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TRANSLATING LEWIS CARROLL'S *ALICE IN WONDERLAND* POEMS INTO
MACEDONIAN

Abstract:

Alice in Wonderland has been translated into Macedonian by different translators five times: in 1957, 1987, 2009, 2013 and 2018. The differences in the translations are evident not just in the prose text and the ways in which the wordplay has been translated, but it is most visible in the translations of Carroll's carefully crafted nonsense poems. This paper offers a comparative analysis of the five translations of the poems by providing insight into the translators' choice in rhythm, rhyme and lexis. The analysis further comments on how the translation choices are affected by the demand for the book, as well as translation policies imposed by the state.

Keywords: literary translation, Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland, nonsense poetry, politics of translation

Five translations of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* have emerged in Macedonian: Slavčo Temkov's 1957 translation, Bogomil Gjuzel's 1987 version, Silvana Acevska's 2009 translation, the 2013 translation by Negjica Glasnovikj, and most recently, the 2018 translation by Marija Petrovikj¹. These versions differ greatly in their approach and quality, something that is particularly evident in the translation of Carroll's carefully crafted nonsense poems.

¹ By the time this paper presented at the ESIDRP conference was published, I also translated *Alice in Wonderland* (2019).

The aim of this paper is to offer a comparative analysis of the existing translations of the poems by providing insight into the translators' choice in rhythm, rhyme and lexis. For the purpose of analyzing the poems and the origin of the translator's choices, I also looked into the Serbian translations of the poems. Additionally, my analysis aims to highlight how educational and cultural policies in fact may affect the final translations of the novel. In other words, I aim to point out how changing translation policies may have played a role in the quality of translation of the novel.

1. Background

The Macedonian language was codified in 1945 along with the establishment of the People's Republic of Macedonia within the Yugoslav Federation, so it is difficult to speak about a history of translation before this period. As Serbo-Croatian was the official language of Yugoslavia, and due to the socialist affiliation of the state, the main foreign languages spoken in post-war Macedonia were Serbo-Croatian and Russian. This explains the dominant body of Russian literature translated in the first post-war decades, as well as the use of Serbo-Croatian as a bridge language for translation – something that is not always noted in all translated editions. In 1992, Anastasija Gjurčinova and Sonja Stojmenska-Elzeser conducted research into the body of translated work into Macedonia from 1945 to 1990, concluding that the largest amount of translated works during this period is that of Russian literature, whereas American and English literature come in third and fourth place, respectively (Gjurčinova and Stojmenska-Elzeser, 1992: 94) – something that can be interpreted as proof that not many translators translated from English. Further proof can be seen in the translations of Shakespeare into Macedonian: Ivanka Kovilovska Poposka has noted three stages in the translation of Shakespeare in Macedonia: the first stage is the indirect phase where the translation was done through a bridge language. This is followed by the collaborative stage, where translators worked from a literal English translation. The third phase is the translation from the original (Koška-Hot, 2012: 19).

Hence, it was natural to wonder whether Slavčo Temkov's 1957 translation of *Alice* was in fact from the original. As the translator had passed a long time ago, before I was even aware of the existence of such a translation, I decided to find out by

conducting informal interviews with Slavčo Temkov's daughter and his nephew, who confirmed that he indeed did not translate from the original language, as he did not speak English, but may have translated from the Serbo-Croatian or Slovak. Upon inspection of the two Serbian translations of *Alice* which emerged in Serbia before Temkov's translation (*Alisa u čudesnoj zemlji*, 1923, by Stanislav Vinaver and *Alisa u zemlji čuda* by Luka Semenović, 1951), I concluded that Temkov had based his Macedonian translation on a combination of these two versions. This proves a particular interesting point, as Vinaver and Semenović's translations are quite different. Tijana Tropin notes that Vinaver's "trademark affinity for puns and parodies was congenial to Lewis Carroll's, but in introducing his wordplays, he often neglected some aspects of original and used considerable poetic license; he himself called the translation "a retelling" (Tropin, 2015: 531). Hence, Vinaver's use of popular children's songs on which he based the translation of Carroll's poems makes it easy to spot where Temkov relied on Vinaver, and where he relied on Semenović's translation.

Bogomil Gjuzel's translation of *Alice* came thirty years later – in 1987 – and for more than two decades was the translation most widely used in schools, as *Alice* was – and still is – part of the elementary school curriculum reading lists for the fourth grade. It was in 2009 that the first new translation emerged, followed by a two other translations by publishing houses who specialize in publishing school books and children's books (Feniks and Prosvetno delo) and can thus target a wide audience on an annual basis. Thus, another translation emerged in 2013, followed by yet another in 2018. This is a very rare case of so many translations existing within such a short time, and can only be explained by the perception of a market for the book, which in turn, as we shall see, may have affected the quality of translations.

2. The Alice poems

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland include a total of 12 poems. There are several characteristics that most of these poems share: their most common form is the ballad stanza (ABCB, alternating four- and three-stress lines), they are parodies of well-known children's didactic songs of the 19th century; they are nonsense poems that illustrate the dream-like nature of the novel, with Alice or the other characters frequently having the intention of reciting a well-known poem that they allegedly

know by heart, but instead uttering comic nonsense that is commonly irreverent to the original. To a 19th century audience, most of the parodied poems will have been recognizable, adding to the comic effect of the novel.

Below is the list of poems (Gardner 1960) along with the originals which they parody, where this can be applied:

	POEM	PARODIED ORIGINAL
1.	All In The Golden Afternoon...	/
2.	How Doth The Little Crocodile...	Isac Watts, "Against Idleness and Mischief": How doth the little busy bee/improve each shining hour...)
3.	The Mouse's Tale	/
4.	You Are Old, Father William	Robert Southey, "The Old Man's Comforts and How He Gained Them": You are old, father William," the young man cried, / "The few locks which are left you are grey...
5.	Speak Roughly To Your Little Boy...	G. W. Lanford or David Bates, "Speak Gently": Speak gently! It is better far To rule by love than fear
6.	Twinkle, Twinkle Little Bat	Jane Taylor, "The Star": Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star...
7.	Will You Walk A Little Faster, Said A Whiting To A Snail	Mary Howitt, "The Spider and the Fly." "Will you walk into my parlour?" said the spider to the fly"
8.	'Tis The Voice Of The Lobster, I Heard Him Declare	Isaac Watts, "The Sluggard": Tis the voice of the sluggard; I heard him complain...
9.	I Passed By His Garden	Isaac Watts, "The Sluggard
10.	Beautiful Soup	James M. Sayles: "Star of the Evening": Beautiful star in heav'n

		so bright, / Softly falls thy silv'ry light ^[1] _{SEP}
11.	The Queen Of Hearts	/
12.	They Told Me You Had Been To Her...	A considerably revised form from Carroll's eight-verse nonsense poem, "She's All My Fancy Painted Him".

Table 1: List of *Alice* poems and parodied originals

Keeping this in mind, the translator of Alice's mostly nonsense, parodic verse is faced with several challenges:

- to decide whether they will domesticate the translation, adapting it to the degree of finding well-known children's poems that would be then subjected to parody. This would, on the other hand, require ample adaptation, which in turn would affect the novel's story and would require even further modification of the text that may go as far as changing the character's names and inventing situations within the story. Of all the examined translations, including the two Serbian versions, only Stanislav Vinaver uses – inconsistently, that is, not for all poems – well-known children's poems as the basis for the parody;

- to retain the rhythm and rhyme of the original, or to the adapt it to the Macedonian equivalent of popular children's poems (for example, ABCB)

- to retain the content of the original at all costs.

3. Analysis of translations

The analysis of the 12 poems provides the following findings:

None of the translations use parodies of existing poems. In other words, none of the translations have resorted to an adaptation or change of the original and its content. This is not entirely true, though, regardless of the fact that no poems have been parodied, of Temkov's translation, as this is the only translation that seems to have favored rhythm and rhyme over staying true to the content of the original. In that sense, Temkov's translations are much more melodious and rhythmical, and more in

harmony with the standard forms of children's poetry. This, in turn, is probably owing to Semenović's translation, though Temkov's translation is in no way literal, nor out of tune with the Macedonian language.

Gjuzel's translation is much more true to the form and content of Carroll's verse, though the attempts to retain the exact structure and content of the original frequently adds to the irregular rhythm of the lines, making them sound somewhat awkward, at times. Of all the translations, this one is perhaps the most true to the original, though it is also a bit stiff.

Acevska's translation, though published in 2009, a time providing ample resources regarding the meaning of the poems, is exceptionally literal. Its lack of rhythm is insolent, its laziness in the rendition of the content evident at first glance. The poems rarely resemble children's poetry, lack all sense of melody, and frequently feature inexplicable equivalents probably arising from misunderstood notions in the poems. At times an occasional, lazy rhyme is thrown into the poem's translations.

It is hard to believe that there can be anything worse than Acevska's translation, but unfortunately that is the case with the 2013 translation by Negjica Glasnovikj. This brutally literal translation lacking all melody and not even attempting to rhyme also features ridiculous mistakes in the translation of lexis, or absurd insertions such as "cheap soup" in the poem "Beautiful soup". The terrible translations of the poems (which goes towards the entire text, as well) is at one point interrupted by a lazy note forgotten by the editor and translator in the second edition of the book published in 2018: "In the later editions", the translator forgot to take out of the text, "the poem continues in this manner..." (Glasnovikj 2018: 88)

As to the 2018 translation by Marija Petrovikj – it is hard to call this a translation, even, as the poems are clearly plagiarized mostly from Acevska's work, with two poems having been stolen from Gjuzel's translation. Gjuzel's poems remain untouched, whereas Acevska's stolen translations feature minor changes in diction, stanza length, as well as use of omissions and inversions.

All the 21st century translations (Glasnovikj, Acevska and Petrovikj) omit the translation of the prefatory poem which introduces the readers to the story behind the story, or how it was that the story of Alice's adventures came to be – not unimportant content at all.

To illustrate my findings, I will present the analyses of three poems: "How doth the little crocodile", "The Mouse's Tale" and "You are old, Father William".

3.1 *How Doth The Little Crocodile*

As noted in Table 1, “How Doth The Little Crocodile” is an irreverent and skillful parody of Watts’s didactic poem “Against Idleness and Mischief”. This is a typical example of how, in the Alice poems, in the dream-like Wonderland confusion, the opening of the poem sounds the same, but the rest comes out garbled – and comedic, as Carroll has substituted the laborious fast-moving bee with the slow, lazy crocodile. The poem features two stanzas of alternating iambic tetrameter and trimeter, in an ABAB rhyming scheme.

How doth the little crocodile
Improve his shining tail
And pour the waters of the Nile
On every golden scale!

How cheerfully he seems to grin
How neatly spreads his claws,
And welcomes little fishes in
With gently smiling jaws! (Carroll 1865/1960: 9)

Temkov’s translation uses metric feet natural to the Macedonian language: trochee and dactyl, incorporating them in a ABCB rhyme pattern. The poem’s rhythm and rhyme is reminiscent of children’s poetry. The only strange occurrence is the appearance of a third stanza which is not present in the original:

Гледај како малиот
гладен крокодил
си го мие опашот
во реката Нил.

Ја разинал устата
и си чека гости.
Риби мали, големи

голта со се' коски!

Еднаш овој крокодил
видел слон крај Нил.
Веднаш на дно избегал
и в калта се скрил! (Темков 1957: 17-18)

In this mysterious third stanza, the crocodile appears to see an elephant by the Nile and dives to the bottom of the river to hide in the mud. I can only assume that since the translator did not work from the source language, he used the two Serbian translations by Vinaver and Semenović. Vinaver's translation is largely based on Serbian children's poems. He has used a poem about little Jole encountering an elephant (though the origin has not been identified yet), whereas Semenović's version is true to the original in the structure and content.

Gjuzel's translation does not separate the poem into two stanzas. It also employs trochaic and dactylic feet, but uses an irregular rhyming pattern (ABBACDED). At times, the rhythm is clunky – due to its irregularity – while the poem stays true to its content.

Еве го малиот крокодил
Со сјајниот опаш
Што ужива да скока
Во реката Нил.
Колку ли радосно зева,
Колку ли испружил јазик,
И малите риби ги тера
Во стомак да ги мази. (Ѓузел 1987: 18)

Silvana Acevska's 2009 translation features two stanzas with an AABB rhyming scheme and a somewhat rhythmically melodious first stanza, a rhythm that simply deteriorates in the second stanza, turning into prose:

Го знаеш ли малиот крокодил
од крајбрежјето на реката Нил,

тој опашот блескав го чисти, мие
и никогаш доста не му е!

Тој своите канци ги шири брзо
Со насмевка ги пресретнува рибите,
Во својата челуст ги мами мило,
А кога ќе влезат – ги голта лесно. (Ацевска 2009: 15)

Negjica Glasnovikj's translation from 2013 is perhaps the worst. Not only does it lack rhythm and rhyme (except for crocodile/Nile, as a simple coincidence), but it is painfully literal, going as far as erroneously translating the word "scale" as "скала", or "stairs" – by which it turns out the crocodile pours the waters of the Nile on golden stairs:

Малиот крокодил
си ја поправа својата блескава опашка,
и ја истура водата на Нил
врз сите златни скали!
Колку весело се смее,
Колку убаво ги шири своите канци,
И ги повикува малите риби
Со нежно насмеани челусти! (Гласновиќ 2013: 15)

Finally, Marija Petrovikj's translation is no less worse in that it plagiarizes Acevska's translation almost entirely, except in the naïve substitution or adaptation of some words: крабрежје – брегот, опашот блескав – својот опаш блескав, and a minor adaptation in the second stanza. The crossed out parts are my insertions of Acevska's original translation:

Го знаеш ли малиот крокодил
од ~~крајбрежјето~~ брегот на ~~реката~~ Нил,
тој ~~опашот блескав~~ својот опаш го чисти, мие
и никогаш доста не му е!
Тој ~~своите канци ги шири мило~~ својата уста ја отвара широко

и со насмевка ги пресретнува рибите
Во својата челуст ги мами мило со милата насмевка ги намамува милно
и кога ќе влезат – ги голта лесно. (Петровиќ 2018: 15)

3. 2. *The Mouse's Tale*

This emblematic poem – a poem where the content mirrors the form – employs a non-visual AABC rhyme scheme and an anapestic hexameter, making the rhythm explosive and rough, much like the content of the poem, whose subject is injustice. Due to the visual nature of the poem, I will not be presenting the examples in Macedonian.

Most versions except Glasnovikj's 2013 and Petrovikj's 2018 version retain the visual structure of the poem, wherein lies the tale/tail pun. Temkov's version, though, changes the story, though the poem has a steady and rhythmic flow and is equally absurd: a dog and a mouse have an encounter and the dog threatens the mouse to be its judge and destroy it.

Similarly, Gjuzel's version changes the content, substituting the dog Fury with a cat, with the middle lines being awkward in terms of rhyme and rhythm, while the rest follow a rhyming couplet pattern reminiscent of children's poems.

Acevska's version is rhythmically clunky, but makes an effort. It is accurate in terms of content, except where she fails to see the word “cur” to mean ‘dog’, so she translates it as “owl” or what could be alternatively translated as someone who is a miss (утко). There is almost no rhyme – except maybe рече-затече, луд-суд, цела-дело.

Glasnovikj's translation is so horrifyingly literal that it does not even retain the visual form, and goes as far as translating the dog's name Fury as literally, the fury (Бесот). There is not even an attempt at rhyme or rhythm.

Petrovikj's 2018 version this time plagiarizes Gjuzel's translation, doing away with the visual form. This is word for word plagiarism.

3. 4 *You Are Old, Father William*

This parody of Robert Southey's didactic poem teaches modesty, temperance and piety. In Carroll's version, the poem is a comedic spoof, a delightful dialogue between a son and his silly father. Composed of 8 stanzas, it employs an ABAB rhyming pattern with alternating verses of 9 and 11 syllables arranged in anapestic feet.

"You are old, Father William," the young man said,
"And your hair has become very white;
And yet you incessantly stand on your head—
Do you think, at your age, it is right?" (Carroll 1985/1960: 26)

Temkov's adaption is based on Semenović's version. Using a ABCB rhyme scheme, it does not copy the Serbian version, but adapts it to suit the Macedonian rhythm and rhyme. Both versions are more reminiscent of the original's melody. In terms of Vinaver, his is a parody of "Uzo deda svog unuka" by Jovan Jovanovic Zmaj (Tropin 2015: 531).

„Ти си стар, оче Виљеме“, рече дечак
„и коса ти је сасвим седа
ипак дубиш на глави као чудак
зар ти не знаш бољег реда?“ (Семеновић 1951: 44)

Ти си стар, ох татко мили
и косата ти е бела,
А сепак на глава стоиш!
Чавка умот ти го зела! (Темков 1957: 43)

Though the rhyme and rhythm are at times irregular, the content of Gjuzel's translation is more true to the original. The metric feet vary, whereas the rhyme pattern is ABAB and ABCB:

„Ти си стар, татко Вилијам“, рече момчето младо,
„И косата ти станала целата бела;
Па сепак, пред прагот се тркалаш преку глава –

Зар на старост да правиш такви дела?“ (Ѓузел 1987: 39)

Silvana Acevska's translation is scandalously prosaic, this time produced without even a speck of effort. The rhythmical repetition of “you are old” and “in my youth” are missing. At times there is occasional, disorganized rhyme:

Му рече на таткото момче младо: “Те стигнала старост сега,
вистина е цела, косата ти е бела,
а ти земјата ја љубиш и на главата стоиш,
од каде сега тоа, кажи, да им прилега само на децата“. (Ацевска 2009: 35)

In its utter lack of imagination and melody, Glasnovikj's 2013 version comes close to Acevska's. However, it surpasses it in its literalness, as well as the erroneous transfer of the word “father” as “priest” („оче“)

„Ти си стар, оче Вилијам“, рече момчето,
„Твојата коса е многу бела;
А постојано стоиш на глава –
Мислиш ли дека тоа е исправно на твои години?“ (Гласновиќ 2013: 39)

Finally, Petrovikj does not disappoint us with another plagiarized version, this time of Acevska's terrible translation. With some changes in words (synonym substitutions, inversions), a merging of the stanzas of the poem and a haphazard breaking of the lines so that it appears as one long poem, Petrovikj perhaps tries to unskillfully mask her plagiarism.

Младото момче му рече на таткото:
„Те стигна
староста сега,
вистина е цела, косата ти е бела,
а ти земјата ја љубиш и на главата стоиш,
од каде сега тоа, тоа им доликува само
на децата“. (Петровиќ 2018: 39)

4. Conclusion

It seems that the differences among these five translations of Alice reflect the gradual decline in the quality of translations in Macedonia. During Yugoslav times, Macedonian readers were largely exposed to Serbian and Croatian translations of literature – translations that have generally enjoyed merited or unmerited positive feedback from readers. Since 1991, Macedonia has been struggling to enrich its otherwise small translated corpus of texts – 950 books in total until 1990 (Gjurčinova and Stojmenska-Elzeser, 1992: 94). This, in turn, has served as an excuse for megalomaniac projects involving the translation of hundreds of hundreds of books within very short periods of time – such as the government projects *Stars of World Literature*, where quantity proved to be more important than quality. This trend of a large supply and small demand, also allowed for translating fees to plummet, which again negatively effected the quality of translations.

Yet another reason behind unsuccessful, scandalously unprofessional or plagiarized translations is their financial motivation: *Alice* is a book assigned in elementary schools, which guarantees that students will purchase it. The lowering of standards – professional and ethical – is a systemic issue connected to the country's overall cultural and educational policies. In the absence of critical journals on literature and translation, in the absence of a legal system that would penalize publishing houses, editors and translators for plagiarism, in the absence of sound educational policies, it is only natural that catastrophes such as Acevska's, Glasnovikj's and Petrovikj's translation of Alice should occur.

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