

Ferens N.O.
Exegesis in Translation of Literature

*Ferens Natalia Oleksandrivna, postgraduate student
 assistant professor at the Department of theory and practice of translation from English, Institute of Philology,
 Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Kyiv, Ukraine*

Abstract. The term ‘hermeneutics’ has growingly been used in translation studies both to mean a practical tool of understanding the original author and a number of philosophic approaches to interpretation. This often results in confusion, especially in post-Soviet translation studies that have only recently incorporated the cultural turn paradigms and are still dominated by the linguistic paradigm. The article suggests adopting a synonymic term ‘exegesis’ to mean the initial understanding of the original text by translator and argues that this seemingly medieval notion can be revived in the context of modern translator’s ethos.

Keywords: *Schleiermacherian hermeneutics, ontological hermeneutics, exegesis, translation, interpretation*

Translation studies have included hermeneutics into their regular range of terms since Schleiermacher as another synonym for *understanding via interpretation* – as well as *interpretation via understanding*. Generally, in humanitarian studies the terms ‘exegesis’ and ‘hermeneutics’ are often used interchangeably, but the latter is much more frequent and technically covers a wider range of concepts and practices, reaching far beyond a simple critical explanation of the text.

In the 20th century the Schleiermacherian notion of hermeneutics as a combination of grammatical and technical interpretation aimed at reaching through symbolic conventions of the language/languages and understanding the ever unconventional Other (an individual figure or a whole culture) [2] was next to substituted by a virtually contradictory concept. The ontological turn shifted the focus of hermeneutics from the romantic congeniality with the Other to the interplay between interpreter’s understanding of the world and her or his self-understanding. Gadamer’s hermeneutic humanism took things even farther, introducing the idea of co-determination of the interpreter and the thing interpreted, through which the interpreter achieves a more profound understanding of both the text and *her or his own self*. Since then Gadamer’s successors and interpreters have been delving deeper and deeper into the abyss of ontological hermeneutics, looking, essentially, for a way to overcome uncertainty towards the very notions of truth and validity of interpretation or to deconstruct the dualistic paradigms and metaphysical approaches in modern philosophy. The focus of interpretation was – and still is – predominantly placed on the importance of understanding the interpreter’s own self. ‘Practical’ hermeneutics – the one more or less synonymic to exegesis – almost lost its relevance as a subject.

In contrast to this, in translation studies hermeneutics is still regarded primarily as a useful, applicable tool and generally evolves from the Schleiermacherian stem, Schleiermacher’s triadic model being revised, in particular, by George Steiner who introduced the idea of fourfold ‘hermeneutic motion’ [9]. But as the omnipresent transdisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity bleed upon the field and fruits of the cultural turn ripen, more and more advanced scholars seem to feel an urge to incorporate philosophy’s agenda and particularly ontological aspects of hermeneutics into their studies.

On the one hand, Schleiermacher’s legacy is still an object of reflection and a source of models and strategies; on the other hand, for example, Ricoeur’s essentially ontological ideas, concerning, among other things, the no-

tion of hermeneutics, can be suggested as a new ethos for translators, a ‘model of translation’ to ‘reconcile identity and alterity’ in the emerging global world [6, p. 252].

Such synthesis is nothing new to the general paradigm of today’s translation studies that have become something not dissimilar to a crossroads between a number of humanitarian disciplines. Yet, there seems to have emerged a growing need for a neat division between hermeneutics-as-a-tool and ontological hermeneutics. Introducing a new term to ensure such a division looks like a sound option, in particular with translation studies within the post-Soviet tradition. It is only in the recent decades that the latter have started to incorporate the cultural turn paradigms and the associated philosophic approaches to studying translation, and these have blended with the still dominant linguistic paradigm. The resulting fusion of older trends and terms and those newly perceived and received often resembles, rather, a *con*-fusion, with hermeneutics – a tricky manifold concept in itself – being, seemingly, one of the most puzzling notions.

And this is where the term ‘exegesis’ and the concept it encompasses may come into prominence.

In philosophy, exegesis usually covers a narrower range of notions than that included into the idea of hermeneutics. According to an authoritative contemporary philosophic encyclopedia, exegesis as a means of understanding aims merely to achieve ‘a kind of immanent interpretation of the text that excludes its genetic, historical, symbolic, mythological, allegoric or any other external explanation’ [1]

As a tool of understanding, exegesis is regarded ‘not as the drawing of meanings into the text, a process that allows for a variety of readings and ways to make the text full of sense, but rather as a correct, or valid understanding of the text aiming to re-construct its initial meaning’ [ibid], which seems to be very close to the Schleiermacherian romantic ambition of reaching a congeniality with the Other.

This is hardly surprising, as Schleiermacher was actually a theologian who applied the experience of understanding Bible to other contexts. Biblical hermeneutics – or exegesis – is strict and exact and fundamentally strives to answer the question ‘How to read?’ In contrast to this, modern hermeneutics’ primary question is rather ‘How do we communicate at all?’ (according to, for example, ‘Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy’ [7]). Schleiermacher is said to be one of the pioneers who introduced the shift; however, as pioneers usually do, he seems to belong equally to the ‘previous’ and the ‘following’ context, and

it is the later interpreters who have 'liberated' his teachings from the inevitable influence of the pattern he is said to have changed.

In studies of literature and translation of literature the question 'How to read?' has undoubtedly remained relevant, as they deal with texts in the first place. The turn from reading to communication equipped the scholars in this field with new concepts and extended the range of contextual readings available to them – historical, symbolic, allegoric, mythological, ironical or any other. Yet, when it comes to providing a basic understanding of what the author originally means, it is the unimaginative, restricting and re-constructing exegesis that plays the part.

In translation, however, one can never stay confined within the limits of basic understanding. A translator *must* translate, that is, provide an interpretation. The very nature of translation always means change, and a global one – a shift between cultures, lingual mediums, epochs, subjectivities, and modes of thought. Thus, exegesis can be only applied in translation as a an initial tool – but not without its implications on ethos.

Exegesis, initially concerning understanding of sacred texts like Bible or Quran, aimed to *draw out* the meaning from their allegories. The process when the interpreter is *drawing in* an external meaning – something that in the recent decades both certain trends in ontological hermeneutics and translation strategies like domestication seemingly have championed – is called eisegesis.

In theological contexts eisegesis is usually disapproved, but when we apply the idea to the practices of literature translation, it does not – at least at the first glance – look blasphemous at all. It seems to fall in the line with the domestication strategy – which in the case of translation from global languages like English is no less subversive, resistant and daring than Venuti's radical foreignization [9] within the context of translation from the 'less global' languages into English. In Ukraine, in particular, the national culture always highly depended on translated material as a means of development and a way of resisting cultural pressure first from Imperial Russia (and Imperial Austro-Hungary and Poland) and then from Soviet Russia. Domestication, thus, has been a popular translation strategy among Ukrainian translators in the 20th century, and bold experiments with both the Ukrainian language and the source material were – and still are – anything but uncommon.

However, at a closer look strategies like domestication or foreignization do not appear to match up directly with, correspondingly, eisegesis and exegesis. Both a domesticating and a foreignizing translation can be either exegetic or eisegetic in nature according to whether the interpreter made an initial effort of understanding the author or simply decided to draw a meaning in instead of trying to draw one out.

From this point of view eisegesis in translation may look as condemning as in theology. However, the eisegetic translator is at least partly redeemed by the fact that nowadays translation is a matter of choice with no strict canon around, and no such thing as translational sacrilege exists – at least within the theory line, for when it comes to a particular author being, as it may seem, profanized translationally, a dramatic reaction may follow.

As Douglas Robinson states it, a translator's version of the author's work can be *re-verse*, *sub-verse*, *con-verse*, *per-verse*, and, seemingly, *any-verse*, with perverse translation being 'the warping of a reader's trust beyond replacement or redirection: a confusion, an unraveling of response, a stymieing of response, a putting the TL reader at sixes and sevens with regard to the SL text' [6, p. 232]. A perverse translation is regarded as a product of 'ideosomatically correct thinking, precisely parodic, a senseless turning inside-out-and-upside-down-and-every-which-way of all that our culture holds ideosomatically dear. We value meaning? Strive for meaningless (Dada). We value order? Sow chaos (Aleatory art). We value truth? Glory in useless lies (Oscar Wilde, aestheticism). We value morality? Cultivate amorality (The Marquis de Sade). We value the metaphysics of present? Deconstruct (Jacques Derrida)' [Ibid].

Translational perversion seems to be much in line with the early postmodernist values of not regarding anything as valuable, the very idea of a playful iconoclasm (which differs dramatically from a cynical ignorance of post-postmodernism) seeming the only exception to the rule. But even a perverse translation is not necessarily eisegetic: an educated blasphemy requires a lot of thoughtfulness and sense – another postmodernist paradox. A blasphemous interpreter initially may be an Eco's *lettore modello*, full of cognitive reverence and making a deeply exegetic preparation with the SL text to then create a truly perverse TL version.

Thus, exegesis in translation is not so much about the product of translation (though its being there definitely shows for an attentive critic or even an intent and educated reader, no matter how far the translator may have decided to go in her or his interpretational shift) as about the process, and about the preparation stage in particular. The study of the historical and cultural backgrounds for the author and the text and analysis of grammatical, syntactical and lexical features of the latter, as exegesis implies, all mean to turn the translator into the *lettore modello* as suggested, in particular, by James Holmes, who says that a good 'metapoet' (i.e. translator of poetry) should possess 'acumen as a critic, craftsmanship as a poet, and skill in the analysing and resolving of a confrontation of norms and conventions across linguistic and cultural barriers in the making of appropriate decisions' [3, p.13-14].

Exegesis in translation is the initial tool, an initial attitude of the translator, something that comes even before the choice of strategy: their desire for a dialogue with the author. And as such, translator's exegesis does not mean translator's humbling or invisibility.

Modern philosophy regards exegesis not as reviving medieval scholastic tradition as a way of interpretation or a new cultural paradigm, but rather means 'to update its initial striving for an immanent interpretation and seeing understanding as reconstructing of the initial meaning' [1]. Being in line with late postmodernist desire for the validity of understanding that comes in the 20th century much as a response to the eisegetic forgetfulness and barbarism of the coming post-postmodernism, this new look at a revised, redeemed exegesis – a neo-exegesis, so to say – implicates, seemingly, its Talmudic and not Hellenistic nature.

Within the Hellenistic, or Socratic dialogue understanding is inevitably dichotomist and has much to do with rivalry, as in order for one side to be right the other *must* be wrong. Medieval scholastic and Biblical exegesis is essentially Hellenistic, and Schleiermacherian tragic view of translation stems from this dichotomist logic of somebody (interpreter) necessarily being wrong if only the Other (author) is right – and vice versa.

In contrast to this, a Talmudic dialogue, as it can be conceived from the works of Martin Buber (whose paradigm of mutual understanding is championed in translation studies by Robinson's dialogical theory of translation [6]) and Emmanuel Lévinas, does not exclude the possibility that *both* participants of the dialogue are right, no matter how contradicting their points may look. According to Lévinas, the aim of a dispute within the paradigm of Talmudic exegesis is not to prove that somebody is right or wrong, but rather to reconcile (but not necessarily to resolve) the differences and open a new piece of truth. Comprehending the Other, or the exegesis of the Other is based upon understanding where the Other initially comes from, irrespective of the immediate context, and accepting, rather than dreading or resenting this otherness [4].

To an average person, translation of a literary work is something not dissimilar to plain and simple restatement

of what the author has said, just using different words. For a translator or a scholar of translation it is obvious, of course, how far from the reality this naive belief is. The basic exegetic understanding can be reduced to plain restating – but in translation one can never avoid the drawing in of the external meanings that are defined by the specifics of the target language or culture; by the *zeitgeist* or the interpreter's wish to discard the trends; and by translator's own subjectivity. However, all this essentially does not make the translator wrong, and that is why conceptually exegesis in translation is of the open-to-dialogue nature.

As an applied tool, translator's exegesis is about the initial re-constructing of the original context and meaning and gives one the answer to the question 'How to read (the text before translating it)?' However, as an applied ethical paradigm in line with late postmodernist search for validity, translator's exegesis deals with the interpreter's initial desire of becoming the *lettore modello* and truly comprehending the Other – the author. It is about opening a dialogue with the author and entering a humanist interaction rather than starting a mindless guessing game of eisegetic irony or, worse, cynicism.

REFERENCES (TRANSLATED AND TRANSLITERATED)

1. История философии. Энциклопедия. Составитель и главный научный редактор А.А. Грицанов – Мн.: Интерпрессервис; Книжный Дом. 2002. [Э-ресурс] / История философии. – <http://www.psylib.org.ua/books/gritz01/index.html>.
2. Шлейермахер Ф. О разных методах перевода / Ф. Шлейермахер. // Вестник Московского университета. Сер. : Филология. – 2000. – № 2. – С. 127–145.
3. Holmes, James S. Forms of Verse Translation and the Translation of Verse Form/ Holmes, James S. Traslated! Papers on Literary Translation and Translation Studies. – Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988. – 117 p.
4. Lévinas, Emmanuel. Humanism of the Other. University of Illinois Press, 2003 – Philosophy – 83 p.
5. Nouss A. Translation and métissage // In Translation – Reflections, Refractions, Transformations. Edited by Paul St-Pierre and Prafulla C. Kar – Vol.71, Philadelphia, USA: John Benjamins North America, 2007. – pp 246-252.
6. Robinson, D. the Translator's Turn – Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1991. – 318 p.
7. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy – [Online] Available at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hermeneutics/>
8. Steiner G. After Babel. Aspects of Language and Translation / G.Steiner. – UK : Oxford University Press, 1975. – 519 p.
9. Venuti L. The Translator's Invisibility. A History of Translation / L.Venuti. – L.–N.Y. : Routledge, 1995. – 345 p.

Ференс Н.А. Экзегетика в литературном переводе

Аннотация. Термин “герменевтика” в науке о переводе в последнее время употребляется как для обозначения практического инструментария, используемого для первоначального понимания оригинального автора, так и в контексте целого спектра философских подходов к осмыслению перевода. В результате возникает путаница, особенно на постсоветском пространстве, где студии перевода только в последние десятилетия восприняли достижения культурного поворота и где до сих пор доминирует лингвистический подход. В статье предлагается употреблять для обозначения инструментария, который обеспечивает первоначального понимание текста переводчиком, синонимичный термин “экзегетика” или “экзегеза”. Приводятся аргументы в пользу того, что это понятие из арсенала средневековой схоластики может быть возрождено в контексте деятельности современных переводчиков литературы.

Ключевые слова: шлейермахеровская герменевтика, онтологическая герменевтика, экзегетика, экзегеза, перевод, интерпретация