



## ПЕРЕВОДОВЕДЕНИЕ

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### IS IT WORTH MULTIPLYING TRANSLATION MULTIPLICITY? FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF WORKING ON A NEW TRANSLATION OF MULTATULI'S *MAX HAVELAAR*

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The article is written within the framework of a relatively new trend in translation studies — the study of translation multiplicity (or, in other terminology, re-translation) of fiction. It uses Multatuli's *Max Havelaar* (pseudonym of Eduard Douwes Dekker (1820–1887)) as its research material. It is an anti-colonial novel with autobiographical elements that opened Dutch readers' eyes to the real state of affairs in the Dutch East Indies. These days, *Max Havelaar* is enjoying a worldwide surge in popularity: between 2017 and 2022, its new translations and retranslations have been published in twelve languages, including English, French and Azerbaijani. The authors of this article, who were involved in creating a new Russian translation (the planned year of publication is 2022), analyse the work of their predecessors — the previous seven Russian editions of the novel, which were published from 1916 to 1959. The analysis leads to the conclusion that the previous Russian versions of *Max Havelaar* do not meet the modern norms of translation (in the terminology of G. Toury), since all the 20<sup>th</sup>-century translations of the novel were made not from the Dutch original, but from a German translation, which had been made from the abridged edition of 1871, and not from the full author's version of 1875–1881. These translations are full of literalisms that do not take into

account the context; they contain errors in understanding the author's text and are unnecessarily difficult to understand. This is why there is a need for a new, modern Russian version, which will allow Russian readers to appreciate Multatuli's famous book at its true value. The differences in translation strategies in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries are listed and relevant examples are given.

**Keywords:** translation multiplicity, translation plurality, re-translation, Multatuli, E. D. Dekker, *Max Havelaar*, speaking (meaningful) names.

## 1. HISTORY OF RUSSIAN TRANSLATIONS OF MAX HAVELAAR IN THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

It was only ten years after his death that the Russian public first heard of Multatuli (Eduard Douwes Dekker, 1820–1887): in 1896, the author of an introductory article to a series of stories entitled *Dutch Humorists* published in the *St Petersburg Herald of Foreign Literature* described the Dutch writer as a “precursor of a new movement” which revived Dutch literature. According to the anonymous reviewer, Multatuli “was the first to attempt to introduce entirely new material into literature and break the shackles in which the Dutch language had been confined for two centuries”, and “gave brilliant examples of humour” in *Woutertje Pieterse*, an excerpt from which was also published as part of this series [Dekker, 1896, p.220]. Of Dekker's most famous novel, he said the following: “*Max Havelaar*, published in 1860, caused a real sensation in Holland” [Dutch humourists, 1896, p.213]. Indeed, this highly artistic and imaginative anti-colonial novel with autobiographical elements, which opened Dutch readers' eyes to the real state of affairs in the Dutch East Indies, where with the connivance of colonial officials the local peasants were subjected to terrible oppression, and where the revolts that broke out here and there were brutally crushed by the Dutch colonial army, was warmly received by the public, made its author famous and contributed to reforms in the Dutch colony — modern Indonesia.

Russian readers were not immediately able to enjoy a full translation of the novel: between 1899 and 1914, a translation of the extensive epigraph to the novel (*Onuitgegeven toneelspel*) was published and at least four translations of Chapter 11 (Fragment, *De Japansche Steenhouwer*) and five translations of Chapter 17 (*Saidja en Adinda*) were published. It was not until 1916 that Zinaida Zhuravskaya translated the entire novel for the first time, though not from Dutch but from German, using a little-known translation by K. Mischke. It is noteworthy that *Max Havelaar*

was usually translated into other languages, if not directly, then through a translation by the celebrated German “apostle of Multatuli” W. Spöhr, whose text is of higher quality and is virtually an authorised translation, approved by Dekker himself. The novel was published in the Soviet Union in 1925, and the translator I. D. Markuson also used Mischke’s translation. The above mentioned Russian translations did not include Multatuli’s numerous commentaries, but instead Mischke’s notes were incorporated into the Russian texts. In 1927, a fuller translation from the Dutch by the orientalist M. I. Tubiansky was published. However, M. I. Tubiansky relied heavily on the 1925 version: he borrowed many translation solutions, some parts of the original were still left out, and Multatuli’s commentaries were not recovered. In 1928, a “literary adaptation” by Palmbakh was published, which was an abridged and adapted version of the novel compiled from the two previous translations. Tubiansky’s translation was subsequently published three more times: in 1936 (with minor corrections), in 1949 (with some literary editing) and in 1959 (an edited version of 1949 with omitted fragments restored and inaccuracies corrected) [Grave, Vekshina, 2021]. In the last two editions, the translator’s name was not given, most probably because he was arrested “for suspected links with the nationalist clergy of Mongolia and Buryatia and subversive activities connected with ideas of tearing away the Central Asian territories from the USSR and creating a new state of some sort — ‘Pan Mongolia’ — under the protectorate of militarist Japan” and shot on November 24, 1937 [Ostrovskaya, 2012, p. 58].

Until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Multatuli’s works were regularly published and reprinted in our country. Altogether no fewer than forty books were published between 1896 and 1959. This gave S. A. Mironov grounds to state in 1968 that “the famous Dutch writer Multatuli is still very well known in our country” [Mironov, 1968–1969, p. 95]. However, after 1959 the flow of Multatuli’s publications in Russia ceased for more than 60 years.

## 2. THE MAIN POINTS OF THE THEORY OF TRANSLATION MULTIPLICITY

An analysis of the Russian translations of *Max Havelaar* is impossible without using the notion of translation multiplicity as a tool. There are other terms for this phenomenon: multiple translations, translation plurality and re-translation. Despite variations in terminology and

new theoretical developments on the subject, the definition given by Yu. D. Levin in 1992 is still relevant today: translation multiplicity is “the existence in a given national literature of several translations of the same foreign-language literary work, which in the original language has, as a rule, only one textual version” [Levin, 1992, p. 213]. The clarification “as a rule” is highly relevant in the case of *Max Havelaar*, since during Multatuli’s lifetime his novel was republished in the Netherlands six times, and the last two times with the author’s corrections. It is important to note that the German translation by K. Mischke is based on an earlier version of the novel.

It is possible to distinguish several types of translation multiplicity. In terms of time span, translation multiplicity is conventionally divided into synchronic (translations published around the same time) and diachronic (translations published consecutively). According to P. Toper, the former group “is the result of a competition of talents and the latter is a means of accumulating traditions” [Sherstneva, 2008, p. 527]. Furthermore, translation multiplicity is divided into active, passive and competing multiplicity. Active multiplicity implies the active functioning of translations published at different times: they are published and republished in equal numbers. One example of such multiplicity is the translations of Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* by Gurova and by Marshak [Isaeva, Dobriakova, 2019]. Passive translation multiplicity refers to the presence of several translations that remain in the shadow of a single translation, which effectively serves as a substitute text in the target language for the original. A competing translation multiplicity occurs when translations are simultaneously published and recognised. Another dichotomy in translation multiplicity is the division into real multiplicity and potential multiplicity. By real multiplicity is meant the actual number of translations of a given work. Potential multiplicity is the theoretical possibility of multiple translations of a text.

In their work *The Inexhaustibility of the Original*, R. R. Tchaikovsky and E. L. Lysenkova list ten postulates of translation multiplicity [Tchaikovsky, Lysenkova, 2001], to which Lysenkova (already without co-authorship with Tchaikovsky) adds five new postulates, and then later E. S. Sherstneva adds five more. All twenty postulates characterise the translation multiplicity from different perspectives: these are the principles and observations concerning the phenomenon, as well as its functions. One of the postulates states: “Translation multiplicity entails

making maximum use of all the resources of the target language. Once all means of adequately recreating the original have been exhausted in a language, it will be impossible to create new adequate translations in that language” [Sherstneva, 2008, p. 528]. This postulate can also be seen as providing a reason for creating new translations (in addition to the inexhaustibility of the original and the potentially infinite number of interpretations): the insufficient use of language resources in previous translations.

### 3. THE DECISION TO CREATE A NEW TRANSLATION OF THE NOVEL

The year 2020 saw the celebration of Multatuli’s 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary in the Netherlands and several other countries. A conference dedicated to his work was held in St Petersburg, where the idea was born to publish a new Russian translation of *Max Havelaar*<sup>1</sup>. On the one hand, this decision was taken because this classic writer of Dutch literature has been undeservedly forgotten in our country, although worldwide his works, especially *Max Havelaar*, continue to be translated and enjoy success. According to the database of the Dutch Foundation for Literature, the first Arabic translation came out in 2017, a Greek one in 2018, an Azerbaijani one in 2020, an Amharic one in 2021, the novel book has also been re-translated into Spanish (2017), English (2019) and French (2020), re-issued in Hebrew (2020) and now is being translated into Bulgarian and Macedonian. On the other hand, it would not be possible simply to reprint one of the existing translations, since none of them conform to the current translation norms, both **initial** and **operational** [Toury, 1995]. While virtually all the previous versions were based on the German translation by Mischke, today’s standards demand that the original, and its most authoritative edition, must be taken as the source text. Such is the scholarly two-volume publication prepared by the literary scholar and textologist Annemarie Kets in 1992, which contains not only the complete text of the novel, without the cuts in the first edition made by the editor Jakob van Lennep, but also Multatuli’s own commentaries of the 1881 edition [Multatuli, 1992]. Regarding operational norms as well as ideas drawn from translation multiplicity theory, it was decided

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<sup>1</sup> It was then decided that the translation team would consist of I. Bassina, I. Michajlova, E. Toritsyna and E. Vekshina.

to follow the principle of dynamic equivalence unflinchingly and to make maximum use of all the Russian language resources accumulated since the last edition of *Max Havelaar* in Russian in 1959 [Multatuli, 1959]. In the following paragraph, we will identify a number of features of the above-mentioned last publication of the novel that are inadequate for today's expectations, and cite some examples.

#### 4. IN WHAT RESPECTS THE 1959 EDITION DOES NOT MEET TODAY'S TRANSLATION STANDARDS. CURRENT TRANSLATION SOLUTIONS

The principle of dynamic equivalence implies that the response to a text by readers in the target culture should be as close as possible to the response of readers of the original at the time when the original was created. All sources on the history of the Dutch language mention that Multatuli's book was a great success in his homeland, among other things because it was written in a lively, natural language that was close to spoken Dutch. However, when reading 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian translations one has to literally wade through great complexities, both of meaning and of language. These translations are replete with **literalisms** that do not take into account the context and therefore distort the meaning and with **deviations from the original**, creating a sense of strangeness in many of the descriptions. Often, logic disappears from the narrative because the macro-level connections of the novel are disrupted.

Of the **literalisms** that distort the text, two are the most dangerous. The first is the translation of the name of the country where the action takes place, Indië, by the Russian word *Индия* (India). The fact is that the Dutch language clearly distinguishes two very similar names for two countries: India and Indië, of which the first is the name of the huge mainland country that used to be an English colony — present-day India, and the second is a smaller island country, now called Indonesia, which was a colony of the Netherlands. In English, the word *India* is used for the first country and *Indies* for the second. As there is only one word *Индия* (India) in Russian, the phrases *Нидерландская Индия* (Dutch India) or *Ост-Индия* (East Indies) should be used to refer to the second country.

The second literalism concerns the translation of a term in the field of the Dutch system of government in the East Indies. The Dutch colonial administration employed local nobles to control the

indigenous populations, embedding them in a hierarchical power structure: local nobles were hired into the Dutch service, paid salaries and appointed as regional, district and village heads, in tandem with Dutch officials. In Dutch, all members of the local nobility who held such an administrative post were called *hoofd* (chief), in contrast to the word *ambtenaar* (official) that was used to call Dutch people in such positions. It was hypocritically believed that as long as both native *chiefs* and metropolitan *officials* were in the service of the King of the Netherlands, they were brothers, with the Dutch being called *elder brothers* and the local nobles *younger brothers*. In all the previously published Russian versions of the novel, the word *hoofd* is translated as *главарь* (ringleader), which means that the denotative meaning of the word is the same as in the original, but the evaluative connotation is quite different. In Russian dictionaries, the word *главарь* (ringleader) is marked as “disapproving”, which completely destroys the glib picture cultivated by the Dutch authorities of an imaginary friendship between the “brothers”. This translation choice makes the entire local nobility appear to be a criminal community, which is not at all what the Dutch administrative term, used extensively in Multatuli’s novel, implies.

**Deviations from the original** are most often caused by a lack of knowledge of the Dutch language, but as often as not by simple inattention to the meaning of phrases. In describing the tragic fate of the Javanese, whose last buffalo is often taken from them by those in power, thus depriving them of their main working tool and condemning entire families to starvation, the author addresses his readers with the sarcastic phrase that they, the Dutch readers, cannot of course be truly concerned about the fate of Javanese people. In translation, the thought goes like this:

*...я не потребую — я еще подожду, о нидерландцы, — чтобы вас это столь же тронуло, как если бы я описал вам судьбу [голландского] крестьянина, у которого отняли корову [Multatuli, 1959, p. 218] (...I will not demand — I will still wait, O Dutchmen — that you be as moved by this as if I described to you the fate of a [Dutch] peasant whose cow was taken away from him).*

The Russian reader is perplexed as to why the author chose to be patient and wait for a while before demanding compassion from Dutch readers. However, according to the original he is not going to wait for anything:

*...zie, ik eisch niet — noch verwacht, o Nederlanders! — dat ge daardoor zult aangegrepen zyn in gelyke maat als wanneer ik u het lot schetste van een boer wien men zyn koe ontnam [Multatuli, 1992, p. 176].*

The Russian translator has undoubtedly confused two homonyms: *nog* is the adverb *yet* and *noch* is part of the double conjunction *neither — nor*. And the correct translation should read: ‘...I do not demand — and do not expect, O Dutchmen! — that you will be moved by this...’.

In the new English translation [Multatuli, 2019] this sentence is absolutely correct:

*...you see, I don't demand — nor do I expect, O Dutch readers! — you to be as moved as you would be if I were describing the fate of a Dutch farmer deprived of his cow [Multatuli, 2019, p. 218–219].*

Sometimes deviations from the original are due to simple **inattention on the part of the translator**. The novel *Max Havelaar* is remarkable for its polyphony (the narration is delivered by several narrators, each with their own voice) and for the variety of narrative forms. Poems that the author either quotes (like Heine's poem in Chapter 10) or composes himself, putting them into the mouths of his characters, including Havelaar himself, feature prominently in the novel. One such character is the young and uneducated but naturally gifted Javanese man Saijah. Multatuli cites allegedly his own Dutch translations of the songs that Saijah composes at pivotal moments in his life. In form, they are *vers libre*, with simple and poetic folkloric imagery, written in slightly primitive colloquial language. Reflecting on Saijah's songs, the author writes:

*Сначала я намеревался использовать при переводе и ритм, и рифму, но потом решил убрать эти «противные пути», как их называл Хавелар [Multatuli, 1959, p. 233].*

*Eerst was myn voornemen wat maat en rym te brengen in die overzetting, doch evenals Havelaar vind ik beter dat keurslyf wegtelaten [Multatuli, 1992, p. 187].*

In the new English translation:

*At first I planned to use rhyme and meter in my version, but like Havelaar, I now think it better to avoid that straitjacket [Multatuli, 2019, p. 234].*

However, the Russian translator(s) paid no attention to these explanations of the author, nor to the form of the verses themselves, and



translated them into Russian quite differently. In one of the episodes, Saijah sings about waiting under a tree for his beloved:

*Maar ik zit alleen by het djati-bosch,  
Wachtende op wat myn hart liefheeft* [Multatuli, 1992, p. 198].

The English translation perfectly captures this simplicity of language of the young Javanese man:

*But I sit alone by the jati wood,  
Waiting for what my heart loves* [Multatuli, 2019, p. 242].

The 1959 edition, however, consistently uses iambic pentameter and adheres to the rule of alternans; the translators resort to pompous turns of phrase which the young Javanese, who had never attended school, could certainly not have known, much less used:

*Но тщетно сердца моего усладу  
Я жду под сенью дерева джати́* [Multatuli, 1959, p. 240].  
(But in vain I await my heart's delight  
under the shade of the jati tree.)

In another song, which the author also “quotes” in full, Saijah reflects on death and love, and all five verses of his song begin with the words *Ik weet niet waar ik sterven zal*, which is rendered as ‘*Не знаю, где умру я*’ (I do not know where I will die) [Multatuli, 1959, p. 233–234].

Nine pages further on, it is described how Saijah becomes mentally disturbed as a result of the suffering he has endured. He sings this same song again, but the translator of the Russian version does not recognise it and translates the same recurring line differently:

...и только по ночам обитатели дома пробуждались, слыша его монотонное пение: ‘*Не знаю, где мне умереть*’ (...and it was only at night that the inhabitants of the house were awakened by his monotonous singing: ‘I do not know where I should die’) [Multatuli, 1959, p. 243].

When translating fiction, a particular challenge is to convey the humour of the original. In *Max Havelaar*, an important factor in creating the humorous effect is the use of funny **speaking (meaningful) character names**. As far as we know, all the local noblemen appearing

in the novel were given their own real names by Multatuli, while for the Dutch characters, whether based on real persons or fictional ones, he invented names to match their character. In previous translations these surnames were rendered by means of transcription, and the result was strings of sounds that were heavy, hard to remember and completely incomprehensible to Russian readers: *Дрогстоппель* (Droogstoppel), *Вавелаар* (Wawelaar), *Слеймеринг* (Slymering).

In order to retain the element of play present in the original and to make the characters' names more agreeable to the Russian ear, it was decided to give them surnames that have meanings similar to the Dutch ones but based on a Russian root. We must admit that our intention to translate the speaking names was strengthened by the English translation of 2019, where these names were also translated and not transcribed or transliterated.

To give just two examples. The main antipode of Havelaar, an ardent fighter for justice, is Droogstoppel, a boring businessman who only cares about money and appearing to be virtuous. His name is made up of two roots: *droog* 'dry' and *stoppel* 'stubble'. *Dry* because everything living in him is dead, *stubble* because he is an unpleasant person and he pricks like stubble. In the English translation, he is suitably called *Drystubble*. After much discussion, it was decided to call him *Сухостебельс* (Sukhostebels) in Russian — literally *dry stalk*. The grandiloquent and hypocritical pastor, to whom Drystubble listens attentively, Multatuli called *Wawelaar* (Waffler), deriving his name from the verb *wauwelen* (to talk gibberish, nonsense). In our translation, he became known as *Фуфелар* (Fufelar), for his supposedly pious speeches are mere rubbish — *фуфло* 'fuflo'.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In summary, the 20<sup>th</sup>-century translations of *Max Havelaar* do not meet current standards of translation, either in terms of initial norms, or operational norms. Certainly, the early Russian translations of Multatuli's novel fulfilled the function they were intended for in Russian society at the time: the 1916 translation, which came out on the eve of the October Revolution of 1917, introduced the work of the Dutch rebel, who believed in justice, to Russian readers. Translations during the Soviet era were also published primarily for ideological and

political reasons in connection with the Soviet Union's struggle against colonialism and the recognition of independence of Indonesia in 1949, with little regard for literary merits of the novel. However, nowadays Multatuli's famous novel is appreciated worldwide as a remarkable artistic work, which organically combines a fervent protest against injustice and brilliant artistic techniques, based to a great extent on sarcasm and humour. It is this unity that we hope to show future readers of the new Russian translation of *Max Havelaar*.

The increase of translation multiplicity of *Max Havelaar* that we produce is diachronic (according to P. Toper's terminology) and, accordingly, it is related to the "accumulation of traditions". By realising the potential translation multiplicity of Multatuli's novel and striving to make the most of the resources of Russian as a target language, we hope that our translation can become a substitute text for the original in Russian culture and language and find its readers among our compatriots. Whether our dreams are justified will be seen in the future.

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**НАДО ЛИ МНОЖИТЬ ПЕРЕВОДНУЮ МНОЖЕСТВЕННОСТЬ?  
ИЗ ОПЫТА РАБОТЫ НАД НОВЫМ ПЕРЕВОДОМ  
«МАКСА ХАВЕЛАРА» МУЛЬТАТУЛИ**

**Для цитирования:** *Vekshina E., Michajlova I. Is it worth multiplying translation multiplicity? From the experience of working on a new translation of Multatuli's Max Havelaar // Скандинавская филология. 2022. Т. 20. Вып. 2. С. 288–300. <https://doi.org/10.21638/11701/spbu21.2022.204>*

Статья написана в русле относительно нового направления в переводоведении — изучения переводной множественности (или, в другой терминологии, повторного перевода) художественной литературы. Материалом служит «Макс Хавелар» Мультиатули (псевдоним Эдуарда Дауеса Деккера (1820–1887)). Это антиколониальный роман с автобиографическими элементами, открывший голландским читателям глаза на реальное положение дел в Нидерландской Ост-Индии. В наши дни «Макс Хавелар» переживает взлет популярности во всем мире: с 2017 по 2022 г. он был заново переведен и издан на двенадцати языках мира, включая английский, французский и азербайджанский. Авторы настоящей статьи, участвовавшие в создании нового русского перевода (планируемый год издания 2022), анализируют плоды трудов своих предшественников, подготовивших предыдущие семь русских изданий романа, которые выходили с 1916 по 1959 г. На основе проведенного анализа делается вывод о несоответствии прежних русских версий «Макса Хавелара» существующим в наши дни нормам перевода (по терминологии Г. Тури), так как все переводы XX в. выполнены не с нидерландского оригинала, а через немецкий язык-посредник, причем немецкий перевод был сделан с урезанного издания 1871 г., а не с полной автор-

ской версии 1875–1881 гг. Эти переводы изобилуют буквализмами, не учитывающими контекст, содержат ошибки в понимании авторского текста и неоправданно тяжелы для восприятия. Отсюда и возникла необходимость создания новой, современной русской версии, которая позволит русским читателям оценить знаменитую книгу Мультатули по достоинству. Перечисляются различия в стратегиях перевода XX и XXI вв., приводятся соответствующие примеры.

**Ключевые слова:** переводная множественность, повторный перевод, Мультатули, Э. Д. Деккер, *Макс Хавелар*, говорящие имена.

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