



TRANSLATING ECONOMICS INTO GREEK (19TH – EARLY 20TH CENTURY): THE LACK OF WORDS AND THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE

FOTINI LAGONIKOS

skaropouli@hotmail.com

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

“Forgive me, but I cannot seem to find the right words”. This could be the common line of many, if not all, the Greek speaking scholars who engaged themselves in the challenging task of translating Economic texts into Greek during the 19th, or even the early 20th century. It is no coincidence that almost every one of them makes a similar statement at the preface to their translations. And of course, they could not find the words, not due to their own insufficiency (some of them being amongst the most prominent Greek intellectuals of their time), but simply because those words were nowhere to be found: they did not exist.

*Two of the very first Economic texts translated into Greek were Say's *Catéchisme d'économie politique* and Droz's *Économie politique* in 1828 and 1833 respectively. The translators of them both admit they had to invent new words in order to translate the terms found in the original works, and ask for the future readers' understanding if they have failed in some of their attempts¹. This is not just some kind of a rhetorical scheme. The task was indeed a difficult one and those who took it up were not always successful in their choices. For example, Georgios Hrissiidis, the translator of Say's work used the greek word “hrimata”, which only means money, to translate the term “richesses”².*

*It is only in 1889, that we have a translator's statement implying that some progress had been made in this rather rocky field. Konstandinos Kipriadis, translator of Leroy-Beaulieu's *Précis d'économie politique*, seems confident that he managed to overcome the difficulties of translating the scientific terms. For that he gives credit to two previous original Greek works written by Ioannis Soutsos and Ioannis Zografos. Ioannis Soutsos, a student of Pelegrino Rossi, was appointed Professor of Political Economy at the newly founded University of Athens in 1837 and remained in this post until his death in 1890. Ioannis Zografos had also been teaching Economics in the University of Athens since 1878³.*

¹ Georgios Hrissiidis, “Prologos” [“Preface”], Jean Baptiste Say, *Politikis Ekonomias Katihisis* [Catechism of political economy], translated by Georgios Hrissiidis, Aegina 1828; Anastasios Polizoidis, “Prologos tou metafrastou” [“Translator's Preface”], Joseph Droz, *Politiki Economia* [Political Economy], translated by Anastasios Polizoidis, Nafplio 1833, p. κδ

² Michalis Psalidopoulos, *Politiki Ekonomia kai ellines dianoooumeni* [Political Economy and Greek intellectuals], Tipothito, Athens 1999, p. 13

³ Emmanouel Kountouris, *I exelixi tis ekonomikis skepsis stin Ellada: 1837-1942* [The evolution of Economic Thought in Greece: 1837-1942], Unpublished Phd Thesis (available here: <http://phdtheses.ekt.gr/eadd/handle/10442/11033>), National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens 1998, p. 57, 102



The slow evolution of Economic Studies in Greece seems to have provided some solutions to the translators' persisting problem.

But that problem was far from being decisively resolved. In 1923, Ioannis Giannopoulos, a lawyer who gave us the translation of Karl Diehl's work on Socialism, Communism and Anarchism, is once again pointing out the difficulty of the task. At the same time he is expressing his bitterness over the indifference with which Greek scientists of the relevant discipline responded to his call for help in translating the scientific terminology of the original book⁴.

⁴ Ioannis Giannopoulos, "Anti Prologou" ["Preface"], Karl Diehl, *Peri Sosialismou, Kommounismou kai Anarhismou* [On Socialism, Communism and Anarchism], Leipzig 1923