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Nice and Fine in the Translation of Ernest Hemingway's "A Farewell to Arms"

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Ernest Hemingway is well-known for his varied literary experiments. He most often exposed his views of life by approaching events in a combined manner: as actor and spectator. His aspirations to the improvement of literary technique were essentially concerned with choice of vocabulary, elaborateness of diction, the use of particular grammatical forms, etc. One instance of such experimentation can be seen in the novel *A Farewell to Arms*. In this paper the author examines the role of two adjectives, *nice* and *fine*, which are used by the writer to create an atmosphere of subjectivity and personal identification in the narrative process. It is also interesting to observe the limits of translatability of *nice* and *fine* in *A Farewell to Arms*. These two lexemes are approached from two points of view: as stylemes, i.e. in terms of their literary function; and, second, in contrastive analysis — that is, as Serbo-Croatian translation equivalents.

No one is nowadays going to argue whether Hemingway has or has not contributed to the development of American prose. A number of critics and biographers who have dealt with Hemingway's writings from the beginning of his literary career have observed that his efforts were directed towards building up a style which one day would make him able to write about events as they might be experienced by an actor rather than by a spectator.¹

¹ Harry Levin, "Observation on the Style of Ernest Hemingway" in *Hemingway and His Critics*, An international Anthology ed. and with an Introduction by Carlos Baker, Hill and Wang, Inc., New York, 1961, pp. 93—115.

Considerations of "the hot pursuit of immediate reality" or, on the other hand, of watching facts from a distance, may very easily make one assume, as Harry Levin says, that races that fiction runs against fact are lost.

One is aware that the language we are all familiar with, as a common means of communication, thoroughly permeates a work of art, both in its form and its contents. It is quite clear that language can in the same way, in both cases, yield innumerable possibilities of expression. However, difficulties in literary analysis arise when those same words used in communication for everyday practical purposes gain additional meanings.² In other words, these meanings become referential in other directions that lead to the creative processes in a work of art. What is then difficult to grasp are the reasons why some particular choices of words or expressions, and their distributions and arrangements, are made the way they are.

No matter how Hemingway's literary work has been evaluated, stress has regularly been laid on how his way of thinking copes with his way of writing and vice versa. A variety of devices in his style have often been discussed: a particular choice of vocabulary; attention drawn to the use of dialogue, its rhythm and uniformity; sequences of short sentences, groups of numerous clauses with the connector *and* between them; repetitions and simplifications of all sorts that may logically appear as spontaneous random solutions, etc. Innovations have indisputably been identified in several areas: narration, description, and dialogue.³

The concise, synoptic way of Hemingway's writing soon found imitators, yet his "simplicity" and "uniformity" worked within such a fixed frame that nothing could be further "simplified" or extended to the use of other possibilities. Accordingly, no one has been able to apply Hemingway's models properly without detriment to his own authenticity.

Hemingway's approaches to the problem of literary diction may be considered from two aspects: innovations intended to overcome some traditional weaknesses, or innovations at all costs, which necessarily lead to artificiality. These phenomena are likely to be considered most efficiently through approaches to language material. In the present state of our knowledge of the laws of the realm of art, one might

² Radoslav Katičić, "Linguistics and Literary Theory" in *The Art of the Word*, A Journal for Literary Studies published by the Croatian Philological Society in Zagreb, 1969, pp. 75-88.

³ See the international anthology referred to in Note 1.

logically suppose that a link between "what" and "how" in a work of art could be sought in this type of analysis.⁴

Nice and *fine* are singled out in this paper as two adjectives that occur in rather vague contexts in the novel *A Farewell to Arms*.⁵ To tell the truth, one would face difficulties in trying to write out in full, if we may say so, the denotations of these two adjectives.⁶ In fact, this is the case with all terms which denote *qualities*. Their power of denotation or, in other words, their collocations, are entirely dependent on the persons, objects, events etc. they qualify.⁷ Problems arise however, when one feels that a qualifier does not say much about an object. In these instances, lacking such power, such qualifiers seem to announce the need for further descriptions of the given object or of whatever takes place around it. One may be so impressed by such terms that one comes to understand them as an indispensable means of making a text more vivid and more dramatic. At first glance they seem to be superfluous, to slow down the process of narration, to cause monotony, and the like.

The following sentence is one of the best illustrations of how *nice* and *fine* are in most instances used in *A Farewell to Arms*:

*The town was very nice and our house was very fine.*⁸

"Grad je bio vrlo lep, a naša kuća sasvim udobna."⁹

"Grad je bio vrlo lijep, a naša kuća bila je veoma zgodna."¹⁰

Obviously, this sentence draws the reader's attention to the role these two adjectives share in this stylistic association. A sort of partnership of *nice* and *fine* may also be observed from the formal point of view: they are monosyllabic, they share the diphthong /ai/ and the same number of sounds.

On the other hand, the construction of the sentence in itself is no less worthy of note. Further, the connector *and*,

⁴ Radoslav Katičić, *ibidem*.

⁵ Harry Levin, *ibidem*, p. 106.

⁶ John Lyons, *Semantics* I, Cambridge University Press, 1978, pp. 206—215.

⁷ Eugene Nida, *Componential Analysis of Meaning*, Mouton Publishers, The Hague — Paris — New York, 1979, pp. 162—164.

⁸ Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*, Penguin Books, 1961, p. 8.

⁹ The translation of Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* by Radojica V. Cirović: *Zbogom oružje*, Narodna knjiga, Beograd, 1965, p. 15.

¹⁰ The translation of Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* by Branko Kojić: *Zbogom oružje*, Mladost, Zagreb, 1952, p. 7.

with its role of coordination and a high frequency count in *A Farewell to Arms*, appears between the two clauses.¹¹ The subjects (*the town and our house*), and the predicates (*was* used twice) with their complements (*very nice* and *very fine*) occupy parallel and symmetrical positions. As we can see, the two clauses are formally (i. e. phonologically) divergent in two instances: in the case of their subjects (*the town* and *our house*) and of the complements of their predicates (*nice* and *fine*), while all the rest are repeated expressions.

One should not disregard the fact that the partnership of *nice* and *fine* in the above sentence is realized in their first occurrence in *A Farewell to Arms*. *The house*, as a matter of fact, has already been introduced in the novel and described in details: "...we crossed the river in August and lived in a house in Gorizia that had a fountain and many thick shady trees in a walled garden and a wistaria vine purple on the side of *the house*" (the italics are mine). *Gorizia* is mentioned for the first time in this sentence, then *the town* (meaning *Gorizia*) occurs with the adjective *nice* in the sentence quoted above in 1. Finally, *the town* appears a little further below in a more detailed description: "... there are hospitals and cafés and artillery up side streets..." Accordingly, the meanings of *nice* and *fine* in *The town was very nice and our house was very fine* are rather vague expressions which repeat and support what has been stated with much more precision. It is clear that the author here uses *nice* and *fine* for other purposes. His intention is to keep the reader to the point, to help him understand some important facts: the changeable conditions of life in the atmosphere of the war. This way, the reader has the opportunity to take part in the significant events and actions more personally and more intimately and to identify himself with the actual participants.

¹¹ The frequent use of *and* in *A Farewell to Arms* may be seen in one of the longest sentences in the book from Chapter 7, page 33: "Maybe she would pretend that I was her boy that was killed and we would go in the front door and the porter would take off his cap and I would stop at the concierge's desk and ask for the key and she would stand by the elevator and then we would get in the elevator and it would go up very slowly clicking at all the floors and then our floor and the boy would open the door and stand there and she would step out and I would step out and we would walk down the hall and I would put the key in the door and open it and go in and then take down the telephone and ask them to send a bottle of capri bianco in a silver bucket full of ice and you would hear the ice against the pail coming down the corridor and the boy would knock and I would say leave it outside the door please." (the italics are mine).

One may also feel that the sentence quoted, with its formal construction, its rhythm and harmony, its seeming simplicity and the symmetrical repetitions of some parts of it, assigns to *nice* and *fine* other than ordinary referential values. The role of *to be*, as a relational verb, and particularly the same form being used in both clauses, is inconspicuous. No doubt, it makes the terms *nice* and *fine* become more prominent from both a formal and semantic aspect. Besides, the verb *to be* is one of Hemingway's favourite expressions throughout his work.¹²

Terms such as *wonderful*, *magnificent*, *lovely* and *splendid* also have a relatively high frequency count in *A Farewell to Arms*. They may be identified in contexts similar to those in which *nice* and *fine* occur. One understands such a choice since, above all, it yields more variety. On the other hand, the meanings of such terms are weakened or neutralized in colloquial usage in spite of their being polysyllabic, that is, from the formal point of view, more conspicuous than *nice* or *fine*.

It is also an important fact that, in *A Farewell to Arms*, *nice* occur more frequently in dialogue than in pure narration or description where generally less emotional and subjective tones are used. In any case, Hemingway tends to make use of these terms in the same way in narration or description as he does in dialogue. Thus, when the reader comes across these terms used outside dialogue, he at once becomes aware of their superfluousness. However, the power of their expressiveness remains since they sound very familiar. Therefore, the lexemes (the smallest lexical units) *nice* and *fine*, used in the above mentioned situations in *A Farewell to Arms*, may be said to become significant stylemes (the smallest units in stylistic analysis). From a stylistic point of view, they may have some advantage over adjectives such as *lovely*, *splendid* and so on.

One can easily see that the translation probabilities for *nice* and *fine* are numerous. Whatever the difficulties in finding their translation equivalents, one thing should be clear: there is no possibility at all of considering some proposed translation equivalents of *nice* or *fine* in a stylistic analysis, say, in a Serbo-Croatian version of the original. In other words, if we made a test using the so-called back-translation method, it might be that we would get adjectives like *wonderful*, *magnificent*, *lovely*, *splendid* or the like, as the tran-

¹² Harry Levin, *ibidem*, p. 107.

slation equivalents of *divan*, *krasan*, *lijep*, *sjajan*, etc. It is quite logical that there would be no possibility of fixing e. g. *nice* as “*zgodan*” and *fine* as “*lijep*”. Only in this way, however, would one be able to get solutions in a contrastive sense in the area of phonology, morphology and possibly syntactic representation.

In contrastive analysis serious difficulties arise with the attempts that are necessarily made at solving the problem of the semantic overlapping between the adjective *beautiful* and all the other terms that may be regarded as synonyms. Namely, *beautiful* should occupy the highest position on a proposed scale of delicacy for the realm of “*beauty*”. Thus, *handsome* (boy “*momak*”) and *pretty* (girl “*djevojka*”) are not interchangeable with *beautiful*. Accordingly, if one chooses *lijep* for “*beautiful*” and *zgodan* for “*handsome*” and “*pretty*”, one may face difficulties in finding a solution for *nice*. *Nice* may easily find correspondence with boy “*zgodan momak*” and girl “*zgodna djevojka*” but not quite successfully in a translation of *nice pudding* “*zgodan puding*”, certainly if *momak* and *puдинг* occur too closely in a text. *Nice* in the first place means *agreeable*, *pleasing*, *delightful*, *kind*, *amiably pleasant* and does not refer to spiritual qualities like *beautiful* or to perfection of form or a pleasing appearance or proportion like *beautiful*, *handsome*, *pretty*, *lovely*.

One of the most relevant components in the denotation of the adjective *fine* is, no doubt, a very high grade of perfection, a quality which is free from imperfections. It is obvious that both *nice* and *fine* have a wide range of application. They can be used with concrete and abstract entities, with animates and inanimates etc. This is one of the reasons why they can yield so many equivalents in other languages.

In the sentence “*The town was very nice and our house was very fine*” *fine* was translated as “*udoban*”. This example may serve as an illustration of how difficult it is to find translation equivalents in such instances. Namely, the use of “*lijep*” as the equivalent of *fine* in this particular case, would be questionable from two aspects: first, no “*beauty*” is in question (no one would have that in mind in Serbo-Croatian); and, secondly, “*lijep*” has already been used as the equivalent of *nice* (*town*) in the main clause. On the other hand, it would be no less debatable whether “*zgodan* (*grad*)” would match *nice* (*town*) in that context:

**Grad je bio veoma lijep i naša je kuća bila veoma lijepa.*

?*Grad je bio veoma zgodan i naša je kuća bila veoma lijepa.*

*Grad je bio veoma zgodan i naša je kuća bila veoma zgodna.

Grad je bio veoma lijep i naša je kuća bila veoma udobna.

It may seem that "udoban" (*fine*) is not a completely satisfactory either. Similarly, one should not neglect the use of "ugodan (grad)" for *nice* (*town*). But what choice should one make if he had the following adjectives qualifying *town*:

| | | |
|-----------|---|-------------------------|
| beautiful | — | lijep |
| nice | — | ugodan, zgodan, *lijep |
| fine | — | ugodna, *lijep, *udoban |
| lovely | — | zgodan, krasan |
| wonderful | — | divan, *krasan |
| splendid | — | sjajan |

It is natural that terms that denote qualities and have a high frequency count, say, in a literary can yield a variety of translation equivalents. This phenomenon is a necessity especially when there is a concentration upon one or two meanings within the same semantic field, e. g. *nice* and *fine* in *A Farewell to Arms*.¹³ It must also be noted that meanings with the same sense that are classified in syntactic analysis as separate parts of speech, as e. g. adjectives and adverbs, must be dealt with together in semantic consideration.

In a more complete survey of the distribution of *nice* and *fine* in *A Farewell to Arms* the two terms should also be contrasted with their synonyms: *beautiful*, *lovely*, *wonderful*, *splendid*, *magnificent*, etc. A further step would include an analysis of their collocations, in the first place, with nouns, etc. Only in this way could one get a deeper insight into the translation probabilities these terms might yield in Serbo-Croatian.

The following is the list of the Serbo-Croatian translation equivalents of *nice* and *fine* in *A Farewell to Arms*:¹⁴

The equivalents of *nice* in Ćirović's translation:

| | | <i>The prevalence in dialogue:</i> | |
|----------|----|------------------------------------|----------|
| lep | 18 | lep | D 12 / 6 |
| divan | 13 | divan | D 9 / 4 |
| ljubazan | 8 | ljubazan | D 7 / 1 |
| zgodan | 3 | zgodan | D 2 / 1 |
| prijatan | 3 | prijatan | D 3 / 0 |
| | 45 | | 33 12 |

¹³ There is no such concentration in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

¹⁴ In Ćirović's and Kojić's translations. See Notes 9 and 10.

The equivalents of *nice* in Kojić's translation:

| | | <i>The prevalence in dialogue:</i> | |
|----------|----|------------------------------------|----------|
| lijep | 24 | lijep | D 16 / 8 |
| ljubazan | 5 | ljubazan | D 4 / 1 |
| zgodan | 4 | zgodan | D 3 / 1 |
| krasan | 4 | krasan | D 2 / 2 |
| dobar | 3 | dobar | D 3 / 0 |
| divan | 2 | divan | D 1 / 1 |
| ugodan | 1 | ugodan | D 1 / 0 |
| prijatan | 1 | prijatan | D 0 / 1 |
| prijazan | 1 | prijazan | D 1 / 0 |
| | 45 | | 31 14 |

The equivalents of *fine* in Ćirković's translation:

| | | <i>The prevalence in dialogue:</i> | |
|----------|----|------------------------------------|-----------|
| divan | 38 | divan | D 33 / 5 |
| lep | 29 | lep | D 17 / 12 |
| dobar | 11 | dobar | D 7 / 4 |
| fin | 4 | fin | D 3 / 1 |
| odličan | 3 | odličan | D 2 / 1 |
| sitan | 2 | sitan | D 0 / 2 |
| sjajan | 1 | sjajan | D 1 / 0 |
| krasan | 1 | krasan | D 1 / 0 |
| izvrstan | 1 | izvrstan | D 1 / 0 |
| prijatan | 1 | prijatan | D 0 / 1 |
| zgodan | 1 | zgodan | D 0 / 1 |
| pogodan | 1 | pogodan | D 0 / 1 |
| udoban | 1 | udoban | D 0 / 1 |
| otmen | 1 | otmen | D 0 / 1 |
| junačina | 1 | junačina | D 1 / 0 |
| tako | 1 | tako | D 1 / 0 |
| zero | 1 | zero | D 1 / 0 |
| | 98 | | 68 30 |

The equivalents of *fine* in Kojić's translation:

| | | <i>The prevalence in dialogue:</i> | |
|----------|----|------------------------------------|----------|
| fin | 40 | fin | D 33 / 7 |
| lijep | 26 | lijep | D 19 / 7 |
| dobar | 11 | dobar | D 10 / 1 |
| divan | 7 | divan | D 4 / 3 |
| krasan | 5 | krasan | D 3 / 2 |
| zgodan | 3 | zgodan | D 0 / 3 |
| ugodan | 1 | ugodan | D 0 / 1 |
| ljubazan | 1 | ljubazan | D 1 / 0 |
| sitan | 1 | sitan | D 0 / 1 |
| zero | 3 | zero | D 2 / 1 |
| | — | | — — |
| | 98 | | 72 26 |

It goes without saying that the choice of translation equivalents depend on many conditions, particularly within a literary work. However, if we are aware of Hemingway's experiments in the domain of style, diction, etc. we may be sure that *nice* and *fine*, owing to their semantic "vagueness", are most likely to yield a variety of translation equivalents. No translator would ever dream of using only two translation equivalents throughout the novel. They should also respond to the criterion of "vagueness". In view of this conception, i. e. from a strictly stylistic point of view, *A Farewell to Arms* may serve as an illustration of the notion of untranslatibility.¹⁵

It may seem that a comparative evaluation of more than two Serbo-Croatian versions of *A Farewell to Arms*, since only two are available, would point with much more precision to the number of translation probabilities for *nice* and *fine*. Yet in no case could this number be reduced to just two equivalents, one for *nice* and one for *fine*. Certainly, if it

¹⁵ J. C. Catford, *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*, Oxford University Press, 1965, pp. 93-103.

were possible to obtain such a result, a type of formal correspondence would be realised, in a morphological sense at least.

It is also to be noted that *nice* and *fine* may easily substitute for affirmative replies. They differ from the adverb *yes*, in the first place, in that they convey an element of emotional or emphatic tone.

A comparison of the frequency count of *nice* and *fine* for *A Farewell to Arms* with that for *For Whom the Bell Tolls* may also point to the fact that *A Farewell to Arms* has been written with efforts expressed by the use of more efficient and more conspicuous means of diction. The following will illustrate this:

Nice and fine in A Farewell to Arms:

| <i>nice</i> | <i>fine</i> | chapter | <i>nice</i> | <i>fine</i> | chapter |
|-------------|-------------|---------|-------------|-------------|---------|
| 1 | 1 | II | 2 | 10 | XXIII |
| 3 | | IV | | 6 | XXV |
| 3 | 1 | V | 3 | | XXVI |
| 2 | 2 | VI | 2 | 3 | XXVII |
| 1 | 2 | VII | | 4 | XXVIII |
| | 4 | XI | | 2 | XXIX |
| 1 | 1 | XII | | 2 | XXX |
| 2 | | XIII | | 2 | XXXII |
| 1 | 4 | XIV | | 1 | XXXIII |
| 1 | 5 | XV | | 6 | XXXIV |
| | 3 | XVI | 5 | 1 | XXXV |
| 4 | 7 | XVII | 1 | | XXXVI |
| | 1 | XVIII | 3 | 9 | XXXVII |
| | 3 | XIX | 2 | 8 | XXXVIII |
| 1 | | XX | | 2 | XXXIX |
| 1 | | XXI | 5 | 3 | XL |
| 2 | | XXII | | 5 | XLI |
| | | | — | — | |
| | | | 45 | 98 | |

*Nice and fine in For Whom the Bell Tolls:*¹⁶

| <i>nice</i> | <i>fine</i> | chapter |
|--|---|---------|
| | 1 izvrsno D (32) | II |
| | 1 dobro D (93) | IX |
| 2 lijepo (D (105) lijepo D (113) | | X |
| 1 zgodna D (128) | 2 sjajno (131) dobro D (140) | XI |
| | 1 lijepom D (154) | XIII |
| | 4 sjajan (220), sjajan (220) krasnih D (233) krasnih D (233) | XVIII |
| | 1 krasan (284) | XXVI |
| | 1 najbolji D (315) | XXX |
| | 1 boljega (329) | XXXI |
| | 1 sjajnih (344) | XXXV |
| | 1 krasno (351) | XXXVI |
| | 2 tanko (392) sjajnu D (395) | XLII |
| 4 krasan D (404), krasan D (404) puna (406), lijepo D (431) | 2 krasno (402) lijepo (431) | XLIII |
| <hr/> 7 | <hr/> 18 | |

¹⁶ Translated by Šime Balen: *Kome zvono zvoni*, Zora, Zagreb, 1967.

PRIDJEVI *NICE* I *FINE* U PRIJEVODU ROMANA
"ZBOGOM ORUŽJE" ERNESTA HEMINGWAYA

Ernest Hemingway je poznat po eksperimentiranju u svom književnom radu. Između ostalog, nastojao je pristupati događajima više kao sudionik nego kao promatrač. Pri tome je posebnu pozornost poklanjao izboru vokabulara, ulozi dikcije, upotrebi određenih gramatičkih oblika itd. U ovome se članku razmatra uloga pridjeva *nice* i *fine* pomoću kojih pisac u atmosferi općeg i objektivnog unosi izraz osobnog i intimnog. Njima se pristupa s dva stanovišta: kao prema stilemima, tj. u svjetlu njihove uloge u književnom djelu; i, drugo, u kontrastivnoj analizi, tj. kao prijevodnim ekvivalentima u hrvatskom ili srpskom jeziku.