

**Congressus Quintus
Internationalis Fenno-Ugristarum**
Turku 20.-27. VIII. 1980

Pars VII



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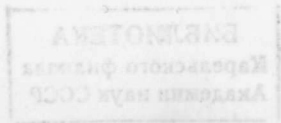
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PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATING FOLKLORE POETRY INTO MODERN LANGUAGES

The paper is concerned with the translations of Karelian and Finnish folklore epic and Elias Lönnrot's "Kalevala" into a number of European languages.

The following sources have been used: the English translations in the book "Finnish Folk Poetry. Epic" (Helsinki 1977) and various translations of "Kalevala" into Russian, Polish, German, English, Swedish, Danish, Norwegian and Estonian. The numbered list of editions is given at the end of the paper, references are made according to this list (number of edition and number of page.)

An adequate translation of any text is based primarily on the profound understanding of this text. Poetry often creates puzzling and vexing problems for the translator. Poetry isn't satisfied with direct (dictionary) meanings of the words, but deals with unique semantic subtleties, figurative associations or with what is called "read into the reading" - approach. A poetic work may allow several interpretations considerably differing from one another, even mutually exclusive. It may contain several semantic layers which can be revealed only after repeated readings, depending on the spiritual experience of the reader.

There is another thing which makes understanding and translating of folklore epic even more complicated. By origin it is a very archaic poetry. It developed and functioned in a totally different historical and cultural epoch, among people with a completely different habitat and absolutely different world outlook, as compared to these of modern man. In ancient times epic vocabulary might have had different meanings of the words, from those they have in modern dictionaries. During many centuries (even thousands of years, as it is sometimes supposed) of oral functioning of some epic motifs the seman-

tics of their vocabulary and figurative expressions couldn't but change, having undergone a long historical evolution. Traces of these changes are observed in epic poems.

It is known that archaic epic preserves the influence of mythology and mythological type of human thought. The primitive mythological consciousness was still relatively syncretic, undifferentiated one. Definitely separated ideas of natural and supernatural, material and spiritual were not crystallized in it. The conceptions of time and space, the picture of man's surroundings and the whole universe were somewhat specific. Being syncretic the ancient mythological consciousness was not abstract at that; its images of things were by no means abstract symbols and allegories that are used in modern literature. All this has left an imprint on the ancient folklore poetry, on its vocabulary and image system.

On the other hand modern standard languages, their lexical and syntactical categories are the result of enormous analytical activity of human brain during many centuries. Any modern language as a system expresses quite a different physical and mental world from that of ancient times. That is why translators of folklore poetry often come across features of the archaic language, which are very difficult, if possible at all, to reproduce adequately by means of a modern language. For example the very words "laulu", "virsi", "sana" in folklore context often have syncretic meanings, combining magic and ordinary features, mythological and aesthetic ones. For example "sana" may denote "a word" and "a spell", and "virsi" means "a song" and "charms". In archaic semantics both meanings exist undifferentiated, more or less inseparable. But these words in various songs may lack their magic sense, everything being dependent on the given context, on the degree of evolution the semantics of the archaic word has undergone. It can be said that depending on the context the degree of magic meaning of one and the same word may vary from 100 per cent to zero. The word may have magic, less magic and absolutely nonmagic meaning.

As an example the word "tarkka" can be analysed in the three

different types of context, and accordingly with three different meanings, I suppose.

1. a) Läksi vanha Väinämöine
läksi neittä kozjomah
taimenta tavottamaha
pimiestä Pohjolasta
tarkasta Tapiivolasta. (1, 128)
- b) Tapiolan tarkka ukko,
Itse Metsolan isäntä... (12, 323)
- c) Ei ole Šeppä Šen parempi
eikä ni tarkempi takoja
još Šynty Šysimäjellä
kašvoi hiilikankahalla. (1, 98)
- d) Siinä virsikäs Vipunen
Kyllä lauloi ja osasi,
Ei ole kuultu, eikä nähty
Sitä ilmoisena ikänä
Parempata laulajata,
Tarkempata taitajata (12, 135)
2. a) Sano vanha Väinämöini
sano tarkkoja tosija:
kunne läksit Väinämöini? (1, 136)
- b) Kuka päivöin etsijäks
kuun tarkoin tähystäjäks? (1, 200)
- c) Ahti Lemminkäinen was:
Korvalta ylen korea,
Kovin tarkka kuulennalta. (12, 220)
- d) Also about Lemminkäinen:
Katsoi toiste, katsoi tarkoin... (12, 337)
3. a) Väinämöinen speaks about himself:
Tuot' en tarkoin tunnekana,
Mikä sorti suuren äänen... (12, 173)
- b) Mother says to Lemminkäinen, who is leaving for Pohjola:
Ei sua kutsuttu sinne,
Ei tarkoin tahatakona! (12, 221)

c) From advice to a bride in a wedding-song:

Piteä sinun pitävi
 Pää tarkka, tanea mieli,
 Aina ankara ajatus,
 Ymmärrys yhen tasainen,
 Iltaisella silmät virkut
 Valkeata vaalimahan,
 Aamuisella korvat tarkat
 Kukon ääntä kuulemahan! (12, 186)

Now let's see how the word "tarkka" is translated by different translators. The translators of "Finnish Folk Poetry. Epic" in the first two types of context (I haven't come across the third type in their book) translate this word as "careful"; careful Tapivola (1, 128), careful smith Ilmollinen (1, 98), and for "sanos tarkkoja tosija" they put "just tell the truth carefully" (1, 136). Thus it seems that the Finnish word "tarkka" is taken here in the modern dictionary meaning and semantic gradations of historical character have not been taken into consideration. In the same book the words "tarkka tammi" are translated as "steadfast oak-tree" (1, 263) and the words "sielt mie löysin veljyeni miesten seppien seasta, naisten tarkkojen tarelta" - as "there I found my brother among the smithmen, among the worthy women" (1, 264).

On the same lines work some other translators, for example in translations into German: "Tapiolas wacher Alter" (5, 303); "auch der alte Tapiolas, selbst der wache Herr des Waldes" (6, I, 264); into Danish: "Tapiogubben, vagtsom Gamling" (9, 264); into Russian "Бодрый Тапиолы старец" (2, 267) and "Строгий старец Тапиолы" (3, 244).

On the other hand W. F. Kirby translates it as "sage of Tapiola" (7, II, 162) and A. Annist as "Tapiola tarka taati" (11, 277). In Estonian and some other Baltic-Finnish languages (Karelian, Vepsian, Vatian) the word "tarkka" means "wise". In the context of the first type exactly the old wisdom of magic character is meant. In the expressions "tarkempi takoja" and "tarkka tammi" a magic smith and a magic mythological oak are implied as well.

The ancient semantics of the word "tarkka" was taken into consideration by German, Danish and Russian translators as well. In the translation of the example 1d the magic meaning is emphasized:

Nimmer ward gehört, gesehen,
 Nie solang die Zeiten dauern,
 Wohl ein besrer Zaubersänger,
 Nie ein stärkrer Sprüchekenner. (5, 137)

Now let's discuss contextual examples of the second type. The word "tarkka" still retains here its magic semantics but already relatively weakened, as some relic phenomenon. From the general context of poems in question it is evident that Väinämöinen and Lemminkäinen are magic singers (in the example 2b Jesus Christ is meant). Such their qualities as eyesight, hearing, the knowledge of the truth are also of magic character. But in the concrete position in which the word "tarkka" is met in the examples of the second type, its archaic mythological sense became vague to a considerable degree, being supplanted by a new (modern, dictionary) meaning: tarkka korva, katsoa tarkoin, ilmaista tarkka (täysi) tosi. In these cases the english word "careful" seems more appropriate in the translations.

Other translators also try to avoid words with magic semantics in the examples of the second type. The expression "kuulla tarkkoja tosia" (12, 140) they translate as:

Kuulda tötta täielista (11, 119)

If the truth you will not tell me (7, I, 198)

Если правды не услышу (2, 112)

The example 2c is rendered by many translators of "Kalevala" according to the principle:

And his ears were of the finest

And his hearing of the keenest (7, II, 1)

And finally, in the examples of the third type, the word "tarkka" is found in such a position, where the magic semantics is completely absent. In the example 3a the whole phrase has an emphasized "nonmagic" sense: Väinämöinen tells about his loosing the gift of magic singing.

But 'tis hard for me to tell you

How my wisdom has departed,

How my voice so strong has failed me (7, I, 248)

In this episode in the example 3b Väinämöinen and Lemminkäinen are already quite common people. With her remark (with the word "tarkoin") Lemminkäinen's mother wants to lesson his presumption, to remind him, that he was not even invited to Pohjola.

For indeed they did not ask you,

And 'tis plain they do not want you. (7, II, 3).

The example 3c should be attributed already to the Wedding Poetry and not to the Old Epic Poetry proper. This is advice to a bride, a common girl, and there is nothing magic even in the general context of the poem. Consequently, the word "tarkka" implies not magic, but human qualities. A bride is given the advice:

Wirst nun immer haben müssen

Klugen Sinn (pää tarkka) und raschen Fassung,

An dem Abend scharfe Augen,

Um das Licht gut hell zu halten,

An dem Morgen scharfe Ohren (korvat tarkat)

Um des Hahnes Ruf zu hören! (5, 181)

The translation of the most ancient stratum of folklore vocabulary presents great difficulties, as the words with appropriate semantic contents are absent from modern languages. The archaic: "Itse virsikäs Vipunen, mies vanha vara-väkevä" is translated not exactly adequately -

Vipunen in songs was famous,

Full of craft the aged hero (6, I, 178)

Vipunen, der Liederreiche,

Er, der krafterfüllte Alte... (5, 133)

In the original the ancient "virsikäs" has also some magic meaning, which the modern word "song" lacks. So the russian translator L. Belsky attempted to translate "virsikäs" by the combination "заклинатель-песнопевец" (master of spellsongs). The folklore expression "vara-väkevä" in its semantics also implies both physical and spiritual power, which are inseparable.

able in the context of the poem. In another translation into German these lines are translated with the emphasis on magic spiritual power: "Vipunen, der weisenreiche, alter Mann, der reich beraten" (6, I, 102).

The translators of "Kalevala" sometimes introduce into the text of the translation arbitrary epithets (such as "boundless sea"), or excessively use such words as "now", "then", "later on", "near", "far off" ("in the distance") etc. Probably they introduce these words in order either to keep to the metre of the poem, or to achieve a better syntactical lucidity, from the point of view of a contemporary reader.

However, on second thought, we see that such arbitrary words are alien to the notions of time and space of the ancients. The ancient consciousness, as it is reflected in folklore epic, had no such notion as linear-space perspective. Therefore it was not necessary to distinguish in the narration "far" and "near" - everything took place as though in one (main) focus, at one distance. The way of folklore epic representation also didn't fix the course of biological time: the hero is either always old (Väinämöinen) or always young (Lemminkäinen). In the folklore epic consciousness there is no notion of space infinity, so such expressions as "boundless sea" or "endless length and breadth of land" are typical of the romantic lexicon of XVIII-XIX centuries, rather than of the style of the archaic epic. Such words as "now", "then", "near", "far off" presuppose already analytical perception of time and space, their abstraction from the direct epic action, concentration of attention on the bonds of Past, Present and Future. This is not characteristic of the archaic epic.

In any case a translator of ancient poetry must decide, whether his translation should render the historical uniqueness of the original, or it should be closer to our modern notions, so that this uniqueness is almost entirely lost. There are different opinions among translators and theorists of translation concerning this. Some translate with considerable deviations from the original (one of such translations

is the translation into Polish 4), others try to be more precise. A historical approach to the original is however very promising and contributes to a better understanding of it. Of course the historical aspect alone isn't sufficient to solve every problem of translation. To begin with, it is still essential to grasp a clear idea of the character of poetry at hand.

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