

JANE AUSTEN'S *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* IN BULGARIAN TRANSLATION¹

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* opens with a sentence that some critics consider the best known in all English literature: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife." It prepares the reader for a novel, in which the narrator seems to be portraying human nature while expressing an ironic attitude towards the existence of an objective point of view. Philosophers may debate over the existence of truth but Austen's Mrs Bennet has no doubts about it and Chapter One offers the heroine's perspective on life. It also introduces Mr Bennet as a counterpoint to her tendency to universalise her own subjectivity and the clash between the two promises an entertaining read.

Currently, there are two Bulgarian translations of the text, Zheni Bozhilova's (1980) and Snezhana Mileva's (2007). This paper examines the implications of the original and its Bulgarian translations, with an emphasis on the cultural layers and the awareness that the Bulgarian versions functionalise.

The first serious obstacle is presented by the use of "my dear Mr. Bennet" as a form of address in English. The phrase evokes the context of nineteenth-century married life in England and the relationship between husband and wife. "My" denotes that degree of familiarity, which is only possible within a family or between very close friends. The use of this possessive pronoun infuriated Byron when Leigh Hunt made use of it in the Preface to his *Story of Rimini* (1816): Robert Mackenzie draws our attention to the fact that "when Byron's books came to be examined, after his death, it was found that the words 'My dear Byron' had been marked out, with ink, and 'impudent Varlet,' in his Lordship's own hand-writing, written opposite!" (1854, 1:201n). "Mr. Bennet", on the other hand, informs us of the respect that the wife owes to her husband in a society, in which middle-class women did not have the option to support themselves and maintain propriety at the same time; financially, they were completely dependent on their fathers or on their husbands (see Teachman). In her translation choices, Zheni Bozhilova seems to have prioritised the fluency of conversation: her phrase,

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“Мистър Бенит, драги” (a Bulgarian equivalent of “Mr. Bennet, dear”) sounds perfectly natural but the sentiments it reveals are different. The Bulgarian word for “dear” on its own, in a post-position, implies a condescending attitude coming as a result of the speaker’s superiority over the addressee. This must have struck Snezhana Mileva as problematic and in her more recent translation she has opted for a phrase that translates back as “dear Mr. Bennet”; this form of address is respectful enough, no doubt about it; what seems to have been lost is the intimacy of “my”. The sentiments of the heroine aside, the two Bulgarian versions of rendering “Mr.” display the two approaches to translating as expressed by Goethe and Schleirmacher, and then appropriated by theoreticians of Translation studies:

There are two maxims in translation: one requires that the author of a foreign nation be brought across to us in such a way that we can look on him as ours; the other requires that we should go across to what is foreign and adapt ourselves to its conditions, its use of language, its peculiarities. (Goethe, cf. Lefevere 1977: 39)

Whereas Goethe appreciated that both methods had their advantages and, therefore, allowed for the possibility to reconcile them as Christoph Martin Wieland had done in his translations, looking for “the middle way in this” (Goethe, cf. Lefevere 1977: 39), Schleirmacher insisted on discriminating between the two:

Either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him; or he leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him. The two roads are so completely separate from each other that one or the other must be followed as closely as possible, and that a highly unreliable result would proceed from any mixture, so that it is to be feared that author and reader would not meet at all. (Schleirmacher, cf. Lefevere 1977: 74)

The Bulgarian translations of *Pride and Prejudice* demonstrate a preference for Goethe’s liberal pragmatism over Schleiermacher’s theoretical uniformity. Zheni Bozhilova preserved the foreign-language “мистър”, “мисис” and “мис” as the forms of address but went out of her way to achieve ease and smoothness in the characters’ speeches. Thus, “she told me all about it” is rendered with the conversational “и всичко ми разправи,” which gives the illusion that the text may have been written in Bulgarian. On the other hand, Snezhana Mileva has opted for the Bulgarian forms of address “господин”, “госпожа”, etc. but her attempts to be loyal to the original sometimes echo the English syntax, as in the first sentence: “Всеизвестен факт е, че всеки необвързан мъж, който има добро състояние, трябва да си намери съпруга”. In other words, assigning the procedures of *foreignization* to the one and of *domestication* to

the other translation would not reflect the complexity of choices. The debate on these two approaches was revived with Lawrence Venuti's definitions: to him, the "domesticating method" is "an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values, bringing the author back home", whereas the "foreignizing method" is "an ethnodeviant pressure on those values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad" (Venuti 1995: 20). His postcolonial ideological stand added a political dimension to the translators' choices:

I want to suggest that insofar as foreignizing translation seeks to restrain the ethnocentric violence of translation, it is highly desirable today, a strategic cultural intervention in the current state of world affairs, pitched against the hegemonic English-language nations and the unequal cultural exchanges in which they engage their global others. Foreignizing translation in English can be a form of resistance against ethnocentrism and racism, cultural narcissism and imperialism, in the interests of democratic geopolitical relations. (1995: 20)

To what an extent these sentiments are applicable when translating from English into another language remains open to interpretation. Nevertheless, the binary opposition between *local* and *global* is worth pondering in the case of Jane Austen's texts and their translations.

The English text of *Pride and Prejudice*, Chapter One tells the reader that Mrs. Bennet is "impatient". This echoes eighteenth-century attitudes towards women as childlike, readily exhibiting their sentiments, in opposition to men, who were rational and reserved. The characterisation is achieved through a combination of direct speech and the narrator's comments:

"Do not you want to know who has taken it?" cried his wife impatiently. [...]

"My dear Mr. Bennet," replied his wife, "how can you be so tiresome! You must know that I am thinking of his marrying one of them."

In Zheni Bozhilova's translation impatience has been transposed into irritability and anger:

— Не ви ли интересува кой е той? — *раздразнено* възкликна жена му. [...]

— Слушайте, мистър Бенит — *вдигна глас* жена му, — започвате да ме *ядосвате*! Не разбирате ли, че *възнамерявам* да го оженя за една от тях? (emphasis added)

The patriarchal mind-set envisaged by the source text appears to have given way to a matriarchal re-distribution of power within the family. In this Bulgarian version, Mrs. Bennet

is in a position to scold her husband, her use of language is patronising and the narrator's comment that she "raised her voice" indicates defiance. Mrs Bennet is not a gentleman's daughter and often breaks the unwritten rules of polite society but in Austen's text she never challenges her husband's authority. The "tiresome" of the original is consistent with the previously indicated "impatience": Mrs Bennet believes that her reading of the situation is the only possible one, it should be "universally acknowledged," and she thinks it tedious to be explaining the obvious. In Snezhana Mileva's interpretation, Mrs Bennet is a bit closer to the character described by Austen but still retains a measure of anger:

— Не искате ли да разберете кой го е купил? – *нетърпеливо* извика съпругата му. [...]

— Драги господин Бенит – каза съпругата му, – как само ме *ядосвате!* Нали знаете, че *имам намерение* да го оженя за една от тях! (emphasis added)

The more aggressive substitute in both Bulgarian translations does not simply contemplate Mr Bingley's marrying one of her daughters, her intentions are admittedly "*to get him married* to one of them"; the mother's role is no longer seemingly passive as in Jane Austen's sentence, while outwardly respectful of the norms of a society in which women are to wait for men to take the initiative.

Mrs Bennet is pro-active enough to demand of her husband to pay a social call to the newcomer. The author has provided Mr Bennet with a well-mannered refusal, "I see no occasion for that", followed by his teasing permission, "You and the girls *may* go" (emphasis added). In the first Bulgarian translation, the husband is on the defensive, asking "А защо аз?" ("But why me?"), as if he were a schoolboy, moaning about an assignment; he then goes on with his attempts to avoid being involved and suggests: "Вървете вие с момичетата" ("You'd better go with the girls"). Thus, in Chapter One of the novel, Zheni Bozhilova's Mr Bennet sounds like a henpecked husband. Snezhana Mileva has been more sensitive to the social context of the original. Her choice of phrase, "Не виждам причина да го сторя" ("I see no reason to do that") preserves his authority as the head of the family.

Dissimilar cultures posit different images at the mention of seemingly equivalent phrases. In the context of Jane Austen's world, the phrase "a man of fortune" evoked associations with aristocratic behaviour. In John Ash's *New and Complete Dictionary of the English Language* (1775) the word "Gentleman" had this definition: "A man of birth, a man of fortune, a man of genteel behaviour..." The corresponding expression in Zheni Bozhilova's translation, "*богаттаи*," has the connotations of "nouveau-riche," not necessarily in the sense

of new money but certainly betraying the lack of an aristocratic tradition in contemporary Bulgarian culture. Snezhana Mileva has avoided it in favour of “млад мъж с голямо състояние,” a phrase that preserves the dignity of “a young man of large fortune”, even if its frequency in Bulgarian does not compare to the frequency of usage of the English counterpart.

To sum up, both translators have devised their own version of the middle way between foreignization and domestication. Zheni Bozhilova has opted for the English-language forms of address, seemingly foreignizing, but her choice of high-frequency words and phrases allows the Bulgarian readers to come up with an alternative reality, rather different from that of English-language readers. In the final analysis, her method seems in favour of bringing “the author of a foreign nation ... across to us in such a way that we can look on him as ours”. This approach is not at odds with the Cold War between the socialist ideology and the imperialist West current in the 1980s, as it maintains a sense of the familiar. Snezhana Mileva, whose Bulgarian-language forms of address hint at domesticating the original, has in fact been more resistant to expressions and collocations that give the translated text the fluency of writing in Bulgarian. Effectively, she appears to prompt Bulgarian readers to “go across to what is foreign” and experience the unfamiliar before they embrace it as their own, which goes hand in hand with the priorities of a globalised world in the twenty-first century.

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