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**ANISOMORPHIC HUMOUR OR HUMOROUS
ANISOMORPHISM? A CASE OF WORDPLAY IN POLISH
TRANSLATIONS OF SHAKESPEARE'S
*LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST***

Abstract: The prevalence of jocular elements in Shakespeare's oeuvre does not cease to evoke linguists' interest. Much as humorousness is viewed universal and ubiquitous, translation technicalities related thereto still seem to pose a challenge for translators. The notion of anisomorphism – inextricably related to rendition and perceived as one of the key constraints affecting translation of wordplay – gathered little attention both at the linguistic and pragmatic level. Therefore, the paper seeks to arrive at a succinct yet comprehensive account of anisomorphic instances. Alongside, the rationale behind the application of particular translation strategies did not go unrecognized. The discussion is predicated upon examples extracted from Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*.

Key words: anisomorphism, wordplay, translation, Shakespeare, humour

Introduction

Plays in Shakespeare's oeuvre are interlarded with the plethora of puns and repartees, of which *Love's Labour's Lost* is indubitably a great example, for it covers over 332 instances of wordplay. Since Shakespeare is pondered a virtuoso punster, one needs a virtuoso translator who contrives to render anisomorphic humorous elements, i.e. to cover the asymmetry between the levels of signifier and signified in Polish and English. That said, the paper aims to elucidate the notion of anisomorphism alongside the extent to which it influenced the choices of Polish translators of *Love's Labour's Lost*. Following Mahood's (1988:9)

vantage point that *[w]ordplay was a game the Elizabethans played seriously*, one may presuppose that he does not concur in the recognition that wordplay is merely a carefree and naïve experimentation with words which lacks refinement, commonly ascribed to Shakespeare's riper writing. That said, translating wordplay duly is of great importance, on the grounds that, as averred by Ewbank's (1986:51), Shakespeare exhibited interest in *the arts of language* which are as practical as function-oriented. Admittedly, his prime purpose was to persuade the recipient *of the human realities of thought and feeling in his plays*. As presupposed by Krawiec (2017:110),

much as diligent efforts were made to pinpoint the finite number of Shakespearean puns in the corpus, and the inventory of wordplay seems exhaustive, the play may well still be found subject to further research.

Puns

Most obviously, formulations and taxonomies pertinent to puns and wordplay are at least multifarious. Inasmuch as it is prudent to arrive at a succinct yet all-embracing account, one should start with exploiting the wording furnished by *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, henceforth abbreviated as *CODLT*, which says: "[a pun is] an expression that achieves emphasis or humour by contriving an ambiguity, two distinct meanings being suggested either by the same word or by two similar-sounding words". Leech (1969:209) elaborates on puns in an akin vein: *[it] is a foregrounded lexical ambiguity, which may have its origin either in homonymy or polysemy*. As averred by Heller (1974:271),

the pun represents not just one pattern but rather an entire class of different patterns which all share the following structural characteristics: namely, that a single manifesting mark signals more than one conceptual function.

Having adduced and juxtaposed three seemingly comprehensive delineations, it is readily discernible that they fail to cover the term profoundly. As pondered by Krawiec (2017:107), *CODLT repudiates wordplay that is predicated upon syntactic ambiguity or homography, and Leech – upon homophony*. In further elaboration she continues that Heller's formulation is exclusive of jests underpinned by the horizontal axis i.e. contingent upon two adjacent lexical items, hence encompasses merely those based on the vertical one. That said, Delabastita's (1993:56) vantage point seems not only relevant, but the most apposite:

wordplay is the general name indicating the various textual phenomena (i.e. that is on the level of performance or parole) in which certain features inherent in the structure of the language used (level of competence or langue) are exploited in such a way as to establish

a communicatively significant, (near)-simultaneous confrontation of at least two linguistic structures with more or less dissimilar meanings (signifieds) or more or less similar forms (signifiers).

In simplified terms, Delabastita's wording is in-depth enough, in so far as it suffices to encompass the degrees of correspondence between signifiers, *viz.* paronymic, homophonic, homographic, and homonymic instances. Importantly enough, the wordings concur in the recognition that the core of the pun is located in similarity of senses and dissimilitude of forms (cf. Krawiec 2017). Accordingly, the facetiousness is contingent upon the link between semantic and formal contrast – the more discernible the first and the finer the second, the more successful the resultant pun.

As regards the taxonomy, much as there are many accounts as how to classify puns, the general dichotomy seems to prevail. Vertical wordplay, otherwise referred to as paradigmatic, implicit (Offord 1990), or self-contained (Ritchie 2005), is underpinned by co-occurrence of at least two identical or akin stings within the same component. Conversely, a horizontal, syntagmatic, explicit (Offord 1990), or contextually integrated (Ritchie 2005) pun is underlain by the presence of two adjacent elements located lineally within the same text, and the hilariousness is activated by former contextual knowledge. Wordplay is frequently examined on account of lexical relations, *viz.* homophonous, homonymous, and paronymous nature. Admittedly, the taxonomy is every so often inclusive of homography, since as pondered by Kökeritz (1953:87) *no Shakespearean pun was ever based upon the spelling of a word; either meaning or pronunciation is involved, but never orthography.* As presupposed by Offord (1997:237), vertical wordplay covers usually subtle intellectual howlers, *with a scornful, cutting edge*, whereas this subtlety in horizontal puns is rather to be replaced by a *more conscious, deliberate and obvious effort to produce comedy, or sometimes self-deprecatory irony.*

Language (an)isomorphism

With regard to humour translation, the notion of isomorphism cannot go unrecognized. Stemming from Greek, with *iso* pointing out to 'equal', and *morphosis* denoting 'form', or 'shape', isomorphism is a purely mathematical term. Linguistically speaking, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics* employs the following formulation:

“[...]an exact correspondence between both the elements of two sets and the relations defined by operation on these elements. Hence of linguistic systems: thus a set of oppositions in one language could at an abstract level correspond to, or be 'isomorphic with', one in another, only the forms by which they are realized being different”.

Thereby, isomorphism denotes a one-to-one correspondence of at least two sets of elements, e.g. Roman and Arabic numerals. Most importantly, altering the components in one set, triggers analogous alterations within the other. In further elaboration, in so far as [l]anguages are not lexically isomorphic (Rasmussen:2010), this case is deemed rather infrequent, and usually finds application while accounting for the contrary term, viz. anisomorphism. *Dictionary of Lexicography* furnishes the following wording: „[a] mismatch between a pair of languages due to their semantic, grammatical and cultural differences. This leads to a relative absence of direct, one-to-one translation equivalents”. What follows from the aforementioned enunciation is that it is not always feasible to apply a one-to-one equivalent in the target passage. Most frequently, rather than full or exact, translation equivalents are *partial, approximative, non-literal and asymmetrical*, on account of the issue of linguistic and cultural anisomorphism. One may encapsulate anisomorphism by dint of the following diagrams:

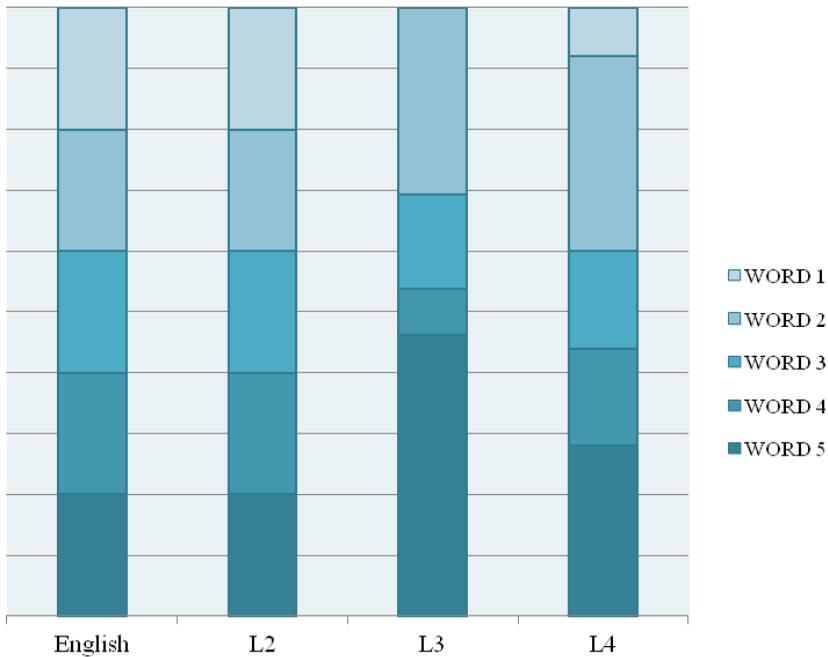


Diagram 1. Language Anisomorphism.¹

¹ Author’s own elaboration based on: Lyons (1968).

The diagram presents five deliberately random English words collated with three, again purposefully undefined, languages. In order to avoid abstruseness, the words were plainly named WORD 1, WORD 2, WORD 3, WORD 4, WORD 5, whereas languages – English, L2, L3, and L4. What may be ensued from the diagram is that individual words cover more or less broad or more or less narrow sense, which is naturally contingent upon the language. For instance, English fully corresponds to L2, thereby in theory they may be called isomorphic, since as accounted for already, in practice no languages are entirely isomorphic. Furthermore, ‘WORD 1’ is not present in L3, and its sense is far broader in English and L2 than in L4.

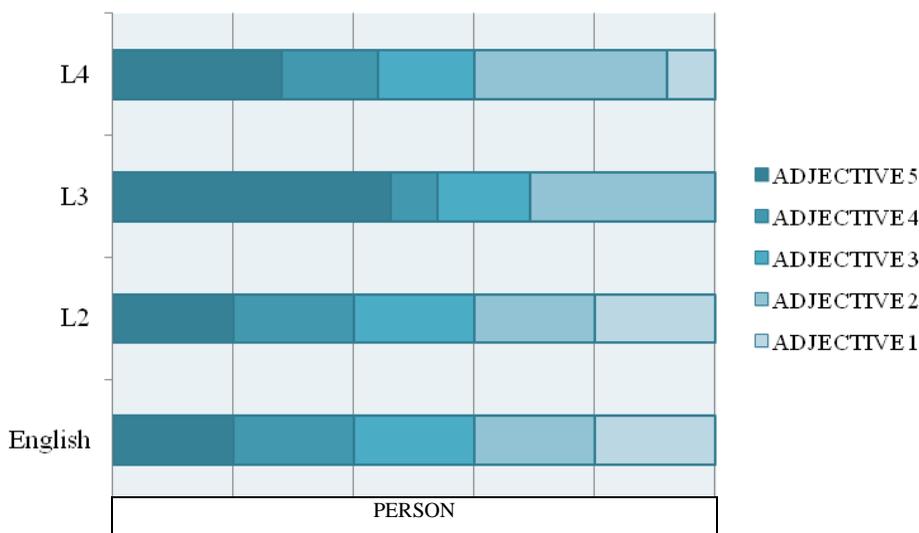


Diagram 2. Language Anisomorphism. Isomorphic words.²

In order to arrive at an even more extensive account of anisomorphism, the component called ‘PERSON’ was added to the diagram to be juxtaposed with an adjective or a group of adjectives, *viz.* ADJECTIVE 1, ADJECTIVE 2, ADJECTIVE 3, ADJECTIVE 4, and/or ADJECTIVE 5. In the case of ‘PERSON is very ADJECTIVE1’, one may readily notice that the meaning of the adjective differs across languages. L4 demonstrates a far less comprehensive understanding than English and L2, whereas there is no such adjective in L3 whatsoever. Therefore, there is no isomorphic expression in L3 for ‘ADJECTIVE 1’. To recapitulate, as posited by Lyons (1968:55), the extent to which two languages are isomorphic is largely contingent upon on the amount of

² Author’s own elaboration based on: Lyons (1968).

cultural correspondence in the two societies that use those languages. There may not be any corresponding words within two languages, which is quite common in terms of culture-bound elements. Newmark (1988) avers that culture-specific words are peculiar to the society that uses the language and intrinsically associated to the culture of that particular community. He continues that such words are therefore linked to the *context of a cultural tradition*. Those may encompass ecology, leisure, food, politics are there other fields.

(An)isomorphism and translation

With reference to translation, anisomorphism may be accounted for as asymmetry, since it is germane to losses and gains that the translator has to estimate during the processes of interlinguistic transfer and that need be taken heed of in the course of juxtaposing two languages. Anisomorphism seems to largely influence translation of wordplay, for it is rather an infrequent case when in the course of rendition both the lexical relation such homophony, homonymy or paronymy is imparted alongside the primary, secondary, and sometimes tertiary senses. Rendering Shakespeare's wordplay reflects the essential peculiarities of the linguistic systems, the lack of isomorphism between the levels of signifier and signified, *viz.* between form and content, which is particularly conspicuous while endeavouring to transfer instances of homonymous nature which are predicated upon the same accentuation and spelling. Even the most perfunctory linguistic juxtaposition of English and Polish corroborates that the lexical systems of those languages, and as posited by Rabadán (1991:125), of any other pair(s) of languages, lack a one-to-one isomorphic correspondence. Thereby, wordplay predicated upon the source language ambiguity is rather improbable to be conveyed in the exact same way in the target text. The difficulty in wordplay translation, as pondered by Delabastita (1994:223), arises due to the fact that

the semantic and pragmatic effects of source text wordplay find their origin in particular structural characteristics of the source language for which the target language more often than not fails to produce a counterpart, such as the existence of certain homophones, near-homophones, polysemic clusters, idioms or grammatical rules.

The paper runs counter to the prevalent opinion favouring the untranslatability of wordplay. All such statements are contingent upon an exemplary pre-coined definitions of what a translation needs to be, whereas the very fact that source instances of wordplay are imparted in target texts, does nullify that opinion at least to some extent. That said, it is prudent to adduce Delabastita's (1993: 190) standpoint, who postulates that

[w]hat seems to be called for is an approach to wordplay translation that stops favouring ideal notions of translation and translatability and that addresses instead the rules and norms that govern the translation of puns in actual reality.

(An)isomorphism and Shakespeare’s language

The issue of anisomorphism occurs at a seemingly straightforward level of the names of Shakespeare’s characters, for they convey a great number of connotations, including those of culture-bound nature. One may illustrate the issue with the character named *Bottom*. Semantically, the word denotes the lowest or deepest part of something [s1], and a person’s buttocks [s2]. Since in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* Bottom is a weaver, the name also refers to the core, spool or skein that the yarn is around [s3]. In Polish, the character’s name was rendered as Podszewka [lining], Spodek [saucer], Wątek [thread], or even Duppek [asshole].

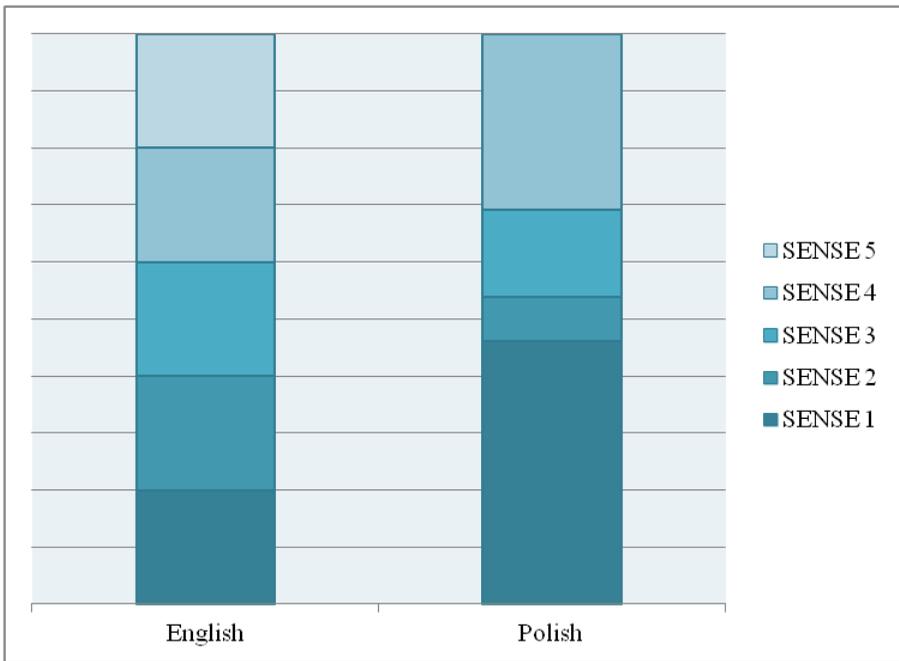


Diagram 3. Language Anisomorphism based on Shakespeare’s language.³

³ Author’s own elaboration based on: Lyons (1968).

What ensues from Diagram 3 is that the meanings of one word may differ across languages, hence e.g. ‘SENSE 1’ may embody a wider array of connotations and collocations in Polish, and lack other senses in English. In a similar vein, the English term *ass* covers three meanings, be it: ‘a donkey’, ‘a person’s buttocks’, and ‘an asinine person’, while its Polish equivalent is devoid of any connotations with somebody’s lower body part. Furthermore, in common parlance both languages employ a phrase *to make an ass of somebody/robić z kogoś ośła*, with a modest semantic difference, viz. in English, *ass* points out to somebody asinine, whereas the Polish term *osioł* is more probable to indicate an inept, clumsy or unintelligent person. Interestingly enough, at that level, the words differ also in terms of register, for the English term appears as a more derogatory one. Both literally and figuratively, the terms convey an animal connotation. Notwithstanding the lack of reference to one’s lower body part, translation is still viable by dint of partial isomorphism between the terms *ass* and *osioł*, as well as the phrases *to make an ass of somebody* and *robić z kogoś ośła*. That said, much as the terms are not entirely isomorphic, the overlaps suffice to produce a satisfactory translation that maintains the jocularity of the source play, especially in Act III, Scene 1, when Bottom’s head is transformed into the muzzle of an ass (a donkey), yet he is ignorant of that and quite perplexed while his comrades run away and says: *I see their knavery: this is to make an ass of me, to fright me if they could.*

Translation strategies

Delabastita (1993) largely contributed to humour translation theory by developing a nine-partite taxonomy of translation strategies, which includes:

1. PUN>PUN – the source text wordplay is translated by dint of a target equivalent. Interestingly, linguistic features of the source text may alter in the translation process, i.e. homonymy may be rendered as homophony etc.
2. PUN>NON-PUN – in the course of translation, the punning conjunction is not imparted, therefore the jocular conjunction is abandoned.
3. PUN>PUNOID – by dint of this strategy, the translator endeavours to convey the source text meaning by rendering the pun as a rhetorical device, such as paradox, rhyme, repetition, irony, alliteration, referential vagueness etc.
4. PUN>ZERO – source text passage inclusive of the pun is skipped in the target text.

5. **DIRECT COPY** – with no concern about the resultant semantic consequences, the source language signifiers are imposed upon the target text.
6. **TRANSFERENCE** – the signified of the source text is foisted upon the target text passage.
7. **NON-PUN>PUN** – *The TT contains wordplay in a passage that is obviously meant as a translational solution to a ST passage that features no wordplay.*
8. **ZERO>PUN** – new textual material is incorporated into the target text.
9. **EDITORIAL TECHNIQUES** – as suggested by the name, it covers the application of explanatory comments or footnotes.

Delabastita's translation strategies proved enough to cover the translation choices of Polish translators. As tabulated below, prevalent inclination towards strategies such as PUN>NON-PUN, PUN>ZERO, TRANSFERENCE, and DIRECT COPY seems to be contingent upon anisomorphic relations between English and Polish passages.

STRATEGY	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
PUN>PUN	171	17,2%
PUN>NON-PUN	763	76,6%
PUN>ZERO	21	2,1%
DIRECT COPY	2	0,2%
TRANSFERENCE	2	0,2%
NON-PUN>PUN	16	1,6%
PUN>PUNOID	20	2,0%
ZERO>PUN	1	0,1%

Table 1. The overall quantitative distribution of translation strategies applied by the Polish translators.⁴

STRATEGY	PUN>PUN	PUN>NON-PUN	PUN>ZERO	DIRECT COPY	TRANSFERENCE	NON-PUN>PUN	PUN>PUNOID	ZERO>PUN
Słomczyński	54 (16,3%)	265 (79,8%)	5 (1,5%)	-	1 (0,3%)	1 (0,3%)	6 (1,8%)	-
Ulrich	54 (16,3%)	270 (81,3%)	2 (0,6%)	1 (0,3%)	1 (0,3%)	-	4 (1,2%)	-
Barańczak	63 (19%)	228 (68,7%)	14 (4,2%)	1 (0,3%)	-	15 (4,5%)	10 (3%)	1 (0,3%)

Table 2. Translation strategies applied by the Polish translators.⁵

⁴ Krawiec (2017).

⁵ Krawiec (2017).

Visibly enough, as plotted in the tables above, in almost 80% of the cases, punning conjunctions were not successfully imparted, ergo the flavour of jocularity was not salvaged. Jests predicated upon the homophonic reading included *inter alia deer* [*dear*], *words* [*wards*], *knight* [*night*]. Homonymic howlers restricted by anisomorphism covered e.g. *arms* ['limbs'; 'weapons'], *bound* ['constrained'; 'constipated'], or *dull* ['vacuous'; name of one of the characters]. Moreover, a complex multi-layered paronymic pun on *adieu, a Jew, Jude, Judas, ass, and as* was not retained:

BOYET

Therefore, as he is an ass, let him go.

And so adieu, sweet Jude! nay, why dost thou stay?

DUMAIN

For the latter end of his name.

BIRON

For the ass to the Jude; give it him: - Jud-ass, away!

HOLOFERNES

This is not generous, not gentle, not humble.

BOYET

A light for Monsieur Judas! it grows dark, he may stumble.

Homonymous instances of wordplay cover identity in terms of spelling and accentuation, and dissimilitude as regards meaning. As pondered by Krawiec (2017:110-111), with regard to the overall formal arrangement of puns in *Love's Labour's Lost*, *appreciably disproportionate representation* is discernible, with paronymy and homophony equating jointly to 47,9%, and homonymy covering 52,1% of all instances of wordplay.

	HOMOPHONY		HOMONYMY		PARONYMY	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
VERTICAL	28	8,4%	97	29,2%	50	15,1%
HORIZONTAL	11	3,3%	76	22,9%	70	21,1%
TOTAL	39	11,7%	173	52,1%	120	36,2%

Table 3. The overall quantitative distribution of puns detected in *Love's Labour's Lost*.⁶

As already mentioned, homonymic wordplay is the most successful, since the biggest jocularity is triggered when the semantic contrast is patent, and the formal one is subtle. The following pun subsumes under the category of vertical

⁶ Krawiec (2017).

wordplay, for it is contingent upon the paradigmatic axis, and conveys two senses co-occurring within the same portion of the text:

ADRIANO DE ARMANDO

[...] *and with his royal finger, thus, dally
with my **excrement**, with my mustachio; but, sweet
heart, let that pass. By the world, I recount no
fable: some certain special honours it pleaseth his
greatness to impart to Armado, a soldier, a man of
travel [...].*

Barańczak rendered:

ARMANDO

[...] *i monarszym palcem
poigrać z tą **odroślą** mej twarzy, jaką są wąsy – ale
zamilczmy i o tym, kochaneczku. Na honor! Nie opowiadam tu
przecież bajek! Owszem, jego majestatowi podoba się czasem
złać jakieś szczególne laski na don Armada, żołnierza,
podróżnika [...].*

The word *excrement* that the pun is predicated upon, is understood simultaneously as ‘an outgrowth of hair’ [s1], and ‘faeces’ [s2]. In the target text passage, Barańczak opted for the word *odrośl*, which corresponds to English ‘sprout’, ‘root’, or ‘offshoot’ [s3], or more loosely to something that having been cut, sprouts again [s4]. Much as in English [s1] and [s2] share a relation of homonymous nature, Polish word ‘odrośl’ does not trigger any immediate association. Consequently, the phrase *poigrać z tą odroślą mej twarzy*, may be formally pondered a counterpart, since the primary senses, viz. [s1] and [s4] overlap more or less equivalently, yet the passage is deprived of the source text jocularly discernible in *dally with my excrement*. That said, the PUN > NON-PUN strategy was applied. As pondered by Krawiec (2017:117), the translator *decided to have compensated for this form of loss occurring, and entertained the ZERO>PUN strategy previously in the target text.*

Conclusions

Asymmetry between the levels of signifier and signified in two languages belonging to two divergent language groups appears as the chief constraint largely influencing translation of wordplay. Translators’ penchant for the application of hardly efficacious strategies such as PUN>NON-PUN, PUN>ZERO, TRANSFERENCE, and DIRECT COPY is deeply underpinned by the predominance of anisomorphic relations between English and Polish passages. An in-depth analysis revealed that merely one-sixth of the translation

choices managed to have coped with the lack of isomorphic correspondence. Wordplay based on homonymic reading, encompassing over 50% of all instances, proved the most challenging, since Polish and English are devoid of isomorphic pairs of words corresponding both in terms of lexical relation, such as homonymy, homophony, or paronymy, as well as in terms of primary and secondary senses.

What needs to be taken heed of is that the transfer of facetious elements reliant on the source text ambiguity in the exact same way as in the target text is rather dubious. Ergo, whenever viable, the translators should resort to other strategies that convey the sense, the pivot, yet fail to salvage formal technicalities.

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