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UKRAINIAN CONTRIBUTION TO TRANSLATION STUDIES: OLEKSANDER FINKEL

Ukrainian translation scholars have made significant contributions to global translation theory by formulating at least four foundational concepts. These include: 1) the expansion of translation theory beyond literature and religion, initiated by Oleksandr Finkel [5]; 2) the issue of self-translation, first raised by Finkel in 1929 [4]; 3) the “unique items hypothesis,” as it was later termed by Finnish scholar Sonja Tirkkonen-Condit [14], originally proposed by Mykola Lukash in 1956 [2]; 4) the problem of translation from closely related languages, thoroughly examined by Maksym Rylsky [3], including the impact of literalist translations on the literary language [1].

However, their legacy has been subject to a dual marginalization. Within the Soviet Union, the rise of Russian chauvinism after the mid-1930s rendered non-Russian scholarship politically undesirable, discouraging citations of works not written in Russian [12]. Outside the USSR, Cold War tensions led to the exclusion or neglect of Soviet contributions in Western reference works, including encyclopedias, handbooks, and anthologies of the discipline.

Oleksandr Moiseievych Finkel (1899–1968) was among the Ukrainian scholars of the 1920s and 1930s who significantly contributed to the conceptual groundwork of Soviet Translation Studies.

1)The Soviet Union was a pioneer in theorizing translation of scholarly texts, motivated by the need to render ideological works by Marx, Engels, and Lenin into various languages of its republics. A landmark in this development was Oleksandr Finkel’s 1929 monograph *Teoriia i praktyka perekladu* (Theory and Practice of Translation) [5], written in Ukrainian, which expanded translation theory beyond literary and sacred texts to include non-literary prose [6, c. 17; 7, c. 319]. Finkel emphasized the importance of non-literary genres, asserting that their study is “just as important and reveals equally interesting problems as literary translation,” and can hold “exceptional social significance” [5, c. 45]. In Chapter 2, *The Translation of Non-literary Prose*, he classified such texts into scholarly and administrative texts – drawing on Charles Bally – as well as journalistic texts based on linguistic traits and social functions [5, c. 47–48), thereby laying the foundation for more refined translation categories. He challenged the notion that conveying a text’s core message is sufficient, arguing that this overlooks genre-specific linguistic and stylistic features [5, c. 51]. For Finkel, prose is not

monolithic; scientific, administrative, and journalistic texts differ in structure, terminology, and communicative purpose, shaped by historical and social contexts.

Finkel's monograph emerged during Stalin's First Five-Year Plan (1928–1932), a time of rapid industrialization and collectivization that created a pressing need for technical and scientific translations into Ukrainian. The 1920s also saw a Ukrainian cultural revival, with figures like Zerov, Rylsky, Burgardt, Pidmohylny, and Kalynovych advocating translation as a means of enriching national literature and connecting with global intellectual traditions. This convergence of ideological, practical, and cultural drivers led to the founding of the Ukrainian Institute of Linguistic Education in Kyiv in 1930, with a branch in Kharkiv, and the launch of university-level translation programs that institutionalized translation studies [8; 11]. Finkel's tripartite typology of non-literary prose was formally adopted in academia through Kalynovych's 1932–1933 and Zerov's syllabi in Kyiv, which addressed translation techniques across genres, including scientific texts and business correspondence [11; 13].

2) Finkel was perhaps the first scholar anywhere to treat in a systematic way the topic of self-translation [9]. As early as August 1928, a 29-year-old researcher from Kharkiv University Oleksander Finkel wrote in Ukrainian the article "H.F. Kvitka as the Translator of His Own Works" (13, 438 words), printed next year in a scholarly collection to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Ukrainian writer Hryhorii Kvitka-Osnovyanenko (1778–1843). For a practical analysis, Finkel examined the self-translations of Hryhorii Kvitka-Osnovyanenko (1778–1843), a foundational figure in Ukrainian literature and an early advocate of vernacular Ukrainian as a literary language. Kvitka-Osnovyanenko translated eight of his Ukrainian novellas into Russian himself [10]. To provide a comparative perspective, Finkel analyzed the Russian translation of *Saldatskyi Patret* (1837) by Vladimir Dahl (1801–1872), one of the most prominent Russian lexicographers [4, c. 108].

Finkel argued that while both author-translators and ordinary translators face similar challenges, their approaches differ. The author-translator avoids ideological and aesthetic distortions typical of external translators, offering a more authentic transformation of the original work. The changes introduced by the author-translator can result in significant discrepancies between the original and the translated versions. In conventional translation, such deviations are often criticized as adaptations or imitations. But Finkel provocatively asks: do the same standards apply to self-translation? Is the relationship between translation and adaptation fundamentally different when the translator is also the author? These questions, according to Finkel, are central to understanding the unique problems posed by self-translation, beyond the general issues faced in translation practice.

Through this case study, Finkel identified the motivations behind the changes made by Kvitka-Osnovyanenko, shedding light on the complex interplay between fidelity, adaptation, and cultural negotiation in self-translation. His work remains a foundational contribution to understanding how the dual role of author and translator complicates traditional notions of equivalence and authenticity in translation studies.

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