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Skovoroda's Poetry Translations into Polish. Theoretical Aspects and Practical Dimensions

Abstract

Walentyna Sobol's article consists of two parts. The first part retrospects to the first mentions of Skovoroda in Poland – from Bohdan Lepky's informational textbook (1928) and Dmytro Chyzhevsky's study *The Philosophy of Skovoroda* (1934) – to the dramatic resonance of the 300th anniversary of the birth of the Ukrainian philosopher celebrated in 2022.

In the second part of the article, the author focuses on translating some works of the collection *Garden of Divine Songs* into Polish – in the projection of selected translation theories by Umberto Eco, Eugene Nida, Ezra Pound, and Jiří Levý. The experience of translating Umberto Eco's novel *The Name of the Rose* by Helena Kostyukovich has been analysed. A comparative analysis of Skovoroda's poetic works translated by Janusz Trybusiewicz and Jerzy Litwiniuk is supported by observations about the peculiarities of the translation skills of each translator. The complexity and importance of working with ancient texts are emphasised.

Among the wide variety of translation concepts, the article's author believes that the Jiří Levý's concept is also promising. It is characterised by the desire to give scientific status to experiments on the translation by providing them with specific methods. One proposed method is multiple translations of the same text into a certain language by different translators, and then back-translation into the original language.

Keywords: theories of translation, practical dimensions, translation, Polish language, Skovoroda, Janusz Trybusiewicz, Jerzy Litwiniuk.

*О краю мій! Свята руїно,
Новітня Троя в попеліх!
Перед Тобою гну коліно
І кличу: Боже в небесах,
За кров, за муки, за руїну
Верни, верни нам Україну.*

The author of these lines, so contemporary, is Bohdan Lepky (4 November 1872 – 21 July 1941). And Lepky is the author of the informative textbook (1928), which spreads the knowledge about Hryhoriy Skovoroda for the first time in Poland:

Wędrował więc jako mędrzec i dziwak po Ukrainie, był zarówno mile widziany na dworach wielkich panów, jak i na futorach kozackich, a o jego popularności świadczy znaczna ilość portretów orza liczne odpisy jego dzieł filozoficznych [...] Dla moralnego odrodzenia ukraińskich warstw wyższych uczynił Skoworoda wiele. Wyrwał je z tego letargu, w który wpadły były, straciwszy niepodległość, a z nią i wszelkie wyższe podniety. Budził sumienie, żądał uświadomienia, poznania siebie, Boga i świata, bo to, według jego zdania – jedno [Emphasis by Bohdan Lepky].¹

Skovoroda's 30 songs from his collection *The Garden of Divine Songs* help conscious readers to embark on the path of perfect knowledge of themselves and the world. This is confirmed by today's reaction in Poland to the role of Skovoroda's philosophy in the year of the 300th anniversary of his birthday:

Polowanie na Skoworodę trwa, cel niustannie wymyka. Na Skoworodę polują także Rosjanie – 7 maja br. W Skoworodynivce na Charkowszczyźnie, miejscu śmierci i pochówku filozofa, w wyniku ostrzału artyleryjskiego spłonęło muzeum poświęcone jego pamięci [...] Kilka tygodni później w Charkowie spłonął, zbombardowany, Uniwersytet Pedagogiczny im. Hryhoriya Skoworody, *alma mater* Żadana.²

¹ *Zarys literatury ukraińskiej. Podręcznik informacyjny Bohdana Łepkiego*, ed. R. Kramar, Warszawa–Zalesie, 2014.

² E. Bendyk, "Hipis z Hetmanatu. Kiedy car Piotr I przekształcał państwo moskiewskie w Imperium Rosyjskie, Hryhoriy Skovoroda tworzył ukraińską filozofię wolności", *Polityka*, 50 (3393), 7–13 Dec. 2022, p. 82.

Do they complete this mission in translation? The purpose of the research is to get a clear view of this question based on the theoretical and practical dimensions of translations of Skovoroda's poetry into Polish.

* * *

Linguistic philosophy, which is the source of knowledge for translation studies, faces many problems. Translation experts reflect on them. Here are just a few: what is the phenomenon of language creativity, what is the guarantee of "possessiveness", what are the functions of language and what exactly unites a specific language with other languages of the world? Are there universal features of the world's languages, and what is their role in expanding human capabilities? Are there worse and better languages? Why is it impossible to translate from one language into another?

Translation serves a better understanding of the world and confirmation of the durability of human culture; it is a "bridge between peoples", as Ivan Franko eloquently put it.

Translation occupies an important place "ontologically, epistemologically, and linguistically".³ The ontological aspect is that the translation comes from a certain being, which is the source text, and a certain being creates the final text, but in a different language. Roman Ingarden solved the problem of the mode of existence of the linguistic existence of an artistic text in a classical way. In turn, the foundations of the linguistic philosophy of translation were laid by Ludwig Wittgenstein. The philosophy of translation is based on two principles. Firstly, all human experiments, their course, every part of them, and every stage take place with language participation. Secondly, all philosophical problems, so-called thinking problems, are related to inaccurate, incorrect use of language. It will be possible to solve or predict them and thereby avoid additional problems and complications – exclusively with the help of linguistic analysis.

³ L. Wille, *Uniwersalistyczne implikacje teorii przekładu*, Rzeszów 2002, p. 11.

Umberto Eco emphasises that the problem of translation is not based solely on linguistic grounds. "To work, the reference must be honoured at the point where the translator is authorised to add something that the original text did not contain. Translation is never a simple transition between two languages, but between two cultures",⁴ he emphasises in a work published in 2006, but gained an even deeper meaning over time. At the same time, Umberto Eco also concludes that precisely linguistic problems are fundamental in the theory of translation: "If you don't want to mix the problems of metalanguage and mediation code, it's to show more fully, to more clearly emphasise the work of interpretation and long comparison between two languages and two cultures".⁵

Perhaps, Umberto Eco continues to think, the best way to establish the meaning of a word is to interpret it with the help of a definition. If, however, every translation is the result of an interpretation, then it is not true that every interpretation is a translation, although many have fallen into the trap of this dangerous metaphor.

One of the most discussed problems is the problem of the existence of an ideal language. Umberto Eco⁶ also asks, "whether there is an ideal language rooted in the universal functionality of the human spirit; a language whose utterances could be expressed in a formal mental language called the mentalese, 'mental language' – the kind that would allow translating Baudelaire".⁷

In the course of thinking and calling for experience and experiments with the three-dimensional language "Aymara" (the *lingua*

⁴ U. Eco, "Doświadczenie przekładu", transl. R. Rzyński, *Teksty Drugie*, 6, 2006, p. 113.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁶ Julia Kristeva in the introduction, calls Umberto Eco one of the most original author, talented with an extraordinary vision of creative imagination, a figure of the modern intellectual outlook: "Włoch, kosmopolita, poliglota olśniewający swą niezwykłą kulturą i imaginacją. Wie, jak pogodzić rozsądek z dowcipem i kształcenie z przyjemnością"; J. Kristeva, "Wprowadzenie", *Teksty Drugie*, 6, 2006, p. 103.

⁷ U. Eco, "Doświadczenie przekładu"..., p. 121.

franca spoken between Bolivia and Peru), the researcher gives the following answer that even if such an ideal language were possible, it would pose a specific problem:

A language could certainly translate every thought expressed in another language, which for many reasons does not lend itself to ordinary translation, but the price would be that everything that that language would express with the help of its own concepts could not be anew translated into our natural languages. An ideal language would be a kind of black hole that would absorb every meaning without the possibility of its reconstruction. Therefore, I prefer to return to endless combinations of interpretation.⁸

The problem of translation becomes especially complicated when it comes to translation from ancient languages, as it is in our case with the translations of Hryhorii Skovoroda's works. Significantly, Umberto Eco had a characteristic case⁹ related to translating his novel *The Name of the Rose*. This novel was translated into Russian by Helena Kostyukevich. The author himself claims that he did not want to modernise his characters; on the contrary, he wanted the readers to become as much "medieval" as possible. For this purpose, Umberto Eco presents the titles of various books by ancient authors in his work in Latin.¹⁰

⁸ Ibid., p. 122.

⁹ It is crucial to show the ambiguity of the contradictions: xenophilisation/nation-alisation and, on the other hand, archaisation/modernisation. It is this contradiction, according to Umberto Eco, that creates various combinations. These reflections accompany the scientist's story about the translation of his novel and give a more complete idea of the complexity of the problems that of translators have to overcome in their works.

¹⁰ According to Umberto Eco, it was crucial for the virtual reader to feel the atmosphere of the medieval period, to identified both with its customs and rituals, and with its language. Eco was thinking of the readers, who despite not having studied Latin, would at least identify by ear, and this was true for Italian, French, Spanish, or German readers. After all, even English readers were able to understand Latin expressions such as *affidavit* or *subpoena* known from the language of the law or TV shows. Even an American readers who do not know Latin will be able to identify the medieval language of the clergy when reading *de pentagono salomonis*, that will remind of the words 'Pentagon' and 'Salomona'.

Why exactly was there a problem with the Russian translation? Because for a Slavic reader (as the author somewhat categorically asserts), Latin sentences and names given in Cyrillic would not clarify anything since (for the Russian-language readers) Latin is not associated with the Middle Ages or with the environment in which the events take place. Considering this, the translator Helena Kostyukevich offered an original and, as time has proven, an effective way out of the situation. Instead of Latin, she used Old Slavic medieval language, the spiritual language of the Orthodox Church. In this way, Kostyukevich's translation helped the readers of Slavic languages understand the essence of the Middle Ages, feel the time distance, the atmosphere of deep religiosity, and understand what the work is about.

The language of Hryhoriy Skovoroda's poetic works is the Ukrainian language of the eighteenth century. In the case of a translation into Polish, we can probably talk about a double translation. The first step is translating the hard-to-understand original language into modern Ukrainian. And only later – into Polish. Skovoroda in Polish translations, which were included in the anthology under the title *Antologia poezji ukraińskiej* [Anthology of Ukrainian poetry], are the works of Janusz Trybusiewicz and Jerzy Litwiniuk.¹¹ Janusz Trybusiewicz is the author of the translation of three poetic miniatures. Comparing the translations of Janusz Trybusiewicz with the original of Hryhoriy Skovoroda highlights the immutability of Skovoroda's reproduction of the blessed moment when clarification comes both in nature and in the human soul:

Przeminęła chmura,
A tęcza powstała.
Przewalił się smutek,
Zajaśniał świat cały.¹²

¹¹ *Antologia poezji ukraińskiej*, comp. F. Nieuważny, J. Pleśniarowicz, introd. S. Kozak, F. Nieuważny, transl. A. Baumgardten et al., Warszawa, 1977, pp. 108–117.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 108.

A condition for the authentic perception of old poetry, sometimes difficult to understand in its archaic essence, is its original revival by giving it a modern linguistic form. Janusz Trybusiewicz does not attempt to modernise the language and style; his translation fulfils a preserving function. The translator revives the image of the dove, the Christian emblem of the Holy Spirit, essential in the philosophical world of Hryhoriy Skovoroda, and at the same time – namely, with the symbolic load of the last two lines – makes the assimilation with the modern world impossible.

It is important to emphasise that the unconditional modernisation of the image of the dove in the dictionary of symbols of the English author Jack Tresidder is considered virtually impossible. Thus, in that dictionary, Tresidder states that even the terminology of international politics, which includes “doves” and “hawks”, “although modern, is based on ancient analogies”.¹³

Gołębico, ptaku czysty, duch ci nie pozwala
Mieszkać w miejscach, które brudne, które świat pokalał,
Tylko trawy i dąbrowy są twoją ostoją –
Tam przyjemnie, tam chłód duszy prawiecznym pokojem.¹⁴

The following translation by Janusz Trybusiewicz of the *Gaudia pelle* miniature appears to be the most conceptual, open to a variety of interpretations:

Radość pędzić,
Lęk przeganiać,
Nie dopuszczać nadziei,
A i smutku się wstrzymać.
O, jakże łatwo umysł przyniewolić
Tam, gdzie niewola
U ludzi zwyczajem.¹⁵

¹³ Dzh. Tressyder, *Slovar symbolov*, perev. S. Palko, Moskva, 1999, p. 61.

¹⁴ *Antologia poezji ukraińskiej...*, p. 109.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

An outstanding translator, a brilliant connoisseur of Ukrainian literature and a world-renowned master of words, Jerzy Litwiniuk, translated seven works of Hryhoriy Skovoroda from the collection of *The Garden of Divine Songs* (*Ogród pieśni nabożnych* in the works of Wolodymyr Mokry¹⁶ and *Ogród nabożnych pieśni* in *Antologia poezji ukraińskiej*¹⁷): songs no. 9th, 10th, 13th, 18th, 19th, 23rd, and 24th.

First, let us dwell on the Tenth Song, the most famous. The first and last stanzas of the Tenth Song undergo drastic changes in Jerzy Litwiniuk's translation. The first lines of Skovoroda, when translated, lose their universal meaning: "Zwyczaj i prawo mają wsze stany; Swój rozum każdej głowie jest dany", meaning: "Every town has morals and rights; Every person has his own mind".

As we can see, Jerzy Litwiniuk emphasises the social and class strata, and the status context. Skovoroda does not have such accents in this stanza: "Every heart has its own love, every throat has its own taste".

Instead, in the refrain – both in the original and in the translation – there is a complete emotional and semantic coherence:

А мнѣ одна только в свѣтѣ дума,
А мнѣ одно только не йдет с ума.

Compared to:

A mnie zaprzęta jedno na świecie,
A mnie to jedno w głowie się plecie.

The next three stanzas of the Tenth Song from the collection *Ogród pieśni nabożnych* are narrative, their translation is graceful and elegant. But in the last stanza, the translator weakens not the sound but rather the content load:

¹⁶ W. Mokry, *Od Ilariona do Skoworody. Antologia poezji ukraińskiej XI–XVIII w.*, Kraków, 1996, p. 342.

¹⁷ *Antologia poezji ukraińskiej...*, p. 110.

O, śmierci z kosą swą zamaszystą!
Nie szczędzisz cara między asystą
Ani nie baczysz – chłop czy wielmoża,
Wszystko polykasz jak słomę pożar.
Kto może plunąć na twoje ostrze?
Taki, co wybrał ścieżki najprostsze.¹⁸

In Jerzy Litwiniuk's translation, the imperative of conscience disappears; instead of the image of a wide road, the straightest paths to the truth appear.

In the light of modern civilisation, when post-truth is gaining strength, such a translation, in my opinion, is inferior to the original because the concept of "conscience" is more voluminous and more profound than the euphemism "the straightest paths" – *ścieżki najprostsze*.

The principle of accurate reproduction of details and simultaneous accentuation is appropriate, Litwiniuk implements it in his work on Skovoroda's Songs Eighteenth and Nineteenth. The number of formal changes here is minimal since the languages of the original and the translation are distant from a linguistic point of view but still close, considering the cultural point of view. Litwiniuk's creative approach clearly demonstrates one of the most well-known theories today among a wide variety of selected translation theories. We mean the theory of Eugene Nida, the synthesis of which is presented by Lucyna Wille in the monographic work *Uniwersalistyczne implikacje teorii przekładu* [Universalist implications of translation theory].¹⁹ Eugene Nida offers the translator a system of priorities as the starting point of their work. These priorities are as follows: 1) the essence of the context is dominant in relation to the literal content (word for word) – the linguistic norm; 2) dynamic equivalence has primary to formal correspondence – the norm of reception of the one who selects; 3) the auditory form of speech is primary over the written form – the norm is communication; 4) the forms used and accepted

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 110–119.

¹⁹ L. Wille, *Uniwersalistyczne implikacje...*, pp. 63–71.

by the recipients for whom the translation is intended take over the forms that can traditionally enjoy greater recognition (the norm of the type of recipient).

Speaking about the primacy of meaning in relation to form, Eugene Nida means a specific “meaning of meaning”, more precisely derived from the whole horizon of relationships of the higher organisational unit of the text that is subject to translation (such a higher organisational unit is a chapter in relation to a paragraph, a book – in relation to a chapter, the Bible in relation to its individual books, the Christian religion – in relation to the text of the Bible). That is, the principle of non-contradiction applies here in the relationship of the whole to the component part. Nida’s theory, which has distinct Platonic features, refers to the universal, which has an expression in every language, to an intelligible message rooted in the extra- and supra-linguistic sphere of autonomous existence. Language appears here as a bridge, an intermediary between qualitatively different beings, a carrier of truth, and a medium of the absolute.

This approach seems to take place in most artistic translators’ translation practice, including Janusz Trybusiewicz and Jerzy Litwiniuk. We appreciate them as the appearance of Skovoroda’s poetic works in the Polish language. Such work is not easy, it is based on the human ability to perceive ethical values, on the basis of the “spiritual self-identity of the human race” (E. Nida).

Jerzy Litwiniuk raises the problem of biblical and philosophical sources in the process of translating of the Twenty-Third Song from the collection of *The Garden of Divine Songs*. Since it presents the problem of time, Lina Kostenko’s poetic lines come to mind: “The day passes, the day passes, And where is my Garden of divine songs...”.

The essence of the context in the process of translating the Twenty-Third Song becomes dominant over the literal meaning at a certain point.

О дражайше жизни время,
Коль тебя мы не щадим!
Коль так, как излишне бремя,
Всюду мещем, не глядим!

Будто прожитий час возвратится назад,
 Будто рѣки до своїх повернуться ключем,
 Будто в наших руках лѣт до прибавки взять,
 Будто наш з безчисленних состав ленний вѣк дней.

Compared to:

Czasie życia drogocenny!
 Jakże ciebie nie szczędzimy!
 Niby jaki śmieć nikczemny
 Rozrzucamy, precz pędzimy!
 Jakby zegar przeżyte oddawał nam chwile,
 Jakby mogły do źródeł zawrócić swych rzeki,
 Jakby każdy mógł wziąć jeszcze lat drugie tyle,
 Jakby z dni niezliczonych składały się wieki.²⁰

The next stanza demonstrates the translator's digression from the original, the biblical image of Methuselah appears in the translation. Methuselah was Noah's grandfather, and God let him live not 800 but 969 years. But Methuselah is also a symbol of the tree of life older than the pyramids...

Therefore, the introduction of this image actualised the motif of the inexorable transience of human existence, but with an emphasis on man's awareness of the perishability of the flesh and the immortality of the spirit. Moreover, the introduction of the image of Methuselah as a symbol of the tree of life, which is older than the pyramids, obviously updates the work of Juliusz Słowacki *Conversation with pyramids*:²¹

Piramidy, czy została
 Jeszcze jaka trumna głucha,
 Gdziebym złożył mego ducha,
 Ażby Polska zmartwychwstała?
 – Cierp, a pracuj! I bądź dzielny,

²⁰ *Antologia poezji ukraińskiej...*, p. 114.

²¹ <https://polska-poezja.pl/lista-wierszy/223-juliusz-slowacki-rozmowa-z-piramidami> Juliusz%20Słowacki (accessed: 31 March 2022).

Bo twój naród nieśmiertelny!
 My umarłych tylko znamy,
 A dla ducha trumn nie mamy.²²

This comparative association of Skovoroda as the predecessor of Słowacki, no matter how subjective it may seem, is also confirmed in my opinion by the lines from the modern studies of Edwin Bendyk mentioned above: “Dla Ukraińców Skovoroda jest bez wątpienia pierwszym filozofem ukraińskim o światowym znaczeniem, porównywalnym z Michelem Montaigne’em, Aniołem Ślązakiem, Janem Amosem Komenskim, Johnem Miltonem, Torquato Tasso”.²³ So, *corpora dormint, vigilant anima*.

A fragment of Skovoroda’s poetry in the original reads as follows:

Для чего ж ми жить желаем
 Лѣт на свѣтѣ восемьсот,
 Ежели мы их теряем
 На всякій бездѣлиць род
 Лутче час честно жить, неж скверно цілий день,
 Лутче один день свят от безбожного года,
 Лутче один год чист, неж десяток сквернен,
 Лутче в пользѣ десять лѣт, неж весь вѣк без плода

Compared to:

Czemu sobie lat życzymy
 Ośmuset jak Matuzalem,
 Gdy na próżno je trwonimy
 Na błahostki, z krótkim żalem?
 Lepsza dobra godzina niż strawionych chwil krocie,
 Lepszy cnotliwy dzień niż rok cały niegodny,
 Lepszy jest prawy rok niżli dziesięć w niecnocie,
 Dziesięć lat użytecznych niż żywot bezpłodny.²⁴

²² Ibid.

²³ E. Bendyk, *Hipis z Hetmanatu...*, p. 84.

²⁴ *Antologia poezji ukraińskiej...*, p. 114.

In Jerzy Litwiniuk's translation, this fragment contains the vision of an "enlightening detail" that Ezra Pound developed as the basis of his theory.²⁵ The theory is based on the concept of energies present in the language. Words are like sculpted images, which can be compared to words engraved on stone. This approach gives the translator more freedom. The translator is interpreted as an artist who models words as a carver. Pound's theoretical writings come from two periods of his own poetic work. The first is the phase of early imagism, which is characterised by a departure from traditional logic, reaching for images and abstraction as means of expression. The second phase is late imagism or vorticism (from the word vortex – whirlwind), which operates with the word in action, as well as – what is especially important – illuminating detail (*luminos detali*), and the meaning of the represented figures recedes into the background subjects, but the main role is played by linguistic energy or form. The central place in his translation theory is the exact reproduction of details: individual expressions, isolated and even fragmentary patterns (images). Ezra Pound's technique consists of extracting key words from the canvas of a poetic work and in reproducing a network of logical and expressive connections constituting a figurative (pictorial) interpretation of the work through the transmission of its ideological structure. For Ezra Pound, translation is, to some extent, equivalent to interpretation and criticism, as it reveals the original text's fundamental (sometimes hidden) structure. And what seems especially correct in his concept is that translation is a creative act because it ensures the continued existence of works doomed to oblivion.

The scientist places a particular emphasis on the need to appreciate the translator-poet's contribution to the preservation of the durability of human thought and human experiences.

The condition for the perpetuation and re-experiencing of old poetry, often incomprehensible but with such a charming depth and archaic flair, therefore, is its revival by providing a coherent linguistic framework, I dare say, as a perfect framing for a precious emerald.

²⁵ L. Wille, *Uniwersalistyczne implikacje...*, pp. 71–77.

The translation performs the functions of preservation: it should revive the values, views, and forms of vision that were essential in ancient times, and also enables their critical and creative assimilation with the modern world, and what is especially important – the translation of poetry has a heuristic character: “it brings the reader to the earlier essential qualities of the original through an equivalent adjustment to the intended form of the work (after translation)”.²⁶

In fact, the translations of Skovoroda’s poetic works into Polish confirm what is said above, and, at the same time, diagnose the points of discussion, which cause a relatively modest number of attempts to bring the wonder of Ukrainian philosopher to the Polish reader.

Among the various translation concepts, the concept of Jiří Levý also seems promising.²⁷ It is characterised by the desire to give scientific status to experiments on the translation by providing them with specific methods. One of the proposed methods is multiple translations of the same text into a certain language by different translators and then back-translation of the translation into the original language. According to the scientist, such a method should make it possible to confirm specific alterations made by translators and derive a particular trend based on them. In addition, it could also indicate the „benefits” of such experiments. According to Levý, these tendencies could be divergent (concentrating) or convergent (that is, dispersing), depending on whether the translator uses a wide or narrow range of options.²⁸ In the projection of translations of Hryhoriy Skovoroda’s works, this method, in my opinion, may also have prospects depending on the number of quality translations of his pieces.

Thus, the translations of Skovoroda’s poetic works by Jan Trybusiewicz and Jerzy Litwiniuk became the pearl of the 1976 edition of *Antologia poezji ukraińskiej*.

Among the songs translated into Polish (nos. 9th, 10th, 13th, 18th, 19th, 23rd, and 24th), it is worth highlighting the translation

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 71–72.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 86–90.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 89.

of the Twenty-Third Song. Not only does the translation highlight the motif of transience, the perishability of the flesh, but also the immortality of the spirit. The main thing is that the introduction of the image of Methuselah as a symbol of the tree of life, which is even older than the pyramids, guides the reader in Juliusz Słowacki's poem *Conversation with the Pyramids*. It is righteous to claim that the Ukrainian philosopher was the forerunner of the Polish poet.

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