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# **АКТУАЛЬНЫЕ ПРОБЛЕМЫ ЛИНГВИСТИКИ И ЛИТЕРАТУРОВЕДЕНИЯ**

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**Эротическое в англоязычной поэзии И. Бродского: лингвистические особенности и трудности при переводе**

Eroticism in Joseph Brodsky's English poetry: linguistic peculiarities and translation difficulties

*В статье рассматриваются два неопубликованных английских стихотворения И. Бродского (1975, 1996) с точки зрения семантических и стилистических особенностей поэтического языка, детерминирующих эротический план содержания стихотворений. Материалом для анализа послужили оригинальные поэтические тексты И. Бродского и подстрочные переводы, выполненные автором статьи.*

*The article focuses on two unpublished English verses written by Joseph Brodsky (1975, 1996). The paper examines semantical and stylistic features of the vocabulary that contain sexual innuendoes and erotic meaning. It considers both original and target language by the example of the interlinear translations provided by the author of the article.*

**Ключевые слова:** И. Бродский, эротическое, перевод

Key words: Joseph Brodsky, eroticism, translation

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Eroticism is one of the common motives in Joseph Brodsky's poetry, both Russian and English. Brodsky's attitude toward eroticism is determined by his own sorrowful love story and pierced through almost all his verses. In his essay "Altra Ego" Brodsky claims, that practically everything could be described in love poem and therefore become its object. Hence, the poet is allowed to write about either girl's traits and lineament or the view from her window. Due to the language itself, even some random lifeless thing could provide the poem with certain degree of love. And still readers would be able to understand that this very poem considers love theme, because the detail could speak for itself very loud.

According to Brodsky, love is one's attitude toward reality, in other words, love regards how someone finite treats something infinite. This attitude causes the feeling of finiteness of the current possession, so Brodsky was "searching for the voice" through which he would be able to perpetuate this very feeling and the notion itself. More than that, we could speak about metalevel in Brodsky's poetry: Brodsky considers any verse as an act of love, regardless its theme, not between the author and his object, but between the language and some part of the reality.

We could define two types of eroticism in Joseph Brodsky's poetry<sup>1</sup>: the first one deals with Greco-Christian term 'eros' which refers to passionate yet romantic and respectful love, sometimes even spiritual and divine; the second one considers the carnal and disrespectful love. From Brodsky's verses we could derive that the infinitely

lofty love concerns neither sexual economy nor semiosis. Vice versa the fleshly love relates to the body and lustful wicked desires which is expressed on stylistic level. When Brodsky speaks about unsensual sex or 'dirty dreams', he uses slang or even obscene terminology.

Regarding the matter of pure carnal relations, Brodsky follows Yuri Tynyanov, who claims that only one woman's part is functional in reaching sexual satisfaction. Woman is treated more like a lifeless object; she is no interest and in no need to be presented in the text<sup>2</sup>. Worth mentioning, that both Tynyanov and Brodsky were ahead of their time. Tynyanov anticipated one of the main thesis of the feminist movement considered woman as a sexual object, and Brodsky anticipated linguistic freedom of the end of XX century.

Paradoxically though eroticism in its common meaning, or carnal love, in Brodsky's poetry is also derived from 'eros'. However, in dealing with romantic love 'eros' is regarded as harmonious and cosmic notion; on the contrary, fleshly love equals coitus which is highly unsensual. Meanwhile the sensual, or romantic, love regards both intimate relations of the lovers and the reality. Woman's touch to man's cheek parallels with the planet's spinning in the universe, the back of their bed becomes the door between the inner and the outer space. Unlike the carnal love, harmonious 'eros' in poems is stylistically neutral. Thus, Brodsky's poetry could be defined as opposition between the desperate dead end of sexuality and eroticism and cosmic openness of 'eros'<sup>3</sup>.

In Soviet Union sexual theme and especially sexual vocabulary were absolutely forbidden. Brodsky was accused of vulgarity and even pornography, almost every editor he appealed to refused to publish his poem 'Shestviye' which includes such profane words as, for instance, 'sperm' or 'condom'. In opinion of Russian poet and contemporary of Brodsky Eduard Limonov, Brodsky is far too intelligent and cultured to resort to obscene and vulgar vocabulary when he tries to sound intimate.

The point is that all the, so called, obscene terms were unacceptable and inadmissible only for Russians and Russian language, whereas as early as 1940s H. W. Auden, for example, was pretty much allowed to use as many vulgar words in his poetry as he wanted to. For example, an erotic poem "The Platonic Blow, by Miss Oral" (sometimes known as "A Day for a Lay" or "The Gobble Poem") was written in 1948 and describes a homosexual encounter. The first verse starts: "It was a spring day, a day for a lay when the air // Smelled like a locker-room, a day to blow or get blown". And most importantly, such lines weren't abnormal for English or American culture or the language itself.

No surprise, that Joseph Brodsky follows Auden, the person he considers the greatest mind of XX century, on this matter. After his emigration to the United States in 1972 Brodsky discovers variety and opportunities of the relatively new language. He passively knew English while staying in USSR, but had never written in it, so English for him as a poet was still to be discovered. In English Brodsky finds the possibility to write freely about the precise carnal love he was, and still is, accused for in

Russian. The first reason is, as it was said above, the culture that determines a positive degree of freedom to write on the sexual and erotic topic. The second reason is the English language itself that contains magnitude bigger amount of appropriate words. The last one causes certain translation difficulties. Let's briefly examine two Brodsky's unpublished verse: "For Lydia on her Birthday" (1975) and "Art is Long..." (1996).

Both verses are illustration of the very opposition between the carnal love and 'eros'. Both are written with polysyllabic rhyming, which in English is associated with light or humorous verse. Though, according to poet and translator Daniel Weissbord<sup>4</sup>, Brodsky was "prepared to risk ridicule or whatever else was thrown at him", because "as a foreign national, he had never been conscripted into the army of native prosodists".

The first one, "For Lydia on her Birthday", is addressed to a real woman, and though Brodsky ironically and jokingly treats her with a certain degree of disrespect, we could assume that as his friend she would take it as a joke. In this verse we could find a number of sexual innuendoes: "But my lyre sings // today your shapes and other things, // although I haven't seen you naked", "...imagination cannot pierce // the iron curtain of your shower", "...to cause ovation – // a standing one", "than stripping off a real one", "if God in Heaven does his beat, // her, but undressed, we'll see up there". All of these innuendoes are rather metaphorical, but quite obvious. The whole verse sounds light and non-offensive despite this kind of treatment woman as a desirable object. And also it sounds pretty much acceptable in English. Trying to provide this verse with interlinear translation, a few difficulties occur. The first one is the common one and could be referred to any verse which contains sexual innuendoes. It is a lack of expressions in Russian language due to cultural and linguistic peculiarities. And the second one deals with the lines "...to cause ovation – // a standing one...". It is a clear sexual innuendo and allegory of the erection, though it could be kept in Russian due to the similar root in both languages of the words 'stand' and 'стоять', in this case in English this allegory is far more prominent than in Russian variant. It could be understood correctly in Russian in case of the double emphasis: 'стОящий' / 'стоЯщий'.

Sexual innuendo in the second verse "Art is long..." is penetrating the whole poem from the very beginning. As we could see, Brodsky plays with the Latin expression 'Ars longa, vita brevis' ("Art is long, // Life is short) and uses it as a pun while comparing art and its length with the sexual intercourse and the length of a penis. In this verse Brodsky is clearer and riskier with words than in the first one, he actually doesn't use lots of innuendoes, except one, he speaks in clear using such words as 'cunt', 'pricks', 'hard-on' or 'to blow'. And these exact words are hard to be translated in Russian. For example, word 'prick' has its certain connotations and quite clear meaning of a penis, while in Russian it is needed for an appropriate and adequate equivalent with the same both meaning and connotations to be found. In the interlinear translation the word 'инструменты' was chosen. The same situation is with the expression 'to blow' which has a mark colloquial, but in Russian there is no such an expression, so it was decided to chose a descriptive method by using the words with direct meaning 'делать минет'.

To conclude, it is worth repeating that Joseph Brodsky's English poetry is far freer linguistically, more precise and contains more sexual innuendoes and indicators of carnal love than his verses written in Russian due to the nature of these both languages and the cultural peculiarities of USSR and the USA.

The main difficulty that could occur during the translation process is finding the right and adequate equivalent in target language with similar connotations and meaning.

<sup>1</sup> Лосев Л. В. Иосиф Бродский: Опыт литературной биографии / Л. В. Лосев. – 2-е изд., испр. – М. : Молодая гвардия, 2006. – С. 233-234.

<sup>2</sup> Там же. – С. 237.

<sup>3</sup> Там же. – С. 235.

<sup>4</sup> Weissbort D. From Russian with Love. Joseph Brodsky in English. Anvil Press Poetry Ltd. London, 1998. – P. 70.

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**Аллегория Феникса в Елизаветинской поэзии**

The symbolism of the Phoenix in the Elizabethan poetry

*В статье рассматривается символическое значение образа Феникса в поэзии конца XVI – начала XVII веков. Представлен краткий обзор истории персонажа в английской литературе. Особенности аллегорического значения образа рассматриваются на материале стихотворения из цикла «Песни Голубя».*

*Article regards the symbolic meaning of the Phoenix in the late 16th – early 17th century. It briefly addresses the overall history of the character in English literature. Article focuses on how the Phoenix is presented in the «Cantoes to Fair Phoenix» and how we can understand the meaning of the character.*

**Ключевые слова:** Феникс, английская литература, Возрождение, аллегория  
Key words: Phoenix, English literature, Renascence, allegory

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Phoenix has been a strong literary symbol throughout the centuries. An ancient myth of an immortal Arabian bird proves to be culturally universal. Following common European experience, English literature adopts Phoenix in the Middle Ages as an allegory of Jesus Christ. It is stated that English literature addresses Phoenix for the first time in an anonymous poem written in 8th – 9th century. This poem is believed to be an adaptation of the Lactantius' *Carmen de Phoenixe*<sup>1</sup>. It reflects ideas of Christianity and uses Phoenix to celebrate resurrection of Christ and immortality of a soul. Both in the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance, Phoenix frequently appears alongside with other birds and animals as a character in literary bestiaries.