

CHALLENGES OF HUMOUR TRANSLATION IN FICTION

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Introduction

Humour is not a modern invention nor is humorous literature. However, what concerns its perception, it appears that humour is highly dependent on cultural background of the perceivers not to mention different cultures and different languages in which people express themselves. All these factors affect the understanding of humorous material and its ability to travel from one culture to the other. Although humour has been studied from philosophical and psychological point of view in the first place, linguistics is not an exception. The patterns of humour and its mechanisms have been studied by Hazlitt (1903), Raskin (1994), Attardo (1994), Alexander (1997), Chiaro (2010) and Berger (2010).

The problems of translation have been studied by Nida and Taber (1969), Newmark (1991), Bell (1991) and Chiaro (2010). What concerns translation into Lithuanian valuable contribution has been made by the Lithuanian linguists Armalytė and Pažūsis (1990). Translation of humour has been researched by Alexieva (1997), Chiaro (2010) and Lithuanian linguist Pažūsis (2006).

The novelty of the work: the problems of translating English humour into Lithuanian have not been thoroughly studied, therefore it has been chosen as a subject of this paper. The article reveals the complexity of humour phenomenon which exists in every part of the world, nevertheless, travels from one language to another with difficulty. The novelty of the research is the identification of the main obstacles in translating humour that contains culture-specific items and instances of untranslatability. The subject of the research is the translation of humour in Jerome K. Jerome's "Three Men on a Bummel".

The aim is to analyze how different sorts of humour in "Three Men on a Bummel" by the

English writer Jerome K. Jerome are translated into Lithuanian.

The objectives of the article are to present the definition and classification of humour in literature; to discuss the problems of translating humour; to compare and classify the examples and draw certain conclusions.

The research methods applied to this work are as follows: 1) Sampling method was used to select and arrange the examples of humour. 2) Contrastive method was used to compare the source text with the target text. 3) Descriptive – analytical method was used to interpret and generalize the findings of the research. 4) Statistical method was applied to systemize the empirical data.

The scope of the research is 43 examples of various sorts of humour selected from "Three Men on a Bummel" by English writer Jerome K. Jerome and its Lithuanian version "Trise dviračiais" by Jonas Čeponis.

The definition and classification of humour

The term "humour" itself originated from Latin word "umor" meaning fluid and was used as a medical term (Chiaro 2010:13). The term reached our days but has lost its former meaning completely. Moreover, its new meaning is rather abstract. Chiaro notices that nowadays it is an "umbrella term" that covers such concepts as "comedy", "fun", "ridiculous" and more (Chiaro 2010:14).

In order not to get lost between a great number of sorts of humour we will use a table presented in Berger's book "An Anatomy of Humor" (1998). Berger distinguishes four categories and classifies all sorts (or techniques) of humour into four groups in the table below: 1. *Language*. The humor is verbal. 2. *Logic*. The humor is ideational. 3. *Identity*. The humor is existential. 4. *Action*. The humor is physical or nonverbal. (Berger, 1998:17)

Table 1. *The classification of humour according to Berger (2010:18)*

Language	Logic	Identity	Action
Allusion	Absurdity	Before/After	Chase
Bombast	Accident	Burlesque	Slapstick
Definition	Analogy	Caricature	Speed
Exaggeration	Catalogue	Eccentricity	Time
Facetiousness	Coincidence	Embarrassment	
Insults	Disappointment	Exposure	

Continued Table 1

Infantilism Irony Misunderstanding Puns, Word Play Repartee Ridicule Sarcasm Satire	Ignorance Mistakes Repetition Rigidity Theme/Variation	Grotesque Imitation Impersonation Parody Scale Stereotype Unmasking	
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According to Berger, the techniques or sorts of humour in the table given above were “elicited by making a content analysis of all kinds of humour in various media and are <...> comprehensive and mutually exclusive.” (Berger, 1998:17) Berger admits that he was not able to find any other techniques of humour to add to his list, therefore, we will base our research on this classification. However, in this paper we will restrict ourselves only to the kinds of humour which are most frequently found in written humorous discourse, i.e.: 1) allusion; 2) irony; 3) absurdity.

Let us proceed with allusion. Galperin in his book of stylistics writes that it is “an indirect reference, by word or phrase, to a historical, literary, mythological, biblical fact or to a fact of everyday life made in the course of speaking or writing” (1981:187). Allusions are very useful in creating humorous texts, because, as Berger notices, they are “very much tied to social and political matters as well as situations which have a sexual dimension <...>.” Moreover, he refers to allusions as “the bread and butter of everyday humor” (2010:21) to show how popular this technique is in creating comic material.

Galperin (1981) defines irony as a stylistic device “based on the simultaneous realization of two logical meanings – dictionary and contextual”, where “the two meanings stand in opposition to each other” (1981:146). Galperin suggests that irony “must not be confused with humour <...>” (1981:147), according to Nash (1985:153) irony is “a major stylistic resort in humour”. However, he also claims that it is a “vulnerable humorous composition”. As far as it is not so easy to recognize, it can fail in producing a humorous effect on a reader.

The following sort of humour to be discussed here is absurdity. According to Berger (1998:19), absurdity as well as confusion and nonsense may seem to be simple but, actually, they are not. What is more, he points out that “its effects may be quite complicated”. Nevertheless, it works well in creating a humorous effect as it is easily recognizable in the text.

Summing up, there is a number of means to express humour in written humorous discourse. The

effectiveness and peculiarities of their translation will be discussed in greater detail in the empirical part of this research.

Problems in humour translation

The problems of translation have been discussed by Chiaro (2010), Bell (1991) and Lithuanian linguist Pažūsis (1991, 2006). As regards the translation of humour, Chiaro compares translation of poetry and songs with translation of humour leaning on the complicity and sums up that “humour easily wins the first prize” (2010:21).

When speaking about the most complicated cases, linguists dealing with the problems of translation (Chiaro 2010, Pažūsis 2006), use a term “untranslatable” or “untranslatability”. However, Chiaro (2010:8) admits that, speaking of humour, it becomes “untranslatable” simply because “an *adequate degree of equivalence* is hard to achieve”. Lithuanian linguist Pažūsis cites Umberto Eco, according to whom, by admitting that a certain piece of text is untranslatable, the translator confirms his own defeat (Pažūsis 2006).

In any case, it is obvious that it is a challenge for the translator to create a new text as close as possible to the original. However, it should be taken into account that not everything is in the hands of a translator. It should be noted that the level of “untranslatability” highly depends on the structure of both source language (SL) and target language (TL). Moreover, what concerns humour, other challenges, such as cultural realia or social differences, arise. Therefore, in this chapter the problem of adequacy is going to be discussed in greater detail. We are also going to overview the types of translation transformations and finally look at some socio-cultural obstacles in translation.

Failures and successes in translating humour

1. *As a matter of fact, there was nothing wrong with the child whatever. He had been out with his aunt that morning; and if he looks wistfully at a pastrycook's window she takes him inside and buys him cream buns and “maids-of-honour” until he insists that he has had enough, and politely, but*

firmly, refuses to eat another anything. Then, of course, he wants only one helping of pudding at lunch, and Ethelbertha thinks he is sickening for something. (p.1)

Tiesąsakant, berniukui ničnieko blogo. Šįryt jis buvo išėjęs pasivaikštinėti su teta ir vos tik ilgesingai pažvelgė į cukrainės vitriną, ši įsitempė mažių vidun, pripirko pyragėlių su kremu ir keksiukų su glajumi, tad vaikas prisikimšo tiek, kad mandagiai, bet tvirtai pareiškė, kad daugiau nebetelpa. Po to, žinoma, per priešpiečius jis norėjo tik vienos apkepo porcijos, ir Etelberta nusprendė, kad vaikas kažkuo apsirgęs. (p.5) (irony)

In the source text the author mentions a special sort of cakes, however, the author goes with a more general one when translating it into Lithuanian. We may assume that the translator did that in order not to confuse Lithuanian readers, as they most probably are not familiar with some traditional British meals. As far as it does not affect the humorous effect of the ironic situation depicted in the source text, we treated it as an adequate choice.

Concretization makes the largest part of all the examples in which any lexical transformations have been found. As it has been mentioned in the theoretical chapter of the article, concretization is a lexical transformation when a word having a wide meaning is replaced by a word having a narrow and more concrete meaning (Armalytė, Pažūsis, 1990:33). It occurs when there is no equivalent in TL. In some cases, even if an equivalent exists, the translator chooses to use another word instead of the one provided by the dictionary because of certain peculiarities of its usage or the context. According to the results of the present research, concretization occurred most frequently in the translation of irony (5 examples) and absurdity (3 examples). Bearing in mind that Lithuanian has a broader vocabulary than the English language, in these cases the translator took advantage of it in order to preserve the style of the original utterance. As far as the aim of the translator was to retain the comic effect of irony and absurdity he focused on the meaning rather than the form. Concretization helped to eliminate any ambiguities for the Lithuanian reader as well as retain the humorous effect and the style of the original text.

2. The English boy plays till he is fifteen, and works thence till twenty. In Germany it is the child that works; the young man than plays. (p.98)

Anglijoje berniukai žaidžia iki penkiolikos, o paskui dirba, iki sulaukia dvidešimties. O Vokietijoje atvirkščiai: dirba vaikai, o jaunikaičiai žaidžia. (p.207) (irony)

What concerns the example of irony (9), the

situation is analogical: the translator adds a three-word phrase “O Vokietijoje atvirkščiai”, which means “It is the opposite in Germany”, in order to highlight the ironic effect based on the opposition.

In this chapter of our research we are going to discuss the examples of humour in which no significant translation transformations have been identified. However, the translator did convert the source text into the target text, yet he chose to do it in the easiest way. As it has been mentioned in the previous chapter, the translation usually depends largely on the choice of the translator. Here we shall discuss some of the translation transformations the translator might have used.

Gallagher (1996:31) describes them as “technical devices used to transfer meaning of a text in one language into a text in another language” and we find a wide range of them in Newmark’s (1988:91) work. Although he distinguishes as many as 15 translation procedures, we are going to discuss only 3 of them. Our research concerns the translation of culture-based texts and, according to Harvey (2000:2-6), functional equivalence and transcription are the most frequently used for translating texts of this kind. We can find similar procedures mentioned on Newmark’s (1988:91) list, however, he distinguishes one more translation procedure which is very important in translating culture-based texts: notes.

To begin with, functional equivalence means using a referent in the TL culture whose function is similar to that of the source language (SL) referent (Harvey 2000:2-6). In other words, as Newmark (1988:83) puts it, it is replacing a cultural word in SL with its equivalent in TL. However, in some cases, the author chooses an opposite procedure – transcription. According to Harvey (2000:2-6), transcription or “borrowing” is reproduction or, where necessary, transliteration of the original term. Newmark calls it “transference” and defines it as a “process of transferring an SL word to a TL text”.

The following examples of parody and allusion from the Lithuanian translation of Jerome K. Jerome’s “Three Men on a Bummel” demonstrate the cases where the translator uses transcription instead of replacing certain cultural realia with their Lithuanian equivalents:

3. Your German likes nature, but his idea of nature is a glorified Welsh Harp. He takes great interest in his garden. He plants seven rose trees on the north side and seven on the south, and if they do not grow up all the same size and shape it worries him so that he cannot sleep of nights. (p.53)

Vokietis myli gamtą, bet įsivaizduoja ją kaip koki šlovingąjį Velš Harpą. Daug dėmesio skiria*

savo sodui. *Sodina septynis rožių krūmus šiauriniame jo gale ir septynis – pietiniame, ir jeigu tie neužauga vienodo dydžio ir formos, jis taip sielojasi, jog negali naktimis miegoti.* (p.109) (allusion)

4. *They were coming towards us in the flesh and blood, unless we were dreaming, alive and concrete – the English “Milor” and the English “Mees,” as for generations they have been portrayed in the Continental comic press and upon the Continental stage. They were perfect in every detail. The man was tall and thin, with sandy hair, a huge nose, and long Dundreary whiskers.* (p.59)

Jeigu tik nesapnavome, mūsų link žengė du visai tikri gyvi žmonės – anglų „milordas” ir „mis”, kaip kartų kartais jie buvo vaizduojami kontinentiniuose humoristiniuose leidiniuose ir teatrų scenose. Atrodė tobuli iki smulkmenų. Vyriškis – aukštas ir liesas, smėlio spalvos plaukai, didžiule nosimi ir vešliomis kaip Dundrerio žandenomis.* (p.120) (allusion)

What concerns the other two examples (3 and 4), the translator transcribes the names of some cultural realia well known to English readers, but unknown to Lithuanian ones. “Welsh Harp” is rendered as “Velš Harpas” and “Dundreary” as “Dandreris”. It must be mentioned that the translator does not leave the Lithuanian reader uncertain. This time he uses another translation procedure called “notes” which is defined as “additional information in a translation” (Newmark, 1988:91). These are translator’s notes about a culturally-bound word or expression and are usually found at the bottom of the page. In this case, we find the explanations in Lithuanian that “Welsh Harp” is a lake in the North-West of London very popular among Londoners and “Dundrer” is a character from Tom Taylor’s book “Our Cousin American” famous for his extraordinary moustache. As far as these allusions are supposed to evoke certain funny associations to the reader, it does not have the same comic effect on Lithuanian reader.

Speaking of translator’s notes it has been noticed by Lithuanian linguist Pažūsis (2006) that theoreticians of the science of translation regard them as something that should be avoided. What concerns the translation of humour, he says that these notes are useless. According to him, if the reader does not find certain parts of the text, which are supposed to be humorous, being humorous, there is no use explaining it. Therefore, the examples presented above can be considered the failures of translating humour.

On the other hand, Pažūsis (2006) admits that the translator’s abilities are limited as they sometimes have to cope with really difficult cases. Here we shall look at some successful examples, but first of all, we should discuss other possible transformations

of translation. Newmark (1988) distinguishes 8 methods of translation. We shall focus on one of them, i.e. semantic translation as it is the one which “must take more account of the aesthetic value of the SL text” (Newmark 1988: 45). This means that the translator conveys the meaning of the original text and at the same time preserves its original form as in the following examples of imitation (5, 6):

5. *A couple of sheep were browsing there, and they followed and took a keen interest in my practice. The one was a kindly, sympathetic old party. I do not think she understood the game; I think it was my doing this innocent thing so early in the morning that appealed to her. At every stroke I made she bleated:*

“Go-o-o-d, go-o-o-d ind-e-e-d!” (p. 29)

Ten žolę rupšnojo pora avių, kurios labai susidomėjusios ėmė stebėti manąsias pratybas. Viena buvo miela, simpatiška senuciukė; nemanau, kad ji suprato žaidimą, veikiau jai padarė įspūdį ši nekalta manoji veikla tokį ankstyvą rytmetį. Sulig kiekvienu mano smūgiuotu kamuoliuku ji sumekendavo:

-Ge-e-e-rai, ge-e-e-rai, vaje-e-e! (p.59-60)

(imitation)

6. *As for the other one, she was a cantankerous, disagreeable old thing, as discouraging to me as her friend was helpful. “Ba-a-ad, da-a-a-m ba-a-a-d!” was her comment on almost every stroke.* (p.29)

O dėl kitos, tai ta buvo vaidinga, bjauri senė, tiek pat varanti mane į neviltį, kiek jos draugė suteikianti man jėgų. -Ne-e-e-kaip, fe-e-e, ne-e-e-kaip! – bemaž kiekvieną smūgį pakomentuodavo ji. (p.60) (imitation)

These examples show how the translator chooses to make the TT look as similar as possible to the ST visually. Hereof, the aim of the translator is to preserve the comic effect, thus, we may claim that his choice is successful for the Lithuanian reader can fully enjoy the imitation in the translation, as if he is reading the original text.

Conclusions

1. Humour is a complex phenomenon which exists in every part of the world, nevertheless, travels from one language to another with difficulties. The main challenges in perceiving and translating humour are the problem of adequacy and sociocultural differences.
2. In the translation of Jerome K. Jerome’s “Three Men on a Bummel” lexical translation transformations are as frequent as grammatical translation transformations. In the group of lexical translation transformations concretization appeared to be the most frequent one and among the grammatical translation transformations addition occurred the most often.
3. Among the sorts of humour found in the book

irony makes the largest part. It is most frequently translated using concretization, addition and substitution. Because of structural differences between the English language and the Lithuanian language the translator was obliged to either use a more concrete Lithuanian word for an English one having a wide meaning, add some extra words in the translated phrase, or substitute certain words in the source text by the ones of different part of speech in order to retain the style and the meaning of the original. It can be asserted that in most cases the translator managed to convey the humorous effect of irony, ridicule, bombast, exposure and exaggeration successfully.

4. When dealing with humorous discourse the translator focused on conveying the meaning in the first place, therefore in most cases the form was less important. According to the results of the research, we may claim that most examples with translation transformations were translated adequately. Even in the instances where the target text differed much from the source text visually, the main idea was perfectly revealed and retained. The style of the target text always corresponded to the Lithuanian grammar rules and was stylistically accurate.
5. The least successful examples of translating humour were instances of allusion containing particular cultural realia unknown to the Lithuanian reader. Transcription and explanatory notes proved themselves to be not efficient in humour translation.

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CHALLENGES OF HUMOUR TRANSLATION IN FICTION

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Summary

The problems of translating English humour into Lithuanian have not been thoroughly studied, therefore it has been chosen as a subject of this article. This research focuses on the analysis of examples of different sorts of humour in J. K. Jerome's novel "Three Men on a Bummel" and compares the source text with the target text. The present paper is assigned to provide a theoretical framework of phenomenon of humour, its classification and translation peculiarities as well as to reveal the complexity of phenomenon of humour which exists in every part of the world, nevertheless, travels from one language to another with difficulties. The aim of the research is to identify and perceive the main challenges in translating humour that contains culture-specific items and instances of untranslatability. Among the sorts of humour found in the book irony makes the largest part. It is most frequently translated using concretization, addition and substitution. Because of structural differences between the English language and the Lithuanian language the translator is obliged to either use a more concrete Lithuanian word for an English one having a wide meaning, add some extra words in the translated phrase, or substitute certain words in the source text by the ones of different part of speech in order to retain the style and the meaning of the original. It can be asserted that the translator managed to convey the humorous effect of irony, ridicule, bombast, and exaggeration successfully. The least successful examples of translating humour were certain instances of allusion containing particular cultural realia unknown to the Lithuanian reader.

Keywords: humour translation, translation transformations, challenges, adequate translation.

IŠŠŪKIAI VERČIANT MENINIŲ TEKSTŲ HUMORĄ

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Santrauka

Angliško humoro vertimo į lietuvių kalbą problematika nepakankamai tyrinėta. Straipsnyje aptariamas J. K. Jerome romano „Trise dviračiais“ įvairių humoro rūšių vertimas: pateikiamos teorinės išvalgos, humoro, kaip fenomeno, klasifikacijos bei vertimo ypatumų klausimai. Humoras egzistuoja visame pasaulyje, bet jo perteikimas vertimo procese tampa tikru iššūkiu vertėjams. Tai atsitinka dėl kelių priežasčių: skirtingo mentaliteto, kultūrinių realijų gausumo, kurios, deja, dažniausiai yra neišverčiamos. Tyrimo metu paaiškėjo, jog knygoje „Trise dviračiais“ dominuoja ironija. Ji dažniausiai verčiama taikant konkretizacijos, pridėjimo ir substitucijos vertimo strategijas. Šios transformacijos yra neišvengiamos dėl anglų ir lietuvių kalbų struktūrinių skirtumų. Vertėjas yra priverstas vartoti konkretesnį žodį vietoj platesnę semantinę prasmę turinčio angliško varianto. Verčiant humorą ir siekiant išlaikyti originalaus teksto stilistinį vientisumą, vertėjas dažnai naudoja pridėjimą arba perfrazuoja. Galima teigti, jog knygos vertėjas Jonas Čėponis sugebėjo adekvačiai perteikti anglišką humorą. Nesėkmingo vertimo atvejams priskyrėme kelis aliuzijos perteikimo pavyzdžius. Aliuzijos, gausios kultūrinių realijų, buvo nelengvas iššūkis vertėjui, su kuriuo ne visada pavyko susidoroti.

Prasminiai žodžiai: humoro vertimas, vertimo transformacijos, iššūkis, adekvatus vertimas.

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