RUSSIAN EQUIRHYTHMIC TRANSLATION OF MUSICAL COMEDY

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Equirhythmic translation, a translation approach which allows rendering a text in the target language so that it maintains the same rhythm, meter, and timing as the original [6], is a complex task, especially in the context of humor. In humorous songs, achieving both perfect rhythm and faithful translation of humor-specific devices (e.g., wordplay, culturally rooted jokes) requires a high degree of sense to humor and music. As a result, translators often prioritize preserving the humor or the general message rather than strictly matching the original rhythm.

In musical stand-up comedy, which combines spoken jokes with brief musical interludes or humorous songs, the main goal is to evoke laughter and connect with the audience through culturally relevant jokes [7, p. 87]. Here, Skopos theory becomes highly relevant, since it emphasizes that translation should serve its intended purpose above all [2, p. 2189]. Therefore, translators usually preserve the humorous effect, prioritizing it over musical accuracy. Nevertheless, ideally, both humor and musicality should be preserved because the original performance relies on the combination of witty lyrics and rhythmic flow to engage the audience on multiple levels. This being said, the question arises: can musical stand-up comedy translation maintain both humorous effect and musical features?

Having analyzed 111 examples of musical comedy (64 of musical stand-up translations, taken from the community "AllStandUp — Весь стендап" on the social media platform VKontakte, and 47 of equirhythmic humorous song translations, taken from Disney movies, translators' communities, the YouTube channel "Людмила Олеговна," and song lyrics websites), the results showed a dominant method in the latter – free translation, taking up to 53% of all humorous song instances. Although it prioritizes musicality over semantic fidelity, this method may help translators preserve the humorous effect and wordplay through entirely rewriting lines, which is seen in the following example.

God only knows he's grown *farther* from home, he's no *father* [5]	Разве поймут, как одинок *путь*, но Отец он *беспутный* [5]

The Russian translation diverges from the literal structure of the original, preserving the pun on "farther" and "father." In the original line, Eminem plays on the

phonetic similarity to highlight emotional and physical distance of the parent. The Russian translation does not mirror the English syntax, but it recreates the wordplay through the opposition of “одинок путь” and “отец он беспутный,” maintaining both the semantic and poetic tension, creating a lyrical equivalent.

Explicitation procedure, that is, the explanation of implied text [1, p. 16], was identified as the most common in the translation of musical stand-up comedy (21,8%) due to several factors: lack of funding, tight deadlines, and subtitling as the prevalent audiovisual translation mode. This procedure allows translators to explain the intended joke, staying faithful to the original, as presented below.

I dated an animal rights activist And one day she got really pissed Because I was eating veal That was wrapped in *pita* bread *PETA?* [3]	Я встречался с защитницей прав животных, И в один день она была зла, Потому что я ел говядину, Завернутую в питу. ПИТА? *(Люди за Этичное Отношение к Животным (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) — американская организация за борьбу животных)* [3]

In this extract, the humor depends on a pun involving homophones: the punchline plays on the confusion between PETA, the animal rights organization, whose members are against eating veal, and pita, which is unrelated to the conflict but sounds similar. In Russian, this phonetic ambiguity is not preserved, as “ПИТА” as an acronym does not exist. To preserve the humor, the translator leaves the phonetic resemblance unchanged but adds an explanation of what PETA stands for, clarifying the source of the joke for the target audience, who may not be familiar with the organization.

Based on provided examples and data, one may think that equirhythmic translation is not possible in cases of musical stand-up comedy, but that is a fallacy. There are a few instances of free translation (which fits the rhyme of the original) applied to musical stand-up songs, an example is as follows.

You want a guy that’s sweet, a guy that’s *tough* A feminist who likes to pay for *stuff* The kind of guy that gets along with your friends Without being attracted to any of them A good boy, a bad boy; a good bad *boy*; A half good, half bad, half *boy* Loves your brothers, sensitive but not weak *and* Is a great lover, calls your mother on the *weekend* Now you might think that this guy only exists in your *mind* Guess what: You're *right*! [4, 27:38]	Ты хочешь парня, что мил и *силён*, И платит за тебя, ведь он в тебя *влюблён*, В ладах со всеми из твоих друзей И при этом всём верен только тебе Хорошист, плохиш, хороший *плохиш*, Дерзкий и жёсткий, но твой *малыш* Любит семью, нежный, но не *слабый*, По выходным звонит твоей *маме* Ты скажешь это возможно лишь только в *мечтах*… Ну, что ж… всё *так*[8, 0:06]

This is a textbook case of free translation, as it contains significant reformulations of structure, creative rephrasing, rewritten punchlines to fit the target audience, and omis-

sion to fit the rhythm and rhyme. The translator intentionally departs from literal meaning and syntactic form to preserve the humorous tone and lyrical flow of the original.

As the study has shown, humorous songs succeed more in preserving both humor and musicality (100% of preserved rhyme and 38,3% of preserved jokes in the given corpus) precisely because translators use free translation as a flexible tool to recreate a joke within musical constraints. Stand-up comedy, on the other hand, frequently sacrifices musicality in favor of preserving the joke (preserved jokes frequency in the analyzed corpus is 81,3%, while omitted rhyme frequency makes up to 93,7%), often using explicitation or communicative translation to ensure that references are understood. However, this is not a sign that preserving both is impossible; it is a reflection of limited budget, time constraints, and low prioritization of musical fidelity in this genre due to its unpopularity.

Translators should be supported to balance humor and musicality, moving beyond literal approaches toward more creative strategies. They should feel free to adapt jokes or rewrite sections to evoke laughter. The industry must value quality translation, with performers investing in it to gain global recognition. Translator training should cover not just language but rhyme, meter, timing, and cultural nuance. By rethinking training, support, and recognition, musical humor can thrive across languages.

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Recommended

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