

Business School “Vzmakh”

Section: English

Type: Academic Writing

Topic: The impossibility of translation from English into Russian on the example of “The Nightmare before Christmas”

Student: Smirnov Ivan

Teacher: Ogorodova S.A.

Felinskiy V.A.

Saint-Petersburg

2013

Table of contents

Introduction	- 5 -
Chapter I.....	- 6 -
The translation.....	- 6 -
1.1. The theory of translation	- 6 -
1.2 The main methods of translation.....	- 7 -
1.2 Terms in fiction and magazines	- 8 -
1.3 The theory of untranslatability on the examples of R. Kipling's "If" and J.K.Rowling's "Harry Potter"	- 9 -
Chapter II	- 11 -
Ways of localizing movies	- 11 -
Pros and cons of dubbing.	- 12 -
Pros and cons of subtitling.	- 12 -
2.1 Translation mistakes: examples	- 12 -
Chapter III.	- 15 -
Minuses and mistakes of translation "The Nightmare before Christmas"	- 15 -
Conclusion	- 16 -
Sources.....	- 17 -

Introduction

These days people entertain themselves in many different ways. One of them (and a very popular one) is watching films and cartoons. There are plenty of them: funny and serious, good and bad, cruel and fantastic. And there are lots of plots. Many of them are somehow connected with Christmas, like “the Nightmare before Christmas”. Most of the movies are made in Hollywood, America. Of course, all of them are in English. This means, that they should be translated, so that people in different countries could watch them. And this is where the problems begin. I have chosen this topic because there are lots of works, which can only be enjoyed fully by reading or watching them with their original language. This is also true about “The Nightmare before Christmas”. This is up to date now because most of the movies are awfully localized, and there’s more and more of them every month. So, my academic writing will help to understand the problem and to solve it.

In the first chapter I wrote about the translation theory, analyzed the translation of R. Kipling’s work “If” and J.K. Rowling’s “Harry Potter”.

In the second chapter I wrote about different ways to translate and localize books, movies and others, and their pluses/minuses.

And in the last chapter I gave some examples of unsuccessful translation from “The Nightmare before Christmas” cartoon and offered ways to solve the problems in conclusion.

Chapter I

The translation

1.1. The theory of translation

In this chapter I am going to examine the history of translation and its development. Also, I will tell about modern translation: the theory of translation, the theory of untranslatability and difficulties which the translators face.

People have been trying to understand each other from the ancient times till nowadays. Much time ago, when books didn't exist yet, translating each other's speech was enough. And it was quite a simple task. What ancient people could talk about? Pretty primitive things, like "You give me many gold, and I let you live" or "I will give you 10 bags of gold, and you will give me many women." Such topics are easy translated. But soon people began writing, and the need in the book translators appeared. And as time passed, the books became more developed, their numbers grew and the language which was used became more complicated.

The translation gave people access to cultural and literature masterpieces of different countries, nationalities, allowed nations to share the experience. But there are problems. As an example, ancient translators were arguing about the nearness of translation to the original work: in the early Bible translation (or any other sacred works) dominated the "word by word" type, which very often made it impossible to understand the text. And this is not the only example. That is why later many translators were persuading the society and their colleagues in the necessity of allowing the translator not to copy words, but to translate the meaning, the idea.

Some tried to formulate the rules for a good translator. For example, French poet and translator **Etienne Dolet** (1509-1546). There are his "rules":

1. To understand the content of the translated text and the authors' intentions.
2. To perfectly know the language from which you translate and the language you translate into.
3. To don't translate the text literally, for it would twist the original content and destroy the beauty of the forms.
4. To use prevalent linguistic forms
5. To choose and place right words in the right place, so that the meaning would be saved.

But he was not the only one with such rules. Famous British poet and translator **John Dryden** (1631-1700):

1. Be a poet.
2. Know your own language and the original work's language.
3. To understand the individual feature of the original's author.
4. To conform your own and author's talent.
5. To save original's meaning.
6. To save the attractiveness without harming the meaning.
7. To save the quality of the verse in the translation.
8. To make the author speak like a modern Englishman.
9. Don't translate literally.
10. Don't try to improve the original.

Some of these rules seemed so clear for the people of the past, that they match like numbers three and nine; five and six and numbers two. However, these days they are often not followed.

1.2 The main methods of translation

The main ways of translating terms are as follows:

Transcription

display – дисплей, algorythm – алгоритм, phenomenon - феномен.

Care should be taken not to overuse this technique. Terms may not survive in the borrowed form, as happened with the computer term *hardware* whose loan equivalent *хардвер* is no longer used in computer science, but has given way to its explanatory substitution:
электромеханическое оборудование, техническое обеспечение.

Transliteration

carbide – карбид, function – функция.

Normally, terms are transliterated or transcribed when a target language lacks a certain notion and borrows it a short foreign form. Many international loan terms are of Greek or Latin origin. This facilitates mutual understanding among specialists:

arthrogryposis – артродрипоз, osteodystrophy – осмоеодистрофия, hematoma – гематома.

However, when using this technique a translator should be aware of ‘false friends’, that is words similar in form but different in meaning, for example:

Benzene in chemistry is equal to *бензол*, not *бензин*, the latter corresponding to *benzen*, *gasoline*. A translator of science texts must use only standard terms, avoiding slang or colloquial words. For instance, *brown coal* – *бурый уголь* (not *коричневый уголь*); *natural gas* – *природный газ* (not *натуральный газ*); *airplane* – *самолет* (not *аэроплан*); *machine oil* – *масло* – *engine oil* (not *machine oil*).

Calque, half-calque:

This technique is often applied to translating compound terms or term phrases:

preanalysis – преданализ; structural system analysis – структурный системный анализ; address field – поле адреса; one-dimensional – одномерный.

This translation technique, even more than transcription or transliteration, may be detrimental to the correctness of the meaning, for it can lead to “false friends”: *letter-of-credit* is not *письмо доверия* but *аккредитив*; *песочные часы* – not *sand clock* but *hour-glass*; *цветные металлы* – not *colored metals* but *non-ferrous metals*.

Translating a word and using it as the term:

mouse – мышь, net – сеть, memory – память.

Gradually, specialists get accustomed to these terms and use them widely in speech.

Explicatory (descriptive) translation and expansion.

This technique is used for verbalizing new objects, not existing in the target language, for example, *open housing* – *жилищная политика равных возможностей*, *tripos* – *экзамен для получения отличия в Кембридже*.

It is desirable that a translator avoid translating a descriptive by a transliterated (technical) term for the purpose of “showing off” knowledge. However, the descriptive technique is justified by the lack of an appropriate technical term in the source language. In English-to-Russian translation, a more explicit character of the Russian language can necessitate the descriptive technique:
radarproof – защищенный от радиолокационного обнаружения, *conflict of interest* – злоупотребление служебным положением.

Reduction

This takes place when one word or a smaller number of words verbalizes a notion:
computer engineer – электроник, *счет прибылей и убытков компании* – *earnings report*.

To make sure that the term is standard, it is necessary to consult the dictionary as often as possible.

Analogue substitution

cold cereal – сухой завтрак, *play school* – детские ясли.

This technique is used for a receptor’s convenience when corresponding similar standard terms exist in the target language.

1.2 Terms in fiction and magazines

Analogue translation is given preference in a more popular text, such as one in literary or magazine register. When it comes to the selection between a loan form and its analog, authors would prefer a form clearer to the receptor.

For example, whereas medical professionals would use the word *letalnyy*, journalists and writers would rather write *smertelnyy* to render *lethal*.

To comment on the meaning of a new or unknown term, a translator must explain it:
runaways – предприятия, переведенные на другую территорию или за границу.

In fiction, terms and professionalisms can function as the speech record of a character showing his or her vocation, education, breeding, environment and sometimes even psychology.

Another function of the term in fiction is to create a technical overtone, showing the surroundings in which the plot develops.

1.3 The theory of untranslatability on the examples of R. Kipling's "If" and J.K.Rowling's "Harry Potter"

So, there are a lot of “rules” for translators. However, instead of helping with translation, they make it harder. English researcher T.Savory made a list of “rules” which are opposite to each other:

1. The translation must save original’s words.
2. The translation must save the original’s ideas.
3. The translation must look like the original work.
4. The translation must look like the translation.
5. The translation must save the translator’s style.
6. The translation must save the original’s style.
7. The translation must look like modern for an author.
8. The translation must look like modern for the translator.
9. It is permitted to add or delete something in the translation.
10. It is forbidden to add or delete something in the translation.
11. Poems must be translated in prose.
12. Poems must be translated in verses.

This means that translation is not possible. Not just because of some rules created by some people who lived in different times and now are probably dead. The fact is, all languages are different, including Russian and English, even if they are similar in something. But grammar, times and etc. doesn’t let us translate any works properly. The translation of Rudyard Kipling’s poem “If” is a good example, which proves this theory. Here are some quotes (the examples of incorrect translation are given in Russian):

“If”, R.Kipling:

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;

“Заповедь”, M.Lozinsky’s translation:

Владей собой среди толпы смятенной,
Тебя клянущей за смятенье всех,
Верь сам в себя, наперекор вселенной,
И маловерным отпусти их грех;

As you can see, this isn’t even “If” anymore, the word ”if” has completely disappeared. That’s why mister Lozinsky named his translation “Заповедь”. Mister Gribanov followed his footsteps in his own translation, “If you’ll manage”:

“Если сможешь”
Сумей, не дрогнув среди общей смути,
Людскую ненависть перенести
И не судить, но в страшные минуты
Остаться верным своему пути.

There is no need in saying that this is not even “If”. It is just another bad translation, made for no reason. But there are some good or at least not bad translations, like Kornilov’s “When”

“Когда”, V.Kornilov
Когда ты тверд, а все вокруг в смятенье,
Тебя в своем смятенье обвинив,
Когда уверен ты, а все в сомненье,
А ты к таким сомненьям терпелив;

This one is really good: it is quite near the original’s ideas and text, and Mr. Kornilov saved the idea with one word, repeated many times.

And the last example is S. Marshak's translation, named "If":

"Если", Marshak:

О, если ты покоен, не растерян,
Когда теряют головы вокруг,
И если ты себе остался верен,
Когда в тебя не верит лучший друг,

This one is the first where the word "if" appears, justifying its name.

The next example is J.K.Rowling's franchise of "Harry Potter" books. The problems with this book's translation are well-known within the borders of the Russian Internet. Since the book came out the Internet is filled with furious articles about how feeble our translators are. Of course, I couldn't avoid such a big argue, which proves the theory of untranslatability. So, what's so special about "Harry Potter", why cannot it be properly translated? There are few reasons. Special names, which describe the characters, special spells and things... Words are very important in "Harry Potter" universe, that's why it is important to translate it properly. Unfortunately, our translators failed. You can see the examples in the tables below.

Table. Names of characters.

Character's name in "Harry Potter"	Russian translation		
	"Rosman" translation	M. Spivak's translation	Fan's translation
Severus Snape	Северус Снегг	Злодеус Злей	Северус Снейп
Voldemort	Волан-де-Морт	Вольдеморт	Волдеморт
Gilderoy Lockhart	Локонс Златопуст	Сверкароль Чаруальд	Локхарт Гилдерой
Mad-eye Moody	Грозный Глаз Грюм	Шизоглаз Хмури	Хмури Дикий Глаз

As you can see, Russian translators did their best in twisting the character's names as they wanted to. As tastes differ, one cannot choose the best version absolutely – only for a personal taste.

Chapter II

Ways of localizing movies

Today's leading tendency in Russia is dubbing all movies and TV programmes. Let me compare those two.

Alice in Wonderland, the latest movie by Tim Burton, makes the headlines, like all of his productions. In Poland the discussion is particularly heated as two versions of the film have been released: one with dubbing and one with subtitles. As standard dubbing is used in Poland almost exclusively for animated and children's movies, dubbing alive-action film meets with suspicion and objections.

Here are some of the very mixed opinions about *Alice in Wonderland*:

"But why all that dubbing?! Intonation of the voice of the actor in the original movie, his performance in that matter is very important... and with us anything that is labeled a fairy-tale etc. gets dubbed. And I already know that I can skip that visit to the cinema..."

"I think that in a movie so rich in neologisms and weirdness – dubbing helps a lot to account for the real atmosphere of the Wonderland!!! I recommend dubbed version!!!"

"And I don't recommend any dubbed movie, unless it is a cartoon. Dubbing sound artificial and is right only for kids. Luckily, this film is available also with subtitles and I am going to see this version."

And that all even though the director of the Polish dubbing has created a real masterpiece, having at his disposal best actors, well translated dialogue list and meticulous sound montage.

The preference for dubbing or subtitling in various countries is largely based on decisions taken in the late 1920s and early 1930s. With the arrival of sound film, the film importers in Germany, Italy, France and Spain decided to dub the foreign voices, while the rest of Europe elected to display the dialogue as translated subtitles. The choice was largely due to financial reasons (subtitling is inexpensive and quick, while dubbing is very expensive and thus requires a very large audience to justify the cost), but during the 1930s it also became a political preference in Germany, Italy and Spain; an expedient form of censorship that ensured that foreign views and ideas could be stopped from reaching the local audience, as dubbing makes it possible to create a dialogue which is totally different from the original. In Spain the compulsory dubbing was also employed for encouraging the use of Spanish language (Castilian) among non-Spanish-speaking population (languages such as Galician, Catalan and Basque were forbidden and prosecuted during Franco's dictatorship).

Another method, used mainly in Russia and Poland, is **lectoring**, a form of voice-over where a narrator tells the audience what the actors are saying while their voices can be heard in the background. The lector's voice usually trails the original dialogue by a few seconds, so that the original audio can be heard to a large extent, allowing the viewer to grasp the emotions in the actors' voices. Voice-over is the preferred form of dubbing among Polish viewers, and attempts to introduce full dubs to Polish television met with viewer protests and ultimately failed. It's also preferred over subtitles; an opinion poll conducted in 2008 shown only 19% of Poles supports the switch to subtitling in television.

Pros and cons of dubbing

- Dubbed voices may seem detached, inappropriate for the character, or overly expressive – when you are used to the real voice of Johnny Depp, hearing him speak like Alexander Bargman, famous Russian actor, can be very distracting and irritating.
- Some ambient sounds may not be transferred to the dubbed track, creating a less enjoyable viewing experience – it can be the sound of heels thumping on the pavement while a couple walks down a street, engrossed in conversation, etc.
- Dubbing may show disregard for the meaning and setting of the movies – it sure seems strange to hear Dr. Quinn Medicine Woman talk to her Wild West townsmen in German, or vice versa – to hear Nazi soldiers speak English to their Russian prisoners.
- Dubbing is a hindrance to multilingualism – according to available data, English literacy and comprehension is statistically far higher in countries where subtitled is the preferred option than in countries where television and films are routinely dubbed.
- Dubbing may be the opportunity to improve the original film by adding regional phrases, hints or some simple side noises like coughing, laughing, buzzing etc. which would be considered as more natural in another language while such noises are missing in the original. The Polish dubbing of *Shrek* contained many references to local culture and Polish humor, a fact that won this version of the film much attention and acclaim of moviegoers.

Pros and cons of subtitling

- Subtitles interfere with the visual experience, as they obscure part of the picture – no comment.
- The act of reading itself is distracting, especially in action pictures: one would be too busy reading the subtitles to pay attention to what everyone is doing – well, if it is an action movie, usually you don't really need to understand what they say, because it is obvious anyway: the good guy is chasing the bad guy, and so on.
- Subtitles are the quickest and the cheapest method of translating content.
- Subtitling allows to hear the original dialog and voices of the actors – for me it renders the whole film watching experience more authentic, and it allows you to practice the language you study.
- From a point of view of a translator, dubbing and subtitled present very different approaches. **Dubbing** is prepared in a way as to preserve the resemblance of sounds and length of an utterance. In other words, the dubbed phrase should ideally match the mouth movement of the character.

Subtitling, on the other hand, puts more stress on the meaning than on the form of the original audio. Subtitles, due to the fact that they are meant to be read, must be adapted to the viewers' reading speed. So a translator will focus on interpreting the message and then will render it in the target language in the most effective and condensed form, that is to convey the purpose of the message and to achieve an acceptable reading speed.

2.1 Translation mistakes: examples

An extremely important thing about translating a movie is translating the title. Titles are a dynamic part of any creative work, especially when it comes to movies. They can be easy, literal,

straightforward (*Titanic*) or symbolic, dramatic, creative (*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*). Regardless, the objective of a movie title is to summarize in some way what that film is about, be it literal or otherwise.

Of course, what some titles mean in one language isn't always easily translated into another language. This is especially true when people try to translate the title without any knowledge of what the movie is about. So here is a list of examples of incorrect translations:

‘The Dark Knight’ became ‘The Knight of the Night’

Spanish title ‘El Caballero de la Noche’ - while accurate - becomes a bit confusing when re-translated back into English. We do love an unplanned title pun...

‘Knocked Up’ became ‘Slightly Pregnant’

Seth Rogan and Katherine Heigl’s hilarious comedy just got funnier! The film about an accidental pregnancy (what’s not to laugh at there?) has enjoyed a number of silly foreign titles. Peru’s Latin American translation ‘Slightly Pregnant’ is odd, but special mention must also go to China’s ‘One Night, Big Belly’ and Israeli moniker ‘The Date That Screwed Me’.

‘Lost in Translation’ became ‘Meetings and Failures in Meetings’

A possibly apocryphal example from Portugal here (though plenty of blogs insist this did happen). It’s included here because we dearly hope that that the title for Bill Murray and Scarlet Johansson’s ‘Lost In Translation’ was indeed... lost in translation.

‘Die Hard’ became ‘Die Slowly’

The German title of action-packed ‘Die Hard’ took on a totally different meaning. In their version (‘Stirb Langsam’) Bruce Willis’ John McClane is seemingly doomed to an agonising death at the hands ‘European’ (blatantly German) terrorists.

‘The Naked Gun: From the Files of Police Squad!’ became ‘The Gun Died Laughing’

This Chinese translation suggests Leslie Nielson’s ace cop comedy was so funny the titular gun in the movie literally died of laughter. Perhaps bureaucrats were concerned by the use of ‘naked’ in the title.

‘Willy Wonka & The Chocolate Factory’ became ‘The Boy That Drowned in Chocolate Sauce’
As far as I remember, chubby Augustus Gloop didn’t actually drown when he fell into a river of chocolate early on in the movie. That’s what the rather dark Danish title suggests though.

‘As Good as It Gets’ became ‘Mr. Cat Poop’

I didn’t believe this one either. The title of ‘As Good As It Gets’ was oddly translated as ‘Mr. Cat Poop’ in Hong Kong. According to imbd.com it came from the name ‘Melvin’ (Jack Nicholson’s character) which sounds a lot like the Cantonese colloquial word for cat poop.

‘Pretty Woman’ became I Will Marry A Prostitute and Save Money’

This was translated into ‘I Will Marry A Prostitute and Save Money’ in China. Well, I guess they did watch this movie before translating at least.

‘The Matrix’

The French called this sci-fi movie ‘The Young People Who Traverse Dimensions While Wearing Sunglasses’. Definitely literal.

‘Leon (or The Professional)’

The Chinese decided on ‘This Hit Man Is Not As Cold As He Thought’ for this title. Which I guess is true.

‘Thelma and Louise’

I guess they don’t like surprises in Mexico. They called the movie, ‘An Unexpected End’.

‘Nixon’

‘The Big Liar’ in China. I think this one was personal.

‘Army Of Darkness’

Oh Japan... ‘Captain Supermarket’. It actually kind of seems appropriate.

‘Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs’

In Israel, they went with a more localized food option with, ‘It’s Raining Falafel’

‘Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind’

Italians were not as creative, but they got the job done with, ‘If You Leave Me, I Delete You’.

‘Leaving Las Vegas’

Japan gave us, ‘I’m Drunk and You’re a Prostitute’.

‘The Sixth Sense’

I guess the Chinese hate surprises even more. They called the movie, ‘He’s A Ghost!’

‘Drive Angry’

Actually, I think Thailand is better at titling a Nic Cage film than Hollywood. In Thailand this movie is called, ‘Super Speeding Cleaning Evil Accounts’

‘The Shawshank Redemption’

I really don’t get what China was thinking with, ‘Excitement 1995’. Excitement wasn’t exactly the mood of the film, and the movie didn’t even come out in 1995. It was released in 1994.

‘The Pacifier’

‘A Super tough Kangaroo’ in Spain. Is it the fact that Vin Diesel looks like a kangaroo? Does he look like a kangaroo?

Chapter III. Minuses and mistakes of translation “The Nightmare before Christmas”

Localizing movies is hard. But localizing musical is even harder: we all know how much trouble for the translators causes the translation of verses in poems. And “The Nightmare before Christmas” had the same fate. It was dubbed by Russian actors and singers. Of course, its translation has big minuses, which demonstrate us the impossibility of full translation and all minuses of localization.

The first minus is actors. It doesn't matter how professional they are, they still have their own voice and can't speak with somebody else's. And the voice which character uses is probably the main thing in this movie! Additionally, they speak in absolutely different manner – speed, intonation, tone and frequency might differ tremendously. Not to mention the fact that one of the characters who is originally female (Shock) in Russian version has a male voice!

Also, the fact that in Russian translation one can hear poetry translated into another language which must be poor by default. Let me give some examples:

ORIGINAL TEXT	RUSSIAN EQUIVALENT	MEANING OF RUSSIAN TRANSLATION
I'd like to join the crowd in their enthusiastic cloud	Чем обернется этот бред- Он уцелеет или нет	Where would this delusion lead? Will he survive?
I want it, oh, I want it, oh, I want it for my own!	Уверен я, не зря меня сюда вела судьба моя!	I'm sure the destiny leads me here for reason
And why should they have all the fun? It should belong to anyone! Not anyone, in fact, but me...	Радость и веселье – для всех! Мы отпразднуем Рождество все вместе и нарядим ёлку!	Everyone should have entertainment and laughter. We will enjoy Christmas and we will make a Christmas tree!

As you can clearly see, the improper translation has vastly changed the whole character of Jack – instead of a gloomy and unhappy person we see quite a sociable man that even seems to be a sort of a knight or something. Instead of being the King of Halloween Town he shows good traits of character and a kind nature inside.

Conclusion

So what should we do with bad, non-professional translations? Of course, we can leave everything as it is now and just try to enjoy good movies. But this kind of localization wouldn't allow anyone enjoy anything, because how can someone enjoy watching completely different movie just because of wrong translation of few sentences? But we also cannot stop the translation because most of the people like everything this way.

If you ask me, I say: watch original versions. If you don't speak the language of the original, choose subtitles. If you speak it a little, you may want to watch an English film with English subtitles; it will help your comprehension and will raise your perception of correct pronunciation and intonation patterns.

Sources

1. http://www.classes.ru/grammar/113.komissarov_obshaya_teoriya_perevoda/html/1.html
2. The theory and practice of the translation – Andrey Parshin
3. <http://forum.sufism.ru/index.php?topic=234.0>
4. http://lib.ru/KIPLING/s_if.txt
5. <http://www.neocortex.ru/translations/h.html>
6. <http://www.translationdirectory.com/articles/article2088.php>