The Meaning Constituting Function of Translation

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Abstract

The paper considers the role of translation in the formation of the social-systemic meaning (Luhmann). Translation contributes to all three dimensions of meaning: factual, temporal and social. The meaning-constituting function of translation is exemplified by the role translation played in the Westernization of Petrine and, to a lesser degree, post-Russia. Translation is a boundary phenomenon of the social system because it opens/closes the system and makes the system sensitive to its environment. Translation supplies the meaning horizon of the system with new options of social action and experience. Some of these options are accepted by the system (marked as 'acceptable' or 'possible'), some are rejected (marked as 'unacceptable'). The supplied options never disappear from the horizon. At some points of its evolution, the social system may accept the heretofore unacceptable options and reject the heretofore acceptable ones. This is what happened in the project of the westernization of Petrine- and post-Petrine Russia. Translation was a *sine qua non* means of re-negotiating the meaning repertoire of the system.

Keywords: translation, Luhmann, social systems theory, Russia, history

1. Introduction

The eighteenth century was a period in Russian history when dramatic changes occurred in all walks of life. It was the time of Westernization, largely initiated by Peter the Great and continued by his royal successors, especially Elizabeth I and Catherine II (the Great). A direct result of this major development was a radical shift in social values, state

organization and the international status of Russia. From that time on, Russia has been striving to be molded in European ways.

Translation[1] was one of the principal means of transferring Western European technical knowledge and practical expertise with respective philosophical, axiomatic and cultural underpinnings. To understand how translation contributed to social reforms in eighteenth century Russia I will draw on Niklas Luhmann's theory of social systems. I will consider one particular aspect of the function of translation in society: its contribution to the constituting of the social-systemic meaning. I will start by outlining pertinent theoretical concepts and then proceed to apply them to the most salient aspects of the translation history of Petrine Russia. In the present paper, I focus on the theoretical apparatus, that is why my examples are selected to illustrate theory and do not claim to outline the history of translation in Petrine Russia, let alone present it in its fullness.

2. Necessary Clarifications

A few words should be said concerning the common misunderstanding of Luhmann's allegedly de-humanized sociology. It would be a gross misunderstanding to think that Luhmann did not properly consider human beings and that, because of this, his theory could not be applied to studies where human beings are discussed. One should understand, however, that Luhmann attempted to recalibrate the sociological theory so that it would be focused on social communication, which naturally cannot exist without human beings. The fact that human beings are viewed as part of the environment of social systems does not mean that they become unimportant or dispensable:

> If one views human beings as part of the environment of society (instead of as part of society itself), this changes the premises of all the traditional questions, including those of classical humanism. It does not mean that the human being is estimated as less important than traditionally. Anyone who thinks so (and such an understanding either explicitly or implicitly underlies all polemics against this proposal) has not understood the paradigm change in systems theory. (Luhmann 1995/1984: 212)

Luhmann theorizes human beings as the point of interpenetration of three types of systems: living (biological), psychic and social. The emphasis is laid on social systems, which, however, does not make speaking of human beings, let alone giving examples of

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[1] Translation is understood in a broad sense as transfer of options of social-systemic action and experience, interlinguistic mediation being considered as only a special case.

concrete flesh-and-blood, named people, some sort of taboo. Luhmann's social systems theory unfolds on three levels: the micro-level of face-to-face communication, the meso-level of organizations, and the macro-level of entire societies. Obviously, when one speaks of face-to-face communication it is often unavoidable to speak of concrete people. In various degrees, this holds true as far as the other levels are concerned. The logic that Luhmann's theory is too abstract and, therefore, depersonalized does not hold water and is based on sheer misunderstanding. This misinterpretation smacks of some sort of superstition: if Luhmann is mentioned then all other names should be dropped because the name Luhmann should allegedly lead us into a human-less vacuum. Epistemological precision ("a more precise reconstruction of the social world," Pokol 2009/2003: section 2) is flagrantly mistaken for dehumanization.

Such misconception of the general stance of Luhmann's theory leads to another misunderstanding: it is often doubted if Luhmann's social-systemic paradigm is compatible with other social theories which do not 'slice' human beings and theorize them 'wholesale', for example Bourdieu's social theory. Some even suggest Bourdieu's critique of the functionalist approach (notably, of Talcott Parsons) as a proof of such incompatibility, but such line of argumentation should be dismissed as unsatisfactory because personal attitudes of one theorist to another theorist or another theory do not prove anything and should be taken *cum grano salis* and against the proper social-historical background. For instance, the controversy of Bourdieu and the functionalists cannot be properly understood outside

> the French sociological scene [which] is strongly embedded in a wider intellectual/political arena, through which a dominant leftist-libertarian attitude makes all the theories that are politically deemed 'conservative' negligible; and Parsons, the functionalism and the system theory have been qualified like that in intellectual circles both in America and Western Europe. Although Bourdieu's intellectual socialisation took place at a definite distance from the French new leftists trends present at the time, a considerable part of the material of his readings left the impact of various trends of Marxism in his theoretical approach. (Pokol 2009/2003: section 3)

What matters is how compatible or incompatible (to what extent and in what aspects) theories, not their authors are. The controversy between Jürgen Habermas and Luhmann did not pose an insurmountable obstacle for Habermas to incorporate Luhmann's social systems theory into Habermas' own theory of communicative action (Habermas 1985/1981; Bausch 2001: 80, 87). This is an example of how more complex dynamics of

the academic world is and why disputes between theorists should be kept apart from the analysis of the compatibility of their theories.

This extensive excursion is necessary in order to pave the way for my supplementing Luhmann's theory with elements of the Bourdieusian theory of social fields. Béla Pokol (2009/2003) showed some of the points of *rapprochement* between the two theories. Such and other points make combining of the two well possible. After all, when eating our lunch, we combine spoons, forks and knives.

3. The Boundary of the System

Luhmann's systemic approach to the study of society is more suitable for considering the social role of translation as compared to another systemic paradigm used in translation studies—the polysystem theory. The polysystem theory was originally conceived to study literary translation as part of a national literary polysystem (Even-Zohar 1979; Even-Zohar 1990). The polysystemic approach was instrumental in the works by scholars of the Tel-Aviv—Leuven school. Yet, a more large-scale sociological theory is needed to see the place of translation in the overall social system. Luhmann's social systems theory may be exactly what is needed because this theory provides the necessary conceptual apparatus and the large enough scope of observation (Poltermann 1992; Hermans 1999; Hermans 2007; Tyulenev 2009).

In Luhmann's theory, society is considered to be a communication unity surrounded by an environment. Social system is a self-reproducing unity. Self-reproduction, or autopoiesis, of the social system takes place due to self- and hetero-reference[2]: each operation is assessed as either belonging the system's own operation or alien. When we speak of translation, it is primarily (but by no means exclusively) hetero-reference that comes to the fore. In the present paper, I will limit myself to translation as hetero-reference.

Translation should be considered to be a boundary phenomenon of the social system. As such, translation has two functions: it opens system for environment and it closes system from environment. Not infrequently, translation is a means of filtering (partly opening, partly closing) the incoming information. As a boundary phenomenon, translation influences the inner structure of the system.

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[2] In some English translations, self- and other-reference (e.g., Luhmann 2000/1996).

4. Meaning and Complexity

Translation is present at the very moment of creating meaning as a horizon of options for the system to assess and choose from. The system's dealing with its environment boils down to a reduction of the latter's complexity: the system cannot comprehend all complexity of the environment and inevitably reduces it. Meaning is a form of adaptation to complexity. In Luhmann's social systems theory, meaning is understood as a phenomenological category—as a surplus of references to social-systemic experiences and actions (Luhmann 1995/1984: 60). Complexity may be defined as a lack of information. Complexity prevents system from observing itself or its environment: too many options and no patterns or redundancies. System reduces the complexity of its environment (and itself, for that matter) by selectivity based on meaning references: at every point in time system selects only one option as 'realizable', leaving the rest in the periphery and saving them for selection in the future.

To get information from/about the environment, the system has to come in contact with the environment. First the system casts a look at its surrounding.[3] Or, rather, since it should always keep an eye on the environment (for no system can afford to be autistic for any considerable length of time) the system assigns the function of watching its environment to some of its subsystems (Luhmann 1995/1984: 197). The responsibility of these subsystems is to keep the system informed about changes of any relevance in the environment. In the biological world, such subsystems are, for example, membranes, skin, eyes, and ears. In social systems, they are diplomatic and intelligence corps.

This 'looking around', however, is only the 'atomic' level of the phenomenon. There is also a 'sub-atomic' level most clearly observed in interlinguistic exchange in which the system is forced to participate whenever engaging in intersystemic (international) affairs. Indeed, the diplomat cannot accomplish much without interlinguistic involvements. Interlinguistic exchange is an indispensible part of the international dealings of the social system with its environment.

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[3] In second-order cybernetics, the terms such as 'look' and 'observe' are used in the most general, not optic sense (cf. Luhmann 1984/1995: 36; 506, footnote 69; Spencer Brown 1969: 69, 76).

The boundary between system and environment cannot be understood simplistically as a geographical frontier. In social systems, this boundary goes deeper into the very minds of its members who offer the information obtained about/from the environment to the system for its evaluation.[4] Constant contacts between the system and its environment play the role of the looks that system casts around itself. What the system sees around itself is the complexity of its environment. This complexity is referenced in the form of hierarchicalized meaning (to be discussed in the next section) and thereby reduced. The system, then, processes the meaning made 'palatable', reduced (Luhmann 1995/1984: 26-27; Luhmann 1998: 143-144).

5. Constituting Meaning

In the case of eighteenth century Russia, we can clearly see the meaning-constituting function of translation. We can more or less exactly pin down the moment when Russia as a social system begins to realize its growing autism: this process took place in the pre-Petrine epoch, emerging out of the necessity to learn from the West. From the fifteenth century, Russia started inviting foreign (mostly Western-European) experts: doctors, pharmacists, architects, and mercenary soldiers. At that time, new options appeared on the system's meaning horizon: Russia as a system notices alternative ways of social operations. Foreigners behaved, dressed, conducted business in strikingly different way. These new options on the meaning horizon were tagged as 'unacceptable'. At the same time, however, initial attempts were made to appropriate some of them. As a result, the referential status of the new options on the system's meaning horizon started to move slowly in the direction of 'possible' ('worth considering') or even 'acceptable'. These references became eligible for future actualization.

When we consider the early days of Peter the Great, we can observe an initial reconnaissance of the environment conducted by a representative of the system. As he frequented the Foreign District in Moscow, populated by Western-European tradesmen, he came in contact with foreigners, enlarging his personal meaning horizon to include new options. This enlargement of one member's horizon led to the enlargement of the

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[4] The member of a particular social system is a carrier of the society's communication. Human beings are 'plugged' into the social domain thanks to the operation of their minds structurally coupled with social systems (Moeller 2006: 18-19). In this sense their minds may be a locus of the system's boundary.

entire system's horizon. Moreover, in this case, the member happened to be the tsar. The difference between the efforts of previous Westernizers and those of Peter the Great can be seen in Bourdieusian terms (Bourdieu 1984: 9). Earlier Westernizers, such as Andrei Kurbskii (1528-1583), Prince Ivan Khvorostinin (d. 1591), Grigorii Kotoshikhin (?1630-1667), Afanasii Ordin-Nashchokin (1605-1680), Vasilii Golitsyn (1643-1714), could only suggest such changes; they did not have the power to impose them on society. Peter in his capacity as *rex* (tsar and, later, emperor) could change the rules of the social game directly and, moreover, by his royal will, universalize them to the entire space of social, political and cultural fields. Peter the Great, thus, imposed a new 'illusio', that is, he created a new illusion, which involved the entire society in a new game (Shusterman 1999: 90, 169-170; Webb et al. 2002: xiii). In his time, the Westernization of nearly all social spheres moved to the 'actualized' ('acceptable') position on the meaning horizon.[5]

Let us consider the status of translation in terms of its status change in the meaning horizon. At the court of Aleksei Mikhailovich, Peter the Great's father, translations had been 'circulated' in two to four handwritten copies. One of Peter the Great's first royal initiatives was to set up a printing press in Amsterdam with which to publish translations (Pekarskii 1972/1862 vol. 1: 11). Translation became an indispensible part of the new state policy. Translation was seen as a means to introduce important foreign writings necessary for carrying out reforms in Russia. The emperor involved in this activity not only translators by trade (for example, those serving in the *Posol'skii Prikaz*, an equivalent of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) but also his aides, state officials and diplomats of the highest rank (notably Vinius, Shafirov, the brothers Zotov). Iakov Brius, one of the best educated and most enlightened figures of Peter's closest circle, was commissioned with editing translations. Copies of all published translations (probably, together with the rest of the publications put out in Russia) would become part of the tsar's library. The tsar himself determined the repertoire of translated publications and the translation policy (Voskresenskii 1945: pp. 34-35, 37, 39, 42, 50, 51, 54, 57, 60, 63, 64, 84, 102, 148).[6] In all these instances, translation was a systemic

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[5] 'Actualized' is stronger as a term than 'acceptable', because meaning options may be acceptable but not yet realized.
[6] The information on Peter the Great's policy concerning translation in the entry "Russian Tradition" (Komissarov 2008) is incorrect (and, unfortunately, this is not the only fault of the entry). Komissarov

meaning-constituting factor. In this function, it was the very mechanism of finding equilibrium between the system and a significant part of its environment—Russia and Western Europe. It is thanks to the exposure to the West that the system radically re-negotiated its own inner communication and renounced its autism in relation to its environment. In the times of Peter the Great, the technical supremacy of the West was realized in Russia as being beyond any doubt (Tschizewskij 1978: 159-160). Importantly, the door for all things Western into Russia was opened primarily by translation.

6. Factual Dimension

The meaning-constituting aspect of translation should be interpreted in the widest communicative-theoretical sense as a mechanism of the system/environment interaction. As such, translation is located at the outermost edge of the system and has the primary function of keeping the system aware of changes in the environment. Furthermore, these changes are introduced as options existing 'out there' which subsequently are included 'in here' by the system, that is, into its meaning horizon. These options are distributed between the three categories of references: actualized, possible, unacceptable (Luhmann 1995/1984: 60).

These three categories appear in the three meaning dimensions: factual, temporal dimension, and social (Luhmann 1995/1984: 75-82).[7] In the factual dimension, the system divides the reference structure into 'this' and 'something else'. In this dimension, Russia qua system distinguishes between what it tags as its own (Russian, Orthodox) and what is foreign (Western, Protestant, Catholic). This is the domain of

writes: "Tsar Peter issued a special decree on translation demanding a faithful rendering of the original sense" (2008: 519). Peter the Great did not issue any *one* such decree with such wording. He commissioned translations into Russian or into foreign languages (e.g.,: Voskresenskii 1945: 50-51) and he commented, if briefly, on the quality of translations (ibid.: 34-35). He issued several official decrees commissioning translations (ibid.: 37, 50, 57, 63, etc.) but none of them contains any instructions on *how* to translate. Brief instructions on *how* to translate are found in Peter the Great's letters to translators (ibid.: 34-35), but, even according to these brief instructions, his policy of translation was more sophisticated than "demanding a faithful rendering of the original sense." I cannot go into details here. This should be a separate discussion.

[7] The social dimension, dealing with what one at any time accepts as like oneself and articulating the relevance of this assumption for every experience of the world and fixing of meaning, is the very foundation of any social-systemic interaction (Luhmann 1995/1984: 80). I will not discuss the social dimension separately precisely because of its ubiquity in the domain of the social. Indeed, it is implied in any social, intrinsically meaning-related interaction whose indispensable part is translation. Therefore, whenever one speaks of translation on the level of social systems' interaction, one is bound to deal with the social dimension of meaning and vice versa.

samenesses/differences. No self-identification/self-reference is possible without this. Therefore, no system can reproduce itself as a particular type of communication, different from all other types of communication, without this type of basic reference. I would like to stress the importance of the translating agent, most actively involved in this vital self-referential process of the system.[8] Translation provides the referential background for self-reference: what is one's own can be seen only at the background of the alien.

Furthermore, the system looks outside by contacting what is outside.[9] By translating what it sees, the system establishes references to the 'foreign'/'different' not as an indiscriminate bundle of options.[10] Rather, as we can see even during the period of its systemic 'autism', pre-Petrine Russia had already hierarchicalized options from the category 'foreign'. Russia differentiated between what was relevant/necessary/desirable for its autopoiesis and what was undesirable/irrelevant. This differentiation led the system further—to process new meaning options. Early Westernizers' exposure to Western values criticized their own system and suggested new options. Peter the Great's own reconnaissance of Western views brought inner-systemic shifts in the meaning horizon when items changed their referential categories most radically. In all these cases, translation supplied the meaning horizon of the system with new options by transferring them across the system's boundary in the minds of the carriers of the system's communication.

7. Temporal Dimension

The temporal dimension of meaning split Russian history into different temporal 'now' and 'then'. If we look at Russian history as a whole, Peter's reforms fall into the acme stage of the system's evolution and constitute the watershed between ancient Russia and modern Russia (Gumilev 1992). This holds true for translation history in Russia, too. Before Westernization, during what I dubbed the 'autistic' stage in its history, Russia's use of translation was minimal. There had been little need of translating agency. But as

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[8] The term 'agent' underlines that translation acted as a part of the overall social system. The term should not be understood as referring to any individual translator. It should not be thought of as synonymous to 'agency' in the opposition 'agency—structure'.

[9] Since 'looking' is not to be understood as optical, but in the most general sense, contacting the environment on the part of the system is a kind of 'looking'. From this standpoint, contacting *is* looking.

[10] Only at the initial stages of its evolution, system sees its environment as an indiscriminate mass (Luhmann 1995/1984: 181-182).

soon as meaning-constituting mechanisms were set in motion (through a growing number of contacts of the system's members with the environment), new options entered the system's referential scope. The enlargement of the scope would not have been possible without making translation the agent whose responsibility was to inform the system about the environment. Hence, trickles of translation suddenly turned into a torrent. Translations were mostly printed for a considerably enlarged readership (Luppov 1973; Luppov 1976; Pekarskii 1972/1862; Tiulichev 1988) and they covered a wider range of topics (Bobrova 1978; cf. Sobolevskii 1903).

We should not forget about non-verbal transfers, which were of crucial importance for the system. Some of them were introduced by foreigners (*outsiders* of the system entering *inside* the system) whose numbers had increased enormously: by August 1698, after his first voyage to Europe, Peter the Great had recruited over 750 foreigners (Paxton 2001: 43). Other transfers were introduced by Russians who traveled or studied abroad (*insiders* of the system who were *outside* the system) (Luppov 1973: 8-9). This shows the elasticity of the border between the system and its environment. In both cases the insiders of the system translated newly encountered notions into their systemic-communicative terminology or, when there were no equivalents, they borrowed concepts from outsiders. This is another example of how translation contributed to the enlargement of the system's meaning horizon.

8. Actualization/Virtualization

Meaning is never static—it is ever-changing, actualizing/virtualizing available references. In eighteenth century Russia, most radical changes in reference distribution occurred. Indeed, certain references, introduced through translation, had been previously tagged as belonging to the 'unacceptable'. Now, suddenly[11], they were 'promoted' and given not only the status of 'possible' but were declared to be the only possible. Westernizers in pre-Petrine Russia were not welcome; in Petrine and post-Petrine Russia it became virtually impossible not to be a westernizer at least to an extent if one did not want to be punished or even ostracized. Translation, also suddenly, was promoted from a

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[11] "Suddenly" may seem a strong word here, but its use will be understandable if we take into account that despite trickles of Western European influence and hints at inevitable changes, it was during the lifetime of one generation under one radically-minded emperor (Peter) that the entire empire made an about-turn.

social-systemic reconnaissance mechanism to the mechanism ensuring the system's autopoiesis. Translations started to play the role of discourse-definer. Without translation, many spheres would have been inarticulable: no terminology, no concepts. Little wonder the translated (not only bilingual) lexicography experienced a boom in the eighteenth century (Birzhakova 1998). But translation influenced even deeper language structures: from graphics through vocabulary to syntax. That translation either produced changes or spurred them (Huettl-Worth 1956; Kutina 1964; Kutina 1966).

9. The Maker of Past and Future

In the temporal dimension, translation contributed to the periodization of emerging modernity. Modernity always rejects the past in the name of the present-future, draws a line between the past and what follows (Jameson 2002). Talking about modernity in whatever discourse (and it *is* a matter of discourse) and with whatever definition, one cannot but periodize. This periodization is conducive to modernity's "libidinal charge" (Jameson), an eagerness for the promised (messianic) future which is built in the present.

Such modernity's eagerness for future can be observed in the Petrine reformation of Russia. Peter the Great and his ideologists constantly brought up the matter of becoming like Europe, learning from Europe. This presupposed a process whose result was located in the eagerly-awaited future. This messianic expectation was possible only thanks to translation, because translation supplied the messiahs with the 'milk and honey' which was to be fed to the public. The information coming from the West—through, made available and mediated by translation—was the only tool for jettisoning old mores and social subsystems and replacing them with new ones. Translation was included in the very ideological-political mechanism set in motion by social power. Therefore it is of little surprise that such potentates as Peter the Great were personally involved in translational activities and commissioned translations to their highest ranked courtiers. Translation constituted the system in constituting the mindset of its members who

translated or for whom translations were made. The entire society fed on what was provided by translation, Russia's veritable "window on Europe."[12]

In the temporal dimension of meaning, differences between past, current and future events become blurred (Luhmann 1995/1984: 77-80). All of them become observable as a horizon of availabilities. The difference between the past/future and present is relegated to the difference between 'before' and 'after', rather than to the axes: 'presence/absence' or 'near/far'. Future and past cannot be experienced, only intended or thematized. The present is the time span that is experienced in two aspects (again, along the axis of 'before/after'): the 'punctual' present reporting irreversibility of change, and the present that endures and symbolizes the reversibility realizable within the meaning horizon. These two presents polarize themselves as events and permanence, change and duration, thereby making it possible for a past, still visible in an irreversible event, and a future, already visible in a lasting present, to become present. Hence, by being presented as time and by means of its vocabulary, incipient irreversibilities are brought into the meaningfully self-referential organization of social systems.

This presentation of time as a meaning dimension makes time and its vocabulary a powerful ideological tool. In other words, one can present reversibilities as constancies and vice versa. Two ethnic groups, an extinct one and an existent one, may be manipulatively shown to share the same temporal meaning horizon and thus the existent one will claim relatedness to the extinct one as the extinct one's present continuation. How can this be practically accomplished? Political authority, or anyone using this technique, must produce documents proving that the relationship between one and the other is the same as between the other's past and the one's present.

There are several thematic options for this in the factual dimension of meaning. One of the most compelling is transfer of cultural heritage from the extinct ethnic group to the existent. It is one of the reasons why in the eighteenth century in Russia, the Old East Slavonic chronicles, religious and other writings began to be published and translated. For example, one of the gems of Old Slavonic literature *The Tale of Igor's*

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[12] The metaphor was originally coined by Francesco Algarotti (1712-1764) about Saint-Petersburg. Later it was used and also with reference to Saint-Petersburg by Aleksandr Pushkin (1799-1837) in his narrative poem "The Bronze Horseman." Arguably, Saint-Petersburg may be metaphorized as a symbol of the westernization-as-translation of Russia.

Campaign was published and translated into modern Russian (Dmitriev 1960). The empire in the making was constructing its history by projecting itself into the past.

As for the category of future, translation played an important part in blurring the difference between presence and absence. The modernized Russia was not present when Peter the Great and his ideologists declared it *in verbo*. Their conception of the future was firmly associated with a Western lifestyle. The latter clearly became a model in the factual dimension of meaning, and translation helped to transfer the factual dimension into the temporal meaning dimension. Translations were produced from different sign-systems (e.g., foreign languages, but also foreign cultural conventions) into the Russian sign-system. A foreign language or foreign cultural convention was introduced into the Russian cultural system of values. By effacing the sign difference (language), translation effaced time's bond for the target consumer, the very factual dimension; in this text-space, ego is identified with alter and vice versa. This led to further future/present time metamorphoses: in translation the future of modernized/Westernized Russia, which was Western Europe's present, became Russia's present. In translation, the unmodernized present of Russia turned into its messianically prophesied future; this future was already visible in the lasting present and thereby became the present. Translation played an interesting role here. To use biblical comparisons again, it supplied the Russians with the heavenly manna in the form of translated materials which were filled with the promised milk and honey of the target consumers' future, someone else's present and thereby the target consumers' present. Thus, translation was the mechanism of splitting the present so that both the past and the future would become visible in the present medium of translation. In such a twofold present, translation reconstituted the target audience; as with manna provided for the chosen people during their transit through the desert, translation nurtured the Russians with an eagerly-awaited and already visible future (fed to them in the form of someone else's present). On the other hand, translation of Old Slavonic texts anchored the eighteenth century Russian readership in their systemic self-referential communication.

10. Conclusion

Translation, as a social boundary phenomenon responsible for making the system sensitive to its environment, plays an important role in renegotiating the system's internal communication. I considered how translation participates in the constitution of the social-systemic meaning. As was shown in the case of Petrine Russia, translation may be of paramount importance in three meaning dimensions: social, factual and temporal. In the social dimension, it was the mechanism of interaction between the system and its environment: Russia qua system interacted through translation with a particular part of its environment, Western Europe. Obviously, without translation such interaction would have been impossible. In the factual dimension, translation was the definer of the social discourse. Translation introduced new themes into the system's internal communication which, in turn, were indispensable for the system's autopoiesis. In the temporal dimension, translation introduced the eagerly-awaited future-focused perspective of modernity into the present of systemic communication. The system's past and future became the system's present largely through translation.

My primary task in this paper was to explore the applicability of Luhmann's social systems theory, or rather one of its aspects (the category of meaning and its constitution), to translation. Such perspective provided new ways to appreciate the social importance of translation. There is no doubt that other aspects of Luhmann's theory should be considered in terms of their applicability in translation studies.

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