


Personal names in English literary translations from Czech and Icelandic

Timothy Pogačar 

Bowling Green State University, United States of America



ABSTRACT

This article presents a select survey of the rendering of personal names in translation into English from European languages with different scripts from the turn of the twentieth century to the early twenty-first century. Works of prose fiction were chosen from Czech and Icelandic, which use characters that are not part of the English alphabet. Their original publication dates are from the middle of the nineteenth to the late twentieth century, with translations trailing by years or even decades. The authors of the original works were very well known and in some cases Nobel Prize laureates. This gives assurance that their works attracted good translators and, in some cases, multiple translators. The hypothesis was that over the course of more than a century, there has been a growing tendency to respect the original spellings of personal names in translations – that is, to employ the source language's script, even when the literary works belong to relatively peripheral European cultures. The explanations for this include increased cultural contacts, the expansion of what has traditionally been called world literature, and internet resources.

Keywords: personal names, literary translation, Czech literature, Icelandic literature, acoustic impression

Osebna imena v angleških literarnih prevodih iz češčine in islandščine

IZVLEČEK

V prispevku je predstavljen izbrani pregled prevajanja osebnih imen v angleščino iz evropskih jezikov z različnimi pisavami od preloma dvajsetega do začetka enaindvajsetega stoletja. Izbrana so bila prozna dela v češčini in islandščini, ki uporabljata črke, ki niso del angleške abecede. Dela so bila izvorno objavljena od sredine devetnajstega do konca dvajsetega stoletja, prevodi pa so zaostali nekaj let ali celo desetletij. Avtorji izvirnih del so bili zelo znani in v nekaterih primerih tudi Nobelovi nagradenci, kar zagotavlja, da so njihova dela pritegnila dobre prevajalce in v nekaterih primerih tudi več prevajalcev. Hipoteza je bila, da je bila skozi več kot sto let vse bolj prisotna težnja po spoštovanju izvorne pisave osebnih imen v prevodih – kar pomeni, da se uporablja pisava izvirnega jezika, tudi če literarna dela pripadajo razmeroma perifernim evropskim kulturam. Razlogi za to so med drugim okrepljeni kulturni stiki, širjenje tako imenovane svetovne književnosti in spletni viri.

Ključne besede: osebna imena, literarno prevajanje, češka literatura, islandska literatura, akustični vtis

1. Introduction

The names of literary characters are proper nouns and a subset of anthroponyms (Nuessel 1992, 38–39) that like other kinds of names (e.g., brand names) are created by individual humans (e.g. literary authors), at least in the modern period. Names refer to real people (or fictional characters) by sound alone; they have no dictionary value (Pulgram 1954, 45–46), even if in some cases the name matches a common noun (e.g., Russian Lev – lion) or meaning can be retrieved etymologically (e.g., Carl – man of low birth). A name is a necessary linguistic referent (Nuessel 1992, 2), and as such it is generally not translated as are the other linguistic items in the natural language surrounding it. This applies to the names of real people as well as to those of literary personages.

That having been said, graphically reproducing a personal name from the source language of a translation presents obvious challenges. For instance, despite centuries of translating experience, there are still competing systems of converting Classical Greek names (Connolly 2009). In translating the names of literary characters from Mandarin to English, phonemic transliteration and semantic rendering continue to be alternatives (Xiao and Huang 2016). Even transferring names between languages with similar Latin scripts can pose questions, such as whether English names should be inflected in a Slovene-language text (Grün 1959, 58–60). However a translator handles personal names, they ought to be transferred into the target language to preserve the person's – and I argue below literary character's – culture (Newmark 2003, 214). The acoustic impression a name produces on a reader is also important (Mossop 2017, 633–34). Translators' awareness of this feature is attested by the fact that some translations include pronunciation keys. The acoustic impressions of characters' names are but a small part of the expanding field of reader responses to literature in translation (Chan 2016, 147–54).

In weighing how to present a character to readers, translators may take into account a name's meaning and/or allusions. A character name's semantic load can be inherent, as is often the case in Fyodor Dostoevsky's novels (Knapp 1998, 27–37), for instance, or exist by dint of allusion. The latter explains why, for example, a leading translator from Slovene to English who usually faithfully reproduces the original forms of personal names has opted to use the name Sebastian rather than Boštjan in the forthcoming English version of Florjan Lipuš's novel *Boštjanov let*: The allusion to the Christian Saint Sebastian, in this case, might elude many readers of the translation (Biggins 2024). In the former case, of course, translators have not attempted to render Prince Myshkin's (of *The Idiot*) surname in such a way as to convey the meaning of mouse; they have transliterated the Russian Cyrillic, and it is left to readers to determine the name's relation to the word *mysh* 'mouse' if they are interested.

This article considers translations into English from languages that use a Latin alphabet but have some different characters and diacritic marks. The handling of personal names in translation even between languages with similar scripts can be a complex issue. The languages that were selected are Czech and Icelandic, which have been until recent decades peripheral among European literatures. The hypothesis was that over the course of more than a century there has been a growing tendency to respect the original spellings of personal names in translations – that is, to employ the source language's alphabet, even when the literary works belong to relatively peripheral European cultures.

Mossop (2017, 622) has called this operation (his term) copying and notes that, like phonoliterating, it can have a foreignizing effect for the reader of a translation (Mossop 2017, 633). I will argue in the conclusion that this effect may be desirable.

2. Procedure and materials

To test the hypothesis, the article looks at names of Christian origin, with minor exceptions, variants of which exist in language communities that developed in contact with Christianity. The article begins with an examination of personal names in the two most well-known modern Czech novels, Jaroslav Hašek's *Osudy dobrého vojáka Švejka za světové války* (1921–1923, *The Good Soldier Schweik* 1930 or *The Good Soldier Švejk* 1964) and Božena Němcová's *Babička* (1855, *The Grandmother* 1891 or *Granny* 1962). The two English versions of each novel show how translators handled personal names between the 1890s and 1960s. There are comparisons with other, Polish and South Slavic, translations around the turn of the twentieth century that reveal similarities and differences with practices in the Czech translations. Then novels in translation by two leading Czech writers of the post-1968 period, Milan Kundera and Josef Škvorecký, are examined to see how personal names are transferred in books by major publishing houses in the 1980s. Once again, there are brief comparisons with other sources. The article concludes with consideration of translated novels by the Icelandic writer and Nobel Prize Winner (1955) Halldór Laxness that suggest a decisive shift in the handling of personal names in favor of preserving their original forms.

2.1 Naming and names of fictional characters

This section of the article advances three reasons for preserving the original spellings of personal names in translation. In the first, colorful lines of Jaroslav Hašek's novel *Osudy dobrého vojáka Švejka* (1921–1923, translations 1930 and 1974), there are three instances of naming (note: Ferdinand in the Czech original):

“And so they’ve killed our Ferdinand,” said the charwoman to Mr. Švejk, who had left the military service years before, after having been finally certified by an army medical board as an imbecile, and now lived by selling dogs—ugly monstrosities whose pedigrees he forged. [...]

“Which Ferdinand, Mrs. Müller?” he asked, going on with the massaging. “I know two Ferdinands. One is a messenger at Průša’s, the chemist’s, and once by mistake he drank a bottle of hair oil there. And the other is Ferdinand Kokoška, who collects dog manure. Neither of them is any loss.”

“Oh, no, sir, it’s His Imperial Highness, the Archduke Ferdinand, from Konopiště, the fat churchy one.” (Hašek 1973, 3–4)

The two Ferdinands Švejk names in this humorous passage are fictional characters; the third Ferdinand refers to a real person, Franz Ferdinand, whom an educated reader of the novel can be expected to recognize. Švejk’s point of view makes the three Ferdinands equivalent in the reader’s eyes, and this equivalency erases the line between real and fictional referents. All three have a personal identity, fictitious or real.

Preserving the original spelling of Ferdinand in an English translation is simple. I will argue that it is best to do so whenever possible (i.e., between languages with similar scripts), though it has taken better than a century of translating prose fiction to reach that conclusion. The reason it is best to transfer the original forms of names is that naming fictional characters is like naming people and changing a name – from modifying its spelling (even between very similar Latin alphabets) to offering an English-language equivalent – is like changing a personal identity. This may sound like raising the status of fictional characters to that of existing humans, but as Philip Roughton, an accomplished translator of Icelandic literature put it, “It has always been my practice, in my translations, to leave the Icelandic spellings of names as they are; names are, to me (and many others) essential to a person’s identity and therefore, I think, unalterable—an Icelander named Þorlákur is Þorlákur, not Thorlakur, or an Icelander named Sigríður is Sigríður, not Sigridur” (Roughton 2024). Roughton is referring to the letters thorn (þ) and eth (ð), which are changed, respectively, to th and d, as well as the diacritics.

To see why the names of fictional characters might be likened to the names of existing people, we can briefly recall what is generally the starting point of classifying names, John Stuart Mill’s assertion that personal names have no connotation or definition in the usual sense that words do (Schwartz 2013, 927). This view is understandable as it applies to real people (e.g., the archduke) but might be questionable as concerns

fictional characters (e.g., the first two Ferdinands) that have connotations – that is, readers associate their names with certain characteristics rather than with a person who has existed.

In this regard, another important touchstone is the philosopher Saul Kripke's view, which differs from Mill's. In his 1970 lectures (Kripke 1980), he emphasizes the importance of the act of naming and the continuity of a name's association with its real referent over time. On this basis, the naming of fictional characters is inherently different from the naming of real people. However, others have argued that we can imagine a parallel act of naming and chain of witnessing to the link between name and referent for fictional characters through publishing and readers' discussions of characters (Thomasson 1993). Kripke's view can also be generalized by substituting a set of characteristics of a fictional character (e.g., Švejk's chemist assistant who drank hair oil) for a unique referent, a person existing in reality (Tiedke 2011).

If Kripke's authoritative view of naming people is accepted and extended in ways to apply it to naming fictional characters, then the translator, as part of the chain witnessing what Kripke terms a baptism and Tiedke a dubbing, ought to use the original form of a character's name in the same way that a historian uses the original form of a person's name, unless there exists a standard alternative (e.g., Eng. Catherine the Great for transliterated Ekaterina; Eng. Pope Francis for Latin Franciscus or Italian Francesco). This is a novel reason for preserving characters' names in translation.

A consideration of at least equal weight in addition to the one outlined from analytic philosophy involves the perceived sound of a name. Research into English and Slovene readers' perceptions of the sound qualities of personal names in translation based on findings from marketing and other fields has shown that readers across cultures receive similar impressions of characters based on the sounds of their names (Pogacar et al. 2017; Pogačar and Pogacar 2024). Altering spellings or using English-language equivalents of names from other languages risks disrupting the transmission of sound impressions contained in the original forms. Of course, this presupposes reader adaptation to a possibly unfamiliar script and may recommend a pronunciation key. It may be reasonable to expect readers to adapt; for example, some US media outlets now use the original spellings of National Basketball Association stars Nikola Jokić (Serbian) and Luka Dončić's (Slovene) names.

A third important reason for preserving original names is that they are part of the source culture, like place names, for example, and as such they should not be changed. In fact, in various cultures fiction with rural settings often combines character names with the names of locales along the lines of so-and-so from such-and-such a place. However, as with the names of prominent people, accepted (localized) usage for

certain locations is an overriding factor. A translator will likely use Prague and not Praha and Moscow, not (transliterated) Moskva.

The following sections of this article will give examples of how personal names, and some place names for comparison, have been handled in translations from Czech into English. The examples will show a move, over the course of the twentieth and into the twenty-first century, towards employing original spellings in translations.

2.2 Translations from Czech: *Osudy dobrého vojáka Švejka za světové války*

The passage at the beginning of the article is taken from an unabridged translation published in 1974. The front matter includes a detailed “Guide to the Pronunciation of Czech Names”. It shows the reader the use of all Czech diacritics and gives examples; for instance, the castle Konopiště in the passage above is glossed in the key as “Kon-o-pish-tyeh.” The translator uses the original spellings of personal names throughout the novel, and the guide suggests the importance of the sounds of these names.

This is in contrast to the first, abridged edition of the novel (Hašek 1930), in which the protagonist’s name is Germanized as Schweik, while the charwoman’s German surname, Müller (original Müllerová, feminine form), has a diacritic mark. The novel contains many German names, of course, but the first pages deprive Švejk of his Czech identity. Elsewhere in the novel we encounter the surnames Slavik and Repa (Hašek 1930, 89) instead of Slavík and Řepa, but Polák (Hašek 1930, 142) is inexplicably spelled as in the original. Then the (1930) translator opts for a phonetic equivalent of Lieutenant Lukaš’s last name (i.e., Lukash). Similar inconsistencies appear in place names, such as Vodicková Street (Hašek 1930, 150), with the correct diacritic, but Hradcany and Budjeovice instead of Hradčany and Budjěovice. In short, the handling of personal (and place) names is inconsistent even though the publisher could have opted for original spellings (Hašek’s name is spelled correctly on the title page but not the cover).

2.3 Translations from Czech: Božena Němcová’s *Babička*

Božena Němcová’s novel *Babička* (1855) is one of the most well-known works in Czech literature, and English translations came out in 1891 and 1962. This study compares the handling of personal names in ten of 18 chapters of both translations, capturing most all of them in the novel (Table 1). While the later translation preserves relatively more original Czech names, both show an overarching tendency to use English equivalents of Czech first and surnames. Of the 53 (43 first and ten last) names in the sampling, 35 or approximately 80% of Czech first names in both translations are rendered

with an Anglicized form. There are eight instances in the 1962 translation where the spellings match the Czech (e.g., Madla, Šima, and Lehotský); the older translation uses transliteration (sh for š) in two cases, the surnames Prošek and Mikeš. Where last names of female characters are concerned, both translations use male forms instead of the marked (with -á) female form.

Table 1. Personal names in Božena Němcová's *Babička*.

First names		
Czech	Frances Gregor (1891)	Edith Pargeter (1962)
Adelka	Adelka	Adelka
Anča	Anna	Anna
Barla	Barla	Barbara
Barunka	Barunka	Babbie
Bertík	Bertie	Bertie
Bětca	Betty	Betsy
Bětká	Betsey	Betty
Cilka	Celia / Cilka	Cecily
Ctibor	Ctibor	Ctibor
Dorotka	Dorothy	Dorothy
Frantík	Frankie	Frankie
Héla	Hela	Helen
Honzíček	Jack	Jackie
Jan	John	John or Johnny
Jeník	Jacob	Jacob
Jiří	George	George
Jiřík	George	George
Johanka	Johanna	Joanna
Josef	Joseph	Joseph
Kašpar	Casper	Jasper
Kačenca	Katherine	Katherine
Kristla	Christina	Christina
Madla	Madeline	Magdalena
Mančinka	Mary	Molly
Mařenka	Mary	Mary
Mikeš	Mikesh	Mikeš
Mikuláš	Nicholas	Nicholas
Míla	Molly	Míla
Mojžíš	Moses	Moses
Rybrcoul	Rybercol	Krakonoš
Šíma	Simon	Šíma
Terezka	Theresa	Theresa
Terinka	Theresa	Theresa
Tomeš	Tomesh	Tom

Toník Václav Vavřínek Viktorka Vilém Vilímek Vlach Vorša Zuzanka	Anton Wenzel Lawrence Viktorka Willie Willie Vlach Vorsa Susannah	Tony Wenceslas Laurie Viktorka Willie Willie Vlach Ursula Susan
Surnames		
Czech pan Beyer Halášek Hortensie Kohoutek Kudrna Lehotský Novotná Prošek, Prošková Stanický Tichánek	Frances Gregor (1891) Mr. Beyer Halashkov Hortense Kohoutek Kuderna Lehotsky Novotny Proshek Stanicky Ticanek	Edith Pargeter (1962) Mr. Beyer Halášek Hortensia Kohoutek Kudrna Lehotský Novotný Prošek, Prošková Stanický Tichánek

Granted, in some cases in which English equivalents are used the name initial sound(s), which research has shown is decisive in how readers or listeners respond to a word (Adelman, Estes, and Cossu 2018; Marslen-Wilson and Welsh 1978; Nooteboom 1981) or name (Pogačar and Pogacar 2024), are similar. Examples (Table 1) in which English equivalents are the same in both translations include Kristla > Christina, Frantík > Frank, Dorotka > Dorothy, and Terezka and Terninka > Theresa. However, in many cases the sounds of English equivalents that match in both translations differ substantially from the original – for example, Jan > John or Johnny, Kačenca > Katherine, Mikuláš > Nicholas, and Vilímek > Willie. Complicating matters is the occurrence of Czech diminutives, which are inconsistently conveyed in the English. The diminutive form is conveyed in Vilímek > Willie, but in the rendering Frantík > Frank, it is unclear that Frank (or Frankie) was once a diminutive of Frances (Czech František), and in Terinka > Theresa, the full English name is used just as it is elsewhere for Tereza. Likewise, both Jiří and (diminutive) Jiřík yield the full name George. Perhaps the most interesting case is that of Honzíček, diminutive of Honza (informal Jan – John), rendered as Jack (Němcová 1891) and Jackie (Němcová 1962), which captures the diminutive of Honza, but both are distant from the Czech original. The most puzzling diminutive is when the grandmother refers to Kristla as *smíšek* ‘laughter’ and

the first translator turns the reference into a name, Smila, that is meaningless to the English reader, while the second translator coins a nickname, Miss Mirth (Němcová 1962, 43). The preponderant use of English equivalents in both translations distorts the sound impressions of most of the original Czech names and deprives characters of their personal and national identities.

Let us consider several cases of varying names in *Babička* that show additional problems with altering originals. A central character, Barunka's name is given as such in the 1891 translation, but she is called Babbie in the 1962 translation. It may be that the translator in the older version did not know that Barunka is a diminutive of Barbora (Eng. Barbara), which is evident in the later translation, though readers would likely have to research the Barbara – Babbie connection. Something similar happens to Vorša. It becomes Vorsa (here the 1891 translator does not supply sh as in the surname Mikeš > Mikesh above) and Ursula. In the case of Mančinka, the first translation gives Mary and explains, “but she was always called Manchinka” (Němcová 1891, 53) (ch for č), without noting that it is a diminutive form. On the other hand, the Czech Mařenka is Mary in the first translation, even though it is a diminutive of Marie or Mařena, and Molly in the second. Once again, it is doubtful that readers of English would make the Mary – Molly connection. (The older translation uses Molly for Míla but the newer one preserves the original Míla.) Finally, Václav is Germanized as Wenzel (Němcová 1891) and Anglicized as Wenceslas (Němcová 1962). The examples of Barunka, Vorša, Mančinka, Mařinka, and Václav suggest these translations hinder not only sound, identity, and cultural transference but introduce inconsistencies that may challenge and even mislead readers.

A word must be said about place names in the translations, because Němcová came from the Krkonoše Mountains and a tale is inserted that is set there, while a shepherd in the novel takes his name from the region. The older translation gives the German term Riesengebirge (Němcová 1891, 49) but in another place the Sudetic mountains (Němcová 1891, 46). The second translation uses the more familiar (in English) Giant Mountains for Krkonoše and Krkonošsky hory (Němcová 1962, 28). Then the shepherd is said in both translations to be a Riesenburg or Riesenburk man and a shepherd from Riesenburg or Riesenburk. The inconsistencies in the newer translation leave the reader to sort out how the names of the mountain ranges relate and the shepherd's association with them. Further, the prince is named Rybercoul (Rybercol in translation 1) in the tale but Krakonoš in the 1962 translation, which would have made sense if the Czech name for the range, Krkonoše, had been preserved in the translation. The 1891 translation makes attempts to translate place

names (e.g., Červená Hůra > Red Hura) while the more recent translation sticks with Czech spellings (e.g., Červená Hůra).

The titles of the translations – *The Grandmother* (Němcová 1891) and *Granny* (Němcová 1962) – certainly convey differing views of the main character on the part of the narrators. The former holds her at greater distance while the latter names her in perhaps too colloquial or regional of a fashion for American English. The respective subtitles of the translations, “A Story of Country Life in Bohemia” and “Scenes from Country Life”, differ as well. The Czech subtitle has *obrazy*, so scenes is a better choice; “in Bohemia” was probably added to the 1891 translation as an advertising explanation. The audience for this translation was an American readership that might have been curious about the land from which tens of thousands had immigrated by the late nineteenth century, with Chicago, where the translation was published, a primary destination. Given the audience, adapting or Anglicizing the majority of character names in the novel is understandable, though it comes with consequences for readers’ impressions of characters, the sounds of their names, and perceptions of the source culture.

Evidence that the alternative of preserving the original forms of personal names in translation was an option in the late nineteenth century is found in volumes of the *Universal Anthology* (1899–1902). The anthology was intended to gather exemplary samples of literature from around the world as a way of combatting the rise of popular, low-brow literature (Garnett, Vallée, and Brandl 1899, xii–xxiii). For example, volume 29 (Garnett, Vallée, and Brandl 1899), contains translations of short prose works from Bohemian (Czech), Slovak, Slovenian, and Serbo-Croatian, all of which use original spellings – that is, for example, the character surnames Horlivý and Zálaha in a story by the Czech writer Svatopluk Čech (Garnett, Vallée, and Brandl 1899, 299–310).

A compromise solution from the time is found in a translation of Henryk Sienkiewicz’s (1905 Nobel Prize laureate) novel *Potop* (1886, *The Deluge* 1891). The front matter (Sienkiewicz 1891, xvii–xviii) contains a transliteration key because “the Polish alphabet has many phonetic combinations which are difficult for one who does not know the language”. So, for example, *cz* > *ch*, *szcz* > *shch*, and *rz* > *r*, and > *j* followed by “the French *j*”. The surname Czarnowski becomes Charnovski and Żyromski > Jyromski. The pronunciation of vowel sounds is also explained. However, the transliteration does not account for other spellings; for instance, the surname Sołłohub > Sollohub and Gościewicz > Gostsyevich. The name Andrzej > Andrei, “because of the extreme difficulty, for any one not a Pole, of pronouncing *r* followed by the French *j*”; the name Michał is simply Anglicized as Michael. Although the key is incomplete, what is interesting is the translator has in mind the sound impression personal names make on readers.

3. Translations from Czech: Milan Kundera and Josef Škvorecký

This section shows the handling of Czech personal names in English translations from the 1960s to the 1980s. Two of the Czech writers most widely read in English translation are Milan Kundera (1929–2023) and Josef Škvorecký (1924–2012), both of whom left Czechoslovakia after 1968. The translation of one of Škvorecký's earliest works, *Smutek poručíka Borůvky* (1966, *The Mournful Demeanor of Lieutenant Boruvka* 1973), a collection of detective stories, does not preserve the original forms of Czech names. In the first story, “The Supernatural Powers of Lieutenant Boruvka”, the surnames Šinták > Sintak, Málek > Malek, Semerák > Semerak, Pěnkava > Penkava, Bárta > Barta; the given names in the story are Anglicized: Pavle > Paul and Josef > Joe. In the second story, “That Sax Solo”, diacritics are omitted but given names are not Anglicized, perhaps because they cannot be: Bedřich > Bedrich (nickname Benny), Marie > Marie, Mici > Mici, Gustav > Gustav, Slavka > Slavka, and Goliáš > Golias.

Škvorecký's Toronto publishing house brought out a sequel featuring Lieutenant Borůvka entitled *Hříchy pro pátera Knox* (1973, *Sins for Father Knox* 1973) with worldwide settings and thus fewer Czech names. Those that are found in the work are handled in the same way as in the 1966 book: for example, the female surname Kořenáčová > Korenac and the surname Hejduk > Heyduk. An interesting case of giving an English equivalent of a first name is Pepíček > Joey, presumably representing the diminutive and everyman meaning of the name in Czech and English. In Škvorecký's books about Lieutenant Borůvka published in Czechoslovakia (Škvorecký 1966) and Canada (Škvorecký 1973), the original spellings of Czech names are not preserved in translation. This still seems to be the continued practice in the 1960s–1970s, although there are examples of Czech literature in translation during this time that use source forms of names in translation throughout (Němcová 1967).

Kundera's *Nesnesitelná lehkost bytí* (*The Unbearable Lightness of Being*) was first published in French translation (1984) and then in the original Czech (1985). Of the four main characters' names, only one, Tomáš, contains diacritics, and it appears in the English translation (Kundera 1984) as Tomas. Reproducing foreign words in the translation is not an issue, as the narrator's excursus on “compassion” shows (Kundera 1984, 19–20): he compares the words *piété* (Fr.), *pietà* (It.), *soucít* (Cz.), *współczucie* (Pol.), *Mitgefühl* (Germ.), and *medkänsla* (Swed.). The 2004 edition of the English by the same translator updates the spellings of personal names other than Tomas and the Czechoslovak president, Novotny (Novotný). The composers Dvorak and Janacek (Kundera 1984, 93) become Dvořak and Janáček (Kundera 2004, 93), and the prime minister, Dubcek, is now Dubček; even the city Zurich (Kundera 1984, 27) becomes Zürich (Kundera 2004, 26). We can only surmise that the translator and/or author

and publisher did not wish Tomas's name to stand out among those of the other main characters (i.e., Tereza, Sabina, and Franz).

When the journal *World Literature Today* devoted an issue to Škvorecký in 1980, however, the original Czech spellings were respected in all of the contributions, including a translation of an excerpt from the novel *Mirákl* (1972, *Miracle in Bohemia* 1980). Surnames like Řivnáčová, Doružková, and Chocholoušová are part of the translation, and a first name such as Evženie, with an obvious English equivalent, appears in the text. This issue of the journal points to the important role of publishers in preserving the original forms of personal names in translation. A good example is the Central European Classics series from the Central European University Press (CEU), which brought out, for example the Czech writer Jan Neruda's *Povídky malostranské* (1878, *Prague Tales* 1993), translated by Michael Heim (translator of Kundera's *Nesnesitelná lehkost bytí*). The current CEU senior editor explained that it is their practice to use original spellings of personal names in literary translations into English from languages with Latin alphabets (Kunos 2024). The managing editor of Slavica Publishers in the US stated a similar practice, distinguishing it from how names are handled in social sciences publications (Polansky 2024). On the other hand, the editor at Istros, an independent British press specializing in translations from Central and Southern European countries, stated that they prefer modifying spellings in literary translations (e.g., Polish Andrzej > Andrey or even André) unless an author insists on the original spellings (Curtis 2024).

If we look, for the sake of comparison, at literary translations from Slovene to English in the late twentieth century in light of this current practice, we can date a widespread but not uniform trend towards preserving original personal names to the 1990s (Pogačar 2024), though there were harbingers. For instance, the journal *World Literature Today* used the original forms of personal names since its inception in 1977.

4. The evolution of translations of Halldór Laxness's novels into English

A premise of this article has been that the rendering of personal names in literary translations from relatively more peripheral European literatures into English has been less respectful of original forms until the late twentieth century. This would seem to hold to a greater degree for Slavic languages than for Germanic and Romance ones. For example, crime novels by Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlööj – that were translated from Swedish into English starting in the 1960s and 1970s – reproduce the original

spellings of personal (and geographic) names regardless of the fact that readers of English cannot be assumed to be aware of how to pronounce unfamiliar characters in the Swedish script. The original spellings carry the characters' identities and are part of Swedish culture.

I have argued elsewhere (Pogačar 2024) that the trend towards preserving the original forms of names in Slovene to English translations follows a course similar to that traced above for Czech during the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The select examples from Icelandic literature show a similar trend. Icelandic is an appropriate choice because it, too, can be called peripheral but is Germanic. Dović and Helgason (2016) have shown the similarities in the way the Icelandic and Slovene nations have cultivated national poets as part of a nation-building enterprise. Recognition of prominent writers and a national literature beyond a land's borders depends, of course, upon translation (Juvan 2019, 61–76).

Iceland's most well-known writer in English translation is Halldór Laxness (1902–1998), whose novels involve the country's literature, history, and exotic geography. Examples of three novels in translation show how the reader of English has been progressively introduced to the original forms of Icelandic names. The first novel, *Sjálfstætt folk* (1934–1935, *Independent People* 1946) has been republished as recently as 2020 with English adaptations of the spellings of Icelandic names.

The second example is Laxness's *Öll réttindi áskilin* (1957, *The Fish Can Sing* 1966, 2000). The first translation uses English adaptations of the spellings of Icelandic names. The second English edition, by the same translator, differs from the first in that a map is added in the front matter along with a note on pronunciation of vowels and the voiced consonant eth (ð) because most all original Icelandic spellings are used in the translation.

The third example, Laxness's *Salka Valka* (1931–1932, *Salka Valka* 1936, 2022) is similar to the second: the first English translation does not use original Icelandic forms of personal names, but the latter one, by a different translator, does. However, this translation of the novel does not come with a pronunciation key, so the reader of English is left to figure out the sounds of the names. Incidentally, the front matter indicates that the first English translation was from the Danish, underlining Icelandic's pre-independence, peripheral status.

The fourth example is Laxness's novel *Íslandsklukkan* (1943, *Iceland's Bell* 2003). It comes with a much more detailed map (made by the translator) than that in *The Fish Can Sing* (Laxness 2000a) and one that uses original Icelandic spellings. *Iceland's Bell*, like the 2000 edition of *The Fish Can Sing*, has a pronunciation guide that includes

one more consonant sound than the latter – the devoiced thorn (Ð) (also used in the spellings of names in *Salka Valka* 2022).

5. Conclusion

The article argues that reproducing the original spellings of characters' names respects personal identity in the way this concept is understood for actually existing persons, conveys the acoustic impressions of characters' names more reliably than Anglicizing them, and that names are an integral part of the source culture a translator ought to provide the reader. A look at how the names of literary characters in English translation from what until the late twentieth century can be called peripheral European literatures (i.e., Czech and Icelandic) shows a gradual trend towards carrying the original spellings into English.

Translations of Jaroslav Hašek's *Osudy dobrého vojáka Švejka* (1930 and 1964) contrast the Anglicization (or Germanization) of the protagonist Švejk's (Schweik and Švejk, respectively) and other Czech personal names in the first translation with the reproduction of the original spellings in the second. The 1964 translation contains a complete pronunciation key for the Czech script, indicating the significance of names' acoustic impressions.

The practice of Anglicizing personal names is seen in translations of Božena Němcová's novel *Babička* from 1891 and 1962. It is notable that the latter translation uses the Czech spellings of place names (e.g., Žernov instead of Zernov) in what is a move towards transferring the source culture more completely. A comparison with a turn-of-the-twentieth century anthology (translation 1906) suggests that transference of original spellings was possible at the time of the first translation, at least for highly educated readers. The translation of a Henryk Sienkiewicz novel (1906) shows that the acoustic impression of personal names was a consideration, given that a partial pronunciation key is provided. Original spellings of Polish names are not used, but there is consistent rendering of names with equivalent English letters to enable the reader to mimic Polish pronunciation.

The handling of characters' names in translations of works by the prominent Czech writers Josef Škvorecký and Milan Kundera suggests that carrying the original Czech spellings into English was still not a practice of major publishing houses into the 1980s, whereas translations of the Icelandic writer Halldór Laxness's novels between 1936 and 2020 indicate a trend towards using the original spellings of names in translations. Translators have come to use Icelandic spellings, thus conveying characters' personal identities, the sounds of personal (and geographic) names, and the source

culture in which they are embedded. Pronunciation guides are important in the second edition of Laxness's *The Fish Can Sing* (Laxness 2000a) and the translation of *Iceland's Bell* (Laxness 2003). A fresh translation of *Salka Valka* (Laxness 2022) uses original spellings but lacks a pronunciation key.

From a contemporary perspective, the practice of Anglicizing names, as was done in two translations of Němcová's *Babička*, is inconsistent and unwieldy if not misleading. Jiří or its diminutive Jiřík, for example, may have an English equivalent George in a shared Christian heritage but the graphic appearances and sound impressions are distant. Further, a reader might ask how does a George fit into a (rural and nineteenth-century) Czech context? The same can be asked to varying degrees about other Anglicized names in the novel. Unless there are overriding concerns about accurately conveying characterization (e.g., the use of Sebastian in the translation of Florjan Lipuš's novel *Boštjanov let*), literary translators should aim to carry the original spellings of personal names into English translations.

If there is indeed a trend towards using the original spellings of personal names in literary translations, then readers are receiving a more genuine impression of the source culture. As the translator Philip Roughton put it:

I personally think that if a person is reading literature from a foreign country, they should be given every chance to learn more of and experience that place and its people and customs—personal names and place names are relatively “easy” foreign elements of foreign literature. Literature should be challenging [...] experiencing foreign cultures should be challenging, eye-opening, door-opening, uplifting, mind- and spirit-expanding. (Roughton 2024)

The cost in effort to the reader is offset by the experience of meeting more of the unfamiliar from a literary work from another culture.

There is also a possible gain as regards the acoustic properties of personal names, though a pronunciation key may be helpful. On the other hand, a reader can easily find the pronunciation of, for example, the names Boštjan (Slovene) and Michał (Polish) on the internet, even spelling them Bostjan and Michal. The Icelandic name Þorlákur may be more challenging, but its pronunciation is available, toom and the letters Þ and á can be inserted in a word processing program.

Publishing houses may have considerations regarding readership that differ from those of writers and translators – that is, they may see an advantage to making fictional characters' names relatively more familiar to readers of translations. But we

might ask whether such considerations have been applied to translations from what have been relatively more peripheral literatures, especially given, for instance, the numerous translations of Sjöwall and Wahlööj's books from Swedish with original spellings of personal names by large US publishers like Bantam, Pantheon, and Vintage. A more thorough answer to the question may be had by looking at English-language translations from other peripheral literatures, such as ones from the Baltics and Southeastern Europe.

References

- Adelman, James S., Zachary Estes, and Martina Cossu. 2018. "Emotional sound symbolism: Languages rapidly signal valence via phonemes." *Cognition* 175: 122–30. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2018.02.007>.
- Biggins, Michael. Personal e-mail 2024-3-6.
- Chan, Leo Tak-hung. 2016. "Reader response and reception theory." In *Researching translation and interpreting*, edited by Claudia V. Angelelli and Brian James Baer, 147–54. London and New York: Routledge.
- Connoly, David. 2009. "A Greek by any other name...: The transliteration of Greek proper names." *mTm. Minor Translating Major, Major Translating Minor, Minor Translating Minor* 1: 41–53.
- Curtis, Susan. Personal e-mail 2024-3-28.
- Dović, Marjan, and Jón Karl Helgason. 2016. *National poets, cultural saints: Canonization and commemorative cults of writers in Europe*. Leiden and Boston: Brill. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004335400>.
- Garnett, Richard, Leon Vallée, and Alois Brandl. 1899. *The universal anthology: A collection of the best literature, ancient, mediæval and modern, with biographical and explanatory notes*. London: Clarke; New York: Merrill and Baker; Paris: Emile Terquem; Berlin: Bibliothek Verlag.
- Grün, Herbert. 1959. O tujih lastnih imenih v slovenščini. *Jezik in slovstvo* 5 (2): 58–60.
- Hašek, Jaroslav. 1930. *The good soldier Schweik*. Translated by Paul Selver. New York: Doubleday.
- Hašek, Jaroslav. 1973. *The good soldier Švejk*. Translated by Cecil Parrott. New York: Thomas W. Crowell.
- Juvan, Marko. 2019. *Worlding a peripheral literature*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-32-9405-9>.
- Knapp, Liza, ed. 1998. *Dostoevsky's The Idiot: A critical companion*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Kripke, Saul. 1980. *Naming and necessity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

- Kundera, Milan. 1984. *The unbearable lightness of being*. Translated by Michael Henry Heim. New York: Harper and Row.
- Kundera, Milan. 2004. *The unbearable lightness of being*. Translated by Michael Henry Heim. London: Faber and Faber.
- Kunos, Linda. Personal e-mails 2024-5-15 and 2024-5-16.
- Laxness, Halldór. 1936. *Salka Valka*. Translated by Francis Hamilton Lyon. London: George, Allen and Unwin.
- Laxness, Halldór. 1946. *Independent people*. Translated by James Anderson Thompson. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Laxness, Halldór. 1966. *The fish can sing*. Translated by Magnus Magnusson. London: Methuen.
- Laxness, Halldór. 2000a. *The fish can sing*. Translated by Magnus Magnusson. Rev. ed. London: Harvill.
- Laxness, Halldór. 2000b. *Independent people*. Translated by James Anderson Thompson. New York: Random House.
- Laxness, Halldór. 2003. *Iceland's Bell*. Translated by Philip Roughton. New York: Random House.
- Laxness, Halldór. 2022. *Salka Valka*. Translated by Philip Roughton. Brooklyn: Archipelago.
- Marslen-Wilson, William D., and Alan Welsh. 1978. "Processing interactions and lexical access during word recognition in continuous speech." *Cognitive psychology* 10 (1): 29–63. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0285\(78\)90018-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0285(78)90018-X).
- Mossop, Bryan. 2017. "When translation is not about meaning." *Babel* 63 (5): 621–42. <https://doi.org/10.1075/babel.00001.mos>.
- Němcová, Božena. 1962. *Granny*. Translated by Edith Pargeter. Prague: Artia.
- Němcová, Jeanne W., ed. 1967. *Czech and Slovak short stories*. Translated by Jeanne W. Němcová. London: Oxford University Press.
- Nemec, Božena (Němcová, Božena). 1891. *The grandmother: A story of country life in Bohemia*. Translated by Frances Gregor. Chicago: A. C. McClurg.
- Neruda, Jan. 1993. *Prague Tales*. Translated by Michael Henry Heim. Budapest: Central European University Press.
- Newmark, Peter. 2003. *A textbook of translation*. Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Nooteboom, Sieb G. 1981. "Lexical retrieval from fragments of spoken words: Beginnings vs. endings." *Journal of Phonetics* 9 (4): 407–24. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0095-4470\(19\)31017-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0095-4470(19)31017-4).
- Nuessel, Frank. 1992. *The study of names: A guide to the principles and topics*. Westport: Greenwood.

- Pogačar, Ruth, Agnes Pisanski Peterlin, Nike Pokorn, and Timothy Pogačar. 2017. "Sound symbolism in translation: A case study of character names in Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*." *Translation and interpreting studies* 12 (1): 137–61. <https://doi.org/10.1075/tis.12.1.07pog>.
- Pogačar, Timothy. 2024. "Izidor ali Isidore? Agata ali Agatha? Osebna imena v prevodih." In *60. seminar slovenskega jezika, literature in kulture: Podoba v slovenskem jeziku, literaturi in kulturi*, edited by Jerica Vogel. Ljubljana: Založba Univerze.
- Pogačar, Timothy, and Ruth E. Pogacar. 2024. "Odzivi bralcev na osebna imena v slovenskih novelističnih besedil." *Jezik in slovstvo* 69 (1–2): 105–22. <https://doi.org/10.4312/jis.69.1-2.105-122>.
- Polansky, Vicki. Personal e-mail 2024-5-20.
- Pulgram, Ernest. 1954. *Theory of names*. Berkeley: American Name Society.
- Roughton, Philip. Personal e-mail 2024-5-16.
- Schwartz, Stephen P. 2013. "Mill and Kripke on proper names and natural kind terms." *British journal for the history of philosophy* 21 (5): 925–45. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09608788.2013.828193>.
- Sienkiewicz, Henryk. 1891. *The Deluge: An Historical Novel of Poland, Sweden, and Russia*. Translated by Jeremiah Curtin. Boston: Little, Brown, and company.
- Škvorecký, Josef. 1966. *Smutek poručika Borůvky*. Prague: Mlada fronta.
- Škvorecký, Josef. 1973. *The mournful demeanour of Lieutenant Boruvka*. Translated by Rosemary Kavan, Kaca Polackova, and George Theiner. London: Victor Gollancz.
- Škvorecký, Josef. 1980. "The finals, an excerpt from the novel *Miracle in Bohemia*." Translated by Paul Wilson. *World Literature Today* 54 (4): 508–14. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40135308>.
- Thomasson, Amie. 1993. "The reference of fictional names." *Kriterion* 3 (6): 3–12. <https://doi.org/10.1515/krt-1993-010604>.
- Tiedke, Heidi. 2011. "Proper names and their fictional uses." *Australasian journal of philosophy* 89 (4): 707–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2010.514930>.
- Xiao, Jiayan, and Guowen Huang. 2016. "Translation and modification: A case study of the English translation of the characters' names in *The Story of the Stone*." *FORUM* 14 (2): 255–73. <https://doi.org/10.1075/forum.14.2.05xia>.

About the author

Timothy Pogačar is a faculty member in the Department of World Languages and Cultures at Bowling Green State University, where he teaches the Russian language, translation, and courses on post-socialist European societies. He is president of the (US) Midwest Slavic Association (2021–2025) and edits (1995–) the journal *Slovene Studies*. Among his book-length (Slovene-English) translations are six novels by Evald

Flisar and Ivan Tavčar's novel *The Visoko Chronicle* (CEU Press, 2021). His current translation-related research projects are on proper names in translation and fiction in Slavic-American newspapers during the first half of the twentieth century.