On the Banality of Translation:
Danilo Kiš and the Exercices de style

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For Andrea, il miglior fabbro.

I. INTRODUCTION

DANILO Kiš's intellectual activity has been met consistently by literary critics with both heavy praise and the harshest of criticism[1]. While much attention has been given to his prosaic work and essay-writing, comparatively less has been paid to his more prolific career as a translator[2]. Relatively unaddressed in Kiš's biography in particular is his early Serbo-Croatian[3] adaptation (1964) of Raymond Queneau's *Exercices de style* (henceforth *EDS*; 1st French edition 1947), the focus of this paper.

This article is divided into the three main parts as follows: In section II, I will give a short overview of the cultural background that may have influenced the *EDS* in the Forties, paying special attention to a cross-disciplinary pattern of (historically cyclical) paradigmatic changes that occurred in human sciences during the XX century. In section III, I will address how significant the Serbo-Croatian translation of the *EDS* (s-c. *Stilske vežbe*) was to Danilo Kiš's literary career; I will first explore the pivotal role played by the concepts of variation and repetition in both Queneau's and Kiš's intellectual biographies, following which I will discuss some of the possible reasons as to why such an early rendition of Queneau's work would have emerged from the then-Jugoslav cultural arena (just six years after the first English version by Barbara Wright). In section IV, I will address a variety of translatological issues — occurring between the source and the target language — by thoroughly analyzing several selected excerpts from Kiš's translation; I will particularly focus on a notable, formal mismatch between Kiš's strict adherence to the French original and the problem-

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[1] A tendentious, contentious debate which in recent years rekindled the infamous controversy surrounding the 1976 Jugoslav publication of *Grobnica for Borisa Davidoviča* [A Tomb for Boris Davidovich] has been addressed in detail in P. Lazarević Di Giacomo, *Una nuova polemica attorno a Kiš*, "Studi Slavistici", 2006, 3, pp. 253-272.

[2] As correctly noted by an anonymous reviewer, this is not to say that Kiš's activity as a translator is completely *terra incognita*. Aside from single articles and essays published in different years on the pages of "Mostovi" (i.e., the journal of the Association of Literary Translators of Serbia), among the most recent contributions to the topic one could mention, for instance, Marko Čudić's monograph dealing with Kiš's translations from Hungarian (cf. M. Čudić, *Danilo Kiš i moderna mađarska poezija*, Beograd 2007) and the September 2021 issue of the French journal "L'Atelier du Roman" devoted to Kiš and his multifaceted literary activity.

[3] As a side note, here I will consistently use the term 'Serbo-Croatian' to refer collectively to the different varieties of the South Slavic di-

alectal continuum which is nowadays spoken in most of the national republics that emerged after the collapse of Jugoslavia, including Serbia. The term 'Serbian' is used whenever explicit reference is made to the specific dialectal variant predominantly written and spoken by Kiš (i.e., the Šumadija-Vojvodina dialect of the Neo-Štokavian macrogroup). Note that Kiš himself, during his lecturing years in Strasbourg and Bordeaux, would define his subject of teaching exclusively as 'Serbo-Croatian' (cf. M. Thompson, *Birth Certificate: The Story of Danilo Kiš*, London-Ithaca 2013, p. 269), which, despite rising tensions in Croatian society towards the end of the Sixties, was nonetheless the official name of the language at that time. The use of Serbian Cyrillic for quotations, when present, follows the orthographic conventions of the original sources.

atic rendition of tempo-aspectual relationships in Serbo-Croatian that, unlike other Slavic languages, has partially retained the complex system of verbal tenses inherited from Old Church Slavonic. In section V I will summarize the main arguments of the paper and draw conclusions.

II. "C'est en écrivant qu'on devient écriveron": What are the *Exercices de style*?

Scholars working on Queneau's literary activity have always tried to codify the *EDS* in terms of their formal features, while still acknowledging that they can hardly be traced back to any specific traditional narrative genre, and that their early classification as a collection of 'essays' is only a crude label for lack of a more accurate term[4]. This could seem somewhat surprising if one viewed the *EDS* as a vast (potentially endless)[5] series of variations on a matrix text featuring two ordinary events loosely related to one another — i.e., a quarrel between two passengers on the S bus at rush hour and subsequently a conversation at Gare St-Lazare between one of the previously introduced characters and another youngster about the sewing of an additional button to the first man's overcoat. It is indeed the multifaceted and self-generating nature of these variations, "[...] des signifiants sans signifié"[6] (a.o., linguistic games, logic and mathematical puzzles, permutations from prose to poetry and vice versa, music sheets, different registers and jargons), with which literary critics experience difficulty in interpreting. Nevertheless, this diversity perfectly reflects the different sides of Queneau's intellectual life — a writer,

a translator, an artist, a journalist, a philosopher, a mathematician, a riddler, and even a sociolinguist *sui generis*[7]. Such multiplicity of interests places Queneau in a privileged position within XX century Western culture, begging the question of where the idea of the *EDS* came from, i.e., which body of concrete cultural references might have exerted their (direct or indirect) influence on the composition of the *EDS*, irrespective of their concrete literary nature. The rest of this section is devoted to providing some possible answers to this question. Combinatorial analysis is the cornerstone of Queneau's approach to literature in particular but also to the arts in general. Specifically longstanding is Queneau's fascination for Leibniz's work, which had already been well-established[8] at the time of writing the first twelve exercises in May 1942 (the so-called 'dodecahedron'). Leibniz's 1666 *Dissertatio de arte combinatoria* [Dissertation on the Art of Combinations], which infamously proposes a computational approach to natural languages by breaking down 'concepts' into small combinations of abstract features defined in terms of their distinctive value, can be rightfully considered as one of the driving forces behind the idea of recursive variation applied to the matrix text of the *EDS*[9]. Note that

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4 A. Kubo, *Du « cadre narratif » dans* Exercices de style *de Raymond Queneau*, "ZINBUN", 2008, 40, p. 2.

5 Most published editions, either reissues of the French original or foreign adaptations, list 99 exercises, which according to Queneau himself, are "[...] neither too many not too few: the Greek ideal, you might say" (the French original comes from Queneau's preface to the Carelman-Massin 1963 edition of the *EDS*, here quoted after Barbara Wright's preface to the 1981 English reissue: cf. R. Queneau, *Exercises in Style*, trans. by B. Wright, New York ²1981, p. 4). Notably however in the aforementioned 1963 edition the original list of 99 exercises is extended with an additional 45 more exercises drawn or painted by Jacques Carelman, 99 typographical exercises by Robert Massin, and a list of 124 'potential' exercises.

6 A. Kubo, *Du « cadre narratif »*, op. cit., p. 3.

7 Queneau received his Bachelor of Arts degree from the Sorbonne in 1926, after obtaining a certificate in logic and general philosophy (1923), in history of philosophy and psychology (1924), and in moral philosophy and sociology (1925). His *cursus studiorum* formed in his early university years, when he engaged in a variety of different subjects, ranging from the assiduous study of foreign languages (above all English, Classical languages, Italian, and German) to linguistics (in a journal entry from October 1921 Queneau cites Saussure, Meillet, Bréal, and Grammont) to psychoanalysis and psychiatry (which must have played a non-marginal role in Queneau's affiliation with the movement of French surrealists led by André Breton, around the first half of the Twenties). Cf. J-C. Chabanne, *Queneau et la linguistique. Partie 1: Repères bio-bibliographiques*, in *Raymond Queneau et les langages. Colloque de Thionville 1992, 9-11 octobre 1992*, "Temps Mêlés-Documents Queneau", ed. by A. Blavier — C. Debon, Liège 1993, p. 24; C. Clarke, *Rewriting the Oeuvre: Raymond Queneau and the Art of Translation*, PhD dissertation, New York 2020, pp. 31-36; E. Souchier, *Raymond Queneau*, Paris 1991.

8 Cf., a.o., C. Clarke, *Rewriting the Ouvre*, op. cit., p. 5.

9 This idea would become a reality with the foundation of OuLiPo in 1960 and the subsequent shift towards more mathematical methods in literary composition, including the 1961 programmatic manifesto, Queneau's pinnacle of combinatory poetry *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* [A Hundred Thousand Billion Poems]. It is possible that Leibniz's influence on Queneau's work was mediated by other con-

Leibniz's post-Cartesian logical machinery, whose 'alphabet of human thought' ultimately aimed at discovering the basic associations of primitive ideas that natural languages are made of, is built on foundational tenets different to the display of rhetoric mastery infamously exhibited in the 33rd chapter of Desiderius Erasmus's 1512 textbook *De Utraque Verborum ac Rerum Copia* [Copia: Foundations of the Abundant Style] — a work often cited as one of the forerunners of the *EDS*. Peculiar in this respect is Queneau's understanding of the *contraintes* [constraints], already alluded to in the framework of the *EDS*[10] and subsequently presented as a founding concept of the OuLiPo. Oulipian *contraintes* are defined as potential (i.e., still unexploited) sets of structural and/or semantic rules predating the creative action and determining in advance the formal character of a text, in turn disrupting its expressive nature. The shift from unconstrained to constrained-based inspiration is in explicit conflict both with the Romantic cult of transcendent (i.e., non-elicited) creativity and the surrealist tradition. Interestingly, these constraints need not be postulated exclusively by the author(s). On the contrary, inherent in the formal structure of the *EDS* is the possibility for readers themselves to take part in the effort of creation and fill all the gaps left empty by the author(s)[11]. The manifesto of this *modus operandi* is summarized in a central passage of *Maladroit* [Awkward], which was chosen by Queneau as the tagline for the cover of the *EDS*' first edition: *c'est en écrivant qu'on devient écriveron* [it's by writing that you become a writesmith][12]. As Bartezzaghi notes, this motto is derived by applying a simple lexical replacement rule to an old French saying, *c'est en forgeant qu'on devient forgeron* [it's by forging that you become a blacksmith], then creating the neologism *écriveron*[13]. The emphasis placed on the application of a set of (restricted) cyclic transformations to syntactic strings, as a means to produce limitless meaningful sentences, indirectly attests to the mid-XX century shift towards post-structuralist linguistic frameworks, a.o., post-Bloomfieldian distributionalism (which was still the mainstream in American, and to a lesser extent European linguistics up to the mid-Fifties), and even more so to its natural successor, i.e., Chomskyan transformational grammar (which Queneau might have encountered during the early OuLiPo years)[14]. From a generative perspective, it would indeed seem plausible to consider the *EDS* (not to mention *Cent mille milliards de poèmes*) as the result of having implemented a set of abstract operations in the process of syntactic derivation, prior to encoding semantic representation and phonological information, however this would neglect the role that formal and stylistic variations play against unchanging grammatical patterns in the *EDS*. The constant interaction between deep (fixed) grammatical structures and their stylistic (ever-changing) makeup has led some critics to consider the *EDS* an example of avant-

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temporary sources Queneau may have been already familiar with, a.o., set theory (cf. N. Berkman, *The OuLiPo's Mathematical Project (1960-2014)*, PhD dissertation, Princeton 2018, pp. 19-71) and combinatorial game theory (Queneau himself had a knack for chess), or even later scientific developments of the Fifties, such as Hintikka's game-theoretical semantics (this piece of suggestion comes from C. Bologna, *La* contrainte *e la poetica medievale*, in *Raymond Queneau: la scrittura e i suoi multipli*, ed. by C. De Carolis — D. Gambelli, Roma 2009, p. 46), the scientific production of the Oxford circle of analytic philosophy (above all, the late Wittgenstein, whose *Sprachspiel* [language-game] theory seems to be tributed in certain exercises of the collection, such as *Interjections* [Interjections]) and, of course, Turing's pioneering work on artificial intelligence (cf. A. M. Turing, *Computing Machinery and Intelligence*, "Mind", 1950, LIX(236)).

[10] It has been argued that in the *EDS* two different levels of (inferred) constraints are operating simultaneously, the inner one linking every exercise to its own title, and the outer one linking every title to the collection as a whole. The compresence of a double level of constraints is a typical feature of riddles and guessing games — a field which Queneau, who had been responsible of the trivia section for the French newspaper "L'Intransigeant" between 1936 and 1938, was well familiar with (cf. S. Bartezzaghi, *Lettura degli* Esercizi di stile, in R. Queneau, *Esercizi di stile*, trans. by U. Eco, Torino ⁴2014, p. 269).

[11] Cf. on that A. Kubo, *Du « cadre narratif »*, op. cit., p. 8; A. López Montagut, *Sur les* Exercices de style *de Raymond Queneau*, "Bulletin Hispanique", 2013 (115), 2, pp. 697-711; C. Sanders, *Raymond Queneau*, Amsterdam-Atlanta 1994, pp. 91-92. This assumption has recently been taken to extremes with the appearance of several works aiming to modify Queneau's exercises for the modern age (cf., a.o., B. M. Brownholtz, *Exercises in Style: 21st Century Remix*, MA thesis, Chicago 2013).

[12] R. Queneau, *Exercises in Style*, op. cit., p. 105.

[13] S. Bartezzaghi, *Lettura degli* Esercizi di stile, op. cit., p. 291.

[14] Cf. G. Graffi, *200 Years of Syntax: A Critical Survey*, Amsterdam-Philadelphia 2001, pp. 309-368.

garde poetry[15], a set of surface transformations performed on a grammatical kernel — akin to Jakobson's *grammatičeskaja figura* [grammatical figure][16]. Nevertheless, even if the *EDS* are a result of a cross-disciplinary epistemological paradigm characterized by the dominance of (post-)structuralist methods in human sciences, a discussion on the possible sources of inspiration for Queneau's collection cannot dismiss the striking affinities that it bears with music composition and music theory. In the preface to the Carelman-Massin 1963 edition, the author discusses a musical performance in the Thirties that he attended with his friend Michel Leiris of Bach's *Die Kunst der Fuge* [The Art of Fugue] held at the Parisian Salle Pleyel, attributing it as the thematic trigger that would lay the foundations for the subsequent composition of the *EDS*. More specifically, Queneau was particularly fascinated by the mechanism of proliferation of apparently endless variations generated from a "rather slight theme" and wished to replicate it in through literature[17]. It is quite revealing that Queneau likened the nuclear structure of the *EDS* with the fugue, considering the number of groundbreaking musical innovations that emerged throughout the XX century. On the one hand jazz music, which had been very popular in France since the pre-WWII years and would later became a distinctive feature of several young subcultures (cf. further), was experiencing a frantic development during the Forties, with the rapid diffusion of bebop, as well as the rise of the new cool jazz movement, whose sophisticated arrangements drew significant inspiration from classical compositions (e.g., the use of whole tone scales). On the other hand, an offshoot of the old big bands, the so-called rhythm'n'blues, would usher in the birth of rock'n'roll in the Fifties. Despite their differences, both jazz and rock'n'roll use structural melodic elements (called 'head' and 'riff', respectively) around which whole songs are harmonically composed and which provide the basis for further instrumental variations and improvisations. In this respect, even with some approximations, the head and the riff are the formal (popular) counterparts of the (classical) subject in a fugue. Even more significant however is the fact that in his preface Queneau does not allude to Schönbergian twelve-tone music, whose outbreak in the early Twenties led to a substantial reform of Western tonal music[18] and challenged the functional alternation of repetitions and variations in a musical piece[19]. More specifically, having disposed of the tonal hierarchical system that qualitatively regulated the ratio between notes and ranges and adopted a linearized approach to musical composition using all twelve notes of the chromatic scale, Schönberg rewrote the characteristics of the old classical subject by postulating a new kind of variation that merely acted as a combinatorial constraint for generating endless sequences of notes. This parallel with the recurrent theme of the *EDS* is striking[20]. The fact that Queneau was familiar with the serialist approach is further evidenced by his long-term close friendship with some staunch supporters of dodecaphony in France, such as Pierre Boulez's teacher

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[15] A. Kubo, *Du « cadre narratif »*, op. cit., p. 2.

[16] Cf. R. O. Jakobson, *Poèzija grammatiki i grammatika poèzii*, in *Selected Writings, Vol. III: Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry*, ed. by S. Rudy, The Hague-Paris-New York 1981, pp. 63-86. Although the first explicit formulation of 'grammatical figure' dates back to the early Sixties, in his highly influential article Jakobson refers to the works of American-based linguists and anthropologists such as Boas, Sapir, and Whorf, who were active in pre-WWII decades (ivi, pp. 65, 76). Jakobson's joint work with Claude Lévi-Strauss, who had been working on a saussurean-durkheimian model of structural anthropology since the second half of the Forties, goes back to the early Sixties as well (C. Bologna, *La* contrainte, op. cit., pp. 46-47). Queneau read Jakobson and corresponded with Lévi-Strauss since the publication of his acclaimed 1953 French translation of Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (C. Clarke, *Rewriting the Ouvre*, op. cit., pp. 286-289).

[17] The passage is cited after R. Queneau, *Exercises in Style*, op. cit., p. 4. Note that the fugue as a contrapuntal compositional technique is generally based on the structural alternation of sequences where the musical theme is first introduced, repeated, and then varied to different extents, which would adapt well to the structure of the *EDS*. Kiš himself however thought that such an association was quite arbitrary (D. Kiš, *Quelques notes sur les* Exercices de style *et leur traduction en serbo-croate*, in *Homo poeticus*, ed. by P. Delpech, Paris 1993, p. 142).

[18] This paradigm shift is notoriously discussed by Theodor Adorno in his 1949 monograph *Philosophie der neuen Musik* [Philosophy of New Music] (cf. T. W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, ed. by R. Hullot-Kentor, Minneapolis 2006).

[19] S. Carretta, *Il romanzo a variazioni*, Milano-Udine 2019, p. 30.

[20] Ivi, pp. 57-59. This is probably one of the reasons for which Mark Thompson would allude to the *EDS* as "[...] the fictional equivalent of twelve-tone music" (cf. M. Thompson, *Birth Certificate*, op. cit., p. 157).

René Leibowitz[21]. One might say that Queneau's underlying tension towards the Greek ideal and his geometric fascination for the 'form' clashed with — and finally prevailed over — the controlled chaos of postmodern structures. Most notably, this perpetuous struggle between allegedly opposite poles (the adherence to the 'form' and the urge to make it collapse; variation and repetition; the infinite potential of creativity and the compensatory role of constraints) is something Queneau would have in common with the man who would have been called to be his first translator in Jugoslavia.

III. Socialism in Style, or of Repetition and Variation

In a short piece published in the column *Književnost u svetu* [Literature in the World], inside the 1964 August-September issue of *Savremenik* [The Contemporary], Aleksandar Stefanović deplored the fact that no work by Queneau had yet been translated in Jugoslavia, even more so given the strong historical connection between Serbian and French literature[22]. Stefanović's timing is at least curious, for in that same year the Belgrade-based publishing house Nolit put into print the first Serbo-Croatian edition of the *EDS*, their second adaptation in a foreign language ever. Charged with the arduous task was a Subotica-born young writer who had just appeared on the Jugoslav literary scene — Danilo Kiš. To gain a better understanding of the personal and intellectual connections between the two personalities one has to go back to the early Sixties which, as discussed in the previous section, was a career-changing time for the newly-oulipian Queneau. At that time, Kiš's literary portfolio consisted of a handful of poems, some short stories and two novels, *Mansarda* [The Garret] and *Psalm 44*, the latter two of which were compiled in a single volume in 1962. Later that same year Kiš, who was not a party member and was already beginning to experience animosity from Jugoslav authorities, success-

fully applied for a job as lector of Serbo-Croatian at the University of Strasbourg, where he taught until the summer of 1964 — just months before the publication of his first groundbreaking novel, *Bašta, pepeo* [Garden, Ashes]. Kiš's bilingualism (Serbo-Croatian and Hungarian) and excellent mastery of foreign languages (fluent in Russian, French, and English)[23], as well as his natural penchant for translation which he had already developed during the Fifties[24], were just some of the reasons as to why he could secure a job abroad that would permit him to leave Jugoslavia temporarily. Kiš's story shares many similarities with Queneau's, however unlike Queneau who never felt comfortable with his own linguistic skills and was always reluctant to discuss his translatological work[25], Kiš would state on various occasions that translating poetry was meaningful for two reasons: firstly, it granted him a better understanding of the formal and content-related peculiarities of the source text; secondly, it was intensive literary training to refine his poetic abilities[26] and "[...] a valve to release lyrical emotion that otherwise might vitiate his prose"[27]. It must be mentioned that, with respect to the first issue, Kiš was a staunch supporter of the necessity to preserve the original poem's formal structure throughout the translation process, leaving its metrical and rhythmic composition unchanged — a belief which has consequences for the adaptation of the *EDS*[28] (cf. section IV). This strong defense of (formal) repeti-

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[21] M. O. Erwin, *Ghosts in the Machine: The Making of European Serialism, 1945-1955*, PhD dissertation, Leeds 2019, p. 60.

[22] A. V. Stefanović, *Rejmon Keno — pisac koga smo zanemarili*, "Savremenik — Mesečni časopis", 1964 (20), 8/9, p. 240.

[23] This piece of information comes from an interview to Burkhard Müller-Ulrich posthumously published in the "Frankfurter Rundschau" on October 28th 1989 (cf. D. Kiš, *Homo Poeticus: saggi e interviste*, ed. by D. Badnjević, Milano 2009, p. 301). Also recall that Kiš was the first student to obtain a degree in Opšta književnost [General literature] from the University of Belgrade in 1958.

[24] M. Thompson, *Birth Certificate*, op. cit., p. 265.

[25] C. Clarke, *Rewriting the Ouvre*, op. cit., pp. 161-178.

[26] Cf. J. Delić, *Danilo Kiš i ruska književnost*, in *Prilozi proučavanju srpsko-ruskih književnih veza, X-XX vek*, ed. by. M. Stojnić, Novi Sad-Moskva 1993, pp. 149-162.

[27] M. Thompson, *Birth Certificate*, op. cit., p. 205. It has been estimated that throughout his life Kiš translated more than 10,000 lines of verse, not to mention prose, plays, and non-fiction (ivi, p. 206).

[28] According to Kiš, this translation strategy, which had been abandoned in France with detrimental outcomes, was indeed a creative work of its own (cf. J. Delić, *Književni pogledi Danila Kiša*, Beograd 1995, p. 205). By association, the consistent adherence Kiš showed to Queneau's source texts may reveal the (alleged) poetic nature of the language of the *EDS* (cf. section II).

tion is but one side of Kiš's literary manifesto. As Mihajlo Pantić identifies, the early work of *Mansarda* ("[...] дело писца који се колеба између поезије и прозе и, заправо, пише само то колебање")[29] is already demonstrative of the recurrent poetic tropes of Kiš's great novels, a.o. the erudite citationism, intertextuality, a poignant lyrical style and, most importantly, *transformativnost* [transformativeness], i.e., "[...] настојање да се сваки нови текст испише друкчије од претходног да би се, тако, парадоксално, потврдила њихова узајамна сличност"[30]. Interestingly, this iterative approach to variation, much in the spirit of Queneau, was frequently described by Kiš with classical music metaphors[31]. In an interview with Lela Zečković for the Amsterdam literary journal "De Revisor" (March 1984), while discussing the formal characteristics of the final chapter of his 'family circus' trilogy, *Peščanik* [Hourglass, 1972], Kiš referred to its internal complex polyphony with an urge to change registers, e.g., slowing down the pace of an andante or modulating the tempo from a calando to a staccato[32]. The process of narrative musicalization, even more apparent in *Enciklopedija mrtvih* [The Encyclopaedia of the Dead, 1983], is a distinctive feature of the postmodern novel which several scholars have derived from an aesthetic inspiration for condensing all the complexity of the outer world and representing the totality of life, simultaneously without sacrificing its nature[33]. This heuristic difference between Queneau's choice of a 'trivial'

subject and Kiš's unquenchable 'metaphysical' mission (which separates him from most of Borges's work as well) draws a *de facto* fault line between their respective epistemological diapasons, which Kiš himself would discuss in a later essay[34]. Further on in the same essay Kiš writes that "[t]raduire les *Exercices de style* a été pour moi un exercice de langue dans les deux sens: par rapport à ma propre langue autant que par rapport à la langue de l'original" and that (italics in the original) "[l]es *Exercices de style* ne sauraient être traduits, ils ne peuvent qu'être l'objet de *variations* dans une nouvelle langue"[35]. One might wonder whether Kiš, in making reference to *une nouvelle langue*, either talks in generalities or have rather in mind one (or more) specific language(s); this question is indeed of central importance for analyzing the *EDS*. Although Queneau's interest in languages and linguistics dates at least as far back to the early Twenties, as already seen in the previous section, it was only after a four-month trip to Greece in 1932 that the French writer began to contemplate the relationship between written and oral French, a quasi-diglossia that in his eyes resembled the sociolinguistic fracture between

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[29] "[...] the work of a writer who hesitates between poetry and prose and, as a matter of fact, narrates this hesitation" (M. Pantić, *Kiš*, Beograd ³2002, p. 14).

[30] "[...] an effort to write each new text differently from the previous one in order to, paradoxically, confirm their mutual similarity" (ivi, p. 19).

[31] S. Carretta, *Il romanzo a variazioni*, op. cit., p. 89.

[32] D. Kiš, *Homo Poeticus: saggi e interviste*, op. cit., p. 188. This superficial consonance between Queneau's and Kiš's orientations might very well have been favored by their common admiration for both Flaubert's and Joyce's work, especially *Bouvard et Pécuchet* and *Ulysses* (C. Clarke, *Rewriting the Ouvre*, op. cit., pp. 7-8, 99-108, 379; M. Thompson, *Birth Certificate*, op. cit., pp. 33-39).

[33] Some of these ideas are already expressed in Lukács's monograph *Die Theorie des Romans* [The Theory of the Novel, 1920] and Broch's essay *Das Weltbild des Romans* [The Image of the World in the Novel, 1933]. Cf., a.o., S. Carretta, *Il romanzo a variazioni*, op. cit., pp. 33-61; M. Rizzante, *Dell'ideale enciclopedico. Sull'arte della composizione di Danilo Kiš*, in *L'albero: saggi sul romanzo*, Venezia 2007, pp. 127-139.

[34] Cf. S. Carretta, *Il romanzo a variazioni*, op. cit., p. 84; D. Kiš, *Quelques notes*, op. cit., p. 143. The term *banalité* (s-c. *trivijalnost*), however, should be meant here in a metastructuralist sense, i.e., as opposed to 'distinctiveness'. Thus, Queneau's 'trivial' exercise, rather than being strictly ordinary, would simply lack any distinctive characteristics (S. Bartezzaghi, *Lettura degli* Esercizi di stile, op. cit., p. 272). Moreover, Queneau's very claim that the matrix text depicts (italics in the original) "[...] un incident réel d'ailleurs, et *banal*" (the passage is quoted after S. Bartezzaghi, *Lettura degli* Esercizi di stile, op. cit., p. 270) has been disputed many times in the literature. Kubo, among others, points out that both the public transport and the man coming out of the crowd — a Queneauian counterpart of Baudelaire's topos of the man in the crowd — are recurrent literary subjects throughout Queneau's work, so that the fact recalled may not be that real at all (A. Kubo, *Du « cadre narratif »*, op. cit., p. 5). Kubo also remarks that "[...] La gratuité du choix thématique n'est qu'une apparence trompeuse" (ivi, p. 6), for the choice of the quarrel as the driving thematic concept of the entire collection is part of a historically rooted rhetorical tradition dating as far back as to Aristotle. From this perspective then the *EDS* would be a crime novel *sui generis*, a collection of ninety-nine different reports on a same fact which accommodates the rules of the same whodunit (ibidem). Unsurprisingly, Queneau always had a penchant for French and Anglophone crime fiction — a passion that reached its peak towards the end of the Thirties, when the idea of the *EDS* was slowly taking a more definite shape (C. Clarke, *Rewriting the Ouvre*, op. cit., pp. 126-127).

[35] D. Kiš, *Quelques notes*, ibidem.

katharévousa (i.e., the archaizing, official version of Modern Greek, which was unknown to large segments of the population) and *dimotikí* (i.e., the vernacular version of Modern Greek)[36]. Comparing the status of *katharévousa* and written French, Queneau implied that the literary language was in fact a dead object — estranged from the *langage populaire*; he began to advocate for the advent of a partially argotized *néo-français* that could rely on a new, more creative lexicon, with a phonetic-based orthography (*français parlé-écrit*) and a syntactic linear order truer to the spoken registers[37]. Queneau's efforts, with special reference to the historical issues linked to the orthoepy of written French, should have resonated with Kiš, who indeed deemed his proposals "[...] sasvim vukovski"[38] [in the spirit of Vuk] (Karadžić, *M.B.*). This is not the only commonality between Queneau and Kiš, who — himself bilingual — was far from being unsympathetic to linguistic issues. The complexity of his figure is reflected in his idiolect, which he always called 'Serbo-Croatian' notwithstanding its inner lexical layering, enriched in his case by Montenegrin, Hungarian, and Vojvodinian elements. Moreover much like Miroslav Krleža, whom he greatly admired despite their often divergent political views, he despised the kind of aggressive linguistic nationalism that would increasingly dominate the political discourse of the new national republics after the violent dissolution

of Jugoslavia in the Nineties[39].

It should thus be clear from the above discussion why Kiš was a suitable candidate for the Serbo-Croatian adaptation of the *EDS*. Nevertheless, what remains unaddressed and perplexing due to little evidence is why Kiš's Serbo-Croatian version had emerged as early as it did. Several assumptions can be made in this regard — none of them decisive. Firstly, the League of Communists of Jugoslavia's political stance towards culture had drastically changed after the monumental diplomatic breakup between Tito and Stalin in 1948, as evidenced in the gradual distancing of Jugoslav artists from socialist realism[40]. From a political perspective, this turn of events ushered in the Non-Aligned Movement — a new socialist model ideologically detached from the Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy and moderately receptive to both market economies and liberal freedoms. Most importantly, from the Sixties onward a new Americanization of Jugoslav popular culture, which was permitted if not fostered by Tito himself, gained a foothold in the country — a sociocultural phenomenon that Radina Vučetić felicitously labelled *koka-kola socijalizam* [Coca-Cola socialism]. Western and more specifically Anglo-American artistic models exerted their pervasive influence on every level of Jugoslav cultural life, although unevenly and to different extents; this resulted in the wide distribution of Hollywood blockbusters (and the prolific production of home-made

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[36] Chabanne claims that a decisive influence on the development of Queneau's linguistic sensibility was played by Vendryès's work of the Twenties (J-C. Chabanne, *Queneau et la linguistique. Partie 2: Queneau lecture de J. Vendryès. De la linguistique à la philosophie du langage*, in *Raymond Queneau et les langages. Colloque de Thionville 1992, 9-11 octobre 1992*, "Temps Mêlês-Documents Queneau", ed. by A. Blavier — C. Debon, Liège 1993, pp. 39-55).

[37] Cf. C. Clarke, *Rewriting the Ouvre*, op. cit., pp. 62-81. Queneau's linguistic views however changed significantly through the following decades, especially after the publication of his 1959 *Zazie dans le métro* [Zazie in the Metro] (ivi, pp. 56-62).

[38] D. Kiš, *Jedna parodija francuske književnosti*, in *Homo Poeticus*, ed. by R. Bratić — Lj. Jeremić, Beograd 1995, p. 106. Reference is being made here to the founding principle of Serbian orthography laid out by Vuk, i.e., *jedan zvuk — jedno slovo* [a letter for each sound]. In the same essay, originally written as an afterword to the 1977 Serbo-Croatian reissue of the *EDS*, Kiš writes that Queneau's exercises are "a game of the mind" and "[a]lso [...] a parody of prosaic and poetic French literature of their own, where individual procedures, individual 'exercises' are only the practical demonstrations of certain other procedures and poetics" (ivi, p. 104).

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[39] Cf. É. Keiflin — D. Marković — V. Stanić, *Danilo Kiš en France: « Exil », création, réception, 1935-1989*, "Bulletin de l'Institut Pierre Renouvin", 2014 (40), 2, pp. 95-109; M. Thompson, *An Alphabet for Danilo Kiš*, "Wasafiri", 2014 (29), 2, pp. 67-68; M. Thompson, *Birth Certificate*, op. cit., pp. 269-275. Speaking of linguistic variants, Kiš recalls how in the late Sixties his Serbian (Ekavian) version provided the basis for a further Croatian (Jekavian, Zagreb-based) adaptation of Queneau's exercises, which was then turned into a hugely successful theatrical play for two actors (Pero Kvrgić and Lela Margitić), in production until Kvrgić's death in December 2020 (D. Kiš, *Quelques notes*, op. cit., pp. 144-145).

[40] In her admirable monograph, Radina Vučetić mentions the talk delivered by Krleža at the 1952 Congress of Jugoslav Writers, *O slobodi kulture* [On Freedom of Culture], as a turning point in this respect (R. Vučetić, *Coca-Cola Socialism: Americanization of Jugoslav Culture in the Sixties*, Budapest-New York 2018, p. 141). The Novi Sad agreement, signed in 1954, would have also been influential as it officially codified the Serbo-Croatian standard (M. Thompson, *Birth Certificate*, op. cit., pp. 270-271).

'partisan westerns')[41], the popularization and further institutionalization of jazz and rock'n'roll alongside the more traditional Sanremo Music Festival[42], the breakout success of Broadway musicals like *Hair*, and even the circulation of avant-garde works both in visual arts and music[43]. It can thus be assumed that the early Serbo-Croatian adaptation of the *EDS* conformed to the same principles of openness towards Western middle-class art that was generally characteristic of Jugoslavia's cultural policy during the late Fifties and Sixties, and even more so as Kiš was then considered distinct from the typical organic intellectual; he was above all a talented expat who happened to reside far from his socialist motherland.

IV. "Nothing changes so that everything changes": Remarks on Kiš's Adaptation

In this section I address some interesting issues connected with the formal aspects of the Serbo-Croatian adaptation of the *EDS*. In subsection IV.I I analyze the matrix exercise, *Notations* (s-c. *Beleška*), arguing that the general claim of its stylistic unmarkedness should be revised, and that the Serbo-Croatian version gives rise to further complications concerning the rendition of tempo-aspectual relationships. Then in subsection IV.II I

will address a central block of exercises whereby Queneau explores the expressive possibilities of verbal tenses, focusing particularly on *Prétérit*[44] (s-c. *Preterit*) and *Imparfait* (s-c. *Imperfekt*); interestingly, Kiš's choice to preserve the formal structure of the source texts results in the creation of completely different versions, which either smooth out (in the former case) or amplify (in the latter case) the stylistic markedness of the originals. Finally, in subsection IV.III I investigate three more exercises whose rendition in a foreign language is problematic for either sociolinguistic or cultural reasons. These include the political clichés of *Réactionnaire* (s-c. *Reakcionar*), the dialectal overtones of *Paysan* (s-c. *Seljački*), and the taboo wordplay in *Javanais* (s-c. *Đački žargon*). As expected, the interplay of repetition and variation is the primary feature of Kiš's rendition of the *EDS*.

IV.I. The Pipe Dream of Neutrality: *Notations* vs. *Beleška*

Notations is the pre-oulipian *Urtext*, intended to serve as a basis for all the subsequent variations of the *EDS*. As the title itself suggests however, the text is far from being stylistically unmarked as it is composed of short sentences — mostly in the present-tense or even nominal — as though they were crude notes penned from dictation. The rhythm of the writing and the sheer succession of the events alluded to seem to be modelled on musical analogies, which would not be expected in a supposedly 'neutral' text:

> Dans l'S, à une heure d'affluence. Un type dans les vingt-six ans, chapeau mou avec cordon remplaçant le ruban, cou trop long comme si on lui avait tiré dessus. Les gens descendent. Le type en question s'irrite contre un voisin. Il lui reproche de le bousculer chaque fois qu'il passe quelqu'un. Ton pleurnichard qui se veut méchant. Comme il voit une place libre, se précipite dessus. Deux heures plus tard, je le rencontre Cour de Rome, devant la gare Saint-Lazare. Il est avec un camarade qui lui dit : «Tu devrais faire mettre un bouton supplémentaire à ton pardessus». Il lui montre où (à l'échancrure) et pourquoi.

Kiš's rendition is closely modelled on the source text, both in the choice of the lexical items and in its

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[41] R. Vučetić, *Coca-Cola Socialism*, op. cit., pp. 63-72.

[42] Ivi, pp. 99-136. A well-documented insight on the critical reception of Sanremo-style easy listening tunes and the cultural appropriation Jugoslav society claimed of the aesthetic values associated with Italian pop culture throughout the Sixties is laid out in F. Rolandi, *Con ventiquattromila baci. L'influenza della cultura di massa italiana in Jugoslavia (1955-1965)*, Bologna 2015, pp. 97-119 (I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing out this reference to me).

[43] Vučetić enlists the 1954 and 1956 Belgrade performances of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, the first Zagreb-based Biennale of electronic and avant-garde music in 1961, Alvin Ailey's American Dance Theater 1967 tour, and the presence of Living Theater and Jerzy Grotowski's Laboratory Theater at the first Belgrade International Theatre Festival in 1967 among the most relevant cultural achievements of Jugoslavia at the time (R. Vučetić, *Coca-Cola Socialism*, op. cit., pp. 167-194). However, according to the author this period of cultural development conceived a much harsher censorship of indigenous artistic products that called into question both Jugoslavia's revolutionary past and its communist dogmas (ivi, pp. 194-207). This period of relative artistic freedom was to be ended abruptly in the early Seventies, with the increasing internal political turmoil (recall the Hrvatsko proljeće [Croatian spring] nationalist movement) and the most incisive film productions of the crni talas [Black Wave] (ivi, pp. 81-84).

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[44] In the 1973 French edition of the *EDS* (i.e., Gallimard's *nouvelle édition*) the exercise is renamed *Passé simple*.

syntactic structure, which only sporadically (most likely, for language-specific reasons of information managing and packaging which cannot be dealt with in detail here) deviates from the French matrix — cf., for instance, the theme-rheme inversion of the Serbo-Croatian version (<*sa dugim vratom kao da su mu ga istegli*>$_2$ <*i sa šeširom na kome traku zamenjuje uzica*>$_1$) with respect to Queneau's original (<*chapeau mou avec cordon remplaçant le ruban*>$_1$,< *cou trop long comme si on lui avait tiré dessus*>$_2$):

У аутобусу С за време највеће гужве. Један тип од својих двадесет шест година, са дугим вратом као да су му га истегли и са шеширом на коме траку замењује узица. Људи силазе. Поменути тип отреса се на свог суседа. Пребацује му да га овај гурне сваки пут када неко прође. Глас пискутав и злобан. Када угледа једно слободно место, хитро се устреми на њега. Два сата касније сретнем га поново код Кур де Рома, поред станице Сен Лазар. Сада је у друштву неког свог друга који му каже: „Требало би да даш да ти се пришије једно дугме на капуту“. Показује му где (на разрезу) и зашто[45].

The Serbo-Croatian adaptation however reveals a peculiarity left unspecified in the French original. Although the succession of brief — present-tense or nominal — sentences within the matrix text is formally adhered to in the Serbo-Croatian version, the temporal interplay of the former is enhanced by the explicit marking of aspectual relationships of the latter — namely, by the consistent opposition between perfective (PF) and imperfective aspects (IPF). Out of the fifteen verbal forms employed in Kiš's adaptation, thirteen are present tenses, with an almost equally corresponding ratio of PF and IPF forms (7 vs. 5)[46]. On the one hand, as expected, PF forms are mainly used in embedded environments, e.g., declarative clauses (da ga ovaj *gurne*), temporal clauses (kada *ugleda*), infinitive clauses (da ti *se prišije* jedno dugme) and the like; however a single PF form (*sretnem*) profiling a punctual and highly resultative event is used in a main clause environment as well, fulfilling (in this context) the function

of the historical present[47]. On the other hand, IPF verbs are the default choice in either main clause environments or embedded clauses whereby a state is profiled rather than an event (na kome traku *zamenjuje* uzica). Such aspectual alternation evokes a propulsive textual pattern that contrasts temporally stretched situations (i.e., situations depicted with respect to their internal duration) to punctual situations referred to as links of a sequential chain of single, unanalyzable wholes[48]. This pattern, although implicitly present within the French original[49], is then an innovation of Kiš's rendition, as it is made explicitly present thanks to the structural characteristics of the Serbo-Croatian tempo-aspectual system. Crucially, such characteristics are to play a pivotal role in other exercises as well.

IV.II. There's Ways to Handle the Past: *Prétérit/Imparfait* vs. *Preterit/Imperfekt*

In a central quadrangle of exercises (29-32) the matrix text is transformed according to a higher-level abstract rule associated with different verbal tenses (*Passé indéfini*, *Présent*, *Prétérit*, *Imparfait*)[50]. Even in this case, Kiš's rendition mirrors Queneau's original by employing a sequence of tenses that are the direct, formal counterparts of

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[45] R. Keno, *Stilske vežbe*, trans. by D. Kiš, Beograd 1964, p. 7.

[46] Excluded from the total count of PF present forms (*gurne*, *prođe*, *ugleda*, *se ustremi*, *sretnem*, *daš*, *se prišije*) is *kaže* (3rd p. sing. from *kazati* [to say]), which is traditionally considered biaspectual in the normative grammars, although in both spoken and written language the verb is frequently used in present-tense environments, whose reference time overlaps with the utterance time.

[47] This use is stylistically marked in contemporary Serbo-Croatian, whereby the historical present is generally used with IPF verbs (cf. S. Dickey, *Parameters of Slavic Aspect. A Cognitive Approach*, Stanford 2000, pp. 147-148). It should also be added that the PF form *se ustremi* (3rd p. sing. from *ustremiti se* [to throw themselves onto]) is contextually licensed by the presence of the pre-modifier temporal clause *kada ugleda jedno slobodno mesto* [when he sees a vacant seat] (cf. R. Queneau, *Exercises in Style*, op. cit., p. 19), which favors a non-actual (viz. iterative) interpretation.

[48] This definition is quoted after B. Comrie, *Aspect. An Introduction to the Study of Verbal Aspect and Related Problems*, Cambridge 1976, p. 3.

[49] Prevalent in the source text is, however, the present simple (*présent*), whose distribution is irrespective of the temporal boundedness of a given situation. Similarly in the English version, the simple present is given preference over the progressive, which is employed (without the auxiliary) only as a functional equivalent of the French *descendent* ([*getting off*]; cf. the Serbo-Croatian present *silaze* from the IPF form *silaziti*).

[50] Consistently with the inherent limitations of the English tempo-aspectual system, Barbara Wright decided to adapt only two of the four original exercises (*Past* and *Present*, respectively), while turning the remaining texts into brand new variants (viz. *Reported speech* and *Passive*). Cf. R. Queneau, *Exercises in Style*, op. cit., pp. 67-73.

the French ones. Conversely, while *Prosto prošlo vreme* and *Sadašnje vreme* in Serbo-Croatian are the exact functional equivalents of the source texts (aspectual microvariation permitting), *Preterit* and *Imperfekt* set themselves apart in that their stylistic polarity is overturned with respect to *Prétérit* and *Imparfait*. Interestingly, this double-sided markedness is not evoked by using a variation; it is in fact a language-specific trait that stems from Kiš's strict, formal adherence to the original.

It is known that in contemporary spoken French the preterite (*passé simple*) has long fallen into disuse and has been replaced by other analytic (*passé indéfini*) or synthetic (*imparfait*) past tense forms. Queneau's original exercise is therefore flagged for its heavily belletristic flavor, which is maladapted to the trivial, ordinary character of the narrated story:

> Ce fut midi. Les voyageurs montèrent dans l'autobus. On fut serré. Un jeune monsieur porta sur sa tête un chapeau entouré d'une tresse, non d'un ruban. Il eut un long cou. Il se plaignit auprès de son voisin des heurts que celui-ci lui infligea. Dès qu'il aperçut une place libre, il se précipita vers elle et s'y assit. Je l'aperçus plus tard devant la gare Saint-Lazare. Il se vêtit d'un pardessus et un camarade qui se trouva là lui fit cette remarque: il fallut mettre un bouton supplémentaire.

As the closest Serbo-Croatian counterpart to the French *prétérit*, Kiš adopts another synthetic past form, the aorist (*aorist*):

> Би подне. Путници се попеше у аутобус. Беху стиснути. Један млад господин носаше на глави шешир окружен гајтаном, не пантљиком. Он имаде дуг врат. Он се пожали на свог суседа да га овај згази на ногу. Чим спази једно слободно место, он се устреми на њега и седе. Спазих га касније пред станицом Сен Лазар. Он би у мантилу, а пријатељ га овако посаветова: треба-де пришити једно допунско дугме[51].

It is essential to mention that unlike West and East Slavic languages, the Serbo-Croatian verbal system has virtually retained the whole set of tenses inherited from Old Church Slavonic, as is the case with most other South Slavic languages. Nowadays aorist, which is almost exclusively formed from PF verbs, carries definite stylistic overtones and has a limited distribution as a narrative past tense, mostly due to the competition of the analytic perfect; nevertheless in spoken language it can be frequently found in other contexts with no overt past reference, such as sentences validated for general (gnomic, atemporal) truths or modalized statements carrying the speaker's emotivity[52].

Kiš's adaptation of the French original is linguistically perplexing for two reasons. Firstly, despite the exercise's aiming to generalize the application of the aorist, the translator alternates two aoristic forms (*bi* podne, putnici *se popeše*) with a passive pluperfect (*behu stisnuti*)[53] and an active imperfect (jedan mlad gospodin *nosaše* na glavi šešir) — all within the first four sentences of the text. This is due to stylistic and grammatical constraints; on the one hand the need to replicate the basic aspectual opposition PF vs. IPF at the level of tense morphology, i.e., the contrast between resultative situations concluded in the past and situations portrayed to be still unfolding at the moment of utterance (or generally resistant to change, e.g., stative predications such as *nosati* [to wear][54]); on the other hand the ever-growing structural inability to license verbal forms that are perceived as obsolete and on the verge of acceptability (e.g., the passive aorist)[55]. Secondly, the freedom to interpret the aorist in two different ways (i.e., not only as a past tense, but also in its atemporal or modal functions) allows the translator to turn the original exercise into a brand new text, whereby one and the same episode can be perceived from two different narratological perspectives (roughly speaking, extradiegetic vs. intradiegetic narrator) and thus

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[51] R. Keno, *Stilske vežbe*, op. cit., p. 39.

[52] The relative frequency of aorist in everyday communication is also diamesically conditioned, for aorist forms tend to be much shorter than perfect ones (cf. P. Piper – I. Klajn, *Normativna gramatika srpskog jezika*, Novi Sad 22014, pp. 391-392, 398, 403).

[53] The verbal phrase *behu stisnuti*, which is a regional Ekavian variant of the standard form *bili su stisnuti*, could also be interpreted as a variant of the passive imperfect which has virtually disappeared from the inventory of tempo-aspectual forms of contemporary Serbo-Croatian (see further).

[54] Quite peculiar is Kiš's choice of the pluridirectional verb of motion *nosati*, lit. [to carry in all directions], over the monodirectional *nositi* [to carry], here [to wear], which, however, resurfaces further on in *Imperfekt* as *nosijaše*. The possible reasons for this subtle juxtaposition are not quite clear, although it may be 'the case' that in Kiš's idiolect the distinction between the paradigms of the two imperfect forms (*nosaše* vs. *nosijaše*) tended to blur, with *nosijaše* rather used as a vowel-lenghtened allomorph of *nosaše*. This issue is left open for future research.

[55] Such a form could in principle still be obtained (*biše stisnuti*), even though it is virtually absent in contemporary Serbo-Croatian.

assigned a different degree of stylistic markedness.

The adaptation of *Imparfait* gives rise to opposed yet complementary issues. In the source text Queneau does not employ imperfects just as pure tense operators; he also seemingly plays on their modalized 'oneiric' function[56] (possibly a cross-Romance feature), which makes the text resemble police report:

> C'était midi. Les voyageurs montaient dans l'autobus. On était serré. Un jeune monsieur portait sur sa tête un chapeau qui était entouré d'une tresse et non d'un ruban. Il avait un long cou. Il se plaignait auprès de son voisin des heurts que ce dernier lui infligeait. Dès qu'il apercevait une place libre, il se précipitait vers elle et s'y asseyait. Je l'apercevais plus tard, devant la gare Saint-Lazare. Il se vêtait d'un pardessus et un camarade qui se trouvait là lui faisait cette remarque: il fallait mettre un bouton supplémentaire.

Once again, Kiš opts to retain the form of the French original, using the Serbo-Croatian imperfect (*imperfekt*) as a direct counterpart of the *imparfait*:

> Бејаше подне. Путници се пењаху у аутобус. Бејаху стиснути. Један младић носаше на глави шешир који бејаше окружен плетаним гајтаном уместо пантљиком. Он имађаше дугачак врат. Он се жаљаше на свог суседа у гужви да га овај последњи газијаше. Чим он бејаше приметио једно слободно место, он се беше к њему упутио и беше сео. Ја га бејах приметио касније пред станицом Сен Лазар. Носијаше мантил за који неки његов друг налазаше ову примедбу: требаше да се пришије једно допунско дугме[57].

Conversely unlike the aorist in its primary temporal meaning, the imperfect — which in contemporary Serbo-Croatian can only be formed from IPF verbs — has long disappeared from the spoken language and has a very limited distribution in the written language, where it is consistently replaced by IPF perfect forms. Imperfects can be sporadically found in association with certain stylistic registers, e.g., in sermons, formal scientific language, or literary works where archaizing language is either consciously adopted or overtly mocked[58]. The generalized use of the imperfect in Kiš's adaptation results

in an artificial and stylistically inconsistent text, even more so considering the dissemination of several verb-stem expanded forms (e.g., *bejahu stisnuti* or *imađaše* deriving from a secondary present conjugation paradigm of *imati* [to have]), which carry a distinct archaic flavor and do not fit the narration of such an ordinary event by any stretch of the imagination. Moreover, much like the incoherent pattern of verbal tenses in *Preterit*, in *Imperfekt* the distribution of imperfects is also inconsistent; this is mainly due to the interference of four pluperfects (*bejaše primetio*, *se beše uputio*, *beše seo*, *bejah primetio*) whose auxiliary is conjugated according to an older conjugational pattern with person-number bound morphemes borrowed from the imperfect paradigm (instead of the more common analytic perfect forms, e.g., *bio sam primetio*). Notably in Kiš's version, pluperfect forms are mainly employed within a succession of temporal subordinates portraying habitual or repeated events in the past — the complex tactic function of which the now obsolete imperfect seems to have lost. It is thus possible to say that, much in the spirit of the OuLiPo tradition, Kiš may have realized that every potential text must be defined against its inherent limits, and that every repetition inherently bears a variation of its own.

IV.III. Language in Society: on Some Cultural Identity Issues

The concepts of repetition and variation (and their application thereof in Queneau's and Kiš's work) are particularly relevant for a group of exercises built on some sociocultural realia of post-war France, whose adaptation throughout the transfer process poses several translatological problems. In this subsection, three texts are examined as prototypical instantiations of cultural identity issues of their own, be they of political (*Réactionnaire/Reakcionar*), sociolinguistic (*Paysan/Seljački*), or sociocultural nature (*Javanais/Đački žargon*).

In *Réactionnaire* the narratological perspective is that of a grumpy man with clear right-wing sympathies and a pronounced disdain for young people — including the characters of the story — whom he

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[56] Although it cannot be addressed in this essay, the relevance of dream-related themes in the whole body of Queneau's poetic and prosaic work — including the *EDS* — has been consistently highlighted in the literature. Cf., among others, S. Bartezzaghi, *Lettura degli* Esercizi di stile, op. cit., pp. 284-287; C. Clarke, *Rewriting the Ouvre*, op. cit., pp. 47, 269-272; A. Kubo, *Du « cadre narratif »*, op. cit., pp. 9-10; C. Sanders, *Raymond Queneau*, op. cit.

[57] R. Keno, *Stilske vežbe*, op. cit., p. 40.

[58] P. Piper — I. Klajn, *Gramatika*, op. cit., pp. 392, 398.

addresses as "morveux" [puppy] and "zazou" [jack-anapes] among other things[59]. The first lines of the exercise best exemplify the aggressive rhetoric of the narrator:

> Naturellement l'autobus était a peu près complet, et le receveur désagréable. L'origine de tout cela, il faut la rechercher dans la journée de huit heures et les projets de nationalisation. Et puis les Français manquent d'organisation et de sens civique; sinon, il ne serait pas nécessaire de leur distribuer des numéros d'ordre pour prendre l'autobus — ordre est bien le mot.

It is known that the story was removed by Queneau himself in the 1973 French reissue of the *Exercices de style*, alongside some minor exercises such as *Permutations de 9 à 12 lettres*, *Hai Kai* and *Féminin*[60]. Allegations have been made in the literature as to why the author took such a drastic decision; possible answers include a growing dampening of political enthusiasm over the decades, with Queneau passing over to more moderate left-wing positions, or even his express purpose to erase every historical or (loosely) autobiographical reference from the text in order to unhinge the traditional hierarchical relationship between the writer and the reader, and allow the latter to take an active part in the writing process[61].

A potential problem for Kiš's adaptation could have been in the biased nature of the rhetorical device embroidered in the source text, which of course would have hardly been able to find its place in the Jugoslav political arena at the time (if at all). To overcome this obstacle Kiš chooses once again to remain as faithful as possible to the French original, avoiding any direct reference to Jugoslav politics (which incidentally might very well have been conjured up by Queneau's mention of the *journée de huit heures* and the *projets de nationalisation*) and even keeping the dismissive assessment of the French people conveyed in the source text (so much for Serbs, Croats, Bosnians, and Montenegrins!):

> Наравно, аутобус је био препун, а кондуктер нељубазан. Разлоге свему томе треба тражити у осмочасовном радном времену и у плановима за национализацију. А осим тога, Французима недостаје смисао за организацију и за грађански ред. Иначе не би било потребно да им се деле бројеви за ред на аутобусу — они управо за ред не знају[62].

While repetition may prove appropriate for the Serbo-Croatian adaptation of *Réactionnaire*, other texts have been approached in a slightly different manner. More than any other exercise of the collection, *Paysan* is the direct reflection of the beliefs on the *néo-français* that Queneau had been developing during the Thirties and Forties (cf. section III), within which Queneau's linguistic interests and aspirations coalesce. The narrator is a peasant, most likely from the outskirts of Paris, who speaks a hybrid, rural argot characterized by peculiar lexical, phonological, and syntactic features[63]. Although the text is cloaked in a rhetorical effect that may have been comical to well-educated readers, the centrality of the *français populaire* and other nonstandard French *patois* is once again put in the spotlight:

> Enfin après qu'j'euyons paillé, je j'tons un coup d'œil tout alentour de nott peursonne et qu'est-ceu queu jeu voyons-ti pas? un grand flandrin avec un d'ces cous et un d'ces couv-la-tête pas ordinaires. Le cou, l'était trop long. L'chapiau, l'avait dla tresse autour, dame oui. Et pis, tout à coup, le voilà-ti-pas qui s'met en colère?

When briefly discussing the Serbo-Croatian target texts that deviate significantly from their respective source texts, Kiš writes that *Seljački* was modelled on the speech of a Montenegrin peasant in that "[...] car ce parler est celui que je connais le mieux et il paraît très provincial par rapport à la langue parlée de Belgrade"[64]:

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[59] R. Queneau, *Exercises in Style*, op. cit., pp. 136-138. The French term *zazou*, more specifically, refers to an anti-conservative subculture which blossomed under the Vichy regime. Their members, either men or women, would publicly flaunt a penchant for jazz music and a flamboyant Anglocentric dress code which shares some characteristics with the attire of the young man on the S bus. The use of such an expressive term might lead the reader to identify the narrator with a nostalgic veteran of the French pro-Nazi government.

[60] Notably, all these exercises have been retained in Barbara Wright's translation (as *Permutations by Groups of 9, 10, 11 and 12 Letters*, *Haiku* and *Feminine*, respectively).

[61] S. Bartezzaghi, *Lettura degli* Esercizi di stile, op. cit., pp. 292-294.

[62] R. Keno, *Stilske vežbe*, op. cit., p. 82.

[63] Cf., for an analysis of the different linguistic layers of *Paysan*, H. D. Bork, *Aspects de la langue du paysan dans la littérature française*, in *Onze études sur l'esprit de la satire*, ed. by H. Baader, Tübingen-Paris 1978, pp. 179-182.

[64] D. Kiš, *Quelques notes*, op. cit., p. 144. Recall that Kiš's mother, Milica Dragićević, was native of Cetinje.

Немах они биљетић са штамбиљем, ма се је некако угура у ону гужву. Каце ми некако смјестисмо у они дио ђе се стоји, а да велим ти, чоче, мишљах нећу жив отолен изисти колико ту бјеше свакојаке феле, све пуно ка око. Ондати, прије но што ће ми један ка официр што ли узет паре за они биљетић, ја се обрну, вељу да виђу чесов се то свијет нагура овђе ка на пазарни дан, те виђех једног грданти бјеше кукала му мајка да се чојек препадне од њега[65].

Unlike the Neo-Štokavian Serbian variants spoken in Belgrade, which are considered virtually homogenous, Old-Štokavian Montenegrin dialects (e.g., the Zeta–Raška dialect) display some distinct lexical and morphological features. Among them are the peculiar extension of palatalization patterns (e.g., *đe* instead of Standard Ekavian *gde* or Jekavian *gdje* [where]), a wider morphosyntactic distribution of elements that are deemed archaic in the urban standard (e.g., the unusually extended use of aorist, such as *smjestismo* [we put], and imperfect forms, such as *mišljah* [I was thinking]), and the coexistence of obsolete (*otolen* [from there]) and substandard lexical items. These latter elements, in particular, form a stylistically layered set and often come in different lexical guises, which may additionally hint at their different geographical origins; compare, for instance, the 'indigenous' vocative form *čoče* for Standard Ekavian *čoveče* or Jekavian *čovječe* [man], the hypocoristic paraphrasis *biljetić sa štambiljem* [little ticket with a stamp] (possibly a Lika-based Italianism standing for [bus pass])[66] and the quite unfiltered regional phraseologisms *svakojake fele* [of all kinds] (from Hungarian *fél* [party]) and *puno ka oko* [jam-packed], lit. [stuffed as an eye]. Notably, clusters of such and other similar features, like the slurred, spoken registers of French farmers, often find themselves at the receiving end of well-intended jokes that were well-known in the Jugoslav cultural sphere. It is likely that Kiš, who in the early Sixties had first-hand knowledge of the multicultural reality of Strasbourg, was familiar with both French and Serbian sociocultural discourses

surrounding the ever-evolving relationship between the urban centers and countrysides of the time — namely, the phenomenon of the depopulation of rural areas with waves of migration towards urban centers as a result of new industrialization[67]. Consequently, Kiš's choice to use a Montenegrin-based dialect to represent a French argot might have had deeper roots than simply knowledge of his mother's native tongue. *Seljački* can thus be considered a perfect negative of the tense exercises dissected in subsection IV.II, whereby the faithful replication of the original French structures resulted in a significant variation; here, on the contrary, variation is performed on the surface in the form of a semiotic transfer (French argot → Montenegrin dialect), as a means to retain the substantial repetition of the original.

A certain degree of balance between repetition and variation is finally achieved in the Serbo-Croatian adaptation of *Javanais*. In the source text, Queneau rewrites the matrix exercise in a sort of taboo slang dating back to the second half of the XIX century[68], which is characterized by the insertion of the infix /av/ between the onset and the nucleus of an open syllable — a manipulation that ultimately aims to disrupt the linear order of morphemes, rendering the word(s) incomprehensible to the foreign ear[69]:

> Unvin jovur vevers mividin suvur unvin vautobobuvus deve lava livignévé essévé, jeveu vapeverçuvus unvin jeveunovomme vavec unvin lonvong couvou evet unvin lonvong couvou evet unvin chavapoveau envantouvourévé pavar uvune fivicévelle ovau lieuveu deveu ruvubanvan.

Kiš's closest adaptation of *Javanais* is *Đački žargon*, whereby the translator — as apparent from the

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[65] R. Keno, *Stilske vežbe*, op. cit., p. 114.
[66] In his famous sketch of the čakavian dialect spoken in and around Senj, Milan Moguš enlisted the word *biljĕtić* among the possible diminutive derivates obtained by attaching to the base form the specialized suffix -ić (M. Moguš, *Današnji šenjski govor*, "Senjski zbornik: prilozi za geografiju, etnologiju, gospodarstvo, povijest i kulturu", 1966 (2), 1, p. 106).

[67] This transitional phase towards a new industrialization — with special emphasis on the radical transformations French rural areas were undergoing at that time — is well portrayed in a 1968 short movie by Éric Rohmer, *Fermière à Montfaucon*, which revolves around the daily routine of Monique Sendron, a young farmer and municipal council member of a small rural village in Occitanie.
[68] Marc Plénat pinpoints the first textual occurrence of javanais in a 1856 five-act drama by Auguste Luchet and Jean-François Desbuards, *La Marchande du Temple* (cf. M. Plénat, *Le javanais: concurrence et haplologie*, "Langages", 1991, 101, p. 95).
[69] For more details on Queneau's javanais and the national character of this tabuized slang, cf. M. Plénat, *Morphologie d'un langage secret: le javanais de Queneau*, "Cahiers de Grammaire", 1983, 6, pp. 150-194.

very first lines — follows a similar process of morphological insertion; a voiced labiodental fricative /v/ is added to the rime of every open syllable and then followed by the same vowel that forms the nucleus of the preceding syllable, thus creating a mesmerizing sound pattern loosely resembling vowel harmony, e.g., j*e*(v*e*)dn*o*(v*o*)g d*a*(v*a*)n*a*(v*a*) *o*(v*o*)k*o*(v*o*) p*o*(v*o*)dn*e*(v*e*) [one day, around noon][70]:

> Јеведновог даванава овоково поводневе нава авауввутовобу-
> вусуву спавазивих јеведновог тивипава сава јавакаво дувуги-
> вим враватовом иви сава шевешивировом овокрувужевенивим
> плеветевеновом траваковом увумевестово павантљивикеве[71].

Interestingly, another peculiar feature that the Serbo-Croatian linguistic continuum shares with French is the abundance of slangs, taboo and secret languages, and substandard argots, all of which have received exhaustive lexicographic treatments throughout the years, as well as having more recently been analyzed from a sociolinguistic perspective[72]. This might explain why, unlike other international versions[73], in Kiš's rendition we find a close counterpart for every French exercise involving the use of secret or taboo languages, e.g., *Loucherbem*, which is adapted as *Šatrovački*[74]. Kiš's knowledge

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[70] Kiš maintains that both *Ђački žargon* and the following *Šatrovački* are based on Belgrade slangs (D. Kiš, *Quelques notes*, op. cit., p. 144). Note however that never in the French original does Queneau ascribe javanais to the creativity of the student population, which is then to be considered an original contribution by Kiš.

[71] R. Keno, *Stilske vežbe*, op. cit., p. 97.

[72] References in literature abound. Cf., among others, M. Radovanović, *Linguistic Theory and Sociolinguistics in Jugoslavia*, in *Jugoslav General Linguistics*, ed. by M. Radovanović, Amsterdam-Philadelphia 1989, pp. 279-300; J. Dmitrijević Savić, *Tracking Language Variation Across the Teens: Some Sociolinguistic Aspects of Slang in Serbia*, in *Challenging Change: Literary and Linguistic Responses*, ed. by V. Lopičić − B. Mišić Ilić, Newcastle upon Tyne 2012, pp. 253-266; U. Hinrichs, *Soziolekte (serbisch/kroatisch/bosnisch)*, in *Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft*, 32 (2), ed. by S. Kempgen − P. Kosta − T. Berger − K. Gutschmidt, Berlin-München-Boston 2014, pp. 2171-2185.

[73] For instance, in Umberto Eco's 1983 Italian adaptation of the *EDS* the exercise *Loucherbem* (i.e., a jargon spoken by young butchers in the Parisian arrondissements along Rue de Vaugirard and La Villette) is dropped — mainly due to the impossibility of obtaining a satisfying Italian rendition of the original jargon — and replaced with *Réactionnaire*.

[74] It is to be noted that Kiš's version of the *šatrovački* jargon, which should feature inversion of syllables in words and therefore be structurally similar to the French *verlan*, shares several similarities with *loucherbem* instead. The reasons for this discrepancy are not clear.

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and mastery of Serbian *tajni jezici* [secret languages] of the Sixties allows him to adapt the formal structure of the source texts without betraying their content; this is a rare case of consonance between repetition and variation.

V. Concluding remarks

This paper addressed Danilo Kiš's 1964 Serbo-Croatian adaptation of Raymond Queneau's *Exercices de style*. Section II discusses the cross-disciplinary sources obtained from the original work have been taken into account. Section III explores the network of artistic connections between Queneau and Kiš, the meaning of repetition and variation for both the authors, and the possible reasons for such an early Serbo-Croatian rendition of the *EDS*. Section IV analyzes the various linguistic aspects of Kiš's version, with particular reference to the adaptation of the tempo-aspectual relationships of the matrix exercise (subsection IV.I), the different contribution of aoristic and imperfect forms in French and Serbo-Croatian (subsection IV.II), and the rendition of a group of exercises built on various types of cultural identity issues (subsection IV.III). What has not been addressed in this essay is the relationship between Kiš's 1964 version and the subsequent reissues (including the 1993 illustrated version), as well as Queneau's later critical reception and Vladimir Gerić's 2008 Croatian version (alongside with its different handling of some sociocultural issues). Similarly, a more detailed account of the relationship between Kiš, the Jugoslav government, and Jugoslav *intelligencija* in the early Sixties has not been discussed for the sake of space. All aforementioned topics have been left for future research.

◇ *On the Banality of Translation: Danilo Kiš and the* Exercices de style ◇
Marco Biasio

Abstract

The present study aims at analyzing some peculiar linguistic aspects of the Serbo-Croatian translation of Raymond Queneau's *Exercices de style*, which was completed by Danilo Kiš and first published by the Belgrade-based publishing house Nolit in 1964. Kiš's version of Queneau's *Exercices de style*, which has received little attention from critics and may well seem a marginal episode in the author's prolific career as a translator, does actually reflect Kiš's own fascination with the key concepts of literary form, variation and deconstruction which permeate most of his prosaic work (most notably, his 'family circus' trilogy and *The Encyclopedia of the Dead* among others). Interestingly, Kiš's strict formal adherence to the original text gives rise to an array of complex translatological issues, dealing primarily (although not exclusively) with the allegedly equivalent rendition of the tempo-aspectual relationships between the source and the target language.

Keywords

Exercices de style, Danilo Kiš, Postmodernism, Variation, Deconstruction, Fugue, Translation Studies, Tempo-Aspectual Relationships.

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