

UDC 821.111.09

HUMOUR AS AN ETHNICALLY CONDITIONED PHENOMENON

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Humour is a complex linguistic phenomenon and it has implications for translating comic texts. Humorous texts are culture-dependent and sometimes cannot be translated adequately. It is impossible to translate humorous text based on certain extra-linguistic factors or on the play of words, specific for source language.

Humor is a complex linguistic phenomenon and this fact, as one of its researches into humour states has implications for translating humorous texts (1, p. 263). A number of factors have been taken into consideration, one of the most important being the overall cultural context in which they (i.e. texts) originate. The significance of the socio-cultural environment of the target and the source for the process of translation is the question which may be posed at this point. There are two opposing claims: one states that humour is a universal phenomenon and any comic text can be successfully rendered into another language. The other affirms that humorous texts are culture-dependent and therefore cannot be equally effective in their translated form.

The *aim* of this paper is to find out if the latter statement is actually true and there are texts or their fragments which cannot be effectively translated into foreign languages. Hopefully, the conclusions we may reach will permit to suggest an approach to translation which might prove effective in the case of humour expressed verbally.

It is reasonable to start with a reminder, that in the translation of a comic text, it is the target addressee's reaction that is at stakes. Attardo admits that the way, in which a joke is presented may differ depending on culture (2, p. 78). He mentions the example of famous Japanese rakugo, which is a type of an extended joke in a monologue form, non-existent in European tradition. The claim seems valid as far as Japanese and European cultures are concerned. But in many European cultures, Belorussian and Russian including, narrative strategies seem to be common and include such forms as dialogue, paradox, stand-up comedian, monologue, story, conundrum, mystery, expository text etc. This parameter could also include such humorous genres as sarcasm, parody, irony or non-sequitur (1, p. 264).

That humour is a phenomenon, deeply rooted in culture and non an independent aspect of reality is confirmed by A. Bednarczyk, who expresses doubts whether "after having passed through to the other side of the 'translation mirror', these (i.e. satirical) texts have remained as satirical as they previously were" (3, p. 283). She affirms that different nations laugh at different things and at different points. She distinguishes three types of associations responsible for the discrepancies in the perception of humorous texts in a particular culture: political situation, national tradition and literary tradition.

At this point, however, a question appears: could a particular national group, in the case of this study the English, have developed a type of humour which can meet incomprehension outside the native cultural sphere? If this were so, British sitcoms would not be known outside Britain and only a handful of British jokes would be comprehensible in a foreign social environment, yet facts demonstrate the opposite.

Moreover, there are individuals who claim that they can make anyone laugh regardless of the audience's nationality or religion and they often demonstrate this ability in practice (1, p. 265).

Thus the subsequent question comes up: are these two types of humour, one culture-specific and the other universal?

Let us consider the story given below.

A Dangerous Look-out

A foreigner, who, being a Frenchman, knew a little English, was sitting in the cabin of a river boat. The boat was approaching a bridge and the man at wheel gave the usual warning by shouting, "Look out!"

The foreigner mistook the warning for an initiation and hung his head out of the window. In doing so he got a bump on his forehead. He drew it quickly back and exclaimed peevishly, "The man cries 'look out' when he means 'look in'!"

The humorous effect of the story is based on the polysemy of the English phrasal verb "to look out". The poor Frenchman obviously only knows one of the verb meanings and falls victim to his insufficient command of English. In British settings the fact that the poor stranger is of French origin may have some humorous implications as well, as there is centuries long opposition between the two cultures. For other cultures however

the humour of the story is concentrated entirely on the play of the meanings of the phrasal verb "to look out". But do they have a corresponding lexical unit in their languages? If not, then, as in Russian or Belorussian, there are obvious difficulties in the translation of the seemingly simple story. And the only way of rendering it then is a descriptive or explanatory one, giving a reasonable account of the double meaning of the lexical item in English and thus offering a clue to what actually happens and why the funny Frenchman puts his head out.

Summing up our tentative research we claim that one of the varieties of culture specific humour is that which is produced by subtleties of the source language not available in the target language.

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UDC 821(7/8).09-111

THE LITTLE MAN THEME IN O. HENRY'S SHORT STORIES

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The article is devoted to the little man theme in O. Henry's short stories. The review of O. Henry's characters is given. The theme covers an ordinary man's life description, his home, place of work, outlook on life, speech. It's pointed out that O. Henry's stories reflect an American's difficulties of e. XIX – b. XX c.

An ordinary man's life has always been the main topic for the authors of all time and nations. The writers depict people's hardships, experience, hope, misfortune and joy at different times. The readers are enthusiastic about such characters and find themselves in such stories. These works are exceedingly popular, because the plots of these stories are close to ordinary people.

The little man theme had existed in the literature of different countries till XIX c. However, in XIX c. a literary character (little man) became very popular. Little man is a «denotation of rather different characters, who occupy lower position in a social hierarchy and it defines their psychology and social behavior (humility combining with injustice and injured pride)» [1, C. 494]. Among the works devoted to this topic are «The Overcoat» by N.V. Gogol, «The Death of a Government Clerk» by A.P. Chekhov, «The Vickar of Wakefield» by O. Goldsmith, the works by A. Daudet, etc.

By the end of XIX c. a new name had appeared in American journalism. O. Henry published his first story in «McClure's Magazine». His stories became widely popular, while his identity remained a mystery. Only after his death it was revealed that O. Henry was a pseudonym of William Sydney Porter. He published his humorous weekly «The Rolling Stone» in 1884. During his short career, the writer released 9 collections of short stories and a novel «Cabbages and Kings» which made a big impression on readers. Each of his collections has its own peculiarities. Short stories are devoted to three main topics: life in a big city (New York), life in the West and South of the USA. The writer recreated the life of ordinary people (shop assistants, cowboys or ordinary swindlers) who lived there.

O. Henry paid much attention to a little man's life in a big city in his works. The reason why he described an ordinary man's life was the diversity of USA's history. USA has always attracted people from all over the world. During 1880 – 1910 the population of the USA had increased in forty million people, «4, 6% of all population of the USA lived in New York in the beginning of XX c» [2]. Rich people still controlled 75 % of all property (1890s). The description of an ordinary man's life who overcomes all obstacles and has positive attitude towards all the things which happen to him, made ordinary US people think more positive. O. Henry placed his characters in a big city in order to show how they were similar to other people. The writer had never put himself above his characters. They were ordinary people as he was. He had changed many jobs, including pharmacist, teller, journalist, writer, etc. His characters also have such professions. The short stories protagonists are not upper class people, but little men living an ordinary life, barley making ends meet. O. Henry's characters are poor men, artists, actors, bankers, swindlers, who get in tricky situations and find a way out with dignity. The writer chose a low/middle class citizen and showed the difficulties of thousand other people in that job.

A typical big city citizen is Soapy (the short story «The Cop and the Anthem»). Soapy is a little man of a big city, noble, dignified. The protagonist is an unordinary beggar, he is well-dressed, has a great taste. He is hard up and wants to spend the winter in prison where he'll have enough food and warmth. Although there are