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**ОРТАЛЫҚ-АЗИЯ  
АУДАРМА ІСІ ЖУРНАЛЫ**

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**ЦЕНТРАЛЬНО-АЗИАТСКИЙ ЖУРНАЛ  
ПЕРЕВОДОВЕДЕНИЯ**

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**CENTRAL ASIAN JOURNAL OF  
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**CURRENT THEORIES IN TRANSLATION STUDIES:  
LAWRENCE VENUTI AND TRANSLATION OF “UTOPIA”**

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**Abstract:** This paper is drawn from a lecture given by Anna Oldfield in a Seminar in Translation Studies to Teachers of Translation at Ablai Khan KazIR&WL in September-October 2017. This paper discusses Lawrence Venuti’s article “Translation, Community, Utopia” from The Translation Studies Reader. Professor Lawrence Venuti (Temple University) is a leading authority on the theory and history of translation. This article evaluates whether Lawrence Venuti’s translation approach of “foreignization” is likely to achieve his stated goal: translations that can resist cultural dominance. Venuti notes the shift of thinking in Translation Studies from reconstructing a text in the domestic culture to creating a “community” with the foreign culture. Venuti’s focus on the idea of the balance of “foreign” and “domestic” in translation is important and valuable. In his work, Lawrence Venuti offers solutions to improve cross-cultural communication. He believes that translation can be a true cultural bridge that can form “imagined communities” of heterogeneous people across languages. His approach inspires new debates in the theory of translation.

**Keywords:** transnational audience, dialect, slang, utopian communities, foreign /domestic meaning.

The American scholar Lawrence Venuti is considered one of the most important voices in contemporary Translation Studies. He is a Professor at Temple University and a professional translator of literature to and from Italian, French, Spanish and Catalan. His book, *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation* is a founding work of translation studies.

This paper will discuss Venuti’s article “Translation, Community, Utopia” from *The Translation Studies Reader*, which he edited. In this article, Venuti searches for the “utopian” element of communication between the foreign and the domestic that is sought in translation. He interrogates the possibilities and limitations of “foreign” and “domestic” interpretations of a text, and offers solutions to improve communication across cultures. Finally, he discusses how translation can form “utopian communities” that can be vital for true intercultural communication. His article gives the inspiring message that translation can be a true cultural bridge that can form

“imagined communities” of heterogeneous peoples across languages.

In the article “Translation, Community, Utopia,” Venuti begins with the idea of the balance of “foreign” and “domestic” in translation. He believes that the original, “foreign” text, will always become “inscribed” with a new, domestic meaning no matter how accurately we try to translate. As Venuti explains,

Translation never communicates in an untroubled fashion because the translator negotiates the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text by reducing them and supplying another set of differences, basically domestic, drawn from the receiving language and culture to enable the foreign to be received there. The foreign text, then, is not so much communicated as inscribed with domestic intelligibilities and interests (482).

Thus, our hope to simply pick up a foreign text and drop it into a domestic box unchanged will never succeed. Something will always have to change.

Looking at the history of translation into English, in the 19th and early 20th centuries the tendency to “domesticate” a foreign text was strong. Translators tried to find comfortable, target language equivalents for foreign idioms and concepts, often changing the language of the text to fit domestic mores. An example could be the translations from Russian to English by Constance Garnett (1861-1946), who translated all of the major novels of Turgenev, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky into British Victorian English. Her translations were very popular at the time, although later they came under criticism for Anglicizing the Russian texts too much: Joseph Brodsky even wrote that “the reason English-speaking readers can barely tell the difference between Tolstoy and Dostoevsky is that they aren’t reading the prose of either one. They’re reading Constance Garnett” (Quoted in Remnick).

Considering Translation Studies as they developed in the USA/UK, Venuti notes the self-reflexive turn in the late 20th century as translators began to wonder if it was correct to favor the domestic over the foreign. Venuti notes the change in attitude: “Seen as domestic inscription, never quite cross-cultural communication, translation has moved theorists towards an ethical reflection wherein remedies are formulated to restore or preserve the foreignness of the text” (483). In this new mode of thinking, the matter had become “ethical” – the domesticizing of the text when translated into English became to be seen as an imperialistic or colonial move, one that erased or repressed the original foreign text. Venuti notes the shift of thinking in Translation Studies from reconstructing a text in the domestic culture to creating a “community” with the foreign culture:

When motivated this ethical politics of difference, the translator seeks to build a community with foreign cultures, to share an understanding with and of them to collaborate on projects founded on that understanding going so far as to allow it to revise and develop domestic values and institutions. The very impulse to seek a community abroad suggests that the translator wishes to extend or complete a particular domestic situation, to compensate

for a defect in the translating language and literature, in the translating culture (483).

In other words, we translate in order to gain something we do not have; the “foreign” element of the text is, in fact, exactly what is missing from the domestic culture. The goal is that the translation will give this missing something and form a true community with the foreign culture.

Nonetheless, Venuti feels that it is not possible to translate without inscribing the text with a strong domestic presence that was not in the original. Thus the question of his article becomes:

“In the absence of cross-cultural communication unaffected by domestic intelligence and interests, what kinds of communities can translation possibly foster? What communities can be based on the domestic inscription of the foreign that limits and redirects the communicative aim of translation?”(483).

To answer this question, Venuti interrogates the process of communication in translation.

#### Communication in translation

In the 1970s, translation theorist Gideon Tourney defined translation as a communicative act that decomposes and recomposes a text, moving an “invariant” message from one language to another. Translation, Tourney writes “is communication in translated messages within a certain cultural-linguistic system, with all relevant consequences for the decomposition of the source message, the establishment of the invariant, its transfer across the cultural-linguistic border and the recomposition of the target message” (Quoted in Venuti, 483-4). Venuti takes up Tourney’s ideas in order to interrogate what exactly is the “invariant” that passes across from one language to another, asserting that the invariant carries something more than was in the original: “The source message is always interpreted and reinvented, especially in cultural forms open to interpretation, such as literary texts, philosophical treaties, film subtitling, advertising copy, conference papers, legal testimony” (484). Thus, he asserts, as the invariant is reconstructed in the domestic

language, the message requires all kinds of new values, histories and messages.

To look closely at the invariant in a literary translation, we can think of any novel and consider what can or cannot change. In a translation of Harry Potter from English, for example, the translator cannot change the order of events or the plot; he or she cannot make Harry and Hermione get married, or bring Dumbledore back to life. All these elements that cannot be changed are exactly what makes up the invariant.

Venuti, however, asserts that with the translation of the invariant into a new language also comes a “domestic remainder” – associations and values that are embedded in the domestic language and cannot help but impact the domestic reader. He writes,

Any communication through translating...will involve the release of a domestic remainder, especially in the case of literature. The foreign text is rewritten in domestic dialects and discourses, registers and styles, and this results in the production of textual effects that signify only the history of the receiving language and culture (485).

To think about what a “domestic remainder” might be, it can be useful to look at the Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*. In this work there are at least 10 different dialects used, all based on 19th century Pike County Mississippi speech. Two of these dialects would be:

1. Southern poor white, such as the speech of Huck Finn. For example:

“That ain’t no matter” or “it warn’t no time for sentimentaling”

2. Southern African American dialect, such as the speech of Jim:

“I ain’ gwynlen’ no mo’ money back a hun’d times, de preacher says! Ef I could git de ten cents back, I’d call it squah, en be glad er de chanst.”

For the English speaker, these dialects create a strong impression that relate to very distinct American historical and cultural histories. The American reader connects the speech with the history of poverty, lack of education, racism and slavery in the Southern United States in the 1800s, a subject which most Americans have strong emotions about. These dialects influence the meaning of the

book: we see that although Huck is uneducated, he is often smarter than the educated adults he encounters, and we see that although Jim is seen by society as a runaway slave, to Huck he is a wise elder, a trusted friend, and a person of rare courage and goodness in a harsh world. By making the speakers of lower class dialects the heroes of the book, Twain is interrogating a society that judges people by race and class.

To translate this book into Russian, the translator has a choice – either to ignore the dialects and all that they convey, or to translate them in some kind of Russian equivalent. However, any Russian dialect used – say, that of an uneducated 19th century serf for Jim, would carry a huge remainder: instead of connecting Jim’s speech to American slavery, it comes instead with the association of Russian serfdom, which is a completely different history. The Russian speaker will have their own domestic associations with the Russian dialects that connect only to Russian history, not to American. It is those domestic associations that come in with any dialect that form the remainder.

To show the impact of the remainder, Venuti gives the example of Patrick Creagh’s 1995 translation of the Italian novel *Sostiene Pereira* by Antonio Tabucchi. Creagh’s translation uses British colloquialisms to try to convey Italian underworld slang. For example, Creagh translates “quarto uominidall’ariasinistra” (‘four men with a sinister air’) as ‘four shady looking characters,’

“stare con gliocchiaperti” (‘stare with your eyes open’) as ‘Keep your eyes peeled,’ and “senzapigiama” (“without pajamas”) as “in his birthday suit” (485).

Venuti notes that Creagh’s translations are “lexical shifts,” but that is not all; they also create a remainder:

“...the notion of shifts does not entirely describe Creagh’s choices. His translation signifies beyond his literary and cultural intentions by releasing a particularly English remainder: the different dialects and registers establish a relation to English literary styles, genres and traditions....Creagh’s polylingual mixture of standard and colloquial British and American gives his prose an extremely

conversational quality that is consistent with Tabucchi's presentation of the thriller plot....Yet the slangy English alters the characterization of Pereira by suggesting that he is less staid and perhaps younger than the elderly journalist presented in the text....

At the same time, the British and American slang refers to moments in the history of English language fiction. It recalls thrillers that reflect similar political themes" (486).

Thus, although Creagh's translation conveys all of the invariants of the original novel (plot, characters, etc.), the British remainders have an overpowering effect over the original Italian.

Returning again to the ethics of translation, Venuti quotes Alasdair MacIntyre, who wrote that "the internationalized languages-in-use in late 20th century modernity," like English "which have minimal presuppositions in respect to possibly rival belief systems" and so will "neutralize" the historical dimension of a foreign text" (Quoted in Venuti 486). Here one can exactly see the colonial impulses of a strong international language, which end up erasing the specific, local histories of the foreign: "Creagh's translation at once inscribed an English language cultural history in Tabucchi's novel and displaced the historical dimension of the Italian text" (487). And in fact, in the Italian original *Sostiene Pereira* sold 300,000 copies within a year of publication, while Creagh's translation sold only 5000 copies within two years of publication. Venuti feels this is due to the translation, noting that "Creagh maintained a lexicographical equivalence, but the remainder in his translation was insufficient to restore the cultural and political history that made the novel so resonant for Italian readers" (487).

Clearly, no translation will be without a remainder – all domestic language has inscribed values and connotations. So, this leads to the question of whether a translation ever communicate to its readers the understanding of the foreign text that the original foreign readers can have. Venuti says it can, "but this communication will always be partial, both incomplete and inevitably slanted towards the domestic scene. It occurs only when the domestic remainder released by the

translation includes an inscription of the foreign context in which the text first emerged (487). This means that the domestic remainder must be resonant with the foreign original, and give off some of the same values and connotations. The remainder can thus be influenced by interpretation:

"A translation of a foreign novel can communicate, not simply dictionary meanings, not simply the basic elements of narrative form, but an interpretation .... And this interpretation can be one that is shared by the foreign language readers for whom the text was written. The translation will then foster a common understanding with and of the foreign culture" (487).

As an example, Venuti cites two translations of Albert Camus' 1942 novel *L'Etranger* [The Stranger]. Venuti compares the French original with Gilbert's 1946 translation (UK) and Ward's 1988 translation (USA). Camus himself admitted that he was influenced by American "tough guy" prose, such as written by Earnest Hemingway and James Caine. Here is the famously jarring opening sentence of this groundbreaking existentialist novel:

Original:

Aujourd'hui, maman est morte. Ou peut-être hier, je ne sais pas. J'ai reçu un télégramme de l'aïeule: "Mère décédée. Enterrement demain. Sentiments distingués." Cela ne veut rien dire. C'était peut-être hier (Camus, 1)

Mother died today. Or, maybe, yesterday, I can't be sure. The telegram from the Home says "YOUR MOTHER PASSED AWAY. FUNERAL TOMORROW. DEEP SYMPATHY. Which leaves the matter doubtful; it could have been yesterday (Gilbert, 1946).

As Venuti points out, Gilbert translated "freely." Gilbert "softened the abruptness of the French, turning "Cela ne veut rien dire" ("That doesn't mean anything") into "Which leaves the matter doubtful." He also added "formality and politeness, rendering "Maman" as "Mother" (489). Other differences exist – for example, Gilbert's rendering of the telegram in capital letters gives it an importance that the original text does not allow. In general, Gilbert's translation is more flowing and less strange than the original, with

its short, clipped sentences like barely finished thoughts.

Ward translated “closely”. Compare his translation:

Maman died today. Or yesterday maybe, I don't know. I got a telegram from the home: “Mother deceased. Funeral tomorrow. Faithfully yours.” That doesn't mean anything. Maybe it was yesterday (Ward, 1988).

Venuti points out that Ward's close translation the lexical and syntactic peculiarities of the French, departing from Gilbert not only by making choices like “Maman”..., but also by adhering to Camus' brief, precise sentences: “That doesn't mean anything” (489). Ward himself described the differences as “dialectical,” citing the difference between Gilbert's British and his American English. But Venuti thinks there is more:

[Ward's version] releases a literary remainder that leads...to an American narrative tradition, to “Hemingway, Dos Passos, Faulkner...Ward's version communicated an understanding of the French text that is available to French readers. This understanding motivated his decisions, for example, to retain the French [child's word] “Maman” [instead of the formal “Mother”]. Ward's writing released a remainder inscribed with American and French references, and for the English language reader the result was truly defamiliarizing (490).

Ward's translation indeed was able to carry over much of the strangeness of the French prose into English. As a reviewer wrote, “The effect of the closer, simpler rendering is to make Mersault seem even stranger – more alien and diffident – than ...the British version” (491). In this case, the American remainder (of the “Hemingway” style) actually helped the translation to communicate the intention of the foreign text to the domestic audience. Ward's translation became a bestseller in English and is still the most popular English translation of the book.

#### Heterogeneous Communities

Of course, not all American readers will be interested in reading *The Stranger*. Most people read it for the first time at the university, and those who enjoy it form a kind of community. This is a community of people

who may never meet each other, but they all have interest in the same book. As Venuti writes, “the domestic inscription in translating constitutes a unique communicative act, however indirect or wayward. It creates a domestic community of interest around the translated text” (491). These communities that form around books can be extremely heterogeneous, including people of different ages, genders, races and classes. Venuti points out that “any community that arises around a translation is far from homogeneous in language, identity, or social position. Its heterogeneity might best be understood in terms of what Mary Louise Pratt calls a ‘linguistics of contact’” (491). Thus a translation provides a unique and specific zone of cross cultural communication, creating not a physical but a linguistic “zone of contact” between the foreign and domestic cultures.

Sometimes the communities that form around texts can be surprising. For example, in 2004, popular television host Oprah Winfrey recommended a new translation of Lev Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volkhonsky. She featured it on her show, called it “sexy and engrossing” and created a webpage on Oprah.com with background information and discussion questions. Thousands of copies were printed, and the book became very popular in the USA. Instead of a smaller audience of university students, the book gained a huge, heterogeneous audience.

Examining communities that form around a foreign text, Venuti hypothesizes that “the interests that bind the community through a translation are not simply focused on the foreign text, but reflected in domestic values, beliefs, and representations that the translator inscribes in it (491). Thus, if we speculate on why Americans read *Anna Karenina*, we can assume that for most of them, it was not to learn more about 19th century Russia, but rather for their own, domestic reasons – interest in the position of women, the question of marriage and infidelity, and the issue of broken homes, all of which are vital contemporary issues. As Venuti writes, “in the case of foreign texts that have achieved mass circulation, a translation becomes the site of unexpected groupings, fostering communities



of readers who would otherwise be separated by cultural differences and social divisions but are now joined by a common fascination (491).

For a time, Anna Karenina created just such an “unexpected grouping” of diverse readers, and created new communities that were now joined with a world of Russian language readers of the same book. Venuti explains how this community widens, claiming “a translation can also create a community that includes foreign intelligibilities and interests, an understanding in common with another culture, another tradition (491).

Citing Benedict Anderson’s work *Imagined Communities* (1988), Venuti sees communities of translation as forming by a similar process. Anderson’s theory was based around nationalism, and the idea that everyone in a nation feels to be part of one community, although most of them will never meet, or even know each other’s names. Anderson calls these national communities “imagined,” because “the members “will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson, 1985). Venuti extends this idea to the transnational audience of a translated text: “The translation becomes the focus of divergent communities, foreign and domestic, scholarly and literary...the translation fostered its own communities, one that was imagined in Benedict Anderson’s sense (491).

We need only to think of the huge international communities that have formed around bestselling translated texts to see how large and diverse these “imagined communities” can be; consider, for example, the communities that have formed around the Harry Potter series, Japanese Manga, or Dale Carnegie’s books. It is in these communities that Venuti finds what he calls “the Utopian Dimension in Translation” (496).

#### Translation and Utopia

Venuti finds in this “utopian” aspect the most inspiring feature of literary translation. He notes that a translation is made, essentially, with hope – with the hope that a community will form, connecting the foreign with the domestic and increasing the mutual understanding of both. Although, he admits, there will always be a domestic remainder, if

handled correctly this remainder itself can be the bridge that pulls the domestic reader into the foreign text:

“Translation is also utopian. The domestic inscription is made with the very intention to communicate the foreign text, and so it is filled with the anticipation that a community will be created around that text – although in translation. In the remainder lies the hope that the translation will establish a domestic readership, an imagined community that shares an interest with a foreign...and it is only through the remainder, when inscribed with part of the foreign context, that the translation can establish a common understanding between domestic and foreign readers (496).

Venuti’s utopian view of translation is created with a spirit of “anticipatory illumination” (Vor-Schein), a way of imagining a future reconciliation of linguistic and cultural differences, whether those that exist among domestic groups or those that divide foreign and domestic cultures (499). Thus, although the translation cannot be exactly the same as the original, and although cultures have vast differences, translation is created in the light of hope (“anticipatory illumination”) that there will be a future where understanding between cultures is possible. This reading of the translator’s work makes it not just an essential job, but one that is necessary for the progress of humanity towards greater understanding.

Venuti ends his article with the idea that translators trying to help refugees negotiate their new lives in Canada are also doing work to create “utopian” communities that hope for a future resolution of current differences. This is vital for multicultural societies. In essence, Venuti believes that ALL translations, literary and non-literary, go through the same processes of “inscribing the domestic” into the foreign in order to create the possibility of a community – so any act of intercultural communication will involve similar types of interpretation, translator’s intentions, and results.

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## АУДАРМА ІСІНДЕГІ ҚАЗІРГІ ТЕОРИЯЛАР: ЛОУРЕНРС ВЕНУТИ ЖӘНЕ "УТОПИЯНЫ" АУДАРУ

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**Аңдатпа:** Абылай хан атындағы ҚазХҚ және ӘТУ аударма теориясы және практикасы бойынша 2017 жылдың қыркүйек-қазан айларында мұғалімдерге арналған семинар лекциясы осы мақалаға негіз болды. Бұл мақала *The Reader Studies Reader* кітабында берілген Лоуренс Венутидің «Аударма, қоғам, утопия» атты жұмысын талқылайды. Профессор Лоуренс Венути (Темпл Университеті) аударма теориясы мен тарихында жетекші маман болып табылады. Бұл мақала Лоуренс Винутинің «шет тілін» алға қоятын аударма тәсілінің өз мақсатына жету, яғни мәдени басымдыққа төтеп бере алатын аударма жасау мүмкіндігін бағалайды. Венути атап өткендей, «Аударма ісі» аударма тілі мәдениетіне бейімделген аудармадан шетел мәдениетіне негізделген жаңа «қоғамды құруға» көшті. Венутидің аудармадағы «шетел» және «жергілікті» элементтер арасындағы баланс туралы идеясы маңызды. Лоуренс Венути өз жұмысында мәдениаралық коммуникацияны жақсарту шешімдерін ұсынады. Ол аударманың шын мәнісінде мәдени көпір бола алатынына сенеді. Бұл көпір гетерогенді халықтардың «елесті қоғамдастықтарды» түрлі тілдерде жақындастыра алады. Оның көзқарасы аударма теориясында жаңа талқылауларға шабыттандырады.

**Тірек сөздер:** трансұлттық аудитория, диалект, сленг, утопиялық қауымдастық, шетел / жергілікті мағына

## СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ ТЕОРИИ В ИССЛЕДОВАНИИ ПЕРЕВОДА: ЛОУРЕНРС ВЕНУТИ И ПЕРЕВОД "УТОПИИ"

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**Аннотация.** Лекция по теории и практике перевода, прочитанная на семинаре для преподавателей в КазУМОиМЯ им.Абылай хана в сентябре-октябре 2017 года, послужила материалом для написания статьи. В статье обсуждается работа Лоуренса Венути «Перевод, сообщество, утопия» из *The Reader Studies Reader*. Профессор Лоуренс Венути (Университет Темпл) является ведущим авторитетом в теории и истории перевода. В этой

статье оценивается, может ли подход перевода Лоуренса Вентути к «иноязычеству» достичь своей заявленной цели: переводы, которые могут противостоять культурному доминированию. Вентути отмечает сдвиг в мышлении в «Исследованиях переводов» от восстановления текста в отечественной культуре до создания «сообщества» с иностранной культурой. Важным и ценным является внимание Вентути к идее баланса «иностранного» и «национального» в переводе. В своей работе Лоуренс Вентути предлагает решения для улучшения межкультурной коммуникации. Он считает, что перевод может быть настоящим культурным мостом, который может сближать «воображаемые сообщества» гетерогенных народов на разных языках. Его подход вдохновляет на новые дискуссии в теории перевода.

**Ключевые слова:** транснациональная аудитория, диалект, сленг, утопические сообщества, иностранный/национальный смысл