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Problems of (Un)translatability in the Yakut Epic Text Olonkho

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The author revisits the issues of untranslatability in the context of cross-cultural communication and analyzed translation as a means of cross-cultural contact. The nature of the problem of (un) translatability is discussed from Wilhelm von Humboldt's view of language as "an expression of the spirit of a nation" and from the perspective of the linguistic relativity hypothesis which views language as "a mediator of thought". The research as part of a large translation project is based on the material of the Olonkho – a Yakut (Sakha) heroic epic poem. The analysis of various linguistic and cultural barriers including lexical gaps as main stumbling blocks while translating is given as well as a brief description of Olonkho.

Keywords: translation, (un)translatability, epic, Olonkho, translation strategies.

The nature of the problem

According to Catford (1965: 94), instances of untranslatability can arise from two sources: one is linguistic, and the other is cultural. (Cit.: Dongfeng Wong et al., 1999: 87)

Throughout the history of the origin of the field of literary translation, both practicing translators and theorists, from different time eras, often denied that it would ever be possible to adequately translate literary works of art, due to difficulties associated with conveying cultural nuances encoded in the language of one culture to the language of another. For example, the famous German linguist and the eminent translator of classical poetry, Wilhelm von Humboldt, in his letter to August Schlegel wrote: "Any (such)[1] translation certainly seems to me an attempt to solve an unsolvable problem, for every translator must inevitably fall into one of two pitfalls: either an overly precise adherence to the original at the expense of the style and language of his own culture, or excessive conformance to the peculiarities of his own culture at the expense of the original; anything halfway, between one and the other, is not only difficult, but is simply impossible." (Cit: Fedorov, 1983: 31)

Humboldt's statements emanate from his views on world's languages, every one of which, according to him, "determines and expresses a national identity of the "spirit" (as well as thought), characteristic of a given nation and, therefore, is not reducible to any other language, just as the identity of the "spirit" of one nation

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is not reducible to the identity of the "spirit" of another." (ibid.) In other words, the culture of one people is impossible to fit within the frame of a culture of another people.

A similar idea lies at the foundation of the now famous in linguistics conception known as the *principle of linguistic relativity*[2], which holds that the structure of a language influences the manner in which its speakers conceptualize their world – i.e. their world view. In a critical review of this theoretical stance, V.N. Komissarov (Komissarov, 2000: 67), makes the following conclusion: "The structure of language is indeed capable of determining possible ways of constructing utterances, organizing in particular ways the expression of ideas, occasionally forcing speakers to obligatorily use that or the other form. But, it is equally true that the linguistic form of an utterance does not uniquely determine its content, deduced on the basis of the interpretation of the meanings of its immediate constituting units, but serves only as a starting point for the comprehension of its overall sense. One and the same meaning can be derived from different linguistic structures, and conversely, one and the same structure may serve as the starting point for the formation and comprehension of different messages. Thus, the dependence of expressed thoughts on their linguistic means of expression is relative and limited. Speakers may be cognizant of the difference between the form of an utterance and its essential subject matter and therefore, have the freedom to overcome certain structural constraints imposed by the formal aspects of language.

Dongfeng Wong and Dan Shen write (quote) "Translating works to bridge the cultural gap between two worlds and make communication possible between different linguistic communities. Bassnett likens language to "the heart within the body of culture," pointing out that "the surgeon, operating on the heart, cannot neglect the body that surrounds it, so the translator treats the text in isolation from the culture at his peril" (Bassnett 1992: 14). (Dongfeng Wong et al., 1999: 88).

From the perspective of language as "an expression of the spirit of a nation" (in a Humboltian sense) or as a "mediator of thought" (in a linguistic relativity sense), it is reasonable to view translation as a means of cross-cultural contact. "The interaction of cultures that occurs as a result of translation presupposes, first of all, the intention on the part of the translator to make available for the reader the facts and ideas inherent in another culture, with the purpose of expanding their worldview, giving them the opportunity to understand that other cultures have different traditions and making them aware that it is necessary to know and respect other cultures." (Hajrulin, 1999: 38) In addition, translation enriches cultures, making a great contribution to the development of their language, literature, science and technology.

The cultural factor reveals itself in one way or another in all genres and kinds of translation, but most clearly in literary translation. As Venuti (Cit.: Shweitser, 1999: 183) notes, two strategies always clash in translation – the focus on the recipient's cultural norms and values (*domestication*) and the focus on the sender's norms and values (*foreignization*). He notes, "Domestication and foreignization are two mutually balancing processes. Text, subjected to excessive domestication, can be perceived more as a parody of the foreign-speaking author in the spirit of the Russian nursery rhymes than as a reflection of the original author's creation. At the same time, excessive foreignization occasionally makes the text obscure, and does not meet the requirements expected of good-quality translation."

Often translators attempt to skillfully combine these two opposing tendencies. Incorrect

conveyance of cultural aspects via translation may lead to the formation of an erroneous representation of the culture of the original in the mind of the reader. Therefore, in translation it is always important to consider the cultural factor, and when necessary to appropriately adjust the text, in each case, trying to find the best solution possible.

Olonkho

The Yakut folklore tradition is represented by a powerful and picturesque genre – the Olonkho. According to Yakut epic researcher Innokentii Pukhov, the name *Olonkho* refers to the entire Yakut heroic epic (Pukhov, 2013). It is of ancient origin and "by its name, … is directly related to the Buryat-Mongol epic – *ontkho*" (Okladnikov, 2013). Olonkho's origin dates back to the times when the ancestors of the modern-day people of Sakha (Yakutia) lived on their former homeland in the South, and had a close connection with the ancestors of the Turkic and Mongolian tribes living in the Altay and Sayan regions. (Pukhov, 2013)

Olonkho is written in an archaic language enriched with symbolism and fantastic imagery, parallel and complex grammatical constructions, traditional poetical forms as well as metaphors, similes, epithets, and hyperboles (or *picturesque words*[3]). Traditionally, the Olonkho was an oral genre in which male, female, good, evil …etc. parts of the story were distinguished only by the intonation and melody of the narrator's voice (Argounova-Low, 2001: 89). P.A. Oyunsky was the first to divide it into separate parts and songs that made it suitable for reading.

Translation of Olonkho

In the Soviet Union, thanks to the policy of M. Gor'ki, many epic works of the peoples of other national cultures were actively translated into the Russian language. For instance, in the period between 1934 and 1941 came to light in the Russian language Shota Rustaveli's poem, "The Knight in the Panther's Skin", the Kazakh national epic, "Kiz Zhibek", the Armenian national epic, "David of Sasun" and a collection of poems by T. Shivchenko and many other works of literature.

The Yakut heroic epic, Olonkho, was not left on the sidelines. One of the first Olonkho texts, recorded and re-worked by P.A. Oyunsky, "Nurgun Botur, the Swift", was translated into Russian by V.V. Derzhavin in 1975, and to this day it is the most publically popular Russian translation in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia).

From the beginning of 1990s, Olonkho has attracted the attention of translators from other countries and of other languages. The first song of Oyunsky's version of Olonkho has been translated into French (Ja. Karro) and English (R.Ju. Skribikin; A.A.Skryabina). "Nurgun Botur, the Swift", by K.G. Orosin, has been translated into French (Ja. Karro) and "Er Sogotoh" in prose into English by the American enthusiast Douglas Lindsay. "Eles Bootur" by P.V. Ogotoev is being translated into and published in Russian (M. I. Alekseeva), English (A.A. Skryabina) and Korean (Kang Duck-Soo) languages and a French translation was published in 2012 (V.I. Shaposhnikova). The Yakut epic texts "Kys Debiriyee" (T.I. Petrova), "Myuldzhyu Boege" (E.S. Sidorov) and P.A. Oyunsky's "Nurgun Botur, the Swift" (E.S. Sidorov) saw the day of light in their Russian translation in 2011-2012. Olonkho has also received attention from translators of German, Turkic and Japanese languages.

On the initiative of the government program aimed at the conservation, study and dissemination of the Yakut heroic epic Olonkho (2006-2015), adopted in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), a project to translate the fundamental work of P.A. Oyunsky, "Djuluruyar Nurgun

Botur" into English was launched in 2007 at the Institute of Foreign Philology and Regional Studies of the M.K. Ammosov North-Eastern Federal University (NEFU). Since its inception, the work on this project has generated significant research material.

Research Material based on Olonkho

The Olonkho translation project has allowed to collect substantial experimental material on the basis of which it has been possible to conduct cross-linguistic comparative research in order to identify the main characteristics of the poetics of the Yakut heroic epic, to reveal features of translation which are peculiar to it, and to create a typology of effective translation methods which have achieved adequate levels of interlinguistic equivalency. The relevance of such research is attested by the fact that there is almost complete absence of either theoretical or applied foundations of such or similar kinds of translation problems.

Of particular interest is the problem of linguistic asymmetry which arises in the translation of literary texts. This problem is especially apropos in connection with the preservation of the author's individual style, in our case, being the preservation of the literary style of Olonkho embodied in the peculiarity of the structure of the Yakut language and in its unique poetic aspects such as formulaic language (epic formulae), syntactic parallelisms, alliterative verse, vivid imagery (*picturesque words*[4]), hyperbole and the extensive use of metaphors and epithets.

The task of preserving the literary style of Olonkho is certainly most difficult and demands of the translator utmost skill and effort. How well the translator manages to accomplish this task directly determines the extent to which the translation would be perceived by the reader as the true Yakut epic, rather than the creation of the translator. The various aspects of Olonkho's literary style are directly linked with the national worldview of the people of Sakha, with their aesthetics and philosophy, with their culture and history. Therefore, the translator must possess not only excellent knowledge of the Yakut language, but extensive background knowledge of the Yakut culture to be able to convey the characteristic features of the epic genre, the peculiarities of the poetics of Olonkho, to the reader.

The language of Olonkho, abundant with archaisms and to a considerable extent distinct from the modern literary Yakut language, deserves special consideration. P.A. Oyunsky, an outstanding scholar of Yakut mythology and Olonkho, has many names and concepts not recorded in the E.K. Pekarsky's dictionary. This means that the translator is faced with the problem of having to translate pieces of text without the help of a dictionary, forcing him/her to generate lexical and possibly grammatical equivalents in a different language completely anew. In light of these challenges, the translator should, therefore, consider the linguistic and aesthetic expectations of the reader and be mindful of certain conventions of social consciousness. The translator should be aware of the fact that his/her work contributes to the development of the reader's literary tastes which may or may not be in accordance with the intentions of the original . In light of these challenges , we believe that the translator should adhere to the original as much as is possible, so as to avoid excessive interference from his/her side.

According to A.V. Fedorov (Fedorov, 1983: 293), the most acceptable translation is one which preserves the linguistic means and stylistic strategies employed by the author of the original. Linguistically, it is important to preserve the syntactic structure of the text, i.e. the length and the volume of its sentences. Stylistically, it is necessary to preserve the uniqueness, richness

and other specific features of one of the most salient aspects of the literary style of Olonkho, its imagery of the personages, actions and situations.

1) PHONETIC ISSUES

Phonetic problems started with the transliteration of diphthongs. There are four diphthongs in the Yakut language that are as frequent as monophthongs: уо [uo], иэ [ie], ыа [ïa], үө [yo]. The diphthong consists of two elements – a nucleus and a glide – and the nucleus has priority in pronunciation. I used this phonetic peculiarity in the translation to make Yakut names and nouns shorter and more readable, for instance "Суодалба" [suodal`ba] became "Sodalba"; "Иэйэхсит" [iejeh`sit] – "Ekhsit"; "ыһыах" [i`hieh] – "Esekh"; "Күөгэлдьин" [kjuegel`jin] – "Kegeljin". I made an exception for diphthongs in one-syllable names and nouns such as "уот" [uot], which was translated either as "Uot" as part of a name, or as "Fiery" as part of a constant epithet attached to the name.

I transliterated some exotic monophthongs based on their phonetic environment and the context, e.g. the Yakut letter "ы" [i] is transliterated either as "y", which is more traditional, or "i". In general, while translating the epic, I ignored almost all the rules of IPA transliteration, since it seemed to me that words transliterated according to these rules would be cumbersome or at best slow down the reading. My goal was not to put off the English-speaking readers but to inspire them to go on reading this long poem.

Another phonetic obstacle was long vowels, for which I used the same strategy: I shortened long vowels in polysyllabic words and transliterated their approximate pronunciation, e.g. "Туйаарыма" [tuja:ri`ma] was translated as "Tuyarima"; but kept a similar graphic forms in short words, e. g. "өлүү" [e`lju:] – "Eluu", "Айыы" [aj`i:] – "Aiyy", "алаас" [a`la:s] – "alaas", etc. Some words are spelt with "h" in order to show their length or different pronunciation: "илгэ" [il`ge] – "ilgeh", "сэргэ" [ser`ge] – "sergeh".

Consonants were also a challenge. Thus, ҕ [ɣ] does not have a direct counterpart in English and may be interpreted as both [kh] and [g]. I chose the last variant as the closest equivalent, e.g. "Бохсоҕоллой" – "Bo(k)hsogolloi"; "оҕо" [o`g(kh)o] – "ogo". This choice was motivated by a word "удаҕан" translated as "udagan" (shamaness) in earlier translations. Sometimes I used data from Russian translations, e.g. the words "ыһыах" and "удаҕан" in Russian have the following graphic forms "ысыах" [i`sieh] and "удаганка" [uda`ganka]. That is why I used "s" in the English translation "Esekh" instead of "Ehekh" – besides, there is a character in the Olonkho who has a similar name "Ehekh" spelt with "h".

According to the general theory of translation, the transmission of the intra-linguistic or syntactic meanings associated with alliteration, consonance, rhyme, and such closely related to them phenomena as rhythmicity and linearity, from one language to another, is impossible to accomplish due to interlinguistic divergences. This is assumed to be true even amongst genetically related languages, not to mention such distinct languages as Yakut and English. Nonetheless, it is possible to compensate for these shortcomings by other linguistic means (Chomsky; Vinet-Darbelnet; Shvejtser) in order to approximate the features of the phonetic and syntactic properties of the original language.

Furthermore, English, like Yakut, builds versification upon the method of alliteration, which greatly simplifies for the translator the already difficult and seemingly impossible task. This is so despite the fact that in modern English alliteration has transformed into a non-functional component of poetry, and is used as a mere decorative element of versification . The principle

of alliteration, however, characterizes all of the monuments of the ancient Germanic poetry (German, Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian) and in many cases, only alliteration adds structural integrity to the Teutonic and Celtic poetry, which otherwise is rather monotonous and rhythmically colourless. Therefore, the fact that alliteration is one of the key elements of the ancient English versification, coupled with the assumption that the Anglo-American reader is well familiar with it, justifies the use of alliteration in the translation of the Yakut epic into English. For example,

1. The fire **b**urned
   As **b**ig as a **b**irch-**b**ark **b**arrel. (Song 6)
2. Hi**s** **s**trong mu**sc**le**s**
   Swelled and **s**trained; (Song 5)
3. Where a fantastic **s**or**c**erou**s** **s**torm **s**wirl**s** and play**s** (Song 1)
4. To **m**ake a **m**aidservant with no **m**ercy (Song 5)
5. **B**lack horse lost,
   Broil **b**roke out…
   Bride was contested,
   Battle commenced,
   Blood was shed,
   Bayonetted eyes,
   Broken skulls –
   Brouhaha **b**rewed. (Oyunsky, song 7)

Careful attention should be given to the translation of proper names which play an especially important role in the creation of Olonkho's imagery and which "one way or another, serve to define its literary character." (Bernstein, 2001: 20). Indeed, proper (and common) names are the essential elements of the form of any literary work; they are the constituent elements of the author's style and one of the means of creating literary imagery. They possess vividly expressed semantics, have a hidden associative background, and are embodied in special phonetic forms; they are capable of conveying the national and cultural attributes, reflect the historical epoch to which the activities of that or another work of literature are related; in a word, they are socio-cultural by their very nature.

In those cases when the proper name does not have a foreign language equivalent, it is necessary to consider the following principles of translation, identified by modern research.

- the principle of the national-linguistic association
- the principle of euphony

In addition, it is important to remember that in the translation of proper names from literary works, the exact accuracy of reproduction usually takes a backseat to the degree of readability and ease of pronunciation . (Ermolovich, 2001)

These principles are directly applicable to the translation of proper names and nicknames of the personages in Olonkho as they do not have fixed foreign equivalents. The translator should preserve the original aspects underlying the structure of the phonetic, phonemic or graphic aspects of the names in the foreign language, so as not to lose their national features and at the same time maintain a correlation with the norms and the traditions of the original. Therefore, according to the principle of euphony, the Yakut word "Боотур" [IPA transcription], should not be translated into English using the transliteration "Bootur"; the more preferred form is "Botur". In this case we can, first of all, avoid the unnecessary association of the Yakut proper name "Bootur" with the common English word "boot", and secondly, bring the translated word maximally close to the pronunciation of the original.

The name of the main Olonkho character contains an epithet or a name-epithet to use a Mayer-Meletinsky's term (Cit.: Neveleva, 1979). "Djuluruyar" [IPA transcription], derived from the Yakut verb "djuluruy" [IPA transcription], which in Russian means "to rush", "to speed" or

"to sweep". There are different versions of the translation of this epithet in English, including "impetuous". However, this latter definition has the meaning of "sudden, behaving without thinking, without the necessary preparation, rushing headlong", which diametrically contradicts the characteristics of the main character of the Yakut epic. Nyurgun Botur is not a mindless personage who suddenly takes off somewhere for no apparent reason; this character, despite his proclivity for improvisation, carefully thinks over his plans before acting. Therefore, the closest English equivalent of the Yakut epithet is the adjective *swift*, meaning "dashing", in the desired sense of the word. Hence, the final version of the translation of the name of the main hero, which is also the title of the epic story, is "Nyurgun Botur, the Swift."

T.A. Kazakova notes that "in many cases...a meticulous recreation of phonetic features can be simplified." (Kazakova, 2001) Simplification here in a phonetic sense has indeed been successfully used to translate complex Yakut proper names that would be particularly difficult to reproduce in a foreign language, such as the name *Ieyekhsit* [IPA transcription]– the patron-goddess and the defender of the human race, protectress of horses, livestock and dogs – which in English I translated as *goddess Ekhsit*.

For a number of other Yakut names I have also used simplification as a technique to render them more easily readable and pronounceable in English. For example, the Yakut summer solstice celebration Ysyakh [IPA transcription] has two English variants, Esekh or Ehekh, which are its near homographs and homophones. In its writing and pronunciation Ysyakh is comparable to the name-epithet Timir Dzhigistey [IPA transcription] whose English equivalent is by analogy Ehekh Harbir.

The translation of the Yakut epic into the English language represents a unique experience of its kind that has no known precedence and this is so for the following reason: in our translation we do not strictly follow the tradition of the international transliteration system; we attempt to rethink and refine otherwise bulky and clumsy words expressing Yakut names, nicknames and realities so as to make their translations more readable and pronounceable.

2) STYLISTIC ISSUES

Epithets are commonly abundant throughout Olonkho, thereby linking and combining different fragments of the epic story. For example , here are the description of the main hero Nyurgun Bootur – one of the most popular mythological heroes of the Olonkho, a legendary giant from the Upper World endued with force and dowered with mysterious talents. His function is to defend the Middle World and the sunny tribe Kun Aiyy. Unlike the demons he never transforms into a dragon but can significantly change his appearance and easily become eagle, ermine, iron-scaled fish, giant bee, spear, can take the form of an adjarai (demon) and even can transform into a fog.

His nickname is the Swift. Quickness is one of the most positive characteristics of someone's personality for the Sakha people. Cf. the constant epithets of positive epic heroes: Дьулуруйар Ньургун Боотур (Djuluruyar Nyurgun Bootur) [IPA transcription] – Yakut. lit. Swift Nyurgun Hero; another epic hero Элэс Боотур – Yakut lit. Move Rapidly Hero, a name of a really fast personage Eles Bootur. For the Sakha people slowness has more negative connotation for its association with laziness, stupidity and illness. The constant epithets of Nyurgun Bootur includes the epithets of his horse as a reflection of his personality, this is a common tradition for Olonkho style where male and sometimes female parts are followed with the description of their horses). The most traditional epithet widely used in Olonkho for male and creatures parts is

oburgu – a polysemantic word meaning "bold", "mighty", "brave", "cunning", "smart and quick", sometimes its meaning is close to an American expression "good on you!". It may be used both in negative and positive sense but always has a sense "awe". Below *oburgu* is translated as *mighty*. The second example includes the description of Nyurgun's beautiful sister Aytalyyn Kuo [IPA transcription] also of a divine origin (a long braid was an obligatory element of girl's beauty).

1. Mighty Nurgun Botur, the Swift,
   With the black fleet of foot horse
   Born standing
   On the border of the clear, white sky (Song 5)
2. Aitalyn Kuo
   Of the eight-bylas-long braid (Song 5)

The examples from the text show what translation strategies were used while translating the Olonkho including those as transcription, loan translation, functional analog, and compensation. In the description of Tuyarima Kuo, one of the famous bride from the epic, an adjective "fair" is used – a word traditionally used in English to describe someone's complexion, or colour of skin or hair. Translators of the previous translations of the Yakut Olonkho used either "white-faced" or "bright-faced", while "white-faced" means "pale", "whitened", "become pale" (due to an illness or fear), and "bright-faced" means "to have a bright happy look connected with the description of some emotion but not someone's complexion. Both words have the temporary meaning, they are quite short and soon pass by. Taking into account these aspects I chose the variant with "fair-faced":

In the room
There was dear, fair-faced
Tuyarima Kuo
With the nine-bylas-long braid,
Her eyelashes fluttered lightly,
A faint smile stirred on her lips,
Then she beamed happily,
Shining as bright as the sun,
Dazzling
Like sunbeams.
Her tender, silver cheeks
Blushed prettily…(Oyunsky, 2013: 312)

On the whole, Olonkho is abundant with the stylistic devices such as metaphors, comparisons, hyperbole and imagery. For instance,

1. Who has the thunder-horse
   Whipped by the lightning lash.
2. That even a snow-bunting would not fly over him,
   Even a little mouse would not run by past him.
3. With eyes shining like frosty morning stars,
   With hooves clanking like lear-tempered steel. (Song 6)

But in some other cases they could intensify the cultural barrier, and make comprehension more difficult. Example 4 presents a famous Yakut olonkho formula of human-being's description: they are two-legged, two-armed, two-eyed, with a face in the front of one's head, a straight nose unlike demons *abaahy/adjarais* – evil and ugly creatures; they are one-armed and one-legged Cyclopes (Pukhov, 2013) made of iron with their faces in the back of their head. The only arm of an abaahy that grows from the centre of their chest and his only leg are forked in an elbow and a knee. As Pukhov states, they represent all the possible sins (wrath, lust, cruelty, infectious diseases, laziness, bestiality, impurity and cannibalism). The abaahy (evil) characters attack people, rob and destroy their land, and kidnap women. (Pukhov, 2013) Their

world is a vast dark icy land with low red skies, fiery oceans and infinite swamps. Yakuts were blacksmiths and found the iron ore in the ground that is why they believe that underground creatures are made of iron. Yakut word *тимир* (timir=iron) has a figurative sense *cruelty*, *cruel*. The most traditional transformation of the abaahy is a dragon shape. The ugly face of the demon resembles muddy rainy dale in example 5. A simile *half-cooked fish soup* in example 6 is attached not only to someone's description but to natural phenomena too like weather or mist.

1. The two-legged (Song 6)
2. With an ugly face
Like a rainy alaas (Song 7)
3. ……the old man
Looked at them
With dull, lackluster eyes
Like half-done fish soup (Song 6)

In translation hyperbolization, in traditional or epic texts, can sometimes evoke astonishment and perplexity from the reader, but, despite this, we preserve these important features of the Yakut epic poetics:

He kissed the upper lip
Of Aitalyn Kuo
Of the eight-bylas-long braid
Three times
As three bowls of blood
Brimmed over;
He kissed her lower lip
Six times
As six bowls of blood
Leaked out,
Touching her skin tenderly,
He rolled her up
Into a bundle and
Put her in his left
pocket. (Song 5)

Some images may be particularly exotic for English-speaking readers, such as the description of a wrathful Nyurgun, which may be especially unusually striking,

His right eye
Stretched down
To his lips,
His left eye
Twisted up to his eyebrows. (Song 5)

But, at the same time certain descriptions may be aesthetically delightful:

They got him ready as an arrow (Song 1)

At first sight, one might assume that the frequently recurring physicality, cruelty and bloodthirstiness of the Yakut epic may be excessively aversive to a foreign reader and therefore may hinder his/her appreciation of its artistic and aesthetic features. Nevertheless, Olonkho's vivid stylistic methods, its peculiar poetic language, built upon a rich system of figural speech and metaphorical allusions, is quite familiar from the world epic tradition.

3) SYNTACTIC ISSUES

The task of preserving the syntactic parallelism in translation to a large respect depends on the degree of overlap between syntactic structure of the Yakut and English languages. Elements of syntactic parallelism which fall outside this overlap are best dealt with in the same way as with the other forms of syntactic meanings. For instance,

1. Mighty Buhra Dokhsun,
Who has never been tamed,
Whose father is Sung Jahin,
Who has the thunder chariot,
Who flashes lightning! (Song 7)

4) LEXICAL ISSUES

We strive to preserve, as much as possible, a few exoticisms, denoting Yakut realities, including, the traditional Yakut units of measurement, such as *bylas* [IPA transcription], *tutum*, *kes*, etc. However, to avoid congesting the translated text with the national-cultural attributes, which could detract the reader's attention from the scenes of Olonkho's developing plot, already suffused with rich and vivid metaphor and imagery, we introduce along with the exoticisms, English translations. Thus, the unit of measure "ilii"[IPA transcription] is translated as "finger-sized"; a hitching post is represented in English in two ways, as a sergeh [IPA transcription] and as a tethering post; the traditional Yakut dwelling "urasa / uraha" [IPA transcription] is equated with the *yurt* because it is a more familiar concept to the English reader; "choron" or "hamyyah" / "kytya" [IPA transcription] is translated as "(wooden, silver) cup or bowl"; "kymys" [IPA transcription] is given as "kumis" which, in our view, would be much more readable for an English reader; and Olonkho's fire-breathing, winged and many-legged monsters, which before were translated as serpents or snakes, are now translated as dragons, which, we think, better represents the true identity of these creatures.

Onomatopoeic lexical units and interjections, such as "Art-tatai!", present particular translation challenges, as it is especially difficult to find foreign language equivalents that could convey the same emotional content. With a rare exception we are forced to preserve such lexical units via translator's transcription and transliteration. For example, the onomatopoeic word expressing giggling Hy-hyk! Hy-hyk!, we translated as Ha-ha!.

'Urui-aikhal! Narin-naskil!
Urui-tusku! Kehgel-nushal!
Let us praise
Akhtar Aiyyhyt,
Let us praise
Kurye Jehegei,
Let us praise
Ekhsit Mother Khotun… (Oyunsky, 2013: 315)

The table below gives a translation of an excerpt from Olonkho which describes how Nyurgun Bootur sets off to the Under World, and the sunny Middle World continues to shine behind him, like a white spot on a cow's head. The imagery verb (the *picturesque word*),"tunaly" [IPA transcription], literally means "to whiten-glisten", "to brighten-glisten", "to shine", "to glow" and therefore, its semantic structure consists of two components <to glisten, to shine> and <white, light>. As can be seen from the table, in the translation is used only the verb "to shine" which, we believe is completely justified but the fact that it is immediately followed by the word combination "Like a white spot on a cow's head".

Орто дойду улуу дуолана
Аан ийэ дайдытыттан
Арахсан барда,
Ааб**ы**лаа**ҥҥ**а тиийдэ,
Күнүн сириттэн
Күрэнэн истэ,
Тунал**ҕ**аннаах толооно
Туоһахта курдук
Туналыйан хаалла... [Oyuunuskay, 1959: 125]

The great giant of the Middle World
Had left
His primordial Motherland,
And come to the thicket,
He was running away
From the sunny land,
The bright surface of which
Was shining far behind
Like a patch on a cow's head…

Another one of the serious issues was the translation of polysemantic words which are used profusely in the Olonkho. For example, the word "түһүлгэ" [tjuhjul`ge] – "tuhulgeh" has a few meanings that hamper the choice of the right word: 1) a place where a festival is celebrated, or where people dance their round dance *ohokai*, which also refers to the name of the dancing circle, or a place for wrestling, or an Olonkho performance, etc. 2) the festival itself, i.e. it can be a synonym for the summer solstice festival Esekh or any other fest (wedding party, etc.). Thus, in Song 9 the word has all the meanings simultaneously but I had to choose a concrete one and it was the festival Esekh:

They made
A wide and vast,
Joyful and bright
Esekh festival – tuhulgeh
On a beautiful copper surface
Of their blessed Motherland…

Colours are the universal phenomena and conventionally there are no special difficulties in translation colours. There are two words in the Yakut language with the meaning "white": of a Turkic үрүҥ [ju`rjuŋ] and Mongol маҕан [ma`gan] origins. They differ in connotations. Turkic "үрүҥ" derives to milk food but can be decoded as "sacred; divine; god's; light". It is normally used in the names of supreme deities or good spirits, e. g. Urung Uolan – *literally:* the White Young Man where "үрүҥ /white" means "of a divine origin/good". Sometimes it can be used in addressing or description of rich fields, pastures, dales, etc., always with a positive meaning, e. g. "radiant white sky", "white alaas" where "alaas" is a valley with a lake. F. e., үрүҥ күн – literally. «white sun» (divine sun), cf. Russ. «белый свет», «белый день» (literally: white world, white day); үрүҥ алаас – literally: «white alaas /field» (fertile, rich land/place). As you see, a seme "white" is displaced by differential semes; moreover «үрүҥ» does not oppose «хара» – literally. «black» – and is rarely connected with the meaning of the colour itself. However Derzhavin translates it as white colour which is not typical of the epic text:

Как белое восходящее солнце… [Derzhavin, 1975: 210]
[As white rising sun]

Не надеялись больше мы
К белому солнцу глаза поднять! [Derzhavin, 1975: 213]
[We did not hope to raise our eyes
To the white sun]

In the meaning of colour the word "маҕан" of a Mongolian origin is used, e. g. "маҕан хаар" [ma`gan ha:r] – "white snow". The Sakha as blacksmiths and jewelers value metals: iron, copper, gold and especially silver. They prefer silver probably for its disinfectant quality. They called gold as "red gold" (red because of much copper added) and silver as "white gold" that is why they often mention silver in describing beautiful white teeth; they never call teeth silver-white but just "silver teeth" implying its white colour, cf. with universal "pearl teeth". Yellow also derives from the colour of the most precious milk product – butter. It can be used in a description of a valley; it is used often in a combination with gold/golden especially in a human appearance description, e. g. "yellow-golden cheeks". Both white and yellow symbolize beauty, richness, abundance and are used in a description of "ilgeh" – an energetic substance of symbolical white and yellow colours. In the Yakut-Russian translation of olonkho Vladimir Derzhavin ignores the most important semes/ differential components of these words and

erroneously translates the rich fields as yellow abundance/richness:

Изобильную желтую благодать
Среднего мира –
Цветущей земли
Мы не надеялись увидать! [Derzhavin, 1975: 213]
(We did not hope to see
The abandon yellow fertility
Of the Middle World –
Flourishing land)

Где земля изобильем желтым полна… [Derzhavin, 1975: 215]
(Where the land is full of yellow abundance)

Золотая желтела там благодать…[Derzhavin, 1975: 241]
(There was a golden-yellow abundance flourishing)

"Oburgu" – a traditional epithet attached to the names of heroes. According to the Dictionary of the Yakut language by Edward Pekarsky it has the following meanings: обургу [cf. with Mongol «абурҕу, абурҕа» huge, big] 1) average, quite, mediocre; quite big ДП.; bigger, more; big in size: однако! Изрядно! – Quite!; ай да молодец! Ай да парень! – these expressions are close to an American expression "good on you!". 2) an addition (sic) to the names of mythological heroes богатырь удалой – literally hero brave, молодец – literally young brave hero, and a loan word обургу и пр. [Pekarsky; 1958: 1777-1778]. But in olonkho the word has more differential components including "bold", "mighty", "brave", "cunning", "smart and quick", sometimes it may be used both in negative and positive senses. But it always expresses "awe". In the Russian translation all differential components are omitted that again proves the idea of the importance of cultural factors in overcoming the untranslatability: «… удалой его сын Бохсоголлой Боотур», lit. "… his brave son Bohsogolloi Bootur", «Удалой Нюргун Боотур», lit. "Brave Nyurgun Bootur" [Derzhavin, 1975: 181], «…исполин Нюргун Боотур», lit. "…the giant Nyurgun Bootur" [Derzhavin, 1975: 188].

5. Conclusion

In the course of our work on the translation of Olonkho into English, we have come to the recognition that the problem of untranslatability can be solved with the help of special 'foreignization' or 'domestication' tendencies and translation strategies in the translator's approach. An epic text contains a high degree of national-cultural presence of a specific ethnic group with ancient roots and history without a direct Western cultural analog. This significantly constraints the choice and the realization of a translation strategy and hence, heavily complicates the process of translation from Yakut into English. Therefore, in translation it is always important to consider the cultural factor, and when necessary to appropriately adjust the text, in each case, trying to find the best solution possible. This article discussed some of these problems, giving clear examples of each, and suggested some ways of obviating them.

1 Author's addition
2 It is also known as the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, Whorfianism or the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis. The first term is now less frequently used in linguistics and other academic fields concerned with issues of language-thought relations, as it is generally assumed to be a misnomer.
3 A term coined by A.E. Kulakovsky, a famous Yakut writer and philosopher.
4 See footnote 3.

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Проблемы (не)переводимости в якутском эпическом тексте олонхо

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Автор исследует проблему (не)переводимости в контексте кросс-культурной коммуникации и перевода как средства межкультурного контакта. Проблема (не)переводимости рассматривается с точки зрения Вильгельма фон Гумбольдта, который считал язык «выражением духа нации», и гипотезы лингвистической относительности, которая определяет язык как «медиатор мысли». Настоящее исследование является частью крупного проекта по переводу олонхо – якутского (Саха) героического эпоса «Нюргун Боотур Стремительный» П.А. Ойунского. В статье проводится анализ различных языковых и культурных барьеров, дается краткое описание олонхо.

Ключевые слова: перевод, (не)переводимость, якутский эпос, олонхо, «Нюргун Боотур Стремительный», переводческие стратегии.