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Bachelor's project

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1. Introduction

Even though translation of humour seems like a difficult task because of the cultural and language aspects of humour it is still achieved in a spectacular way. The humorous works of Shakespeare have been translated thus making his comedies achievable to many people around the globe. As mentioned, the hard task behind translating humour is often either the language specific features of the humour at task or the cultural intricacies of the given language and its country.

1.1 Background and Research Question

This thesis will be based on two languages which are Polish and English. I am a fluent speaker in Polish as it my mother tongue, so it was natural for me to pick a thesis that focuses on a Polish text. The ST is in Polish written by Andrzej Sapkowski and TT is in English translated by a Polish translator Danusia Stok. The name of the book is *Ostatnie Życzenie (*eng. *The Last Wish)* and it is a compilation of short stories that is supposed to introduce the reader to the story and its characters of *the Witcher* universe. While the book is not filled with jokes everywhere, the nature of the characters gives them the ability to have a comedic interpretation of different situations in which they land. Sapkowski is known for his witty and somewhat dark humour, something that is seen in his books and is well reflected in his characters.

Witcher has seen a raise in popularity lately, mostly due to the videogame *Witcher 3: The Wild* Hunt (2015) as well as the Netflix series *The Witcher* (2019). Because of this spike of popularity, the book is now being translated into more languages than before. It originated in Poland and most of the monsters and stories in the books follow polish folklore. The plot follows the main character Geralt who is a witcher, meaning that he has undergone training in preparation for becoming a monster slayer for hire. Another important character for this thesis will be Jaskier who's name got translated into Dandelion even though a direct translation of the name would give us the flower Buttercup, some speculate that this decision has been made to not make the name too feminine.

My research question for this thesis will be: *"What are the differences and similarities in humour between the ST and TT in The Last Wish by Andrzej Sapkowski?"*

2. Theoretical Background

Clario (2017) writes that translation of humour is a challenging task, due to language specific attributes of humour as well as its cultural aspects (p. 414). The challenges may lay e.g.

wordplay, language specific humorous words or situations that historically and culturally appear in the given language. To review and analyse the different approaches Sapkowski takes to write humour as well as analyse the translation of these texts I will use the GTVH.

2.1. General Theory of Verbal Humour

The General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) together with the Semantic-Script Theory of Humour (SSTH) have been defined as the most dominant linguistic humour theories that have been published in the last decades (Attardo, 2017, p. 126). The GTVH provides a categorization of that is needed when recognizing something as a humorous text. It brings forth categorization based on the different Knowledge Resources (KR) which consist of Script Opposition, Logical Mechanism, Situation, Target, Narrative Strategy and Language (Attardo, 2017, p. 128). These are helpful to understand and pinpoint to what exactly makes a text funny and humorous. While the GTVH was primarily focusing on examples based on simple jokes, it is a misunderstanding that it should only be used for that purpose. Attardo (2002) provides an expansion to the theory that gives us the ability to use it on longer texts, however some structures do indeed change when looking for humorous bits in the text.

2.1.1 The Knowledge Resources

Humour as mentioned earlier can have some room for interpretations especially given that it tends to be a subjective matter as one thing can be fun to some while others will not see the same humour in the joke. The KR's are here to help us navigate through this and identify bits and pieces of the text that would be considered humorous, these are presented in Attardo (2017). *Script Opposition* (SO) is a KR that focuses on the fact that the two scripts (parts) in a joke need to either be compatible with each other or opposite of each other. A common script opposition can be *normal/abnormal, serious/non-serious* etc (pp. 133-134). The *Language* (LA) KR contains a phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical description of the text, it can also contain information about frequency of occurrence of units and clusters (p. 128). The Narrative Strategy (NS) KR describes how the humour in the given text is structured, as well as how it is placed, e.g. where the jab line or punchline in the text is (p. 130). *Target* (TA) is a simple KR that focuses purely on who the target of the joke is. It is quite common that jokes often have an aggressive manner towards either humans or human activity (p. 131). The *Situation* (SI) KR tells us something about the main description of the background of the joke, it is the situation where the joke takes place (pp. 131-132). The *Logical Mechanism* KR is possibly the most problematic resource the GTVH provides us. It tells us something about the logical aspects of the joke, there is still research done on whether

this is a necessary KR as some claim that one does not always have to understand the logical mechanism behind the joke for the joke to be funny. Some logical mechanisms are *analogy, exaggeration* etc. and Attardo makes it clear that this KR is optional (p. 133).

2.1.2 General Theory of Verbal Humour in Longer Texts

When analysing longer texts, one of the most important aspects we can look at are punchlines, and while jokes can have those the case is a bit different for longer texts. Long texts often have the humour spread across different sentences, phrases, and words throughout the whole text (Tsakona, p. 315). Attardo's (1996) introduction and explanation of jab lines helps with this issue because jab lines can occur at any point in the text. These are "humorous parts of the text which are essential to the narrative in which they appear or to the development of the text itself" (Attardo, p. 91). Jab lines can both have something to say in accordance to the main plot of the book or just the small micronarratives within the story. Jab lines and punchlines also differ in their functions as jab lines do not disrupt the development of the story and its interpretation, whereas punchlines often end the interpretation by reinterpreting the story. Additionally, Attardo (2017) writes that one should look out for repetition of humour and jab lines in longer texts as these might make the humour even more significant (p. 135).

2.1.3 General Theory of Verbal Humour and Translation

When it comes to translation and the use of GTVH there has been mixed opinions about it. As one of the KR's in GTVH is Language it can be hard to apply in an analysis in both languages. However, there are scholars and researchers that have done so either by changing the Language KR to "semiotic strategy" like we see in Attardo (2017) or applying it in a different way, therefore I will attempt to do the same as I see the GTVH being extremally helpful in this thesis.

2.2 Method

For this I will use the General Theory of Verbal Humour by Salvatore Attardo, which since its original form has seen updates so that it does not only fit short jokes, but also longer texts. Furthermore, I decided it would be appropriate to use Touryean descriptive method. It is a three-step methodology which consist of situating the text within target culture system while looking at its significance or acceptability, then analysing the text of ST and the TT to identify what Toury calls for "coupled pairs". These are basically texts that correspond each other between ST and TT. Thereafter try to attempt generalizations of patterns that one was able to find in the analysis (Munday, p. 175). To see it more clearly the General Theory of Verbal Humour will be applied to all the humorous bits. As it would be difficult to analyse the whole book, I decided to settle on a sample of 7 jokes across the book.

There are multiple limitations to this thesis and some improvements can be made when researching a topic like this in the future. First and foremost, the number of samples required for a generalization of the results should be amplified and an analysis across multiple books of the same writer/translator should be done to get a good sample for generalization. Then there is the matter of humour being a very subjective matter which by nature makes the sample that I have chosen subjective to some extent. These are samples that I found funny or humorous while reading the book, and a solution to this would be to have multiple people work on the same project.

3. Data and Analysis

ST (Sapkowski, 2011)	Knowledge Resources	TT (Sapkowski, 2012)	Knowledge Resources
- Tyle że chętnych zrobiło sę jakby mniej. Ostatnio co prawda, był jeden, ale chciał te trzy tysiące koniecznie z góry. No to wsadziliśmy go do worka i wrzuciliśmy do jeziora (p. 15).	**SO** life/death, normal/abnormal **LA** none **NS** Jab line **TA** Scammers **Si** Bargaining **LM** none	- Although there are fewer volunteers now. There was one recently, but he insisted on the three thousand in advance. So, we put him in a sack and threw him in the lake. (p. 10)	**SO** life/death, normal/abnormal **LA** none **NS** jab line **Ta** Scammers **Si** Bargaining **LM** none
- Po tych trzech kurach nie będzie strzygi, jeśli dobrze zrozumiałem. A co będzie? - Jeżeli wszystko pójdzie dobrze, czternastolatka. - Czerwonooka? Z zębami jak krokodyl? - Normalna czternastolatka. Tyle że... - No? - Fizycznie. - Masz babo placek. A psychicznie? Codziennie na śniadanie wiadro krwi? Udko dziewczęcia? (p.23)	**SO** Normal/abnormal, physical/psychological **LA** none **NS** Two jab lines, a polish saying **TA** abnormalities **SI** Explanation of curse lifting **LM** exaggeration	- After the third crowing of the cock, there will be no striga, if I understand correctly. What will there be? - If all goes well, a fourteen-year old girl. - With red eyes? Crocodile's teeth? - A normal fourteen-year-old. Except that… - Well? - Physically. - I see. And mentally? Every day, a bucket of blood for breakfast? A little girl's thigh? (pp. 18-19)	**SO** normal/abnormal physical/psychological **LA** none **NS** multiple jab lines, **TA** abnormalities **SI** Explanation of curse lifting **LM** exaggeration

- Żeby się tak dać pochlastać zwykłej strzydze! Mięśnie, ścięgna, o mały włos poszłaby tętnica szyjna! Na Wielką Melitele, Geralt, co się z tobą dzieje? Jak to się stało, że dopuściłeś ją tak blisko? Coś ty chciał z nią zrobić? Wychędożyć? (p. 39)	**SO** violence/sex **LA** Very old word for "intercourse" is used **NS** One jab line **TA** Geralt's masculinity **SI** Geralt is hurt after a fight with a striga **LM** exaggeration, faulty reasoning	- To let yourself be slashed like this by an ordinary striga. Muscles, tendons – she only just missed your carotid artery! Great Melitele! Geralt, what is happening to you? How did she get so close to you? What did you want with her? To mount her? (p. 35)	**SO** violence/sex **LA** None **NS** One jab line **TA** Geralt's masculinity **SI** Geralt is hurt after a fight with a striga **LM** exaggeration, faulty reasoning
Ostrzegam cię, w tym czasie nie próbuj sił w walce z ruchliwym przeciwnikiem. - Dziękuje za ostrzeżenie. Udziel mi może jeszcze rady: z czego mam w tym czasie życ? Skrzyknąc kilka panienek, kupić wóz i zorganizować objazdowy dom rozpusty? (p. 39)	**SO** warning/ignorance **LA** none **NS** irony, a jab line **TA** none **SI** Melitele warns Geralt of fighting in the future and he's frustrated with the proposition **LM** none	- I warn you, do not test your strength by fighting an agile opponent during that time. - Thank you for the warning. Perhaps you could give me some advice, too: how am I supposed to live in the meantime? Rally a few girls, buy a cart and organize a travelling house of ill-repute? (p. 35)	**SO** warning/ignorance **LA** none **NS** irony, jab line **TA** none **SI** Melitele warns Geralt of fighting in the future and he's frustrated with the proposition **LM** none

[…] ''Oddasz mi to, co pierwsze wyjdzie, aby cię powitać''. Powiecie, to może być pies, halabardnik przy bramie, nawet teściowa, niecierpliwiąca się by napyskować wracającemu do domu zięciowi. Albo ''Oddasz mi to, co w domu zastaniesz, a czego się nie spodziewasz''. Po długiej podróży, mości panowie, i niespodziewanym powrocie będzie to zazwyczaj gach w łóżku żony. Ale bywa, że będzie to dziecko. (p. 146)	**SO** moderate/extreme expected/surprise **LA** old word for lover "gach" **NS** Multiple jab lines, over exaggeration **TA** mothers-in-law lovers **SI** explanation of "the law of surprise" **LM** Analogy	[…] «You will give me the first thing that comes to greet you". It might be a dog, you'll say, a halberdier at the gate, even a mother-in-law impatient to holler at her son-in-law when he returns home. Or: "You'll give me what you find at home yet don't expect." After a long journey, honourable gentlemen, and an unexpected return, this could be a lover in the wife's bed. But sometimes it's a child. (p. 139)	**SO** moderate/extreme expected/surprise **LA** none **NS** multiple jab lines, over exaggeration **TA** mothers-in-law lovers **SI** explanation of "the law of surprise" **LM** analogy
- Gdy studiowałem w akademii w Oxenfurcie, historia zajmowała drugie miejsce na liście moich ulubionych przedmiotów. - Co było na pierwszym miejscu? - Geografia – rzekł poważnie poeta. – Atlas świata był większy i łatwiej było za nim ukryć gąsiorek wódki. Geralt zaśmiał się sucho [...]. (p. 165)	**SO** expected/surprise **LA** none **NS** one jab line, Geralt laughing **TA** life of a student **SI** reminiscing of old times **LM** role exchange	- History was second on my list of favourite subjects when I was studying at the Academy in Oxenfurt. - What was first? - Geography, said the poet seriously. – The atlas was bigger and it was easier to hide a demijohn of vodka behind it. Geralt laughed dryly […]. (p. 158)	**SO** expected/surprise **LA** none **NS** one jab line, Geralt laughing **TA** life of a student **SI** reminiscing of old times **LM** role exchange

- To były czasy – mruknął wiedźmin. – Dziękuję, babko. A teraz pokażcie nam, gdzie tu o diable mowa i cóż to księga o diabłach powiada. Tym razem więcej rad bym usłyszeć, bom ciekaw, jakiego to sposobu na niego użyliście. - Uważaj, Geralt – zachichotał Jaskier. – Zaczynasz wpadać w ten żargon. To zaraźliwa maniera. (p. 187) [...] A kto wam kazał – roztwierdził się Jaskier – dawać mu tyle kulek? Soi w księdze, żeby jeno przygarść. A wy jemu wór onych kulek dali! Wy jemu amunicji na dwa roki bez mała przysporzyli, durni wy! - Uważaj - uśmiechnął się wiedźmin. – wpadasz w w żargon. To zaraźliwe. - Dziękuje. (p.191)	**SO** urban/rural **LA** Geralt gets affected by being in a rural area and starts talking in their dialect/old polish **NS** Geralt talking in old Polish, Jaskier delivering one jab line, Jaskier talking in the dialect, Geralt delivering the jab line **TA** peasants and the way they talk **SI** Sitting in a cottage and explaining how to get rid of a devil **LM** role reversals	- Those were the days, - muttered the witcher. – Thank you Grandma. And now show us where it speaks of the devil and what the book says about devils. This time 'tis grateful I'd be to heareth more, for to learn the ways and meanes ye did use to deal with him most curious am I. - Careful, Geralt, - Chuckled Dandelion. – You're starting to fall into their jargon. It's an infectious mannerism. (p. 180) […] - And who told you to give him so many? – Dandelion was enraged. – It stands written in the book, one fistful to take. Yet ye gaveth of balls a sackful! Ye furnished him with ammunition for two years, the fools ye be! - Careful – smiled the witcher. – You're starting to fall into their jargon. It's infectious. - Thank you. (p. 181)	**SO** urban/rural **LA** Geralt gets affected by being in a rural area and starts talking in Old English **NS** Geralt talking in old English, Jaskier delivering one jab line, Jaskier talking in the dialect, Geralt delivering the jab line **TA** peasants and the way they talk **SI** Sitting in a cottage and explaining how to get rid of a devil **LM** role reversals

4. Discussion and Further Analysis

Based on the analysis done above we can discuss some central topics in the translations of humour in *The Last Wish*. First and foremost, it is notable that the translator visibly values translation of humour to a great extent thus trying her best at translating the somewhat cultural and language specific humour in this book. Main themes of the humour in this book focus around aspects like sex, alcohol, and language and all of those can be seen in the samples given above.

4.1 General Observations

In general, we can observe that throughout the analysis the results between the correspondences of humour in the ST and TT are either the same or similar. It is apparent that the translator wanted to keep intact most of the humour in the book by using words that mimicked the jokes in the ST in a spectacular fashion. Across the different KR's we are not able to spot that many differences except for the Language Knowledge Resource which is explained below. Other than this the SO which is a vital part of the joke has stayed intact, and so has the other KR's like Narrative Structures, Targets, Situations and Logical Mechanisms. This is an interesting observation given that Clario (2017) clearly states that this field of translation is one of the most challenging ones given the variety of language variations and culturally specific humour. Luckily for the translator this text was not filled with extremely culture-specific or language-specific (or both) wordplay humour which surely made the task much easier. Continuity of jokes happens at multiple occasions like in sample #3, #4, and #7 which is carefully kept in check in the TT as well as to provide the greater humorous aspect of these jokes across multiple pages.

4.2 The Language

There are instances in the samples where Sapkowski uses old polish words to create a more humorous circumstance between the characters like with the case of sample #3 where he uses the word "*wychędożyć*" (eng. Intercourse) which historically has been used by Polish-Latvian nobility in 1500. This is a word that is probably hard to translate as its roots are rooted in Polish history and culture, thus making it funnier and more humorous in this sentence. Her chosen tactic is to find a dynamic equivalence where one tries to re-create the function the words might have had in their original situation and decides to exchange it to *"to mount her"* which while it is not a direct translation makes sense and is generally more funny than "have

sex with her" or its equivalent. Same situation occurs in sample #5 where the word *"gach"* which again is a considerably more advanced and older word for "*kochanek"*, however both can be associated very simply with the word "lover". Which proves again that the translator tried her best at finding the most equivalent words in English that would fit the humorous parts of the story.

Another situation where the language plays a big part of the humour in this book is when the main character Geralt and Dandelion visit a local village to find work. They are met by people who are peasants and work with farming, after a while when they talk about the job Geralt starts speaking in Old Polish just like the peasants do. Dandelion reacts to this with a remark that makes this situation funny, the same thing happens later on however in reverse making this a repetition of humour which in longer texts is often the key to having a good humorous part in the book. Now, instead of translating these words in Old Polish directly into English the translator wanted to keep the same effect in place, therefore she insisted on using Old English in the same place. Using words like *"gaveth", "ye",* and *"'tis"* which keeps the "peasant" situation pretty in place and fits the characters very well. Even though the initial idea of using Old Polish for this part is "lost" she keeps the humour at the same level as in the original with this adaptation.

5. Conclusions

To conclude and answer the research question of this thesis which was: *"What are the differences and similarities between correspondences involving humour in the source text?"*. We can see that the differences were mainly in language something that was caused mainly due to Sapkowski's use of Old Polish, however the translator clearly adapted and made these very specific words into Old English. The translator was also met with a specific word used in Old Polish where she decided to find a dynamic equivalence for the word, something that resulted in some loss of humour but not all of it. To my surprise the similarities can be found throughout all of the translations, this can be seen by looking at the KR's from GVTH where we can clearly see that the situations, logical mechanisms, targets, narrative structures and script oppositions stayed untouched which is impressive when thinking about how difficult it is to translate humour in general. Something that has to be noted that these humorous samples are not necessary jokes and are mostly humorous due to us knowing the characters and situations in which they find themselves in, which makes this kind of humour both easier and harder to translate.

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