



UDC 81'25+811.113.4

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THE IMPORTANCE OF TRANSLATING KAREN BLIXEN'S NOVEL *THE AFRICAN FARM* FROM DANISH

For citation: Krasnova E. The importance of translating Karen Blixen's novel *The African Farm* from Danish. *Scandinavian Philology*, 2023, vol. 21, issue 2, pp. 282–296. <https://doi.org/10.21638/11701/spbu21.2023.206>

The importance of a new translation of Karen Blixen's *The African Farm* is based on two factors: the book has never been translated from Danish (although the Danish version differs from the English version), and existing translations of the English version contain a number of inaccuracies. Karen Blixen's book *The African Farm* was published in English in the UK in 1937 under the title *Out of Africa*. In the same year, Karen Blixen published the Danish text of the book under the title *Den afrikanske farm*. This book is not the only example of Karen Blixen's own translations from English into Danish, as she also translated some of her short stories after their first publication in English. It is still a controversial issue whether her translations may be considered “copies” of the original works or they should be regarded as recreations in Danish. This article presents a comparative analysis of the English and the Danish texts of *The African Farm* which confirms that we are talking about two different versions of the work, since while creating the Danish text, Karen Blixen used several transformations: transpositions, substitutions, additions and omissions. The notion of “transformation” in this article implies a very wide range of modifications. The author makes significant changes to the original text. The result is a new text with quite a number of differences from English; the text that awaits translation from Danish. *Out of Africa* has been translated from English into Russian twice. The translations by experienced translators make a significant contribution to the history of literary contacts between Denmark and Russia; however, they contain a number of errors due to misunderstanding of Danish and African realities, as well as disregard for the specific situation. Translation of the Danish version of *The African Farm* is necessary not only because the Danish version has never been translated into Russian, but also because it would allow for the explication of some themes important for Karen Blixen that were “lost” in the translations from English. The present study does not presuppose consideration of literary aspects. It involves

only differences between the Danish and the English versions of the novel, as well as the analysis of existing translations from English.

Keywords: Karen Blixen, *Out of Afrika*, *African Farm*, Danish literature, author's translation, Danish, English.

1. INTRODUCTION

Karen Blixen (1885–1962), one of Denmark's best-known writers, published some of her books in English and then translated them into Danish. Her novel *Out of Africa* was first published in English in 1937 in England. A little later that year, the novel was published in Denmark in Danish under the title *Den afrikanske farm* ("The African Farm") — in Karen Blixen's translation. In early 1938, the book is published in America, the text is almost identical to that of the English edition. Interestingly, the American publisher suggested some changes to the text (the first chapter was even edited), but Karen Blixen and her English editor categorically refused the suggestions of the translator and editor [Ankjær Sahl, 2022]. The Danish text is not an exact translation from English; rather, in this case, the term "recreation" should be used. In *The African Farm* Karen Blixen talks about her life in Kenya from 1914 to 1931, about growing coffee on her coffee plantation, her love for the African continent, the amazing nature of Africa, and her relationship with the locals. The book received renewed attention in 1985 with the release of Sidney Pollock's *Out of Africa*, starring Meryl Streep and Robert Redford. In 1986, the film won seven Academy Awards in various categories, including Best Picture and Best Director.

2. ON THE STATUS OF THE TWO VERSIONS OF THE NOVEL

The African Farm is a complex, multidimensional work that suggests many interpretations. On the one hand, it is an autobiographical narrative about life in Africa, on the other hand, it is about "Blixen's and her contemporaries' understanding of the perception of the contradiction between culture and nature, as well as the rapid development of civilization" [Rode, p. 17]. And, of course, it is a travel novel and a philosophical novel about the losses that every human being faces and how hard it is to accept them.

The question of the status of the two texts created by Karen Blixen is still debated: whether they are equivalent, whether they can be con-

sidered identical, or whether we are talking about two different texts [Brandtly, 2002; Steponavičiūtė, 2010; Van de Stadt, 2020]. The transformations¹ in Karen Blixen's Danish translations are numerous, and they do not always lend themselves to analysis. Kure-Jensen's study describes them as "amplifications" that include richer vocabulary, increased specificity, and deeper explanation of concept [Kure-Jensen, 1993, p. 317].

Knud Sørensen, having analyzed Karen Blixen's self-translations on the example of the collection *Seven Fantastic Stories*, concludes that Karen Blixen does not translate, but rather recreates her text in Danish, and that there are some Danisms in her English texts and Anglicisms in her Danish texts. In addition, he concludes that Karen Blixen had a brilliant command of English, but still not perfect [Sørensen, 1981, s. 71].

It is beyond the scope of this study to assess Karen Blixen's English language proficiency, but Knud Sørensen's observations — albeit based on a collection of short stories — are certainly noteworthy.

3. RUSSIAN TRANSLATIONS OF THE NOVEL *THE AFRICAN FARM*

The novel has been translated into Russian twice, both times from English. In 1997, it was published under the title *Farewell, Africa!* translated by M. Kovaleva, and in 2004 under the title *Out of Africa* translated by A. Y. Kabalkin. Both translations were made by experienced translators and make a significant contribution to the history of literary contacts between Denmark and Russia; however, they contain many inaccuracies related to the misunderstanding of Danish and African realities, as well as inattention to the specific situation (see section 6).

4. THE PROBLEM OF SELF-TRANSLATION

An author's translation, or self-translation, is a translation performed by the author of a work. A limited number of studies have been devoted to the peculiarities of the author's translation in modern translation theory. There is a logical explanation for this: there are not many cases when a famous author, whose books may be in demand in two cultures, has a sufficiently good command of two languages. One vivid example

¹ The term "transformation" in this article is understood broadly — as any modification used by the author. The author uses them quite freely, but these modifications are most conveniently described in the terms proposed by L. S. Barkhudarov [Barkhudarov, 1975].

is Vladimir Nabokov, who believed that he, better than any translator, could cope with the task: "...in publishing 'Lolita' in Russian, I pursued a very simple goal: I want my best English book — or, to put it more modestly, one of my best English books — to be correctly translated into my native language" [Nabokov, 1991, p. 351].

A. M. Finkel, speaking about the value and exclusivity of the author's translation, notes that "the translator in general and the author-translator seem to face the same tasks and difficulties, but in author's translation their solution acquires a slightly different character, a different direction, a different content than in ordinary translation" [Finkel, 1962, p. 104]. The text created by the author is as unique and inimitable as its prototype.

The peculiarity of self-translation is that it involves significant transformations of the source text that translators cannot afford. The author himself determines what changes should be made to a text intended for an audience speaking another language (most often his mother tongue). Perhaps, in the case of an author's translation, we should speak not of an original and a translation, but of two versions of the same work, which have equal status.

5. FEATURES OF TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE AUTHOR'S TRANSLATION OF *OUT OF AFRICA* INTO DANISH

The comparison of the two texts shows that despite the closeness of the English and Danish texts, there are some differences between the two versions, and the very fact that the author made some decisions to change the text suggests that we are dealing with the recreation of the text in Danish. The techniques used by Karen Blixen in translating *The African Farm* can be most conveniently described in terms familiar to translation studies [Barkhudarov, 1975]:

- 1) transpositions;
- 2) substitutions;
- 3) additions;
- 4) omissions.

The author uses the arsenal of these means quite freely; often she goes much farther away from the text than the translator could go, because she has the right to decide what the Danish reader should see in the text.

5.1. Transpositions

The transpositions in the translation text are few and mostly occur in the description of the nature of Africa.

Up on the very ridge of the hills and on the four peaks themselves it was easy to walk; the grass was short as on a lawn, with the grey stone in places breaking through the sward.

‘На гребне и даже на всех четырех вершинах ходить было легко, трава там была невысокая, как на лужайке у дома, и только кое-где из нее выглядывали серые камни’ (пер. с англ.²).

Det var ujævnt, ufarbart land på bjerget, men når man var nået helt op på bjergryggen, så var der let at gå. Græsset var kort som på en klippet plæne, den grå sten brød hist og her gennem grønsværen.

‘Местность на горе была неровной, непроходимой, но когда ты поднимался на самую вершину хребта, идти было легко. Трава была невысокой, словно на постриженной лужайке, местами из нее выглядывали серые камни’ (пер. с дат.).

It is impossible that a town will not play a part in your life.

‘Невозможно представить, что город не будет играть роль в вашей жизни’.

En by i nærheden kommer til at spille en rolle i ens liv, det er ikke muligt andet.

‘A nearby city will play a role in your life, there’s no way around it’.

‘Город, который находится поблизости, будет играть роль в вашей жизни, иначе и невозможно’ (пер. с дат.).

The transpositions in the Danish text are usually not related to grammatical peculiarities or to the requirements of the context. For Karen Blixen it was obviously a continuation of her work on the text, only now in her mother tongue.

In most cases, as in the examples above, transpositions are combined with additions.

² Where no translator is indicated, the translation is made by the author of this article.

5.2. Substitutions

Some substitutions are unavoidable, and have to do with the transfer of length units into Danish, e. g. feet are converted to meters, and distances in English miles are converted to Danish miles.

Of particular interest are those substitutions which, according to Karen Blixen, make the text more comprehensible to the Danish reader and clarify certain images and comparisons.

For example, when describing one of the guests of the farm, she writes that “in our daily intercourse he had, as was to be expected, much of the Ancient Mariner, or of the Old Man of the Sea”.

The author uses the image of a character in the poem by the English poet Samuel Coleridge (1772–1834) *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, published in 1798.

In the Danish text, however, the author removes “the Ancient Mariner” and instead uses a comparison with the evil old man from Sinbad the Sailor’s fifth voyage that is more understandable to the Danish reader.

However, “the Ancient Mariner” does appear later in the text when Karen Blixen quotes the poem on Dennis Finch-Hatton’s tombstone, but he is no longer connected to the image of the guest.

Senere hen lod Denys’ broder, lord Winchilsea, en obelisk sætte på hans grav med en inskription, der var taget ud af Coleridges digt: “The Ancient Mariner”.

Позднее брат Денниса, лорд Уинчилси, поставил на его могиле памятник с цитатой из «Старого Морехода» (пер. с дат.).

Another example of culture-specific substitution: “puppet theater” (*puppet-show*) in the chapter *The Somali Women* in the Danish text turns into the name of the puppet theater “*mester Jakel-forestilling*”³ understandable to the Danish reader.

Many of the author’s substitutions, which have nothing to do with the culture-specific component, are concretizing (in some cases this group overlaps with the “Additions”, see 5.3). Karen Blixen completes the text, corrects and clarifies it (Table).

³ Master Jakel is a popular figure in Danish puppet theater.

Table. Comparison of some fragments from the English and Danish texts of the novel “The African Farm”

English text	Danish text
<i>filled with the scent of plants</i>	<i>fylt med duft af løv og græs</i> 'filled with the fragrance of leaves and grass'
<i>In the middle of the day</i>	<i>I middagsheden</i> 'in the midday heat/in the midst of the midday heat'
<i>the brown desert</i>	<i>den brungrå ørken</i> 'brown-gray desert'
<i>We ourselves, in boots</i>	<i>Vi hvide folk, i svære støvler</i> 'We white people are wearing heavy boots.'
<i>Many months after</i>	<i>Et halvt år efter</i> 'Six months later.'
<i>Everything that you saw</i>	<i>alt i denne natur</i> 'everything in this nature'
<i>The Natives</i>	<i>et helt folk</i> 'whole people'
<i>The farmer</i>	<i>nybyggerne⁴</i> 'settlers'
<i>Farah was away for the day.</i>	<i>Farah var i byen hele dagen.</i> 'Farah spent the whole day in the city.'
<i>...this was a pleasant day in hospital.</i>	<i>Det var hospitalets lykkeligste dag.</i> 'It was the happiest day at the hospital.'

It is obvious that Karen Blixen was very attentive to the Danish text, she rewrote it, made corrections and clarifications.

5.3. Additions

Additions in Karen Blixen's Danish text occur in two instances:

1. when the author wants to bring the text closer to the Danish reader, to make it more “Danish”;

⁴ Here the author chooses a particular plural form to convey a generalizing meaning.

2. when the author has a desire to add to the description of nature, a city or a situation.

One prime example of the first approach is the insertion in the story of a stork with a broken wing that happens to be Karen Blixen's on the farm. In the Danish text one sentence has been added, no doubt intended for the Danish reader:

*Jeg fik hjemvé af at se på den, den så ud, som om den hørte til i Danmark*⁵.

'I felt nostalgic looking at him, he reminded me of Denmark with his whole look.'

An example of the second approach:

Nairobi was a medley place.

Nairobi var en uensartet, forvirret by.

'Nairobi was a motley, hectic city.'

Some additions are related to Karen Blixen's family history, such as when she quotes exactly from her father's memoirs in the Danish text:

Fra Gråsten til Dybbøl var jeg sluttende officer efter en lang kolonne.

'On the withdrawal from Gråsten to Dybbøl I was rearguard officer.'

In the English text, however, there is only part of this quotation, missing the mention of the town of Gråsten, from which the army was retreating, and the father's position.

Another type of addition has to do with the author recalling some detail, such as another type of coffee that was grown on the farm.

Concretizing additions occur throughout the text. In the English text she says that she is happy when she has guests over for dinner, but in the Danish text she adds "and praise the food".

⁵ The stork is undoubtedly a very "Danish" bird. The image of the stork is often found in Danish poetry and in Danish literature. And at the end of the novel *The African Farm* there is a very beautiful narration about the (see section 6).

Or the author specifies the place and time of some event. Instead of “he told” — “he told me at lunch”.

On occasion, Karen Blixen adds phraseology that certainly enlivens the text:

They were immediately up to the idea.

‘He immediately agreed with that thought.’

De gik straks med liv og sjæl ind på tanken.

‘He immediately agreed unreservedly (lit. ‘in body and soul’) with the idea.’

5.4. Omissions

For some reason, Karen Blixen in the Danish text omits epigraphs in three chapters: the first, third, and fifth.

Some of the omissions are due to Karen Blixen’s desire to remove terms, comparisons, and epithets that may not quite make sense to a Danish reader.

When the Africans speak of the personality of God they speak like the Arabian Nights or like the last chapters of the Book of Job; it is the same quality, the infinite power of imagination, with which they are impressed.

‘Когда африканцы говорят о личности Бога, кажется, что они рассказывают тебе сказку из «Тысячи и одной ночи» или конец библейской Книги Иова — в обоих случаях их поражает одно и то же: бесконечная мощь фантазии’ (пер. М. Ковалевой).

Når afrikanerne taler om Guds væsen, så dvæler de, som vi i Jobs bog, især ved tanken om hans vældige indbildningskraft.

‘When Africans speak of the divine nature of God, they are struck, as we are in the book of Job, primarily by the idea of the power of his imagination’ (transl. from the Danish).

‘Когда африканцы говорят о божественной природе Бога, их поражает, как и нас в Книге Иова, в первую очередь мысль о силе его воображения’ (пер. с дат.).

The following omission remains unclear: when listing the nationalities that each native had encountered, the Danish version omits the Jews. The following is the English text.

Nearly every Native, down to the little herdboys of the plains, has in his day stood face to face with a whole range of nations as different from one another, and to him, as a Sicilian to an Esquimo: Englishmen, Jews, Boers, Arabs, Somali Indians, Swaheli, Masai and Kavirondo.

‘Почти каждый туземец, даже пастушата на равнинах, встречались с людьми самых разных национальностей, столь же непохожими друг на друга, как сицилиец на эскимоса: с англичанами, евреями, бурами, арабами, индийцами, приехавшими из Сомали, с суахили, масаи и кавирондо’ (пер. М. Ковалевой).

6. FEATURES OF TRANSLATION OF THE NOVEL *THE AFRICAN FARM* FROM ENGLISH INTO RUSSIAN

There is no doubt that both English translations are done by talented translators, but English translation without knowledge of Danish realities and in-depth study of Kenyan realities is not always successful. In addition, the complexity of Karen Blixen's images, the abundance of allusions and hidden quotations pose very difficult challenges for English translators.

Thus, in the chapter *The Shooting Accident* (in M. Kovaleva's translations *An Accident on the Farm* and A. Y. Kabalkin's *An Accident*), where “Khadija's camel driver” is mentioned, none of the translators realized that Khadija is the wife of the Prophet Muhammad. M. Kovaleva turns Muhammad's wife into “the prophet Khadija”. A. Y. Kabalkin tries to evade the problem and uses the combination “legendary guide of the camel caravan”, but never names the prophet. The reader of this amazingly beautiful and poetic fragment will not realize that it is about Prophet Muhammad.

In general, such “smoothing” is characteristic of A. Y. Kabalkin's translation. There is a feeling that when the translator cannot cope with the task, he omits a text fragment, makes unnecessary additions or distorts the text.

*He is a privileged person, the one who has got nothing to do, but for whose enrichment and pleasure all things are brought together; **the Kings of Tarshish shall bring gifts**. He takes part in a great battle or ball, and wonders the while that he should be, in the midst of those events, so far privileged as to be lying down.*

‘Ему даровано великое счастье: без малейших усилий с его стороны он познает ни с чем не сравнимое удовольствие. Он участвует в великом сражении или танцует на грандиозном балу, причем сознает, что все это время даже не утруждает свои ноги стоянием, а просто возлежит’ (пер. А. Ю. Кабалкина).

Some of the errors in the English translation are due to ignorance of Danish history.

My father was an officer in the Danish and French army, and as a very young lieutenant at Düppel he wrote home: “Back in Düppel I was officer to a long column. It was hard work, but it was splendid”.

‘Мой отец служил офицером в датской и во французской армиях. Будучи молодым лейтенантом в Дьюпелле, он писал домой: «Строевой офицер — трудная, но прекрасная работа»’ (пер. А. Ю. Кабалкина).

‘Мой отец служил офицером сначала в датской, потом во французской армии, и в ранней молодости писал родителям из Дюпеля: «В этом городке я командую крупным подразделением»’ (пер. М. Ковалевой).

Ignorance of historical events important for Denmark leads not only to incorrect rendering of toponyms (Dybbøl is a town that is connected with the events of 1864, every Dane knows the Battle of Dybbøl — a clash between Prussian and Danish troops), but also to misunderstanding of the whole situation. A Danish-speaking interpreter could refer to the life story of Karen Blixen’s father and the history of the war.

In the 2004 translation, the lack of attention to detail is surprising. When a gunshot suddenly sounds at night and the heroine realizes that she has to get out of bed and go outside, in A. Kabalkin’s text she puts on “a skirt, a robe and slippers”. I think the translator should not suggest such an outfit for the Baroness to go out. She could hardly go out of the house in a robe (and for some reason over a skirt).

From M. Kovaleva we read:

I put on a skirt, a coat, slipped my feet into my shoes.

A coat, of course, is a little better than a robe, but she’s probably wearing a jacket. It is the jacket that is “paired” with the skirt, not the coat. In the Danish text, by the way, she is wearing something like a sweater.

In A. Y. Kabalkin's translation, we meet "polished floors" ('полированные полы'), which, of course, is impossible to imagine in a Kenyan estate. We are talking about the fact that in her living room the floors were waxed to a shine.

One of the shortcomings of A. Y. Kabalkin's translation is unmotivated additions; he completes "from himself" some fragments⁶.

And in the evening it did not seem right that I should sit down quietly to read; I was driven out of my house by the fear of losing it.

*По вечерам мне не полагалось спокойно отдыхать с книжкой в руках; страх лишиться дома и **всего остального имущества** лишил меня покоя' (пер. А. Ю. Кабалкина).*

*'In the evenings I was not supposed to rest in peace with a book in my hands; the fear of losing my house **and all my other possessions** deprived me of peace' (translated by A. Y. Kabalkin).*

The addition about possessions seems superfluous. Karen Blixen doesn't mention her possessions, and that's not accidental. It was not important to her.

There are also some omissions in A. Y. Kabalkin's translation — obviously due to misunderstanding. If the translator did not understand details or realities, he simply omits them.

*The maize grew up higher than your head as you walked **on the narrow hard-trampled foot-paths in between the tall green rustling regiments, and then again it was harvested.** The beans ripened in the fields, were gathered and thrashed by the women, and the stalks and pods were collected and burned, so that in certain seasons thin blue columns of smoke rose here and there all over the farm⁷.*

'Сначала вытягивалась выше человеческого роста упругая кукуруза, после ее уборки созревали бобы, которые собирали и лузили женщины, чтобы потом сжечь прямо на борозде стебли и стручки, так что в определенные месяцы моя ферма курилась бесчисленными столбами дыма'.

One of the important differences between the English and Danish text is the narration of the story in the chapter *Livets veje* (*Road of Life*

⁶ Bold here and hereafter is the translator's addition.

⁷ Bold is what the translator has omitted.

in M. Kovaleva's translation and *Roads of Life* in A. Y. Kabalkin's translation). The Danish version of this chapter tells the story of a man who suddenly wakes up in the night from a noise, gets up and runs to the sound. Along the way he trips over rocks several times, falls, gets up again, and finally ends up at a lake where a dam has burst. He works all night, and only when he has repaired all the damage does he return home. The description of the obstacles encountered on his way that night is accompanied in the margins by dotted drawings, which eventually form a picture of a stork (which the man sees from his window the next day). The drawings and the text form a whole, and the image of the stork is very important to Karen Blixen. In the English version there is just a drawing of a stork, but A. Y. Kabalkin does not include it in the text. The image of the stork, formed from human movements, can be interpreted in different ways, but it forms a whole with the text.

In M. Kovaleva's translation, the drawings somehow miraculously made it into the book — although the translation was made from English, where there is only one — a stork assembled from fragments.

7. CONCLUSION

The Danish and English texts of *The African Farm* are separate, stand-alone versions of the text. Karen Blixen used many transpositions, substitutions, omissions, and additions in creating the Danish text. Thus, we are dealing with a new original Danish text, which should be translated into Russian. Translation of the Danish version of *The African Farm* is necessary not only because the Danish version has never been translated into Russian, but also because it would allow for the explication of some themes important for Karen Blixen that were “lost” in the translations from English.

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**О ВАЖНОСТИ НОВОГО ПЕРЕВОДА РОМАНА КАРЕН БЛИКСЕН
«АФРИКАНСКАЯ ФЕРМА» С ДАТСКОГО ЯЗЫКА**

Для цитирования: *Krasnova E. The importance of translating Karen Blixen's novel The African Farm from Danish // Скандинавская филология. 2023. Т. 21. Вып. 2. С. 282–296. <https://doi.org/10.21638/11701/spbu21.2023.206>*

Важность нового перевода книги Карен Бликсен «Африканская ферма» обусловлена двумя факторами: книга никогда не переводилась с датского языка (при том, что датская версия отличается от английской), а существующие переводы английской версии содержат целый ряд неточностей. Книга «Африканская ферма» вышла в Великобритании на английском языке в 1937 г. под названием «Из Африки» (*Out of Africa*). В том же году Карен Бликсен опубликовала текст книги на датском языке под названием «Африканская ферма» (*Den afrikanske farm*). Эта книга является не единственным примером собственных переводов К. Бликсен с английского на датский, поскольку она также перевела некото-

рые из своих новелл после первой публикации на английском языке. Вопрос о том, можно ли считать ее переводы «копией» оригинальных произведений, или их следует считать воссозданием на датском языке, до сих пор является спорным. В данной статье приводятся результаты сопоставления английского и датского текстов «Африканской фермы», которые подтверждают, что речь идет о двух вариантах произведения, поскольку при создании датского текста Бликсен использовала целый ряд трансформаций: перестановки, замены, добавления и опущения. Понятие трансформации в данной статье предполагает очень широкий спектр преобразований. Автор вносит значительные изменения в исходный текст. В результате возникает новый текст, имеющий целый ряд отличий от английского, текст, который ждет своего перевода с датского языка. С английского языка на русский роман «Из Африки» переводился дважды. Переводы, выполненные опытными переводчиками, вносят весомый вклад в историю литературных контактов Дании и России, однако в них содержится ряд погрешностей, связанных с непониманием датских и африканских реалий, а также с невниманием к конкретной ситуации. Перевод датской версии «Африканской фермы» необходим не только потому, что датский текст никогда не переводился на русский, но и потому, что он позволит эксплицировать некоторые важные для Карен Бликсен темы, которые «потерялись» в переводах с английского. Настоящее исследование не предполагает рассмотрение литературоведческих аспектов. Речь идет только о различиях в датском и английском вариантах романа, а также об анализе существующих переводов с английского.

Ключевые слова: Карен Бликсен, *Из Африки*, *Африканская ферма*, датская литература, авторский перевод, датский язык, английский язык.

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Received: June 17, 2023

Accepted: July 1, 2023