adequately retained the Russianness inherent in the poem. This is especially true for the English translation of the poem. The style of the poem has mostly been preserved. What we mean here is that in case of the English translation, the text has not been domesticated to conform to the target culture, whereas in case of Tumanyan’s translation, it has been foreignized - Armenianized. Toumanian seems to have created another chef d’oeuvre out of Pushkin’s poem. He fully and accurately delivers the author’s message injecting some extra love into it which adds a veritable kaleidoscope of color.

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