Translation Challenge: The Beginning of Tolstoy's "Anna Karenina"

1 Text in English

The text to be translated in this Translation Challenge is the initial passage of Tolstoy's 1878 novel *Anna Karenina*.¹ The Ayeri translation here follows the English one by Constance Garnett (1901), which can be found on *Project Gutenberg*.

Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.

Everything was in confusion in the Oblonskys' house. The wife had discovered that the husband was carrying on an intrigue with a French girl, who had been a governess in their family, and she had announced to her husband that she could not go on living in the same house with him. This position of affairs had now lasted three days, and not only the husband and wife themselves, but all the members of their family and household, were painfully conscious of it. Every person in the house felt that there was no sense in their living together, and that the stray people brought together by chance in any inn had more in common with one another than they, the members of the family and household of the Oblonskys. The wife did not leave her own room, the husband had not been at home for three days. The children ran wild all over the house; the English governess quarreled with the housekeeper, and wrote to a friend asking her to look out for a new situation for her; the man-cook had walked off the day before just at dinner time; the kitchen-maid, and the coachman had given warning. (Tolstoy 2013)

2 Text in Ayeri

¹ Hat tip to Steven Lytle for suggesting it.

¹ Kamayon pandahajang-hen mino; minarya miraneri sitang-ton pandahāng-hen minarya.

² Enyareng atauya kāryo nangaya pandahana Oblonski. ³ Silvisaye sarisa envanang, ang manga miraya ayon yena cān-cānas layeri Kahani, seri ganvayās pandahaya ton, nay ang narisaye ayonyam yena, ang ming saylingoyye mitanyam nangaya kamo kayvo yāy. ⁴ Eng manga yomāran eda-mineye luga bahisya kay, nay tong vakas ten pulengeri, sitang-tong-namoy ayonang nay envanang, nārya nasimayajanghen pandahana nay nangānena ton naynay. ^{5a} Ang mayayo nyān-hen nangaya, ming tenubisoyrey, mitantong kadanya. ^{5b} Ang engyon vihyam miromānjas keynam si sa lancon kadanya apineri kondangaya, nasimayajas pandahana nay nangānena Oblonski. ⁶ Ang saroyye envan sangalas yena, ang manga yomoyya ayon rangya ton luga bahisya kay. ⁷ Sa senyon ganye nangaya-hen; ang ranye ganvaya Angli kayvo lomāyaya visam nay ang tahanye ledoyam, yam mya balangyeng pinyan yanoley gumo hiro ye; ang saraya ersaya bahisya sarisa pidimya tarika sirutayyānena; ang narisaton lomāya risang nay lantaya vapatanas ton.

3 Interlinear Breakdown

(I) Kama -yon pandaha -ye -ang =hen mino; mino -arya miran -eri sitang- ton be.like -3PL.N family -PL -A =all happy; happy -NEG way -INS self- 3PL.N.GEN pandaha -ang =hen mino -arya. family -A =every happy -NEG.
"All happy families are alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way."

I was looking for a way to express 'alike' here, first trying to go with 22 kamo 'equal, same' and then realizing that it might in fact be better to use the related verb de: kama- 'be as ... as ...' intransitively to mean 'be alike', i.e. expressing likeness rather than equality.

In an earlier article on the blog, I wrote about constituent order in Ayeri that "the predication in equative sentences seems to be interpreted in the way of a transitive sentence, although it is lacking an overt predicate" (Becker 2012): in Ayeri, adjectives and nominals in predicative sentences come after the subject NP, as though they were objects. This, in fact, goes counter to Universal 145 in *The Universals Archive* (Plank et al. 2009), since Plank et al. predict predicative adjectives in VSO languages to be treated like (or at least similar to, I suppose) verbs. I decided to break my rule and follow the universal in this case for stylistic reasons, since I thought that *pandabāng-hen minarya minarya miraneri sitang-ton* does not flow as well as the sentence with the constituents reversed.

(2) Enya -reng atau -ya kāryo nanga -ya pandaha -na Oblonski.
 everything -A.INAN chaos -LOC big house -LOC family -GEN Oblonski.
 "Everything was in a big chaos in the Oblonski family's house."

This sentence shows Ayeri's normal constituent order again, as compared to (1), the predication being the NP "atauya kāryo." Tagalog, as a VSO language which I have been returning to as an inspiration for Ayeri, however, seems to place not only predicative adjectives before actors like the universal cited above predicts, but also predicative NPs:

- (i) Tagalog (Schachter 1976: 499):
 - a. *Abogado ang lalaki*. lawyer T- man "The man is a lawyer."
 - b. Matalino ang lalaki.
 intelligent T- man
 "The man is intelligent."

Since I could not find out anything about the etymology of the name Oblonsky, I left it as it is and respelled it with the graphemes available in Ayeri transcription.

(3) a. Silvisa -ye sarisa envan -ang, ang manga mira -ya ayon yena discover -3SG.F previously wife -A, AT PROG do -3SG.M husband (-T) 3SG.F.GEN cān -cān -as lay -eri Kahani, si -eri ganvaya -as pandaha -ya ton, ... love -DIM -P girl INS French, REL -INS governess -P family -LOC 3PL.N.GEN, ... "The wife had previously discovered that her husband had been having an affair with a French girl, who had been a governess in their family, ..."

b. ..., nay ang narisa -ye ayon -yam yena, ang ming sayling -oy
..., and AT announce -3SG.F (-T) husband -DAT 3SG.F.GEN, AT can continue -NEG
-ye mitan -yam nanga -ya kamo kayvo yāy.
-3SG.F (-T) live -PTCP house -LOC same with 3SG.M.LOC.
"..., and had announced to her husband that she could not continue living in the same house with him."

This is the first section that necessitated coming up with new vocabulary: $\log \frac{1}{2} \cos \frac{1}{2} can - can$ '(love) affair' as a diminutive of $\log \frac{1}{2} can$ 'love' (a little like German *Liebelei* and *Techtelmechtel*); $\operatorname{sec} u$ ganvaya 'governess' from a combination of $\operatorname{sec} gan$ 'child' and the feminine occupational derivative suffix $\operatorname{sec} u$ gan' child' and the feminine occupational derivative suffix $\operatorname{sec} u$ and $\operatorname{sec} u$

This sentence is also a good illustration for Ayeri's tendency to underspecify tense. For one, narratives are not marked by the epic past tense, and secondly, the aspect of actions happening before the time of narration or leading up to it is only signified by the time adverb non sarisa 'previous(ly), earlier; former(ly)'.

eda- mine -ye luga bahis -ya kay, nay tong (4) Eng manga yoma -aran vakas AT.INAN PROG exist -3PL.INAN this- issue -PL (-T) for day -LOC three, and 3PL.N.A aware puleng -eri, sitang- tong =nama =oy ayon ten -ang nay envan -ang, nārya 3PL.INAN.GEN pain -INS, self-3PL.N.A = just = NEG husband - A and wife -A, but nasimaya -ye -ang =hen pandaha -na nay nangān -ena ton naynay. member -PL -A =all family -GEN and household -GEN 3PL.N.GEN as.well "These issues had continued to exist for three days, and they had all been aware of them with pain, not only the husband the wife themselves, but all members of their family and household as well."

Words new or modified in this sentence are rate vakas 'conscious, awake', whose definition should also include 'aware', and حرات *nangān* 'household', which is a renominalization of حرات nanga 'house'. The ongoing aspect of the conflict is indicated by the progressive marker *constants manga* in addition to the time reference *luga babisya kay* 'for three days'.

- (5) a. Ang maya -yo nyān = ben nanga -ya, ming tenubis -oy -rey, AT feel -3SG person (-T) = every house -LOC, can make.sense.of -NEG -3SG.INAN, mitan -tong kadanya. live -3PL.N.A together.
 "Every person in the house felt that it couldn't be made sense of them living together."
 - b. Ang eng -yon vib -yam miromān -ye -as keynam si sa lant -yon AT be.more 3PL.N share -PTCP trait -PL -P people (-T) REL PT lead -3PL.N (-T) kadanya apin -eri kondanga -ya, nasimaya -ye -as pandaha -na nay nangān -ena together luck -INS inn -LOC, member -PL -P family -GEN and household -GEN Oblonski. Oblonski.

"People who were led together in an inn by luck shared more traits than the members of the family and the household Oblonski."

Sentence (5a) posed a difficulty in translating "there was no sense in their living together" due to the nominalized VP, "living together" (Tolstoy 2013). I decided to leave the phrase unnominalized in my translation, although in principle, include to express the genitive part of the original phrase. possible. The problem then is, however, how to express the genitive part of the original phrase. Fortunately, Ayeri allows complement phrases, so *mitantong kadanya* is here literally 'that they live together', the conjunction being inferred from context.

Furthermore, I did not want to literally translate "there was no sense in ..." after I discovered that I had earlier coined a verb a frie tenubis- 'make sense of'. Since I wanted to avoid a non-specific 'you' here, I rendered the subject of this clause as a patient, thus turning the verb into a passive form.

Sentence (5b) contained the difficulty of a comparative statement that was beyond a simple 'CMP is more QTY than STD'. To evoke a more literary style, I used the comparative verb inperendent enderQTY than STD' instead of a simpler construction with the corresponding suffix <math>inperendent endernot completely sure if the verb construction makes sense syntactically, but I assumed that <math>inperendent enderwould be the head in this case and the phrase headed by <math>inperendent enderwould be subordinate to it,essentially serving as the quality QTY of the standard STD that the comparee CMP is compared to:

- (ii) a. CMP be.more $[_{QTY}$ big] than STD.
 - b. CMP be.more $[_{QTY}$ sharing traits] than STD.

The rather complex comparative structure is, however, further complicated by the relative clause attributed to the agent جبتهر *keynam[ang]* 'people'. Due to information flow and syntactic weight, this constituent moves to the right edge of the clause.

 (6) Ang sara -oy -ye envan sangal -as yena, ang manga yoma -oy -ya ayon AT leave -NEG -3SG.F wife (-T) room -P 3SG.F.GEN, AT PROG exist -NEG -3SG.M husband rang -ya ton luga bahis -ya kay.
 (-T) home -LOC 3PL.N.GEN for day -LOC three.

"The wife did not leave her room, the husband had not been at home for three days."

I am a little tempted to insert a conjunction between the two main clauses here, but I do not know whether it should be $\frac{1}{2}$ nay 'and' or $u_{2}^{2}u_{2}$ yanoyam 'because', since either reading is possible.

- (7) a. Sa sen -yon gan -ye nanga -ya =hen; ...
 PT neglect -3PL.N child -PL (-T) house -LOC =all; ...
 "Children were neglected all over the house; ..."
 - b. ...; ang ran -ye ganvaya Angli kayvo lomāya -ya visam nay ang tahan
 ...; AT argue -3SG.F governess (-T) English with servant -LOC main and AT write
 -ye ledo -yam, yam mya balang -yeng pinyan yano -ley gumo hiro ye
 -3SG.F (-T) friend -DAT, DATT shall find -3SG.F.A please place -P.INAN work new 3SG.F
 ; ...
 (-T) ; ...

"...; the English governess argued with the head servant and wrote to a friend that she may please find her a new work place; ..."

c. ...; ang sara -ya ersaya babis -ya sarisa pidim -ya tarika sirutayyān -ena;; AT leave -3SG.M cook (-T) day -LOC previous hour -LOC exact dinner -GEN; ... "...; the cook left the previous day at the exact hour of dinner; ..." d. ...; ang narisa -ton lomāya risang nay lantaya vapatan -as ton.
...; AT express -3PL.N servant (-T) kitchen and driver (-T) warning -P 3PL.N.GEN.
"...; the kitchen servant and the driver expressed their warning."

For this passage as well, new words had to be coined or extended: fiz: sen- 'neglect', and zin narisa-'announce', coined in (3), gains the additional meanings 'express, pronounce'. The lantaya 'driver' and rrnz vapatan 'warning' are not in the dictionary, but they are nouns regularly derived from verbs, in so far, they are transparent and not in desperate need of a new dictionary entry.

4 Conclusive Thoughts

This translation exercise was originally proposed in a discussion thread as a stand-in for the popular "Babel Text" from the biblical book of Genesis (11:1–9) for those who do not wish to use a religious mythical story to compare fictional languages and showcase their own. And while the passage from *Anna Karenina* contains many simple sentences, it still poses some syntactic difficulties that may be hard to tackle in a rather newly developed conlang. At least, this is the context in which I have most often seen the "Tower of Babel" story used in.

However, this passage from Tolstoy provides vocabulary that seems more immediately useful to get a conlang started than the "Tower of Babel" story. How often, after all, does one talk about 'mortar' and 'bitumen', or translate texts into one's conlang that do? At least in my own experience, vocabulary of the domestic and everyday life spheres appears much more frequently.

References

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