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## Is textual analysis possible in the postcolonial theory of translation?

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### ABSTRACT

The paper aims at discovering the textual values for translation quality assessment through the prism of the postcolonial theory of translation which should, supposedly, share some colonial textual symbols, key words and criteria, rising before the sheer colonial milieu got established.

The well-known Ukrainian 18<sup>th</sup>-century philosopher, Hryhoriy Skovoroda, lived during the last decades of the period when Ukraine was a colony (1764/1786–1917). His mysticism and pursuit of happiness can also be interpreted as a way of escaping from or reacting to current political changes. Thus, the task of the paper is to discover the colonial perception of Ukrainian statehood via his philosophical piece ‘A Conversation Among Five Travellers Concerning Life’s True Happiness.’

The case study is concerned with a number of theoretical issues:

- principles of translation quality assessment (by linguistic or hermeneutical means; the search for contrasting structures or key words);
- language and its functions (a language in a padlock of power and politics; a language versus a nation; does this bring any specific translation solutions?);
- political thinking and temporal limits (interpreting the 18<sup>th</sup>-century notions for a 21<sup>st</sup>-century reader);
- cultural signs of the epoch (the Bible as a colonizing text or a text for the colonized; all Old and Middle Ukrainian authors lavishly used quotes from the Bible: were the reasons purely religious, slightly social or partially political?).

Accompanying questions and ideas for translation assessment concern the issue of intralingual translation (the 1770s Middle Ukrainian original and the 1994 Contemporary Ukrainian translation), the perception of the Other (remote places and distant events), the genesis of the concept ‘Motherland’ in Ukrainian and English.

**Keywords:** postcolonial theory of translation, translation assessment, Skovoroda, deterritorialization, hybridity, orality, colonial identity.

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The paper aims at discovering the possible textual values for translation quality assessment through the prism of the postcolonial theory of translation which should, supposedly, share some colonial textual symbols, key words and criteria.

The well-known Ukrainian 18<sup>th</sup>-century philosopher, Hryhoriy Skovoroda, lived during the decades when Ukraine was being turned into a colony (1764/1786–1917). His mysticism and pursuit of happiness can be also interpreted as a way of escaping from or reacting to current political changes. Thus, the task of the paper is to discover the colonial perception of Ukrainian statehood via his philosophical piece ‘A Conversation Among Five Travellers Concerning Life’s True Happiness’ and to trace the possibility of its translation into English.

## General principles: Imagined communities and their dimensions

The cultural turn of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century brought such views of ‘translations less as linguistic events and more as manifestations of culture’; thus, ‘translation offers an opportunity to redefine audiences, social relations, historical inheritance and ethnic identities’ (Warren 2007: 52). Being one of its products and practices, the postcolonial theory of translation concentrated on a nation as an imagined community, an imagined limited sovereign community (Anderson 1991: 6–7). The practices of this theory developed two fundamentally different approaches: the first one orients at how “the colonial powers forced their subjects to “translate” their local language, sociality, or culture into the terms of the dominant colonial power”, thus, “texts mirror historical events”; the second one acknowledges “differences between languages and groups that invites some mediation between or explanation of differences” (Howland 2003: 47, 48). These perspectives motivate the use of culturally-grounded key terms: ‘Questions of identity, representation, and difference – central to any cultural framework of translation – assume a heightened and distinctive status in postcolonial studies’ (Shamma 2009: 185).

From the viewpoint of textual interpretation, the analysis of “the transgressions of power in colonial situations” (Howland 2003: 47) will be significantly dubious if based on two highly-generalized concepts – representation and identity. Meanwhile, regarding them as ontological cornerstones, we need more detailed criteria for analytical operations. More reflective criteria were offered by R. Sugirtharajah (Sugirtharajah 1999: 5): hybridity, fragmentation, deterritorialization and new identities (hyphenated, double, multiple) can offer some guidelines for textual section, leaving out the historical phenomena of stigmatization, negation and liberation for above-textual interpretations.

A complex act of communication that arises from the relationships between colonizing and colonized nations does not necessarily generate “a common idiom,

but a series of negotiations involving untranslatability, incommensurability, and the risk of unbridgeable gaps between peoples and cultures” (Howland 2003: 46).

## Deterritorialization

Territory is a key concept in national self-identification, and colonialism, first of all, can be defined as ‘the political, social, economic and cultural domination of a territory and its people by a foreign power for an extended time’ (Kottak 2002: 92).

In Ukrainian mentality, the understanding “territory-as-nation” is traced back to the 14<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. The toponym Rus’ (Русь) was also an ethnonym: 1) territorial entity (Ukrainian lands which were incorporated in Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Poland and later the Commonwealth of Two Nations under different names: the Principality of Kyiv, the Rus Voivodeship etc.); 2) the residents of this territory (the Ruthenians-Ukrainians); 3) the Orthodox people (ССУМ 1978: 2:309). The conceptualization of the abstraction “homeland/fatherland” got finalized in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century (отчизна/вітчизна, and later – supposedly, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – батьківщина).

The situation was similar in England: the term ‘native country’ occurs frequently in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (starting from 1513) (CEOED 1971: vol. 1: 1898). The “native” was the place or scene of one’s birth / the place or country of one’s birth or the nation to which one belongs (interestingly, the phrase ‘my natyf language’ was first recorded in 1509). Gradually other kin concepts developed: “fatherland” (the place of one’s birth, one’s country (1623); the land of one’s fathers (1822); cf. “mother country”, a country in relation to its colonies (1587), one’s native country (1595)) (CEOED 1971: vol. 1: 969) and “motherland” (1711) (CEOED 1971: vol. 1: 1858). The “homeland” was first registered in 1670: “The land which is one’s home or where one’s home is; one’s native land” (CEOED 1971: vol. 1: 1322).

Thus, in the pre-Skovoroda times, the Ukrainian elite was absolutely conscious of their homeland and its significance in war and political matters, despite different geopolitical changes (decline of some states, emergence of the others, territorial shifts). The very Ukrainian philosopher rather seldom mentioned Ukrainian lands: there are 2 references to “Ukraine” (meaning Contemporary Ukraine’s Northeast, Slobozhanshchyna) and 21 mentions of “Little Russia”<sup>1</sup> (correlated to the then Hetmanate, the central part of Ukrainian autochthonous settlement and the political symbol of Independent Ukraine) (Ушкалов 2007: 79).

Colonizers actively practised *deterritorialization* (eliminating symbols of the indigenous nations) and *reterritorialization* (introducing the colonizers’

1| The history of the toponym “Russia” (Россія) is of interest from the viewpoint of colonial history. It only designated Ukrainian cultural area, and the term “Little Russia” (Мала Росія) stood for Western-Ukrainian lands, esp. the area of contemporary Halychyna in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Before Peter the Great’s rule, today’s Russia was known only as Muscovy.

symbols). Skovoroda himself is a purely colonial-by-epoch writer who took the current historical conditions for granted. Though he did not share Czarist policies, he never protested overtly against them: Skovoroda's criticism of Russia's ruin of Ukrainian Independence was rather indirect, inconspicuous and not eloquent (Scherer 1994: 64). One of the possible explanations is that Skovoroda remained in the framework of Ukrainian baroque mysticism, and his views of the State were more religious, expecting the creation of the New Jerusalem in the heavens where salvation weighted more than political values. These principles correlate with the Jewish rejection of state sovereignty built on "the strong Jewish conception that sovereignty reposes in God alone and that humans merely exercise delegated powers" (Elazar 1978: 234).

For that reason, the prevailing of foreign toposes can also be regarded as a way of substituting for foreign symbols. The study of Skovoroda's naming practices provides four guidelines for assessing the Otherness in the local Ukrainian context:

- real geographical names (as symbols of political orientation and a precondition for the inferiority complex: the foreign is better than the local);
- biblical names (representing a historical tradition in every-day life: the Bible quotations made the author and reader an integral part of the world sacred history as described in the Bible);
- human proper names (the significance of authority and local naming traditions);
- ethnonyms (which always underlined the opposition "the local vs. the other").

Tab. 1. The Table of Names in Skovoroda's *Conversation*

	Original (Сковорода 2011)	1994 Ukrainian (Сковорода 1994)	1965 English (Skovoroda 1965)	2005 English (Skovoroda 2005)
Geographical names (*reconstructed noun instead of adjectival modifications)	Париж, Венеція, Флоренція, Франція, *Лондон, Йерусалим	Париж, Венеція, *Флоренція, Франція, Лондон, Єрусалим	Paris, Venice, Florence, *England, London, Jerusalem	Paris, Venice, Florence, *England, London, Jerusalem
Biblical Names	Исаїя, Мойсей, Соломон, Давид, Авраам, Петро, Павел, Йеремія, Христос, Мелхиседек	Ісаїя, Мойсей, Соломон, Давид, Авраам, Петро, Павло, Єремія, Христос, Мелхиседек	Isaiah, Moses, Solomon, David, Abraham, Peter, Paul, Jeremiah, (Christ), Melchizedek	Isaiah, Moses, Solomon, David, Abraham, Peter, Paul, Jeremiah, Christ, Melchizedek

Ancient mythology, etc.	Венера, Ураній	Венера, Ураній	Venus, Uranus	Venus, Uranus
Nations	Россіане, Римляне, Жид, Еллине, лях	Росіяни, римляни, жиди, елліни, лях	Russians, Romans, Jews, Greeks, Pole	Russians, Romans, Jews, Greeks, Pole

Accepting the dominance of foreign names over the local ones as a harmful anti-national and colonizing tendency, we can state that Skovoroda is indeed a colonial-by-essence writer. The only exception is the quasi-mention of the city of *Myrhorod / Peace-city*, but even this is a philosophical, ideal site and not a real geographical place.

The ‘far-vs.-near’ opposition is important to hyperbolize the lacking attention to nearby comfort: “We seek happiness in our social stations, our epoch, our country, while it is always and everywhere with us” (Skovoroda 2005: 15). However, it ruins the original’s local flavour in translation. The system of geographical perception is definitely changed as London is ‘local’ but not ‘other, far, foreign’. This system of geographical symbols will bring their own interpretation, but certainly, they will not be colonial. Meanwhile, Biblical and Roman traditions trigger absolutely different sets of associations and emotional reactions. Folk stereotypes of nations – the only remnants of the localness, coded in proverbs – will not bear their historical memory.

Skovoroda did not benefit from historical narratives. His futuristic views were based more on developmental cycles than on the political pursuit of happiness for the whole nation-state. Back in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, he, too, observed that “the new ethnicity arises in an era of advanced technology” (Novak 1992: 10). But his “cultural memory, cultural differences and distinctive cultural aspirations” (ibid.) were not part of the grand Cossack narrative. Thus, Skovoroda’s text is a monument to Russian colonialism in Ukraine, which remains in the original and evaporates in translation.

## Hybridity: Colonial Personality and Language

Western European nationalism arose in imperial powers like England, France and Spain in the 18<sup>th</sup> century; meanwhile, language and print played a crucial role in the growth of European national consciousness: national communities consist of people who read the same sources and thus witnessed the same events (see Anderson 1991). This is conversely true for colonial nations: “the language of the weaker is always reduced to that of the more powerful” (Howland 2003: 48).

The ‘Enlightened’ 18<sup>th</sup> century was the century of linguistic Russification in Ukrainian territories that were losing the national autonomy – and, thus, identity

–under the press of Russian Czarism. It is not surprising that the language of the educated became the local Slobozhanshchyna variety of standard Russian with numerous Ukrainianisms, and this language was the foundation of Skovoroda's writings. "Skovoroda constantly communicated with these circles, and the readers and followers he had belonged there. Skovoroda was materially dependent on them. This was his milieu, not that of peasants", stated G. Shevelov (Shevelov 1994: 131). The great difference between Shevchenko's and Skovoroda's stance lies in how a colonial personality ("the illiterate, inarticulate, or subordinated") was able "to free themselves from the confines of imperial language and to articulate their identity within their own culture or language" (Howland 2003:49). Reasonably, Shevchenko regretted: "А на москалів не вважайте, нехай вони собі пишуть по-своєму, а ми по-своєму. У їх народ і слово, і у нас народ і слово. ... А Борнц [Бернз] усе-таки поет народний і великий. І наш Скворода таким би був, якби його не збила з пливу латинь, а потім московщина" ["Don't pay any attention to the Russians, let them write in their tongue, and let us write in ours. ... And Burns was a really national and great poet. And our Skovoroda could be like him if his current had not been swayed by Latin and later by Russian"] (Шевченко 2003: 207).

Skovoroda's milieu must have formed his ahistorical personality (here Shevchenko, having a strong historical vision of Ukraine-as-a-land/state, will be his antipode): "His thinking was panchronic, i.e. essentially a- and anti-historical. Truth, in his vision of God and the world, was revealed out of time and historical context. ... Political passions and involvement were alien to him" (Shevelov 1994: 102, 112). His social position shaped and was shaped via a rich set of multilingual mosaic, covering the vocabulary of Church Slavonic, Russian, bookish and vernacular Ukrainian as well as Greek, Latin and Hebrew. G. Shevelov evaluates this multidimensionality that "stylistically, Skovoroda represented the High Baroque, a style that never accepted the reality of life and the reality of the [spoken] language in a literary work" (Shevelov 1994: 129).

So, can the style be shaped by colonial conditions? Or, can the style shape these colonial conditions in the author's mentality? Language (along with speech) receives two-dimensional perspective: language as a tool (cause) and language as an asset (consequence). The causative nature of a text is then very innovative, influential and authoritative in translation; the consequential nature fails in translation as the text is the monument only to one language at a certain period of its existence. Skovoroda's languages can be categorized in two groups from the translation perspective: 1) matrix languages which create the very essence of communication (i.e. Ukrainian, Old Russian and Church Slavonic for the original in contrast to English only in the translation); 2) exotic languages (exoticisms from Greek, Latin and Hebrew which are usually preserved in translation). Thus, the colonial hybridity is lost irretrievably.

## Orality and defragmentation

Characteristically colonial discourse is based on oral narratives due to a range of reasons, like general illiteracy, domination of colonial languages, chosen languages of instructions (see more in: Bandia 2008: 14). In 18<sup>th</sup>-century Ukraine, oral discourses prevailed because of the liquidation of Ukrainian academic tradition by Russian Czarism, and the guardians of the local identity were wandering singers-musicians (старці) who performed Ukrainian historical songs and epics at crowded markets and church yards and, thus, raised the nation-shaping consciousness. It is not surprising that after Catherine the Great's destroying the Host of Zaporizhzhia as a symbol of Ukrainian statehood and independence in 1775, the nation-wide convention of begging singers-musicians took place the same year. Being highly-organized like a medieval guild, they felt power of belonging to and influencing this nation and discussed a number of political issues. Among them was the question: Чи буде уп'ять Україна? (Literally: Will there be Ukraine again?) Wandering players who themselves were not fully aware of their own ethnic identity and national (vs. social and religious) unity (Кушпет 2007: 177), anyway, contributed to the preserving of Ukrainian identity as it was.

Orality itself can be viewed from different perspectives: mainly linguistic (lexical innovation, syntactic wordplays, in-text translations of indigenous words/expressions, vernacularism and creolization) as well as cultural and pragmatic (oratory, discursal indirectness, proverbs, vulgarity, names, references and modes of address) (Bandia 2008: 11). Certainly, some of these features are not purely colonial. Lexical innovation, syntactic wordplays and vernacularism are characteristic for creating any new lingual identity if the national language (and literature) is young or in decline. The discourse of power is not always colonial in this case.

18<sup>th</sup>-century cultural knowledge in Ukraine was supposedly located between a fair command of the Scriptures (its amount and repertoire was acquired and shaped through Sunday masses and traditional beliefs) and some geographical data (due to political and war events). Thus, Ukrainian space was in different systems of axes: horizontal (we vs. "others" like Poles, Russians, Jews, Tatars, Turks) and vertical (earthly life vs. heavenly life). This can help interpret the reception of Bible quotes in the original and in translations. These quotes stopped being culture-specific, but did this stretching turned them into European, universal or colonial values?

The critical apparatus of Skovoroda's *Conversation* in the academic edition deciphered 276 biblical references and reverberations (Сковорода 2011: 530–557). Meanwhile, the comments to the translation into contemporary Ukrainian (Сковорода 1994: 497–499) mark 32 biblical references, and the footnotes to the 2005 full English-language translation (Skovoroda 2005) contain 137 references with the biblical quotes.

These quotes, however, look more like fragments, and their full interpretational potency is dubious. It may sound that a nice collection of excerpts from the Bible is able to boost any viewpoint, and any discourse transforms into a lingual game.

What is the probability that Skovoroda's half-citation "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood" was or could be interpreted as an invective against the earthly powers? The verse quote is Ephesians 6: 12: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (King James Version). Was it generally possible that this half-phrase might evoke associations from the political sphere? Unfortunately, the oral discourse of the 18<sup>th</sup> century is closed for readers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## The Bible as a colonizing text

In the world history, Bible translation was always significant, though this significance was not always positive. Like in India: "The soap and the Bible were the twin engines of Europe's cultural conquest" (Guha 1996:4). In 18<sup>th</sup>-century Ukraine, Russian Czarism used the Church as an important tool for Russification and denationalization of the Ukrainians. Institutional Christendom served cultural imperialism in the name of Christianity (*cf* Adrian 2007:290). And the Bible also turned in a kind of colonizing tool, even though indirect, as it influenced all aspects of social life, such as social classes, gender, ethnicity, roles and status, nationality, occupation, education, group membership, political and religious affiliation, language and cultural traditions, and location in time and space (Rukundwa 2008: 341). The text of the Bible can be interpreted as a monument of colonialism, as well. This is testified by the analysis of the cultural significance of the Bible from the various perspectives of social life, exemplified in the following table.

Tab. 2.

Aspects of social life	1770s original	1965/2005 English translations	1994 Ukrainian translation
Text of the Bible	The Czarina Elizabeth Bible	The King James Version	The translation by Ivan Ohiyenko
Social class	Upper classes (because of costly editions)	All classes during the time of the translation	All classes during the time of the translation
Gender	Not evident	Not evident	Not evident
Ethnicity	Eastern (and Southern) Slavs	English-speaking community	Ukrainian

Aspects of social life	1770s original	1965/2005 English translations	1994 Ukrainian translation
Status	Highest (in the Russian Orthodox Church)	High	High
Nationality	Russian Empire	English-speaking countries (esp. the US)	Ukraine and the diaspora
Occupation	Clergy and the Court	Accessible for everyone	Accessible for everyone
Education	Accessible for the highly-educated	Accessible for everyone	Accessible for everyone
Group membership	Not evident	Not evident	Churches with Kyiv-based authority
Political affiliation	Not evident	Not evident	Not evident
Religious affiliation	Slavia Orthodoxa (Orthodoxy of Byzantine Rite)	Diffused	Diffused (more for Ukrainian Orthodox and Protestants)
Language	Church Slavonic (of less Kyivan and more Russian recensions)	17 <sup>th</sup> -century high-flown English	Ukrainian
Cultural traditions	Linked to the 1499 Gennadiy Bible, the 1581 Ostroh Bible, the 1663 Moscow Bible – all based on the Septuagint	Linked to the 1539 Great Bible, the 1560 Geneva Bible, the 1568 Bishops' Bible and based on the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts	Connected with the history of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church during the 20 <sup>th</sup> century

The division of power in the three language projects (Skovoroda's writing, Contemporary Ukrainian and English) reflects different historical traditions and perceptions. And, the oppression, related to the silenced Ukrainian Church, will remain in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century text. Even in the intralingual translation (the 1770s Middle Ukrainian original and the 1994 Contemporary Ukrainian translation), the change of the same referenced text immediately liquidates any feeling for colonial status.

## Conclusions

The postcolonial theory of translation has triggered a number of questions whose answers will sound controversial and ambiguous. It is not clear whether a person, who does not have colonial experience and post-memory, can have an adequate understanding of the colonial text. From this perspective, equivalence will be definitely shaped beyond the parameters of a translator's personality. Besides, it is not understandable if we can speak about translators of colonial literature and colonial translators as about two opposite, contradicting personalities. Meanwhile, there is no evidence that an amateur translator with colonial experience will be more professional than a qualified translator without experience like this. A separate group of questions which goes further than the limits of this article, is still seeking for answers in the postcolonial theory of translation: did (and how) colonial translators (say, 19<sup>th</sup>-century Ukrainian translators) perceive themselves as colonial, non-colonial or anti-colonial personalities? How important is the difference between non-colonial and anti-colonial discourse?

The postcolonial approach adds up a lot to the understanding of the original while the very translations testified their lingual unimportance as well as their failure to render colonialism in the target text. This helps us realize that texts as cultural facts will demand a different vision of equivalence based on untranslatability and multidimensionality. This approach to equivalence perfectly matches the contemporary postpositivist world.

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