

## The place of the 1958 edition of Andrei Fedorov's "Introduction to Translation Theory" in the history of translation studies

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It has been 30 years since the communication barriers between Eastern and Western translation studies (TS) scholars caused by political reasons were removed. Or it seemed so. Until that time, information flow in TS had passed more or less in a one-way direction: for Eastern scholars it had been rather difficult to get access to current information in the field, but when they overcame the physical obstacles they could easily read the works of their Western colleagues written in English, German or French, the languages of their professional interest. For Western scholars it had also been rather difficult to get access to the writings of Eastern translation theorists but mostly for different reasons: very few of them were written in Western European languages so they had to be translated, but one would translate only what was worth it. In essence, the main obstacle had been an ideological one: since some sort of ideological foundation, such as the leading role of the Communist Party or a Marxist worldview, had to be mentioned in every Eastern scholarly writing (or even in prefaces or postscripts of literary works) to demonstrate their ideological flawlessness, in the eyes of the uninitiated reader, it cast doubt on the whole work and resulted in rather low interest in translating Eastern reflections on translation. And while in the 1990s a very intensive study of Western TS started in the East, followed by "an interest in and adoption of 'Western' theories at the expense of re-evaluating and responding to our own theories in the light of current trends" (Gromová and Kamenárová 2014, 108), the attitude of Western scholars towards Eastern translation theory has remained skeptical, especially towards the Soviet one, and it "has resulted in the consistent absence of Soviet scholarship in Western TS anthologies and in Western histories of the field, an absence that appears only to confirm and compound their irrelevance" (Baer 2021a, ix).

This is one of the reasons why it is only this year that the principal book of Soviet and Russian translation theory, *Vvedenie v teoriiu perevoda* (Introduction to translation theory), written by Andrei Fedorov in 1953, has become a part of West European translation studies in Brian James Baer's translation (2021c).

### ANDREI FEDOROV AND HIS INTRODUCTION TO TRANSLATION THEORY

Andrei Fedorov (1906–1997), a man whose "biography is a bit odd"<sup>1</sup> (Mossop 2013/2019) from a West European point of view, was a literary scholar (a specialist on the works of the Russian Symbolists Innokentii Annenskii and Alexander Blok)

and a translator as well as a linguist, and, above all, translation theorist. It should be noted that before the publishing of his *Introduction* in English, Fedorov had not been completely unknown to Western TS, since his work had been introduced in the Western European context in two ways, directly and indirectly. The first way is represented by the only other English translation of his works, the article “The Problem of Verse Translation” (1974) published in the journal *Linguistics*. The second was based on: a) very influential but not very objective sources of information represented by Edmond Cary or Peter Brang<sup>2</sup> (see, e.g., Pym [2016] 2017); b) Fedorov’s influence in the theorizing of Otto Kade and Itamar Even-Zohar (see Baer 2021a, x); and c) writings endeavoring to provide an objective view of Fedorov’s contribution to TS, authored mainly by Slavonic or Russian studies scholars, such as Susanna Witt (2011), Brian Mossop (2013/2019) or Larisa Schippel (2017). The increasing number of such works in recent years is a good sign of a possible move towards a general translation theory – an ideal TS has been trying to achieve from the very beginning:

A [...] prerequisite for the development of a full-blown general theory of translation is that we each need to know more about what the other is doing. [...] It is unfortunate that, given the limited knowledge of Russian in the West, so much [...] remains a closed book to so many of us (Holmes [1978] 2005, 102).

The first English translation of *Fedorov’s Introduction to Translation Theory* (as its translator Baer entitled it) may help TS get closer to this ideal aim or at least to the “synthesis of opinions in translation theory”<sup>3</sup> (Fedorov 1966), of which Fedorov dreamed, and thus become such a turning point, such “a real revolution in science of translation” (Garbovskiy and Kostikova 2012, 54) as was its original back in 1953.

The key principle of Fedorov’s theory was the principle of translatability [*perevodimost’*], that is, the possibility of a full value translation [*polnotsennyi perevod*], which is achievable only when we proceed not on the basis of individual elements separately rendered, but on the basis of the complex whole [*slozhnoe tseloe*] in which those elements are found and which lends them their specific meaning (Fedorov 1953, 100; Baer 2021c, 82),

for what is important in translation is the correlation [*sootvetstvie*] not of one individual feature or of a simple collection of features, but the correlation of entire systems [*tselaia sistema*], in which everything is mutually conditioned [*vsë vzaimoobusloveno*] (17; 11).

Fedorov applied a Russian Formalist systems-based approach to the study of literature, an adaptation of Saussurian linguistics, to the study of translation (cf. Baer 2021a), and this Saussurian view of translation enabled him to develop a foundation for general principles that can be applied to all kinds of translation. It was possible only if there was a common denominator “and the most obvious common denominator was language” (Mossop 2013/2019). This was the most revolutionary idea, for “Fedorov was the first to argue that translation theorizing should be based on linguistics, due to the fact that language is the common denominator of all translation” (Baer 2021a, i). For that reason, Fedorov’s book is considered the beginning of a linguistics-based translation theory in Russia.

## CONFUSING TERMINOLOGY

When explaining the approach used in his book, Fedorov uses two adjectives that may function as synonyms – *lingvisticheskii* (linguistic; connected with the study of language) and *iazykovoï* (linguistic; connected with language):

as translation always has to do with language, always involves working with language, translation demands to be studied primarily from a linguistic perspective [*v lingvisticheskoi razreze*] related to the nature of the relationship between the two languages involved and their stylistic means of expression. Moreover, the study of translation in literary contexts constantly runs up against the necessity of examining linguistic phenomena [*iazykovye iavleniia*], analysing and evaluating the linguistic resources [*iazykovye sredstva*] used by translators (Fedorov 1953, 13; Baer 2021c, 8–9).

The publication of Fedorov's *Introduction to Translation Theory* triggered the famous polemical debate concerning literary translation (cf., e.g., Azov 2013; Witt 2016; Pym [2016] 2017; Baer 2021a) in which literary translation theorists (led by Ivan Kashkin) reproached Fedorov for reducing translation of literature to mere linguistic operations and argued that literary translation cannot be studied from the point of view of linguistics (cf. Kashkin [1954] 1977). But Fedorov understood translation as both a creative activity (*tvorcheskaia deiatel'nost'*; 1953, 7; Baer 2021c, 4) and a stylistic operation in its broadest sense. For Fedorov, "the fundamental task for translation theory, as a linguistic discipline, appears most vividly in the context of stylistics [*v stilisticheskoi razreze*]" (18; 12).

After the criticism of his *Introduction*, Fedorov revised it and in 1958 the book was published with a subtitle added: *Vvedenie v teoriu perevoda (Lingvisticheskie problemy)* (Introduction to translation theory [Linguistic problems]). After that it was revised and republished two more times (in 1968 and 1983), with the title of the book changed into *Osnovy obshchei teorii perevoda (Lingvisticheskii ocherk)* (Fundamentals of general translation theory [A linguistic essay]) and *Osnovy obshchei teorii perevoda (Lingvisticheskie problemy)* (Fundamentals of general translation theory [Linguistic problems]) respectively (the unaltered 1983 edition was republished again in 2002). In each of the versions of the book Fedorov not only revised the text and updated the information (without substantially changing the book's composition), but also again and again explained his "linguistic" position (except the 1983 edition), trying to support it by adding subheadings to the book, but it did not make things any clearer. The word "linguistic" seemed to cast a spell on the readers, especially the proponents of the literary approach to translation, for many decades.

Fedorov's linguistics, however, seems to differ from the linguistics in the works of such Russian linguistics-oriented translation theorists as Iakov Retsker, Leonid Barkhudarov, Alexander Shveitser or Vilen Komissarov. The contribution of these theorists' works to the development of Russian TS is indisputable, and yet their view of translation is narrower than Fedorov's – contrary to Fedorov's stylistic (in its broadest possible sense) approach, they all formulated "purely" linguistic specific translation theories. So even though Fedorov himself termed his theory as linguistic, the term "a language-oriented, language-based approach" (Mossop 2013/2019) seems more apt.

## MISUNDERSTANDINGS IN THE WEST ELIMINATED

So if in Fedorov's native country such misunderstandings concerning his book occurred, how could it have been understood in the West where intermediaries are needed? It is necessary to ask the right questions if something does not make sense. This is what Anthony Pym (Pym and Ayzazyan 2014) did when Brian Mossop drew attention to "the remarkable" (2010) book by Fedorov as probably "the first sustained argument (330 pages!) for a language-based rather than a literary theory of translation" (Mossop 2013/2019). The important thing here is that Pym was the first Western scholar outside Russian or Slavonic studies (i.e. not reading Russian) to not only notice that but also to try to learn more. Together with Nune Ayzazyan, they have done what the Russian literary translation theorists in the 1950s and later should have done: They have thoroughly read what Fedorov wrote to find that his book provides "the complex unitary concept of translation" (Pym and Ayzazyan 2014, 15). Some of the questions that arose while reading the book Pym answered himself (Pym [2016] 2017), some were answered by Baer (2021a; 2021b).

Perhaps the most important here was the question: "Could we have read it so wrongly?" (Pym and Ayzazyan 2014, 14). Pym's research shows us that a scholar may sometimes act as an "unreliable narrator" (like E. Cary), that translation is sometimes the source of the greatest misunderstandings in TS, that one should analyze a scholarly writing as if it was a text to be translated, with all its extra-textual aspects (e.g. that it is crucial to read the source itself, but the source may not be enough when dealing with text from another "ideological world"), and that questions from a person from outside our field of interest (e.g. Russian studies, in this case) or belonging to another generation, however naïve they may seem, should be answered and not be ridiculed as being obvious because they make us reconsider the obviousness.

Today Western TS scholars have the whole text of Fedorov's 1953 *Introduction* at their disposal. The editor's and translator's commentary in the book, as well as a number of writings on the topic, may help in better understanding the text that was written in the country and in the times where and when people knew how to read between the lines. Moreover, there is one more source that is worth reading in this context – the second, 1958 edition of Fedorov's book.

## WHY SHOULD WE READ THE 1958 EDITION OF FEDOROV'S *INTRODUCTION TO TRANSLATION THEORY*?

First, the 1958 edition is less ideological. Although it still contains chapters on Marx's, Engels's and Lenin's views on translation, the chapter "Vital issues concerning translation theory in light of Joseph Stalin's teaching on linguistics" (or, to be more precise, all references to Stalin in it), which may deter a Western reader from reading the book, was omitted. While Mossop (2013/2019) and Pym (Pym and Ayzazyan 2014) are willing to admit that it was a thing that had to be said at the time, Baer argues that "Fedorov was genuinely elated when in 1950 Stalin definitively refuted the theories of Nikolai Marr, who had dominated Soviet linguistics since the 1930s" (2021a, xxiv), but this does not mean he was elated to cite "the brilliant work [*genial'nyi trud*] of Stalin" (2021c, 80; Fedorov 1953, 97). The omission

of the chapter could be explained as warranted by favorable political circumstances – after Stalin’s cult of personality was condemned in 1956, all references to him had to be removed from books. But Fedorov’s attitude in this respect is revealed by his style – in all the passages reflecting official Soviet ideology, there is no emotional involvement, Fedorov just uses typical ideological clichés (e.g. “decadent works of bourgeois authors”) and sometimes even “just switches to the dumb language of purges and public scolding [*tupoi iazyk chistok i prorabotok*]” (Fokin 2016, 171) that first occurred in his 1941 work *O khudozhestvennom perevode* (On artistic translation). Concerning the chapters on Marx, Engels and Lenin, one would certainly not refer to them as to translation theorists, but the material provided in the chapter is relevant to the topic of the book and shows Fedorov’s professional interest in it.

In the “Introduction to the second edition” Fedorov explains why a substantial revision of the book was necessary. There were several reasons: a lasting interest in the problems of translation, a high number of works on translation that had occurred after the publication of the first edition and the critical comments on the first edition. The main objections to the first edition concerned the undue broadening of the competences of linguistics. Fedorov admits that in the first edition some of his formulations regarding the role of linguistics in translation may have been too radical. “The categorical nature of these formulations, apparently, overshadowed everything that was said [...] about the multifacetedness [*mnogostoronnost*] of study translation requires and about the possibility of different ways of studying it, not mutually exclusive”<sup>4</sup> (1958, 4). He points out that much more research in the field of linguistic aspects of translation is necessary so that translation theory as a philological discipline could be formed.

Most of the text of the “Introduction to the second edition” is a response to the objections or accusations of Ivan Kashkin (expressed in Kashkin [1954] 1977, [1955] 1977). More clearly than in the first edition, Fedorov formulates the core ideas of his theory.

In any translation (including literary translation) language is in no way a mere auxiliary means [*vspomogatel'noe sredstvo raboty*]. Any problem solved in translation (ideological and cognitive – in relation to scientific writing or ideological and aesthetic – in relation to literature) is solved only by the means of language [*iazykovye sredstva*]. Of course, the ideologically correct interpretation of the original, penetration into its artistic uniqueness and high qualities of the translator – all these are necessary prerequisites for solving the problem, but the means of solving it (certainly not an end in itself) is language (1958, 5).

In order to prevent misunderstandings concerning literary translation Fedorov is more specific about it:

[S]ince in translation, compared to the original literary work, such tasks as the search for a theme and for a hero, the creation of a plot, its composition etc. do not arise, it is language that becomes the main and only area of the *creative activity* [*tvorchestvo*] of the translator as the one who interprets [*istolkovatel'*] and expresses [*vyrazitel'*] the author’s intention. Images of the original, expressed by certain means of language, can be rendered, “re-expressed” [*perevyrazheny*] in translation only by certain means (in very many cases formally distant) of the other language (6).

In the introduction to the second edition of the book Fedorov also explains that the two main areas of translation issues are the same as in the first edition: first, general problems related to language that are common to all types of translation are discussed, and second, the specific features of the translation of various types of textual material are examined. He once again emphasizes that

it is not a book on literary translation as such [...], that literary translation, being the highest form of translation activity [*vysshaia forma perevodcheskoi deiatel'nosti*], is discussed only as a part of the general problem of translation, but the most principal and complex part [*printsipial'neishaia i slozhneishaia*] [...], and that from all the vast problem of literary translation there are highlighted some special linguistic problems that are crucial from the point of view of translatability [*perevodimost'*] (8).

The 1958 edition is more elaborate than the first edition and its arrangement is more logical. Especially in the first chapter, in which the aims of the theoretical study of translation are discussed, new definitions were added. For example, the foundation of the book is defined here as linguistic in the broad sense of the word, “i.e. including the stylistic issues of language in literary works”<sup>5</sup> (16). And the aims of a language-based translation theory are given as follows:

Translation theory in its linguistic aspect should analyze, explain and summarize the facts of translation experience, it should establish correspondences and differences [*sootvetstvia i raskhozhdenia*] between languages. It should serve as a scientific foundation for translation practice. On the basis of the general regularities [*obshchie zakonomernosti*] revealed by translation theory, specific conclusions can further be drawn in relation to individual special cases. At the same time, it is, of course, necessary to avoid any kind of stereotypes in resolving translation issues. The development of normative principles or “rules” [*normativnye printsipy ili “pravila”*] of translation is possible only to a limited extent and always in a relatively general form. [...] A decisive role is always played by the context, the specific case (19).

The 1958 edition, of course, contains all the fundamental information of the first edition, the most fundamental being this definition of the act of translation, with a slight but significant change compared to the first edition: “The act of translation [...] signifies the faithful [1953: accurate] and complete expression through the means available in one language that which was already expressed by the means available in another language in an inseparable unity of content and form”<sup>6</sup> (11; 1953, 7; Baer 2021c, 4). The translator’s task therefore lies

in the constant search for the linguistic means to express the unity of content and form represented by the original, and in the selection of linguistic means from among the various options. This process of searching and selection is in all cases [*v liubom sluchae*] a creative one [*tvorcheskii kharakter*] (14; 12; 7–8; Fedorov’s emphasis missing in Baer’s translation added).

It should be noted, however, that for Fedorov *any* translation is a creative process (creative *in all cases*), “a form of creative activity in the field of language [*forma tvorcheskoi deiatel'nosti v oblasti iazyka*]” (11; 7; 4) so the creative aspect of translation is not reduced to only literary translation.



Another fundamental element of Fedorov's theory is the term "full-value [adequate, *polnotsennyi*] translation": "A full value translation entails exhaustive [*accuracy in*] rendering the semantic content of the original and full value functional-stylistic correspondence with it"<sup>7</sup> (132; 111; 92; the words in brackets were left out in the 1958 edition). Fedorov uses the term "*adekvatnyi* [adequate]"<sup>8</sup>, already existing in the Russian translation theory (Azov 2013; Ayyazyan and Pym 2017; Baer 2021a), together with the Russian word "*polnotsennyi*". It again can be explained by the political circumstances. "Protecting the integrity of the Russian language became a leitmotif in late Stalinist Russia, where the use of foreign words would be increasingly associated not only with aestheticism and small-f formalism but also with a fawning attitude toward the West" (Baer 2021a, xxiii). It is interesting, however, that Fedorov never gave up on the loan word. In the later editions of his *Introduction* (1968, 1983) he uses both words as synonyms and in his 1966 article he writes that it was Aleksandr Smirnov and himself who defined the term *adekvatnost'* or *polnotsenost'* as "concerning all types of translation [...] and therefore being a concept of the general theory of translation [*iavliaetsia kategoriei obshchei teorii perevoda*]" (Fedorov 1966, 56).

One might ask: Why read the 1958 edition and not, for example, the latest one ([1983] 2002) in which Fedorov updated the information about the newest trends (1980s) in TS and the translation examples? On one hand, the last edition still contains the chapters on Marx, Engels and Lenin; on the other hand, the chapters on documentary business and technical material are omitted, so it does not contain all the basic genres of the translated material. But what is most important, in the definition of the act of translation the formulation about *inseparable unity of content and form* is missing.

## CONCLUSION

According to Andrei Fedorov, "every translation is a window in another world [*okno v drugoi mir*]" (1988, 137). Brian Baer's translation of *Fedorov's Introduction to Translation Theory* opened such a window to another world, to "Europe's *internal other*" (Baer 2011, 1) that, let us hope, may after that become part of *us*.

The 1953 edition of Fedorov's book is a classic, a milestone, because "without the unified approach to translation made possible first by Fedorov and then by others, the translation schools might never have given birth to Translation Studies" (Mossop 2013/2019). But there is another version of this book, its 1958 edition, that maintained all the qualities of the classic while its deficiencies were reduced. It is by no means a "hopelessly outdated" book (Azov 2012, 136); on the contrary, its reader, just like the reader of the first edition, "is likely to be astonished at the high level of sophistication and erudition of Fedorov's work" (Baer 2021, x). Fedorov himself appreciated clarity of expression and in contemporary (1980s) linguistics-based translation theory he pointed out to "the tendency to the greatest possible accuracy and rigor of explanation, to the maximum terminological differentiation of concepts, in fact leading to certain (sometimes large) complexity, 'encodedness', not always justified by the degree of complexity of the subject" ([1983] 2002, 133). In his writings he sometimes used light irony, but, as the translator Levon Mkrtch'ian, Fedorov's student, wrote, he "argues well, respectfully, and the un-hurried softness of his tone conveys the firmness of his positions"<sup>9</sup> (1984).

Moreover, in Fedorov's work, way of thinking, and writing we can see not only his scholarly qualities, but also his qualities as a person – his key concepts in terms of translation: objectivity and responsibility seemed to be the values he aspired to in his life. “There are a hundred petty nationalisms operative in translation theory: every tradition invented its most valuable concepts first; every nation deserves better international recognition of its contribution” (Ayvazyan and Pym 2017, 240). Perhaps they are not nationalisms, but it is just personal ambition hiding behind them, as we could see in the case of Kashkin (or in Pym 2015) and his attitude to Fedorov – Kashkin, as a literary translator himself, must have known that Fedorov's approach to describing translation, including literary translation, was right (while he himself not being able to define his own term “realist translation” [*realisticheskii perevod*], see Kashkin [1955] 1977, cf. also Azov 2012), but he simply could not allow anyone and anything to threaten his position and status of the founder of a translation school (see Kashkin [1954] 1977). This is what Fedorov would never have done. His students remember him as “a genuinely principled [*po nastoiashchemu printsipial'nyi*], good and honest man” (phoenix-germani [Maiboroda] 2006) with “impeccable aristocratic manners [*bezuprechnaia aristokraticheskaia manera*]” (Kalashnikova 2013). Maurice Friedberg compares Fedorov with Roman Jakobson:

Jakobson's range of scholarly interests was exceptionally broad, so it was natural for him to write that a linguist should be sensitive to the poetic function of language and *vice versa*. Andrei Fedorov [...] was a linguist of that kind. However, Jakobson and Fedorov were exceptions among scholars (1997, 72).

*Fedorov's Introduction to Translation Theory* is an exceptional text, a proof that “manuscripts don't burn” and that it is worth turning “to the text, to the written word that survives across history” (Pym and Ayvazyan 2014, 14).

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For more on A. Fedorov's work and/or life see, e.g., Schippel (2017), Mossop (2013/2019), Baer (2021c), Pym ([2016] 2017), Shakhova (2021), Friedberg (1997), Azov (2013), Fokin (2016).

<sup>2</sup> Apart from the case referred to by A. Pym, P. Brang's essay was the only source of information about Fedorov's *Introduction to Translation Theory* for Katharina Reiss (2014) “because the Russian original was not available” (19) in 1971 when the German original of her book was published.

<sup>3</sup> Certain moves in this direction have already been made, e.g., in Pym ([2016] 2017).

<sup>4</sup> If not mentioned otherwise, all quotations from Fedorov (1958) are translated by author, with the terms or phrases that are similar or the same as in 1953 edition borrowed from B.J. Baer's translation.

<sup>5</sup> “т. е. включая и вопросы стилистики художественной речи”

<sup>6</sup> “перевести – значит выразить верно [1953: точно] и полно средствами одного языка то, что уже выражено средствами другого языка в неразрывном единстве содержания и формы”

<sup>7</sup> “Полноценность перевода означает исчерпывающую передачу [1953: точность в передаче] смыслового содержания подлинника и полноценное функционально-стилистическое соответствие ему.”

<sup>8</sup> On using the term *adequate* in English see Baer 2021b.

<sup>9</sup> “Полемизирует А. Федоров хорошо, уважительно, а в неторопливой мягкости тона – твердость его позиций.”



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## The place of the 1958 edition of Andrei Fedorov's "Introduction to Translation Theory" in the history of translation studies

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Andrei Fedorov. "Introduction to Translation Theory." Russian translation studies. Saussurian views of translation.

It is usually the first edition of a book that takes a significant place in the history of a particular area of knowledge. In the case of the translation studies classic, Andrei Fedorov's *Introduction in Translation Theory* (1953), its second, revised 1958 edition is no less significant. Free from references to Stalin's ideas on translation (compared to the first edition), being more elaborate and still containing all the exhaustive definitions of the first edition, it can not only be read as a basis for a general translation theory, but also used as a handbook of translation practice.

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