ECHOES OF THE "LANGUAGE QUESTION" IN THE TRANSLATIONS OF ECONOMICAL TEXTS INTO GREEK

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We have already discussed the problem faced by the first translators of economical texts into Greek, when they had no Greek words to translate the terms found in the original works. But another frequent (and even more persistent over time) complaint of the Greek translators is what they keep referring to as "language abnormalities".

These are mostly the results of a major problem of the Greek society in general, which is known as the Greek "Language Question" [LQ]. It started as a disagreement among Greek scholars, a couple of decades before the formation of the Greek state (1831) and escalated to a major conflict which even led to riots and people getting killed in the streets of Athens at the beginning of the 20th century.

The LQ was primarily a debate about the correct or desirable form of the written language. The roots of the problem can be found in the phenomenon of Diglossia, "that is the contemporaneous existence of two different varieties of the same language used for different purposes, which had been a feature of the Greek language since the end of the 4th century BC, when the spoken language began to diverge perceptibly from the old norms which were being adhered to by writers"[1].

So the problem for the Greek scholars of the late 18th century was that they felt they had to educate the Greek people, because they believed this was the safest way of achieving national independence, but they had no language to do so with.

Roderick Beaton describes the situation: "By the time of Greek independence in 1821 there were essentially three theoretical solutions to this problem "on the table", and each had its already vociferous adherents. According to these, the national (written) language should be (a) based on the traditional written language, although there is some vagueness as to what this really means; (b) a transcription of the spoken language, or (c) some form of more or less planned convergence between the two. By the end of the nineteenth century, the debate had essentially developed into a polarized contest between the spoken language (now called "demotic", in preference to the older term "Romaic") and its adherents

[1] Peter Mackridge, *The Modern Greek Language. A Descriptive Analysis of Standard Modern Greek*, Oxford University Press, New York 1985, p. 6

("demoticists") on the one hand, and the advocates of a form of compromise (*katharevousa*) on the other"[2].

Of course, the LQ had an important ideological aspect, since language was considered one of the main unifying characteristics of the Greek nation, and at the time Greeks felt they had a very strong interest in proving that they were the descendants of the ancient Greeks.

By the second decade of the 20th century, the "Language Question", had become even more political. The rise of the labor movement in Greece at the time, gave a whole new meaning to the conflict. The communists were now supporting "demotic" as the language of the working class, while "katharevousa" was seen by many as the language of the established forces.

One of the results of this conflict was that none of those two different varieties of the same language, neither *demotic*, nor *katharevousa*, was able to evolve into a truly complete language system, and this led to the "language abnormalities" our translators had to put up with.

It is also interesting to see which variety of the Greek language the translators chose to use, in relation to the works they were translating.

For example, it comes as no surprise that Pandelis Pouliopoulos, then General Secretary of the young Greek Communist Party, chooses to translate the works of Karl Marx in a pure form of demotic, back in the 1920s.

Others are bound by their position to a different approach, but will not, nevertheless, hide their sympathies. Spiros Koronis, Professor of Political Economy at the Technical University of Athens, states at the preface of his translation of Werner Sombart's: *The Proletariat. Pictures and studies*, published in 1921:

"We chose to translate the text in a simple form of *katharevousa*. But there are some points where the words are so full of the author's feeling of love for his fellow man […]. At those points we also tried, with great pleasure indeed, to depart somewhat more from the icy forms of *katharevousa*."[3]

Finally, there are those who seek for the middle ground in language, as they do in Economics. The translator of Gide's work on *Consumers' Co-operative Societies*, published in Greek in 1932, is anxious to clarify that his wishes were for the book to be read and

[2] Roderick Beaton, *An Introduction to Modern Greek Literature*, Oxford University Press, New York 1994, p. 229

[3] Sombart, Werner, *To proletariaton. Melete ke ikones*, Athens 1921, p. 19 [Greek translation of *Das Proletariat. Bilder und Studien*]. Koronis has also translated works of Gide, and Bernstein.

understood by all social classes, and that is why he chose not to follow any of the warring linguistic forms[4].

The “Language Question” went on troubling Greek authors, readers, translators (and of course students) for several more decades. Even during the late '60s we can find translators who felt they had to explain why they chose the one form or the other. It was only after the fall of the military regime in 1974 that *kathareuousa* was officially abandoned by the Greek State.

[4] Gide, Charles, *I sineterismi katanaloseos***,** Athens 1932, p. 12-13. [Greek translation of *Les sociétés coopératives de consommation*].