Lexical Variation of ‘divine quietness’ – ‘silence’ in the Slavonic Versions of the Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian

Based on Material from Homily 21 of Version A and Homilies 10-14 from Version B

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Abstract—The present paper discusses the lexical variation of the lexemes of ‘divine quietness’ and ‘silence’, found in the two Slavonic versions of the Ascetical Homilies of Isaac the Syrian. The preference of the translator of version B for the lexeme ‘silence’ marks a new step in the process of creation of ascetic terminology.

Keywords—Isaac the Syrian; lexical variation; version A; version B; divine quietness; silence

I. SUBJECT OF STUDY

The subject of the present paper is to study the lexical variation of the lexemes Млъчани – Мльчальство and Безмлъви, encountered in Homily 21 of version A and in homilies 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14 of version B of the Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian. The said lexemes render the same word in the Greek original, thereby forming a correlative pair (lexeme in version A – lexeme in version B). The interchangeability of the parts of the correlative pair is characteristic of Slavonic copies.

II. SOURCES

The following manuscript copies of Version A and version B of the Slavonic Ascetical Homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian were used as sources of this study:

- Homily 21 – version A, Serbian copy of 1355 (Hilandar No. 470); see the catalogue of Dimitrije Bogdanović [1].
- Homilies 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 – version B, according to the Bulgarian copy of 1389 (Russian State Library, No. 462), (Preliminary list XI – XIV No. 552) and the Russian copy from the 40s of the 15th century (Codex Coloniensis) [2: 229–247], now at the Institute of Slavonic Languages and Literature at the University of Cologne.

The use of the lexical variants in the three manuscripts will be presented below in the form of columns. The first column features the lexemes from the Serbian copy of 1355 (Hilandar, No. 470), (Homily 21) [1], version A; the second column – the Bulgarian copy of 1389 (Russian State Library, No. 462), (Preliminary list XI – XIV No. 552), [3] (Homily 10, 11, 12, 13, 14), version B; and the third column – the Russian copy from the 1440s (Codex Coloniensis) (Homily 10, 11, 12, 13, 14), also version B.

III. LEXICAL VARIATION OF Малъчани / Мълчалство AND Безмлъви IN THE SLAVONIC COPIES OF THE ASCETICAL HOMILIES OF ST. ISAAC THE SYRIAN

The study of lexical variation in medieval Slavonic manuscripts is one of the typical problems of historical lexicology and medieval studies generally. According to E. M. Vereshchagin, “variation of the means of expression (including lexical variation) is an invariable part of the standards of the first Slavonic literary language” [1: 36].

A. Variation of the Lexemes of Малъчани / Мълчалство and Безмлъви in the Two Slavonic Versions of the Ascetical Homilies of St. Isaac The Syrian

In the copies of Homily 21 of version A and in homilies 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14 of version B of St. Isaac the Syrian’s Ascetical Homilies, the variation of the lexemes of Мълчалство from version A and Безмлъви from version B occurs on three occasions, while Малъчани from version A and Безмлъви from version B are found on two occasions.
In one of the cases, the lexeme млъчналъството features in the two versions: млъчналъството (A) – млъчнанъството (B1, B2) (see Table 1).

The lexeme млъчналъството should be registered in a future dictionary of 14th century Hesychast literature.

In Hesychast literature the word κείμαιναί ‘silence’ may refer to either the practice of exercise of sobriety (silence is perceived as remaining solitary in the cell with thought for and fear of God), or to the name of Hesychasm as a whole.

The lexemes мљкуванче / мљкуване / мљкуванческо / мљкуванце (Gr. ἁσυχία, σιωπή) [11, vol. II: column 203] and κείμαιναί (κείτα μακία) / кειμαιναί (Gr. ησυχία) [12, vol. I: column 59] are found in 11th century Slavonic manuscripts.

It is also possible that the two lexemes мљкуванче and млъчналъството were coined especially for the needs of the literary language (for the translation of a Greek word) because both have literary suffixes -ен/-ен.

B. Lexical Variations in the Two Slavonic Versions of St. Isaac the Syrian’s Ascetical Homilies

According to M. Fedotova, the difference on principle between the two Slavonic versions of St. Isaac the Syrian’s Ascetical Homilies, proving that these are not different redactions but two translations independent of one another, lies not in the sphere of the literal translation, respectively in the field of stylistics, but in the sphere of outlook, of the ideology. For example, the choice of млъчналъството in version B instead of мљкуванче / мљкуванческото from version A marked a turn in the point of view of the translator, i.e. the difference in the translations reflects difference in the understanding of the Greek term η ἁσυχία [13: 68].

The Hesychast teaching in the Eastern Orthodox Church tradition distinguishes between:

1) Quietness in the concrete meaning of the word, i.e. giving up speech;
2) Hesychia itself as a stage in monastic life, as a peculiarity of the ‘mental and physical essence’ of the monk;
3) Mystical quietness, silence of revelation accompanying the highest degrees of knowledge of the light of God [13: 68-69].

A “wall” appears between the anchorite and the world, that is why the abstention from speech and communication became the symbol of this split. Quietness isolates the person. The Contemplative silence of ascetic life is a means to overcome passions.

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The following affixal lexemes are listed in the dictionary edited by F. Miklošič: мълчание, мълчанник, мълчанник (калугер, кој то је дал облик на мълчане, пустинник, мълчалник), молчание, мълчание [8: 348].
lexemes (lexeme supreme degree of seeing the light term млъчани). Each of these concepts is presented in Greek by different lexemes (σιγή, ἡσυχία, σιωπή, ἡρεμία and others).

S. M. Zarin concludes that ἡσυχία in ascetic writings has a narrower and more special meaning compared to the meaning of this term in the Scriptures. According to him, ἡσυχία in the Scriptures is used rarely, only on several occasions, the word itself means peace, млъчание ‘silence’ (in the New Testament). On the other hand, “the synonymous ἡρεμία and other words with the same root have more limited connotations than млъчани, since the latter refers to the inner essence of man, while the former is used most frequently to designate the external, sensual part of the phenomena and of human activity” (italics according to S. M. Zarin) [15: 426].

According to the observations of M. Fedotova, whoever wrote version B consistently translated the Greek term ἡσυχία as млъчание, preserving the variant млъчание / млъчанство meaning for the synonyms σιγή and σιωπή, unlike version A, where all variants are mixed and the term ἡμοκομία is translated once as млъчание / млъчанство and on other occasions as млъчанство. This consistent use of different lexical variants in version B aims to achieve stylistic differentiation, on the one hand – distinction of the concrete and the “literary” meaning. On the other, the choice of the translator of version B marks a new step on the way to the creation of consistent ascetic terminology. The Slavonic translator realized that the conceptual notions concerning the Hesychast movement have to be distinguished [13: 71-72].

The lexical variation in the two Slavonic versions reflects not only the dynamics of the language change, not only different preferences for translation techniques, but also the dynamics of style and the dynamics of the ideas. To designate divine quietness as giving up speech, the 14th century Slavonic translator consciously uses the lexeme млъчание / млъчанство, while for the translation of the term ἡσυχία from ascetic literature the translator used the lexeme млъчанство. In order to convey the meaning of the supreme degree of seeing the light of God, the translator again uses the variant млъчанство / млъчанство ‘divine quietness’, which in the given context began to be used in tradition thanks to the works of Dionysius the Areopagite, translated into Slavonic also in the 14th century. The author of version A does not take into account the conceptual difference between the Greek and the Slavonic usages of the word and for him млъчанство and млъчанство are complete synonyms [13: 72].

M. Fedotova notes that the age of Hesychast councils of 1341, 1347 and 1351 left an imprint on translations on which Hesychasts and their followers in Constantinople, Mt. Athos, Bulgaria and Serbia worked actively. It was precisely the Hesychast movement in the Slavic South that conditioned the enormous interest in 14th century mystical and ascetic literature [13: 72].

IV. CONCLUSION

Linguistic variation is one of the most specific problems of textological and linguistic research of medieval Slavonic manuscript heritage. The number and character of the differences between the individual copies of a certain text from the medieval literature fund present the picture of the possible changes in the process of copying, beginning with the spontaneous changes and ending with conscious interventions (editing) of orthographic, lexical, grammatical, stylistic and textual character.

The lexical variants in the two Slavonic versions of St. Isaac the Syrian’s Ascetical Homilies show that medieval Bulgarian ascetic and monastic lexis featured variants for designating certain notions. Their combination in a certain text was chosen consciously, not randomly.

The observations and conclusions made in the present study could be used for further research of lexical and semantic peculiarities of the medieval Slavonic versions of St. Isaac the Syrian’s Ascetical Homilies, as well as in the compilation of specialized dictionaries of medieval ascetic literature.

REFERENCES


[8] Kratkii slovar' shesti slavjanskikh jazykov (russkago s cerkovnoslavjanskim, bolgarskago, serbskago, cheshskago i pol'skago) a takzhe francuzskij i nimeckij. [Short dictionary of the six Slavic languages (Russian with Slavonic, Bulgarian, serbian, Check and Polish) and also French and German.] Sost. pod red. F. Mikloshicha. S. Peterburg i Moskva, Vna, 1885.


