

<https://doi.org/10.18485/analiff.2024.36.2.4>

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# Linguistic and Cultural Aspects of the Swedish Honorific Personal Pronoun *Ni/ni* and its Translation into Serbian

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## Key words:

Swedish,  
honorific pronouns,  
translation studies

## Abstract

The use of the Swedish personal pronoun *du* (Serb. *ti*) or the use of the honorific personal pronoun *Ni/ni* (Serb. *Vi/vi*) in Sweden can be examined from several perspectives. Firstly, for many Swedes, this is a matter of linguistic and social identity, tradition, culture, history, but also of the context of the conversation. Shifts in the use of these personal pronouns have often been conditioned by radical social and historical changes spanning centuries in Sweden. Secondly, when mediating between Swedish and other linguistic and cultural communities, such as the Serbian community, the question of how to address others is also a cultural question, directly related to the differences in understanding the relationship between speakers in the two linguistic and cultural communities. The third perspective relates to a specific translation challenge which, in this case, refers to the confusion about the use of non-honorific or honorific personal pronouns in specific situations even among native Swedish speakers themselves, especially in recent decades. Translators, therefore, must keep up with linguistic, social and cultural trends in the source and target language communities. This paper provides, for the first time in about 150 years of translation exchange between the Swedish and Serbian language communities, an analysis of the socio-historical and linguistic prerequisites for the use of the personal pronouns *du* (Serb. *ti*) or *Ni/ni* (Serb. *Vi/vi*) in the Swedish language, alongside the tendencies in translation theory and practice in the Serbian language community concerning this linguistic issue. (примљено: 28. октобра 2024; прихваћено: 10. новембра 2024)

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## 1. Historical overview

In historical overviews, it is often indicated that the wider and ultimately more frequent use of the Swedish personal pronoun *du* (a non-honorific *you*) coincided with the recommendation by a government official in 1967 (Fremer, 2018). Nevertheless, the actual change started many centuries before, and it seems that it is still ongoing although at varied pace, depending on historical and social periods. It is, however, not clear when exactly and how fast the interchange between the use of the Swedish honorific pronouns *Ni/ni/I* (honorific *you*) and the non-honorific *du* developed, but it is clear that the form *Ni/ni/I* has been asymmetrical, connected to hierarchy and building a distance between the speakers during the entire history of Swedish.

The original Swedish *I* (an early Swedish form of the honorific *you*), which eventually became *Ni/ni*, was used in the 13th century, after the Latin model for expressing courtesy towards royalty, nobility and priesthood. Children also addressed their parents and the elderly with the honorific pronoun *I*, while parents, in turn, responded with *du*. In this way the pronouns expressed a hierarchical relationship. In the medieval estate society the use of titles increased, which resulted in an even more detailed hierarchical ranking (Håkanson, 2003). In old Swedish rural society there were no doubts regarding how to address others: in general, *du* was used to address one person and *I* two or more (Wellander, 1952). What afterwards disintegrated the old system was the medieval class society with its titles and a very particular model of internal interaction. The development towards the use of titles went in two directions. Firstly, there was the use of a title and a third-person singular pronoun in order to omit frequent repetitions, for example “*Might I ask Mister school master if He could grant me the mark now*”. Secondly, there was the use of a title and a third-person pronoun, but in its plural form, for example “*I beg of your Mercy to hear my request, should you desire*”.<sup>1</sup>

The tendency to address others with *Ni/ni* in the Swedish kingdom grew rapidly with the 18th century enthusiasm for the French language and culture (Nygård-Fagerudd, 2016). If one was educated, one used the French *vous* in conversations. Prior to this century, it was the German language and its plural form *Sie* (honorific *you*) that also influenced the use of the Swedish forms *Ni/ni/I*. The French influence, however, spread widely across Sweden in various forms. The reign of King Gustav III (born in Stockholm in 1746, ruled from 1771, and assassinated in 1792), also known in the Swedish history as the Gustavian era, coincided with the European Enlightenment. Both educated and fluent in French, close to the court of Versailles, Gustav III was a patron of theatre, opera and arts in Sweden. During his reign, the Swedish language underwent such drastic changes influenced by the French

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1 Welander's original quote is needed here because of the specific examples in Swedish: “Utvecklingen till allt större artighet mot de betitlade gick fram på två vägar. Man kunde tilltala dem med titeln. [...] *Får jag fråga Herr Prosten om Han kan ge mig betyget nu?* [...] Man kunde visa sin vördnad också genom att tala i pluralis, som om den tilltalade vore ett majestätiskt flertal gentemot ens eget blygsamma ental: *Jag beder Eders Nåde att I viljen hörsamma min begäran*”.

language and culture that their impact is still visible in the modern Swedish lexicon (words such as Swedish *paraply* derived from French *parapluie*, Swedish *fåtölj* from French *fauteuil*, or the Swedish greeting *adjö* compared to the French *adieu* are merely some of the examples).

In the 19th century, polite conversation in Swedish became even more complex: one went from using the plural personal pronoun for expressing respect to the exact opposite, and the rich and the privileged started using the personal pronoun *Ni/ni* – servants were addressed with *Ni/ni* by the lords who desired to mark the distance between them, and in turn the servants also addressed the lords with the pronoun *Ni/ni* to signal their submissiveness. In an article about the main characteristics of the historical changes connected to the Swedish linguistic and social reforms in the late 1960s, so called *Du-reformen* (Eng. *Thou-reform*), Maria Fremer comments on several outcomes of the event (Fremer, 2015: 89–93). Until the reform, personal pronoun *du* was used symmetrically among family, friends, and children. Symmetrical use of the pronoun *du* was also common in student life and at the workplace, where relationships were friendly and equal. The pronoun *Ni/ni* was used symmetrically only during brief formal meetings, and asymmetrically in communication between higher and lower ranked persons, where the pattern of address consisted of the combination of a title and last name, for example, *herr Svensson* (Eng. *Mr. Svensson*), *fru Petersson* (Eng. *Mrs. Petersson*) and was used universally – that is, both symmetrically out of respect between the speakers, and asymmetrically as a more formal address. The asymmetrical use of the honorific pronoun *Ni/ni* started to function as a demeaning form, whereas the use of titles still was more acceptable and less oppressive.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the use of titles persisted longer because they could be used in both formal and informal situations. Fremer gives an example: *Nu måste direktörn skynda sig om direktörn vill komma i tid* (Eng. *The manager needs to hurry if the manager wants to be on time*) (2015: 19). In turn, Swedish developed expressions where words used for addressing and honorifics can be omitted, such as passive and impersonal constructions, for example: *Vad sags om det?* (Eng. *How about that?*), *Är det bra så?* (Eng. *Is that all right?*), *Får det lov att vara mera te?* (Eng. *How about some more tea?*).

Both in Sweden and in the rest of Europe, the 20th century was a turbulent time, marked by wars followed by modernization, industrialization, and a strong economic growth. The Swedish *folkhemmet* (the so-called *People's Home*) or the welfare state, a notion modelled by Per Albin Hansson<sup>3</sup>, brought both social security and

2 The famous Swedish *title disease* (Swe. *titelsjukan*) in the 19th and the first half of the 20th century meant that the title had to be repeated every time a person was addressed, since it could be perceived as rude to use non-honorific *you* when addressing unfamiliar persons or professionals: from a notary to an engineer and a conductor (Håkanson 2003). When Erik Wellander wrote his posts in *Dagens Nyheter* in the 1950s, he commented that even this was not enough; the name was also included. He gives a ponderous) example: *Professor Andersson said that Professor Andersson would come as soon as Professor Andersson could.*

3 Per Albin Hansson (1885–1946) was a Swedish politician and two-time Prime Minister between 1932 and 1946 (in four governments) and the founder of the so-called *People's Home* (Swe. *Folkhemmet*), the Swedish welfare state. During this period, many reforms occurred, and P.A. Hansson is still considered one of the most

progress, equality and mutual understanding. After the continued democratization of the Swedish society during the 1960s, the course of this particular linguistic change was also rapid and unstoppable. The notion of *jämställdhet* (Eng. *equality*) became crucial for the political and social dialogue of the period. The non-honorific pronoun *du* became the dominant word for addressing others, regardless of their status or the relationship between interlocutors. In her study about *Du-reformen* from a historical perspective, Fremer observes that both Swedish as a language and its native speakers replaced with informal word *du* a complicated system of addressing each other with titles, which was a powerful language shift that occurred over a relatively short transition period (2018: 16).<sup>4</sup> Fremer adds that the differences in address depend on various factors, such as regional location (urban or rural), social status, age, etc. Even more than half a century after its onset, *Du-reformen* and its results still raise many questions. Fremer points out that the pronoun *du* is qualified as an intimate word used in intimate settings, and that it was unthinkable, for example, for a seller to address a customer with *du* before *Du-reformen* (2018: 96, 129). The honorific pronoun *Ni/ni* is still defined as a word that shows an asymmetrical relation between interlocutors. Consequently, titles were also much more common before *Du-reformen*.

In popular history, the most common interpretation is that the reform started in the late 1960s and that it took about ten years to settle. Nevertheless, revolutionizing the use of the Swedish *du* took place as early as the beginning of the 20th century, but mostly within the working class and among younger people.<sup>5</sup> In his welcome speech to the staff of the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare (Swe. *Medicinalstyrelsen*), Bror Anders Rexed<sup>6</sup> suggested that all of the employees at the institution have the right to address each other with the pronoun *du*, and that he himself also expected to be addressed with *du* or by his first name. This marked an important change in the form of address, even in formal situations and places such as the work environment. In other words, while Rexed was not the first to regularly use the pronoun *du* when addressing others, his approach did result in a more open social and cultural dialogue.<sup>7</sup>

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successful Swedish Prime Ministers. In the context of our study, Hansson's legacy considering the stabilization and democratization of the Swedish society also affected (socio)linguistic changes in Sweden.

- 4 "I och med du-reformen övergav svenskan och svenskarna ett komplicerat tilltalsystem med krav på titeltilltal till förmån för den informella tilltalsformen *du*, som i dag är dominerande i de flesta situationer. [...] Övergången skildras som mycket snabb."
- 5 In her study, Fremer also analyzed the use of *du* in Swedish advertising films from a sociological standpoint, covering the period from 1915 to 2013. The aim of her somewhat more personal approach to the earliest films is to examine the methods applied in them to gain the trust of clients, familiarize them with the products, and raise their commercial value.
- 6 Bror Anders Rexed (1914–2002) was a Swedish neuroscientist and university professor known both for his scientific achievements, i.e., the development of the system of *Rexed laminae* in medical studies, and his contribution to *Du-reformen*.
- 7 However, certain linguistic situations in Swedish are still characterized by the use of the third person in official contexts. For example, members of the Swedish royal family are addressed with *kungen/konungen* (the King), *drottningen* (the Queen), *kronprinsessan* (the Crown Princess) etc., i.e., they are never with the non-honorific personal pronoun *du*. In an interview in November 2020, the Swedish Queen Silvia is addressed by a journalist

## 2. Current situation in Swedish language, culture and society

In a brief 2021 *Språktidningen's* survey among native Swedish speakers, about 3,700 of its readers and social media followers were asked to answer whether they were more or less inclined towards the use of honorific *Ni/ni*.<sup>8</sup> Here we briefly introduce the survey and its results:

*Which word best describes how you feel about being addressed with ni?*

It is outdated 33.8%,  
 Impersonal 16.6%,  
 Polite 12.6%,  
 Demeaning 12.3%,  
 Socially hierarchical 11.4%,  
 Snobbish 5.7%,  
 Servile 3.8%,  
 Neutral 2.3%,  
 Kind 1%,  
 Modern 0.6%.

*How do you react when you are addressed with ni?*

Very negatively 36.9%,  
 Quite negatively 33.9%,  
 Neither positively nor negatively 20.5%,  
 Quite positively 5.1%,  
 Very positively 3.6%.

*Do you feel that the addressing others with ni has become more common in recent years?*

Yes, much more common 21.1%,  
 Yes, somewhat common 45.8%,  
 The situation has not changed 24.2%,  
 No, it has become less usual 5.5%  
 No, it has become very unusual 3.3%.

The answers to the first question show that only a small percentage of informants feel that *ni* is *neutral*, *kind* or *modern*, and 12.6% of them think that the pronoun is *polite*. Answers expressing a rather negative attitude towards *ni* account for about 80% of all answers, which shows that the general opinion is

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in the third person singular: *Vilken kunskap om demens önskar drottningen att hon haft då, som hon har idag?* (Eng. *What kind of knowledge about dementia that the queen has today does she wish she had then?*)

The rest of the interview can be read at the following link: <https://www.vardfokus.se/historiskt/silvia-hyllar-vardens-hjaltar/>.

8 *Språktidningen* is one of Sweden's leading linguistic on-line journals. The details of the survey can be seen in Swedish here: <https://spraktidningen.se/2021/06/pressmeddelande-det-utskallda-niandet-kan-vara-pa-vag-tillbaka/>.

still inclined towards the use of the pronoun *du*. More than 70% percent of the informants react *very negatively* or *quite negatively* when addressed with *ni*, but, paradoxically, almost 70% feel that the use of *ni* has become more common in recent years. In addition to this survey, another study presented in *Språktidningen's* article shows that four out of five informants are most commonly addressed with *ni* in restaurants, cafés, hotels, and stores, but only one out of ten prefers that form of address. Younger generations have a more positive attitude towards *ni* and consider it to be more neutral or polite, partly due to the importance of politeness and etiquette in language communities, and partly due to the influence of other languages that do maintain honorific pronouns (for example, German *Sie*, French *vous* or Spanish *usted*).<sup>9</sup>

A similar study, although somewhat more extensive, was conducted by Linda Johnsson in 2006 and it relates to some previous studies (for example Mårtensson's from 1986). Some of the conclusions relate to the fact that younger people do tend to choose the honorific *you* (*Ni/ni*) when addressing an unfamiliar person, especially when they are unsure how to approach them or want to make a good impression. One of the most important factors here is the age of the person being addressed, but also the person's status. It is evident that younger Swedish speakers do not have a clear understanding of how and when *Ni/ni* was used in the past. Johnsson points out that contact with other languages that commonly use honorific pronouns may also have exerted an influence on younger Swedes. It is also clear that, if *Ni/ni* is used, it is usually in service-related interactions (cafés, restaurants, beauty salons etc.), but also in telemarketing (Johnsson, 2006: 35). The analyzed diagrams in Johnsson's study show the following trends: (a) all informants, both women and men across age groups, have been addressed with the pronoun *Ni/ni*, (b) most of them have been addressed with the honorific pronoun by the staff in restaurants, cafés, during telemarketing etc., (c) none of them has been addressed honorifically by younger relatives, (d) men are addressed honorifically somewhat more often than women. The results of the research also show that it is primarily younger Swedes who perceive honorific pronoun *Ni/ni* positively because, in their opinion, it expresses courtesy and respect, whereas older Swedes think that honorific pronouns and honorifics in general create a distance between interlocutors. When asked whether they themselves use the word *Ni/ni* and, if so, how often, 72% percent of older Swedes answered negatively. In connection with the results of the study, Jonsson adds that the informants consider it most convenient to address a person honorifically not only to show respect and politeness, but also to establish a distance or even a barrier between themselves and the other speakers.

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<sup>9</sup> Anders Svensson, author of the article and currently one of the most prominent Swedish language specialists, adds that there are still too many speakers who have negative feelings about the pronoun *Ni/ni* for it to have a broader impact. At the same time, he would not be surprised if a certain *Ni-reform* occurred in the next two or more generations. Nevertheless, Swedes are not expected to simply give up using *du* instead of *ni*, but *ni* could become a common honorific pronoun used in the service industry and formal communication.

The relationship between the participants in a conversational situation is also often investigated in contemporary stylistic studies. Commenting on the fact that we all pay attention to what we say and how we say it, but also to how others address us, Peter Cassirer points out that titles are generally used in the Swedish language community more than in other language communities, which he describes as a common national myth attributed to Swedes in general (1999: 44–45). In defense of this practice, Cassirer also notes that by using honorifics and titles one can express a specific attitude towards the person being addressed. Moreover, Cassirer comments on the situation during the 1990s in Sweden, when the personal pronoun *du*, after almost half a century, was becoming somewhat less common; at the same time, the personal pronoun *Ni/ni* was on its way back, but this time as the honorific pronoun. A more personal style in Swedish is marked by using personal names and nicknames. Both participants in a communication situation can be addressed as *du*, which contributes to the informality of the content and emphasizes its emotional aspect.

In the article *From Du and back again* (Swe. *Från och med DU – och tillbaka igen*), *Språktidningen's* Wivan Nygård-Fagerudd (2016) compares *Du-reformen* to an old concept that has become popular again. It remains to be seen how the media will affect the use of the pronouns *du* and *ni*.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, a specific practice in a language community, in which members address each other in a certain way, has become more widespread and started to engage all social strata, driving social change. Even more than fifty years after the reform, Swedes still address each other with the pronoun *du*, not due to an official order, but because they have chosen to use the word that reflects an ideal of equality. When equality is questioned, *du* serves as a reminder that everyone matters equally in the Swedish society. “In the world’s virtual forums, all of us address each other with *du*”, comments Nygård-Fagerudd (2016).

### 3. Parallel overview of the linguistic and translation situations in Swedish and Serbian

Per Lagerholm (2008) points out that it is not only senders and receivers themselves that are important factors in communication, but also the relationship between them. Do they know each other or not? Is their relationship close or distant? Is there a difference between their levels of knowledge? The stylistic difference in these contexts is a difference in formality. The less the participants in the communication know each other, the language becomes more formal. On the other hand, the more they know each other the language becomes less formal. Formality in communication is expressed predominantly in standard language. Formal

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<sup>10</sup> In numerous linguistic podcasts in Sweden, the question of *du* in the Swedish language history and current situation is being discussed. For example, *Du-reformen* is considered to be one of the hundred most important changes in the Swedish language. A 25-minute program *Du-reformen och det nya niandet* (Eng. *The Thou-reform and new tendencies in addressing with ni*) can be listened to in Swedish here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_rhy66KuHFE&ab\\_channel=Spr%C3%A5ktidningen](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_rhy66KuHFE&ab_channel=Spr%C3%A5ktidningen).

language is monologic, less personal, less social and used mostly for informational, investigative and argumentative purposes. Informal language is rather dialogic, often with dialectal elements, more social and personal. The difference between formal and informal language is also affected by factors other than the relationship between the participants. Among other factors, the predominant relationship is affected by the specific context, which in turn may contain other modifying components. The difference between formal and informal language is of great importance in relation to contextual factors (Lagerholm, 2008: 53–54). The way interlocutors communicate, including their stylistic choices, influences how a message is interpreted and conveyed – formally in official contexts, conversationally in informal situations, or intimately in the family circle.

The example of how persons are addressed in Swedish provides a good point of comparison for rules of address in other language communities. For example, in Serbian-speaking universities, it is common for students to address each other using the non-honorific pronoun *you* (Serb. *ti*) or, very rarely, with the honorific pronoun *you* (Serb. *Vi*). Up until around the 1990s, everyone officially addressed each other with *comrade* (Serb. *drug/drugarica*), which very quickly disappeared in university settings (replaced by titles such as *profesor*, *docent*, *doktor* etc.), but lasted for decades in other domains. Professors now address students with the honorific *Vi*, and other professors either with the honorific *Vi* or the non-honorific *ti* if their interaction and cooperation is closer. Some of the main questions include which of these models could be applied, but also what is inappropriate to use in the Swedish language and Scandinavian languages in general. In other words, students or other members of university staff from Serbian-speaking areas need to adapt to a different system of addressing their Scandinavian colleagues or greeting them if they want to communicate accurately, not only grammatically but also communicatively.

Teaching a language means also teaching its culture, and in certain cases even the models of communication can differ from one language community to another, which is the case with Swedish and Serbian. Teaching materials can contain texts in Swedish that reflect genuine communication situations, but sometimes lack consistency in the use of pronouns. *Svenska utifrån* and *Rivstart A1+A2* are two textbooks used for beginner courses in Swedish, and they both consist of various dialogues set in different linguistic and cultural situations.<sup>11</sup> In cases where people are addressed in Swedish, it is necessary to discuss with students beforehand that the translation into Serbian needs to be checked contextually and adjusted accordingly, so that it can function correctly in the target language.<sup>12</sup> In the following example (1), the linguistic and cultural differences in the use of the Swedish noun *du* and its translation into Serbian should be noted.

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11 Courses in Swedish (the CEFR levels A1–C1+) at the University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philology, consist of textual and conversational materials that contain relevant and current cultural references and are also used for translation exercises. In that manner, cultural and translation segments of language learning are combined.

12 The same is needed for the process of reverse translation.



(1) Swedish original:

Hos doktorn

[...]

Varsågod och sitt. Hur kan jag hjälpa *dig*?

Jo, det är så att jag ofta har ont i huvudet.

Jaha. Hur länge har *du* haft huvudvärk?

Jag har haft ont i huvudet i flera månader nu.

Har *du* ont varje dag? (Scherrer/Lindeman, 2015: 199)<sup>13</sup>

Translation into Serbian:

Kod lekara

[...]

Izvolite, sedite. Kako *Vam* mogu pomoći?

Pa, često me boli glava.

Tako znači. Koliko dugo imate glavobolje?

Već nekoliko meseci.

Boli li *Vas* svakog dana?

Example (1) in Swedish shows uniformity and consequent use of *du*, which facilitates translation into Serbian: consistent use of the pronoun *Vi* and finite verbs in the second-person plural. Serbian translation could also contain the pronoun *ti* and finite verbs in the second-person singular, but contextually it is more likely that in this conversational situation the pronoun *Vi/vi* and the second-person plural verb form would be used in Serbian. Additional attention should be paid in the case of reverse translation due to the specific linguistic, contextual and cultural features of Swedish.

In the following example (2), there could be at least two versions of Serbian translation.

(2) Swedish original:

Vad har *du* i väskan?

En journalist frågar folk på stan: Vad har *du* i väskan?

Ursäkta, vad har *du* i väskan? (Scherrer/Lindeman, 2015: 23)<sup>14</sup>

13 Translation into English:

At the doctor's

[...]

Please, sit down. How may I help *you*?

Well, my head often hurts.

Okay. How long have *you* had headaches?

I've had them for several months now.

Have *you* had them daily?

14 Translation into English

What do *you* have in *your* bag?

A journalist asks people around the city: What do *you* have in *your* bag?

Excuse me, what do *you* have in *your* bag?

Translation into Serbian, version (2.a):

Šta *imate* u torbi?

Novinar ide gradom i pita ljude: Šta *imate* u torbi?

Izvinite, šta *imate* u torbi?

Translation into Serbian, version (2.b)

Šta *imaš* u torbi?

Novinar ide gradom i pita ljude: Šta *imaš* u torbi?

Izvini, šta *imaš* u torbi?

In cases such as those described above, a suitable context, an image, or even a video segment, would be needed for a more precise version of the translation. The conversational situation in dialogue (2) in its translations into Serbian can be interpreted as both formal (2.a) and informal (2.b), depending on the level of formality expressed by personal pronouns and different forms of verb phrases. The persons interviewed by the journalist in this case are not necessarily of the same age, social status, sex, etc.

Dialogue (3) is an example of an asymmetrical situation where interlocutors in Swedish use different personal pronouns when addressing each other. This conversational situation could result in at least two different translation solutions in Serbian, but not all of them would equally capture the actual formality of the relationship between the interlocutors.

(3) Swedish original

Kommunikationsproblem

Anders: Godmorgon! Får jag tala med inköpschefen, Bodin?

Växeln: Pia Bodin? Ett ögonblick! Det är upptaget. Vill *ni* vänta?

Anders: Nej, tack, jag ringer igen.

[...]

Anders: Jag heter Mattson [...]. Jag vill diskutera en sak med henne. Kan *du* framföra det, är *du* snäll! (Nyborg et al., 2001: 91)<sup>15</sup>

Translation into Serbian, version (3.a):

Problem u komunikaciji

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Special note: The English translation of example (1), as well as the English translations of examples (2) and (3), contain the personal pronoun *you*, which means that the task of translating the dialogues from Swedish into English is somewhat less complex.

15 Translation into English:

Communication problem

Anders: Good morning! May I speak with sales manager Bodin?

Office: With Pia Bodin? Just a moment! It is occupied. Would *you* like to hold on?

Anders: No, thank you. I'll call again.

[...]

Anders: My name is Mattson. [...] I would like to discuss something with her. Can *you*, please, let her know?

Andeš: Dobro jutro! Smem li da razgovaram sa Budinovom, šeficom nabavke?

Centrala: Sa Pijom Budin? Trenutak! Zauzeto je. *Želite li da sačekate?*

Andeš: Ne, hvala, nazvaću ponovo.

[...]

Andeš: Ja sam Matson. Hteo bih da se čujem s njom u vezi sa nečim. *Možete li joj, molim vas, to preneti?*

Translation into Serbian, version (3.b):

Problem u komunikaciji

Andeš: Dobro jutro! Smem li da razgovaram sa Budinovom, šeficom nabavke?

Centrala: Sa Pijom Budin? Trenutak! Zauzeto je. *Želiš li da sačekaš?*

Andeš: Ne, hvala, nazvaću ponovo.

[...]

Andeš: Ja sam Matson. Hteo bih da se čujem s njom u vezi sa nečim. *Možeš li joj, molim te, to preneti?*

Translation of the abovementioned and many other examples, where linguistic mediation between Swedish and other languages (in this particular case Serbian) must adequately represent the level of formality in the conversation, could result in different solutions depending on the cultural, social, ethical and other factors relevant for the target language and culture. Although misunderstandings related to different patterns of communication in Swedish and Serbian can occur, language/translation educators should aim towards a mutual consideration and acceptance of the patterns of the source language and culture so as to accurately transfer them into the target one.

#### 4. Conclusion

Is 'You' making a comeback? (Swe. *Kommer Ni igen?*) is a question posed by Svensson (2021) in his article about the possible revival of the Swedish honorific pronoun *Ni/ni* when addressing someone in Swedish. In his opinion, there are few things in any language that evoke such strong emotions as when a person is being addressed. Condescending, hierarchical, outdated, distancing, artificial and submissive – these were some of the most common answers when *Språktidningen*, one of the leading Swedish linguistic journals, asked its readers and followers on social media to take a survey about the use of the honorific personal pronoun in Swedish. Four out of five informants claim that they are addressed with the pronoun *Ni/ni* at least sometimes. This usually happens in restaurants, cafés and hotels, as well as in shops; however, only one in ten likes it. Among younger people, attitudes towards honorific *you* are more positive, since they tend to perceive it as neutral or polite. For younger generations, the pronoun lacks the historical or traditional connotations that older speakers might associate it with, which also means that many younger people now emphasize the importance of common respectfulness, politeness and etiquette in society. This may explain the fact that it is mainly young

people who use the honorific personal pronoun *Ni/ni* in particular situations, much like the German *Sie*, French *vous* and Spanish *usted*.

Language learning involves cultural/social studies, even though the connection between them is not always transparent. This connection can be understood by a learner, but his/her ability to use the language correctly, not only grammatically but also communicatively, depends on the point when he/she acquires the so-called communicative competence. However, for many centuries, teaching a foreign language involved merely translating texts into one's mother tongue accurately, without making any grammatical mistakes. Nevertheless, grammatical accuracy in itself does not guarantee correct communication, because something can be completely grammatically correct but still misleading, inappropriate or ineffective.

Due to these and other differences between languages, we often make mistakes when speaking a foreign language due to interference from our own language, or because we introduce constructions and meanings from our own language into a foreign one. Sometimes these mistakes are minor, such as those concerning, for example, the gender of nouns, the use of prepositions, inadequate word order, etc., but they can also significantly impair communication and, especially, cultural mediation. In order to avoid the latter type of mistakes, namely the incorrect use of honorific pronouns in two rather distant linguistic and cultural communities, students should be trained in language and cultural competencies from both linguistic and translation perspectives during the language learning process.

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## Зорица Ђ. Ковачевић

Сажетак

### ЈЕЗИЧКИ И КУЛТУРНИ АСПЕКТИ ПЕРСИРАЊА ШВЕДСКОМ ЗАМЕНИЦОМ *NI (VI)* У ПРЕВОДУ НА СРПСКИ ЈЕЗИК

Питање употребе шведске личне заменице *du (tu)* или персирање путем личне заменице *Ni/ni (Vi/vi)* у шведском језику се може посматрати из више перспектива. Пре свега, ово је за многе Швећане питање језичког и друштвеног идентитета, традиције, културе и историје, али и тренутка у ком говоримо. Осцилације у употреби ових личних заменица често су биле, а и данас су, условљене коренитим, вишевековним, друштвеним и историјским променама у Шведској. Као друго, за посредовање са осталим језичким и културним заједницама, питање начина опхођења према другима је и културолошко питање, које је у непосредној вези са разликама у перцепцији односа међу говорницима у две језичке и културне заједнице. Трећа перспектива посматрања се односи на специфичан преводилачки изазов који, у овом случају, садржи недоумице чак и за саме изворне говорнике шведског језика, а у вези с тим шта ће се и у којим ситуацијама користити, нарочито у последњих неколико деценија. Преводиоци, стога, морају да прате језичке, друштвене и културне трендове у заједницама полазног и циљног језика. У овом раду се, први пут за око стотину педесет година преводилачке сарадње између шведске језичке заједнице и наше, анализирају језички и друштвеноисторијски предуслови за употребу личних заменица *du (tu)* и *Ni/ni (Vi/vi)* у шведском језику, као и тенденције у преводилачкој теорији и пракси код нас када је реч о овом феномену.

### Кључне речи:

шведски језик, персирање, транслатологија