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THE HISTORY OF TRANSLATION OF THE YAKUT HEROIC EPIC OLONKHO INTO WORLD'S LANGUAGES

The article gives a brief review of translations of the Yakut heroic epic Olonkho into world's languages. It studies translations beginning from 1844 up to the present day. In 2005 UNESCO proclaimed the Yakut heroic epic Olonkho a "Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity". However, is Olonkho really known among international community? It is impossible to give a straight answer to this question, for Olonkho is just being translated into other languages (except translations into the Russian). Meanwhile various epics of the peoples of the world had successfully become common property long time ago. For example, it is known that the Finnish epic "Kalevala" has been translated into 65 different languages; translations of the Kyrgyz epic "Manas" has made it known throughout the world, etc. Translation of our epic into other languages is extremely difficult and important work. It can be carried out only by professionals, who, on the one hand, know and understand all the shades of the language, Olonkho is translated into, and on the other hand – all the shades of Olonkho language, which represents the masterpiece of the Yakut language wealth. The most important requirement to translation is maximal approximation of target language to source language, approximation, not adequate translation. The latter is impossible, but translation can be considered as successful if it conveys deep individual conception of epic, preserves all of its unique characteristics, special epic world with its original characters and their actions and deeds. In other words, translation is intended to convey to foreign readers the inner spirit of epic, all of its local color and its real historical and cultural significance.

Keywords: epic, indigenous people of Siberia, plotlines, community, authentic culture, traditions, classification, myth, folklore, archetype, image, animism, totemism.

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Из истории перевода якутского героического эпоса олонхо на языки народов мира

В статье предпринята попытка провести краткий обзор перевода якутского героического эпоса олонхо на языки народов мира. В ней рассмотрены переводы, начиная с 1844 г. по настоящее время. Якутский героический эпос олонхо в 2005 г. признан ЮНЕСКО Шедевром Устного Нематериального Наследия Человечества. Однако известен ли якутский эпос широкой мировой общественности? Однозначно ответить на этот вопрос представляется невозможным, ибо перевод олонхо на другие языки народов мира только начинает осуществляться (исключением являются переводы олонхо на русский язык). Это тогда, когда многие эпосы народов мира стали достоянием мировой общественности достаточно давно и с широким размахом. Известно, что финский эпос «Калевала» переведен на 65 языках народов мира; благодаря переводам кыргызский «Манас» широко известен миру и т. д. Перевод нашего эпоса на другие языки – чрезвычайно сложная, трудная и ответственная работа. Она под силу только специалистам, знающим и понимающим все нюансы богатства языка, на который переводится эпос, с одной стороны, с другой – все нюансы языка олонхо, представляющего вершинный памятник богатства якутского языка. Главное требование перевода – максимальное приближение языка перевода к языку оригинала, приближение, а не адекватное воспроизведение. Оно, последнее, невозможно, но перевод может быть признан удачным, если в нем передано глубокое, индивидуальное понимание эпоса, сохранены все уникальные его особенности, особый эпический мир с его самобытными действующими лицами и их поступками и свершениями. Иными словами, перевод призван донести до иноязычного писателя внутренний дух эпоса, весь его национальный колорит и его реальное историко-культурное значение.

Ключевые слова: эпос, коренные народы Сибири, сюжетные линии, общность, самобытная культура, традиции, классификация, миф, фольклор, архетип, образ, анимизм, тотемизм.

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Introduction

Translation of our epic into other languages is extremely difficult and important work. It can be carried out only by professionals, who, on the one hand, know and understand all the shades of the language, Olonkho is translated into, and on the other hand – all the shades of Olonkho language, which represents the masterpiece of the Yakut language wealth. The most important requirement to translation is maximal approximation of target language to source language, approximation, not adequate translation. The latter is impossible, but translation can be considered as successful if it conveys deep individual conception of epic, preserves all of its unique characteristics, special epic world with its original characters and their actions and deeds. In other words, translation is intended to convey to foreign readers the inner spirit of epic, all of its local color and its real historical and cultural significance.

Beginning of translation

For the first time the Yakut heroic epic – Olonkho was mentioned in literature in 1844, when the academician A. F. Middendorff noticed singing of unknown *olonkhosut*¹-improvisator during his trip to Eastern Siberia (1842-1845), which aroused his interest. Then he recorded the beginning of olonkho “Eriedel Bergen” in Latin alphabet but in source language and gave a brief summary of its content in Russian. This work was included in collected book “Examples of folk literature of the Yakut people” in 1911 under the editorship of E. K. Pekarsky. In 1851 O. N. Böhlingk attempted to make word-for-word translation of A. Ya. Uvarovsky olonkho “Ereidekh-Buruidakh Er Sogotokh” into German [1, p. 808-819]. It would be appropriate to recall that it was O. N. Böhlingk, who first introduced for scientific use terms olonkho and olonkhosuts.

In 1884 “News of East-Siberian Branch of Russian Imperial Geographical Society” published Russian translation of N. S. Gorokhov olonkho “Urung Uolan”, which outlined the fullest and truest concept of the Yakut olonkho [2, p. 43-60].

“Verkhoyansky collection” of the famous Russian scientist-ethnographer, folklorist and political exile I. A. Khudyakov, who was deported to Verkhoyansk for revolutionary activities, was also of great significance. His “Verkhoyansky collection” (1890) is Russian translation of his collected field data. It was published after the scientist’s death in Irkutsk. The collection included word-for-word translation of the famous olonkho “Khan Jargistay” and incomplete records of three olonkho “Basimmilakh Baatyr”, “Ogonjordokh Emekhsin” – old man and old woman, the main character of which was Er Sogotokh, a popular character among epic works of Yakutia, and “Bert Khara” [3]. “Verkhoyansky collection” was very important for more detailed studying of the Yakut olonkho.

Another rewarding work was made by political exile Sergey Vasilevich Yastremskiy, who was deported to Yakutia in 1887-1896. In 1895 he recorded and in 1900 translated extracts from three olonkho into Russian. The results of Yastremskiy’s work on the Yakut folklore were published only in 1929 in Leningrad, entitled “Examples of the Yakut folk literature”; in its chapter “Bylina² (olonkho)” there were published Russian translations of five olonkho [4]. The expert in oral folk arts of the Yakut people A. P. Afanasyev assisted S. V. Yastremskiy in translation.

We should also mention worthy work of ethnographer, folklorist, honorary member of Academy of Sciences of USSR E. K. Pekarsky. E. K. Pekarsky and his like-minded friends had found masters of the Yakut language, wise men and talented olonkhosuts. He took upon himself organization of collecting of folklore material. He laid special emphasis on the language of olonkho. Famous olonkhosuts, storytellers and singers-toiuksuts lived in Boturussky ulus that time. For example, the olonkhosut from the 1st Igideisky nasleg³ of Boturussky ulus Ivan Yakovlevich Sleptsov dictated him following olonkho: “Toion Nurgun”, “Kyun Erilik”, “Bahymni Baatir”, “Toion Kulut”, “Agis sala kuturuktaakh aidaryky sier attaakh Kulantaia Kullugur”, etc.

E. K. Pekarsky had done much as an author and as an editor of “Examples of folk literature of the Yakut people” academy publications in three volumes and eight editions. It should be noted that editing and correcting of uneducated olonkho records was very difficult, because there was not common transcription for Yakut texts and everybody wrote as they thought proper. As a result of appropriate methodology of textual work, formed over a number of years, E. K. Pekarsky managed to achieve

¹ Olonkho performer.

² Russian traditional heroic poem.

³ Administrative division of Yakutia.

precision and scientific certainty in his translation of original text. The first volume consists of 15 texts of heroic epic olonkho, seven of which are written to the fullest extent possible, others are short and sketchy records. The first volume in five editions (1907-1911) includes olonkho, recorded by Pekarsky himself and other people under his direction.

If E. K. Pekarsky enriched folklore studies with a great number of olonkho texts, then S. V. Yastremskiy's merit was that he made first translations of oral olonkho. This work was ready as early as in 19th century, but remained in manuscript for long time.

Translations of S. V. Yastremskiy make a very good impression, but, as G. U. Ergis notes, one can notice some simplifications in details. Translations were typed under the editorship of E. K. Pekarsky in straight text as a prose, though S. V. Yastremskiy divided them into lines in his original manuscript.

In 1936 the book "Yakut folklore" was published in Leningrad. It generally consisted of unpublished data, collected by A. A. Popov and G. A. Neustroev, a student from Yakutia [5]. As for materials, published earlier by S. V. Yastremskiy in "Examples of the Yakut folk literature", following olonkho were included in the book – "Er Sogotokh" and "Two shamans". There are examples of all main genres of the Yakut folklore in the book: olonkho, fairy tales, legends, songs, algy¹, riddles, proverbs and sayings. Introductory article "Ancient folk literature of the Yakut people" was written by academician A. N. Samoylovich.

Working method of the edition's participants was interesting and productive. A. A. Popov, the author of part of original texts, who had a complete command of the Yakut language, made word-for-word translation that was as close as possible to the original text. He introduced these texts to the poetess E. M. Tager, reading them aloud to her for many times. He accompanied it by pointing of stressed and unstressed, long and short syllables, as a result of which they made an exact rhythmical record that showed unique melody of the Yakut speech. E. M. Tager made a literary translation on the basis of the rhythmical record and literal translation. Moreover, she tried to convey the solemn way of people's life, images and comparisons, to take into account the syntax of the original text. Prepared in such a way translations were checked by A. A. Popov one more time and passed to literary scholar M. A. Sergeev for final formulation. Through joint efforts of many people, translation had become accurate and literary at the same time. So this experience could be an example in preparing of important folklore publications.

After 15 years A. A. Popov began translating one of the best olonkho "Kuruubai Khaannaakh Kulun Kullustuur" of olonkhosut I. G. Teploukhov-Timofeev, which was recorded in 1906 by V. N. Vasiliev and published by E. K. Pekarsky in "Examples of the Yakut folk literature". The translation was made to a high level and fully conveyed the idea and artistic content of olonkho, special features of its style and poetic language, loaded with archaisms and complex syntactic constructions. Translation, as well as the Yakut text were edited by I. V. Pukhov and G. G. Okorokov, then included in "Epic of the people of USSR" book series and published in 1985 [6].

The first scientific paper of the Institute of Linguistics, Literature and History of the Yakut branch of Academy of Sciences, published by the Institute of World's Literature of the Academy of Sciences of USSR in two languages, was olonkho "Nurgun Botur the Swift" by K. G. Orosin, its translation, commentaries and introductory article of G. U. Ergis [7]. This publication laid the foundation to other scientific papers of masterpieces of the Yakut heroic epic olonkho, particularly in bilingual versions.

In this way, due to these translations Russian-speaking readers could for the first time get an overview of the Yakut heroic epic – Olonkho, special characteristics of the Yakut poetic language and compare this unique epic with epic of other peoples of the world. It is true that the first translations of the Yakut heroic epic into the Russian, carried out by N. S. Gorokhov, I. A. Khudyakov, S. V. Yastremskiy, are rather qualitative. Translators were aiming to get as close as possible to the spirit of the original text and convey its unique poetic features.

As for Russian translations of more recent times, we should first of all outline the translation of P. A. Oiunsky olonkho "Nurgun Botur the Swift", carried out by a highly-experienced translator V. V. Derzhavinin 1975. This translation is notable for high quality. It expresses genre uniqueness of the Yakut epic and made as close as possible to the original. So in all parameters it receives much attention from scientists and public. The translator was awarded P. A. Oiunsky State Prize.

¹ Blessing, praying.

In 1984 there was published the poetic translation of V. M. Novikov – Kyunnyuk Urastyrov olonkho “Mighty Jagaryma”, made by Alexander Romanov [8]. The author is a national poet of Yakutia, a living keeper of poetic treasure of his people. It was said that the translator could understand the spirit of olonkho, enter its unique world and masterfully express it in the Russian language.

In 1993 N. P. Burnashev olonkho “Kyys Debiliye” was published in book series “Masterpieces of folklore of the people of Siberia and Far East” both in Yakut and Russian [9]. In 1996 “Mighty Er Sogotokh” of V. O. Karataev was published in the same book [10]. Translations were made by N. V. Emelyanov, P. E. Efremov, S. P. Oiunsky. Both publications had phonorecords with olonkho fragments.

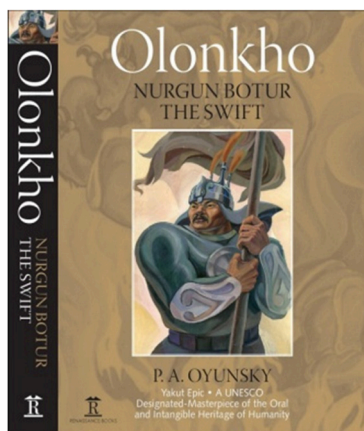
In recent times E. S. Sidorov did translations of olonkho into Russian. He translated into Russian such olonkho as “Invincible Myuljyu Bege”, “Yuchyugei Yudyugyuien Kuhagan Khojugur” of D. A. Tomskaya, “Uol Er Sogotokh” of N. G. Tagrov. In 2011 Olonkho Research Institute of M. K. Ammosov NEFU published olonkho of P. P. Yadrinhinskiy – Bejeele “Jiribina Jiriliatta Woman Warrior” with its Russian translation [11]. It is worthy to note that students from Yakut Stylistics and Russian-Yakut Translation Department of Institute of Languages and Cultures of the Peoples of North-East took part in translating under the general editorship of Professor T. I. Petrova, Associate Professors I. V. Sobakina and N. S. Sivtseva.

In 2016 olonkho of D. A. Tomskaya – Chaika “Kyys Kylaabinai the Warrior” came out in Russian and English languages. It was edited by Professor of NEFU V. V. Illarionov [12]. Russian translation was made by A. E. Shaposhnikova, English translation – by V. K. Neustroeva. This book was dedicated to Olonkho Esek¹ in Verkhoyansky district.

The above mentioned shows that the translation of olonkho into Russian has rather interesting history. Due to these translations the Yakut epic got Russian-speaking readers not only among scientists, but also among public in general. It should be noted one more time that V. V. Derzhavin’s translation of the main epic of the Yakut people “Nurgun Botur the Swift” enjoys great popularity.

First translations of olonkho into *foreign languages* are of exceptional interest, particularly, the translation of A. Ya. Uvarovsky olonkho “Er Sogotokh: The Lone Stranger” into the English language, which was made by Douglas Lindsey, Associate Professor of Traumatic Surgery Department of Arizona University Medical College. It was published in Arizona quarterly in 1971 [13]. The same olonkho was translated into *Turkish* by Yu. I. Vasiliev – Jargistay. In 1984 Tatran Publishing House, Bratislava, Yugoslavia, produced Milos Krno’s translation of olonkho “Nurgun Botur the Swift” into Slovak, made from the translation of V. V. Derzhavin.

In 1990 Yankel (Jacques) Karro, the officer of Paris National Library, translated K. G. Orosin’s olonkho “Nurgun Botur the Swift” into French and discovered to the European reader wonderful world of the ancient Yakut epic.



Uniqueness, magnificent figurativeness and wealth of olonkho language still attracts attention of foreign scientists. It is known that Japanese translator Yamashita Munehisa attempted to translate the first song (there are nine of them) of **P. A. Oiunsky** olonkho “Nurgun Botur the Swift”. Nowadays he is working on translations of “Modun Er Sogotokh” and “Kyys Debiliye”. Both of these olonkho will be published by the editor of Heibonsya Publishing House.

As for the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), attempts to translate olonkho into foreign languages were made in the last decades of the 20th century. Here are famous translations: French translation of fragment from P. A. Oiunsky olonkho “Nurgun Botur the Swift” for children “Nurgun Botur rescues Khan Jargistay” (translators Ya. Karro, L. M. Sabaraykina), translations of the first song of P. A. Oiunsky olonkho into English (translators A. A. Skryabina, 1993, and R. Yu. Skrybykin, 1995), as well as multilingual project on translation of P. V. Ogotoev olonkho “Eles Botur” into *English* (translator A. A. Skryabina, 2002). In 2012 “Eles Botur” of P. V. Ogotoev was published in French. Translation was made from the Yakut language into French by

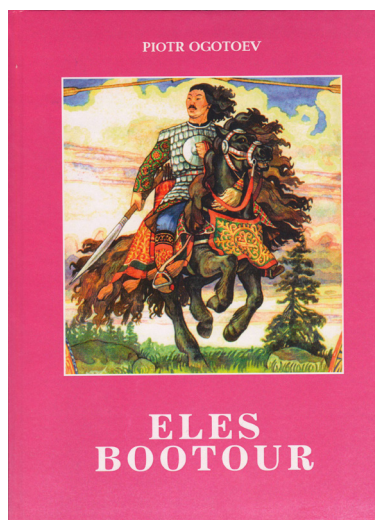
¹ A summer solstice festival of the Yakut people/

V. I. Shaposhnikova, Associate Professor of the Institute of Modern Languages and International Studies of M. K. Ammosov North-Eastern Federal University. Olonkho of P. V. Ogotoev was also translated into German and Korean. Korean translation was carried out by Professor Kang and published in South Korea in 2005.

In 2010 through the help of International Organization of Turkic Culture (Turkey) there was published Turkish translation of K. G. Orosin “Nurgun Botur the Swift” in a beautiful design. The translation was made by Doctor Murat Erzos [14].

Over the last years translation of olonkho into Russian and other European languages moved to a qualitatively new level. New translations of the Yakut heroic epic olonkho were made. The key role is played by professors of M. K. Ammosov NEFU. In 2014 there was published a full translation of the main Yakut olonkho “Nurgun Botur the Swift” of P. A. Oiunsky [15]. The book was published in Renaissance Books under the editorship of Paul Norbury in

Great Britain. It should be mentioned that the translation was started in 2007 in the Institute of Modern Languages and International Studies of M. K. Ammosov NEFU. A great responsibility for such a hard work as translation of unique olonkho written by the expert of epic language P. A. Oiunsky devolved on professors, postgraduates and graduates of Translation and Interpretation Department of the Institute of Modern Languages and International Studies. It was carried out under the direction of Associate Professor Alina Alexandrovna Nakhodkina. The group consisted of such well-known translators of the Republic as A. A. Skryabina, S. V. Kholmogorova, V. K. Neustroeva, L. A. Shadrina and Z. E. Tarasova. Piers Vitebsky, Professor of Cambridge University and well-known among Yakut people anthropologist, and Genevieve Perrault from Canada assisted them. It is of great importance that the translation was made from source language, i. e. from the Yakut language. It gives advantages in understanding of



historical features of Sakha people culture, which can be seen in heroic epic olonkho.

Kyrgyz translation of P. A. Oiunsky olonkho “Nurgun Botur Swift” was finished and published in 2014. It was carried out by national poet of Kyrgyz Republic Beksultan Zhakiev from Russian translation of V. V. Derzhavin [16].

Now Olonkho Research Institute is planning to translate olonkho of T. V. Zakharova – Cheebiy “Ala-Bulkun” into **Turkish** (based on E. K. Pekarsky text) and V. O. Karataev “Mighty Er Sogotokh” into **English** and **French**. The Institute is also planning to translate the Yakut epic into Spanish, German, Chinese, Korean, Japanese and other languages. We are inspired by the fact that Finnish epic “Kalevala” has been translated into 65 different languages! An interesting aspect about it is that the Institute gives preference to translation of earlier records, which preserve original style and, what is more important, olonkho language of that time.

Conclusion

Translation of olonkho into foreign languages is definitely not an easy task. It is not work of one man. Basing on existing translations of olonkho and involving experienced translators, editors and students, Olonkho Research Institute makes a strong contribution so that the Yakut heroic epic Olonkho could become public domain as a Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. We should take into the consideration the growing interest of foreign countries to our epic and keep in mind that publication of translations into other languages will contribute to cultural exchange, cooperation in humanitarian area, strengthen the image of the people – creator of epic on international level. In general, we have a great deal of work on deep scientific study of human value of Olonkho, then it will expand the horizons of contribution of Sakha people to world culture.

Heroic epic olonkho is the pinnacle of Sakha people wisdom, its high grade of intelligence, hymn to the kindness and rectitude. It shows flight of imagination of the whole nation and embodies indomitable national spirit. In 2005 an outstanding event happened in the history of olonkho – UNESCO proclaimed the Yakut epic a Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, i. e. province of all mankind. In this regard olonkho researches have a new challenge – promotion of historical and cultural importance of the Yakut epic in languages of the peoples of the world.

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