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Archaisms in three Polish translations of *Romeo and Juliet*

Romeo and Juliet is a tragedy written by William Shakespeare in 1595 about two young star-crossed lovers whose deaths ultimately reconcile their feuding families. It was among Shakespeare's most popular plays during his lifetime and one of his most frequently performed and translated plays.

Translation of a written text from English into Polish is an elaborate task. A translator encounters various difficulties while transforming a source text into a target one. For instance, employing the appropriate words is troublesome, especially when the target language is to show the exceptionality of Shakespeare's language which abounds in archaisms. In the article I am going to focus on words now seem as outdated. My intention is to demonstrate that they are frequently replaced by their modern counterparts, which significantly changes the uniqueness of the original text. My research is based on *Romeo and Juliet* and its three Polish translations by Paszkowski, whose translation dates back to the 19th century, Słomczyński, who translated the play in 1983, and Barańczak's translation from 1990. The question arises if the lack of archaisms deforms the original text. The article gives the answers to this question.

Defining translation

Munday points out that translation "can refer to the general subject field, the product (the text that has been translated) or the process (the act of producing the translation, otherwise known as translating). The process of translation between two different written languages involves the translator changing an original written text (the source text or SL)

in the original verbal language (the source language or SL) into a written text (the target text or TT) in a different verbal language (the target language or TL)”¹.

Newmark writes that “translation is concerned with moral and with factual truth. This truth can be effectively rendered only if it is gasped by the reader, and this is the purpose and the end of translation”². Of course, this definition of translation has certain flaws as the concept of ‘truth’ is very subjective. Moreover, the author specifies that translation should combine accuracy and accessible language which, in my opinion, rarely coincide.

Since I compare the translations in terms of equivalence certain explanation should be provided.

Equivalence

In a broad sense equivalence is an equality of meaning. In the context of the translation theory the equivalence is “the preservation of relative similarity of cognitive, semantic, stylistic and communicative information contained in the original text”³.

Nida points out that in translation it is not enough to reproduce the message but it is more important to consider the effect of that message on the target reader. The effective translation depends on the reader they address. However, the main goal of the translation should be to keep the unchanged “spirit of the original” so that the source reader has the same understanding of the text as any other reader having this text in a different language. Of course, there is a contradiction as it is impossible to have the same comprehension of a text, not even among source readers.

Examples of archaisms

An archaism is an obsolete word or phrase that is no longer current. Taking into consideration the fact that Shakespeare’s language dates back to the 16th century, Polish translations of his play should abound in archaisms. Nevertheless, the examples below show that the original choice of words was not reflected in every translation.

Act I, Scene I

Capulet says, “My sword, I say! Old Mountague is come, / And flourishes his blade in spite of me”⁴. Shakespeare’s “to flourish” was first attested in the late 14th century meaning, “to brandish (a weapon)”⁵. The word “spite” is used with the reference to “ill will, malice”⁶.

¹ J. Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Application*, Routledge, London & New York 2001, p. 4–5.

² P. Newmark, *About Translation*, Multilingual Matters LTD, Clevedon – Philadelphia – Adelaide 1991, p. 1.

³ B. Hatim and J. Munday, *Translation: An Advanced Resource Book*, Routledge, New York 200, p. 117.

⁴ W. Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Wordsworth Classics, Great Britain 2000, p. 37.

⁵ D. Harper, *Online Etymology Dictionary*, 2001–2010.

⁶ A. Room, *Cassell’s Dictionary of Word Histories*, Cassell & Co., London 2002, p. 584.

Paszkowski translates this phrase as “Miecz, mówię! Stary Montekio nadchodzi. / I szydnie swoją klingą mi urąga”⁷. He uses not only equivalent words but also the same punctuation marks, when writing “Miecz, mówię!” Equivalence is apparent as the content together with its form are reflected in this translation. The only difference appears with the possessive pronoun, “my” which is not included by Paszkowski. This, however, does not change a thing in understanding this fragment. The next phrase is also a direct calque from the original as he writes “Stary Montekio nadchodzi”. Nothing is altered which proves that the equivalence is maintained. The lexical resemblance to the original is also visible in the last fragment of this utterance. The word “szydnie” derives from “szydlerczo” which refers to the phrase “in spite of”. Moreover, “klinga” means “a blade of side arms, i.e. sabers, swords, foils, etc.”⁸ which also finds its equivalent in the original as Capulet mentions “blade”. Finally, “urągać” is defined as “to revile” which carries similar communication meaning to “flourish”. Paszkowski’s translation of this utterance includes words which came out of use in everyday Polish. His version enables the reader to go back Shakespeare’s times due to the choice of words and to ‘feel’ closer to the source culture. His colleague translators did not follow this direction.

Słomczyński writes “Mój miecz, powiadam! Już stary Monteki / Nadchodzi, godząc we mnie nagim ostrzem”⁹. The first part of this utterance is similar to Paszkowski’s version. The differences appear in the next fragment, i.e. “godząc we mnie nagim ostrzem”. The word “godząc” suggests certain bloodshed which did not occur in this scene. Capulet is not hurt or killed. This word is to replace the verb “flourish” which does not carry the same meaning. The only equivalence is found in the word “ostrze”, although the original “spite” is not reflected which makes the translation incomplete and shallow.

Finally, Barańczak writes “Rapier, powiadam! Ten ramol Montecchi / Przywłókł się i wywija mi przed nosem / Swoim szpikulcem”¹⁰. He uses more contemporary words with certain humor when adding i.e. “ramol” and “przywłókł się”. The word “ramol” means “an old crock”, which is not included in the original where a reader finds only “old” as an adjective describing Mountague. Nevertheless, “ramol” fits perfectly in the context, allowing to sense the intense reluctance between two heads of the families. The same situation is with “przywłókł się” which is marked in the original with “is come”. In comparison to Paszkowski’s and Słomczyński’s “nadchodzi”, this verb has a colloquial register, which makes the scene less serious. Barańczak’s equivalence is also noticeable in the next fragment of this utterance when he writes “wywija mi przed nosem swoim szpikulcem”. “Wywija mi przed nosem” combines two original English words. The first one, “flourish”, reflects the action “wywijać” and “spite”, which carries a flavor of malice, and is comparable with “przed nosem”. Shakespeare’s “blade” finds its humorous translation, “szpikulce” which does not directly copy this lexical element but shows the aim of the English author.

⁷ W. Shakespeare, *Romeo i Julia*, translated by J. Paszkowski, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1964, p. 41.

⁸ M. Szymczak (ed.), *Słownik Języka Polskiego*, PWN, Warszawa 1988, 1989, p. 932 (translation mine).

⁹ W. Shakespeare, *Romeo i Julia*, translated by M. Słomczyński, Wydawnictwo Zielona Sowa, Kraków 2008, p. 13.

¹⁰ W. Shakespeare, *Romeo i Julia*, translated by S. Barańczak, W drodze, Poznań 1994, p. 16.

Comparing these three translators, Barańczak's version of this utterance presents the most current version. The applied language is the most contemporary and natural to the Polish reader. Generally, Paszkowski's translation of this fragment can be compared to the time machine that allows the reader to sense the 16th century language and the English culture. On the other hand, Barańczak's translation enables the inexperienced readers of Shakespeare's plays to have the urge to get familiarized themselves with *Romeo and Juliet*. Słomczyński's translation leaves something to be desired.

Act I, Scene II

In one of the first utterances, Capulet advises Paris against marrying to his daughter as she is too young. He explains, "She hath not seen the change of fourteen years: / Let two more summers wither in their pride"¹¹. According to etymology dictionary, "hath" is defined as "archaic third person singular of [*has*]"¹². Owing to the fact that there are words which nowadays came out of use, a contemporary English reader familiarizes himself with Shakespeare's times. In this scene, a reader is informed about Juliet's age, which is mentioned in a very poetical manner. The fact that Juliet has not seen "the change of fourteen years" tells a reader that the main character is almost fourteen. Of course, not only words serve like a time machine, but also whole sentences. The next line proves to be the example. The word "wither" has its origin in the 15th century as "apparently a variant of *weather*"¹³ and "a differentiated and special use of *wederen* 'to expose to weather'; 'to become weather-beaten'"¹⁴. Juliet's father gives Paris advice to wait two more years before he decides to marry his daughter. The language, which is used to reflect this sense, is poetical and unique for the reader as Shakespeare does not write about "two years" but about "two more summers" instead. The Polish translators had three different ideas how to render these two lines.

Paszkowski writes, "Ledwie czternastu lat wysnuła przędzę; / Parę jej wiosen jeszcze przeżyć trzeba"¹⁵. The translator uses "ledwie", when referring to Juliet's age, which suggests that the girl is already fourteen. The adverb "ledwie" indicates the minimum level of something or it suggests that something has been achieved with difficulties. A small discrepancy between Shakespeare's line and the Polish version is visible as in the original Juliet is almost fourteen and not already fourteen. This difference contributes to misinforming the reader about an important fact, such as the age. As a result, it does not convey the original message and its sense, which makes the translation not equivalent. "Wysnuć przędzę" denotes an activity. Its basic form, "snuć przędzę", is understood as an idiomatic expression, "to try to make sb believe a long story that is not true [literary 'to spin a yarn']"¹⁶. In this context, Paszkowski's line does not include any idioms. His phrase points to a passage of time and, simultaneously, describes the activity that was popular in the past. In this way, a reader can feel that the verse he is reading was not translated from

¹¹ W. Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, op. cit., p. 42.

¹² D. Harper, *Online Etymology...*

¹³ A. Room, *Cassell's Dictionary of Word Histories*, op. cit., p. 680.

¹⁴ D. Harper, D., *Online Etymology...*

¹⁵ W. Shakespeare, *Romeo i Julia*, translated by J. Paszkowski, op. cit., p. 50.

¹⁶ S. Wehmeier (chief ed.), *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English, seventh edition*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2005, p. 1474.

a contemporary language. Paszkowski changes “summer” into “wiosen”, which is not equivalent in terms of lexis, but Polish version alters the source word to make it adequate in the target language. The old-fashioned Polish phrase, used to mark the flow of years, is to be rendered into “spring” not “summer”, which was noticed and translated correctly. Although instead of pointing to two years of awaiting to get married, the translator does not include any specific number of years. In his version, a reader finds “parę wiosen”, which does not convey the original intention. Too many inaccuracies contribute to the lack of equivalence between the Polish lines and those in the master copy.

Słomczyński is more precise concerning the age of the title character as his translation reads as follows, “Nie ukończyło nawet lat czternastu; / Niech jeszcze dwakroć lato się rozśmieje”¹⁷. The first line conveys the message included in the original as this translator, unlike Paszkowski, clearly states that the girl is not yet fourteen. The fact that he writes “lat” first and then “czternaście”, contributes to more poetical overtone, therefore, it sounds good in the target language. Słomczyński translates the second line more literally. He does not change the original “summers” into “springs”, which Paszkowski does. Instead, he maintains “lato” together with “dwakroć”, which provides a reader with knowledge that two more years should pass before Paris marries Juliet. Here, one more term ought to be mentioned, precisely ‘anthropomorphization’ which “[refers] to any attribution of human characteristics (or characteristics assumed or believed by some to belong only to humans) to animals or non-living things, phenomena, material states and objects or abstract concepts”¹⁸. It is illustrated when Słomczyński uses “rozśmieje się” with reference to “lato”. He associates summer with something pleasant, which is the reason why he attributes laughter to it. In his version “roześmiać się” points to “appear”, which matches the context and renders the original message. Although a reader does not find any similar lexical counterpart to match the Polish verb, the Polish text is equivalent to Shakespeare’s verses.

Finally, Barańczak presents us the third version of these two lines, “Czternastu lat nie skończyła. Niech minie / Lato i drugie niech przyjdzie po wiosnie”¹⁹. Apart from certain changes in the word order, this version is almost identical to Słomczyński’s. The second line reveals more differences. Barańczak uses both “lato” and “wiosna”, and, therefore his translation combines elements from Paszkowski’s and Słomczyński’s versions. Maintaining the original “summer” and pointing to the exact number of years that should pass, Barańczak makes his translation equivalent to the original.

Since Barańczak’s translation is the most contemporary one, there is no surprise that he uses the most contemporary language. A target reader does not find any lexical difficulties to understand the Shakespeare’s tragedy. Although this simplicity in terms of a language has also a drawback as the reader will never experience the exceptionality of Shakespeare’s 16th century language. All in all, Barańczak does not bring the Polish reader closer to the source culture. Paszkowski’s translation reflects the archaic language. It would be the closest version that reflects the source culture but for the fact that there are too many lexical differences. If a translation is not equivalent to the original, it does not bring the

¹⁷ W. Shakespeare, *Romeo i Julia*, translated by M. Słomczyński, op. cit., p. 19.

¹⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page, [accessed: 20.11.2013].

¹⁹ W. Shakespeare, *Romeo i Julia*, translated by S. Barańczak, op. cit., p. 25.

reader closer to Shakespeare. Słomczyński's fragment also contains certain archaisms and due to the fact that his version is equivalent to the original, he reflects the source culture and Shakespeare's style in the most successful way.

Act II, Scene II

When Romeo needs to part with Juliet for the night, he feels deep sorrow. His unhappiness is reflected in his words, "Love goes toward love as schoolboys from their books"²⁰. Shakespeare compares the mutual almost magnetic attraction, when two people are in love, to eagerness and blissfulness when a student does not have to learn and feels resentment towards schoolbooks. Despite the passage of time, the reluctance concerning attending classes and learning has not changed. Still pupils would rather play with their peers than spend time doing homework.

Paszkowski renders the original into "Jak żak, gdy rzuca książkę, tak kochanek / Do celu swego pospiesza wesoly"²¹. His translation accurately reflects the message embodied in the master copy. The word "żak" perfectly harmonizes with the rest of the Polish verse, not to mention the fact that it is a perfect equivalent to "schoolboy". Paszkowski brings the reader closer to Shakespeare's times as in the Middle Ages, "żak" was a well-known and widely used word to describe a schoolboy. The name derives from *diakon* since those who wanted to enter the monastery were attending school. The exact form of the word "żak" came to Poland from Czech²². Paszkowski renders the resentment felt by schoolboy towards his books by writing "rzucać". Although Shakespeare does not include this verb, the original sense is preserved and even strengthened, which helps the reader to picture the scene better. "Love goes toward love" has its counterpart, "kochanek / Do celu swego pospiesza wesoly". The Polish version is longer than the original line as Paszkowski adds more lexical elements to make his translation more understandable to the target reader and more comprehensible. He succeeds also in maintaining the original sense as the message is passed without distortions. Equivalent verses, when concerning Shakespeare's line, are also comparable to the master copy in terms of a language that contains archaism, i.e. "żak", the archaism the later translations lack. The source culture is reflected thanks to these archaisms.

Słomczyński's fragment reads as follows, "Miły, chcąc miłą swą ujrzeć, nie zwleka / I niby uczeń ze szkoły ucieka"²³. Here "love" is translated into "miły" that as well refers to someone close to our heart. In this context, the translation renders the original sense. The phrase denoting resentment, "schoolboys from their books", is conveyed with "niby uczeń ze szkoły ucieka". Unlike Paszkowski, Słomczyński applies "uciekać ze szkoły" instead of "rzucać książki". Two Polish versions present different choice of words to describe the same scene but they communicate identical message and, therefore, are equivalent to the original. "Schoolboy" is rendered into "uczeń" that belongs to a modern language, contrary to Paszkowski's "żak". Despite the lack of archaisms, the translator reflects the original message accurately.

²⁰ W. Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, op. cit., p. 62.

²¹ W. Shakespeare, *Romeo i Julia*, translated by J. Paszkowski, op. cit., p. 87.

²² A. Brückner, *Słownik etymologiczny języka polskiego*, Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 1993, p. 661 (translation mine).

²³ W. Shakespeare, *Romeo i Julia*, translated by M. Słomczyński, op. cit., p. 47.

Barańczak presents different, but modern, translation “Jak uczeń z lekcji zwolniony, wesóły – / Tak tęskne serce rwie się do spotkania”²⁴. “Schoolboy” is rendered into “uczeń” that proves to be its contemporary counterpart. “Zwolniony z lekcji” when compared to “rzucać książki” or “uciekać ze szkoły” has different meaning. Unlike Paszkowski’s and Słomczyński’s versions, “zwolniony z lekcji” does not mean disobeying school regulation. Moreover, the magnetism between two people in love is reflected in “tęskne serce rwie się do spotkania”. The verb “rwie się” highlights the anxiety and eagerness to meet a beloved person. Regardless differences in lexis, Barańczak’s version is equivalent to the original. The target reader will not find examples of obsolete language but he will find these verses comprehensible and easy to follow.

The last but one Juliet’s utterance describes a time of the day. She says, “’Tis almost morning”²⁵. Her words are to hurry Romeo to leave before anybody sees him. All three Polish translators successfully reflect “almost morning” but with different words.

Paszkowski renders this fragment into “Dnieć będzie”²⁶. His version contains the most obsolete language when compared to Słomczyński’s and Barańczak’s lines. As a result, a target reader can experience the source culture as Shakespeare’s language abounds in archaisms. Paszkowski applies the verb which is rarely used in terms of contemporary language, i.e. “dnieć” whose direct translation would be “to dawn”. This fragment conveys the original sense accurately and provides the reader with an old-fashioned language, which helps to sense Shakespeare’s times. The equivalence is evident.

Słomczyński’s language is more modern, “Dzień się już budzi”²⁷. His version is poetical and communicates the original sense. Although Paszkowski and Słomczyński employ different choice of words to render the same fragment, their versions are equivalent to a phrase from the master copy. The only difference concerns Słomczyński’s translation, which is deprived of obsolete language and therefore, less characteristic to Shakespeare’s times.

Finally, Barańczak presents “Już prawie ranek”²⁸. His contemporary language accurately renders the original message. Surprisingly, his version is lexically closest to the original as “almost morning” is copied into “prawie ranek”. That was usually Słomczyński whose lines were literally rendered from the original. Barańczak’s verses were not focused on source vocabulary and culture but rather on a source communication aim. This time, however, Barańczak applies almost the same lexical elements as Shakespeare. The only exception refers to “’tis” and its counterpart “już” which sounds natural in a target language but does not carry exactly the same meaning. By and large, Barańczak’s fragment is natural and understandable to the target reader.

All three translators successfully render the original fragment in three different ways. Paszkowski, Słomczyński and as well Barańczak describe the same time of the day without any ambiguities or distortions in meaning. However, if one translator is to be chosen as the one who translated the fragment in the stylistically closest way to the original, it will be Paszkowski. His archaic language enables the reader to go back Shakespeare’s times.

²⁴ W. Shakespeare, *Romeo i Julia*, translated by S. Barańczak, op. cit., p. 63.

²⁵ W. Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, op. cit., p. 63.

²⁶ W. Shakespeare, *Romeo i Julia*, translated by J. Paszkowski, op. cit., p. 89.

²⁷ W. Shakespeare, *Romeo i Julia*, translated by M. Słomczyński, op. cit., p. 48.

²⁸ W. Shakespeare, *Romeo i Julia*, translated by S. Barańczak, op. cit., p. 64.

Conclusions

Paszkowski renders the original from the perspective of the 19th century. Since his translation is the oldest version, it employs a lot of examples of archaisms. He reflects Shakespeare's intentions, language and style accurately. His target reader may sense the exceptionality of the original without taking the English version. The words he applies are not easy to understand for a contemporary reader but it also makes people think not only about the 16th century drama but also about the Polish language and etymology of words that sound unfamiliar. By his translations he proves that he is well prepared to render Shakespeare's plays. Paszkowski proves that he understands the 16th century language and its style.

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