WHEN VOCABULARY IS NOT THE PROBLEM: STUDENT TRANSLATIONS OF TERRY PRATCHETT`S *SOUL MUSIC* (CASE STUDY)

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Abstract: The article offers an analysis of the relative quality of translations made by students of English studies in the context of their training in translation from English into Bulgarian. The object of the analysis are the proposed translations of three pre-selected passages from the sixteenth novel of the Discworld series by Terry Pratchett, namely the book *Soul Music*[124]. These particular author and book have been chosen to serve as the object of the case study for two main reasons: firstly, the writing style of Terry Pratchett is characteristically rich in quantity, quality and variety of wordplay; and secondly, the fact that a successful rendering of the humorous effect is crucial in the translation of humorous fantasy as a genre.

From a theoretical viewpoint, the present article regards wordplay as not solely the result of bringing together linguistic items with similar form in order to contrast their meanings and thus create a humorous effect (as suggested by Delabastita). Instead, it accepts the view that wordplay involves a clash between cognitive domains (as Alexieva points out). Thus the inconsistencies and difficulties in rendering wordplay and its effect adequately in translation can be viewed as resulting from the discrepancies between the domains of knowledge and experience, and are thus illustrative of as well as dependent on the culture- and language-specific ways of "mapping"the world. Therefore, although the phenomenon of wordplay is universal and applies to language in general, its translation into another language and culture is often problematic due to the specific nature of cognitive structures.

The challenges and problems which the translation of wordplay presents in practice, as well as the potential for failure in this enterprise on the part of the translator, should thus not be underestimated or neglected. The article aims to pinpoint some of the most common difficulties students encounter during the process of learning how to translate this type of fiction from English into Bulgarian, as well as to outline some specific suggestions for tackling problematic texts.

In order to be of help to those interested in the process of translating such texts the proposed discussion points out the mistakes made by the students in translating the passages (including grammatical or syntax mistakes, unintentional changes in the original meaning of the Source Language text (SL text), misunderstanding or entirely failing to understand the author`s point etc.). More importantly, however, the article aims to underscore the importance of encouraging students of translation to use their imagination in their endeavors and to approach even the most challenging of texts with an attitude that does not focus on problems but instead on their potential solutions.

Keywords: translation, wordplay, humorous fantasy, Terry Pratchett.

1. INTRODUCTION

One important theoretical issue which needs to be considered when analyzing translations of a particular text has to do with the need to adhere to a particular framework in order to ensure systematic and relatively objective results. One such framework is the one proposed by Newmark[125] which requires that a comprehensive analysis should cover five topics:

"(1) a brief analysis of the SL text stressing its intention and its functional aspects; (2) the translator's interpretation of the SL text's purpose, his translation method and the translation's likely readership; (3) a selective but representative detailed comparison of the translation with the original; (4) an evaluation of the translation - (a) in the translator's terms, (b) in the critic's terms; (5) where appropriate, an assessment of the likely place of the translation in the target language culture or discipline."

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[124] Pratchett, T. *Soul Music.* New York: Harper Prism, pp. 1-2, 66, (1995).
[125] Newmark, P. *A Textbook of Translation*. New York: Prentice-Hall International, pp. 186, (1998).

Another aspect of the analysis of the language of humour is terminological and concerns the distinction between the notions of "pun" and "wordplay". Hammond and Hughes[126] provide a clear and thorough distinction between the two terms:

"The difference between the pun and the play on words is that in the pun completely different words, having completely different meanings, are noticed to have the same or similar sounds, and are brought together in one sentence; whereas in the play on words one word is noticed to have two meanings, which have diverged from one common root word, and these different meanings of the same word are brought out. […] Both the pun and the play on words condense two meanings into one set of sounds […] The pun has a capricious and irrational quality. On the other hand the play on words is, because of the identical spelling of the different meanings, equally happy in speech or writing. The divergent meanings of one root word are reunited in the play on words. Thus the play on words has a rational, erudite quality."

Other authors such as Delabastita[127], Alexieva[128], Attardo[129] and Veisbergs[130] focus on the nature and the mechanism of functioning of the phenomenon of humorous language rather than on establishing terminologically correct distinctions between the types of wordplay. Delabastita, for example, sees the term "wordplay" as "the general name for the various *textual* phenomena in which *structural features* of the language(s) used are exploited in order to bring about a *communicatively significant confrontation* of two (or more) linguistic structures with *more or less similar forms* and *more or less different meanings*"(italics original). As opposed to the theory of wordplay as a clash between different meanings can also be observed in Alexieva:

"[W]ordplay sets in opposition not only meanings but also different domains of knowledge and experience; this happens in a way which the different cognitive structuring of another linguistic and cultural community may not enable the translator to reduplicate. Yet, a better understanding of the cognitive mechanisms involved will at least allow us to make more precise predictions about the way the translated version of a pun will function in the recipient culture."

Similarly to Alexieva's understanding of the involvement of cognitive domains in the creation and recreation of humorous effects, Attardo and Veisbergs view wordplay as resulting from the bringing together of opposing scripts. Attardo argues that for the creation of humorous effect it is necessary that the text bring together two simultaneously overlapping and opposite scripts, where scripts are viewed as human cognitive structures for the organization of world knowledge.

Still another matter of crucial importance for the successful solving of any challenges and problems in translation concerns the range of strategies which can be employed in the problem-solving process. Delabastita thus suggests the following:

- Translating the SL wordplay with a TL wordplay;
- Translating wordplay in a way that loses some aspect of it;
- Replacing it with another device in order to achieve similar effect;
- Omission;
- Compensating for the loss of wordplay;
- Inserting explanatory information in footnotes.

2. CASE STUDY
a) Procedure

The present case study is based on the translations made by ten students of English Studies in their second and third year. Each one was assigned the same three preselected excerpts from the book *Soul Music* by Terry Pratchett to

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[126] Hammond, P., P. Hughes. *UPON THE PUN - Dual Meaning in Words and Pictures.* London: W. H. Allen, (1978).

[127] Delabastita, D. "Introduction". *Wordplay and Translation.* Ed. Delabastita, D. Special edition of *The Translator, 2:2, pp. 128, (1996).*

[128] Alexieva, B. "There Must Be Some System in this Madness. Metaphor, Polysemy, and Wordplay in a Cognitive Linguistics Framework". In: *Traductio. Essays on Punning and Translation.* Ed. Delabastita, D. Manchester and Namur: St. Jerome and Pressses Universitaires de Namur, pp. 137-154, (1997).

[129] Attardo, S. *Linguistic Theories of Humor.* Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 203-205, (1994).

[130] Veisbergs, A. "The Contextual Use of Idioms, Wordplay and Translation". In: *Traductio. Essays on Punning and Translation.* Ed. Delabastita, D. Manchester and Namur: St. Jerome and Pressses Universitaires de Namur, pp. 155-176, (1997).

translate within 2 weeks' time. They were also allowed to use any dictionaries or encyclopedias they deemed necessary in order to ensure that they would be able to solve any problems stemming from unknown vocabulary in the process of translation. They were made aware of the importance of preserving the humorous effects of the original in their translations and were therefore encouraged to use their imagination and not be confined by requirements for a literal translation. Instead, preserving the humorous quality of the Source Language (SL) text in the Target Language (TL) text was to be given priority.

Based on the student translations of the three excerpts a corpus of coded units (phrases or longer passages) has been created in order to facilitate further analysis. Due to objective limitations in terms of volume, however, the present paper offers an analysis of a selected excerpt from the entire corpus. The excerpt comprises a selection of 9 units (Units numbered 1 to 9), each translated by 3 of the students (see Table 1 below).

b) Expected results

Due to the specific nature of the selected excerpts, students were expected to find difficult translating the wordplay and puns. Respectively, they were expected to employ one of the aforementioned strategies - translating the SL wordplay with an equivalent or similar TL wordplay, replacing it with another device in order to preserve the effect, compensating for its loss or using explanatory footnotes - in order to be able to produce successful translations. The final strategy - omission - however, is not considered a successful one in this case, since it shows the inability of the translator to recreate the effect of the SL text in any way.

Except for the passages pertaining to the humorous effects, the excerpts were not expected to present considerable problems to the students since they are not particularly complicated in terms of either syntax or lexis. Moreover, students were allowed to consult any kind of reference literature they considered necessary and were therefore expected to be able to easily solve any problems of this sort such as unknown words, phrases, expressions etc.

c) Results from the research

The translations made by the three students (Translation 1, Translation 2 and Translation 3, respectively) of selected problematic passages are presented in Table 1 below:

Unit №	SL Text (original)	Translation 1 (T1)	Translation 2 (T2)	Translation 3 (T3)
1	"you can be an immortal anthropomorphic personification and still get things, as it were, dead wrong…"	"можеш да си безсмъртно антропоморфно въплъщение и все пак да разбираш нещата, така да се каже, напълно погрешно."	"дори и да си безсмъртен с вид на човек, все пак можеше, както личеше, адски да сгрешиш..."	"ти можеш да бъдеш безсмъртна антропоморфна персонификация и пак да получаваш нещата, сякаш е грешно до смърт..."
2	"*Because of Quantum."	-	-	-
3	"This is also a story about sex and drugs and Music With Rocks In."	"Това също е история за секс и наркотици и Музика с елементи на рок."	"Също така, това е история, засягаща сексът, наркотиците и „музиката с рога"."	"Това е също история за секс и наркотици и музика"
4	"CURRY GARDENS Kitchen Entlance - Keep Out, Ris Means You."	""КЪРИ ГАРДЪНЗ" Вхот Кам Кухнятъ - Ни Влизъй. ?!"	"КЪРИ ГАРДЪНС Вхот Кухня – Не влизай. Туй значи ти."	"Къри Гарденс Кухенски Въход – Не влизай. За теб съ отнася"
5	*"Curry with Sweat, and Sore Balls of Pig"*	"Къри със Слатку, и Подлютени кюфтета от Прасе"	"Къри с Пот и Възпалени Свински Топки"	"Къри с пот, и горчиви свински ролца"
6	*"Curry with Sweer and Sour, Ball of Fish"*	"Къри с Слатко и Кисело, Парче от Риба"	"Къри със Слатку и Солено, Рибена Топка"	"Къри с пот и горчива топка риба"
7	*"Curry With Named Meat"*	"Къри с Някакво Месо"	"Къри с Кръстено Месо"	"Къри с кръстено месо "
8	*"Porn Cracker"*	"Сфинска хрупкава бисквита"	"Порно трошачка"	"Порно крекер"

9	"Eat It Here Or, Take It Away"	"Яжте Тук Или, Го Вземете За У вас си"	"Изяш тук Или си вземи за вкъщи"	"Яжте тук или вземете за вкъщи"

Table 1

For the purposes of the present study, the original spelling, punctuation and formatting choices made by the students in their translations have been preserved as they play an important role in achieving (or failing to achieve) the intended humorous effects of the original.

d) Analysis of the results

The units excerpted from the original can be separated into two groups based on whether they have an element pertaining to linguistically achieving humorous effect. The units which are not humorous illustrate the mistakes students have made when translating supposedly non-challenging passages. However, since those which are humorous in nature are of greater interest to the present study, the analysis is limited in accordance with the priorities of the present article.

Unit 1 contains a play on words based on juxtaposing and contrasting the two mutually exclusive notions of immortality ("an immortal anthropomorphic personification") and death, where the notion of death features as part of an idiomatic expression ("dead wrong"). Reproducing the wordplay in translation, therefore, could be done by replacing the English idiom with a Bulgarian one which similarly involves a reference to death (or a similar/ associated notion) as related to being wrong or mistaken. Since there is no readily available equivalent idiom or set phrase in Bulgarian, except perhaps the expression "(правя/допускам) фатална грешка" (literally, "make a fatal mistake"), translating this wordplay is challenging and potentially problematic. This can be seen in Translation 1 (T1) and Translation 3(T3), each of which omit the wordplay. However, whereas T1 is linguistically correct, T3 is nonsensical as it not only fails to recognize and render the wordplay, but also shows a lack of understanding on the student's part of the meaning of the expressions "get things (wrong)" and "as it were". The student thus translates the first expression as "получаваш неща" (literally, "receive things") instead of the correct "разбираш нещата" ("understand/comprehend things") and the second as "сякаш е" ("as if it were") instead of as "така да се каже" ("so to say"). This results in the absurd "получаваш неща, сякаш е грешно до смърт" (literally, "receive things as if it were wrong to death"). Only Translation 2 offers an attempt at preserving the wordplay by employing a juxtaposing of the notion of being immortal ("безсмъртен с вид на човек") and the phrase "адски да сгрешиш" (literally, "(be) hellishly mistaken/wrong").

The second unit is a footnote which all of the students have omitted in their translations. The use of footnotes, however, is characteristic of Terry Pratchett's style and is a typical way of achieving humorous effects. Although this specific footnote does not contain any sort of play on words and is not challenging for the translator in itself ("Because of Quantum" is quite literal and can be rendered in Bulgarian simply as "Заради Кванта"), it is interesting that none of the students has recognized its importance for the translation. This could perhaps be attributed to the students' lack of familiarity with the stylistic specificities of the original text and the resulting lack of recognition of the relevance of the footnote text.

Unit #3 presents perhaps the biggest challenge to the translator, as it involves wordplay based on reference to a specific object from the real world whose wording has been altered for humorous effect. The source of the phrase "sex and drugs and Music With Rocks In" from the SL text is thus the title of the 1977 song by Ian Dury "Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll"[131]. Since it is not common for titles of songs to be translated into the Target language, few people would be expected to make a direct connection between the object of reference and even literal translation of the name of the song, let alone one altered for humorous effect. There exists, however, a 1990 theatrical play by Eric Bogosian[132] entitled similarly "Sex, Drugs, Rock & Roll" which Bulgarians are familiar with due to its popularity in theatres for the past 25 years. The title of the play in Bulgarian is "Секс, наркотици, рокендрол"[133] and supposedly can be conveniently relied upon in reproducing the aforementioned wordplay. One such attempt can be observed in Translation 1, where the student is familiar with the title of the play and comes up with the following translation - "секс и наркотици и Музика с елементи на рок" (literally, "sex and drugs and Music with elements of rock"). The student who offers Translation 2, however, claims to not have been familiar with the existence of such a title. As a

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[131] Wikipedia. Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sex_%26_Drugs_%26_Rock_%26_Roll.>. (last accessed 05 March, 2017).

[132] Bogosian, E. *Sex, Drugs, Rock & Roll.* New York, N.Y. : HarperCollins Publishers, (1991).

[133] "Секс, наркотици, рокендрол". Богосян, Е. <http://www.tba.art.bg>, (last accessed 05 March, 2017).

result, they use the definite article (which in Bulgarian is also grammatically incorrect since the nouns in the phrase are not in the Subject position) - "сексът, наркотиците и 'музиката с рога' " (literally, "the sex, the drugs and the 'music with horns'"). Thus, this translation fails to directly refer to the popular existing title, although it does in fact attempt to compensate for the loss of humorous effect by using the phrase "музика(та) с рога", which does sound unusual and absurd and can be considered an interesting solution to the problem. The third translation, however, while preserving the similarity to the title of the existing play, entirely omits the "With Rocks In" phrase, leaving simply "секс и наркотици и музика" (literally, "sex and drugs and music"). This translation, therefore, does not attempt to compensate for the loss of the wordplay from the original.

Units 4 to 9 all belong to the menu of a restaurant which the author of the original text claims to be "misspelled, of course, because the menu of the folkier kind of restaurant always has to have misspellings in it"[134]. Thus, the humorous effect of the units relies very much upon an effect of a low level of literacy (bad spelling) combined with references to actually existing objects which the reader can recognize (namely, the names of dishes typical of Chinese cuisine). Units 5 and 6 are thus variations of a curry dish with sweet and sour sauce and meatballs (either pork or fish) and unit 7 is a misspelled version of prawn crackers. Additionally, a humorous effect is achieved by reproducing in writing some phonetic qualities of Asian pronunciationof English words - for example, their proneness to using the sounds represented by the letters "l" and "r" interchangeably, and also the difficulty they potentially have in pronouncing "th", all of which result in the mispronunciation of particular words. Taking these points into consideration, it should be possible for the translator to reproduce the effects from the original text by applying the same mechanism the author of the SL text uses - namely, referring to familiar Chinese dishes in "broken Bulgarian" with bad spelling and also combining this with a general effect of a low level of literacy.

All three students have generally managed to recreate the effect of a low level of literacy, as can be observed in their translations of units 4 and 9. The misspelled word "Entlance" (correctly, "Entrance") has been recognized by all three students, while only one of them has failed to recognize the "Ris" in the original as the misspelled version of "this". In spite of this, all three translations are quite successful in rendering the humorous effects of the original. Translation 1 has 5 misspellings - "Вхот" instead of " Вход", "Кам" instead of "Към", "Кухнятъ" instead of "Кухнята", "Ни" instead of "Не" and finally "Влизъй" instead of "Влизай". Translation 2 has one misspelled word ("Вхот" instead of "Вход") and additionally uses the highly colloquial phrasing " Туй значи ти" instead of the neutral "Това значи ти". Translation 3 misspells the word "Вход" as "Въход" and in addition uses "съ" instead of "се". Similarly, unit 9 has been translated quite successfully by the students, although the variants proposed in Translations 1 and 2 are more pronouncedly similar to the original. Translation 1 relies on incorrect punctuation as well as on colloquialisms, whereas Translation 2 employs a misspelled word ("изяш" instead of the correct one "изяж").

The translations of units 5, 6, 7 and 8, however, show a difference in the approaches between the three students. The author of Translation 1, for example, has adhered to the strategy of misspelling words while also attempting to translate the names of the dishes in a recognizable way. This way the word "sweet" ("сладко" in Bulgarian) which is misspelled in two different ways in the original (as "Sweat" in unit 5 and as "Sweer" in unit 6) is also misspelled in Translation 1 in two different ways - "Слатку" in unit 5 and "Слатко" in unit 6. Due to the incorrect punctuation, however, the fact that the misspelled "Sour" in unit 5 ("Sore") is rendered as the grammatically correct form "кисело" does not lead to a loss of humorous effect. This is not so in Translation 1 of unit 7, however, where the rendering of "named meat" as "някакво месо" (literally, "some kind of meat") does not really bear the connotations of the original. Since the meat used in cheap restaurants is of proverbially low quality and is often of undetermined origin, the "named meat" would refer to a higher quality meat, one which is from a known ("named") source. Translating this as "some kind of meat" in fact achieves the opposite effect here. Finally, Translation 1 of unit 8 ("Porn cracker", the misspelled version of "Prawn cracker(s)") can be considered quite successful, as it manages to retain the humorous effect of poor spelling ("сфинска" instead of "свинска") although it fails to retain the reference to the same dish as in the original (prawn crackers being a very different dish from the proposed by the author of Translation 1, literally "crunchy pork biscuit").

Unlike the author of Translation 1, those of Translation 2 and Translation 3 have decided to treat the misspelled words as the words they resemble as a result of the misspelling. This way in unit 5 the misspelled "Sweet" is translated both in Translation 2 and 3 as "пот" ("Sweat"), and the misspelled "Sour" is translated respectively as "възпалени" ("Sore") or "горчиви" ("Bitter"). Translation 2 of unit 6 employs misspelling as a strategy and the

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[134] Pratchett, T. *Soul Music*. New York: Harper Prism, pp. 66, 1995.

"Sweer" (correct "Sweet") is rendered as "Слатку" (correct "сладко"), whereas Translation 3 of unit 6 remains consistent in using the words "пот" and "горчива" for "Sweer"and "Sour" respectively. Translations 2 and 3 of the phrase "Named meat" in unit 7 can be considered quite successful, as they manage to recreate the connotations of a kind of meat which is of higher quality while at the same time the use of the unusual word кръстено"(literally, "Christened", "named") creates a clash with the word "meat" in this context, which is a promising strategy for achieving humorous effects.

Finally, the "Prawn cracker" misspelled as "Porn cracker" in unit 8 is rendered in both Translation 2 and Translation 3 literally, without an attempt at revealing the actual reference of the word. Thus we have "Порно трошачка" and "Порно крекер" respectively, where the first one does not have any connotations pertaining to food and the second one only relies on the word "cracker" to bear the semblance to food. As a result, these two translations of the phrase sound quite absurd and confusing and could potentially create a humorous effect, albeit by different means from the original.

3. CONCLUSION

The present article aims, among other things, to expose the popular belief among students of translation (of whom the author of this paper used to be one) that a dictionary or access to the Internet is the solution to all their problems. The results from the present research have shown that this is far from the truth, as even when they are given plenty of time and full access to reference sources, students often fail to successfully translate particular items. Paradoxically, they may misinterpret and therefore fail to translate in an appropriate way items which are relatively simple and should not be challenging for students at this level of mastering the English language. Since the translations of the particularly interesting, humorous passages are relatively successful in reproducing the effect of the original, it can be inferred that students can meet such challenges when they are aware of the priorities in translating the specific text. In other words, approaching the text with the idea of preserving or reconstructing the purpose of the original, as well as using one`s imagination in a way that is dedicated to remaining true to the idea of the original can be considered crucial to the successful rendering of humorous effects in translation. This should also serve to encourage students to approach texts in a practical, solution-seeking and efficient way - one that does not focus on the presence of a few unknown words and as a result lose sight of the forest for the trees. Instead, it proposes an approach to translating texts that involves looking for the gist and grasping the "big picture" before filling in the details where the proverbial devil presumably is.

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