BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE TRANSLATION OF PUNS FROM ENGLISH INTO RUSSIAN

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Acest articol abordează problema dificultăților lingvistice și culturale cu care se confruntă traducătorii atunci când lucrează cu jocurile de cuvinte în textele literare. Pe baza exemplelor din serialul Discworld, este ilustrat modul în care funcționează diferite tipuri de jocuri de cuvinte în limba engleză și modalitatea redării acestora în limba rusă.

Translating puns is recognized as one of the most difficult tasks in translation. It involves reproducing its effect, which depends on timing, word choice, and the reader's expectations. Linguistic features such as ambiguity, sound similarity and different word formation often make direct translation impossible. These challenges are complicated by cultural differences, which affect how humour is perceived and how meaning is constructed.

I. *One barrier is* ***the difference in linguistic structure between English and Russian***. English favours short, monosyllabic roots and has relatively simple morphology, whereas Russian is characterized by longer, multisyllabic words with complex structure. This structural contrast means the two languages offer different opportunities for puns. V. Komissarov notes that puns "based on the external similarity of phrases, different in meaning, are entirely based on intralinguistic relations that exist among the words of a source language, which in most cases are absent in the system of target language" [6, p.113].

For example, English often builds puns using words that sound the same or are spelled the same. Words like "*knight"* and "*night"* are spelled differently but sound exactly the same. A joke like "Why was King Arthur's army *too tired to fight*? Because it had *too many sleepless knights*" works based on this principle. In Russian, the word for "knight" is «*рыцарь»* and for "night" it is «*ночь»*, and they sound completely different. So, the pun cannot be repeated [5]. This shows how differences in how words sound in each language can make some puns untranslatable.

English grammar is more flexible because it does not use many endings to show how words function in a sentence. This allows one word to play more than one role, which often creates ambiguities that can be used for puns. Russian grammar is more exact. It marks case and number clearly, so each word's role is obvious. Because of this, the same kind of ambiguity is harder to create.

For example, the pun "I wondered why the baseball was getting bigger. Then it hit me" relies on the double meaning of the verb "hit." In English, "hit" can mean both "to strike" and "to suddenly realise". In Russian, these meanings would be expressed by different words, so the pun would not work the same way. This difference shows how grammar can affect the possibilities for puns in a language.

II. *Beyond structural issues, there are* ***semantic barriers to translating puns between English and Russian.*** Languages divide meaning in different ways. A word in English may have several connotations, but no single word in Russian may cover them all. E. Nida points out that each language has its own network of meanings, culture and experience [4, p.12].

English words often develop several meanings over time. This can happen through metaphor, borrowing, or just long use in different situations. A short word like "*pitch"* can mean many things. It can refer to a sound in music, a throw in sports, or a sales offer. These meanings are completely different, but English uses the same word for all of them. According to X. Chen the writer could easily make a pun using just this one word, for example, "taking a pitch at the pitch meeting" [2, p.102]. In Russian, this would be hard to translate. Each meaning has its own word. For musical pitch, it would be «тон», for a throw, «бросок», and for a sales pitch, «презентация» or «предложение» [5] Since these are all separate words in Russian, the joke cannot be recreated in the same way. The English pun works because one word covers many meanings, while Russian splits them up.

As P. Newmark pointed out, there are several kinds of ambiguity that can appear in language. These include ***ambiguity at the level of words, grammar, reference*** [3, p.134]. A pun often works because it combines two or more of these at the same time. In English, a sentence can be unclear both in the meaning of individual words and in the way the whole phrase is structured. But when translating into Russian, such ambiguity is harder to keep. As a result, one possible meaning is selected and the rest are lost. And with them, the pun disappears.

For example, the pun, "The poor elevator attendant was always going down". The pun appears because "going down" can mean both physically descending and emotionally feeling low. In Russian, you cannot use one phrase to cover all these meanings at once. Expressions like «*идти вниз»* or «*опускаться»* refer only to physical movement and do not carry the same double meaning [5]. Because of this, the translator must choose which meaning to keep. The other one is lost.

III. *Besides the language distinctions,* ***the different cultural backgrounds*** *are also big barriers to English pun's translation.* Culture is a big concept covering many aspects such as history, literature, art, and religion.

D. Delabastita outlines several principles that influence the chances of successfully translating puns, depending on the relationship between the languages [1, p.223].

First, he notes that ***when a pun is phonetic***, the chances of finding a suitable equivalent in the target language are higher when the two languages are historically related. Since English and Russian belong to different language families, the likeli-

hood of finding phonetic equivalents is generally low, making the translation of homophones particularly challenging.

Second, ***when a pun is polysemic***, the chances of finding an equivalent are not strongly influenced by the historical relationship between the languages. This suggests that translating Pratchett's homonyms from English into Russian relies more on semantic overlap than on shared linguistic roots.

Third, ***when the pun is syntactic or morphological***, the chances of finding an equivalent are higher when the source and target languages are typologically related. English and Russian differ significantly in their grammatical structures, including word order and inflection systems, which complicates the translation of puns based on syntax or morphology.

In conclusion, a pun is more than just a joke. It combines sound, meaning, grammar, and sometimes cultural background, all in one short phrase. English and Russian often differ in all these areas. Words may not sound alike, grammar may be strict, and cultural references may not match. Because of this, it is rarely possible to keep both the form of the pun and its double meaning in translation.

References:

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