

ПЕРЕВОД И ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИЯ ТЕКСТОВ ИНДИЙСКОЙ ФИЛОСОФИИ

PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATION OF SANSKRIT PHILOSOPHICAL TEXTS IN RUSSIAN THOUGHT (Theodor Stcherbatsky and His Followers)

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This paper deals with the methodological problems pertaining to the translation of Sanskrit philosophical texts raised by famous Russian Buddhologist and Indologist Theodor Stcherbatsky (1866—1942) and developed by his brilliant disciple Otto Rosenberg (1888—1919). The author addresses to the problems of translation as discussed by some modern Russian Sanskritologists. The main thing — is to keep the balance between the typological similarity of different traditions of thought. The author's opinion is closer to that of Rosenberg who made an accent on the otherness, than to that of Stcherbatsky who put forward the idea of *philosophia perennis*.

Key words: translation, Sanskrit philosophical texts, Theodor Stcherbatsky, Indian thought, Otto Rosenberg, “input” languages, the “output” languages.

The contribution of Sanskrit to the development of world thought could not take place without the work of translation of texts in different domains of traditional knowledge. That is why it is important to be aware of the translation enterprise, its problems and challenges. In every translation there is a different amount or degree of what is properly being translated. It depends upon a distance between the “input” and the “output” languages, which may be defined by the difference between their appropriate cultural and civilizational perspectives. Within the frames uniting languages of one family, there may be many common structures, words, expressions, which can simply be transposed from one language to another, for example, Latin words in Roman languages. If we take the so called East — West civilizational and cultural opposition, the most important distance is that between Western civilization and China. We may not even call it an opposition in the proper sense of the word, because these civilizations are simply incommensurable as different systems of reference. Within the frame of the hieroglyphic system quite another style of reasoning had been developed, many problems formulated on the basis of Indo-European languages did not arise for the very reason as the French scholar brilliantly showed. For instance, China had no ontology, no such concepts as substance, quality, time, subject, object, etc. Instead there evolved an interesting concept of becoming as the unfolding of a self-regulation — Dao- of Nature (1).

What unites Indian and Western thought is the Indo-European linguistic matrix which allows a certain kind of meaning-making. Sanskrit is in no way less apt to express philosophical meanings than ancient Greek or Latin. It distinguishes between being and nonbeing, being as presence and being as becoming — verbal roots AS and BHU, substrates and attributes, and more concretely substance (*dravya*) and quality (*guṇa*), subsistence (*sthana*) and motion (*karman*), time (*kāla*) and space (*dik*), subject as such (*Ātman*), and object (*artha*), knowing subject (*jñātr*) and agent (*kartr*). In Sanskrit, it is possible to form abstract substantives and, hence, to operate abstractions and general terms. The kinship can be traced not only in the domain of thought structuring categories but also in related problematizations and conceptualizations as, for instance, the relationship between substance and quality, essence and phenomenon, part and whole, between universals and particulars, cause and effect. One may call this fundamental structural affinity a common Indo-European horizon of meanings.

As Russian is even closer to Sanskrit by its grammatical structure than many of modern European languages, it allows a more literal translation (2).

In this paper, I will dwell on the methodological problems pertaining to the translation of Sanskrit philosophical texts raised by famous Russian Buddhologist and Indologist Theodor Stcherbatsky (1866—1942) and developed by his brilliant disciple Otto Rosenberg (1888—1919). Then, I will address myself to the problems of translation as discussed by some modern Russian Sanskritologists.

In the translation of Sanskrit philosophical texts Stcherbatsky followed what he had called the philosophical method as against the philological method of literal, or word to word translation. He was one of the first European scholars to single out Sanskrit philosophical texts as a special gender of Sanskrit literature.

“These texts are written in a distinctive style that has little to do with the style of poetic and narrative literature. They also have special technical terms, the value of which is not always easy to guess. For a long time European scholarship, engaged in the development of other branches of Indian literature, did not pay enough attention to these works. They were considered as obscure and full of barren scholastic subtleties, which were of no evident or hidden value. This view led to the fact that the ancient Indians were declared to be generally incapable of exact thinking and clear presentation. These merits were attributed exclusively to the ancient Greek and modern science. If such an opinion has been circulated even among Sanskritologists what one might expect from scholars to whom the original Indian writings were completely inaccessible” (3).

Stcherbatsky, further, explained that this state of affairs subsisted until the return from India of professor Georg Buhler, who during his prolonged stay in this country had established close relations with the native Indian scholars and worked with them on the translation of some Shastric texts. “With the help of local tradition, — wrote Stcherbatsky, — the rich content of the Sanskrit scholarly literature has become evident, and one has to replace the charge against Indians that they are incapable of exact thinking with the charge against European scholars that they are incapable to understand them. After publication of prof. Jacobi’s translation of one of the best Indian works on the theory of poetry “no one will doubt that in the depth of analysis, in the power of thought and precision of expression Indian scholars had no equal in ancient times” [1. P. 54].

As far as philosophical texts proper are concerned Stcherbatsky remarks: "...the difficulty of their translation has increased by the fact that philosophy hasn't language of its own and it expresses the concepts it has to operate with, using metaphors. The translator now and then has to deal with the words, well known to him, but referred to some concepts that clearly have nothing in common with the ordinary meanings of these words. Only through a hypothetical reconstruction of the philosophical system in question, one can at the beginning only approximately define the concept, which is metaphorically denoted by such a term. A literal translation would be completely useless as it does not express a thought of the author" [1. P. 55].

In other words, a word to word translation will present the translation of the metaphor, rather than of a term.

Stcherbatsky continues: "The difficulties in translating technical terms had lead some scholars to the practice of leaving technical terms without translation". Russian scholar is against this practice. He said that in his own work: "We did not leave a word untranslated. We generally tried where possible to penetrate into the thought of the author in its entirety and to express it in Russian as it could be expressed by the author himself, if he would have to write in that language. In those cases when we had to deviate considerably from the Sanskrit text or to introduce insertions and supplements which were needed to make the text more understandable, we add a note with a literal translation. But it should be remarked that the literal translation may be relevant only for those who are familiar with the Sanskrit language. Those who are not familiar with it, if they would like to compare the literal translation of some particular place with the statement of its meaning and by doing so to check the adequacy of translation, they can easily fall into mistake, since the translation of each element of Sanskrit proposition is rather an explanation of its construction than the rendering of the thought hiding in it" [1. P. 55].

In conclusion, Stcherbatsky refers to the requirements for translation formulated by the famous Russian philosopher Vladimir Soloviev with regard Greek classics, especially Plato: "After having mastered the ideas of the original text in their fullness and accuracy of expression, in any particular case, representing some difficulty for the literal translation, it is necessary to put yourself a question: How does this author — say Plato (one easily can replace Plato by Dharmakīrti or Shaṅkara) — with all the peculiarities of his mind, character, style and way of thinking as we know them from historical sources — express this thought in all its shades of meaning had he knew Russian, and had he wrote in that language?" [1. P. 56].

A good translation according to Soloviev, is a translation in which a translator so to say platonize himself, while making Plato to think like a Russian thinker, so a good translation of Plato must draw upon two sources — of Greek and Russian languages. If we replace Plato by Dharmakīrti, the situation of the good translation will be as follows: Russian translator must make himself Dharmakīrti and make Dharmakīrti to think in the spirit of Russian language. Is such a situation possible?

Let us note, first, that neither philological nor interpretive methods of translation outlined by Stcherbatsky do not purport to hermeneutical reflection. Stcherbatsky implicitly believes in the absolute transparency of the input original language, and the language of the translator, or output language, Sanskrit and Russian for each other. The main

guideline was to him a certain idea, which is one, whereas languages expressing it may be different and interchangeable. This approach is based on the conception of so called *philosophia perennis*, eternal philosophy — quite widespread in his time. Historical and cultural dimension is something secondary as compared with a number of eternal philosophical ideas that may be expressed in different languages, in different cultures and historical periods.

Those European thinkers who believed in *philosophia perennis* profess a certain understanding of language: according to them, language is merely a docile instrument of expressing thought. So the main task is to identify this or that idea, considered to be *perennis*, the question of its formulating in different languages — is of the secondary order. If Dharmakīrti had come to the same ideas as Kant (time and cultural distance are of no importance), we commit no error in rendering his thoughts in Kantian categories.

Let us turn to Otto Rosenberg. For him, some overlap or similarity of thought between India and Europe does not make the task of translation easier. On the contrary, it makes it more difficult:

“The original point of departure and the main problems are the same in Europe and in India, differences within their traditions, too, because the laws of thought are the same for all, but taking in account that the development of these streams of thought in Europe and India were quite independent from each other, the way taken by either tradition, were different, there were another formulations of the issues, another methodology, and terminology, many of the concept have a different meaning. That’s why sometimes it is so hard to find a suitable translation. Difficulties are in words but not in the thoughts” (4).

If Stecherbatsky said about his research that in it: “...the language of Buddhist philosophers is rendered as far as possible by the language of modern philosophy” (5), Rosenberg wrote: “Whenever possible, the exposition [of the Buddhist philosophy — V.L.] should be carried out in a simple language, avoiding technical terms and refraining from underlining the parallels [with Western philosophy — V. L.]. Insertion of the European philosophy into the Buddhist scheme of ideas is extremely dangerous, it can easily lead to a false understanding of Buddhism: each [Buddhist] technical term has its own relation to a number of other terms which unwittingly come up by association. Therefore, even if the two terms — one European and one Buddhist — correspond to each other, their related associations may be quite different. That is why the translation of Buddhist terms, and, in general philosophical terms of other cultural systems is so difficult. The difficulty lies not in the peculiarities of language, but in the heterogeneity of the series of associations related in each case, with this or that concept. Therefore it is necessary for the translation of some technical terms by our (Russian) words, for example, “object”, “sensuality”, “mental”, etc., to make a reservation, pointing out to the ideas which are arising in the person brought up with the help of these foreign terms. ‘Artha’ and ‘vishaya’ correspond to the term ‘object’, but they have nothing in common with the idea of ob-jectum. “Salvation” and “nirvana” are the same, since both are the ultimate religious goal, but the association of the word “nirvana” with the concept like “salvation” is impossible” [2. P. 81—82].

It is hard to escape the impression that by these words Rosenberg implicitly criticized his teacher, his interpretive method, because all he had mentioned here: the use of the special Western terminology, of the parallels, or “the insertion of European philosophy into the Buddhist scheme of ideas”, may have a direct relation to the works Th.I. Stcherbatsky. Rosenberg, unlike Stcherbatsky, dealt with what we now call the hermeneutical reflection. He problematized the translation not as a rendering of senses pertaining to one language by the means of another language, but in a much more fundamental way — as a tool for understanding of the other cultural tradition. If we translate any philosophical term relying only on its “purely linguistic” value as a word, the concept rendered by it may remain inaccessible, but the concepts are not necessarily transmitted even in the case of the so-called philosophical translation. Sanskrit philosophical terms are loaded with their specific associations, the same with terms of the European philosophical vocabulary, which are, too, embedded in their net of associations. The associative character of terminology is a serious problem for the translator noticed by Rosenberg but completely ignored by Shcherbatsky.

Rosenberg continues:

“As far as literal translations — in the etymological sense — are concerned, one can run across a new threat: the translated term may coincide with the proposed translation only in one of its meanings, in which case there may arise a misunderstanding and the inability to properly understand the translation. Equivalents such as the notorious “law”, “loi” instead of “Dharma”, “name and form” instead of “*namarupa*”, etc. translations are in this category...” [2. P. 82].

Elsewhere, Rosenberg puts forward the following argument: “As the special terms are borrowed from the ordinary language, their etymological meaning contribute little or nothing to the understanding of their philosophical significance in the system, in exactly the same way we pay relatively little attention to the basic etymological meanings of philosophical terms and abstract words in general” [2. P. 105].

According to Rosenberg, “The question concerning the method of translation of the Buddhist terms is still far from resolved, it is necessary, according to need, to apply one or the other mode of translation” [2. P. 82].

Thus, the translation strategy of Rosenberg consists not in a commitment to one or to another method of translation — literal or interpretive, for him the use of the method depends on the situation in question. Elsewhere, he adds one more important feature: “We should not seek to establish the same meaning for all the cases, we should not, after making sure that this is impossible, prematurely conclude, that the Buddhist authors are illogical and not systematic. The works on Buddhism are suffering from this tendency to render a term always by the same equivalent” [2. P. 149].

Rosenberg concludes his reflections with the words:

“The difficulty indicated above is of the utmost importance: it constantly reminds us that, although almost all ideas are evidently common, however they are expressed differently. We can meet in the Buddhists texts the same solutions of the same issues as in the European systems, however, their methods are different, and the issues are explored in a different manner. The value of systematic Indian philosophy as well as Indian philosophy in general lies in the fact that in it the problems which are known to us are analyzed differently. Therefore it is particularly important to keep to the origi-

nal Buddhist schema, not transposing the Indian ideas into the frame of our systems” [2. P. 82].

Thus the gap, the discrepancy between the Buddhist and Western systems, is, according to Rosenberg, an important stimulator for our hermeneutical reflection. Why the otherness of Buddhism and Indian philosophy in general was so precious to him, why it was so important not to lose, not to dissolve it in a universality of *philosophia perennis*? And how should we understand this otherness, if we have no other means than those forged within the European culture?

In modern Russian indological studies, Vladimir Shokhin, an admirer and follower of Stcherbatsky (6) calls his method of interpretive translation an “hermeneutic extreme” (7). He definitely opts for a literal translation: “The task we set before ourselves in the translation of classical Sāṃkhya texts was to reveal their literal meaning — hence the frequent use of square brackets and an attempt to avoid what may be called interpretive, or modernizing translation..., as well as transliteration of the terms without translation” [3. P. 8]. According to him the translated texts have to speak “with a European in his language and not soliloquizing in their own” [3. P. 8].

But, as we know, the European philosophical language is the language forged by European philosophers like Plato, Descartes, Kant, Hegel etc. What is then the difference between the literal translation in Shokhin’s and the interpretative translation of Stcherbatsky?

In my opinion, the old dispute about literal and interpretative translation of the Sanskrit texts — is actually a dispute about the different levels of interpretation. Strictly speaking, a literal translation, that is, translation of the word, not of the concept, when dealing with philosophical texts is counter-productive (in that respect I agree with Stcherbatsky), but Stcherbatsky’s intention to transpose the Sanskrit text into the European system of reference in order to make life easier for the reader is also open to criticism.

The desire to translate the Sanskrit text in such a way that it would talk with the European reader in his or hers own language (which was a purpose of both Stcherbatsky and Shokhin) creates an illusion of the absolute transparency of Indian tradition, its complete and thorough expressibility in the horizon of European categories and concepts. It seems to me that the modern reader is quite prepared to discover the resistance of the material pertaining to other culture, to be aware of the dockings and discordings between European and Indian systems of thought. Modern reader of philosophical literature is quite capable to understand that there are untranslatable terms, and problematic translations. A modern translation from my point of view must not only explain but also problematize, highlight the cultural otherness of the other as against one’s own cultural identity. In other words, a translation is a dialogue between two languages, two cultural systems. A good translation, in my view — is a translation which takes in account the situation of the translator in-between two cultures, which embraces not only the immediate meaning of this or that word or sentence, but also the general self-images and self-description of both Indian and European traditions.

Let us return to Vladimir Soloviev example referred to by Stcherbatsky. In my opinion, it is important to preserve a cultural distance between Plato, or Dharmakīrti, and Russian, or European philosophical discourse. Before translating the Sanskrit term *manas* by the word “mind”, the translator must put the following question — can mind be

insentient according to the European philosophical sense of this word? As we know, it is not possible, so *manas* which in some Indian philosophical schools is understood as an instrument of conscious Self (*Ātman*), deprived of its own consciousness, cannot be translated as “mind”.

For Andrew Paribok, our famous Sanskrit and Pali scholar, as well as for Vladimir Shokhin, the translation of every word — is a victory of translator, while the Sanskrit term in the Russian transcription or transliteration without translation — is his or her defeat. In this respect they follow Stcherbatsky’s ideas. However, it seems to me that any principle of translation, even if by itself it is reasonable, has its limits. Well, the translation will speak with the reader in his own language, but the cultural flavor of the original text will completely evaporate. Hence, a disappointment and even mistrust of the readers towards some translations that look like habitual Western philosophical discourse.

A translator should not be afraid of Sanskrit terminology. Introducing Sanskrit terms, which has no analogues in Russian or in other languages, could be a contribution to the development of the “input” language. Such Sanskrit words, like *karma* and *saṃsāra* are already firmly established in our everyday life. The Russian language is full of all sorts of loans and open to innovation. It is good to gradually accustom the reader to the Sanskrit terminology, simplifying its assimilation by transliteration in Cyrillic and breaking compound words into their constituent parts.

For the Russian translation of the Sanskrit philosophical texts a problem of the loaned foreign philosophical terminology suggests itself. Andrew Paribok believes that since the original Sanskrit or Pali text does not contain any loaned foreign terminology, it is necessary to ensure that the translated terms remained Russian, not foreign words [4. P. 15—16]. However, in practice it is impossible to implement such a principle, especially with regard to the specific logical or philosophical terminology, basically, borrowed from Roman languages. You can certainly say “love of wisdom”, “*liubomudriye*” instead of “philosophy”, but this Russian word does not cease to be a translation of the relevant Greek term. It seems to me that the “linguistic patriotism”, understood as a desire to remain within the Russian language — is an absolute utopia, especially when dealing with philosophical texts. After all, our cultural heritage is not limited to “autochthonous” Russian philosophy (whether such a philosophy ever existed is still a question?). It would therefore be wrong to somehow restrict the use of European philosophical terminology in the translation of Sanskrit texts. What is important is to explain what kind of meaning this or that European term has in relation to India. For example, one can use the expression “Indian syllogism”, but clearly reveal the restrictions of application of this term to the *Nyāya* or Buddhist logic. The main thing — is to keep the balance between the typological similarity of our traditions of thought, which makes them constituent elements of the common Indo-European horizon of meanings, on the one hand, and the distance separating their culture and civilization frames — on the other. In this sense, my point of view is closer to that of Rosenberg who made an accent on the otherness, than to that of Stcherbatsky who put forward the idea of *philosophia perennis*.

ENDNOTES

- (1) *François Julien*. Le Détour et l'accès, Stratégies du sens en Chine, en Grèce. — Grasset, 1995; Un Sage est sans idée, ou l'autre de la philosophie., «L'ordre philosophique», Seuil, 1998; Du «Temps», Éléments d'une philosophie du vivre. — Paris, réed. Le Livre de Poche, 2012.
- (2) We have 6 cases, three genders, no articles.
- (3) Here and further on I quote from the first famous Stcherbatsky's philosophical work entitled "Theory of Knowledge and Logic according the teaching of the Late Buddhist". Vol. 1. — Sanct-Peterburg, 1903. — P. 53—54 (modern reedition, 1995. — P. 56—58). In Russian.
- (4) Publication of the manuscript note of Rosenberg in my paper in Russian: Stcherbasky and Rosenberg: double portrait against the background of the époque". — Works of Russian Anthropological School. — Moscow 2007.
- (5) *Ibid.* — P. 6.
- (6) He wrote an excellent book about him "Shcherbatskoy and His Comparative Philosophy". Institute of Philosophy, Moscow, 1998.
- (7) *Ibid.* — P. 187.

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- [1] *Stcherbatsky T.* Theory of Knowledge and Logic according the teaching of the Late Buddhist. — Vol. 1. — Sanct-Peterburg, 1903.
- [2] *Rosenberg.* Problems of Buddhist philosophy. Reedited in: Rosenberg O.O. Works on Buddhist philosophy. — Moscow, 1991.
- [3] Moonlight of Sāṃkhya. («Sāṃkhya-kārika» «Sāṃkhya-kārika-bhāṣya» «Tattva-kaumudi»). Introduction, Translation from Sanskrit into Russian, and Notes by V.K. Shokhin. — Moscow, 1995.
- [4] Questions of king Milinda. Introduction, Translation from Pali into Russian, and Notes by A.V. Paribok. — Moscow: Oriental Literature, 1989.

PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATION OF SANSKRIT PHILOSOPHICAL TEXTS IN RUSSIAN THOUGHT (Theodor Stcherbatsky and His Followers)

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Статья рассматривает методологические проблемы, связанные с переводом санскритских философских текстов, в свое время поднятых известными российскими учеными Ф.И. Щербатским и О. Розенбергом. Автор также обращается к дискуссиям некоторых современных российских санскритологов. Основной задачей, по мнению автора статьи, является, сохранение типологического сходства различных традиций. Позиция автора более близка точке зрения О. Розенберга, акцентировавшего «инаковость», нежели позиции Ф.И. Щербатского, выдвигавшего идею "*philosophia perennis*".

Ключевые слова: перевод, санскритские философские тексты, Ф.И. Щербатской, индийская мысль, О. Розенберг, язык оригинала, язык перевода.