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(UN)TRANSLATABILITY OF A TEXT: A BLESSING IN DISGUISE? THE CASE OF SPANISH, ENGLISH AND POLISH

Abstract: Untranslatability constitutes one of the controversial issues within the area of Translation Studies. Scholars frequently disagree as to its very existence, some of them claiming that certain linguistic effects simply cannot be translated into another language, with others asserting that all texts produced by man are translatable to a greater or lesser degree, irrespective of the linguistic means they apply. In this paper, in order to illustrate the issue of potential untranslatability, I adopt the perspective of a translator faced with a task of rendering a text featuring a plethora of challenging linguistic effects. The original text is in Spanish and I attempt to translate its fragments into English and Polish. The paper discusses the difficulties encountered during the translation process itself, as well as the solutions selected, together with their justifications. All this is done with a view to presenting specific problems related to untranslatability, as illustrated by the original text selected for translation, as well as to demonstrating how and to what degree the challenging linguistic effects present in this text can be successfully reproduced in another language.

Key words: untranslatability, word play, pun, translation, ambiguity.

1. Introduction

As observed by Hermans (2009, p. 302), the day-to-day practice of translators demonstrates that translation is possible. Therefore, a question arises: where did the concept of “untranslatability” come from? In fact, when mentioning “untranslatability” scholars do not usually mean absolute untranslatability but rather the question whether fully adequate translation can be achieved. Untranslatability, then, is relative and may concern for instance connotation, nuance or poetic quality. To the least translatable texts belong those that purposefully exploit the idiomatic

resources of a given language, or those that use multiple codes like poetry, where words may be woven into patterns including those of a semantic, metrical, rhyming or intertextual nature. This led Jakobson (1959) to claim that poetry is untranslatable and only “creative transposition” is possible. However, the question of how creative transposition differs from translation still remains unanswered.

Since untranslatability is based both on the linguistic structure and on the relation between language and culture, it is often divided into two types: linguistic and cultural. For Catford (1965), linguistic untranslatability concerns situations where the text’s author intentionally exploits linguistic ambiguity or polysemy, whereas cultural untranslatability is identified in cases when situational features referred to in the original are absent in the culture of the translating language (Hermans, 2009, pp. 301-302).

As observed by Tomaszekiewicz, untranslatability could be described as “a feature of a certain utterance in one language which does not have an equivalent utterance in another language” (2006, p. 66). She also stated that absolute untranslatability is a very rare phenomenon and one that differs from “a lacuna”, that is “a situation in which one language lacks a certain word, notion, syntactic construction that exists in another language” (2006, p. 57). This lack can be compensated for by means of certain translation techniques. According to her, the instances of untranslatability can usually be encountered in the translation of poetry where it is necessary to simultaneously re-create the original imagery, rhythm and meaning. Therefore, certain word plays or semantic effects based on the formal properties of a given language may prove to be untranslatable (2006, p. 66).

Wojtasiewicz (1957/1992) claimed that untranslatability is an exception rather than a rule and that all texts can be translated to a greater or lesser degree (1992, p. 28). He suggested that the notion of untranslatability is related to the nature of equivalence, and proposed the definition of text equivalence whereby “text b in language B is equivalent to text a in language A if text b evokes the same reaction (associations) in its recipients as those that arise in the recipients of text a” (1992, p. 20). However, he also highlighted the shortcomings of this definition as, according to him, sometimes one text (written in one language) may produce various reactions in different people and it may also happen that one text evokes various reactions in the same person, depending on the moment of reading. Therefore, it might be claimed that a set of associations evoked in an individual by a given text is unique. On the other hand, however, because communication constitutes the predominant function of languages, the reactions that a given text evokes in various people tend to be quite similar. The degree of this similarity will inevitably differ according to the text type, but it is still possible to translate a text so that it evokes similar associations in the target language recipients as the original version produced in the source language recipients (1992, pp. 20-22).

Hejrowski (2004a), referring to Nida’s words, also agrees that all texts produced by people can be translated to a greater or lesser degree because of the

relative similarity of mental and linguistic structures, as well as the human ability “to adjust to the behavioral patterns of others [...] It would seem that we possess a kind of grid which we can employ to reinterpret experience in terms of some other conceptual framework...” (Nida, 1964, p. 55, after Hejwowski, 2004, p. 130). Therefore, it is this capacity for empathy and the flexibility of the human mind that enables people to understand what others try to communicate.

However, Hejwowski (2004b, p. 16) mentioned, after Neubert and Shreve (1992, p. 85), that there might be situations when there is no point in translating a given text as there would be no demand for such a translation. In order to support this claim, he provides an example of the hypothetical situation of translating the general theory of relativity into Tok Pisin. This would require creating specialist physics-related vocabulary, non-existent in this language, but still, it would prove an unnecessary effort since educated inhabitants of Papua New Guinea know English.

But otherwise, translation is possible and worth doing despite the inevitable losses which are an inseparable consequence of any translation activity. However, Hejwowski points out that the linguistic and cultural differences might constitute the sources of, as he calls it, relative untranslatability (2004b, p. 71). This means that all texts created by man are translatable, but certain features of the source text can make the translation process extremely difficult and demanding for the translator.

2. Materials and methods

The text selected for translation is authored by Marcos Mundstock, (born May 25, 1942) – an Argentinian musician, writer, comedian, and former broadcaster and copywriter, a founding member of Les Luthiers, an Argentine comedy-musical group, and writing many of their shows and lyrics.¹

He is an actor involved not only in the theatre but also in film and television. On the 30th March 2019 he participated in the International Congress of the Spanish Language in Cordoba delivering a brief speech.² Since he could not be physically present at the Congress due to a medical condition, the actor prepared a monologue which he recorded and which was later played for the public on a big screen installed on the stage. The monologue lasts just over 15 minutes and includes very insightful comments about the nature and peculiarities of the Spanish language. The actor presented it with his characteristic sense of humor and witty language, making the audience repeatedly burst into laughter. His monologue is

¹ <https://historia-biografia.com/marcos-mundstock-de-les-luthiers/> accessed 22.07.2023.

² https://www.diariodesevilla.es/sociedad/Video-Les-Luthiers-Marcos-Mundstock-Congreso-Lengua_0_1341166302.html accessed 22.07.2023.

extremely enjoyable to watch and listen to, and presents a considerable challenge to any translator faced with the task of rendering the text into their native language. The author of this text has decided to take up this particular challenge and translate Mundstock's discourse into both English and Polish.

3. Introduction to the discourse

Marcos Mundstock starts his discourse with greeting the audience and then moves on to relating how he was trying to explain to his daughter certain linguistic mistakes commonly made by the users of Spanish. This part of the discourse follows the structure of: 'you should not say....., you should say..... instead'.

Así, le expliqué a Lucía que no se dice 'desapercibido' sino 'inadvertido'; que se debe decir 'delante de mí' y no 'delante mío'; que las cosas 'se adecuan' y no se 'adecúan'; que no hay 'varias alternativas' sino sólo 'una alternativa con varias opciones'; que algo 'podría ser' en lugar de 'pudiera ser'; que no se dice 'te lo vuelvo a repetir' o que el que 'prevé', lo que hace es 'prever' y no 'preveer' y, por más previsor que sea y muchas 'ees' que agregue, no preverá más que hace unos días atrás. Uy, ¡perdón! Que 'hace unos días' o 'unos días atrás'.

The main challenge here, from the translator's point of view, is that the mistakes he refers to are so strongly connected with the specific character of the Spanish language that it is difficult to find their equivalents in Polish or English. In this case, the literal translation would not work at all. Therefore, it seems that the best decision the translator may make here is to look for specific linguistic mistakes made by the users of Polish and English respectively, the mistakes that would be of a somehow similar character to the ones mentioned in the original. This considerably facilitates the entire task since in any language one may find numerous incorrect expressions commonly used by speakers on a daily basis. That was the path I decided to follow when translating this fragment of Mundstock's speech:

Therefore, I was explaining to Lucia that we should not say 'not unnoticed' but 'unnoticed'; that one should say 'in front of me' and not 'in front of mine'; that certain things 'adapt themselves' and not 'adopt themselves'; that there are not 'several alternatives' but only 'one alternative with several options'; that you, in fact, 'couldn't care less' instead of 'could care less'; that you do not say 'a tuna fish' or that the one who 'foresees', what he actually does is 'to foresee' and not 'foursee' and regardless of how good he is at this foreseeing and how many extra letters he adds, he will not foresee further, though, than a few days back ago. Oh, sorry! 'Going back a few days' or 'a few days ago'.

Dlatego też tłumaczyłem Lucii, że nie mówi się „nieuważony” tylko „niezauważony”, że należy mówić „przede mną” a nie „przed mną”, że pewne rzeczy się „dostosowują”, a nie „dostosowywują”, że nie ma „różnych alternatyw”, a jedynie „różne warianty jednej alternatywy”, że coś „mogłoby być” zamiast „mogłoby być”, że nie mówi się „ponownie powtarzać”, a ten

kto coś przewidział zajmuje się „przewidywaniem” a nie „przewidywywaniem” i niezależnie od tego jak dobry jest w tym przewidywaniu i ile dodatkowych liter/sylab wprowadzi, to nie przewidzi dalej lecz...kilka dni cofając wstecz. O, przepraszam. „Cofając się o kilka dni” lub „kilka dni wstecz”.

In the original fragment, both the word ‘desapercibido’ and ‘inadvertido’ mean the same, i.e. ‘unnoticed’. However, some language purists may still perceive ‘desapercibido’ as an instance of double negation which is undesirable in a language. This is because the word contains two prefixes, ‘-des’ and ‘-a’, both of which mean ‘without’, thus making it a double negation of the word ‘percibido’, i.e. ‘noticed’. I followed the same path in the English translation, introducing the double-negative expression ‘not unnoticed’, whereas in Polish, whose structure unfortunately allows multiple negations within one sentence, I decided to introduce the equivalent of the original ‘unnoticed’ but with a pronunciation mistake, which I think is likely to be committed for instance by children or some less careful speakers: „nieuważony”.

The next mistake mentioned in the speech was quite easy to find equivalents to: we should say ‘delante de mí’ instead of ‘delante mío’, which is to say that one should say ‘in front of me’ and not ‘in front of mine’. In the Polish version I took advantage of the preposition „przed” (in front of) and the pronunciation mistakes which people sometimes make when combining this word with the pronoun ‘me’.

The ensuing mistake referred to in this fragment is related to incorrect pronunciation: ‘las cosas “se adecuan” y no se “adecúan”’ – the Spanish verb ‘acceduar’ has multiple meanings, for instance ‘to adjust’ or ‘to adapt’. In the English translation I decided to use the fact that English speakers frequently confuse the words ‘adapt’ and ‘adopt’ and therefore I translated this fragment as: ‘things “adapt themselves” and not “adopt themselves”’; whereas in Polish I took the dictionary equivalent of the Spanish ‘acceduar’ which is „dostosowywać się” and again introduced a pronunciation mistake by adding an extra syllable to this already long word, thus making it the unnaturally long „dostosowywywać się”.

Moving on, we come to ‘no hay “varias alternativas” sino sólo “una alternativa con varias opciones”’ and this could be translated literally into both English and Polish: ‘there are not “several alternatives” but only “one alternative with several options”’.

Then the speaker observes that ‘algo “podría ser” en lugar de “pudiera ser”’ – this fragment mentions two different forms of the same modal verb ‘poder’ which means ‘can/be able to’. The form ‘podría’ is the conditional form used in Spanish for speculations and in second conditional sentences, whereas ‘pudiera’ is the form of future subjunctive which does not exist in English or Polish. Therefore, in the English translation I decided to use compensation and, in a sense, abandon the original effect and introduce another common English mistake: ‘that you, in fact, “couldn’t care less” instead of “could care less”’. In Polish I used the equivalent of the original verb ‘poder’ and introduced another pronunciation mistake related

to the incorrect stress within this word, underlining the stressed syllable in both words in order to clearly mark the pronunciation: *coś „mogłoby być”* zamiast „mogłoby być”.

In the next sentence the author draws the audience's attention to the fact that you should not say 'te lo vuelvo a repetir'. This is a typical pleonasm, an instance of redundancy where one word within a phrase repeats the meaning of the other. The Spanish expression means 'to repeat something again', which is a common mistake made by speakers of many languages and it could be translated literally into both English and Polish. However, for the sake of variety, in the English text I used another pleonasm, namely 'tuna fish', but in fact any pleonasm could here serve the purpose of a functional equivalent. In Polish I translated it literally but could also introduce any other common pleonasm, e.g. „wracać z powrotem” ('to return back'), „fakt autentyczny” ('an authentic fact'), etc.

Finally, the last part of this fragment talks about the act of predicting things: 'el que "prevé", lo que hace es "prever" y no "preveer" y, por más previsor que sea y muchas "ees" que agregue, no preverá más que hace unos días atrás. Uy, ¡perdón! Que "hace unos días" o "días atrás"'. First of all, Mundstock mentions the pronunciation mistake made in the verb 'prever' to which some speakers tend to add an extra /e/ sound. In English I chose an equivalent of 'prever' that is synonymous to 'predict', i.e. 'to foresee' in order to later change it into the incorrectly spelled version 'foursee', taking advantage of the fact that 'for' and 'four' are homophones. In Polish I just added an extra syllable to the word which is an equivalent of 'prever' („przewidywać”), thus making its pronunciation unnecessarily long („przewidywywać”). Finally, the very last part of the sentence refers again to a phrase which is a pleonasm and adds an extra rhyme: 'no preverá más que hace unos días atrás'. In English I used a similar pleonasm, 'a few days back ago', and then separated it into two correct versions: 'going back a few days' and 'a few days ago', thus preserving the original message, as well as the original rhyming effect, due to the addition of the word 'though' so that it rhymes with 'ago': 'he will not foresee further, though, than a few days back ago'. In Polish I managed to recreate the rhyme while preserving the meaning of the original pleonastic phrase: *nie przewidzi dalej lecz...kilka dni cofając wstecz. O, przepraszam. „Cofając się o kilka dni”* lub „kilka dni wstecz”.

4. Our language and time measurement

In the following fragment of his discourse Mundstock ponders over certain expressions used in Spanish with reference to the passing time. Most of them are idiomatic, e.g. 'en menos que canta un gallo', 'en un santiamén', 'en un periquete' – he is wondering if there is a difference between them in terms of how much time they exactly refer to, and he proposes that there should be a kind of 'exchange rate'

established between them in that, for instance one ‘lo que canta un gallo’ equals two ‘santiamentes’ and four ‘periquetes’.

Propongo que un ‘lo que canta un gallo’ equivalga a ‘dos santiamentes’ y a ‘cuatro periquetes’.

In both English and Polish translation I was looking for functional equivalents here, i.e. idiomatic expressions that would also refer to time measurement. In English I selected the phrases: ‘in the blink of an eye’, ‘at the drop of a hat’ and ‘in leaps and bounds’, whereas in Polish: „błyskawicznie” (‘in a flash’), „w okamgnieniu” (‘in the blink of an eye’), „w mig” (‘in no time’).

I suggest, therefore, that one ‘in the blink of an eye’ shall equal two ‘drops of a hat’ and four ‘leaps and bounds’.

Sugeruję więc, by jedno „błyskawicznie” było równe dwóm „okamgnięciom” oraz czterem „(w)migom”.

Then the author moves on to discussing idiomatic phrases used in Spanish to express little importance of something: ‘me importa un comino’, ‘me importa tres pepinos’, ‘me importa medio pimiento’, ‘me importa un bledo’, which mean, respectively: ‘it is as important to me as cumin/three cucumbers/half of a bell pepper/amaranth’. Since all of these expressions contain names of plants, the speaker then introduces a short comment: ‘Todos entrañables vegetales’ (‘all those dear vegetables/plants’).

Asimismo, habrá que dar la discusión sobre los valores asignados a las cosas de poca importancia. Cuando alguien dice ‘me importa un comino’, ¿en qué está pensando? ¿En más o en menos que ‘me importa tres pepinos’? ¿O ‘medio pimiento’? Todos entrañables vegetales, eh.

Unfortunately, neither English nor Polish offer phrases expressing little importance that would contain plant names so I decided this was yet another place to resort to adaptation and look for functional equivalents. In English there are expressions such as: ‘I do not care a hoot’, ‘I do not care a fig’, ‘I do not care a tuppence’, ‘I do not care a sod’. Since no plants are mentioned in these phrases, it was also necessary to change the comment that follows them, so I simply opted for: ‘All these weird comparisons’. In Polish the corresponding expressions would be: „obchodzi mnie to tyle co zeszłoroczny śnieg”, „figę mnie to obchodzi”, „guzik mnie to obchodzi” (‘it is important to me as last year’s snow/as a fig/as a button’). Dictionaries of idioms and synonyms proved extremely helpful here and it also turned out that Spanish is much more abundant than English or Polish in phrases expressing little importance.

Likewise, it seems necessary to discuss the values assigned to things of very little importance. When someone says ‘I do not care a hoot’, what do they really mean? Is this more or less than ‘I do not care a fig’? Or ‘a tuppence’? All these weird comparisons.

Gdy ktoś mówi „obchodzi mnie to tyle co zeszłoroczny śnieg”, to o czym tak naprawdę myśli? To więcej czy mniej niż „figę mnie to obchodzi”? Ach, te dziwaczne porównania.

5. Form, aspect, morphology, descriptive capacity of the sound of words (and possible misunderstandings)

This part of Mundstock's speech is very creative in terms of word formation. The author starts with the word 'agnóstico' which derives from the Greek word ἄγνωστος (ágnōstos) meaning unknown, and which in English and Polish sounds very similar so it did not pose any translation problems. Then the author says that this word should not be confused with three other words which sound similar to the original but which have different meanings (they were created by the author himself) and bring associations with other words. And so we have: 'angosticismo' which refers to the Spanish word 'angosto' meaning 'narrow'; 'agosticismo' which might be associated with 'agosto', the name of the month (August); and 'agnolotticismo' which incorporates the Italian word 'agnolottis' – a type of pasta dish.

Comencemos por la palabra 'agnóstico'. Muchos científicos se declaran agnósticos. El agnosticismo sostiene que la existencia o no existencia de Dios está fuera del alcance del entendimiento o de la experiencia. El agnóstico se abstiene de cualquier juicio sobre la existencia de Dios. Digamos, no sabe, no contesta. Pero, cuidado, no debemos confundir 'agnosticismo' con 'angosticismo', que es una doctrina que postula que todo lo bello debe ser angosto. Ni con el 'agosticismo', que dice que todo lo bello ocurre en el mes de agosto. Y menos aún con el 'agnolotticismo', según el cual la existencia o no existencia de Dios está fuera de la ingesta de un plato de agnolottis.

In translation it was not difficult to come up with equivalents of these newly-coined words – I tried to be as faithful to the original words as possible in both English and Polish. Much more problematic was translating the explanation of their meanings. So, for instance, I translated 'angosticismo' as 'angosticism' / „angostycyzm” but since in English and Polish this has nothing to do with being narrow (Spanish: 'angosto'), I had to look for other words that would include the chunk 'angost-' and I decided to use the name of the Venezuelan town of Angostura, famous for its production of bitters. Thus, I explained the meaning of the word 'angosticism' as 'a doctrine postulating that all that is beautiful comes from Angostura'. The word 'agosticismo' I translated as 'agosticism' / „agostycyzm” which in English can be explained as: 'a doctrine which says that all that is beautiful happens in August' or, alternatively, 'a doctrine according to which the meaning of life should be sought only in the Italian town of Agosta' – this latter version was also the one I opted for in the Polish translation (since there was no chance to connect the word 'agosto'/'August' with any Polish name of the month). Finally, the last coined word 'agnolotticismo' I rendered as: 'agnolotticism' / „agnolotycyzm”, only slightly changing the words phonetically and in terms of spelling in order to comply with the rules of English and Polish respectively. The explanation of its meaning was translated as a doctrine 'which claims that the existence or non-existence of God depends solely on the number

of agnolotti ingested'. In the Polish version I also added a short explanation in the text as to what agnolotti are (a type of Italian pasta).

Let's start with the word 'agnostic'. Many scientists consider themselves agnostics. Agnosticism holds that the existence or non-existence of God is beyond the reach of reason or experience. An agnostic, therefore, abstains from any judgment about the existence of God. Let's say, he does not know, so does not speak. But, careful, we must not confuse 'agnosticism' with 'angosticism', which is a doctrine postulating that all that is beautiful comes from Angostura; nor with 'agosticism', which says that all that is beautiful happens in August/ according to which the meaning of life should be sought only in the Italian town of Agosta. Nor should it be confused with 'agnolotticism', which claims that the existence or non-existence of God depends solely on the number of agnolotti ingested.

Zacznijmy od słowa „agnostyk”. Wielu naukowców uważa się za agnostyków. Agnostycyzm to pogląd, według którego istnienie czy też nieistnienie Boga pozostaje poza zasięgiem rozumu czy doświadczenia. Agnostyk powstrzymuje się zatem od jakichkolwiek sądów na temat istnienia Boga. Można powiedzieć, że nie wie, więc się nie wypowiada. Ale uwaga: nie można mylić „agnostycyzmu” z „angostycyzmem” – doktryną, która postuluje, iż wszystko co piękne pochodzi z Angostury, ani też z „agostycyzmem”, według którego sensu życia należy poszukiwać jedynie we włoskiej Agoście. Nie należy też go mylić z „agnolotycyzmem”, który twierdzi, że istnienie czy też nieistnienie Boga zależy wyłącznie od liczby spożytych włoskich pierożków agnolotti.

6. Sayings and syllogisms

During his speech Mundstock also includes an entire fragment about sayings and proverbs commonly used in the Spanish language, criticizing them severely, and with his characteristic wit, for the fact that they construct syllogisms 'behind our back'. 'Syllogism' is a word that comes from Greek συλλογισμός syllogismos, meaning 'conclusion, inference', and it is a kind of logical argument that applies deductive reasoning to arrive at a conclusion based on two or more propositions that are asserted or assumed to be true. From the combination of a general statement (the major premise) and a specific statement (the minor premise), a conclusion is drawn. For example, knowing that all men are mortal (major premise) and that Socrates is a man (minor premise), we may conclude that Socrates is mortal. Syllogistic arguments are usually represented in a three-line form:

All men are mortal.
Socrates is a man.
Therefore, Socrates is mortal.³

Mundstock presents such syllogisms as unintentional and quite annoying phenomena created by certain proverbs. He says that the proverb 'cría cuervos y

³ Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Ancient Logic <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/logic-ancient/#ModLog> accessed 22.07.2023.

te sacarán los ojos' (literally: 'feed the ravens and they will pick out your eyes') is supposedly totally coherent with 'el ojo del patrón engorda el ganado' (literally: 'the master's eye fattens the cattle'), explaining that the ravens that you are feeding will pick out your eyeballs, then they will eat them and, as a result, get fat. This entire reasoning was quite easy to translate into English since this language offers similar animal-related proverbs, I only slightly changed the very animal from a raven to a horse: 'the saying "do not look a gift horse in the mouth" is entirely consistent with "the eye of the master fattens the horse". What this really means is that the gift horse is currently chewing the master's eye and so you shouldn't look in its mouth to spare yourself the unpleasant sight.' This final sentence I also changed in translation so that it would be coherent with the proverbs I selected – I had to find a logical explanation of why the two proverbs featuring a horse are in fact consistent with each other and when juxtaposing them together, one could find a certain logic behind them. I followed exactly the same path in the Polish translation since Polish also has the same proverbs featuring a horse.

En 'Crítica a los refranes tradicionales' yo denuncié los notables silogismos que los refranes usuales han ido construyendo en silencio, a nuestras espaldas. Por ejemplo, 'cría cuervos y te sacarán los ojos' es del todo coherente con 'el ojo del patrón engorda el ganado'. O sea, los cuervos que tú crías te sacarán los ojos, se los comerán y engordarán consecuentemente.

In 'Criticism of Traditional Sayings' I reveal striking syllogisms that the colloquial sayings have for years been forming in secret, behind our backs. For example, the saying 'do not look a gift horse in the mouth' is entirely consistent with 'the eye of the master fattens the horse'. What this really means is that the gift horse is currently chewing the master's eye and so you shouldn't look in its mouth to spare yourself the unpleasant sight.

W „Krytyce tradycyjnych przysłów” ujawniam znaczące sylogizmy, które popularne przysłowia tworzą po kryjomu, za naszymi plecami. Na przykład powiedzenie „darowanemu koniowi w zęby się nie zagłada” jest jak najbardziej spójne z „pańskie oko konia tuczy”. Innymi słowy, подарowany koń właśnie przeżuwa oko pańskie, więc nie zaleca się zagładania mu w zęby, gdyż nie jest to bynajmniej przyjemny widok.

7. Conclusion

Coming back to the definition provided by Tomaszekiewicz (2006, p. 66) saying that untranslatability is “a feature of a certain utterance in one language which does not have an equivalent utterance in another language”, I would claim that the lack of equivalent expression does not mean that the utterance cannot be translated at all. In any two languages, there are numerous words and expressions which do not have their exact equivalents, but, as illustrated by the English and Polish translations of Mundstock's discourse, it is still possible to translate them. Of course, as regards the translation of such language items, one cannot expect the translated text to

produce exactly the same reactions (associations) in its recipients as those that are evoked in the recipients of the source text, because what is well-known to the source text readers may be totally unfamiliar and exotic for the target text readers. However, as already mentioned at the beginning of this paper, all human beings have the ability to put themselves in the position of others. This capacity for empathy as well as the flexibility of their mind enable them to understand what others try to convey (Nida, 1964, p. 55). These two factors, coupled with certain experiences that are common to all human beings regardless of their culture, are what makes any translation at all possible.

In the case of the supposedly “untranslatable” elements, the choice of the translation technique largely depends on the purpose of translation, the form and the general sense of the source text, as well as on the characteristic features of the recipients to whom the translation is addressed. Whatever the choice, the translator has a wide array of linguistic devices at their disposal, as well as their own creativity, which is of paramount importance. Where the source of this apparent “untranslatability” is the language itself, for instance in the form of word plays, the most important task for the translator is to try to recreate not the original form but the original effect. Of course, achieving a similar effect does not mean that the translator needs to use exactly the same linguistic devices as the author of the original text. Sometimes it requires great effort and creativity from the translator but it seems it is always possible to produce a translation that would have a similar impact on most readers.

Therefore, despite the obvious linguistic and cultural differences, I support the view that all texts produced by people can be translated to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the competence and the creativity of the translator. In fact, these differences, and the resultant apparent “untranslatability” might be considered “a blessing in disguise”, as proposed in the title of this paper, since they provide the translator with a stimulus to use their imagination, out-of-the-box thinking and creativity they may not have the chance to apply otherwise.

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