Translation Peculiarities of Slanguage

Karolina Butkuvienė, Lolita Petrulionė

Abstract. The article defines and analyses three main translation methods of slanguage items, i.e. softening, stylistic compensation and literal translation as well as their application in translation of modern literature. It is claimed in the paper that softening is focused on the perception of the target text reader; the language of the target text is formulated in such a way that it sounds natural for the reader. Stylistic compensation is defined as a means that helps to recreate a similar effect in the target text using the means specific to the target language in order to compensate the losses of the source text. Literal translation is applied when words of the source language are translated directly into the target language. The instances presented in the article are selected from Marian Keys's novel "Watermelon". The results of the research have been analysed, generalised and the conclusions have been drawn. They are expected to be useful for further investigations of translation methods as well as to enhance new quality understanding of translation studies as a whole.

Keywords: translation methods, slanguage, equivalence, softening, stylistic compensation, literal translation.

Introduction

In the last few decades an important number of studies have turned their attention to translating. Translation is considered to be a practical activity that involves turning one language into another, the aim of which is to establish a certain relation or equivalence between the source and target texts (Baker, 1988). However, the central problem of translating has always been whether to translate literally or freely. Moreover, it should be pointed out that each language has two varieties: standard and non-standard (Lick and Alsagoff, 1998). Recently, linguistic researches have been restricted to the translation issues of the standard language. World-wide famous linguists such as Baker (1988), Newmark (1998), Nida (2001), Munday (2001), Petrilli (2003) have implemented many researches in the field of translation studies. However, not much attention has been paid to the second variety of language as such a phenomenon as slanguage has not been considered a serious issue and has been treated negatively. But the spread of slanguage in fiction, particularly in modern literature, only encourages further investigations to be implemented in the field of translation of non-standard language.

There is hardly any other term that is as ambiguous and obscure as the term slang as it indicates everything that is beneath the standard usage of current English (Galperin, 1981). Even though the terms *slang* and *slanguage* in this article are used interchangeably, some differences between them could be distinguished. According to Stenström (2002) the term *slanguage* comprises not only words that are considered to be *slang*, but also other forms of slangy language: taboo words, swear words, vogue words, vague words, small words.

Translation theory provides three main translation methods of slanguage items, i.e. softening, literal translation and stylistic compensation. Softening is focused on the perception of the target text reader; the language of the target text is formulated in such a way that it sounds natural and comprehensible for the reader. However, the degree of omitted or softened slangy items should not be too high;

otherwise the style of the text will be distorted (Nida, 2000). Literal translation is used when words of the source language are translated directly into the target language (Vinay and Darbelnet, 2000). Stylistic compensation involves making up for the loss of a source text effect by recreating a similar effect in the target text using the means specific to the target language or text (Baker, 1988). Thus, **the aim of the research** is to investigate peculiarities of slanguage translation methods in theory and practice. Applied scientific research methods have been the following: *literary analysis* which allowed to review various issues concerning translation theory and to perceive the importance of the application of different translation techniques; *metaanalysis* that provided a possibility to interpret the results and conclusions made by other authors in similar investigations and *contrastive method* which enabled to analyse the structure of languages and to estimate different and similar aspects of their systems.

Theoretical Approach to the Translation Methods and Procedures

Translation is an important social activity that could be described as a process of

> "changing an original written text (the source text or ST) or the original verbal language (the source language or SL) into a written text (the target text or TT) or a different verbal language (the target language or TL)" (Munday, 2001, p.5).

However, the central problem of translating has always been how much the translator can deviate from the source text. Today the translator has to pay attention to three major factors: the purpose of the translation, the type of the text and the readership. Newmark (1998) presents the following methods of translation: *word-for-word* translation when the source language word-order is retained, the words are translated literally by their most common meanings; *literal translation* where the source language grammatical constructions are transferred to their nearest target language equivalents but the lexical words are translated literally without an attention paid to the context; *faithful translation* which recreates the precise contextual meaning of the original within the constrains of the target language grammatical

structures. The latter seeks to be completely faithful to the intentions of the writer; *semantic translation* which considers the aesthetic value of the text as the most significant factor, and the translator renders less important cultural words by culturally neutral terms; *adaptation* is defined as the freest form of translation; *free translation* that presents the content without the form of the original; *idiomatic translation* reproduces the message of the original but tends to distort the meaning by using idioms where these do not exist in the original and *communicative translation* that attempts to transfer the exact contextual meaning of the original in such a way that both content and language are acceptable and understandable to the reader. It is also worth to mention that Newmark (1998) identifies the difference between translation methods and translation procedures. He claims that, "while translation methods relate to whole texts, translation procedures are used for sentences and the smaller units of language" (Newmark, 1998, p.81). Among the most determinate and frequent procedures used by translators Newmark (1998) points out transference, naturalization, cultural equivalent, functional equivalent, synonymy, shifts or transpositions, compensation, etc.

Towards the Understanding of Slanguage

The term *slanguage* is considered to be a non-standard variety of language that could be prescribed to a form of slang or the language employing much slang. Linguists' opinions vary on the differences between slang and other forms of non-standard language. Stenström indicates that *slanguage*

"does not only consist of what we generally perceive as slang, <…> but also vague words such as stuff, thingy, dirty words like bitch, cunt, and small words like sort of, you know" (Stenström, 2002, p.64).

The attitude towards slanguage is said to be negative. Generally, the main attention has been paid to the use of the standard official language among people and its correctness in all cultures. Accordingly, such a phenomenon as slanguage has not been analysed very seriously for a long time by linguists as it was treated negatively. However, the situation has changed. With the spread of modern literature slanguage and its types have been disscussed and analysed more deeply. The significance of slang is evident in the English language. It is analysed by linguists in various articles, books and it is recorded in various dictionaries. Ockerstrom claims that there are several attitudes towards *slang*:

"It is seen as either a harbinger of hope and change (particularly among the young) or as a threat to what is perceived as "proper" language and society" (Ockerstrom, 2007, p.1).

Lithuanian linguists such as Kniūkšta (2001), Pupkis (2005), Župerka (2006) also wrote concerning issues of slang and its usage whereas Balčiūnienė (2006) focused on slang translation.

Various sources provide a lot of definitions of slang. Slang is considered to be words, phrases and usages being regarded as very informal and often restricted to special contexts or peculiar to a specified profession, class, etc. (OXFORD 2003). Encyclopaedia *Britannica* defines slang as un-conventional words or phrases that express either something new or something old in a new way. <...>Nonstandard word

usage includes cant or jargon, synonyms for vague and high-sounding or technical and esoteric language not immediately intelligible to the uninitiated (BRITANNICA). Allan and Burridge (2006) state that slang is the language of a highly colloquial and contemporary type which is considered stylistically inferior to standard formal and even to polite informal speech. Moreover, it should be highlighted that different items of slanguage vary in different languages and cultures. Consequently, it is not easy to find the exact equivalents for certain words during the translation process. In order to solve the translation problems, three major translation methods, i.e. softening, literal translation and stylistic compensation are applied during the translation process.

Translation of Slanguage in Marian Keyes's Novel "Watermelon"

The research material has been selected from Marian Keyes' novel "*Watermelon*". The book has been taken randomly, however, the author is considered to be one of the best selling authors of modern literature and several of her books have been translated into Lithuanian. The scope of the research is *136* instances.

Translation method of *softening* is the most frequently used in the translation of slanguage items of the novel. It does not contradict to the essence of dynamic equivalence that is depicted by Nida as "the closest natural equivalent to the source-language message" (Nida, 2000, p.136). This type of the translation method is focused on the perception of the TT readers, how they would comprehend the rendered message. The language of the TT should be formulated in such a way that it would sound natural and understandable for the readers. However, the translator should be aware of the words being softened or being omitted as the high degree of such items' omission or softening might distort the translated text and its style.

The softening method in the translation of the text is used in order to avoid rude and vulgar expressions that occur in the ST. Though, slanguage items are neutralized, the dynamic equivalence is attained. The majority of slangy items of the ST are replaced by words that belong to the standard language of the TT.

The following examples could illustrate the statements above.

"*A crap one*," I mumbled. (Keyes, 2005, p.110)
– *Labai prasta*, – sumurmėjau. (Keyes, 2004, p.123)

"*That's crap*!" I protested loudly. (Keyes, 2005, p.152)
– *Nesąmonė*, – garsiai papriešaravau. (Keyes, 2004, p.167)

I told you that mum hated that **crappy old vase** that you made for her. (Keyes, 2005, p.107)
Sakiau, kad mama labai nemėgo tos **niekam tikusios tavo vazos**. (Keyes, 2004, p.121)

One of the most common words which is softened in the translation process is the word "*crap*". The direct meaning of the word is "solid waste that is passed from your bowels" (LONGMAN 2006). It would correspond to the Lithuanian word "*šūdas*", however such equivalents as "*prastas*", "*niekam tikusi*" or "*nesąmonė*" are chosen instead. From the purely linguistic point of view this transformation is not justified as the words of different stylistic register were used. On the other hand, the cultural specificity of the TL

restricts the usage of the word *"crap"* as this word is used only in particular social groups and in informal situations.

The other group of words that is usually softened is swear words. The usage of such words as *"fuck", "asshole", "shit", "piss off"* is tolerated in spoken English, but their Lithuanian equivalents are unacceptable in Lithuanian.

Consider the following examples:

> "Oh **fuck off** and leave me alone," I would reply. (Keyes, 2005, p.113)
> –**Atstok**, duok ramybę, – atsakydavau. (Keyes, 2004, p.127)

> **Fuck them**, I thought cheerfully. (Keyes, 2005, p.200)
> **Velniop jas**, džiugiai pagalvojau. (Keyes, 2004, p.219)

> He's like a **fucking machine,** with no feelings at all. (Keyes, 2005, p.366)
> Jis panašus į **prakeiktą** bejausmę **mašiną**. (Keyes, 2004, p.393)

> "Chose your next words very carefully, you **asshole**." (Keyes, 2005, p.463)
> – Kitus žodžius rinkis labai atsargiai, **mulki**. (Keyes, 2004, p.498)

> I was **pissed-off with him** for playing with my feelings. (Keyes, 2005, p.487)
> Jis man **įgriso iki gyvo kaulo** žaizdamas mano jausmais. (Keyes, 2004, p.522)

> Is it really like trying **to shit a couch**? (Keyes, 2005, p.45)
> Ar tai nepanašu į mėginimą **pridirbti ant sofos**? (Keyes, 2004, p.56)

> "Oh shit," I thought frantically<…>. (Keyes, 2005, p.496)
> „O, velniai griebtų", paklaikusi pagalvojau,<…>. (Keyes, 2004, p.531)

The next group of words includes such words as *"goddamn", "bloody", "stuff"* that do not have definite lexical meaning in English, but they intensify the transferred message. However, the Lithuanian variants show the tendency to omit these words in such a way reducing emotional power on the TT readers.

Consider the following instances:

> I thought he was **too goddamn lazy** to have an affair. (Keyes, 2005, p.87)
> Maniau, **kad jis pernelyg tingus**, kad galėtų užmegsti romaną.(Keyes, 2004, p.99)

> <…>, but you **can be damn sure** it won't happen again. (Keyes, 2005, p.95)
> <…>, bet **gali būti tikra**, jog tai nepasikartos. (Keyes, 2004, p.108)

> Mother **bloody** Teresa? (Keyes, 2005, p.32)
> Motina Teresė? (Keyes, 2004, p.41)

> You know the **stuff** I'm talking about. (Keyes, 2005, p.35)
> Žinote, apie ką kalbu. (Keyes, 2004, p.44)

> She murmured **stuff like** <…>. (Keyes, 2005, p.74)
> Ji murmėjo **kažką panašaus** į <…>. (Keyes, 2004, p.86)

The other translation method applicable in the translation process of slanguage is *stylistic compensation*. It involves making up for the loss of a source text effect by recreating a similar effect in the target text using the means specific to the target language or text (Baker, 1988). Stylistic compensation method allows to use the same linguistic devices in the TT and in such a way to obtain a similar effect in the ST. But compensation can involve the use of different linguistic devices in the target text too if they create a similar effect to that achieved in the source text (Baker, 1988). Generally speaking, the stylistic compensation method helps to avoid language and culture specific problems occurring in the translation, but translators should render culture-specific items in such a way that the proper style of the text is maintained. This method is usually used while translating idiomatic expressions, puns and in other cases when exact equivalent cannot be found.

> "**We'll get plastered**," she said enthusiastically over the phone. (Keyes, 2005, p.184)
> – **Mudvi nusilesim iki žemės graibymo**, – džiugiai pasakė te-lefonu. (Keyes, 2004, p.222)

> **What a pain in the arse**, I thought rebelliously. (Keyes, 2005, p.393)
> **Kokia rakštis šikinėje**, maištingai pagalvojau. (Keyes, 2004, p.423)

> **Dammit**, dammit, dammit. (Keyes, 2005, p.272)
> **Kad jį perkūnas**, kad jį perkūnas, kad jį perkūnas. (Keyes, 2004, p.294)

> I drained the glass **in one go**. (Keyes, 2005, p.73)
> Ištuštinau taurę **vienu mauku**. (Keyes, 2004, p.85)

> Then I would eff and blind **like a fishwife** <…>. (Keyes, 2005, p.94)
> Tada nusikeikdavau **kaip vežikas arba turgaus boba** <…>. (Keyes, 2004, p.106)

The above examples show the translator's successful try to render the English collocations into Lithuanian equivalents that are specific only to the TT readership as *"vienu mauku", "kad jį perkūnas", "kokia rakštis šikinėje", "kaip turgaus boba"*, etc.

However, there were several instances that caused certain difficulties for the translator. The examples below illustrate successful transference of lexical meaning, but failure to render emotional impact on the reader.

Consider the following examples:

> <… > and **wishy-washy fashion**. (Keyes, 2005, p.178)
> <…> ir **be jokio entuziazmo**. (Keyes, 2004, p.194)

> I asked, feeling like a right old **fuddy-duddy**. (Keyes, 2005, p.275)
> <…> paklausiau jausdamasi kaip tikra sena **nevykelė**. (Keyes, 2004, p.295)

These examples contain puns where phonetic aspect plays an important role next to the lexial meaning. The usage of similar Lithuanian puns would be appreciated, too.

The last translation method analysed in the article is *direct* or *literal translation* method. Vinay and Darbelnet claim that literal translation is

> "the direct transfer of a source language text into a grammatically and idiomatically appropriate target language text in which the translator's task is limited to observing the adherence to the linguistic servitudes of the target language" (Vinay and Darbelnet, 2000, p.86).

Thus, this method is recommended to be applied whenever it is possible to find the equivalents in the TL.

The direct or literal translation is mainly used if ST and the TT languages belong to the same language family or they

share the same or very similar cultural background. But it is not advisable to use the literal translation method when languages and their cultures have certain kind of differences in the way of thinking or structuring the language patterns (Vinay and Darbelnet, 2000).

The examples below show that the direct transfers are used in a considerate number of cases, commonly in the descriptions of people, their parts of the body and their actions. Among the directly translated words we come across "*bitch*", "*bastard*", "*arse*", "*tits*", etc.

"She's such a ***bitch***," Helen was complaining. (Keyes, 2005, p.106)
– Ji tikra ***kalė***, – skundėsi Helena. (Keyes, 2004, p.119)

"Smug ***bitches***, I thought sourly <…>". (Keyes, 2005, p.18)
Pasipūtusios ***kalės***, – tariau pagiežingai. (Keyes, 2004, p.27)

I wanted to run after him, but the ***bastard*** knew that I was bed-bound courtesy of several stitches in my vagina. (Keyes, 2005, p.16)
Norėjau lėkti jam iš paskos, bet jis, ***šunsnukis***, žinojo, kad mane prie lovos prikausčiusios kelios siūlės makštyje. (Keyes, 2004, p.25)

"Your father is a ***bastard***", I whispered to my child. (Keyes, 2005, p.32)
– Tavo tėvas tikras ***niekšas***, – sušnabždėjau savo vaikui. (Keyes, 2004, p.42)

But then I remembered what a contrary ***bastard*** Fate is. (Keyes, 2005, p.85)
Bet paskui prisiminiau, koks užgaidus tas ***išpera*** likimas. (Keyes, 2004, p.97)

Fat ***arse*** never won fair James. (Keyes, 2005, p.22)
Kvaila ***subinė*** niekada nebuvo užkariavusi dorojo Džeimso. (Keyes, 2004, p.30)

<…> while I have ***to work my arse off studying*** <…>. (Keyes, 2005, p.495)
<…> o aš tuo tarpu ***turiu trinti subinę prie mokslų*** <…>. (Keyes, 2004, p.531)

<…> I would be a victim of "shrunken flat droopy ***tit***" syndrome. (Keyes, 2005, p.25)
<…> jog bijojau tapti "susiraukšlėjusių, plokščių, nukarusių ***papų***" sindromo auka. (Keyes, 2004, p.34)

My tone of voice was intended to convey that I would not, as the saying goes, ***piss on him*** if he was on fire. (Keyes, 2005, p.348)
Šitokiu tonu norėjau parodyti, kad jeigu jis užsidegtų, neketinu ***jo apmyžti***. (Keyes, 2004, p.374)

"***Shag him***", she said. (Keyes, 2005, p.250)
– ***Pasidulkink su juo***, – tarė ji. (Keyes, 2004, p.271)

<…> that every day of his life would be a ***Shagfest.*** (Keyes, 2005, p.326)
<...> kiekviena gyvenimo diena turėtų būti ***dulkinimosi šventė***. (Keyes, 2004, p.352)

The above presented instances once more prove the fact that direct or literal translation method is applied when the exact or close equivalents in the target language exist if compared to the source language.

Conclusions

The theoretical analysis of slanguage translation methods and their application in practice allowed to show the main tendencies in slanguage translation from English into Lithuanian. Thus, it could be claimed that softening translation method is the most prolific in slanguage translation. However, the translator should be aware that the high degree of softened or omitted words might distort the translated text and its style. Moreover, the overuse of softening method might weaken the emotional impact on the target text readers. Stylistic compensation method is not always used successfully in recreating the similar source text effect in the target text. Furthermore, direct transfers are applied when exact or close equivalents are found in the target language. Nevertheless, the findings of the research reveal the major problems in slanguage translation, it would seem that further investigation is needed in this field.

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Slengo vertimo ypatybės

Santrauka

Terminas „slengas" yra pakankamai dviprasmiškas ir neapibrėžtas lingvistinis terminas, kadangi jis apima viską, kas peržengia šiuolaikinės literatūrinės anglų kalbos vartosenos ribas. Vertimo teorija teikia tris pagrindinius slengo vertimo metodus: žodžio reikšmės „sušvelninimą", pažodinį vertimą ir stilistinę kompensaciją. Žodžio reikšmės „sušvelninimo" metodas yra orientuotas į tikslinį teksto skaitytoją; siekiama, kad verstinio teksto kalba skaitytojui skambėtų kuo natūraliau. Tačiau vertėjas neturėtų praleisti ar sušvelninti per didelio skaičiaus slengo žodžių, kadangi dėl to nukentėtų teksto stilius. Pažodinis vertimas yra taikomas tada, kai originalo kalbos žodžius galima išversti ir yra tikslinga išversti pažodžiui į kitą kalbą. Dažniausiai šis metodas yra vartojamas, kai originalo ir tikslinė kalbos priklauso tai pačiai kalbų grupei arba jas jungia bendra kultūrinė patirtis. Stilistinė kompensacija yra toks vertimo metodas, kuris leidžia naudoti tas pačias arba skirtingas stilistines priemones tam, kad būtų pasiektas panašus poveikis tikslinei auditorijai. Taip kompensuojama dalis vertimo nuostolių. Šio tyrimo pagrindinis tikslas yra išnagrinėti minėtų vertimo metodų taikymą verčiant šiuolaikinę grožinę literatūrą. Išvadose akcentuojama, kad dažniausiai pasitaikantis slengo žodžių vertimo metodas yra žodžio reikšmės „sušvelninimas", tuo tarpu stilistinė kompensacija ne visada sėkmingai panaudojama siekiant sukurti panašų poveikį tikslinei auditorijai. Pažodinis vertimas dažniausiai taikomas tais atvejais, kai tikslus arba artimas ekvivalentas originalo kalbos žodžiui egzistuoja tikslinėje kalboje.

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