

National Identity in Translation

STUDIES IN LINGUISTICS, ANGLOPHONE
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PETER LANG

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Macedonian Nation in Translation: Translating Macedonian Realia into “Big Cultures”

Abstract: The object of this article is to analyze the translation of Macedonian realia into “big” western cultures. The corpus consists of the English translation of the poetry book *White Dawns* by Kosta Racin and the French translation of the novel *Witch* by Venko Andonovski. Realia are classified into groups and then different translation strategies are observed. Venuti’s theory on domestication and foreignization is taken into consideration in order to examine which strategy prevails in the corpus. Macedonian literature in official language being young the corpus is also analyzed through the prism of Zohar’s polysystem theory.

Keywords: realia, translation, domestication, foreignization

1 Introduction

National identity being a very complex subject offered us different analysis approaches especially having in mind that Macedonian¹ national identity was often and, still is, unfortunately object of denial. In this article, we chose to illustrate Macedonian national identity through the analysis of realia translation in two, at first glance, very different books: poetry book *White dawns* (1939) by Kosta Racin (РАЦИН 2013) and postmodern novel *Witch* (2006) by Venko Andonovski (АНДОНОВСКИ 2014). These books have different structure and they are also published in different periods; the first one illegally, during the Second World War (1939), when the contemporary language was not established, and the second one, published recently (2006), is written in contemporary Macedonian language. We even analyze the translation in different languages - *White Dawns* in English and *Witch* in French.

Despite all these differences, these works have in common their rootedness in the extremely rich folk literature, a source to which both post-war and contemporary authors are constantly coming back. Therefore, they abound in realia that refer to various aspects of the Macedonian tradition. As far

1 Editors’ note: This chapter has been submitted for publication in late 2018, i.e. before the official renaming of Macedonia to North Macedonia in February 2019.

as the target languages are concerned, the books are translated into English and French, languages spoken outside national borders, thus presupposing a large public.

The theoretical frame of the article is based on four pillars: Vlahov and Florin's definition of *realia*, *realia*'s classification given by Nedergaard-Larsen and finally, Even Zohar's polysystem theory and Venuti's theory on translation strategies.

Speaking about the untranslatable in translation Vlahov and Florin (Влахов & Флорин: 1980:476) define *realia* as:

words (and composed expressions) of the popular language representing denominations of objects, concepts, typical phenomena of a given geographic place, of material life or of social-historical peculiarities of some people, nation, country, tribe, that for this reason carry national, local or historical color; these words do not have exact matches in other languages.

They also provide a detailed classification that will be later changed and elaborated by numerous scholars. In this article, we took into consideration Nedergaard-Larsen's (Nedergaard-Larsen: 1993:210–211) classification of *realia* into four groups: geography, history, society and culture, divided in various subgroups. For example, the group *history* consists of subgroups: buildings, events, and people. The group *society* embraces *realia* like social organization, social conditions, ways of life, customs (food, meals, clothing...) etc. The last group is divided into subgroups like religion, education, culture, etc.

The translations are analyzed through the prism of Zohar's polysystem theory (Even Zohar 1990). According to this theory, one literature represents a polysystem (system of various systems) and when a literary work is translated it becomes a part of the polysystem of a given national literature. The translated work can occupy a primary or a secondary position in the national literary polysystem. The translation can occupy a primary position when it has an innovative role in the literary system, but, according to Zohar, secondary position is a normal position for translated literature. Consequently, if the translation occupies a primary position it will be source oriented, but if the translation has secondary position, it will be target oriented. Taking into consideration the fact that Macedonian literature in official Macedonian language is young, one can assume that it will take secondary position in the "big" English (Anglophone) and French (Francophone) polysystems.

We also included Venuti's theory on domestication and foreignization in order to be able to see which strategy prevails in the corpus. Venuti (1995: 20) indicates that domestication *an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values, bring the author back home*, while foreignization is an

*ethnodeviant pressure on those (cultural) values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad.*²

2 Realia in *White Dawns*

Kosta Racin is the most famous Macedonian poet and founder of contemporary Macedonian poetry. His poetry book consists of only twelve poems reflecting the social position of Macedonians between the two world wars. In that sense, it is a poetry of sorrow and of suffering of the abused. However, although themes are somber, *White Dawns* is not a poetry of despair, but as the title suggests, it is a poetry of hope, of rebellion, poetry believing that the common men, the craftsman, the digger, the tobacco grower will be able to accomplish social justice through a struggle. Racin uses the metaphor of *white dawns* in a political sense too, as though, through the elegiac sorrow that tormented him, grew the hope that the sun will rise above his divided and occupied fatherland.

Searching to establish a contemporary literature, Racin draws inspiration from the folklore, thus bridging the tradition and the present. His poetry refers to Macedonian folk tradition directly and indirectly. Indirectly, by their musicality and structure (the use of octameter and blank verse as well as rare enjambments) poems resonate Macedonian folk songs. Directly, this poetry refers to the Macedonian heritage by quotations of Macedonian songs and proverbs and by the use of realia.

The book entitled *Founders of Modern Macedonian Poetry* comprising the newest English translation of *White Dawns* was published in 2011 as part of a vast translation project *Macedonian literature in English*. The author of the translation is the late university professor Graham Reid.

In *White Dawns*, Racin uses various realia that can be classified in the following groups: *history*, *society*, and *culture*.

The group *history* is represented by the historical figure of *Крaли Марко*, a very important part of the Macedonian folklore tradition. In fact, he is a symbol of the fight against the Turks and protector of the people who has often been attributed supernatural powers. For example, his sword was so big and so heavy that only an extraordinary hero could handle it and fight with it.³

2 On domestication and foreignization see also Venuti (1998), Venuti (2001: 240–244) Berman (1984) and Schleiermacher (1813/1992: 36–54).

3 There is a huge discrepancy between the glorified King Marko in the folk literature and the historical figure King Marko (1335–1395). In fact, after the death of his father he became a king, but had to recognize the authority of the Turkish sultan and spent all his reign as a Turkish vassal. His figure and all the polemics about him became a

In the poem *На Струга дуќан да имам* (*To Have a Shop in Struga*⁴) Racin deplores the dying out of crafts by mentioning the glory past:

*Bring it out that we may forge
Good Prince Marko's sword. (Founders: p.66)*

The translation of this name is very specific because Marko's title *Крали* became an inseparable part of his name and is always written with a capital letter. The translator, using a capital letter has imitated the form, but has not properly transferred the title meaning "king" and not "prince". We can just assume that the reason for this was the fact that the form *Крали* is archaic and made him think of diminutive forms.

As far as the personal name *Марко* is concerned, it is transcribed - *Marko*, but there are no further explanations about the meaning of this important figure, or the translator did not do any additional effort to bring closer the reader to the Macedonian tradition.

Another realia, belonging both to the group *history* and *society* is the realia *печалбар* designating a person who went abroad in order to earn his living and provide survival of his family. The word *печалбар* derives from *печал* which is a polysemic word – apart from working abroad, it also means "sadness", so in this sense, talking about these people, Racin does not only refer to the hard work, but also to the grief of these people detached from their native land. The English translation provides a short description *economic emigrants* integrated in the text, that is semantically quite precise, but still, does not refer to such extant to pain and to suffering, nor to the specific historical moment.

The same tendency towards domestication, but through another translation technique⁵ –generalization, can be found in the translation of two realia belonging to the group *society*. In fact, the realia *опо* is part of the subgroup *ways of life, custom* and denotes a round dance characteristic for the Slavic nations. The translation provides the superordinate term *dance*:

source of inspiration for a large number of contemporary Macedonian writers such as Blaze Koneski (Блаже Конески), who dedicated a whole poetry cycle (Конески 1981: 313–327) to his superhuman but also very human attributes.

- 4 Racin refers to a famous Macedonian folk song with the same title but with very joyful motives, praising the beauty of the shops and of the crafts. The song is available at the following link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CiHNNQdIJY>.
- 5 On different translation techniques see Vinay and Darbelnet (1977) or, more recent, Molina and Hurtado (2002).

*And from among them - spirits
Came softly one by one-
And raised up grave by grave
Hero after hero to the dance. (Founders: p.51)*

The same strophe mentions another cultural realia *самовила* defined as “fairy in folk poetry” (Конески: 2003–2014). In the English translation, one can find the equivalent *spirit*, a generalized translation not indicating that these spirits are female and live in deserted places, usually woods.

The Macedonian lexeme *чума* (*plague*) belonging to the same group is also translated through generalization because in addition to the basic meaning of “disease, cholera” it is encountered in the Macedonian folklore with the meaning of “a mythological creature represented as an old woman with long black hair destroying everything on her way” (Конески: 2003–2014). This image is not transferred in the translation:

*Has a plague passed in the night
Gathering the fruit of the fields
that the barn stand bare!*

On the other hand, the English word *plague* is polysemic too, denoting a contagious bacterial disease, but also an unusually large number of insects or animals infesting a place and causing damage⁶. Therefore, instead of transferring the image of the scary, black, old woman the reader of the translation can easily assume the second meaning of the term.

The last realia in *White Dawns* belongs to the group *culture*. In fact, it is a personal name *Богомил* (*Bogomil*) (meaning “loved by God”) indicating the leader of a religious sect *богомилство* (*bogomilism*) that appeared in Macedonia during the twelfth century.

Racin was particularly interested in this movement⁷ and in the poem *The Diggers* he calls Macedonians as successors of the old man Bogomil to be as brave, to be rebels as he was:

*The soft, the gentle land
of old man Bogomil
swollen with its yield*

6 Oxford *Living Dictionaries* available at <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/plagueb> accessed on December 18, 2018.

7 Racin was very interested in the Bogomil movement and he even wrote a short essay entitled *Богомилите* (*Bogomils*). (Рацин 1966:180–195).

*awaits with suffering soul
the mighty strokes
of our spades... (Founders: p.67)*

Although the transcription of the antroponym can be interpreted as a foreignization we do not witness any additional effort in bringing closer foreign reader to this person.

Statistically, we can conclude that out of six realia, four are object of domestication and two of foreignization. The domestication is done through description (one realia) and generalization (three realia). On the other hand, the two realia object or foreignization are in fact, antroponyms that are just transcribed but without any additional explanation that would bring closer the foreign reader to the Macedonian culture.

3 Realia in *Witch*

Witch is the most read and award-winning contemporary Macedonian novel. It is a postmodern novel that incorporates several stories. Emphasis is placed on the love between Padre Benjamin, confidant of the pope, and the beautiful “witch”, Macedonian girl Jovana. This story is linked to the lives of two students of medicine, one of whom is in relationship with the author. On the other hand, the author has a rather dynamic role in the novel: he tells us about his childhood and some aspects of the life of his grandmother Slobotka Atanasova, he makes us read his father’s detective stories and he even addresses the reader. Thus, he unites different periods of the Macedonian history: from the Ottoman rule, the communist era and, of course, the present time. The foreword is written by Milan Kundera and the French translation, published in 2014, is done by Marija Bejanova.

The numerous realia in the novel are marked with an asterisk and the explanation is given in the margins of the text, but also in the glossary at the beginning.

As in *White dawns*, realia in this novel can be classified in three categories – history, society, and culture.

The first group contains four realia, three antroponyms and one toponym each of them indicating different historical periods.

The first historical realia we come across in the text is *Целадин-бег*. *Целадин* is a typical Turkish name and *бег* is a Turkish title. In the French translation, the name is transcribed and the second part is translated: *Djeladin-bey*. In fact, Djeladin-bey is a well-known Turkish malefactor but the historical and cultural connotations related to this person are not explained because the context makes clear the role of this historical figure to the French-speaking reader.

The second historical antroponym, *Ванчо Михајлов*, refers to the period between the two world wars, when Bulgarians infiltrated traitors in the Macedonian revolutionary movement in order to hinder the creation of the Macedonian independent state. This antroponym is transliterated *Vanco Mihajlov* and then explained in the glossary *révolutionnaire pro-bulgare (pro-Bulgarian revolutionary)*.

The antroponym *Tito* also bears historical connotations. In the original text, it is used as an attribute of the noun *Yugoslavia – Титова Југославија*. The French translation *la Yougoslavie de Tito (Tito's Yugoslavia)* does not provide any explanation, the solution of the translator being based on the assumption that he is a worldwide known political and historical figure.

The toponym *Mijacija* has a strong historical connotation and is defined in the glossary as “a region in Macedonia”. Nevertheless, this region is known by the fact that it gave birth to zografs and famous fresco artists, which is not mentioned in the glossary, but can be understood from the context in which the lexemes *Mijacija* and *zograf*, are placed next to each other (Andonovski: 2014, p.215). The toponym *Mijacija* is used in another passage of the novel with a historical connotation: *славното мијачко царство (le célèbre royaume de Mijacija/ the famous kingdom of Mijacija)*. The attribute *famous* is replaced by the attribute *ancient* for a better understanding of the context: *le royaume antique de Mijacija (the ancient kingdom of Mijacija)*. Still, there is some inconsistency in the explanation because all the explanations appear in the margins of the text, but the explanation of the region of *Mijacija* is given only in the glossary.

The above examples show that the translator opted for foreignization when translating historical realia and the effort to bring closer the foreign reader is done not just through transcription but also through additional explanations except for *Djeladin-bey*, where she leans on the context, and *Tito*, where she leans on the general knowledge of the reader.

The general noun *зограф* being historical and social realia is transcribed *-zograf* and explained on the margins of the text as well as in the glossary as *peintre des fresques murales dans les monastères orthodoxes (painter of mural frescoes in Orthodox monasteries)* giving a clear example of a classical foreignization strategy combining transcription and explanation.

Almost one third of the realia in the corpus (six realia) belong to the group *society* or to the subgroup: *way of life* representing food (four realia) or clothing (two realia).

In a passage of the novel, the author, being a child, finds his grandmother's notebook with recipes. The notebook indicates how to prepare certain Macedonian dishes whose translation is also related to phonetic and extralinguistic challenges

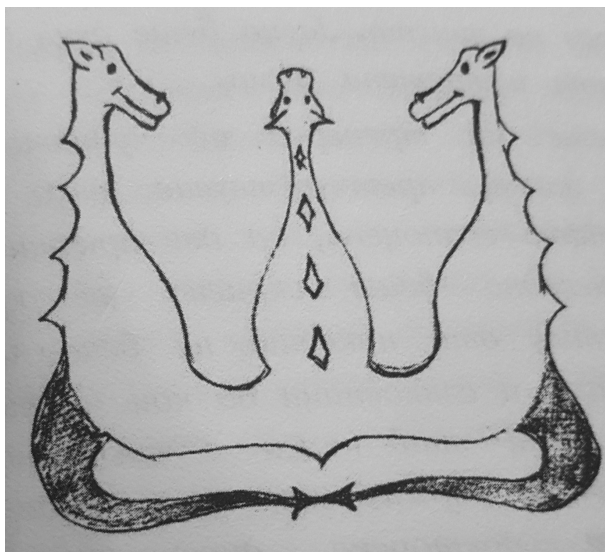


Fig. 1: A picture from *Вештица*, (Андоновски, 2014, p.123) illustrating Cyrillic letter *u*, represented as a three-headed dragon.

because the initial letters of the recipes are images. That is the case with the dish *шурден* (*shirden*) beginning in Macedonian with the Cyrillic letter *u*, represented as a three-headed dragon (Fig. 1).

In order to save the image, the translator negotiates⁸ replacing *shirden* with Williams (pears), because of the resemblance of the letter *w* (Fig. 2) with the letter *u*.

Chirden is not the only realia lost in the translation. The letter *ð* is the initial letter of a recipe beginning with tomatoes (домати) with peppers, typical ingredient of Macedonian dishes. In translation, because of the phonetic requirements of the initial letter *d*, there are *dates*, fruits that are not characteristic for Macedonia. In addition, the second recipe also begins with the letter *d*: *добро исечкајте кромид* (cut onions), a phrase with which many Macedonian recipes begin. The French translation starts with the letter *d*, but the ingredients - turkey and saffron (*dinde et safran*) are not part of the Macedonian recipes.

8 More on translation as an act of negotiation see in Eco's book *Dire presque la même chose* (Eco 2006).

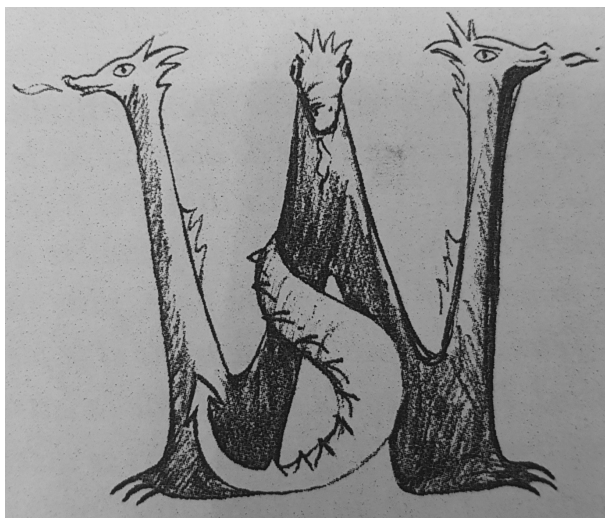


Fig. 2: A picture from *Sorcière* (Andonovski, 2014, p.127) illustrating Latin letter *w*, represented as a three-headed dragon.

The image of the Macedonian letter *ð* (Fig. 3) is replaced with the Latin alphabet letter *d* (Fig. 4).

Food realia are omitted and replaced by foods that are not at all part of the Macedonian culinary tradition.

Andonovski also mentions another two typical Macedonian dishes *питулици* and *кравајче*. Both realia are domesticated and translated into French with an approximate equivalent - *beignets* (*donuts*) (Andonovski 2014:155) and *galette* (*slab*) (Andonovski: 2014 : 311).

Domestication, as translation strategy is also applied on the two realia designating elements of traditional clothes: *срма* and *зобани*. *Срма* is a silver thread used in the filigree and in the decoration of traditional clothes. This realia is not transcribed, but the description *fil d'argent* (*silver thread*) (Andonovski: 2014, 169) is incorporated in the text. This is also the case with the realia *зобани* translated with the generic name - *habits traditionnels* (*traditional clothes*) (Andonovski: 2014, p.228), although it designates the clothes of the Vevcani region.

In the group *culture* there are realia referring to architecture, music, literature and religion.



Fig. 3: A picture from *Вештица*, (Андоновски, 2014, p.122) illustrating Cyrillic letter D, represented as a crying girl.

When translating realia from the first two subgroups the translator opted for foreignization, although with certain inconsistencies. For example, the realia *чардак* belonging to the field of architecture is transcribed *tchardak* and described in the margins and in the glossary as *sorte de balcon sans balustrade* (*sort of balcony without railing*). Still, this definition is not very precise because it is rather a partially or completely closed balcony (Конески 2003–2014).

Two realia *зурли* and *тапани* refer to Macedonian musical heritage and are usually played together during marriage ceremonies. The second instrument is transcribed - *tapan* and is accompanied by an explanation bringing it closer to the most similar instrument - *tambour à deux faces* (*two-sided drum*). On the other hand, the first instrument is transcribed - *zourla* and it is explained in the margins as *hautbois* (*oboe*) making this explanation vague, not detailed. In fact, *zourla* is a very simple instrument resembling to a pipe with holes and present in many cultures. In this example, the translator opts for foreignization, but the explanation leans towards generalization.



Fig. 4: A picture from *Sorcière* (Andonovski, 2014, p.127) illustrating Latin letter D, represented as a crying girl.

The novel also features the names of famous contemporary Macedonian writers such as Ante Popovski and Petre Andreevski, not known to French-speaking readers. In a passage of the novel, one of the characters says that she *has read everything from Shakespeare to Ante Popovski and Petre Andreevski* (Andonovski: 2014: 93). In the French translation we find other authors and the character says: *from Shakespeare and Baricco and Kureishi to Petre Andreevski* (Andonovski: 2014:100). The intention of the author with this sentence is clear: he wanted to indicate a long period in the history of literature from Shakespeare to the present day, of course, intentionally mentioning his favorite contemporary Macedonian writers Ante Popovski and Petre Andreevski. The omission of the famous Macedonian poet Ante Popovski and his replacement with globally known writers such as Baricco and Kureishi shows a typical domestication through omission but has not been applied to all examples, having in mind that Petre Andreevski found his way to the French translation. The omission of Ante Popovski may still be explained by the fact that he is mentioned elsewhere in the text (Andonovski: 2014:145) as a poet

whom the narrator admired. It is unclear why were non-francophone writers such as Baricco and Kureishi chosen to replace Ante Poposki.

As well as in *White Dawns* the lexeme *богомилу* appears in the novel *Witch*. The translator has opted to transfer the pronunciation, the Macedonian imprint, with the transcription of the lexeme *bogomiles* in French and she also provides a quite detailed explanation in which she tries to approach the meaning of this lexeme to the French-speaking reader without domestication by mentioning that the doctrine of this sect inspired in particular Cathars in France.

In conclusion of the analysis of the second corpus, we can summarize that out of seventeen realia, seven are domesticated and ten of them are object of foreignization. The domestication is done through omission (two realia), substitution with similar elements in the target-culture (two realia), substitution with elements belonging to other cultures (one realia) and through description (one realia) and generalization (one realia). Or, the translator balances between domestication and foreignization, rather following her own instincts than a certain, elaborated strategy.

4 Conclusion

From the analysis of the two corpuses we can draw several conclusions.

First, there is a certain difference between the strategies used by the translators. In fact, domestication as a translation strategy prevails in the first corpus (67 %), while in the second, foreignization prevails although in a very small percentage (59 %). This is to be explained by the fact that the second book is a novel and it is easier to insert explanations in that kind of a text than to interrupt the reading of a poem that implies a certain rhythm. The translations (especially the first one) go in line with Zohar's hypothesis that when the translation occupies secondary position, it tends to be target-culture oriented.

The lack of consistent strategies for translating culture-bound elements is due the fact that both translators are bilingual and bicultural but have not studied the theory of translation and are not familiar with some theoretical aspects that can help them in delivering better translations.

In fact, even when a poetry book is concerned, the translator can use of footnotes, or can give a detailed introduction bringing closer the text to a foreign reader. The technological development has made the information easily accessible and the translators should be braver when it comes to using images or links to videos, for example.

We have to admit that the gap between the Macedonian and English (Anglophone) culture is big, as well as the gap between the Macedonian and French

(Francophone) culture. Still, however close or distant the cultural traditions of certain countries are, it is translator's task to build bridges between them and to enrich them. In that sense, we estimate that the development of translatology could encourage new translators to retranslate works of Macedonian authors especially, Ratsin's poems, so that foreign readers can hear the sound of Macedonian folk songs and of the national instruments. Finally, through the translation, foreign readers should be able to see Macedonian heroes, fairies and plagues, so that they can share the worldview of an unhappy but eager for freedom nation.

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Latin

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Cyrillic

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