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FROM PRACTICAL GRAMMAR TO LITERARY TRANSLATION. HOW CAN PRACTICAL GRAMMAR CLASSES AID PROSPECTIVE TRANSLATORS OF LITERARY TEXTS – AN ANALYSIS DEDICATED TO MY STUDENTS

People pretend, imitate, lie, fantasize, deceive, delude, consider alternatives, simulate, make models, and propose hypotheses. Our species has an extraordinary ability to operate mentally on the unreal, and this ability depends on our capacity for advanced conceptual integration.

(Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 217)

At first sight, poetry and grammar do not go well together. In contrast to poetry, commonly assumed to carry “a quality of beauty, grace and deep feeling”, the concept of grammar evokes associations with the technical aspect of language, i.e. its mechanism: “the rules by which words change their forms and are combined into sentences” (entries: ‘poetry’ and ‘grammar’ in *Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture*). At universities, the curricula of language studies keep the two separate, in the form of grammar courses and poetry courses; and rarely is any poetry noticed in grammar because grammar can be taught and learned whereas poetry yields to subjective interpretation rather than reasoning by means of objective rules.

An innovative perspective on grammar, including grammar in translation, has been proposed by cognitive linguistics, whose “basic assumption is that language is best regarded as an integral part of cognition, and that it will be insightful to study language in light of what is known about the mind, whether this be from experimentation, introspection, or even common-sense observation.” (Taylor 2002: 8) The cognitive approach treats grammar as image, or imagery, which was first postulated by Langacker. One of his seminal works, *Concept, Image and Symbol. The Cognitive Basis of Grammar* (1990), contains a chapter whose title “Grammar as image” has become a motto of cognitive linguistics. In that work, Langacker defines grammar as a set of parameters – or dimensions – of imagery (Langacker 1990: 5–15), by which he refers to its capacity to mirror human cognitive structures and processes (for a detailed description of imagery cf. also Langacker 1988: 49–90). Thus grammar is a “human factor” in a text: a way to express an author’s point of view. What follows for cognitive linguistic text analysis, grammar is viewed as a legitimate element of poetics (cf. e.g. Stockwell 2002). The application of cognitive

linguistics (and the dimensions of imagery) to translation makes it possible to see translation equivalence as the equivalence of images and thus reveals the poetic impact that grammar can create in literary texts and their translations (cf. Tabakowska 1993).

Among texts in which the author's point of view and message are conveyed *via* grammar is Wisława Szymborska's poem "W biały dzień" (Szymborska 1997: 260, 262). In this poem, it is grammar that constitutes the principle of poetic composition: a consciously employed grammatical construction is the basis of the image construal that impacts the reader in terms not only purely cognitive but also emotional. Since an equally conscious use of grammar in translation would ensure the equivalence of images, the following analysis will first deal with the original (Polish) grammar-based image in this poem and then explore this aspect in the English translation.

Wisława Szymborska "W biały dzień"

Do pensjonatu w górach jeździłyby,
na obiad do jadalni schodziłyby,
na cztery świerki z gałęzi na gałąź,
nie otrząsając z nich świeżego śniegu,
zza stolika pod oknem patrzyłyby.

Z bródką przyciętą w szpic,
łysawy, siwiejący, w okularach,
o pogrubiłych i znużonych rysach twarzy,
z brodawką na policzku i fałdzistym czołem,
jakby anielski marmur oblepiła glina –
a kiedy to się stało, sam nie wiedziałyby,
bo przecież nie gwałtownie, ale pomalutku
zwyżkuje cena za to, że się nie umarło wcześniej,
i również on tę cenę płaciłyby.
O chrząstce ucha, ledwie drażnionej pociskiem
– gdy głowa uchyliła się w ostatniej chwili –
„cholerne miałem szczęście” mawiałyby.

Czekając, aż podadzą rosół z makaronem,
dziennik z bieżącą datą czytałyby,
wielkie tytuły, ogłoszenia drobne,
albo bębnił palcami po białym obrusie,
a miały już od dawna używane dłonie
o spierzchłej skórze i wypukłych żyłach.

Czasami ktoś od progu wołałyby:
„panie Baczyński, telefon do pana” –
i nic dziwnego w tym nie byłoby,
że to on i że wstaje obciążając sweter
i bez pośpiechu rusza w stronę drzwi.

Rozmów na widok ten nie przerywano by,
 w pół gestu i w pół tchu nie zastygano by,
 bo zwykle to zdarzenie – a szkoda, a szkoda –
 jako zwykle zdarzenie traktowano by.

Understanding the situation in Szyborska's poem requires powerful and complex, though automatic, mental operations. The main task of the reader is to discover the status of the poem's world in reference to the here and now. For this purpose, the reader must decipher the clues which indicate the degree of (un) reality constructed by the author.

What catches the reader's eye first in this poem is frequent repetition of the conditional verb form at the end of the line, first in the 3rd person singular, masculine gender: *jeździłby, schodziłby, patrzyłby, wiedziałby*, etc. (in which the ending *-by* is attached to the verb) and then, at the end of the poem, in the subjectless construction: *byłoby, przerywano by, zastygano by, traktowano by* (in which, with the exception of the first one, the conditional particle *by* is independent from the verb). The conditional mood used here indicates an unreal situation, which is described only hypothetically with regard to either the present or the past reality. Whether it is the past or the present may not be obvious at first sight since in Polish the same verb form can be used to say that a situation is hypothetical now or was hypothetical in the past, and clarification frequently depends on the context. What is significant is the fact that Szyborska repeats the conditional verb form so many times and that it is situated in the rheme position: at the end of the lines (a more typical position would be at or near the beginning of the lines). Although the Polish language has the advantage of the free word order in a sentence, as opposed to English (analysed below), this particular feature in the poem makes the verbs in question clearly stand out. While still natural in the Polish language, the position of the verbs reveals the information structure which highlights the hypothetical character of the situation.

The fact that the poem creates a hypothetical reality may be investigated in terms of the mental spaces theory, developed within the framework of cognitive linguistics by Fauconnier (cf. Fauconnier 1994). A mental space is a kind of scene, situation or scenario whose primary characteristic is its temporary character:

Mental spaces are regions of conceptual space that contain specific kinds of information. They are constructed on the basis of generalised linguistic, pragmatic and cultural strategies for recruiting information [from long-term memory – A.G.] [...]. The hallmark of a mental space [...] is that mental spaces are constructed 'online', in the moment of speaking or thinking, and can be structured by other cognitive entities including semantic frames, idealised cognitive models or domains by a process known as **schema induction**. Thus a mental space results in unique and temporary 'packet' of **conceptual structure**, constructed for purposes specific to the ongoing discourse. Mental spaces are set up by **space-builders**, and can contain one or more of the following sorts of information type: an **element**, a **property** and a **relation**. Mental space construction begins with the formation of a **base space** relative to which other mental spaces are built. A series of connected mental spaces are referred to as a **mental spaces lattice**. (Evans 2007: 134)

Space builders are words or phrases which act as signals to the readers, making them “«set up» a scenario beyond the «here and now», whether this scenario reflects past or future reality, reality in some other location, hypothetical situations, situations that reflect ideas and beliefs, and so on.” (Evans 2007: 202–203) Among the typical space builders are prepositional phrases (which function as various adverbials, e.g. defining the place or time valid in their mental space) or connectives (including ‘if... then...’). Grammatical tenses and moods act as space builders, too, as they give a scene its temporal frame. Different conditionals differ in the type of mental spaces and the markers of a conditional sentence serve as space builders. Moreover, in a longer text, the reader can trace the appearance of the mental spaces lattice based on the conditional mood by following certain space builders which trigger such hypothetical mental spaces.

However, although Szyborska’s poem makes use of the conditional mood, it does not allow for disambiguation of the situation in it although the reader does know that it is unreal, which is prompted for by the Polish verb suffix *-by* and the particle *by* (English ‘would’). What the reader does not know is whether that unreal situation is present or past. The poem does not contain full conditional sentences: the subordinate clause with its tense and the conditional space builder – Polish *gdyby* (English ‘if’) – is absent. The reader must find a hint, or hints, other than grammatical ones, that make clear the situation (and the grammatical mood meant in the poem); and the hints appear in carefully measured doses. First, we do not know who the poem is about, except that the masculine gender of the verb forms indicates a male person. The person is described as getting old; his life is routine. Next, in that context already sketched, the mention of a bullet, especially when juxtaposed with the fact that the man is getting old while he could have died earlier, may suggest that the incident with the bullet happened during World War II. The final hint is the name: Baczyński, familiar to most Polish readers adult enough to have studied the poetry of Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński at least at school. This name erases all doubts that might have appeared at first, concerning the reference of the hypothetical mental spaces in the poem: it becomes clear now that it is the present unreality set up against the background of World War II, and in particular the Warsaw Uprising, in which Baczyński lost his life as a soldier.

The structure of the poem follows the order of an increasingly detailed description of the present habits and appearance of an ageing man, contained in the lattice of subsequent counterfactual mental spaces. Their content is then juxtaposed with another space: the man’s memory of the war. However, the name *Baczyński* introduces a mental space with a different epistemic status: that of a fact, namely the tragic death of the young and talented Polish poet Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński in the Warsaw Uprising. This mental space draws its content from the conceptual domain containing the reader’s greater or smaller knowledge of Baczyński’s poetry and biography, learned at school.

The power of the poem consists largely in the blending of the above mental spaces. Blending is defined as selective integration of the content of the input mental spaces, resulting in a new space, some of whose content may be entirely

novel, i.e. non-existent in the input mental spaces. The new space is called a blend. A clear and brief definition of blending may be found e.g. in Evans (2007: 12, 13).

In Szymborska's poem, by virtue of blending, the ageing man is identified with Baczyński. In the blend, Baczyński has survived the war because the bullet, which in reality killed him, missed his head. This point in the poem prompts reinterpretation of its previous part: the readers may recognize the details of Baczyński's present reality. The boarding house in the mountains with its interior, the view from its windows, the routines there is the 'Astoria' Guest House for Writers in Zakopane (where, had he survived, Baczyński would spend time writing, like Szymborska herself and many other writers).

Another product of the blending process is irony based on contrasts. Only owing to the blend do we notice the sad contrast between our knowledge of Baczyński's tragic life and his romantic and apocalyptic poetry on the one hand and, on the other hand, the image of his present cosy life and old age as shown in the poem. Another contrast is between the poem's title, which suggests that the reader is going to witness a surprising or shocking event, and old Baczyński's monotonous, ordinary, daily routines. In other words, the reader's reception of the irony – and the surprise – come from juxtaposition of the fictional ordinariness with the real-life tragedy.

Further analysis concentrates on the translation, and in particular on the key parameters focused on above. The poem has been translated as "In Broad Daylight" by Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh (Szymborska 1997: 261, 263):

He would
vacation in a mountain boardinghouse, he would
come down for lunch, from his
table by the window he would
scan the four spruces, branch to branch,
without shaking off the freshly fallen snow.

Goateed, balding,
gray-haired, in glasses,
with coarsened, weary features,
with a wart on his cheek and a furrowed forehead,
as if clay had covered up the angelic marble – he wouldn't
know himself when it all happened.

The price, after all, for not having died already
goes up not in leaps but step by step, and he would
pay that price, too.

About his ear, just grazed by the bullet
when he ducked at the last minute, he would
say: "I was damned lucky."

While waiting to be served his noodle soup, he would
read a paper with the current date,
giant headlines, the tiny print of ads,

or drum his fingers on the white tablecloth, and his hands would
have been used a long time now,
with their chapped skin and swollen veins.

Sometimes someone would
yell from the doorway: "Mr. Baczyński, phone call for you" –
and there 'd be nothing strange about that
being him, about him standing up, straightening his sweater,
and slowly moving toward the door.

At this sight no one would
stop talking, no one would
freeze in mid-gesture, mid-breath
because this commonplace event would
be treated – such a pity –
as a commonplace event.

What follows from the analysis of the original performed above, the distinguishing features to be examined in translation are the conditional mood, the resulting mental spaces and their blending, with irony as the product of all these factors.

The question of the kind of unreality (past or present) requires the translator to make a choice that is much more definite than in the original, namely the choice between the second, and the third conditional – or perhaps their combination (the mixed conditional where the superordinate clause is in the second conditional while the subordinate clause is in the third). In the Polish version, the verb form does not indicate this precisely and the reader may assume that Szymborska describes the ageing poet's hypothetical life now or his hypothetical life in the past. Grammar does not offer any disambiguation. The type of mental space becomes evident only after the reader learns who the poem is about: it becomes obvious that the type of conditional underlying the poem is mixed, rather than second or third. That is why the reference to Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński is the key factor of mental space counterfactuality in the source text. In the English version, some of this ambiguity is necessarily solved by the translators, who already at the very beginning use the second conditional. This makes it clear for the target text reader that the ageing man's life is placed in the hypothetical present, rather than past: it is someone who might be alive now. However, it is the English grammar that did not allow the translators to preserve the ambiguity of the original in this respect.

However, and much more importantly, the name Baczyński does not make on the reader such a powerful effect of sudden enlightenment as it does in the original. Naturally, the English translation does not activate in the target reader the conceptual domains of Polish literature (and the sub-domain of the Polish literature of the war period in particular) and the content of the domain of the English-speaking reader's knowledge of World War II will be very different from that of the Polish one. One might venture to say that the very person of Baczyński is much less meaningful to the target reader: perhaps the poem could be about

anyone now dead who could have lived longer, the bullet in the poem could have been just any bullet, not necessarily related to a war. Since the target readers' background knowledge, or the extralinguistic context that they can rely on, is so different, it required the translators' footnote with basic explanation, which is an immediate signal to the target reader that the poem's world is an unfamiliar one:

Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński, an enormously gifted poet of the "war generation," was killed as a Home Army fighter in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 at the age of twenty-three (*translators' note*). (Szyborska 1997: 261)

The footnote does provide the missing information (and the missing element of the blend) but the fact that the target readers are forced to divide their attention between the poem and the explanation, and that they can fully understand and experience the impact of the poem only after reading the translators' footnote, weakens the surprise and the immediate, undivided poetic power that the original has. Using the cognitive linguistic terminology from the area of blending theory, it may be said that in the original the mental spaces blend with elements of the conceptual domain of Polish readers' background knowledge in the poem itself (during its reading), which is what strikes the source reader. Inevitably, in the English version without a footnote there would be little to 'feed' this blend – but the fact that the poem needs explanation delays blending until the footnote has been read and, sadly, dilutes the irony.

Because in the original the conditional verb form is placed at the end of most lines, stressing the counterfactuality to the reader, conscious use of the second conditional is very important in translation. The hypothetical situation described in Szyborska's poem requires the use of *would* and the bare infinitive. Since the word order in English sentences is much stricter than in Polish, the possibilities of emphasizing the conditional form of the verb are few. The translators placed the auxiliary verb *would* at the end of the line (which mirrors *-by* and *by* in the original) though for that purpose they had to move the main verb to the beginning of each subsequent line and the opening line is extremely brief, which makes it much more emphatic than the original. In this way, the interpretation of the poem is partly enhanced by its grammar-based graphic pattern. The fact that the graphic aspect of a text may be a kind of literary space is described by Dorota Korwin-Piotrowska (2011) in her book *Poetyka. Przewodnik po świecie tekstów*:

[...] eksperymenty z kompozycją, znaczeniem i wizualną stroną druku wprowadzają zagadnienie **przestrzeni wizualnej** do pojęcia tekstu. Tekst staje się nie tylko obszarem znaczącym, przynależnym do sfery językowych znaków i sensów, lecz także przestrzennym obiektem wymagającym współpracy wielu zmysłów, plastyczną **wizualizacją**. (Korwin-Piotrowska 2011: 253)¹

¹ [...] experiments with the composition, meaning and visual side of print introduce the issue of **visual space** to the concept of text. A text becomes not only an area of meaning, belonging to the sphere of linguistic signs and senses, but also a spatial object that requires the cooperation of many physical senses, a plastic **visualisation**. (Korwin-Piotrowska 2011: 253, trans. A.G.)

The composition of Szyborska's poem "W biały dzień" reveals such a systematic graphic distribution of the counterfactual space builders that this text should be regarded as a spatial object and treated as such in translation. Its grammar (the conditional mood, in particular) has proved to be among the key elements to be considered in translation as well as translation criticism and assessment. It is grammar that carries and emphasizes the message by highlighting the counterfactuality of the series of scenes, or the mental spaces lattice, involving Polish poet Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński, that the poem consists of. The fact that the author herself paid attention to the visual, graphic aspect of the grammatical structure that she used prompts the translators to strive to achieve a similar spatial distribution of the conditional verb forms throughout the poem in easily noticed places, including the last line. The translators did achieve this goal, putting even greater emphasis than the author on the auxiliary verb *would* by graphically isolating the beginning of the first line.

The above analysis leads to a conclusion that grammar does play a crucial role in poetry and that practical knowledge of grammar may be a decisive factor in translation. In the translation of this poem, the choice between the second and third conditional sets up a particular kind of counterfactual mental space in a way that is much more definite than in the original (although it must be admitted that the translators had no room for leaving ambiguity here). Secondly, the graphic distribution of the auxiliary verb *would*, which triggers subsequent mental spaces, impacts the meaning. The awareness of the role of the conditional mood in the source text, so different from the much more concrete target text, and its effect on how the poem is read, processed and understood by Polish and English readers, is indispensable for discussion and assessment of this particular translation.

Therefore, despite the fact that practical grammar is commonly approached as a boring element of the English Studies curriculum at university, prospective translators of literary texts should be aware that those seemingly down-to-earth grammatical issues, laboriously practised in class (such as the conditional mood), have the power of changing the world – the whole world of a piece of poetry.

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Od gramatyki praktycznej do przekładu literackiego. Jak gramatyka praktyczna może wspomagać tłumaczy tekstów literackich – analiza dedykowana moim studentom

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł to analiza niektórych zawłości gramatyki angielskiej, nauczanej na I roku studiów licencjackich filologii angielskiej, jako podstawy przekładu literackiego. Autorzy tekstów literackich, takich jak wiersze, wykorzystują gramatykę, by budować obraz i przesłanie, jakie chcą przekazać czytelnikowi. Przyszli tłumacze muszą być świadomi tego, że w gramatyce jest poezja; dlatego też ich praktyczna znajomość gramatyki powinna być obecna i doskonała podczas tłumaczenia tekstu literackiego. Niniejszy artykuł omawia praktyczne znaczenie gramatyki jako elementu warsztatu tłumacza na przykładzie wybranego zagadnienia w wierszu, którego poetycka siła opiera się na przemyślanych konstrukcjach gramatycznych; mianowicie, artykuł pokazuje, jak wątpliwości związane z wyborem czasów w zdaniach warunkowych mogą istotnie wpłynąć na prawidłowe tłumaczenie wiersza Wisławy Szymborskiej „W biały dzień”. Wybory gramatyczne omówione zostaną na przykładzie tłumaczenia pt. „In Broad Daylight” autorstwa Stanisława Barańczaka i Clare Cavanagh. Analiza przeprowadzona jest z perspektywy językoznawstwa kognitywnego.

Słowa kluczowe: warsztat tłumacza, gramatyka, poezja, językoznawstwo kognitywne