

TRANSLATING BOOK TITLES

Alina IABLONSKI, *student, Faculty of Philology,
Alecu Russo Bălți Stat University*

Scientific adviser: **Elena VARZARI**, *university assistant*

Rezumat: *Scopul acestui articol este de a studia tehnicile de traducere care pot fi aplicate la traducerea titlurilor cărților, comparând titlul original cu cel tradus. Analiza s-a axat pe următoarele tehnici: traducerea literală, transliterarea, omiterea, adăugarea și înlocuirea titlului la traducerea din engleză în rusă. Au fost prezentate exemple de traduceri ale titlurilor cărților.*

Cuvinte-cheie: *titlu, traducere, tehnici de traducere, realități, context, text.*

Year by year books have got a strong position on the market on global level. Needless to say, the translation of books involves their adaptation to the norms of other cultures. However, we assume that exactly the translation of book titles creates issues of reliability, as in many cases they may be presented in a single word. Therefore, it is recommended to emphasize that “...*the translator’s intention* [should be] *identical with that of the author...*” [7, p. 13].

It is rather hard to imagine a literary work without a title, as it is the first thing that readers pay attention to. Therefore, a translated book title should transfer the same effect as the original one. In other words, the translator and the author implement the same function and transmit the same effect - notably intriguing the readers. Anna Berdnikova considers that the title of a literary work is important due to its functions. In her article «Что в себе несет заглавие текста?» she maintains the idea that a title is frequently interpreted as the main theme of the work and therefore, it transmits the author's vision of a particular phenomenon [2]. In addition, as a

book is judged by its title, readers should be lured by it in a few seconds. Thus, a title is not just “*the distinctive name of a work of art, musical, or literary composition*” as mentioned in the Collins Dictionary [10], but the whole complex of different functions and authors’ intentions. Most authors have got an inclination to choose such a title that will implement the goal of interpreting the whole work. Hence, it has a compact form with a connotational rather than a denotational meaning.

The elucidation of what a title is has a paramount importance. According to Hazard Adams (1987) a title and a work are connected by unbreakable bonds. He supported the idea that the real titles are those that the author gave to his/her text. Even being translated accurately titles still lose the original features becoming “...*labels, designations and often interpretations*” [1, p. 10]. Another scholar Jerrold Levinson (1985) in his article *Titles* claimed that “...*titles are plausibly essential to works...*” for they are the key of the works’ creative manner [5, p. 31].

It is necessary to understand that while translating book titles the whole book serves as its context, and the translator should keep in mind that the name of the book reflects its contents in an exceptionally condescend variant. Thus, it is recommended to translate the title at the end of the whole process of rendering a text from the source language⁴ into the target language⁵. This will help to save the primary meaning and what is more significant - the author’s voice. Yet, there are difficulties which occur in rendering a text into another language. The list of problems includes: (1) cultural differences; (2) pun or intentionally modified fixed expressions; (3) colloquial forms and slang; (4) grammar issues.

Cultural differences are a common problem while translating book titles because of realia. In other words, realia are words and expressions for culture-specific material things. N. M. Musina in her article “Realia as a cultural phenomenon” states that they “...*do not have lexical equivalents in other languages...*” and “...*have no analogues in other cultures and respectively there are no lexical units denoting them*” [12, pp. 481-484]. As realia reflect the way of life and society’s values, the translator should put great efforts to transfer the meaning from one culture into another without omissions. In brief, the product should be adopted by the audience with no distortions. It might be of interest to mention that the title of the first book in the Harry Potter series has been changed. The publishing house Bloomsbury released it with the title *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* in the United Kingdom, while the American publishing company Scholastic Corporation translated the title as *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* for the word *philosopher* is not associated with magic. The publishing house Egmont in Romania launched the first book titled *Harry Potter și Piatra Filozofală* which was translated by Ioana Iepureanu. Igor Oransky, a translator of the Russian publishing house Rosman, translated the title as «Гарри Поттер и философский камень» [3].

Cultural problems also include phraseological units and idioms. For example, the title of Stephen Hawking’s book *The Universe in a Nutshell* was translated as

⁴ A source language = SL

⁵ A target language = TL

«Мир в ореховой скорлупке» by the Russian publishing house Amphora. Meanwhile, the phrase *in a nutshell* is a stable expression in English that should be translated as *in two words, briefly*. From the point of view of grammar, the title «О Вселенной вкратце» would be more correct and accurate [4].

Apart from cultural differences the usage of **pun or intentionally modified fixed expressions** is a challenge to the traditional way of giving a title to a written work. As any author puts in his/her title a specific intention and sense, the translator has to decode this hidden subtext and then suggest a title in the TL with the same core of the author's idea. For instance, the book title «Низший пилотаж» by Bayan Shiryanov denotes the opposite effect from the Russian set expression «высший пилотаж». The expression «высший пилотаж» has got a positive meaning and denotes the highest degree of doing something. Whereas the book raises such problems as drug addiction and junk's life the author has changed the positive meaning of the expression into a negative one. As a result, the translator should seize the essence of the matter and provide such a title that will also convey the same meaning in the TL and it should be translated into English as *The Worst School*.

It is considered that **colloquial forms and slang** make a title sound crude and vulgar. However, it is the author's decision and it should be respected during the translation process. If the title is misinterpreted the whole book will lose its allure. Thus, the book *Brainwashing Is a Cinch!* by James Maratta should be translated into Russian as «Промывка мозгов – как раз то, что надо!».

Finally, special attention should be paid to **grammar issues**, as each language has its peculiar characteristics of the way how a language functions. Whereas the list of analytical languages includes English and German, the Russian language refers to the synthetic ones. Therefore, the distinction between genders causes some problems in translating book titles. For example, *The Book Thief* is the original title of the book written by the Australian author Markus Zusak. As English does not involve three genders, mainly the neuter gender, female and male readers can only assume who the main character is – a male or a female. In German the book was translated as *Die Bücherdiebin* in which the article *die* and the suffix *-in* indicate the feminine gender. As a result, the title lost its suspense for the German readers because of the grammar rules. However, the Russian variant of the translation has managed to preserve the mystery as in the original title. Nikolai Mezin, the translator of the Russian variant of the book, has come with the following suggestion, translating the title as «Книжный вор». Using some peculiarities of the Russian language, he has veiled the gender of the main character as in literature the male gender is considered to be neutral. Translating book titles also implies difficulties a translator may face. Thus, Newmark claims that “...everything is translatable up to a point, but there are often enormous difficulties” [7, p.76]. To resolve these problems several techniques to translate book titles may be applied: Literal translation, Transliteration, Omission, Addition and Replacing the title.

To begin with, **Literal translation** is “following or representing the exact words of the original; word-for-word” as the Collins Dictionary states [6]. This strategy is popular in translating book titles, as authors tend to put the universal

meaning in the names of the books. Newmark maintains the idea that “*If the SL text title adequately describes the content, and is brief, then leave it*” [7, p. 57]. Here are a few examples of literal translation of book titles from English into Russian:

The Lord of the Rings by J. R. R. Tolkien = «Властелин колец» Джона Р. Толкина;

Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen = «Гордость и предубеждение» Джейн Остин;

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee = «Убить пересмешника» Харпер Ли;

The Wind in the Willows by Kenneth Grahame = «Ветер в ивах» Кеннета Грэма;

Little Women by Louisa May Alcott = «Маленькие женщины» Луизы Мэй Олкотт;

One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel García Márquez = «Сто лет одиночества» Габриэля Гарсиа Маркеса;

Memoirs of a Geisha by Arthur Golden = «Мемуары гейши» Артура Голдена;

Lord of the Flies by William Golding = «Повелитель мух» Уильяма Голдинга;

The Woman in White by Wilkie Collins = «Женщина в белом» Уильяма Уилки Коллинза;

I Capture the Castle by Dodie Smith = «Я захватываю замок» Доди Смит;

The Godfather by Mario Puzo = «Крёстный отец» Марио Пьюзо;

Dracula by Bram Stoker = «Дракула» Брэма Стокера;

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood = «Рассказ служанки» Маргарет Этвуд;

The Gadfly by Ethel Lilian Voynich = «Овод» Этель Лилиан Войнич.

Transliteration is another technique which is applied while translating book titles. This technique implies the act or process of writing words using a different alphabet. Taking into consideration that in many cases authors title their books by using names of characters, this technique is widely used. It is obvious that the Russian sounds differ from the English ones. However, translators apply sounds making them sound closer and more similar to the original ones. Here are examples of using transliteration while translating book titles from English into Russian:

Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë = «Джейн Эйр» Шарлотты Бронте;

Rebecca by Daphne du Maurier = «Ребекка» Дафны Дюморье;

Middlemarch by George Eliot = «Миддлмарч» Джорджа Элиота;

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll = «Приключения Алисы в Стране чудес» Льюиса Кэрролла;

The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald = «Великий Гэтсби» Фрэнсиса Скотта Фицджеральда;

The Picture of Dorian Gray by Oscar Wilde = «Портрет Дориана Грея» Оскара Уайльда;

Artemis Fowl by Eoin Colfer = «Артемис Фаул» Йона Колфера;

Katherine by Anya Seton = «Кэтрин» Ани Сетон.

Along with transliteration *transcription* may be applied while translating book titles. Thus, in the above examples one can notice that the English name Alice from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* has been translated by Alexandra Rojdestvenskaya as Алиса and therefore the title itself is translated as «Приключения Алисы в Стране чудес». However, the title of the book *A Town Like Alice* by Nevil Shute has been translated into Russian as «Город как Элис» and refers to the Australian city *Alice Springs*. In the first example the translation has been made on the basis of the alphabet and therefore such a technique as transliteration has been applied. In

the second variant translation has been done on the basis of sounds, namely transcription: /'ælis/ for the English and Элис for the Russian translation. According to the Dictionary of English Personal Names both variants are possible: "ALICE ['ælis] ж `Элис, `Алис, традиц. Ал`уса" [9, pp.31-32]. As a result, *Alice* is translated completely differently in the Russian variants. Nevertheless, transliteration of titles involves free interpretation that affects the readers' perception, and reveals some details of the plot. Alexandra Barinova reflects upon these changes in her article «Необычные переводы известных книг». For example, *Jane Eyre* became *Riso Kaijin* in Japanese, translated by Futo Mizutani, which means a *Perfect Lady*. In Chinese, Fang Li translated the book *Jane Eyre* as two hieroglyphs that reproduce the closest sound to the name (Jianai) and mean *Simple Love* [11].

It is important to mention another technique that translator may use in translating book titles. As a general rule, **Omission** is the act of not including something from the SL into the TL. Accordingly, the book titles given below have been translated in the following way:

Breaking Dawn by Stephanie Meyer = «Рассвет» Стэфани Майер;
Possession: A Romance by A. S. Byatt = «Обладать» Антони Сьюзен Байетт;
Never Let Me Go by Kazuo Ishiguro = «Не отпускай меня» Кадзуо Исигуро;
Howl's Moving Castle by Diana Wynne Jones = «Ходячий замок» Дианы Уинн Джонсон.

Let us expand on the above-mentioned examples. Comparing the English and the Russian variants of the title of Stephanie Meyer's book *Breaking Dawn* one can observe certain changes. The literal translation sounds inappropriate to the Russian readers and the translator replaced it by one word. The book *Possession: A Romance* by A. S. Byatt was launched in the Russian variant as «Обладать». According to Oxford Learner's Dictionary the word *romance* has many different meanings such as "love or the feeling of being in love, a story of excitement and adventure, often set in the past or story about a love affair" [8]. Omission was used here as it was impossible to translate it into Russian in one single word and preserve all these meanings. In the Russian variant of the book *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro the word *never* was omitted. To my mind, the translator Leonid Motylev did it on purpose to avoid the negative meaning of this word. While analyzing the examples above one can see that the name of the main character was omitted in the Russian translation of *Howl's Moving Castle*. As titles should be attractive and short the variant «Ходячий замок» seems to be quite appropriate. Moreover, the intrigue is kept in the Russian variant and readers have to think over what the name of the main character is.

Addition is one more technique translators use. To be more specific, Addition is the act of adding something to the TL compared to the SL. Here are examples of applying this technique while translating book titles from English into Russian:

Mort by Terry Pratchett = «Мор, ученик Смерти» Терри Пратчетта;
Fangland by John Marks = «Страна клыков и когтей» Джона Маркса;
A Moveable Feast by Ernest Hemingway = «Праздник, который всегда с тобой» Эрнеста Хемингуэя;
Tess of the d'Urbervilles by Thomas Hardy = «Тэсс из рода д'Эрбервиллей» Томаса Харди.

Consequently, translators who use this technique make changes while translating the title of a book. Svetlava Jujunava added an explanation in the title while translating the book *Mort* by Terry Pratchett. This has been done because of the name of the main character. The word *mort* can be translated as *deadly* or *death*. The book *Fangland* by John Marks refers to horror literature full of mystic and fantastic twists. So, the translator decided to intensify this genre by adding the word *claws* in the Russian variant. Clearly, English, being a laconic language, can combine many meanings just in one word. Hence, to translate the word *moveable* into Russian some explanations should be added for the literal translation like «способный к движению» does not sound attractive. Thus, *A Moveable Feast* by Ernest Hemingway was translated into Russian as «Праздник, который всегда с тобой». A language is the mirror not only of the structural levels but of cultural peculiarities as well. That is why in the translation of the book title *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy into Russian the additional word «род» was added. It will help readers to understand that *d'Urbervilles* is not the name of a place, moreover, the definite article *the* denotes that *d'Urbervilles* is a family name. In our opinion, the structural differences of two languages are another reason of using the additional technique in this case.

Finally, **Replacing the title** occurs when a translator uses a fully free method of translation in order to make it be accepted better by the reader in a TL. In this manner, the books listed below illustrate how titles in the TL differ from the ones in the SL: *His Dark Materials* by Philip Pullman = «Тёмные начала» Филипа Пулмана; *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* by Douglas Adams = «Автостопом по галактике» Дугласа Адамса; *The Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger = «Над пропастью во ржи» Джерома Сэлинджера; *Watership Down* by Richard Adams = «Обитатели холмов» Ричарда Адамса; *And Quiet Flows the Don* by Mikhail Sholokhov = «Тихий Дон» Михаила Шолохова.

Even though, the book *His Dark Materials* by Philip Pullman refers to children's literature, the author's target was to show the myth about how the universe was made. Consequently, the word *His* is related to the *Creator*. However, the Russian title «Тёмные начала» does not convey the same meaning and lacks the allusion to supreme power of a God.

Other interesting cases of translating book titles are related to the *antonymic translation*. Despite the fact that literal translation could be used one cannot judge whether this translation is correct or not. It should be kept in mind that translation is about the meaning, not just separate word transferring. For example, *Before I Die* by Jenny Downham was translated into Russian as «Пока я жива», *I'll Never Be Young Again* by Daphne du Maurier as «Прощай, молодость», *Atlas Shrugged* by Ayn Rand as «Атлант расправил плечи».

In conclusion it must be mentioned that "...the title should sound attractive, allusive, suggestive, even if it is a proper name, and should usually bear some relation to the original, if only for identification." [7, p. 57]. Since titles are so dependent on the rest of the text and, especially nowadays that they tend to give essential infor-

mation for the proper comprehension of the text, the translator does not have much freedom to change the title, being forced to let some connotations be lost in the process.

References:

1. ADAMS, Hazard. "Titles, Titling, and Entitlement To." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 46, no. 1, 1987, pp. 7–21. Retrieved from: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/431304> 04 June 2020
2. BERDNIKOVA, A. "Что в себе несет заглавие текста". From *ШколаЖизни.ру*, 2008 Retrieved from: <https://shkolazhizni.ru/school/articles/19812/> 27 February, 2021
3. https://harrypotter.fandom.com/ru/wiki/Переводы_серии_«Гарри_Поттер»_на_языки_мира 08 August, 2020
4. <https://magazine.skyeng.ru/mif-books/> 08 August, 2020
5. LEVINSON, Jerrold. "Titles." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 44, no. 1, 1985, pp. 29-39. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/430537> 04 June, 2020
6. LITERAL, Collins Dictionary online Retrieved from: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/literal> 27 February, 2021
7. NEWMARK, Peter. *A textbook of translation*. Pearson Education Limited. Ed. 2017, 306 p. ISBN 0-13-912593-0 Retrieved from: https://archive.org/stream/ATextbookOfTranslationByPeterNewmark/a%20textbook%20of%20translation%20by%20peter%20newmark_djvu.txt 27 February, 2021
8. ROMANCE, Oxford Learner's Dictionary online Retrieved from: https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/romance_1?q=romance 27 February, 2021
9. RYBAKIN, Andrey. *Словарь английских личных имен*. Moscow: Ed. Русский язык, 1989, 224 p. ISBN 5-200-00349-0 Retrieved from: https://fileskachat.com/view/34825_3603a82d4e2009b800c0de79248fe4f7.html 04 June, 2020
10. TITLE, Collins Dictionary online Retrieved from: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/title> 27 February, 2021
11. БАРИНОВА, Alexandra. "Необычные переводы известных книг". From *ЭКМО*, 2019 Retrieved from: <https://eksmo.ru/selections/neobychnye-perevody-izvestnykh-knig-ID15525013/> 08 August 2020
12. МУСИНА, Надира. "Realia as a cultural phenomenon". From *Молодой ученый*, 2017, № 22 (156), pp. 481-484. Retrieved from: <https://moluch.ru/archive/156/43949/> 04 June, 2020