A diachronic study of religious discourse: development and functioning (on the material of Germanic languages)

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Abstract. This article deals with functional peculiarities of religious discourse in different historical periods. As a significant part of religious discourse the sacral text appears whose study is undertaken with regard to historical, chronological, sociocultural and situative factors. The main emphasis is centered on the hermeneutic, etymological, grammatical, lexical analysis of translations of the St. Mathew's Gospel made in different languages at various language development stages.

Introduction

Nowadays communicative linguistics expands the scope of its research by integrating various viewpoints, concepts and perspectives united by either a single subject matter or a common approach or an innovation research method. Students of communicative linguistics focus on many types of discourse the importance of which in the organization of any communication type can hardly be overestimated. Recent foreground studies investigate religious language and style, sacral texts and religious culture as a whole.

A sacral communicative act is the subject of those studies that investigate devoutness and the sacral language from the discourse perspective. The objectives of a sacral communicative act include administration of church services by human beings and organization of the system of religious views that must inculcate faith in people.

Being the "central point of human life in language" and the "lingual manifestation of existence" [1, 10], discourse embraces all human activities. "Any act of language usage ― whether it be a product of high value or a trifling remark in a dialogue – is a particle in the continuous flow of human experience. As such it coopts and reflects in itself the unique set of circumstances under which and for which it has been produced" [2, 39].

Now discourse is treated as a complex communicative phenomenon determined by socio-cultural, historical chronological and situational factors. In addition to a text itself, discourse comprises extralingual information about, first and foremost, the communicants' knowledge of the world, various opinions and concepts, the addresser's pragmatic assumptions and goals the knowledge of which is required for comprehensive understanding of a text,

etc. For this reason, discourse implies analysis of the addressers' qualifications and their utterances as well as classification of genres and speech types, description of the significant and the signified, research of the communicants' goals and aspirations.

Diachronic aspect of religious discourse

The problem of the comparative discourse investigation from the perspective of diachrony vs. synchrony is multidimensional. First of all, it implies linguistic research proper that includes analysis of the correlation of meanings of words and the balance of using linguistic structures and expressions in different phases of history. Moreover, a question arises frequently: whose linguistic view of the world is expressed by the given source of religious discourse (RD)? Since the Bible and the Gospels, in particular, are translated texts, they are results of some interpretations, and express the viewpoint of a man or a group of people engaged in the proliferation of the text and, essentially, of its sense. In addition, the Hebrew view of the world expressed in the source text has been reinterpreted many times. As a result, the sacral texts represent not so much the world perception of Hebrews as views of the world of people who belonged to various nations, confessions and epochs.

When the issue of the RD development is treated, we should understand that the discourse incorporates national, social, cultural and historic phenomena of the past as well as their subsequent description and interpretation: they form the background against which mentality and world perception of people participating in the RD develop in a certain phase of history. One may state that RD is *a method (and means), consistently reproduced in time and space, of transmitting the complex of meanings of a sacral text with account of the*

mentality, religious experience and objective reality of people speaking a certain language in a certain phase of history. This explains why the evangelistic texts have been translated many times in various languages, each of them expressing the world view typical of the translator's contemporaries and compatriots and different from the world view of ancient Hebrews and other ancient peoples that professed Christianity.

Diachronic research of RD clearly reveals a change of viewpoints on facts and events combined with a diversification of ways and means of reflecting the reality of a certain epoch as well as variability of approaches to the analysis and description of the reality.

Diachronic investigation of discourse practices allows to algorithmize the process of ancient sacral communication, to reveal its peculiarity, to feel the spirit of that epoch through the mediation of sacral texts and to understand, even though intuitively, the philosophy of ancient rituals and customs.

At present RD contains less information about intuitive or psychological matters; it is more typical for it to reflect exegetical, hermeneutical and philosophical approaches to religious literature, customs and rituals, since in the modern age, with its plurality of worlds, there is not a single confessional spirit. Therefore, it is argued that the modern discourse is less independent and unique and more structured and schematic [3, 106].

Sacral communication and hardships of translation

When the problem of structural and semantic relations between ancient texts and their modern translations is considered, it is undeniable that a modern text is a translation from an ancient language to a modern one. In this respect, the physical nature of that world, the society and the cultural and historic situation in which an ancient text was produced are perceived as another, different extralingual reality. Since the language of the source text changes or entirely disappears (though the text itself still exists), the exactness of the target text's meaning remains a challenging open problem. Here it is instructive to recall the words of St. Jerome, the creator of the Vulgate: "I can translate only what I have understood" (cit. acc. to [4, 32]).

Thus, a source text and a target text appear in different discourse conditions, which results in the interference of discourses of different ages. The multidimensionality and counterpoint of the linguistic view of the world even within the same language space implies the necessity to investigate in the national-cultural and socio-historic context in which the discourse emerges and develops. During such investigation the target text is presented as an existing entity, and "not the imaging object (a 'referent', in

this case — the source text) is analyzed but a constructional whole as a "thingish" entity, a "structure" that incorporates some aspects of the imaging and estranged "referent" [5, 9]. As a result, there is a discrepancy between situations in the text and real situations.

Comparative studies of theological literature reveal some differences between ancient texts and their translations. The differences come down to textual inexactness and distortions of the text meaning. The meaning distortions, in their turn, include incomplete information, additional information and distinctive information.

Incomplete information is defined as the information contained in the source text and made implicit in the target text. This type of the meaning distortion is a result of approximate translation of the text. Another case of information incompleteness is a lack of important information that is presented implicitly in the source text, and is revealed by means of the second or third layer of the text underlay meaning.

Additional information is another type of the meaning distortion. It may be exemplified by automatic preservation of the grammatical categories that are obligatory in the source language but are irrelevant for the source text. At the sphere of lexis, such distortions are manifested through excessive use of certain words or by the descriptive translation of a word, which results in the unjustified strengthening or weakening of the word meaning or distortion of the text rhythm.

Apparently, the most serious distortion of the source text is adding the distinctive information to the target text as a result of a false exegesis. On the one hand, it is very difficult to reveal this type of distortion of the author's intention. On the other hand, it is distinctive information that distorts the text completely. Due to such distortion, a sacral text obtains new connotations while the recipients lose the most important thing, i.e. a possibility to hear the author's voice.

A sample of contrastive-comparative analysis

Since ancient books in Greek, Latin and Hebrew were used as source texts for translations in that historic period, and translators were expected to observe the compulsory rules of rendering the meaning and structure of the source text, translations appeared that distorted the text meaning or did not reproduce it accurately.

Let us compare some fragments of the 19th verse of the fifth chapter of the Gospel of St. Mathew in Latin (Lat.), Gothic (Go.), Old High German (OHG), Early New High German (ENHG) and modern German (MG).

Latin (4th c.; Vulgata): *Qui ergo solverit*

unum de mandatis istis minimis et docuerit sic homines minimus vocabitur in regno caelorum. Qui autem fecerit et docuerit hic magnus vocabitur in regno caelorum.

Gothic (c. 360; Vulfila): *iþ saei nu gatairiþ aina anabusne þizo minnistono, jah laisjai swa mans, minnista haitada in þiudangardjai himine; iþ saei taujiþ, jah laisjai swa, sah mikils haitada in þiudangardjai himine.*

Old High German (c. 830; Tatian): *Ther thie zilosit einaz fon then minnistun bibotun inti lerit so man, minnisto ist giheizan in himilo rihhe. Thie thar tuot inti lerit thie ist mihhil giheizan in himilo rihhe.*

Early New High German (1545; Luther): *Wer nun eins von diesen kleinsten Geboten auflöset und lehret die Leute also, der wird der Kleinste heißen im Himmelreich; wer es aber tut und lehret, der wird groß heißen im Himmelreich.*

Modern German (2000; die Schlachter-Bibel): *Wer nun eines von diesen kleinsten Geboten auflöst und die Leute so lehrt, der wird der Kleinste genannt werden im Reich der Himmel; wer sie aber tut und lehrt, der wird groß genannt werden im Reich der Himmel.*

In the Latin version that is obviously close to the Greek text, the word *ergo* has the meaning of final estimate ('consequently, therefore'). This meaning is lost in the Gothic version because Vulfila uses the word *nu* that has the meaning of 'now, presently' in addition to that of estimation [6, 286]. This word, with its meaning that would correspond to the Latin text and, at least, partially, to the Gothic version, is absent in Tatian's OHG translation. In Luther's translation and in the MG version by Fr. Schlachter based on Luther's text the modal meaning 'summarizing, making conclusions' is not rendered either because the modern word *nun* designates identification with the reality ('jetzt, da') [7, 946].

Making comparative analysis of this part of the text, we should pay attention to the Latin and German verbs that mean 'to violate'. In the Vulgate, the use of the tense-aspect form "perf. conj. act." of the verb *solverit* one of the semantic variants of which is 'to break, abolish, liquidate, cancel' darkens the meaning of the Old Greek verb *lūo* the main meaning of which is rendered by the seme 'to violate' in the Gospel of St. Matthew. It is most probable that the meaning of the Latin verb dominates over that of the Old Greek equivalent in later German translations of the NT. For example, the meaning of the Gothic verb *gatairan* used in the form opt. pl. *gatairiþ* contains such semes as 'to break, destroy, terminate', and the seme 'to violate' is missing, while the OHG verb *zilōsen* contains semes 'lösen, auflösen, zerstören, brechen' [8, 243]. In this case the seme 'brechen' that corresponds to the meaning of the Greek verb *lūo* is

not the main component of the meaning of the verb *zilōsen*. It is noteworthy that G. Köbler in his "Old High German Dictionary" lists such Latin equivalents of this verb as *destruere*, *dirumpere*, *dissolvere*, *dividere*, *resolvere*, *solvere*, and only the verb *resolvere* in its eighth (!) meaning [9, 667] corresponds to the Greek verb *lūo* and the OHG verb *zilōsen*. A Middle High German (MHG) successor of *zilōsen* is the obsolete verb *zerlösen* that has the meaning of 'auflösen; abtun, berichtigen; auseinandersetzen, beilegen; beruhigen' [10, 683] and is gradually disappearing from the German word-stock. A. Ziemann does not include 'brechen' that dates back to the OHG as a correspondence of *zerlösen* in his dictionary. This information is found in an appropriate entry of "Deutsches Wörterbuch" by the brothers Grimm (cf.: "übertr. ein gesetz, vorschrift brechen, nach der lat. vorlage: thaz ni sî zilôsit Moyseses êwa (Joh. 7, 23; gebrochen LUTHER)" [11, Bd. 31, Sp. 721, 1 b)]). Due to the absence of the verb *zerlösen* and the use of its ENHG equivalent *auflösen* ('to abolish, liquidate, cancel') in M. Luther's translation, since that time and till now (cf. the example from Fr. Schlachter's translation) the meaning of 'brechen' (to violate) is not rendered (cf. the MG *sein Wort / einen Eid brechen*). Here we can state that the content of this part of the text is rendered approximately, in its modern interpretation, and the original meaning, rendered by means of the verb *lūo* in the Greek translation, is lost.

Now it is worth addressing the concept of commandment, one of the key concepts of the religious continuum. In combination with the concept 'to violate', the word is not only a part of the organic whole. It also plays a very important role in the life of any Christian. Adequate rendition of its meaning is essential for understanding of the RD as a whole.

In the Latin text, the concept is designated by the word *mandatum* derived from the verb stem *mando* that means 'to hand, deliver, trust, point out, commission, order'. The meaning of the verb *mando* is related to the Lat. *manus* 'hand' + root *$dō$- (*dare*) 'to give' [12, 460].

Other etyma are used in the German texts. They are derived from Proto-Germanic stems. In his Gothic translation, Vulfila uses the word *ana-busns* 'bodement, premonition, augury, miracle' < German *būsni-* (cf.: Old English *bȳsen*, *bisn* 'example, model' and Old Norse *bȳsn* ‚miracle') [13, 30; 14, 31]. In the OHG text, one can see the word *bibot* 'Gebot' (= OHG *gibot*; cf.: *gibod*, Old Saxon *(ge)bod*) that is an abstract verbal noun derived from the verbs *bieten* or *gebieten* by means of ablaut. Originally, the word had the meaning 'Befehl, Erlass' (c. 800) in the OHG; then, with addition of semes 'Vorschrift, Gesetz, Grundsatz', its meaning expanded [15, 375; 16, 407].

The word *entolē* (< *entéllō*) that had semes 'order, assignment, guidence' in the classic Greek and only later, i.e. in the NT, acquired additional semes 'instruction, commandment', seems to be translated literally into Latin: the classic Lat. *mandatum* does not have the meaning 'commandment' (see the above etymology). It acquired this seme only in the sacral text of the Gospel. The system of meanings of the corresponding German words has developed similarly. In this sense, the Gothic translation is somewhat peculiar semantically: the word *ana-busn* used in it reproduces the sacral meaning of a commandment, an important concept of the RD, more distinctly since it has such semes as 'an example for imitation, a model, a legend, a narration', which makes the meaning of the Gothic word closer to that of the Russian equivalent.

The usage of adjective forms deserves special attention. In the fragment analyzed, annomination, i.e. a repetition of the same form (in this case, superlative), is a distinct phenomenon: Lat. *minimis, minimus;* Go. *minnistono, minnista*; OHG *minnistun, minnisto*; MHG/ENHG/MG *kleinsten,* (*der*) *Kleinste*. The stylistic device imparts the rhythmics that is perceptible in any context and that penetrates the whole text of the Gospel. Moreover, due to a repetition of the same word a reader/listener is forced to focus on understanding of that specific fragment of the sacral text that contains the main meaning of the verse.

The usage of the adjective *magnus,* with its semes 'large, great', in the Latin version, and its German counterparts is of some interest, too. In the German versions, the main component of the meaning of Go. *mikils*; OHG *mihhil*; MHG *groß* is the seme 'great' that expands the semantic structure of the adjectives and imparts a new shade of meaning to the sentence as a whole. Obviously, the sentence contains the antithesis manifested in the opposition of the minimum of the property expressed by the superlative degree of the adjective to the maximum of the property expressed by the positive degree of the adjective (cf.: Lat. *minimis, minimus ― magnus*; Go. *minnistono, minnista ― mikils*; OHG *minnistun, minnisto ― mihhil*; MHG/ENHG/MG *kleinsten,* (*der*) *Kleinste ― groß*).

Conclusion

Modern RD developed under the influence of antique traditions presents an obvious evidence that "any sentence, even a complex one, can be repeated numerously in the same form in speech; but as an utterance (or a part of an utterance) no sentence, even a one-word sentence, can ever be repeated: it is always a new utterance, even when it is a quotation" [17, 345]. Translations of ancient sacral texts prompt us to think again and again how adequately they reproduce the meaning of the original, whether this meaning is perceived fully and correctly by the modern readership, how old commandments and rituals are "felt and perceived" in the constant flow of events, which signs of the past become more conspicuous and prominent and which traces of the past are erased forever.

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