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**DECONSTRUCTIONIST TRANSLATION THEORY:  
VISIBILITY OF DIFFÉRENCE**

**ТЕОРИЯ ПЕРЕКЛАДУ ДЕКОНСТРУКЦІОНІСТІВ:  
ВИДИМІСТЬ РІЗНИЦІ**

**ДЕКОНСТРУКЦИОНИСТСКАЯ ТЕОРИЯ ПЕРЕВОДА:  
ВИДИМОСТЬ РАЗЛИЧИЯ**

The paper focuses on the challenge deconstructivist theory constitutes for translation via an analysis of Derrida's theory that revised not only the «violent hierarchy» of the 'original – translation' but also the keystones of translatability: equivalency, adequacy, formal correlation, etc., arguing that translation, in the conventional use of the term, is impossible. From the perspective of deconstruction it is viewed only as a powerful tool in unveiling the plurality of the text's meaning that makes invisible *différance* visible. Untranslatability in Derrida's use of the term does not imply that translators should not translate. It simply implies that it is impossible to produce the plurality of the source text in a translation. Derrida, Paul de Man, Foucault, Jonathan Culler, J. Hillis Miller et al. criticize the traditional views of translation by eliminating equivalence from the purpose of the translation. The focus is on the complex set of relations between the two texts. The article investigates the issue providing explanations for new approaches to translational phenomena through discussion of Derridian ideas on the variation of meanings advocated in his resonant article «Des Tours de Babel». Derrida redefines translation, calling into question any approach as «reproduction», suggesting that translation can be viewed only as *deferring* the original text without any possibility to grasp what the original text aimed to tell. He argues that deconstruction and translation are phenomena of the same order and one cannot talk about the reproduction of what does not exist. Rather, there is a reason to talk about «unrepresentability.» The deconstructivists gave a fundamentally different dimension to the old translation problem, casting doubt on traditional theories, demonstrating the illusory nature of any attempt to find the meaning of how to read, interpret or translate.

*Keywords:* Derrida, deconstruction, translation, meaning, equivalent, source-language text, target-language text, plurality of meanings, «Des Tours de Babel».

Розглянуто нові підходи до вивчення проблем перекладу в аспекті впливу ідей деконструктивізму, який переглянув не тільки «жорстку ієрархію» оригінал – переклад, але й такі центральні категорії цієї науки, як адекватність, еквівалентність, формальна кореляція тощо, стверджуючи, що переклад у звичайному розумінні взагалі неможливий, але він може розглядатися тільки як необхідний інструмент для розкриття безлічі значень тексту, які роблять «видимими невидимі відмінності». Неперекладність для Дерріда не означає відмову від перекладу, це лише вказує на неможливість у перекладі зберегти множинність варіантів значень оригінального тексту. У центрі деконструктивістської теорії перекладу – увага до складнощів у відносинах між двома текстами. Свої ідеї Дерріда виклав у резонансній статті «Навколо вавилонських веж», припускаючи, що переклад можна розглядати тільки як «відстрочку» оригіналу без будь-якої можливості зрозуміти його. Він стверджує, що деконструкція і переклад – явища одного порядку. Саме у процесі перекладу цю особливість, яку він називає *différance*, як раз і може

бути відстежено. Вчений переконаний, що не можна говорити про репродукції того, чого не існує. Швидше, є підстави говорити про те, що не може бути «представлене». Нове полягає в тому, що деконструктивісти надали принципово інший вимір старій проблемі, поставивши під сумнів вихідну тезу всіх теорій, показавши ілюзорність будь-якої операції з пошуку сенсу будь то читання, інтерпретація або переклад.

*Ключові слова:* Деррида, деконструкція, переклад, значення, еквівалентність, оригінал, переклад, плюральність смислів, «Навколо вавилонських веж».

Рассмотрены новые подходы к изучению проблем перевода в аспекте влияния идей деконструктивизма, пересмотревшего не только «жесткую иерархию» оригинал – перевод, но и такие центральные категории этой науки, как адекватность, эквивалентность, формальная корреляция и т.д., утверждая, что перевод в обычном понимании вообще невозможен. С точки зрения деконструкции он может рассматриваться только как необходимый инструмент для раскрытия множества значений текста, которые делают «видимыми невидимые различия». Непереводимость для Деррида не означает отказ от перевода, а лишь указывает на невозможность в переводе сохранить множественность вариантов значений исходного текста. В центре деконструктивистской теории перевода – внимание к сложности отношений между двумя текстами. Свои идеи Деррида изложил в резонансной статье «Вокруг вавилонских башен», предполагая, что перевод можно рассматривать только как «отсрочку» оригинала без какой-либо возможности понять его. Он утверждает, что деконструкция и перевод – явления одного порядка. Именно в процессе перевода эта некая ускользающая суть, которую он называет *différance*, как раз и может быть отслезена. Ученый убежден, что нельзя говорить о репродукции того, чего не существует. Скорее, есть основание говорить о «непредставимости». Новое видится в том, что деконструктивисты придали принципиально иное измерение старой проблеме, поставив под сомнение исходный тезис всех теорий, показав иллюзорность любой операции по поиску смысла, будь то чтение, интерпретация или перевод.

*Ключевые слова:* Деррида, деконструкция, перевод, значение, эквивалентность, оригінал, перевод, плюральность смыслов, «Вокруг вавилонских башен».

**Introduction.** Now it is obvious that new approaches to humanities have influenced translation studies as well. An attack on much privileged linguistically oriented concepts of translation theory (John Catford, Eugene Nida, Albrecht Neubert et al.) and broad humanitarian strategy [9] in defining translation (Walter Benjamin, Roman Jakobson, Ortega y Gasset) characterizes the academic scene today. One of the leading roles in this process belongs to the theory of deconstruction that inspired a wide-range of scholars within a broad array of disciplines, including translation studies. Deconstruction methodology, originated by Jacques Derrida and appropriated by his most influential followers (Paul de Man, Jonathan Culler, J. Hillis Miller among them), undermines traditional translation borders, accepting limitations and restraints. Translations, according to deconstructionists, do not fix the same meaning as it is in the original, but open up a free play, extending language boundaries, making visible an effort of grasping a nonexistent meaning. The purpose of the paper, therefore, is to propose the most coherent and historically motivated presentation of the recent developments in translation theory.

At the end of the twentieth-century deconstruction theory started to redraw fundamental questions of traditional translation idioms (the notion of equivalence, formal correlations, social acceptability and the very concept of determinable meaning, etc.), opening new perspectives on seeing translational phenomena. Challenging the foundation of Western translation theory on the limits of language, writing, and reading, deconstruction criticism opened new insights into the problems of text and meaning with the focus on the possibility/impossibility of translation.

In contrast to linguistically oriented translation scholars, Derrida – the founder of deconstruction theory – suggests that there is no deep (kernel) structure, rather the

chains of significations, and the original as well as its translations is among them. Derrida believes that deconstruction and translation are closely connected: it is a translation that makes invisible *différance* visible [4, p.21]. What is crucial here is the destabilization of the theoretical framework of translation. Derrida redefines translation, calling into question any approach as «reproduction», suggesting that translation can be viewed only as *deferring* the original text without any possibility to grasp what the original text aimed to tell.

Indeed, this stance is quite familiar to the historians of translation studies: the discussion of the impossibility to reproduce the original is not new. Most importantly, deconstructionists gave new impetus to this idea and questioned the very possibility to raise the problem of equivalence, claiming that the text's meaning depends only on translation (or reading). Noteworthy, poststructuralist reader-response theory (H. Jauss, W. Iser, S. Fish, J. Culler et al.) has the same background.

Derrida develops the idea of a notable German philosopher Walter Benjamin, who in his foundational work «The Task of the Translator» allows the target language to be affected by the foreign language: «It is the task of the translator to release in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another... For the sake of pure language, he breaks through decayed barriers of his own language» [1, p.80].

It seems that Derrida, as well as the influential American translation scholar Lawrence Venuti, who in his criticism of domestication labels it as cultural imperialism [9], also follows Benjamin, regarding that the translator should less think in terms of copying and more in terms of how languages relate to each other.

Venuti suggests that the practicing translator should resist domestication in favour of «foreignizing translation» [10, p.148]. By «foreignizing» he means the strategy of resistance to domestication. He is attracted to deconstructuralist strategies that foreground the play of the signifier, puns, neologisms, archaisms, fragmented syntax, and experimental forms, asserting that faithfulness usually results in vast distortions.

For many scholars in the field, Walter Benjamin's translation philosophy is a starting point in the deconstructive expansion of language meaning. In the article «Des Tours de Babel» (1985), Derrida [3] also adopts Benjamin's well-known concept of «language survival» to explain how translation conveys and complements the original. The title of the article is intentionally ambiguous and conceptually loaded. In the title 'des' is not only an indication 'some', but also a sign of the conceptual game (Des Tours – détour). The emphasis is laid on the connotation «difference/presence of a trace» embedded in Derridian deconstructivist idiom – 'différance'.

Another word in the title – 'Babel', is, for Derrida, also deconstructively loaded: it is not only the Babylonian (towers); it also has the traces of 'father', 'god'. Thus, Derrida extends the established cultural and historical schemes, offering an alternative and highly doubtful interpretation. The old and the new meanings coexist in the process of such 'dissemination'. Referring to Benjamin's thought; Derrida states that the task of the translator is to guarantee not only the survival of the language but also the life of the original. The original continues its life beyond the borders of the linguistic means of its creator. «For a translation comes after the originals... It characterizes the stage of their survival... a continuation of life rather than life as post-mortem» [3, p.178].

For Derrida, as for Benjamin, the original is always loaded with another form or structure, which is embedded in it and which is a guarantee of its continued life in translation. However, this structure is not directly revealed, it is hidden and never fully clarified, it is always semantically and semiotically «open», «incomplete». And Derrida

calls this quality of the text «thirst for life», «a thirst to be translated», «and a passion to be realized in translation».

This incompleteness of the text structure and the desire to «complete it» are the main «law» of the translation process, which Walter Benjamin calls the «duty» that defines the translation task. The original «survives» only at the cost of its transformation. And in this process, the original continues to grow. Derrida is convinced that this is exactly what the endless process of filling in the open structure of the original text looks like. Moreover, not only text undergoes changes, but also the language itself. Languages, for Derrida, are not isolated from each other, but are interconnected and mutually derivative.

Benjamin emphasized this property of translation, noting that while overcoming the barriers of the target language and converting the original text into a translated one, the translator pushes the boundaries of the language, forces the languages to change and 'grow'. Derrida assumes the significance of this observation: «Just as the fragments of the amphora, if one is able to reconstitute the whole, must be contiguous in the smallest details, but not identical to each other» [3, p. 189].

The deconstructionist's main point is that translation puts us in contact not so much with original meaning as with the plurality of languages. «Difference is never pure, no more so is translation, and for the notion of translation we would have to substitute a notion of *transformation*: a regulated transformation of one language by another, of one text by another» [4, p.20].

Perhaps the best example of this approach (which demonstrates that deconstructionists are not «the intellectual terrorists», as Ihab Hassan whimsically states) is James Joyce's own translation of the passages from «Finnegans Wake» into Italian. In the academic community, not coincidentally, any discussion on the problems of the nature of language and translation is invariably associated with the name of James Joyce, this great innovator.

Jacqueline Risset, a poet and translator herself, was the first to publish Joyce's own translations of two parts of his «Finnegans Wake» in «Tel Kel» magazine in 1973. She describes Joyce's translation as radical Italianization [8], as deconstruction which makes visible the pluralistic qualities of the language, making them even more dramatic than in the source-language text. The scholar believes that such a text demonstrates Derrida's main thesis: the translation really transforms the original as it is translated into another language. Risset claims that the «Finnegans Wake» Italian text cannot even be called a translation. It is rather a 'rework', 'rewriting', 'processing'. Such a strategy of translation involves the extension of the original to a new mode [8] and, needless to say, that without Joyce's discoveries, the emergence of deconstructivism would be very doubtful.

However, the text, in deconstructivist translation theory, is not in opposition to the original, it fixes an ongoing process of creating a work (work-in-progress) [10]. Noteworthy, the English «Finnegans Wake» exposes linguistic plurality within one linguistic system and by its form challenges the prevailing translation tradition (from one language to another). «Finnegans Wake» is hardly translated, not only because it is a complex text, but, possibly, because it is not only English, it contains a mixture of different languages.

Almost every word of «Finnegans Wake» is so rich in foreign language cultural references that it is even difficult to call it a monolingual work. A translation can only highlight a word game, which, of course, does not exhaust the richness of the original. In the article «Joyce Translates Joyce» (1984), Risset notes that Joyce did not focus on the search for equivalence, but gave the original a fundamentally new look «another version of text in progress» [8, p. 8].

The researcher shows that the translation strategy Joyce developed is aimed at using different levels of the Italian language – idioms, dialectical words, archaisms. He turns to the Italian language, and in it, in its rich history, he finds different strata that create an effect equal in strength to «the plurilinguistic qualities» inherent in any language. Hence, so long before Derrida, Joyce in his translation practice did what the French philosopher formulated as the main principle of his theory of deconstruction: not only the difference, but also the «trace» of a familiar, and wellknown in the translated texts. Thus, translation as «enterprise» has approached the moment to begin an exploration of *différance* in action. Apparently, translation theory needs to be equipped with the possibilities of the new methodology.

So far, the only work considering the theory of translation via the contemporary problems of deconstructivism belongs to Raymond Van den Broeck «Translation Theory after Deconstruction» [2]. The scholar maintains the inevitability of a significant loss of meaning in the process of translation and shares Derrida's concept of translation as the deconstruction of the original. For Broeck, as well as for Derrida and Jonathan Culler, deconstruction, unlike destruction, means revising and «turning over» the opposition. Only through radical experimentation with the conventions of the target language can a productive deconstruction of the original be possible.

Developing Derrida's ideas, Broeck criticizes the concept of *source-text oriented theories* that are focused on the meaning of the original text. However, it seems that the scholar simplifies Derrida's concept, reducing it to the defamiliarization of the target language, identifying it with the target-oriented theory. Derrida not only wrote the word *différance* through «a», eliminating the 'linguistic' form but also substantiated the importance and inevitability of 'distinction'.

Finally, it is possible to state that a changing perspective to understand the place of translation in culture allows expanding the field of the problems discussed, taking translation studies out of a vicious circle of debate about fidelity and literalism. While structuralism in translation studies has highlighted the importance of analyzing and conveying the form of the original through 'close reading', the positive and vastly rewarding side of the changes that deconstructivism has introduced into the theory of translation is primarily due to the possibility of a new awareness of the inexhaustible depth of the original. Indeed, there are classical works in this field: the works of writers, scholars and philosophers such as Benjamin, Ortega y Gasset, Nabokov, and Jakobson among them that are acclaimed as most thought-provoking, foreshadowing much of contemporary developments in translation studies.

Within the last years, translation studies have grown intensively, though questions abandon, opening up further challenges: is it possible to assume that the original depends on the translation but not vice versa? Does the original contain a «meaning» that can be aesthetically or scientifically defined if this meaning changes with each new translation of the text into another language? What precedes?

Original? Idea? The form?

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Надїйшла до редакції 09.10.2019