Darin TENEV, « Derrida in Bulgarian », *Traduire Derrida aujourd'hui*, revue ITER N°2, 2020.

The context never provides a sufficient explanation for anything. Yet it is always necessary to grasp as much of it as possible. In the present essay I will delineate some particularities of the Bulgarian translations of Jacques Derrida, translations that form an important part of the Bulgarian reception of the French thinker, and in order to do this, in order to tell my story so that it does not fall apart completely, it is necessary—albeit not sufficient—to start with the context of this reception.

There were no published translations in Bulgarian of any of Derrida's texts until the 1990s. This could be explained by the political regime, and the fact that during the rule of the Communist party many Western thinkers were prohibited. However, things were apparently more complicated as there existed translations of Sartre and Camus, and also of Roland Barthes and Philippe Sollers already by the end of the 1960s,[1] and later of Maurice Blanchot, Louis Althusser and others. Therefore, one can suspect that not unlike Joyce, Derrida was not translated mainly for reasons other than simply ideological. In the case of Derrida one can speculate that these reasons have to do with the *lasting influence of structuralism and of Bakhtin* all through the 1960s and the 1970s.[2] It may come as no surprise that the two Bulgarians who went to France and became world famous at precisely that time, namely Tzvetan Todorov and Julia Kristeva, were both engaged initially with structuralism and were both introducing Bakhtin to the West. It was only during the 1980s that people in the humanities started reading Derrida, together with Foucault, Bourdieu, Lyotard, Deleuze, etc. It is also during the 1980s that the interest in phenomenology increased (not only in philosophy but also in sociology and literary studies). It can be claimed that the first translations of Derrida were born out of the specific context of the 1980s when there was a proliferation of university seminars which brought about a different set of dispositions towards the humanities in general. Some of these seminars were formally organized, others were informal but all of them contributed to the transformation of the academic landscape and made possible the proliferation of various types of critical discourses hitherto unthinkable.[3]

What started in the 1980s in oral discussions and circulation of unpublished papers and

manuscripts in small academic communities led, after 1989, to multiple publications of a variety of thinkers ranging from Nietzsche, Freud or Bergson to Heidegger and Jaspers, Derrida and Foucault. Among other things, this meant that Derrida was translated into a language that had no established phenomenological and psychoanalytical vocabulary; there was still no consensus whatsoever about the Bulgarian rendition of key notions such as Heidegger's *Dasein* or Bataille's *excès*, and so on. For instance, a book by Heidegger was published for the first time in Bulgarian in the same year when the first two books by Derrida came out.[4]

On the other hand, the dominance of Hegelian-Marxist discourses throughout the socialist regime had fixed the translation of concepts such as *Aufhebung* to the extent that any other translation would have made the reference to Hegel unintelligible.[5]

In other words, when speaking about the task of the translator of Derrida in Bulgarian from the beginning of the 1990s, even before commenting on the puns and neologisms of the French thinker, one has to point to the necessity of *inventing* simultaneously both the discourse of Derrida and the discourse Derrida is writing about, i.e., is commenting and deconstructing. The invention was at least two-fold. On the one hand, the translators had to introduce or rather create Bulgarian terms for the phenomenological, psychoanalytic and other concepts that were at the same time or later introduced in a different manner by the translators of Husserl, Freud, etc. On the other hand, they had to find ways of transforming the existing philosophical vocabulary so that the reader can still grasp the Kantian, Hegelian and other references without disrupting the coherence of Derrida's text often reliant upon the specific French translations and the chances the French language gives. The two-sided problem of *non-existing vocabulary* and *all too fixed vocabulary* was a constant stumbling block before any translator of Derrida from that time.

It can be argued that this situation changed with the end of the 1990s since by then—and not without the help of Derrida's translations—to a large extent the vocabulary (or I should say 'vocabularies') of the humanities had evolved and already offered a variety of options for rendering phenomenological, existentialist, neo-Marxist, psychoanalytical, and semiotic terms in Bulgarian. Meanwhile, even the most inflexible of Hegelian-Marxist terms went through a transformation that opened them up to other uses (sometimes to the detriment of the more rigid philosophical conceptuality) while other terms were being employed (and often without any reflection) in their place. Slowly but surely the linguistic chaos of the

1990s gave way to a normalization of the discourse in the different fields of the human sciences. In this sense, translating Derrida in the last twenty years was, I believe, much easier than before.

But the translation of Derrida was never simply about translating his texts. It was just as often a problem of finding Bulgarian renditions of his key notions such as *différance* when trying to introduce his thought or to practice deconstruction. And it was often done in critical essays and text commentaries, and not only in book translations. Of course, this aspect of translation extracts the terms out of the syntax of the Derridean texts and runs the risk of substantivizing them. It nonetheless remains part of Derrida's translation in Bulgarian and should be studied as such.

A case in point is the celebrated *différance*. In fact, its Bulgarian variants to a large extent exemplify the different strategies of translating Derrida in the broader sense. And it must be noted right away that three of the most innovative versions of rendering *différance* come from sources other than translations of Derridean texts. Here I will briefly present the different Bulgarian versions of *différance* precisely as being representative of the way Bulgarian translators tackle the difficulty of rendering both Derrida's writing and his conceptual moves.

The translation of the eponymous essay, which was published only in 1999,[6] actually does not translate but simply transcribes in Cyrillic the French neologism. This can be seen as part and parcel of the linguistic chaos of the 1990s when translators without much experience, faced with too many terms and neologisms that had no existing Bulgarian equivalents, preferred to transcribe and not to translate them. This strategy (which I would call a 'strategy of helplessness') made many texts simply incomprehensible. In the case of Derrida's essay however this helped introduce the neologism as a technical term whose meanings the text explains so that not much innovation on the part of the translator is needed.

In her translation of *Of Grammatology*, Zhana Damyanova, one of the most prominent translators of the French thinker, also keeps the French word but does not transcribe it in Cyrillic and thus, instead of simply using it as a technical term, manages to stress its untranslatability.[7]

In the first translation of *Voice and Phenomenon*, published in 1996 and almost immediately sold out, *différance* is rendered as *razlichavane* (an equivalent for *differentiation*), a substantivized form of the verb *razlichavam* or *to differentiate*.[8] This version puts the accent on the active side of *différance*. The whole aspect of deferral and postponing is absent, and this makes the translation somewhat awkward. For example, one reads that the two meanings of 'differentiating' are 'to differentiate' and 'to postpone' but this does not make sense in Bulgarian as there is no 'postponing' in *razlichavane*.[9] There are many translator's footnotes but nowhere is *différance* commented on.

In the second translation of the book, published in 2007, the translator Krassimir Kavaldzhiev uses two words—*razlika* (difference) and *otsrochka* (deferral)—with a hyphen.[10] In this way he manages to communicate the two main aspects of *différance* without introducing a neologism. He comments on the word in his postface claiming that it is not translatable by a single word in Bulgarian precisely because of the irreducibility of the two main meanings of the French verb *différer*.[11] Thus, even for the translator his version *razlika-otsrochka* is a compromise, an unavoidable compromise. It must be said that many of the other difficulties in translating this work such as the use of the colloquial *vouloir dire*, etc., find an elegant solution that does not sound unnatural and yet does not betray Derrida's complexity on the level of linguistic expression.

The strategies described above have many positive aspects, but it seems as if they all refuse to take advantage of the possibilities offered by the Bulgarian language when it comes to translating *différance*. The three most innovative versions I mentioned above, on the contrary, are linguistic experiments on the level of the Bulgarian word for difference. And they are not to be found in the translation of Derrida's texts. Before I describe them, I should say that in Bulgarian there are two words for 'difference' stemming from the same root: *razlika* and *razlichie*. Roughly put, *razlika* is the specific difference between two things whereas *razlichie* is the more general term. If one asks the question 'What is difference?' in Bulgarian one will usually employ *razlichie*; and when one asks 'What is the difference between this and that?', one will usually employ *razlika*. Needless to say, there are many occasions where the two words may be used interchangeably.

The first experiment I will focus on is in an essay introducing Derrida and deconstruction by Vladimir Trendafilov.[12] In it Trendafilov explains Derrida's neologism, and proposes to render it in Bulgarian by *razlik*. This would be the same word as *razlika*, without the last

vowel. In this way, the word will sound unfinished and not-whole, and will express "the unfinished difference, the movement of realization of the word for difference without the realization actually taking place."[13] Interestingly enough, it is not by introducing an "a" as in Derrida but by taking it away that Trendafilov is able to suggest the postponing of the realization on the level of the word itself. His argument is that any particular difference in the world is unavoidably already part and parcel of a metaphysical system and that, with Derrida, we should think beyond (or rather on this side of) the concrete differences. The aspect of 'deferral' in this translation is not expressed by the meaning of the word but by its form. Proposed as early as 1992 this translation of *différance* was quickly forgotten.

The second experiment is proposed by Vladimir Gradev in his translation of Gilles Deleuze's *Difference and repetition*. Gradev who has translated several books by Derrida, insists in his postface that there is no such thing as untranslatable words and points to Derrida's *différance*. In Deleuze's work Derrida's neologism is mentioned once in a footnote[14] and Gradev proposes his version in the translation of this footnote.[15] Gradev uses the more general word *razlichie* but changes the final "e" with an already extinct Cyrillic letter for "e". In this way he introduces a visual difference in the writing that cannot be pronounced. At the same time this form suggests a certain lag or anachronism on the level of the word. It recalls Heidegger's shift from *Sein* to *Seyn*, but the shift of the letter here cannot be justified by the history of language and is rather a purely conceptual linguistic experiment.

The final translation of *différance* I will comment upon was invented by Dimitar Kambourov who was among the most active deconstructionists in the Bulgarian academia in the 1990s and was one of the people who introduced deconstruction in the sphere of higher education and made it popular. The translation appears in his literary criticism where he offers unexpected readings and re-readings of Bulgarian lyrical works; in other words, it is not in commenting Derrida, but rather in thinking with Derrida about works which Derrida most probably never read that Kambourov introduces his version for *différance*. And this version is *razlachie*. He substitutes the "i" in *razlichie* (difference) with an "a": *razlachie*. This looks formally similar to what Derrida had done in his neologism with the "a" (the first letter in the alphabet, etc.). However, in Bulgarian this has a different connotation. The neologism *razlachie* is a portmanteau word that inscribes the "lag" of *ot*lag*ane* (deferral, postponement) in *razlichie* and at the same time suggests to the native speaker the idea of spacing.[16] A true linguistic invention, Kambourov's neologism was rather neglected in

the 1990s but recently has become more and more popular. I find it very appealing and use it in my translations of Derrida's texts as well as in my own essays on Derrida.

It should be noted that both Kambourov and Trendafilov are literary scholars and that French is not their first foreign language. One can suspect that in Bulgaria deconstruction became popular in the field of literary studies (and not that of philosophy, or any other discipline) under the influence of American academic fashions. Yet, whatever the origin of this popularity, it is precisely in this sphere that some of the boldest attempts to translate key notions using the linguistic resources of the Bulgarian occurred. And it is perhaps mostly with the help of literary studies that Derridean terms such as *trace* and *dissemination* have permeated theoretical language in Bulgaria and have contaminated the discourse of the humanities.

As for Vladimir Gradev who proposed his version of *différance* in his translation of Deleuze—certainly an eccentric and interesting decision—, he graduated in French literature and, after completing a dissertation on Foucaut, Derrida, Deleuze, Blanchot, but also Giordano Bruno, Bossuet, Sir Thomas Brown and others, and has written extensively on Heidegger, Benjamin, mysticism and so on. His philological background combined with his philosophical reflection gave birth to some of the most praiseworthy translations of Derrida. They are interesting not only in the way they translate particular neologisms or ambivalent words like *différance*, but also thanks to their specific focus on Derridean syntax and turn of phrase as well as on etymological figures (such as, for example, the play with the 'cap' in *L'Autre cap*, or the use of the derivatives of "-demn-", "-propr-", "-racine-" and others in *Foi et savoir*, etc.).[17] Just as in the case of his translation of Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*, Gradev makes abundant use of the Bulgarian prefix system in his translations of Derrida, which allows him to work more flexibly on words with Slavic roots, thus making the translation sound more natural; but this does not stop him from employing Bulgarian words with Latin origin when he has to stress the Latin traces in Derrida's discourse or when Derrida himself puts the accent on "Latinity" and "*mondialatinisation*". Gradev's strategy in translating Derrida has been taken up in the last few years by other translators and it could be argued that it formed an important trend in this field.

The peak in the translations of Derrida in Bulgarian was perhaps 2001, which is not unrelated to the fact that in the autumn of the same year Derrida himself came to Sofia for

a conference together with Jean-Luc Nancy, Ginette Michaud, Bernhard Waldenfels and many others. Since then the publication of Derrida has been rather sporadic and more texts have appeared in journals and periodicals than in book form. On the other hand, the research on Derrida has expanded. Several dissertations have been written on the French thinker in different disciplines—literary criticism, pedagogy, philosophy of religion, cultural studies. Several conferences have been dedicated to Derrida just in the last couple of years. All this activity is in more than one way related to the translations of his texts, and simultaneously to the promise of translations to come.

In 1993 the first text by Derrida to appear in book form was “Des tours de Babel”, one of the key texts Derrida wrote on translation, and the text was preceded by a long foreword by the translator Georgy Katsarov that focused on the problems of translating Derrida writing on translation.[18] By focusing on the example of *différance*, I have tried to demonstrate in this essay how ever since the first translations of Derrida into Bulgarian, the particularities of this translating effort, as dominated by the context as they were, exhibited a taste for trying out different strategies oriented toward different ends; among other things, this has meant and still means an ongoing reflection on translation that has permeated not only the reception of Derrida, but also theoretical language in general—and the question of translation is one that makes us ask if there ever was such a thing as “theoretical language in general”[19].

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[1] It must be mentioned that the translations of Barthes and Sollers were not really accessible as they appeared in a limited edition of the journal of Bulgarian translators. Cf. Vassil Garnizov, “Strukturalism i kasen socializam [Structuralism and Late Socialism]”, In: *Vekat na strukturalizma* [*The Century of Structuralism*]. Ed. Vassil Garnizov. Sofia: Nov bulgarski universitet, 2017, pp. 178-252.

[2] On the state of the human sciences in Bulgaria during this time, cf. the special issue of Slavica TerGestina, vol. 20, I/ 2018, dedicated to the history of literary theory in Bulgaria. Like elsewhere, in that period literary theory was more than just a theory about literature.

[3] On the crucial role of the seminars from the 1980s, see Miglena Nikolchina, *Lost Unicorns of the Velvet Revolution*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2012.

[4] In the case of Heidegger, it was a collection of significant texts, including “What is Metaphysics”, “The Origin of the Work of Art” and “Letter on Humanism”. See Martin Heideger, *Sashtnosti*, translated by Dimitar Denkov and Hristo Todorov, Sofia: Gal-Iko, 1993. The first book on Heidegger, written by one of the translators, Dimitar Denkov, was published the previous year. There was no published translation of *Being and Time* until 2005.

The first two books by Derrida in Bulgarian were *Positions* and *Des tours de Babel* (this text was published as a small book on its own), both translated by Georgy Katsarov who wrote his dissertation under Derrida’s supervision. See Jacques Derrida, *Pozitsii*, translated by Georgy Katsarov, Sofia: Kritika i humanism, 1993, and Jacques Derrida, *Vavilonski kuli*, translated by Georgy Katsarov, Sofia: Kritika i humanism, 1993.

[5] On the adventures in translating Hegel’s *Aufhebung* in Western and in Eastern Europe, see again NIkolchina, *Lost Unicorns of the Velvet Revolution*, op. cit. The Bulgarian term for it (‘*snemane*’) is a loanword from the Russian translation.

[6] See Jacques Derrida, “Diferans”, translated by Rositsa Pironska, *Demokraticheski pregled*, 39-40/ 1999, pp. 769-770.

[7] See Jacques Derrida, *Za gramatologiata*, translated by Zhana Damyanova, Sofia: Lik, 2001.

[8] See Jacques Derrida, *Glasat i phenomena*, translated by Todorka Mineva, Sofia: Lik, 1996.

[9] See ibid., p. 121.

[10] See Jacques Derrida, *Glasat i phenomenat*, translated by Krassimir Kavaldzhiev, Sofia: Sema-RS, 2007.

[11] See ibid., p. 115.

[12] See Vladimir Trendafilov, “Dekonstruktsiyata u Derrida I niakoi negovi posledovateli”, *Savremennik*, 2/ 1992, pp. 285-294. It should be noted that Trendafilov was professor in

English literature and Translation studies at the University of Sofia.

[13] Ibid., p. 289.

[14] See Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et répétition*, Paris: PUF, 1997 (1968), p. 164 n1.

[15] See Gilles Deleuze, *Razlichie I povtorenie*, translated by Vladimir Gradev and Irena Kristeva, Sofia: Kritika i humanism, 1999, p. 163n30.

[16] See, for example, Dimitar Kambourov, *Bulgarska liricheska klasika*, Sofia: Prosveta, 2004, pp. 206, 332.

[17] See Jacques Derrida, *Drugoto oglaviavane*, translated by Vladimir Gradev, Sofia: Lik, 2001; and Jacques Derrida, *Vyara i znanie*, translated by Vladimir Gradev, Sofia: Lik, 2001.

[18] See Georgy Katsarov, “From Derrida to Дерида”, in: Jacques Derrida, *Vavilonski kuli*, op. cit., pp. 3-26.

[19] See Nikola Georgiev, “Literaturovedskiat Vavilon”, *Literaturovedskiat vavilon*, Sofia: Iztok-Zapad, 2019.