

SELF-TRANSLATION IN TRANSLINGUAL WRITING *Luan Starova's Albanian and Macedonian versions of the novel 'The Times of the Goats'*

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Abstract – In this contribution I examine the Macedonian and Albanian versions of the novel 'The Times of the Goats' both written by the Albanian-born writer, poet and translator Luan Starova who lives in the Republic of Macedonia. His prose fiction displays an interesting case of literary translanguaging and self-translation, because he uses two working languages in his literary production: Macedonian, the acquired language, and Albanian his mother tongue, learned only in the family context. As a bilingual and bi-cultural mediator, Starova has built a bridge between the Albanian and Macedonian cultures. The process of (re)creation and (re)writing some parts of the text blurs a clear-cut distinction between the 'original', represented by the first version of the novel published in Macedonian, and the 'translated' version, published in Albanian nine years later. The result is a sort of 'twin work' or better said a 'bicephalic' text in which the different lexical and stylistic choices are adapted to the two different linguistic, semantic, pragmatic and sociocultural contexts.

Keywords: Balkan Studies 1; Translingual Literature 2; Translation Studies 3.; Albanian Studies 4.; Luan Starova 5.

*In affectionate memory of Prof. Wilfried Fiedler,
Master of Albanian and Balkan studies.
(Oberfrohna, Chemnitz 7th May 1933, † 11th
September Berlin).*

1. Luan Starova: a writer between two cultures

In this contribution I examine the Macedonian and Albanian versions of the novel 'The Times of the Goats' both written by the Albanian-born writer, poet and translator Luan Starova who lives in the Republic of Macedonia. He was formerly professor of comparative and French literature at the University of Sts. Cyril and Methodius in Skopje, Macedonia's first ambassador to France, and is now member of the Macedonian Academy of Arts and Sciences.

His prose fiction displays an interesting case of literary translanguaging and self-translation, because he uses two working languages in his literary production: Macedonian, the acquired language, and Albanian his mother tongue, learned only in the family context and kept *Si një lule në saksi* 'Like a flower in the vase' (Nanci 2008, p. 26, f. 32, Zaimi 2003, p. 24). The writer, while admitting his status as a bilingual writer, recognizes the importance of his mother tongue in his artistic creation:

Mund të thuhet se fati im ka qenë i veçantë. Fati i familjes sime emigrante shqiptare bëri që unë të mos mësoj në gjuhën e nënës dhe disa libra t'i shkruaj maqedonisht e pastaj t'i rishkruaj edhe shqip. Kjo ka ndodhur edhe me disa tekste të mia të shkruara fillimisht në

frëngjishte. Por, pavarësisht se në cilën gjuhë shkruaj, frymëmarrja e librave të mia është në gjuhën shqipe. [...] Gjendem para një sfide para së cilës nuk dua të kapitultoj – do të rikthehem domosdo gjuhës së nënës në veprën time. (Sulejmani 2005, p. 13)

‘It can be said that my destiny has been particular. The fate of my Albanian emigrant family meant that I did not study in the mother tongue and that some books were written in Macedonian and then rewritten in Albanian too. This happened also with some of my texts initially written in French. But, regardless of what language I use in writing, the breath of my books is in the Albanian language. [...] I find myself faced with a challenge before which I do not want to capitulate - I will certainly return to the mother tongue in my work’.

The Albanian language always intervenes to help him when there is some gap in other languages:

Shkrimi në gjuhën e të tjerëve është larg mendsh se mund të përbëjë një fakt që guxon të lidhet me injorimin e gjuhës së nënës. [...] Edhe përkundër shkrimeve të bëra në gjuhën e të tjerëve, shkrimtari mbetet përgjithmonë i strukturuar në veprën e tij prej gjuhës së parë, prej gjuhës së nënë (Sulejmani 2005, p. 13).

‘One can not even remotely think that writing in another language can be linked to the ignorance of the mother tongue. [...] Despite the use of a foreign language in the drafting of a work, the writer remains forever structured in his work from his first language, the mother tongue’ (Nanci 2008, p. 28, Sulejmani 2005, p. 13).

Nevertheless, Starova has chosen to write fiction both in Albanian, his mother tongue, and in Macedonian, the language of his adopted country. He can thus be truly characterized as a translingual writer.

Writing fiction in a language other than one’s native tongue is not a new phenomenon. Prominent examples in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries include Samuel Beckett, Flann O’Brien, Antonio Tabucchi, Vladimir Nabokov, and Joseph Conrad, who have all written important works in more than one language (“ambilingual translingual”), as in Starova’s case, or in only a single language other than their native one (“monolingual translingual”) (Kellmann 2000, p. 12). The concept of translingual literature and the increasing attention to issues concerning (trans-)/national identity, cultural hybridity, exile and migration in literary studies (Sorvari 2016, p. 141) changed also the traditional view of self-translation which “has often been described simply as a freer, less literal translation” (Jung 2004, p. 532).

As Grönstrand (2014, p. 122) points out, this view of self-translation has been criticized because “it indicates a dichotomy, and often also a hierarchy, between the two texts and between the author/translator”. For these reasons, I will avoid a comparison of the Macedonian and Albanian versions of Starova’s novel based on a hierarchy of the type: source vs. target text. Indeed, when viewed as a whole consisting of two different versions, the novel belies the traditional dichotomy between “original” and “translation”, offering a form of cultural mediation between two target languages and cultures which are relatively close to each other (Korhonen *et al.* 2016), Lindstedt 2016).

First of all, Macedonia and Albania are neighbouring countries where both varieties are spoken (Friedman 2011, Schubert 2005): in multilingual Macedonia, Albanian is the largest minority community,¹ whereas inside the current Albanian state Macedonian varieties survive in five areas.

Like other members of the Balkan convergence area, Macedonian and Albanian share many phenomena on the morphosyntactic, syntactic and lexical levels as a result of

¹ The Albanian community is situated in the areas of Skopje, Kumanovo, Bitola, Tetovo, Gostivar, Debra, Struga, and represents about 30% of the population; Jusufi (2011).

contact-induced change, and have also in common many ethnographic and anthropological features (Friedman 2005, Joseph 2010, Kahl 2014, Schaller 2012). In this way the variations between the Macedonian and the Albanian versions of Starova's novel will be analysed trying to appreciate the "intercultural conditions" in which the text arises (Hokeson & Munson 2007, p. 8).

2. The Novel "The Times of the Goats"

The novel *Времето на козите* first appeared in 1993 at the publishing house Мисла in Skopje and was published only nine years later in Albanian.² Being at the same time historical and allegorical, folkloric and fantastic, *The Time of the Goats* draws lyrically on Starova's own childhood. It is the second novel in Luan Starova's acclaimed multi-volume Balkan Saga *Saga Ballkanike – Kështjella prej hiri*. In this saga the author traces his family history from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the 20th century to the collapse of Yugoslavia at the end of the same century. Like the other volumes of the saga, this novel presents the Balkans not as a region of inherited hatreds, but a place where people of different ethnicities together suffered war, poverty, and exile.

The story is set in Skopje at the end of the 1940s, in the critical period leading to Tito's break with Stalin. Pushed to leave mountain villages to become the new proletariat in urban factories, a flood of peasants crowds into Skopje – and with them, all of their goats. The newcomers are welcomed by Skopje's citizens who are suffering from hunger. Unfortunately the central government issues an order calling for the slaughter of the country's goat population: the municipal leaders are faced with a dilemma: With food so scarce, will they hide the outlawed animals? Or will they comply with the order and endure the bite of hunger.

3. A Comparison of the Two Versions of the Novel

A comparison of the two versions shows similarities and textual variations of different kinds. A problem of non-equivalence at word level is represented by the Albanian adjectival phrase *djathë i bardhë* 'white cheese', example (1), which refers to a specific type of cheese made from sheep's milk, typical of the Albanian culture. As Mona Baker claims:

"the lexical meaning of a word or lexical unit may be thought of as the specific value it has in the particular linguistic system and in the 'personality' it acquires through usage within that system" (Baker 1992, p. 12).

In the corresponding Macedonian sentence, example (2), appears the phrase *младо сирење* "young cheese" which refers instead to a generic type of cheese because this specific meaning is not lexicalized in the Macedonian language:

- (1) Albanian: *Çanga, përmes dhiarëve i dërgoi shpejt sekretarit të partisë një kade të vogël me djathë të bardhë të njomë që, e lezetuar me pak qepë, përbënte rregullisht mezen e tij* (Starova 2004, p. 6).

² Luan Starova 2004, *Koha e Dhive*, Logos-A, Shkup.

‘Some goatherds sent by Çanga gave the Party secretary a small bucket filled with young white cheese which, as a snack, was regularly tasted with a little onion’.

- (2) Macedonian: *Козари испратени од Чанга, му носеа на партискиот секретар младо сирење во мало каче, од кое тој со задоволство мезеше со младо кромитче* (Старова 1993, p. 22).

‘Some goatherds sent by Çanga gave the Party secretary a small bucket filled with young cheese and the Party secretary was delighted to nibble it along with a fresh little onion’.

As a legacy of the secular Ottoman domination, the common Balkan traditions and lifestyles are represented by the uses of the noun Albanian *meze* ‘appetizer’ and the verbal form Maced. *мези* ‘to snack’ loaned from Turkish *meze* ‘appetizer’ (Dizdari 2005, p. 655). Many other lexical borrowings which belong to the common corpus of Balkan Turkisms (Falaleev 2016) are found elsewhere in both texts, like e.g. the plural forms Albanian *komshi* (Dizdari 2005, pp. 549-550), Macedonian *комиши* ‘neighbours’, the interjections Macedonian *аферим* ‘bravo!’ (Dizdari 2005, p. 5),³ Albanian *për hajr* ‘success!’ (Dizdari 2005, pp. 325-327), which are used especially in dialects and in informal registers to express a wide variety of emotions such as excitement, joy, or surprise:

- (3) Albanian: *Urime e për hajr ju qoftë, o komshi! Ju jeni tash i yni!* (Starova 2004, p. 30).
‘Congratulations! Success, neighbours, now you are one of us!’
- (4) Macedonian: *Аферим, аферим, комиши, и вие сте сега наши!* (Старова 1993, p. 41).
‘Bravo, bravo, neighbours, now you are one of us!’

The two texts contain an extremely colourful language, plenty of idioms, metaphors and other figurative expressions, which make them an ideal piece of literature for investigating idiomatic culture-specific expressions. The fact that idioms are frozen patterns of language which allow no variation in form and often carry a meaning which can not be deduced from their individual components makes their translatability rather tricky. Nonetheless Starova has used equivalent idioms in Albanian and Macedonian, thus (re)creating the same linguistic and stylistic richness in both versions:

- (5) Albanian: *Disa njerëz keqdashës thonin duke pëshpëritur se ai kishte qen një spiun i futur në lagje, që kishte bashkëpunuar me autoritetet që në fillim dhe i kishte lënë tani banorët me gisht në gojë* (Starova 2004, pp. 84-85).
‘A few malicious people spread a rumor that he entered as a spy in the goatherd Quarter, that he had worked constantly with the authorities, and now he had left the inhabitants in the lurch!’.
- (6) Macedonian: *Ретки зловници потајно тврдеа дека тој бил уфрлен шпион во Козар маало, постојано соработувал со властите, а сега сите ги оставил на џедило* (Старова 1993, p. 108).
‘A few malicious people secretly said that he entered as a spy in the goatherd quarter, that he had worked constantly with the authorities, and now he had left everyone in the lurch!’.

The strategy of matching an idiom (Albanian: *i kishte lënë tani banorët me gisht në gojë* ‘and now he had left the inhabitants in the lurch!’; lit. ‘he had left them with the finger in the mouth’) by an other idiom (Macedonian: *a сега сите ги оставил на џедило* ‘and now he had left everyone in the lurch!’ lit. ‘He had left everyone on the sieve’) can only occasionally be achieved. In examples (7) and (8) a Macedonian non-idiomatic expression (*козите, проклети да бидат!* ‘The goats, may they be they damned!’

³ This Turkish loanword is widespread across many Balkan languages, but entered Albanian language with a more regional diffusion.

corresponds to an Albanian idiom (*Dhitë i marrtë e mira i marrtë!* 'The goats, to hell with the lot of them!'). The use of this idiom which is deeply radicated in Albanian folk culture (Thomai 1999, p. 684), adds special vividness of style and expressive meaning to the Albanian version:

- (7) Albanian: *Dhitë i marrtë e mira i marrtë! U tërbuan fare asaj pranvere. Të pashoqëruara nga askush, ata hallavitëshin nëpër qytet si fantazma bardhoshë, shpesh në tufë, të ndezuara si flake* (Starova 2004, p. 17).
 'The goats, to hell with the lot of them!, ran wild that spring. They gambolled alone through the city, like white phantoms, lit in flames, often whole herds of them'.
- (8) Macedonian: *A kozite, prokleti da bidat, recиси zбеснаа таа пролет. Шетаа сами низ градот, како бели привиденија, во фурии, неретко во стадо* (Старова 1993, p. 24).
 'Meanwhile the goats, may they be they damned, ran wild that spring. They gambolled alone through the city, like white phantoms, in a fury, often whole herds of them'.

In the next example (9) the Albanian idiomatic expression *më raftë pika* (Thomai 1999, p. 762) 'I will be damned' is preferred to the adjectival phrase *e zeza unë* (Adjective ^{black sg. f.} Personal Pronoun ^{I. pers. Sg.}) which has a precise equivalent in *црна јас* 'poor me' of the Macedonian version (10) since in both languages the corresponding adjective has extended its meaning from 'black' to 'miserable, wretched' through metaphorical usage:

- (9) Albanian: *Fëmijët, më raftë pika, më raftë, kanë rënë pa asnjë kafshat buke, me barkun bosh* (Starova 2004, p. 25).
 'The children, I will be damned, have gone to bed without a crumb of bread, they are hungry.'
- (10) Macedonian: *Децата, црна јас, легнаа без залче леб, гладни* (Старова 1993, p. 34).
 'The children, poor me, have gone to bed without a crumb of bread, they are hungry'.

The comparison of the two parts exhibits that they differ in quite a few details. Starova prefers to highlight the specificity and the indivituality of each text, as can be seen in the following examples where the variations are marked in bold:

- (11) Albanian: *Por ishte e vërtetë edhe që Çanga ishte i mprehtë dhe me humor. Fjalët sikur dilnin nga shpirti i tij* (Starova 2004, p. 38).
 'But it was true that Çanga was sharp **and with humour. It was as if the words came out of his soul**'.
- (12) Macedonian: *Но Чанга имаше стреловит ум. Вистинските зборови сами му се лепеа за душата* (Старова 1993, p. 51).
 'But Çanga had a razor-sharp mind. The **true words alone attached themselves to his soul**'.
- (13) Albanian: *Me siguri do t'ia rregullonin qejfin skretarit të Partisë* (Starova 2004, p. 16).
 'It was sure that they would have fixed up the Party secretary'.
- (14) Macedonian: *Сигурно не ќе поминеше добро партискиот секретар на градот* (Старова 1993, p. 23).
 'It was sure that things **would not have gone well** for the Municipal Party secretary'.
- (15) Albanian: *Vdekja mund të jetë për njeriun burim i një ankthi të madh, por kjo lloj ndjenje është e huaj për kafshët! Tha Çanga paksa i çuditur* (Starova 2004, p. 46).
 'Death can be a great **source of anxiety** for people. Animals do not have those feelings! - Çanga said in wonder'.
- (16) Macedonian: *Смртта на луѓето може да им биде голем изговор. Животните се без такво чувство! –рече зачудено Чанга* (Старова 1993, p. 60).
 'Death can be a great **excuse** for people. Animals do not have those feelings! -Çanga said in wonder'.

Not infrequently the Albanian text contains more information than the Macedonian one:

- (17) Albanian: *Ai shpesh na fuste **tinës** ndonjë dyshkë* (Starova 2004, p. 36).
‘He would give us **secretly** a penny’.
- (18) Macedonian: *А тој често ни даваше по некоја пара* (Старова 1993, p. 48).
‘And he would often gives us some coin’.
- (19) Albanian: ‘Gjuetja e shtrigave’ *ndiqte rrugën e vet, proceset **kokë e këmbët** të montuara ndiqnin njërin-tjetrin* (Starova 2004, p. 15).
‘The “witch hunt” continued. Trials which were **completely** a farce followed one another’.
- (20) Macedonian: *Продолжување 'ловот на веитерки', се редеа монтираните процеси* (Старова 1993, p. 21).
‘The “witch hunt” continued. Farce trials were held’.
- (21) Albanian: *Edhe dhitë morën forcë e **gjallëri*** (Starova 2004, p. 16).
‘And the goats got back their vigor **and vivacity**’.
- (22) Macedonian: *И козите добиваа сила. Речиси ја мелеа самата земја, ги извлекуваа нејзините последни сокови* (Старова 1993, p. 22).
‘And the goats got back their vigor’.

In the following (23) and (24) Starova creates the poetic metaphor *птицата на стравот* (‘the bird of fear’) to express his father’s feeling of anguish. This poetic image is completely missing in the Albanian version:

- (23) Albanian: *Por, kur babai ishte me Çangën, shpirti i tij hapej deri në atë shkallë, sa i larghe frika* (Starova 2004, p. 37).
‘But when father was with Çanga, his soul opened up so much that he dismissed his fear’.
- (24) Macedonian: *На татко ми кога беше со Чанга, му се отворише душата и од неа излетуваше птицата на стравот* (Старова 1993, p. 49).
‘But when father was with Çanga his soul opened up so much that the bird of fear escaped from it’.

As a bilingual and bi-cultural mediator, Starova has built a bridge between the Albanian and Macedonian cultures. The process of (re)creation and (re)writing some parts of the text blurs a clear-cut distinction between the ‘original’, represented by the first version of the novel published in Macedonian, and the ‘translated’ version, published in Albanian nine years later. The result is a sort of ‘twin work’ or better said a ‘bicephalic’ text in which the different lexical and stylistic choices are adapted to the two different linguistic, semantic, pragmatic and sociocultural contexts.

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