

# Review

## of a dissertation for obtaining a PhD degree

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- Theory and Practice of Translation - English

**Dissertation topic: TRANSLATION PROBLEMS IN DIGITAL SERVICE PRODUCTS FROM ENGLISH INTO BULGARIAN**

**Scientific supervisors:** prof. dr. Alexandra Bozhidarova Bagasheva and prof. dr. Petya Nacheva Osenova

**Reviewer: Prof. Dr. Vessela Kirtcheva Guenova**

Department of Romance Studies, Faculty of Classical and New Philologies, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Member of the scientific jury for the procedure (Order No. RD-38-590 of 24.10.2023)

### 1. Details of the procedure

The composition of the Scientific Jury was approved by Order No. RD 38-590 of 24.10.2023. The first meeting of the scientific jury, held on 7.11.2023, determined the chairman of the jury, reviewers and authors of opinions, and set the deadline for submitting reviews and opinions, as well as the date of the public defence. I have been assigned to prepare a review of the dissertation.

After having read the annexed by the PhD student report on the fulfilment of the **minimum national requirements** (MNR) under Article 1a, paragraph 1 of the Rules for Implementation of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (PPZRASRB), the members of the scientific jury came to the conclusion that Maria Todorova **fully meets** and even exceeds these requirements. On the basis of the provided reference on the absence of plagiarism, the members of the jury decided on the **absence of plagiarism** in the thesis. No infringements of the procedure have been established.

### 2. Data on the PhD student

Assistant Professor Maria Todorova holds a Master's Degree in Translation (English) from the Department of English and American Studies, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (2017) and a Bachelor's degree in English Philology from the same Department (2015). In the period 2012 — 2017 she carried out a number of internships as an English teaching assistant, as well as an Erasmus+ internship. In the period 2017 — 2019 she worked in the translation industry as a project manager and since 2017 she has also been a freelance translator and localization specialist. Since November 2019, she has been an Assistant Professor at Sofia University, Department of English and American Studies, where she teaches various courses, including *Translation* (EN-BG) and seminar classes in *Software and Translation* in the Master's programme in Translation.

### 3. Data on the dissertation and the author's summary of the dissertation

Maria Todorova's dissertation : **Translation Problems in Digital Service Products from English into Bulgarian**, written in English, comprises 5 chapters: introduction, definition of working concepts and literature review, research process, methodology and working typology, analysis of the corpus of translation errors and available solutions, conclusions (with the last 2 parts occupying the main part of the dissertation), as well as a bibliography of 158 titles, totalling 166 pages.

Chapter 1: Introduction identifies and justifies the directions of enquiry into the problems of translation for localization, which relate respectively to genre conventions, technological macrostructure and the constraints it imposes, and insufficient context. The study operates on a corpus of translation errors while thoroughly accounting for cross-linguistic asymmetries and their impact on translation decisions. The aim is twofold: to develop a typology of translation problems in EN-BG localization and to propose a framework of strategies for available solutions. The research questions focus on existing problems in EN-BG localization, their possible language-specific aspects, available solutions, and recommendations for localization translation training.

*The study rightly excludes machine translation errors from its scope for localization, as MT generates highly specific errors regardless of the genre of translation, and this could seriously skew the results of such an analysis. At the same time, a future study could usefully focus solely on the problems of localization through (edited or unedited) machine translation from English into Bulgarian, using and possibly building upon the methodology and error typology developed in this study.*

Chapter 2: Literature Review. The review of the literature on localization and translation for localization in various problematic aspects is focused and adequate to the topic of the dissertation, without lingering unnecessarily around general theoretical issues of localization. The literature review starts by focusing on the problems of localization to the so-called "commercially minor languages", such as Bulgarian. *Having chosen to avoid the seriously problematic qualification "minor" or, moreover, "minority" for the definition of Bulgarian is a rightful approach, especially since the question of naming such idioms in the context of the linguistic hegemony of a few leading languages in the world is controversial and unresolved.* The analysis of statistical data on Bulgarian-speaking users of digital content on the Internet provides precise conclusions about the scope and validity of localization to Bulgarian, its inclusive dimension and its particular value for people who do not speak English at all or possibly not well enough. Further, the study identifies the characteristics of translation for localization and examines in detail the perceptions of the relationship between translation and localization in the scholarly literature and in business practice, which appear to be heterogeneous and contingent on the respective points of view. For the purposes of their study, the author justifies and adopts a concept of localization as a type of specialized translation (p. 22), *with which we can fully agree*, and highlights the need for translation studies to collaborate and engage more actively with localization issues in order to help achieving higher quality translator training and hence an overall increase in the quality of translation for localization. The lack of theoretical work on the place of localization in Bulgaria, its practice and its language dimensions is explicitly noted — *a gap that this dissertation contributes to fill. Thus, from the literature review M. Todorova asserts the importance of the relationship between the theoretical and practical dimensions of her research for the quality of translation and the training of translators for localization.* The author examines research on the main challenges of translating for localization, offering commentary, critical analysis, and even polemics with the authors with regard to their applicability to her study (e.g., the controversy surrounding Jimenez-Crespo's typology of "digital genres," pp. 35-36). At the same time, the literature review allows her to clarify and justify her choice of the type of texts she focuses her analysis on: localization of digital service products (p. 38): software, websites, mobile applications. In the

conclusion to the chapter, Todorova reiterates the directions in which proactive developments in translational studies are needed to overcome the 'clash of commercial and theoretical' in the field of translation quality for localization (p. 47), *while highlighting again the link between theoretical developments and the training of translators for practice.*

The short chapter 3: Study Set-up and Corpus Development sheds light on some important methodological dimensions of the study. The specificity of the texts in the context of localization makes it difficult to explore the problems of translation, thus justifying the choice to consider them in the thesis "from a user perspective" and insofar as they affect the pragmatic purposes of the texts (p. 49). *It may be noted here that in this case this is also the most appropriate approach for detecting problems in translation, although neither the only one nor an exhaustive one.* Further in the chapter, a preliminary working typology of EN-BG localization problems is outlined, and the three categories of problems – related to genre, to macrostructural limitations, and to lack of sufficient context – will be analysed from the perspective of linguistic asymmetries that can create translation problems, especially since these asymmetries have already been the subject of separate studies in Bulgarian translation studies. Language asymmetries are also the main focus of the framework of solutions for overcoming and avoiding errors that is proposed in the next chapter. The error corpus (150 errors found in 42 products, see Appendix 1 of the thesis) is presented, and its collection process is described in detail. The whole process of the survey work is systematized in a clear graph (Fig. 7 on p. 55).

Chapter 4: Translation Errors and Available Solutions is the central and largest chapter in the work, structured in three parts:

#### 1. Genre-related errors

The analysis in this category precisely distinguishes four subcategories (the form of address to the consumer, the parts of speech that refer to the individual, anonymous consumer and have the category of gender, the call-to-action texts, and the use of terms and neologisms typical of digital service products and brands). In each of these, the analysis highlights the relevant cross-linguistic asymmetries, underlining and illustrating the diverse, massive and all-too-characteristic errors they often cause, such as inconsistencies, vagueness, ambiguities, etc. To overcome such errors, a variety of translation strategies, clear and justified instructions and recommendations for the translator are offered. The author also explicitly notes the frequent combination of errors in this first category with errors falling in the other two categories. The solution options are original and well thought out, and the specialised considerations from a software localization perspective, the necessary consideration of which determines the possibility and choice of the proposed solutions, should be noted here.

#### 2. Errors related to macrostructural limitations

These errors, in turn, fall into three subcategories: variable elements in the macrostructure, character limitations, and locale conventions on standard elements such as units and currencies. Again, a number of asymmetries (word order, gender and number, variable spelling of the Bulgarian prepositions „в“ and „с“) underlie the first subcategory. The limitation of the number of characters in the translation is the basis of numerous errors or impairments of the functionality of the translation through inappropriate and incorrect abbreviations. The solutions proposed here suitably recommend avoiding literal translation. Some of the suggestions could be further optimized (e.g., on p. 116, Table 15, #3 – simply „Да/Не“, #5 – „Влезте/Влизате като“...), while still preserving the functionality of the message. Maria Todorova stresses that errors in the spelling of units and currencies are largely determined by the degree of internationalisation of the source text, and nevertheless need to be recognised and accounted for by translators. The analyses are illustrated with appropriate examples from the corpus of errors.

### 3. Errors related to lack of sufficient context

Insufficient context leads to two subcategories of identified errors, related respectively to semantic or morphosyntactic ambiguity and to a kind of paradigmatic variation in a category of the target language that does not exist in the source language. The author proposes a number of strategies for accessing the pragmatic context necessary for informed translation decisions, while acknowledging the difficulties translators often face in this regard.

The final chapter 5 states the answers to the research questions posed in the introduction and draws relevant conclusions from them. The contributions of the dissertation and the prospects for future research on the problems of localization translation between English and Bulgarian are duly highlighted.

The typology of translation problems in digital service product localization from English into Bulgarian is clearly systemised in a table on p. 139. It explicitly highlights the synergies between categories of errors, which are crucial for anticipating their possible occurrence and designing efficient translation solutions and strategies (p. 138). Considering translation problems for localization from the perspective of the specific EN-BG language pair is particularly important for understanding the particular manifestations of more general problems and for pinpointing those specific to that language pair with a view to proposing language-specific solutions as well. The solutions are also systemised in a clear table (p. 143). *We should note here that in our opinion linking translation transformations and strategies to the 'linguistic competence' of the translator (e.g. on pp. 141, 145) seems not fully accurate and, in any case, too general; in our view, we are talking here about a whole set of so-called translation competences, to use the EMT European Network of Master's Programmes in Translation and quality label's classification of translators' competences. Respectively, the 'extra-linguistic' competences would be more accurately defined as technological, personal and interpersonal (the so-called 'soft' skills) and service delivery competences.*

*The observation about the translator's need to be more aware of cross-linguistic asymmetries is extremely important and relevant (p. 142). This awareness is set as a key recommendation for improving the quality of English-to-Bulgarian translation for localization, particularly with regard to specialised training in this type of translation: a language-pair-specific approach as well as a proactive role for the translator. We would add here, as a basic and, in our opinion, necessary recommendation, the improvement of translation competences within a structured training, preferably in an academic environment.*

Directions for future research are outlined, both in terms of following particular aspects developed in the dissertation and by building on the results achieved in it in collaboration with representatives of the localization industry with a view to extending the research's access to the process, source codes and environment.

The rich bibliography of current research evidences a thorough awareness of relevant translation studies on cross-linguistic asymmetry and on various problems of localization.

The summary, available in two versions – in English and in Bulgarian – presents a comprehensive synthesis of the issues and results and meets the formal requirements.

### 4. Contributions of the dissertation

The conclusion highlights the main contributions of the research as follows:

1. **First comprehensive study** of the problems of translation for English-to-Bulgarian localization;

2. **A corpus of errors** has been gathered, enabling further expansion and use in future research or training;

3. **An original taxonomy of translation problems** has been compiled (and also tested, validated and extended) with possible uses for translation training in academic and business contexts, as well as for raising awareness;

4. The research provides a framework of **translation strategies and recommendations for solutions** applicable to training, translators' lifelong upskilling, edition of reference materials, etc.;

5. **The linguistic approach** in theories of translation for localization and the need to take into account the specificities of the language pair have been duly established;

6. The necessity of focusing on **cross-linguistic asymmetries** in the respective language pair in localization training (and *not only in localization training, we might add, but in translation training as a whole*) is highlighted.

In addition to these contributions, which are mentioned in the dissertation, we would also add as an important contribution the indirectly expressed but clearly perceptible affirmation of the **need for higher and more relevant qualifications for translators**, namely, the need for better acquired and adequately applied *translation* competences, alongside others.

### **5. Publications and participations in scientific forums**

Maria Todorova participated with papers in 6 national and international scientific forums and has 6 publications on various aspects related to the topic of the dissertation (4 of which are valid for the present procedure). This scientific activity obviously testifies to the lasting interest and thorough research work Todorova has maintained in the field of translation for localization.

### **6. Conclusion**

The dissertation of Assistant Professor Maria Todorova is situated at the intersection of three disciplinary fields. It features an in-depth comparative study on problems of localization (a highly specialized and promising field of translation) – a research undertaking which has not been conducted in our country so far. This research is particularly valuable in the context of a language such as Bulgarian. The linguistic perspective and the systematic consideration of linguistic asymmetries effectively integrate the research in the field of Bulgarian translation studies and justify the high value of its results. The precise typology and analysis of errors, accompanied by strategic suggestions for translation solutions, also give the study considerable practical utility for professionals. Moreover, this dissertation establishes a direct link between the language services market and the higher education sector, thus making a significant contribution to the most adequate training of highly qualified and market-successful translators<sup>1</sup>. It thus contributes to bridging the gap between theory and practice, and between translation training and industry.

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<sup>1</sup> From the error analysis conducted in the paper it becomes evident that most of the errors are not only caused by linguistic asymmetries and specifics of localization, but also by the translator's skills and competences level. Indeed, practically everywhere the errors are combined with literal translation, and the proposed solutions tend to escape from literalism and use appropriate transformations instead. A reasonable conclusion can be drawn as to the fundamental importance of translation competences, on which all kinds of specialised skills and competences build, but cannot replace these. This confirms the rightfulness of strict academic training for generalist translators.

The pedagogical dimension of this dissertation makes it particularly important and significant at the intersections of translation studies and practice. Indeed, there is a need for more structured training of translators in specialised translation for localization, as it seems that many of them have not undergone structured training, either in an academic or in a business environment, do not sufficiently possess the necessary competences and

The contributions of the work include not only original results of a comparative research, but also real strategies and solutions to support practice, as well as important guidelines for the academic teaching of translation with regard to its connection to the market.

The numerous statistical studies and analyses of the corpus are very precisely structured and conducted in a careful, reflective and self-critical manner, which testifies to high scientific integrity. The work is written in excellent, rich and clear English with an elegant and nuanced expression. The maturity and scientific ethics of a young researcher like Maria Todorova are impressive. She undoubtedly possesses both in-depth theoretical knowledge and an outstanding capacity for independent research.

I would recommend publishing the work and spreading the word about it in the localization industry. It is also desirable to develop and offer a specialized elective course in EN-BG localization as well as a qualification course for current localization translators.

On the basis of the above-mentioned merits of this work and the related publications of the author, I give my **positive assessment** and I would recommend to the members of the esteemed scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to the candidate Maria Ivanova Todorova with full conviction.

Sofia, 3.1.2024

Prof. Vessela Guenova, D. Sc.

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consequently make many of the errors identified. There is also a need to maintain a closer link between the academic training of translators and the specialist translation industry, in this case, localization.