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**The problem of Literary Translation Multiplicity
in Russian Interpretations of the Matter-of-Fact Romance
«It's Never Too Late to Mend» by Charles Reade**

This paper examines two Russian translations of the novel «It's Never Too Late to Mend» by Charles Reade in terms of literary translation variability. The presence of two Russian interpretations of this work, published almost simultaneously in 1857, allows us to raise the highly topical problem of translation multiplicity, still being an understudied issue of literary translation theory.

Key words: Charles Reade; matter-of-fact romance; translation multiplicity; genre peculiarities; translation reception.

The present study focuses on the Russian translation reception of the literary works of Charles Reade, the English writer of the second half of the 19th century, and, particularly, on the popular in the Victorian literature genre model of the matter-of-fact romance, originated and developed by Reade. Problematics of the Victorian novel has been studied by many well-known Russian and foreign scholars including Yu. D. Levin [2], V. V. Ivasheva [1], I. M. Mikhalskaya [3], L. P. Shipitsyna, M. Wheeler [11], D. Sutherland [10], P. K. Gilbert [8], T. Bragg, R. Fantina [7], and others. In this regard, it is noteworthy that Russian translations of the novels of many Victorian writers [5, 6], such as Ch. Dickens and Sh. Bronte, are sufficiently covered in the scientific literature. Yet, despite the popularity of Ch. Reade's works in Russia in the second half of the 19th century, which is confirmed by a large number of translations, Russian translations of his novels, as well as his literary activity itself, have been left beyond the scope of the Russian literary study. This determines the relevance and novelty of this paper.

A separate scientific problem, still unresolved, is the aesthetics and poetics of the matter-of-fact romance, which appeared to be so popular in Russia in the 1850-60s. This kind of novel synthesizes the poetics of at least two literary methods – realism and romanticism, which determined the peculiarity of the Reade's work with facts. Reade's novels always strive to depict reality accurately and completely while retaining the reader's interest by incorporating

the elements of adventurous, melodramatic, and pointedly imaginary narration. This results in the appearance of two plotlines: the reflection of real (personally «proven» by the author) events and facts, aiming to convey reality in its social and historical manifestations due to the structure and activities of social institutions of Victorian society, its morals and moods; and a bright adventure story with an obligatory love theme interpreted in the spirit of romanticism.

In addition, Victorian literature is known to be rooted in enlightenment ideology, advocating the active influence of the writer on society vices. Thus, the first matter-of-fact romance by Ch. Reade «It's Never Too Late to Mend» (1856) reflects the problem of corruption and ill-treatment of prisoners in English prisons in the second half of the 19th century. In this novel, the author analyzes social problems mainly in moral, ethical and psychological terms, thus, offering solutions and actively fixing in the minds of readers his views on the social structure, social relations, and state laws.

Finally, the relevance of the study is due to the existence of two Russian translations of the novel «It's Never Too Late to Mend», both published in the year of 1857. One of the them is entitled «*Luchshe pozdno, chem nikogda. Roman v dvuh chastyakh*» («Better Late Than Never. Romance in 2 parts») and was published in the journal *Biblioteka dlya Chteniya* (The Reader's Library). The second translation was published under the title «*Nikogda ne pozdno ispravit'sya: obyknovennaya istoriya*» («It's Never Too Late to Mend: an Ordinary Story») in the journal *Sobraniye Inostrannykh Romanov, Povestei i Rasskazov v Rerevodakh na Russky Yazyk* (Collection of Foreign Novels, Narratives and Stories in Russian Translations). This fact allows us to address the essential problem of translation multiplicity, which remains an understudied issue in the theory of literary translation, raised back in the works of Yu. D. Levin and P. M. Topor [4].

As mentioned above, both translations of the novel «It's Never Too Late to Mend» were published in different Russian literary journals, yet in the same year, therefore, according to P. M. Topor, they can be qualified as a «synchronous» slice of the Russian history of literary translation. The scholar believes that such translations can be considered the result of a sort of competition between translators, and that «...multiplicity is a natural attribute of literary translation, associated with the concept of creative personality, the competition of talents» [4, p. 228]. Some observations by R. R. Tchaikovsky similarly refer to the phenomenon of translation multiplicity: «In case of translation multiplicity, the status of translations of the original changes, and competing texts appear. Translation multiplicity clearly reveals the strengths and demonstrates the weaknesses of translations» [5, p. 149].

The present study offers a comparative analysis of both translations with the original. It should be noted that the interpretation entitled «It's Never Too

Late to Mend: an Ordinary Story» represents a high-quality and detailed variation of the original, which fully preserves the distinctive narrative and authorial style of Reade. Going back to the problem of translation multiplicity, it is noteworthy that unlike the second translation, most of the chapters in the first translation of the novel are an abridged, summary interpretation that is often built on ignoring the work of the English writer with «established facts» that tend to reflect the smallest details of the narrative. It is their loss that led the Russian translation to compressing the original down to the limits sufficient for understanding the novel as a work of mass literature. In this context, this can be explained by the crisis of translation activity which occurred in Russia in the second half of the 19th century, and about which P. M. Toper wrote: «Despite the evident expansion of translation activity in Russia – quantitative, genre, thematic, national-language, etc. – researchers rightly note that in the second half of the 19th century the level of translations decreased, and by the end of the century it was in a state of decline as compared to its beginning» [4, p. 92].

First, let us consider the translations of the novel's title. In the first variant, the title «It's Never Too Late to Mend» sounds like «Better late than never» (*Luchshe pozdno chem nikogda* in Russian), i.e., it is translated using an old Russian folk proverb, which conveys the message that urges those who have stumbled to take the path of correction. This translation of the title undoubtedly communicates the main educational message that the author carries through the entire narrative in the original. The title of the second translation is «It's Never Too Late to Mend: an Ordinary Story», which represents a literal translation with «ordinary story» as an explanation. Probably, by adding this subtitle the author of the second translation showed that the problem of prison violence was a common practice not only in Victorian England, thus supporting the position of Reade, who considered the prison narrative as the historical and event-related basis of the novel.

In both the first and second translations of the novel into Russian, the structure of the original is changed. Similar to the original, the first translation of the novel «Better late than never. Romance in 2 parts» consists of 85 chapters, but the translator divides his version into two more parts (mentioning this feature even in the title). In this way, he emphasizes that the novel comprises two plotlines: the prison narrative is reflected in the first part, while the Australian adventures of the gold diggers are described in the second part. The structure of the second translation undergoes minimal changes: the translated version consists of 84 chapters instead of 85 with chapters 55 and 56 being combined into one. The author of the translation reduced, albeit only slightly, the description of the everyday life and routines of the gold diggers (Robinson and Fielding) in Australia. Otherwise, the second interpretation is an almost

complete reflection of the original, fully preserving not only its plot structure, but also the author's style and his position in relation to the main characters.

In accordance with the author's line, the novel is characterized by sharp social problematics, «exposure» of the life of British prisoners, the lower class, who are subjected to cruel tortures and moral humiliation. Reade meticulously studied real crimes and incidents, which formed the basis of his novel plot. Reade's thorough handling of the facts and the emphasis on the truthfulness of his prison epic are revealed in the detailed, sometimes shocking descriptions of the tortures which prisoners were regularly subjected to. It is known for a fact that while working on the novel, Reade visited several British penal institutions in order to collect documentary material for his future novel: «As part of his project of reforming prison practices, Reade collected data from many locations, but his primary model was the notorious Birmingham Borough Prison where a young prisoner hanged himself in 1853, prompting a damning Royal Commission Report that Reade used extensively. Reade presents a catalog of horrors as he demonstrates, in merciless detail, how the prisoner's human identity is stripped away by the assignment of a number instead of a name, by constant surveillance, by sensory deprivation, by meaningless work on the crank, and by constant physical violence or the threat of it» [7, p. 52–53].

In conclusion, we note that the comparative analysis of the translations with the original has also revealed that the beginning of the translation reception of «It's Never Too Late to Mend» and the matter-of-fact romance by Ch. Reade [9] in general in Russia was largely due to the context of mass literature. The attention of the readers of the first translation «Better Late Than Never» was mainly focused on the features that associated the original with the sensational novel, with the traditions of enlightenment ideology and romantic aesthetics; many chapters of the first Russian translation, especially those connected with the description of the prison life of its characters, are an abridged interpretation resulting in a substantial semantic compression of the original. Meanwhile, the perception of the second translation «It's Never Too Late to Mend: An Ordinary Story», unlike the first, is based on an extensive interpretation of the events and relationships between the characters; virtually all the chapters of the novel in this variant are a detailed, «literal» translation that focuses readers' attention on pressing social issues, which, from the perspective of Ch. Reade himself, were considered to be the leitmotif of the entire novel.

Being textually synonymous and highlighting one another's strengths and weaknesses, the Russian translations of the Reade's novel seem to complement each other, building up to a certain extent the reception of the original to the whole, which indicates, due to their synchronicity, not only and perhaps not so much the semantic intensity of the original, but the level of translation culture achieved in Russia in the second half of the 19th century, as well as the variety

of deep processes of the formation of the Russian classical novel that took in the traditions of foreign literature, in particular, the Victorian matter-of-fact romance.

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