

## TRANSLATING PALACIO'S *WONDER*: FRIENDSHIP ACROSS CULTURES

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This paper explores how friendship is conveyed linguistically and culturally in the Russian translation of R.J. Palacio's *Wonder*. The novel's youthful dialogue, slang, and nicknames pose specific challenges for translators who must balance accuracy with emotional resonance. As language evolves rapidly, especially in how children and teenagers express friendship, translation must keep pace to ensure meaningful cross-cultural understanding.

The study analyzes Anna Krasnikova's 2017 Russian translation, examining how informal speech, slang, and affectionate language shape the portrayal of friendship. Specifically, it identifies linguistic markers, compares their equivalents in Russian, and considers how informal dialogue supports interpersonal relationships. It also reflects on how translation choices affect cultural tone and emotional authenticity. A comparative textual analysis was conducted, focusing on examples of nicknames, slang, and speech acts that illustrate the subtleties of friendship.

The translator's role in bridging cultural differences is complex and vital for cross-cultural communication. Translators act as cultural mediators, ensuring the source text's essence is conveyed accurately in the target language. Language itself is both a connector and a barrier when mutual understanding is lacking, making translation both a bridge and a challenge. As noted: "Modern translation theory is a search for extra-linguistic, sociocultural and psychological factors that shape its strategy and norm." [1, p.90]

In fiction, translation is a communicative act that crosses linguistic and cultural boundaries, preserving meaning while adapting tone, context, and style. As noted, "Literary translation is a very free translation, in which the accuracy of the translated text is not so important as the impressions and feelings that such a text leaves on the reader..." [1, p.93]. This shows how, in fiction, impact often takes priority over strict linguistic precision.

Peter Newmark, in *A Textbook of Translation* [3, p. 45], outlines eight primary methods of translation, including word-for-word, literal, faithful, semantic, adaptation, free, idiomatic, and communicative translation. These methods vary in their degree of fidelity to the source text and the extent to which they prioritize the target audience's comprehension and cultural context. They are particularly effective in pre-

serving the emotional tone and cultural relevance of the original dialogue, ensuring that the translated text resonates with readers in the target language.

Context is vital in literary translation, as it includes the cultural, situational, and historical background that shapes meaning. As Mona Baker notes, context is often mentioned but rarely explored in depth in translation studies [2, p. 321]. In fiction, it is crucial for interpreting informal language and understanding whether a phrase is affectionate, dismissive, playful, or ironic. Accurately translating friendship expressions depends on this awareness to keep character interactions authentic.

To meet these complex demands, translators often use Vinay and Darbelnet's seven procedures—borrowing, calque, literal translation, transposition, modulation, equivalence, and adaptation. This flexible framework helps tackle linguistic and cultural challenges in fiction, especially when translating nuanced expressions of friendship, preserving both meaning and emotional tone.

Ultimately, translating the theme of friendship in fiction requires more than the accurate rendering of words; it demands sensitivity to emotional undercurrents, interpersonal nuances, and cultural expectations. This is particularly true in literature aimed at children and adolescents, where friendship often plays a central narrative role. We have examined a wide range of linguistic markers used in the original English version and their equivalents in the Russian translation. This analysis encompasses 90 examples of how friendship is linguistically expressed in R.J.Palacio's *Wonder* slang, informal speech patterns, terms of endearment and other expressions commonly used among children and teenagers.

From the beginning of the story, we come across a great number of illustrative examples of how friendship and closeness are expressed in *Wonder* by the use of affectionate forms of address. The main character, August Pullman, has many nicknames given by his family and friends. The most common one is: En: “Auggie.” [4, p.20] – Ru: «Аву.» This is the clipped form of his full name, an informal one, reflecting the warm dynamic between him and the people around. The translator uses adaptation strategy for communicative translation, since the goal is to convey emotional nuance, therefore, the translator chooses a Russian diminutive that sounds natural and affectionate. Additionally, in chapter “Padawan”, his father calls him: En: “Auggie Doggie.” [4, p.57] – Ru: «Ав-Гав.» As it is said in the novel, this is a name “from an old cartoon about a dachshund”, that they have been watching together. Therefore, this nickname as well has an emotional connotation, besides the linguistic one. The translator also adapted it, using a creative and culturally appropriate equivalent that mimics the rhyme and dog reference and emphasizing playfulness and affection suitable for child-directed speech.

As for the slang expressions: En: “Cool beans!” [4, p.69] – Ru: «Крым.» is a very common one in teenage speech. While this translation may not directly correspond to the literal meaning of the English phrase, it successfully conveys the intended meaning – enthusiastic approval – through the use of a culturally appropriate Russian slang expression. This is an example of equivalence, which involves conceptual rather than

lexical borrowing. The translator uses a Russian youth expression that functions in the same pragmatic context. Newmark's communicative method is evident here, due to the fact that the focus is placed on the communicative effect of the phrase, ensuring that the target reader perceives it with the same emotional connotation.

Another important aspect of translating friendship in literature is handling metaphors, aphorisms, idioms, and proverbs, which often carry deep cultural and emotional meaning. Translators must find equivalents that preserve both the original message and its tone, using strategies like equivalence and Newmark's idiomatic method. For example, Mr. Browne's precept "No man is an island, entire of itself" [4, p.331] is translated almost literally, as the metaphor is widely recognized and understandable in Russian culture. In contrast, "*Kind words do not cost much. Yet they accomplish much. – Blaise Pascal.*" [4, p.311] becomes «Доброта – это то, что может услышать глухой и увидеть слепой» (Mark Twain), and "*When given the choice between being right or being kind, choose kind. – Dr. Wayne W. Dyer*" [4, p.311] is rendered as «Единственная правота – доброта» (Joseph Brodsky). These examples show how carefully adapting aphorisms and maxims helps preserve the novel's central message of kindness and friendship for the target audience.

The analysis of friendship expressions in the English and Russian version of *Wonder* highlights both the challenges and creative potential of literary translation. Our study shows that the careful use of translation strategies is essential for conveying the original tone, emotional depth, and cultural context. Whether through literal translation, adaptation, or equivalence, each choice influences how the theme of friendship is perceived by the target audience.

### References:

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*Recommended*

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