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**DOMESTICATED TRANSLATION:  
THE CASE OF NABOKOV'S TRANSLATION OF  
*ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND***

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What is translation? On a platter  
A poet's pale and glaring head,  
A parrot's screech, a monkey's chatter,  
And profanation of the dead.

V. Nabokov, "On Translating  
*Eugene Onegin*" (1955)

*DOMESTICATED VERSUS FOREIGNIZED*

**T**he main question in the history of translation theory has been the question of the nature of translation. What is more important – to create a text which will be accepted in a target cultural environment or to preserve the formal and aesthetic original in order to evoke interest in a foreign culture? This dilemma offers two primary methods of dealing with translation: domesticated<sup>1</sup> (emphasis on the language

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<sup>1</sup> One of the most famous theorists of natural, domesticated translation is Nida Eugene, an American specialist of Bible translations. She is considered to be a follower of Martin Luther, who translated the Bible into the common German language and declared the priority of content above form.

and culture of the target text) and foreignized<sup>2</sup> (emphasis on the language and culture of the source text) translation strategies.

Venuti defines domesticated translation as “an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target language cultural values, bringing the author back home.” In this case translator should erase every shred of foreignness and create a familiarized and immediately recognizable text, adjusted to the target text’s linguistic and cultural dimensions (1995: 20). On the contrary, followers of the foreignized method see the source text as the only objective reality of a literary work. Their primary aim is to transfer the original idea of the text as exactly as possible – without any additional interpretations, explanations or adaptations. Using this method, the translator is expected to preserve the foreign identity of the source text, i.e. to keep linguistic and cultural differences in the translation. Foreignized translation gives readers more information about the foreign culture but tends to increase the difficulty of understanding the text.

Translators who are disposed to the domesticated method proclaim that the essential component of any literary work is not its “technical” side, but something invisible and often called the “spirit” of the original. This “spirit” has to be successfully transferred into the target culture. According to Nida Eugene, domestication also permits adjustments to “special literary forms,” “semantically exocentric expressions” or “intraorganismic meanings” (1964: 170). Naturalness, as a key requirement in this type of translation, should be raised to such a degree that it “bear[s] no obvious trace of foreign origin” (1964: 167).

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<sup>2</sup> Domesticated translation is also described as target language (TL) or “reader-to-author” approach and foreignized, as source language (SL) or “author-to-reader.”

Scholars in modern translation theory such as Tymoczko (1999: 55-56), deny the existence of a single polarity that describes the orientation of a translation and criticize this dichotomy. Tymoczko points out that a translation “may be radically oriented to the source text in some respects, but [could] depart radically from the source text in other respects so as to assimilate it to a norm of a receiving culture” (Tymoczko 1995: 21).

The truth has not been established yet. *Domesticated translation* is more natural and easy to understand because it is read as an original text. *Foreignized translation* presents a foreign language and culture and for that reason requires a certain level of knowledge about the source cultural environment. Both methods are mutually hostile, and the dualism still exists in the theory and practice of translation while different reasons and evidence are provided to prove the primacy of each method.

In the history of modern translation there are scarcely any examples of “betraying” one method and moving to the opposite approach. One of the rarest exceptions is Vladimir Nabokov, who used both methods in establishing his translation doctrine. Only a few translators in the twentieth century possessed Nabokov's linguistic sensibility, and his contribution to the theory of translation and practice is invaluable. In his translation of Lewis Carroll's novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, young Nabokov-Sirin used a domesticated method of radically familiarizing of the original. In contrast, his later translation of Pushkin's novel in verse, *Eugene Onegin*, signified a complete transition to an extreme foreignized translation, aimed at keeping the original text as authentic as possible.

This article focuses on the translation of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, exploring problems in translation arising from the differences between two languages and

cultural milieus. I will analyze Nabokov's domesticated strategies of familiarization of the linguistic and literary properties in the process of adjustment of Carroll's text to its target audience.

*THE TRANSLATION OF ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND:*

*A CHALLENGE IN TRANSLATING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE*

Translating *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to any language is definitely not among the easiest tasks. The novel contains parodies, puns (especially the frequent use of homophones), wordplay, verbal humor, "speaking" names, personifications, enciphered allusions, literal interpretations of phraseological components, and unusual metaphors, as well as other elements of Carroll's creative style which appear on every single page and result in paradoxically humorous effects, making this book a real challenge for translators. Lewis Carroll's tale is notable for its varied and distinctive use of style, clear intertextuality and the interplay between fiction and reality.

Moreover, *Alice* includes numerous details characteristic of an epoch and society – Victorian England. Modern English readers are probably still able to identify those features in the text oriented to a particular culture and period, but Russian readers would fail comprehending them without additional explanations. The Russian translator Boris Zakhoder, who successfully translated *Winnie-the-Pooh*, was frequently asked: "Why don't you translate *Alice*?" whereupon he answered: "It would be easier to transpose England" (quoted in Nikolaeva 1996: 89). Ever since it was first brought into Russian in 1879, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* intrigued and sorely tested Russian translators.

Despite the fact that Carroll himself believed that the book is virtually untranslatable (as he reportedly said in connection with the first French translation; see, Kibbee 2003: 308), *Alice* was translated more often than almost any other work, except for the Bible (Carpenter/Prichard, 1984: 17).

Prior to turning to Nabokov's translation of *Alice*, I will summarize the characteristics typical to translating children's literature in general. Contrary to common belief, translating for children might not be easier than translating for adults. Since "children's semiotic experience does not allow them to interpret the signs of an alien semiosphere" (Nikolaeva 1996: 27), a variety of explanations, adaptations or direct changes may be necessary. In his research of translating children's literature, Zohar Shavit suggests that the translator of children's literature may manipulate the text in various ways. Such freedom is allowed as long as the translator is adjusting the text to make it appropriate and comprehensible for children. Considering children's ability to read and comprehend, some translators may even choose to modify the plot, characters and language (1986: 112-113); others can delete or change inappropriate scenes to make the text more accessible for young readers (1981: 174).

Thus, the main task of a translator of children's literature is to make it relevant for the target audience. Riitta Oittinen states that "[in] translating as rewriting for target-language audiences – we always need to ask the crucial question: 'For whom?' Hence, while writing children's books is writing for children, translating children's literature is translating for children" (2003: 128). The interests of the readers, in this case children, should be taken even more seriously than the interests of the adults.

Children's literature scholar Zena Sutherland maintains that what may be a mild hazard for an adult can pose a serious barrier for a child. For instance, names, titles, complex syntax, or allusions to cultural heritage or common knowledge in foreign literature may be unfamiliar to members of recipient cultures. The translator of children's literature must keep this fact in mind in order to avoid creating an overly difficult uninteresting translation which may alienate children from reading (1981: 67). Sutherland agrees that in the realm of children's literature a "new," domesticated and familiar text can be created instead of a literary "translation" of the original text (1981: 69).

It is difficult to decide which elements in the source text can be preserved and which should perhaps be omitted. According to Nikolaeva, the best translation of a children's book does not necessarily entail precise accuracy and closeness to the original. It is much more important to consider the issues of reception and the readers' response. The children have to be able "to accept and utilize the book." An effective translation should arouse in them the same feelings and associations experienced by the young readers of the source text (1996: 28).

This vision of translating children's literature seems logical. Children, with their imperfect reading abilities and limited world knowledge cannot, and are not expected to tolerate as much strangeness and foreignness as adult readers. On the other hand, keeping in mind the target audience does not mean that the original should be oversimplified and that children should not be challenged. It is the task of the translator to make appropriate decisions on how she/he will compensate for the children's lack of background knowledge without oversimplifying the original and "forcing children into simple texts that have lost any feature of difficulty, foreignness, challenge and mystery" (Stolze 2003:

209). However, as Umberto Eco writes in the Introduction to *Experiences in Translation*: “Every sensible and rigorous theory of language shows that a perfect translation is an impossible dream” (Eco 2001: ix).

Nabokov’s translation of *Alice* into Russian is admittedly successful. Obviously, in translating Carroll’s novel (1923), Nabokov considered primarily his future readers’ abilities and interests, tending to create a translation that would be as accessible as possible to the mind of a child. He tried to convey to the Russian children the humor, the originality and the brightness of the paradoxical and attractive Carroll's world, his sense of the absurd, and his amazing gift for games of logic and language. Just as a foreignized translation is intended to create a feeling of entering an unknown world, a domesticated translation must provide a recognizable and familiar atmosphere for the reader. At the same time, Nabokov refused to oversimplify his translation or to patronize its young audience with simplistic translation solutions.

### *TRANSLATING PARODIES*

The novel *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* presents dilemmas to all translators. Julian W. Connolly calls Nabokov’s version “one of the most ingenious and delightful” (1995: 19). Exploring Nabokov’s translation methods of adaptation of the original to the Russian milieu, Connolly particularly stresses his “free spirited approach” in transferring Carroll’s parodies of didactic verses (1995: 20-21) with admirable ingenuity and creativity. The poems in *Alice* are parodies upon familiar rhymes which are related and intertextually connected to the Victorian English culture. It is clear that the target readers

of translated text would not easily embrace the subtle Victorian parodies. Thus, the adaptation required replacing the parody of the didactic verses common in Victorian pedagogy with Nabokov's own parody of Russian poems, especially those which his young readers were expected to recognize. In fact, successful translation of the verse parodies constitutes one of the most important adaptations to the target audience of Russian children. Nabokov was strongly criticized for providing examples from Russian poetry and even accused of unnecessary Russification of the story and erasing any shade of the "English" spirit (Demurova 2003: 184). However, it is unreasonable to expect any Russian child to understand the parody of Isaak Watts or Robert Southey. By choosing popular Russian verses, Nabokov preserved Carroll's intention of having his readers guess them.<sup>3</sup> This ability to capture the challenging element of playing with the text proved to be Nabokov's significant achievement in translating *Alice*.

Connolly points out that Nabokov chose Mikhail Lermontov's long poem, "Borodino," devoted to the glorious victory of the Russian army over the French invasion forces (1812) on the Borodino field (1995: 19), to adapt Carroll's parody of Robert Southey's "The Old Man's Comforts and How He Gained Them" ("You are Old, Father William"). As a result, Nabokov achieved a comical effect by evoking a classical poem; he even managed to preserve Carroll's original meter, rhyme, and the meaning of the first line of each couplet, which reads like in Lermontov: "*Skazhi-ka diadia*" ("Tell me, uncle"). Moreover, Lermontov's poem was composed in a form of a dialogue between a recruit and an old soldier. Thus, Nabokov even preserved the aspect of theme-parody as in the original young Alice talks to the elder and wiser Caterpillar.

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<sup>3</sup> Time proved that Nabokov invented the most appropriate method of rendering Carroll's parody which was also used by one of the modern translators of *Alice*, A. Kononenko (1998-2000), who substituted the original verses with Pushkin's and Lermontov's poems as well as with Krylov's fable.

As Connolly notes, Nabokov also used Pushkin's poem "Gypsies" – the line from "*Ptichka Bozhiiia ne Znaet*" ("God's Bird Doesn't Know") instead of the parody of Isaak Watt's "Against Idleness and Mischief" (in Carroll's "How Doth the Little Crocodile")<sup>4</sup> (1995: 20). In the original poem, Watts uses an image of a bee as a model of hard work. In Carroll's parody, the crocodile is pictured as a deceptive and predatory creature. In Pushkin's original poem, the image of the bird is used as a symbol of the independent and freedom-loving Gypsies. Translated parody sounds recognizable and funny because Nabokov, like Carroll, uses the image of a "cheating," deceptive crocodile.

Connolly also notes that in order to translate Carroll's "The Lobster Quadrille," an original parody of Mary Botham Howitt's "The Spider and the Fly," Nabokov chose Pushkin's poem "*Pesn' o veschchem Olege*" ("The Song of Prophetic Oleg") (1995:21), a ballad about a Russian warrior who was foretold that his favorite horse would become a cause of his death. At the end of the poem, Oleg is bitten by a snake that hides in the head of his dead horse. Nabokov preserved the original rhyme of the ballad and used the key-word "*veshchii*" ("prophet") in the first line to make the poem more recognizable.

There are two more parodies successfully conveyed by Nabokov which were described by Demurova (2003: 188-189): Lermontov's poem, "*Kazach'ia kolybel'naia*" ("Cossack's Lullaby"), and a famous folk verse "*Chizhyk-Pyzhik, gde ty byl*" ("Chizhyk-Pyzhik, where have you been"). "Cossack's Lullaby" is used in the translation of lullaby sung by the Queen of Hearts ("Speak roughly to your little boy..."), although the chosen poem is not as efficient as "The Lobster Quadrille" because the parody remains lyrical and pompous. Supposedly, Lermontov's poem was not very well-known by children, at

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<sup>4</sup> According to another version, this is a parody on the child's rhyme "How doth the little busy bee."

least not as the children's folk verse "*Chizhyk-Pyzhik, gde ty byl,*" used to translate a parody of the famous nursery rhyme "Twinkle Twinkle, Little Star."

By choosing the strategy of substitution, Nabokov manipulated famous verses of the target culture in order to ensure that the text is as meaningful and as accessible to the *target text* reader as it was to the *source text* reader.

### CULTURAL ADAPTATIONS

"Since successful translation depends on a double awareness of the cultural context in which the original was produced and of the context into which it is to be projected," says Brower in his Introduction to the collection of essays on translation, "it will often reveal strikingly the likeness and differences between two civilizations" (Brower 1966: 5). Carroll's novel reflects the time in which it was written. According to Hagfors, the use of culture-bound elements, such as proper names, food items, measures of length and currency, historical figures, etc., is "one way of demonstrating not only into which culture the story is set but also of creating an atmosphere that reflects the values prevalent in that culture and period of time" (2003: 188). She stresses that to translate a book is a special challenge because the translator and the publisher have to decide whether "they want to imply these same values for the target text readers, or whether they want to make adaptations to the text in order to fit it better into the target culture" because their decision will define the text's "destiny" in the target culture (2003: 118).

There are many British cultural references in *Alice* that can become problematic in translation. When dealing with cultural elements, Nabokov's translation adopts the

strategy of localization which means that the translator attempts “to anchor a reference firmly in the culture of the target audience” (Davies 2003: 72). Obviously, he considered expressions typical of the English cultural background to be incomprehensible to the Russian readers and decided to erase all possible awareness of a different cultural content. Undoubtedly, this decision created a sense of familiarity and helped Russian readers to enter the magnificent world of Carroll’s book and to identify themselves with the characters of the story. On the other hand, an almost complete familiarization of cultural items can hardly serve as a tool for learning about foreign cultures, times and customs.

Nabokov’s substitutions extend to the smallest details of Russian cultural milieu. For instance, he used both Russian measures of length and monetary units. When Alice falls into the rabbit hole, she talks about distance in terms of miles. Russian children might not be familiar with “miles,” but they had to realize that the word referred to a very long distance. Nabokov used the word “*versta*,” choosing a more easily understandable concept of distance for Russian children. Connolly notes that the sum of one hundred pounds becomes one thousand rubles and shillings and pence are converted to kopecks (Connolly 1995: 19).

Food items,<sup>5</sup> which often play an important role in children’s books, are also replaced with Russian analogs. In *Alice*, food is often used as a way of gaining entry into the other world. Some items, well-known in Russia at that time, such as “roast turkey,” “pine-apple,” or “currants” are translated directly. The supposedly unknown sweets were substituted with titles of typical Russian food items. Thus, “comfits” are replaced simply

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<sup>5</sup> The significant role of food in children’s literature in general has been discussed in detail by Nikolaeva (2000: 128-130).

with “candies” (конфеты); the word “pirozhki” (пирожки), a typical Russian word for “pies”, is used instead of “tarts”; “hot buttered toast” becomes “grenki” (гренки), and “barley sugar” is translated as “sweets” (сладости). Nabokov also changed “orange” marmalade into “strawberry” marmalade, supposedly, because oranges were an exotic fruit in Russia and children would not have imagined such a “rarity” to be used for marmalade.

Carroll’s story is also full of cultural references, most of which only make sense in their British/Victorian context. For instance, historical figures, such as William the Conqueror, Edwin, the Earl of Mercia, Morcar, the Earl of Northumbria, Stigand, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Edgar Athelin, are mentioned in the Mouse’s story. Following his strategy of familiarization and localization, Nabokov transformed fictional characters and historical persons so that they would fit better into a Russian milieu. The most famous adaptation, which is also mentioned by Connolly (1995: 19), is the modification of the story told by the French Mouse who comes to England with William the Conqueror. In Nabokov’s translation, England is replaced with Russia and William the Conqueror is replaced with Vladimir Monomakh (a Russian Grand Prince). It is questionable whether all Russian children know who Vladimir Monomakh was and so it is unclear whether Nabokov achieved his goal of making this character more accessible to his readers. In fact, William the Conqueror is first mentioned when Alice encounters the Mouse in the second chapter, but in that case Nabokov replaces William the Conqueror with Napoleon, probably considering the French emperor to be a more recognizable historical figure to a Russian audience. By introducing two completely different cultural milieus, Nabokov does not avoid a significant misunderstanding. The

nationality of the Mouse is supposed to be French but the identity of the character whom the Mouse followed to the shore appears to be Russian.

Edwin and Morcar, the Earls of Mercia and Northumbria, Stigand, and the Archbishop of Canterbury disappear in Nabokov's translation and are replaced with Monomakh's son, Mstislav, and the grand prince Olegovich.

All cultural references indicating that the story is set in Britain are deliberately omitted in Nabokov's translation and this practice includes, quite consistently, the names of all characters. In order to make it easier for the reader to identify with the main characters and to avoid alienation throughout the reading process, Nabokov decided to Russify English personal names. As Christiana Nord points out, just a quick glance at the translated text reveals that translators often substitute, transcribe and omit names (2003: 182). Obviously, the presence of foreign names in a translation brings with it the risk of creating a linguistic barrier for young readers. According to Tymoczko, the referential function of the names presupposes their "recognizability" and "memorability" because they must "in some way be memorable so as to serve their function as indicators of unique objects" (1999: 225).

It is clear that unfamiliar foreign names may be difficult for children to recognize and memorize. On the other hand, names are an important part of the original text as they often carry out the function of characterizing a person or a place. A translator, therefore, has to make a decision to either find a completely new name or keep it the same as in the original.

It would be an impossible task to preserve all personal allusions in the Russian language, therefore Nabokov used the substitution strategy and tried preserving the

original name-play.<sup>6</sup> This served as a pattern for creating a humorous effect and evoking certain associations.

Almost all of the culture-bound elements related to proper names are domesticated to make them fit into the Russian target culture. To achieve this aim, Nabokov drew on the whole repertoire of names existing in the Russian language. Thus, Alice was transformed into Ania,<sup>7</sup> a diminutive of a common Russian name, Anna. This decision is one of the most contentious, because the change of the girl's name entails the change of the title as well: *Ania v Strane Chudes*. Nabokov remains the only Russian translator in the twentieth century who changed the name of Carroll's protagonist. All other translators have retained the name used in the original.

In the second chapter, Alice loses her self-assurance and fears that she may have become "Ada" or "Mabel." Nabokov retains the name "Ada" but replaces "Mabel" with "Assia," emphasizing Alice's doubts about her identity by establishing sound similarity between the names: *Ania-Ada-Assia*. "Mary-Ann," the name the White Rabbit uses to call Alice, is replaced with "Masha," another popular Russian female name.

Two other common names appear in the fourth chapter. Servants who work for the White Rabbit are named "Pat" and "Bill." In the translation, Bill is replaced with *Iashka* (a colloquial diminutive of the Russian name, *Iakov*) and Pat with Pet'ka (a colloquial diminutive of the Russian name, Peter). Both of the colloquial diminutives signify the social position of the servants because in the Russian language diminutives of personal names are usually used to express familiarity or, sometimes, even disrespect. Similarly, as Kibbee states, the name "Pat" has clear cultural connotation, being the

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<sup>6</sup> For instance, "Mock Turtle" was translated as "chepupakha" (Connloy 1995: 22).

<sup>7</sup> The first translation of *Alice* into Russian was entitled *Sonia v strane Diva* (1879).

stereotypical Irish name. “Pat” also encompasses many stereotypical features of the Irish dialect (“sure” at the beginning of a statement, “yer” for “your,” the pronunciation “arrum” for “arm,” etc.) (2003: 311). This ethnic and class identification is lost in Nabokov’s translation.

Elsie, Lacie, and Tillie in the Dormouse’s story were renamed Masia, Pasia and Dasia (derivatives of the Russian names Masha, Pasha and Dasha) which, according to Connolly, allowed Nabokov to transfer the effect of sound repetition (1995: 19). The word “dormouse” was not a translation challenge because it has an equivalent in Russian which Nabokov used. The Russian word “*sonia*” has two uses: it can mean a dormouse and a person who likes to sleep, but it can also be a woman’s name. Considering both uses of this word, Nabokov was able to transfer the important characteristic of the mouse’s sleepiness as well as add female connotations to her image.<sup>8</sup>

The absence of associative fields created a difficulty for Nabokov as well as for other translators of *Alice* into the Russian language. Carroll’s original is sated with allusions, hints, “speaking” names which, once translated into a different language, lose their hidden meaning. In the original, there appears a “strange company” of a Duck, a Dodo, a Lori and an Eaglet. To follow the original allusion is quite difficult. However, “Duck” is supposed to refer to Reverend Duckworth, Carroll’s colleague and friend; “Lori” might stand for Lorina Liddell, Carroll’s eldest sister; “Eaglet” probably comes from Edith, Carroll’s youngest sister, and “Dodo” might refer to Lewis Carroll himself. In fact, all of the characters are supposed to have the ciphered names of the participants of the famous picnic on 4 July 1862, when Carroll told his story about a little girl named Alice for the first time (Demurova 1970:15-16).

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<sup>8</sup> In the later translations, the Dormouse has always been addressed as “she”.

It is impossible to preserve these allusions in Russian without an extensive commentary. Thus, Nabokov decided to completely erase any hint of reference to real persons in order to avoid additional explanations which would only intensify the incomprehensibility of the text. He translated "Duck" literally as "*utka*" ("duck"), "Dodo" as "Dront" (it is known as an extinct bird in Russian culture), "Eaglet" as "*orlenok*" (a diminutive of the Russian word for "eagle" – "orel") and only "Lori" remained "Lori", as in the original.

The connotations of the translation of "Cheshire Cat," which is renamed "*Maslianichnyi Kot*" ("Butter Cat"), are explained in Demurova's study (2003: 186). "*Maslianitsa*" ("Butter Day") is a third preparatory week, a religious holiday, when people usually eat pancakes. There is also a famous proverb in Russian – "a cat can not have Maslyanica the whole time" (*ne vse kotu Maslianitsa*), meaning that a man can not simply enjoy himself all the time but must eventually get to work. This proverb is also used in the translation to explain the significance of the Cat's name. However, some of the names are literal translations,<sup>9</sup> such as "Hatter" and "March Hare," which in the original allude to idiomatic expressions "as mad as a Hatter" and "as mad as a March Hare" but have no direct equivalents in the Russian language (Demurova 2003: 187). The idea of hares which are mad in March could evoke certain associations in Russian readers, but the idea of a hatter being mad had no equivalent in Russian. The meaning implied in the original was lost due to the literal translation, but in this case Nabokov did not have a choice.

#### TRANSLATING PUNS

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<sup>9</sup> "White Rabbit" and "Caterpillar" as well as "Gryphon" and "Pigeon" are also translated literally.

Nabokov's approximation of the effect of English puns is thoroughly explained by Demurova and Connolly; I am going to have a look only at examples not mentioned in their papers.

Nabokov was successful in translating the English puns based on homonyms. For instance, the pun in the conversation between Alice and the Cheshire Cat which sounds like "pig or fig" is translated as "*porosenok ili openok*" ("pig or honey agaric"). Sometimes Nabokov even invents his own homophones: when the White Rabbit talks to Alice about the imprisonment of the Duchess, Alice asks for what "*shalost*" ("prank") she was punished. The White Rabbit thinks that she said "*zhalost*" ("pity") and wonders why she is so sorry about the Duchess.

Another substitution of a homonym can be found in the chapter "Who stole the Tarts." When the Hatter testifies, he starts by mentioning the twinkling of the tea. The King angrily asks him: "The twinkling of the what?" and the Hatter replies that "it began with the tea." The King becomes furious and exclaims: "Of course twinkling begins with a T!" mistaking the time of the event for the first letter of the word. Unable to duplicate this pun, Nabokov invents a different kind of misunderstanding on the part of the king. The Hatter mentions that when he started drinking tea he suddenly felt "*syro*" ("wet") in his head, but the King thinks that he says "*syr*" ("cheese") and angrily notes that the cheese is absolutely unnecessary.

Nabokov also translated the pun occurring in the conversation between Iashka and the White Rabbit. Iashka explains that he digs "for apples," thinking that apples grow in

the earth like potatoes. Nabokov uses the verb "vykapyvat" ("to dig out"), conveying the absurdity of the servant's action.

Another pun appears in the Mouse's story when she declares that "the patriotic archbishop of Canterbury found it advisable." The Duck does not understand what the Mouse means and asks her what exactly the archbishop found. The Mouse becomes angry and replies that the archbishop found *it*, sarcastically asking the Duck if he knew what this could mean. The Duck says: "I know what 'it' means well enough, when I find a thing, it's generally a frog or a worm. The question is, what did the archbishop find?" In order to locate a distinctive equivalent of this pun, Nabokov used a word-play based on a possible confusion of the words "otnosheniia" ("relationships") and "otnosit" ("to carry off"). Thus, the Mouse declares that the relationship ("otnosheniia") between the Grand Prince and his brothers has been aggravated, and the Duck replies that he knows what it means because he often carries ("otnosit") worms or frogs to his children.

#### *STYLE-LEVEL*

The outstanding characteristic of *Alice* is its lexical and syntactical simplicity. Nabokov did not change the style-level into a colloquial-childish tone which would have been unacceptable for *Alice* although it could have been more easily comprehended by Russian children. His changes in the text do not result in simplification. An example of this is a passage from the first chapter. The original passage starts with the words: "Well' thought Alice to herself; 'After such a fall as this [...]'" Nabokov translates the word "well" as "odnako" which is archaic and is often used in literary texts, stressing

Alice's intelligence and politeness – the main characteristics of her speech. He also transposes the word “fall” with the word “*ispytanie*” (“trial”) which is also characteristic of a high literary style.

Obviously, Nabokov adapts the source text for readers familiar with a sophisticated vocabulary. For instance, in the conversation between Alice and the Caterpillar, Nabokov renders the expression “short remarks” as “*skupa na slova*” which means “chary of words” and ascribes elegance and sophistication to the narrator's voice. When she is talking to Alice, the Duchess uses the word “*uvol'te*” which is an archaic word in Russian and means “leave me in peace”/“do not force me to do something.”

Sometimes Nabokov intentionally embellishes the text with additions and substitutions to make it sound more archaic. When Carroll refers to the dialogue between Alice and the Caterpillar, he constantly uses the verb “to say,” probably stressing the official and superior tone of the Caterpillar. Nabokov comes up with a variety of Russian verbs: “*sprosila*” (“asked”); “*otvetila*” (“answered”); “*molvila*” (an archaic verb which means “said”/“pronounced”); “*progovorila*” (“uttered”), “*reshila*” (“decided”), “*prikazala*” (“ordered”) and “*osvedomilas*” (another archaic verb with almost the same meaning as “asked” or “inquired”). Sometimes Nabokov intensifies the meaning of the verb used in the original, as in the conversation between Alice and the Pigeon: the verb “*ubiraisia*” (“get out”) is used instead of “said the Pigeon in a sulky tone”. The same intensification of verbal forms may be observed in the conversation between Alice and the Duchess who is said to have “*riavknula*” (“roared”) and “*otrezala*” (“cut short”).

The major part of the work is in a dialogue form – Alice's conversations with the peculiar creatures she encounters reflect the social problems of Victorian times. The

conversations take place between a very polite upper-class girl and all sorts of older creatures, with different backgrounds, tempers and intentions. But although the vocabulary and sentence structure are simple, they never become patronizingly childish. Nabokov's use of language results in a translation that sounds natural in Russian, but at the same time transfers an exact correspondence of the stylistic level; this correspondence is important because the Victorian society was so strictly ordered that the smallest disturbance had comical connotations. In this case, Nabokov's faithfulness to the style of the novel is remarkable. He consistently used the polite form of addressing others (the pronoun "vy" in Russian) in Alice's conversations with her interlocutors. He also literally translated all expressions aimed to stress Alice's politeness and her respectful attitude towards other creatures: "*budte dobry*", in the conversation with the White Rabbit ("would you be so kind"); "*ochen' vezhливо otvetila*" ("she answered very politely"), in the conversation with the Caterpillar; "*budte dobry mne ob'iasnit*" ("would you be so kind and explain to me"), in the conversation with the Duchess; "*akh, prostite menia*" ("Oh, excuse me"), in the conversation with the Mouse. There are no examples of unacceptable slang in Nabokov's translation.

Nabokov neatly reproduces uneducated, lower-class speech, as in an example with the Gryphon. There is a certain discrepancy between the Gryphon's speech and his social status which turns him into a Mock Gryphon: "What fun! This here young lady," said the Gryphon, "she wants for to know your history, she do." Nabokov translated the word "fun" as "*umora*," a colloquial Russian word which actually means "exaggerated fun" but is derived from the verb "*umorit*" which means "to kill," and refers to the Queen's constant threats of everyone's execution. The expression "young lady" which is

commonly used in sub-standard English speech is translated as “*baryshnia*”, an old-fashioned way to refer to young women in Russia. The word expresses respect for the lower-class, but in modern Russian it often has humorous connotations. On the whole, Nabokov succeeds in preserving the ironic, colloquial speech of the Gryphon by inventing Russian old-fashioned equivalents which echo a colloquial lower-class Russian speech. In this case his decision not to translate words literally seems correct because a word-for-word translation of “fun” and “young lady” into Russian would not adequately convey Carroll’s original intonations.

An analogous example appears in the conversation between Alice and the Duchess when the Duchess uses the expression “you dear old thing” addressing Alice. Stressing the ironic informality of the relationship between them, Nabokov translates this expression as “*detochka*” (“baby”), a colloquial word used to address children that expresses an extreme familiarity when used to address adults.

## CONCLUSION

It is difficult, if not impossible, to give an objective response to the question of what constitutes a good translation. Nabokov’s decision to favor the almost complete Russification of Carroll’s novel is questionable, especially considering his later ideas about the importance of the translation’s exactness and accuracy. For instance, Nabokov’s translation of *Eugene Onegin* in prose, a perfect example of a foreignized translation: it aimed primarily at the scholarly audience and thus was equipped with scrupulous notes which explained not only the contextual and poetic meanings of the

Russian original or clarified historical, social and cultural issues of the nineteenth century, but also provided biographic material about Pushkin, references to Russian and European literature, etc. Nabokov's intention to reveal the complicated world of Pushkin's genius resulted in a profound and extensive scientific work which can hardly be designated as a mere translation.

*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* remains the only novel for children translated by Nabokov. Summarizing Nabokov's main achievements in this translation, it should be mentioned that while he familiarized the foreign cultural context and focused on the target audience, his translation of *Alice* did not underestimate children's ability to comprehend. The author sacrificed some "technical" elements to make his translation of Carroll's story accessible to younger audience. Nabokov followed the main strategy of domestication (realized in the text as substitution and localization throughout the whole story), avoiding cultural misinterpretations and culturally paradoxical scenes. The literary value of Nabokov's translation is evident in the meticulous interpretation of puns and their basic sense, verbal plays, parodies, style, and intentional misunderstandings as well as his ability to catch the ironic nonsense and intentional absurdity of Carroll's world. If children's appreciation of the final result is to be considered a translator's ultimate yardstick, then Nabokov undoubtedly produced a successful translation of one of the most challenging children's writings in modern literature.

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