https://doi.org/10.7592/FEJF2018.71.chlopicki

TRANSLATION OF MENUS: LABOUR OF SISYPHOS, SQUARING THE CIRCLE OR MARRYING WATER AND FIRE?

Władysław Chłopicki
Institute of English Studies
Jagiellonian University, Poland
e-mail: chlopicki@gmail.com

Abstract: As a regular customer of restaurants both in my native Poland and in other countries (particularly in the United States), I have always wondered why restaurant menus are so difficult to comprehend for a cultural outsider. In fact, this tendency is systematic and has to do with what Venuti (1995) has described as a necessary foreignization of texts in translation and what other translation scholars have referred to as inherent untranslatability of certain cultural texts. Still, subjective factors, such as lack of skills or experience on the part of the translator, should not be underestimated either. The question mark in the title thus results from my initial inability to determine whether translating menus is bound to fail, at least to some degree, due to objective problems or whether an expert and experienced translator should always be able to overcome the cultural barrier and generate an acceptable translation. The article concludes by stressing the lack of appreciation of translation as a skill in Polish society as well as the international nature and diversity of Polish food tradition and its apparent class divide.

Keywords: equivalence, foreignization, menu translation, untranslatability

EQUIVALENCE AND OTHER RELATED NOTIONS IN TRANSLATION STUDIES

In order to put the issue against a suitable background, the notion of *equivalence* in translation studies should be briefly discussed. This is the central issue in translation studies, embedded in centuries of translation experience of writers from St Jerome to Umberto Eco. The central question is whether languages and texts written in these languages are compatible, i.e., it concerns both language systems and language use. Already medieval scholars wrote treatises on mental categories underlying the grammatical ones, and postulated the existence

of universal grammar, which in fact accounted for the universality of human thought. "Grammar is one and the same in all languages in its substance and surface differences between them are merely accidental variations", famously claimed thirteenth-century scholar Roger Bacon (cf. Robins 2013 [1967]: 90). Furthermore, the focus of interest of medieval scholastic philosophers was the relations between words and things, i.e., they were interested in how words were arbitrarily attached to things in the world by different languages, but at the same time they perceived the commonality of human understanding despite the variety of languages. Most importantly, they argued that words stood for things they signified, since they could not signify them directly, and what follows – the study of words as well as sentences, which involved various grammatical categories, was a way to discover the nature of objective reality. Reality was out there for people to discover and languages reflected it, therefore the duty of scholars was to delve into the nature of reality via the study of language.

This "mentalist" approach to language reiterated later in the history of linguistics under various guises, including Noam Chomsky's generative linguistics, and recently resurfaced in the school of cognitive linguistics. Its representatives claim that meaning is conceptualization (e.g. Langacker 2008), and so it has nothing to do with actual "things" out there in the world. In their view we create meanings, we construct them in our minds under the influence of our culture and language. By simply looking at an object, such as cheese, we will not be able to understand the meaning of the word *cheese* unless we have earlier worked out its meaning, either by personal experience with the object or by linguistic or cultural awareness of it. Equally well we can construct meanings of objects we have not seen before (such as *ambrosia* or *nectar*) but we have been told about (cf. Roman Jakobson's (1959) classical article on translation).

In a classical work in Polish translation studies, written in the same time period as the one by Jakobson and in a similar spirit, Olgierd Wojtasiewicz (1996 [1957]) considered translation to be dependent on both language and culture. In this vein, he made a distinction between subjective and objective difficulties which prevented translation – that is, generating an equivalent text in the target language. Among the former were incapability or lack of experience of the translator or misunderstanding of the text. Among the latter, however, were difficulties which stem from objective differences between the respective language systems of the source and the target text, for instance, differences in the grammatical categories of definiteness, gender or aspect (*linguistic untranslatability*), as well as difficulties which stem from the lack of compatibility of cultural categories that he called technical terms (*cultural untranslatability*). These include local tools, measurements, kinship terms, dances, ritual institutions, architectural monuments, weapons, musical instruments, elements

of clothing, religious terms, biological terms as well as food terms. The solution for translators that Wojtasiewicz holds consists in defining equivalence in translation in terms of the same or similar associations being evoked by the target text as those of the original text (see Bałuk-Ulewicz (2016 [2002]) for the distinction between absolute and partial untranslatability).

With regard to specific decisions that a translator can make, Roman Lewicki (2000), in his study of the perception of translated texts by respondents, was inspired by the Czech translation scholar Jiří Levý (2011 [1963]) to accept the notion of a *translation norm*, understood as the awareness of the reader that they are not reading the original work, but a translation. The awareness brings openness on the part of the reader to accept the presence of elements which look or sound foreign in the target text, including proper names, forms of address, the so-called *realia* – i.e., foreign concepts referring to various aspects of life in a foreign country – as well as collocations, unusual dialogues and text genres unknown in the target culture. From a broader perspective, Piotr Kwieciński (2001) discusses two essential relations well known in translation studies. Firstly, it is that of the *source-target relation*, which essentially boils down to the comparison of the original text with that of a translation, although this comparison is not usually open to the reader of the translated text, but only to an analyst. Secondly, it is the *target text profile*, which, broadly speaking, assesses the quality of the target text, thus indicating how the translated text reads without any recourse to the original. Kwieciński has developed a five-point system of assessing whether the translated texts he examined met the expected standard on both counts, which was tantamount to issuing an overall assessment of the translation. Among the criteria was the cultural asymmetry, which involved the direction of the translation, i.e., whether the text was translated from or into a more culturally dominating language. For instance, when translating from English into Polish there was no need to render such cultural terms as *sitcom* or *hamburger* (they could be considered *recognized exoticisms*) or supply glosses on names such as John Kennedy, while in the reverse case references to *knedle* (form of dumplings) or Leszek Miller (the former Prime Minister of Poland) do require translations or glosses (they would be *exoticisms* which are not recognized). Other translation strategies include: borrowing, adding a gloss, using a calque (normalisation in his terms) or (naturally) omission.

An interesting voice in the discussion of the notion of equivalence in translation was offered by Umberto Eco (2001) in his published lectures, in which he discussed his own experiences with translators who rendered his books into numerous languages. He attempted to tackle the question of how one can decide about similarity of meaning between two languages. Since direct comparison is not possible and one requires *tertium comparationis*, which in turn is not

available, he claims that "similarity in meaning could only be established by interpretation and translation is a special case of interpretation" (Eco 2001: 13). He stresses that translation does not concern the process of comparing two languages, which is done in phrase books for tourists. There the tourists learn, for instance, that the Polish equivalent of *cheese* is *ser* – an explanation of limited applicability, since they can only use it in interpreting the texts where *ser* can be found to refer to cheese in general and not those where references are to *cottage cheese* (*twaróg* or *ser biały*) or hard cheese (*ser żółty*). In this vein Eco convincingly argues that translating involves "making a bet on the sense of the text" and thus a "textual abduction" of sorts (Eco 2001: 16) as well as a shift from one culture to another. To illustrate this further, he provides wonderful examples of what *coffee* implies in Italian and American cultures, connoting a very small quantity and a quick bar experience versus a considerably large quantity, including possibly refills, and long social experience, respectively:

> *Ordinai un caffe, lo buttai giu in un secondo ed uscii dal bar* (lit. 'I ordered a coffee, swilled it down in a second and went out of the bar').
> *He spent half an hour with the cup in his hands, sipping his coffee and thinking of Mary*. (Eco 2001: 18)

Eco also considers the age-old dilemma of translation scholars, dubbed *domestication* versus *foreignization* by Venuti (1995), which essentially implies either the need to bring the world of source culture closer to the reader or take the reader out on a trip to visit a foreign culture (the dichotomy is also known among translation scholars as the Schleiermacher dilemma). He advocates the middle-of-the-way strategy, avoiding excessive domestication, which would make the reader doubt the authenticity of the text (if all the realia and names were to be changed into those of the target culture), as well as excessive foreignization, which in turn would make the translation stilted, yielding excessively to the style of the original text and including all the peculiarities of the source culture without any adjustments or glosses.

From another perspective, Pascual (2012), in her case study of a Catalan restaurant menu, refers to the distinction between regional and international cuisine and argues, on the example of the local restaurant, which, in translating regional cuisine, should be favoured and considered as an indispensable point of reference. From the point of view of the present contribution it is an interesting perspective; still in the Polish context different criteria are preferred (see the section below).

TRANSLATING MENUS

Even though some of the recurring problems which haunt menu translators would appear understandable and unsurprising in view of the above translation research trends, still the degree of unsuccessfulness of menu translations considerably exceeds what one could expect and as such requires analysis and explanation, especially as menu translators often go beyond the necessary foreignization of the translated texts. Firstly, the subjective translation problems seem to dominate over objective issues, which means broadly that not enough effort is exerted in order to render the complicated reality of the source language and culture. In other words, from the point of view of the analyst, the difficult decision whether *pierogi* should be rendered as *dumplings* or *pierogi* yields to the lower-level but still significant decisions whether *pierogi* should be "translated" as *pierogis*, *pirogs*, *pierógs* or *pirogi*. The restaurant managers, on the other hand, generally play down the significance of the efforts that need to be undertaken to ensure both the cultural appropriateness and linguistic accuracy of translated menus. This lack of determination finds its reflection in the lack of care to ensure the qualifications and professionalism of the translators that are asked to do the translations. To put it simply, the restaurant managers use two strategies: "my wife's second cousin will do it, she has been to England once" strategy or "I know English myself – why waste money on a translator" strategy, both of which boil down to the imperative to save money and make do with *any* translation. The assumption that is often made is that customers do not care so much about the name of the dish as long as it tastes good. If any translator is commissioned to do the translation, then they are often paid little or given little time to do their task well. Furthermore, it is often expected that a translator will stick to the original text as much as possible, which follows from the assumption that translation is really all about finding the appropriate words in the target language, which no doubt are out there and just need to be found. In other words, the task of menu translation is generally underestimated.

Recently, a culinary dictionary (Bartnicki 2010) was published in Poland in the hope to help translators deal with the problem. The dictionary provides English translations for names of dishes, drinks, types of meals, edible substances, edible and inedible animals, types of restaurants, kitchen utensils, measurements, as well as verbs and adjectives used in the culinary discourse. Interestingly, it also includes food terms used in fantasy literature – the author's favourite type of literature (notably, he is also the translator of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* into Polish). The self-proclaimed objectives of the author are identified in the introduction to the dictionary as not only providing practical aid for translators and a reference book for philologists and translation theorists,

but also promoting the neglected lexicographical work on science-fiction literature (Bartnicki 2010: 9). In the present article I discuss some of the examples of translations recommended by the dictionary – not always uncontroversial, but it is worth stressing that the author did not consider all of his choices to be final and expressed his readiness to accommodate if his readers suggested more apt equivalents (ibid.: 12). This did not meet with much reaction, which in a way proves the argument advanced in the present paper – the significance of translation as a skill is underestimated by society at large. By voicing his attitude, however, Bartnicki – himself an accomplished translator – showed awareness of the cultural nature of food terms and the often objective difficulties of finding single and precise equivalents for them in the target language. Be it as it may, all of the examples provided below are from my own collection.[1]

In my view, the criteria to be relied on when translating menus are the following four: **comprehensibility**, **completeness**, **economy**, and **carefulness**. Specifically, I argue that borrowings need to be restricted in order for the translation to be comprehensible and consistent, descriptive equivalents need to be used when single-word equivalents are not easy to understand, omissions are possible but need to be justified, and last but not least – it is indispensable to verify the accuracy of the translation to eliminate misspellings and other inconsistencies (this is surprisingly neglected in Polish menu translations) and avoid unintended humour.

To illustrate the first of my specific rules, **try to make sense and get across to the customer**, which follows from the criterion of comprehensibility, let me provide a few examples. The first example concerns a term referring to a type of light wheat bread known in Kraków as *weka* (Fig. 1).

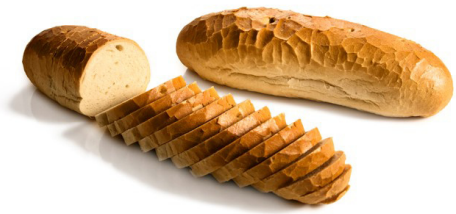

Figure 1. Weka *(http://www.piekarniapochopien.com/wyroby-piekarnicze.html).*

The translation I have found simply consists in borrowing the term into English and adjusting the spelling to indicate the desired pronunciation of the borrowed term in English (*Vecka* or *Veka*, both capitalized). The possible descriptive equivalent of the word could be *Kraków-style white bread loaf*, which on the one hand ensures the presence of the generic term *white bread loaf*, while on the other adds the specifying term Kraków-style. An approximate British equivalent of the bread is referred to in the United Kingdom and some other countries as a *milk loaf* (see Fig. 2) or *milk bread*.

1. weka – *Vecka*, *Veka*, Kraków-style white bread loaf, ~ *milk loaf*[2]

In spite of a certain degree of similarity, both the traditional shape and taste of the typical *weka* and *milk loaf* differ to an extent, and milk loaf does not have egg among its ingredients, thus it seems legitimate not to consider them equivalents and use different names.

Figure 2. *Milk loaf (http://www.thelittleloaf.com/2012/11/08/sesame-milk-loaf/).*

Styles of drinking coffee have been mentioned above as typically cultural. Thus the Polish habit of drinking coffee, made by pouring hot water on the coffee powder placed at the bottom of a glass (see Fig. 3), practiced particularly at the time of Polish People's Republic (1948–1989), could be referred to in English as *coffee the PRL style*. The only difficulty is the lack of target reader orientation since the Polish abbreviation PRL (Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa) should be used in full form and translated as Polish People's Republic. An additional cultural aspect significant for the translation is that drinking coffee (or tea) from a glass, no doubt a habit adopted by Poles under the influence of Russians, is considered uncultured as opposed to drinking coffee (or tea) from a cup.

Figure 3. Kawa po turecku – *coffee served the Polish People's Republic style (http://retro.pewex.pl/481985).*

The original term used to describe the type of coffee illustrated in Figure 3 is *kawa po turecku*, which back-translates into *Turkish coffee* (considered an approximate equivalent in Bartnicki 2010, side by side with *cowboy coffee*, which in turn refers to the kind of coffee boiled in a pot over a camp fire). It should be noticed that the difference between *Turkish coffee* (Fig. 4) and *the coffee PRL style* (Fig. 3) is much larger than that between *weka* and *milk loaf*, both in terms of the manner of brewing and the way of serving: Turkish coffee (see Fig. 4) is first boiled in a metal pot and then poured into an elegant small cup placed on the saucer. Still it is very sweet and very strong – the features it shares with the PRL-style coffee. Thus the frequent translation strategy which treats these two false friends as equivalent is completely unwarranted.

2. Kawa po turecku – *Turkish coffee*, cowboy coffee, coffee the PRL style

In fact, to increase the confusion for translators, *kawa po turecku* is sometimes used in Polish to refer to the Turkish type of coffee as illustrated in Figure 4, too.

Figure 4. *Turkish coffee (http://omnivorescookbook.com/adventure-in-istanbul-enjoy-turkish-coffee/).*

Comprehending a translation does not only involve objective difficulties and some degree of cultural untranslatability, but it brings subjective difficulties, too, as in the examples below, where translators offer seemingly sophisticated but rather incomprehensible versions of Polish terms, lacking in grammar (3) or making inappropriate vocabulary choices (4 and 5).

3. pieczeń z sarny – roasted *of roe-deer's* (= roasted roe-deer)
4. pieczeń z jelenia – *roti de stag* (= roasted deer)
5. rolada cielęca – *collar* of veal (= veal roulade; *roulade* is preferred by Bartnicki 2010)

The next rule concerns borrowings and is as follows: **Borrowings are acceptable, but must be used consistently and cannot interfere with comprehensibility**. Thus "rydze z patelni" have in fact been foreignized as 6 or 7 in my corpus.

6. *"Rydz"* mushrooms *Frying*
7. fried *"Rydz"* mushrooms

Although 6 is lacking in grammar, while 6 and 7 use an unclear capitalization pattern (there are no reasons why a type of mushroom, *rydz*, should be capitalized), two other, domesticated options are open to translators, a more generalized one (8) and a more specific one (9), both naming the mushroom species in English (*saffron milk cap* is the established equivalent – selected by Bartnicki 2010, although *pine mushroom* is a possibility too):

8. fried mushrooms
9. fried saffron milk cap mushrooms

The case of *kotlet de volaille* requires a special comment when borrowings are discussed.

Figure 5. Kotlet de volaille – *breaded fried chicken with butter and dill filling (http://tradycyjnakuchnia.blogspot.com/2013/11/tradycyjne-kotlety-de-volaille-devolay.html).*

Tradition has it that the recipe was brought over to Poland in the seventeenth century by Queen Marie Casimire Louise de La Grange d'Arquien (known in Poland as Queen Marysieńka), the French wife of King Jan Sobieski, hence the French name of the dish. Apparently, however, it comes from Ukraine and is known there as *Котлета по-київськи*, or chicken Kiev in English translation. Its defining feature is the presence of liquid butter inside which must flow out when the ready dish is cut in two parts. Some green dill leaves are part of the original recipe and the chicken must also be breaded. Apart from the apparent equivalent, which includes the reference to Kiev – irrelevant when translating a Polish dish, translations involve descriptive equivalents of various degrees of development, from the most general one (10, preferred by Bartnicki 2010), since it applies to other chicken breast recipes too, to more specific ones, imprecisely defining the dish with regard to its shape (a roll; 11), or classifying it (more precisely) according to the way of preparing (a cutlet), and adding the borrowed French term to define it further (12) as well as a longer description of what the dish is (13):

10. chicken breast
11. chicken breast roll
12. De volaille chicken cutlet
13. breaded fried chicken fillet stuffed with butter

Searching for various ways of rendering the foreign-sounding dish in English, I have encountered a number of unrecommended versions, which indicate the translator's struggle with its Frenchness by using capitals, apostrophe or even French words:

14. Chicken De Volaille; cutlet de' volaille; Chop de Vollaile; Cotelette de volaille; filet a'la devolaille

The most curious translation I encountered wrongly classified the dish as a pork chop (it is neither a chop nor is it made of pork) and attempted to narrow it down by adding the coined, non-existent style of cooking and then further the descriptive definition which includes the misleading phrase "with butter" (butter could then be understood as coming on top, and it does not):

15. *pork chop* de volaille style: coated chicken breast with butter

The term *szaszłyk* is another interesting case of borrowing. In translation it can indicate a great cultural variety of Turkish type dishes and depending on the culture and language, it can indicate a skewered meat, such as shish-kebab or other type of kebab not necessarily served on a skit (kebab in British English, just as in Polish, indicates a döner kebab or other kebabs): the choice between

two possible equivalents – *kebab* or *shashlik* moves the reader towards Turkey or Russia, respectively. Probably this is why Bartnicki (2010) chooses *shashli(c)k* as the general equivalent, while for *szaszłyk turecki* he prefers *shish kebab*.

Figure 6. Szaszłyk *(http://tasty.blog.pl/tag/szaszlyk/).*

The translations I have encountered involved various attempts to develop the translated version by either specifying the kind of meat (16 – *polędwica* in Polish refers to pork or beef loin mainly) or adding the reference to the original Turkish dish name in brackets (17), which is naturally confusing, given that the dish is made of pork. Two other translated versions (18 and 19) build on the original in a much more awkward way, since, on the one hand, they both lack in grammar (a spit crumbs?) and involve misspellings (blef broiler?), while on the other, 18 talks about both broiling and frying, which does not make sense; in addition, both use the expression *broiling on spit crumbs*, which probably has something to do with bread crumbs as well as the fact that shashliks are served on spits.

16. szaszłyk z polędwicy – beef sirloin shashlik
17. szaszłyk wieprzowy – pork shashlik (shish-kebab)
18. szaszłyk drobiowy – slices of chicken broiled on *a* [sic] *spit crumbs* and fried
19. szaszłyk – slice of *blef broiler* on *spit crumbs*

A third rule of menu translation which obviously follows involves **consulting expert local knowledge on cooking**, including local cooking. The author of 18 apparently did so, as *drób* (literally translatable as *poultry*) has been rightly rendered as chicken, since most of the dishes referred to as *drobiowy* are actually

made of chicken. In 20, however, the translation has not gone into the heart of the matter as *jagody* are most probably blueberries, since the term is unlikely to apply to any berries, even though in part of Poland *jagody* are indeed any berries. Still, knowing Polish recipes, one would expect blueberries. The sweet cream is apparently and rightly added for the sake of a foreign customer, who might not know that the dish is served sweet. 21 makes other assumptions: on the one hand, wings (*skrzydełka*) are likely to be chicken wings, which is added for the sake of the foreign customer, but then it is also assumed that they are coated with cornflakes – this is not guaranteed given the general meaning of the Polish term *panierowane*; thus it would be safer to use an equally general term – *breaded* or *breadcrumbed* – that does not specify whether fine breadcrumbs or cornflakes have been used. In 22, the translator has assumed that the traditional Polish side dish is fried in butter, and in fact chopped cabbage is at least just as likely to be fried in oil or lard, thus a much more accurate translation would be simply: fried cabbage or more accurately stir-fried cabbage, the latter referring to the specific manner of frying the cabbage. 23 makes an interesting shift from mutton (sheep's meat, *baranina*) to sheep, perhaps dictated by the fact that the original term is *pieczeń barania* (lit. mutton roast) and not *pieczeń z baraniny* (lit. roast of mutton), the latter phrase actually using the mass noun *baranina* and not just the adjective *barania*. *Roast sheep* invariably brings to mind the whole sheep roasted over a campfire, rather than a part of its meat served to customers, and thus is less preferred to roast mutton (or: roasted mutton).

20. pierogi z jagodami – *berry* pierogies with sweet cream
21. skrzydełka panierowane – chicken wings coated *in cornflakes*
22. kapusta zasmażana – cabbage fried *in butter*
23. pieczeń barania – *roast sheep*

24 illustrates the local form of a rather international dish called *croquette* and known locally as *krokiet*. Since it is usually served with meat and international versions include other stuffings, a preferred translation would be meat croquette (Bartnicki 2010 prefers simply *croquette*). Still the translator preferred to explain the dish as cabbage-filled and added the gloss on breadcrumbs as part of a long description which identifies it as a type of pancake. Although breaded pancakes do exist, and also the shape of croquettes and pancakes can be similar given the variety of pancake recipes, still Polish customers make a clear distinction between *krokiet* and *naleśnik*, as illustrated by Figure 7 and 8, *krokiet* never being served with a sweet filling.

Figure 7. *A typical* krokiet *– meat croquet (http://sklep.zych.bartoszyce.info/index.php?cPath=2).*

Figure 8. *A typical* naleśnik *– pancake often served with a sweet filling (http://fashionelka.pl/nalesniki-razowe-na-slodko-i-na-slono/).*

24. krokiet – pancake *stuffed with cabbage, coated in breadcrumbs*

The next rule demands that **glosses be used for local terms** which are not known world-wide, the rule being clearly in agreement with the rule of comprehensibility. *Pierogi* is a case in point since this typically Polish dish would be a good candidate for a dish whose name could be borrowed by other languages. Still, getting across to the reader is crucial, so instead of a loan, which comes under various guises (25; *pirogs* or *pirogi* being the oddest, somewhat anglicized versions), a form of domestication is sometimes preferred (such as *dumplings*), often accompanied by a gloss. Regardless of the choice, *Russian pierogis* are not an intelligible version (especially that, in fact, they are not Russian in origin), thus other translations are encountered, such as 26, 27 or

28. While 26 is an acceptable version, even though it ignores the third essential ingredient of onion, 27 specifies the type of cheese ingredient, forming a calque of *white cheese*, where what is meant is cottage cheese. Moreover, the translator of 27 seems to consider *pierogi* as coming in *versions* (like their names), which seems to be an unnecessary addition. 28 in turn not only mentions cheese only as an ingredient, which brings the risk of confusing it with the type of *pierogi* that is served sweet, but also perhaps unnecessarily classifies the *pierogi* as flat, differentiating it perhaps this way from *knedle* (rounded dumplings made with thicker dough and served e.g. with plums; they are also *dumplings* in Bartnicki 2010). A borrowing can thus save the consumer from confusion (cf. Fig. 9 and 10). Versions 29 to 32 are highly descriptive, 31 being the most factually accurate, while 32 even attempts a fine definition of *pierogi* itself as "boiled dough pockets".

25. pierogi, "pierogi", "pierogi" (dumplings), pierogis, pierogies, *pirogs, pirogi*[3]
26. cheese and potato dumplings
27. *white* cheese and potato version of pierogi
28. *flat* dumplings stuffed with cheese
29. dumplings stuffed with cottage cheese and potatoes
30. "pierogi" (dumplings) stuffed with cottage cheese and potatoes
31. Russian style potato, cottage cheese and fried onion dumplings
32. boiled dough pockets filled with cottage cheese, potatoes, and onion

Figure 9. Pierogi ruskie *(http://www.przepis-kulinarny.pl/pierogi-ruskie-id1671.html).*

Figure 10. Knedle *(http://kuchnia.wp.pl/query,Knedle,przepisy.html?ticaid=118042).*

Interesting glosses can also be encountered in the following examples. In 33 the way of serving is added, possibly on the request of the restaurant owner, as it does not belong to the standard recipe and is not part of the standard meaning of the *pierogi* in question. In 34 the traditional *bigos* dish (Fig. 11) is referred to with stew as a gloss, while in fact the borrowing could be replaced here with a fairly well established functional equivalent: Polish hunters' stew[4], especially when both terms occur side by side. The ingredients of *bigos* must include cabbage (fresh and/or pickled) and various meats, plus optionally onion, mushrooms or plums. It must also be cooked for a very long time to achieve the desired taste. The difficulty with translating the name of the dish as stew, beef stew or cabbage stew is that all these terms tend to be understood as referring to a type of thick, nourishing soup, which *bigos* is not. *Kotlet mielony* in 35 (see Fig. 12) is another simple but traditional meat dish, made of minced meat with egg and breadcrumbs.[5] In translation there is a double gloss – minced meat is added to the original name followed by the modifier "Polish style". This is most likely because minced meat in English is associated either with a meatball (a small round piece of meat served in some quantity, known as *pulpety* in Polish) or a meatloaf (a larger piece of minced meat, sometimes served with an egg inside, visually resembling a pate; see Fig. 13). Translating *kotlet mielony* as *Polish style meatloaf* has thus some degree of accuracy (and completeness), and at the same time a suitable degree of comprehensibility.[6]

33. pierogi z grzybami i kapustą – cabbage-mushroom *pierogies* served *with salad w/ bacon*

Figure 11. Bigos *(Colin Cameron from Edinburgh, Scotland – Bigos, CC BY-SA 2.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=4305457).*

Figure 12. Kotlet mielony – *Polish style meatloaf (http://niebonatalerzu.pl/2013/05/kotlety-mielone.html).*

Figure 13. *Meatloaf (http://www.taste.com.au/recipes/pork-beef-meatloaf-bacon-jam/b089f46a-7ab2-4312-af34-7249c4537218).*

34. bigos – Polish "bigos" stew
35. kotlet mielony – *"Mielony" minced meat* – Polish style

Still other cases of glosses include problems with rendering local proper names as in 36, where the dish name should rather be translated as *regional style sirloin steak*, or adding a proper name to refer to a dish better, as in 37 – the problem is that in fact *kołduny* is a Lithuanian dish, thus a more generic term should be in place, such as *bouillon with meat dumplings*.

36. stek podkarpacki – *Podkarpacki* steak
37. bulion z kołdunami – *broth* with *Polish* dumplings[7]

So far the focus has been on the criterion of comprehensibility, and before I conclude, let me briefly discuss examples of how the three other criteria can be followed. **Completeness** assumes that, unless there is a good reason, omissions are not recommended as in the following examples: in 38 capers are left out, in 39 and 40 the sauce (cranberry and béchamel, respectively) is not mentioned (*Roasted turkey with cranberry sauce*, and *Cheese and ham pancakes baked in bechamel sauce* are the recommended versions), whereas in 41 what is unnecessarily omitted is that the dish is *chef's special*.

38. makaron z tuńczykiem, oliwkami, sosem pomidorowym i kaparami – pasta with tuna fish, olives, tomato
39. indyk pieczony z żurawiną – turkey roast
40. naleśniki z serem i szynką zapiekane w sosie beszamelowym – pancakes with cheese and ham
41. stek wołowy na sposób szefa podany – sirloin steak with egg

Omission can be justified, however. *Oscypek* (see Fig. 14) is a highlander type of smoked sheep cheese which could also be translated in an expanded version: *sheep milk cheese*, or using a borrowing: *oscypek cheese* (Bartnicki (2010) chooses just the borrowing as a dictionary equivalent). The translation of 42 includes the true, although not indispensable, information that the cheese is *smoked highland* cheese, but at the same time it ignores the fact that it is *grilled* (see Fig. 15). The omission of the former is justified exactly because including it might lead to abandoning the latter – the *smoked grilled cheese* or *grilled smoked cheese* are stylistically awkward just as *smoked fried cheese* in 43.

42. oscypek grillowany z żurawiną – *smoked highland* sheep cheese with cranberry sauce
43. oscypek smażony z boczkiem – *smoked* fried sheep cheese with bacon

Figure 14. Oscypek – *sheep cheese (http://www.trzyznakismaku.pl/produkty/oscypek).*

Figure 15. Oscypek grillowany z żurawiną – *grilled sheep cheese with cranberry sauce (http://przekaskinaimpreze.pl/grillowane-oscypki-z-zurawina/).*

The criterion of **economy** demands, for instance, that parallel structures be used for the sake of brevity, especially the noun phrases with premodified nouns, typical of English syntax, but not necessarily typical of more flexible Polish one. The descriptive translation offered in 44 not only misunderstands the essence of the dish (the potatoes are not boiled with peelings, but they are simply boiled unpeeled, and no special sauce is added; see Fig. 16). The dish could be translated as jacket potatoes (Bartnicki's (2010) choice, the dictionary qualifying it also as an Irish dish), although the latter are made and served differently – they are baked in their skins (not boiled as the Polish dish) and then cut in half, with beans, salad or even fries put inside later (Fig. 17). In 45,

ziemniaki w mundurkach are mistranslated as fried potatoes, and the principle of economy is unnecessarily compromised by translating *kaczka* as *wild duck* (it is usually not wild).

44. ziemniaki w mundurkach – potatoes boiled *with peelings with sauce*
45. kaczka pieczona z jabłkami, ziemniaki w mundurkach, warzywa gotowane – roast *wild* duck with apples, *fried* potatoes and boiled vegetables

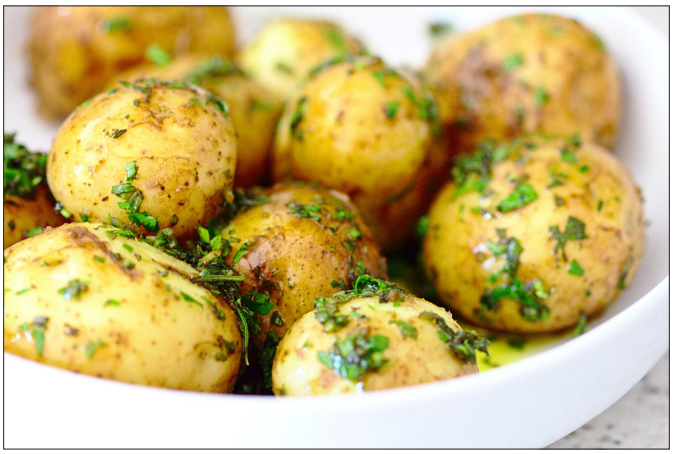

Figure 16. Ziemniaki w mundurkach – *boiled jacket potatoes (http://justmydelicious.com/2016/08/ziemniaki-z-ziolami.html).*

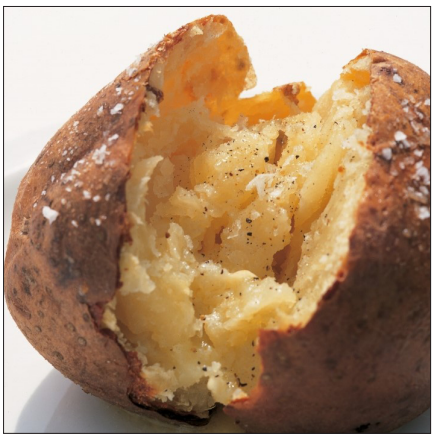

Figure 17. *Jacket potato (http://www.deliaonline.com/recipes/type-of-dish/vegetarian-food/jacket-potatoes).*

In order to meet the same criterion of economy, prepositions (*z*, *na*) should usually be dropped when translating into English for the sake of the above-mentioned noun phrases.

46. pierogi z kapustą – cabbage dumplings, **not**: dumplings *with* cabbage
47. barszcz z krokietem – borsch served with a meat croquette (or: cabbage croquette), **not**: borsch *with* pancake stuffed *with* cabbage
48. kotlet po góralsku – highlander style pork chop, **not**: chop *in* mountaineer's style
49. placki po węgiersku – Hungarian style potato pancakes with meat[8], **not**: fried potato cake with meat *in* Hungarian style

The criterion of **carefulness** demands the translation to be verified, which in the translations below obviously did not happen. The unspotted mistranslations include simple misspellings – their number in menu translations is surprisingly high (cf. 50 and 51) and some of them are sloppy enough to mix up two different vegetables (52).

50. pieczeń wołowa faszerowana – *roastet* (= roasted) beef with vegetable *Stuffing* (= stuffing)
51. placki ziemniaczane polane śmietaną – potato cake *fillet* with sour–cream (= potato pancakes with sour cream)
52. krokiety ziemniaczane z mozarellą i szynką – *tomato* (= potato!) croquettes with *mozarella* (= mozzarella) and ham

Typical mistranslations also involve failing to adjust to English syntax by using a postmodified noun phrase (53 and 54), or simply using a term in its Polish spelling (55 and 56), or even borrowing a term which would be incomprehensible in English without any gloss and in fact is translatable (57).

53. szparagi pod beszamelem – asparagus in *souce beshamel* (= beshamel sauce)
54. kalafior gotowany – *cauliflower boiled* (= boiled cauliflower)
55. flaki z parmezanem – beef tripe with *parmezan* (= tripe soup with Parmesan cheese)
56. omlet francuski z rumem – *omlet* with rum (= rum omelette)
57. botwina z ziemniakami – borsch *botwina* (= young beetroot leaves soup) with potatoes

Unverified translations often produce an unintended humorous effect at the expense of the translator (or in fact the restaurant), which should naturally be avoided. Each of the following examples (58–66) brings its own amusing blunder.

58. kotlet ze schabu zawijany – pork chop *to roll up*
59. kotlet po pańsku – *Yours* cutlet
60. jajecznica pańska – *master's* scrambled eggs
61. kotlet mielony – *mill* chop
62. pierogi ze szpinakiem – *dumping* with spinach
63. herbata specjalnie parzona – tea *infused especially*
64. deska serów – board *of* cheese
65. fantazja szefa – chef's *imagination*
66. puchar lodowy ekstra – *extra* bowl of ice cream

In 58 the translation suggests that the customer is to roll up the pork chop him- or herself (in a way that has not been disclosed), while what is intended is a rolled pork chop; in 59 a non-grammatical form is generated due to a misunderstanding of the expression *po pańsku*, which refers to a gentry-style (pork) chop (the amusement also stems from the totally inappropriate capitalization, typical of Polish polite addresses, and unused in English), while in 60 the abbreviated form *pańska*, in the same sense, brings an undesired ambiguity of what should be described as gentry-style scrambled eggs. The amusement in 61 stems from the odd selection of the word *mill* to render the minced meat (*mill* is strangely phonetically close to the Polish term *mielony*) as well as the odd choice of *chop* where none is meant (see the discussion of 35), while 62 evokes an incongruous image of dumping something with spinach, while what the dish should be called is spinach dumplings. 63 brings a gentle humorous effect when an unusual word order is employed to refer to a specially brewed tea, while in 64 *board of cheese* brings odd associations by analogy with the board of trustees, etc., and it should be replaced with the more conventional *cheese board*. In 65 customers are offered to be served the chef's imagination, which would be most unlikely to happen, while what is meant is chef's fantasy – a conventional phrase to refer to an unusual dish (the reason why the unobvious word has been chosen was probably because fantasy seemed a too easy and thus improbable choice). Finally, 66 seems to have resulted from a misunderstanding of *ekstra* in Polish, which does not mean an extra bowl of ice cream on top of the one ordered, but instead an *extra large* bowl of ice cream, which could also be rendered with one of its cultural American equivalents of Ice Cream Sundae or Ice Cream Super Bowl.

CONCLUSION

Having discussed the variety of examples, let me briefly conclude by saying that menu translation is a difficult task and requires from the translator both extensive knowledge of source and target cuisines as well as translation experience, not to mention high ethical standards, which would include precision, carefulness, and professionalism in proofreading. While subjective difficulties are thus possible to overcome, objective ones require the thought-out choice of a translation strategy, taking into consideration the all-important criteria of comprehensibility, completeness, economy, and carefulness. While doing so, the translator should thus, first of all, try to understand what the dish actually is, be aware of the foreign perspective of the reader and their international point of reference (and think of appropriate glosses to use), and take the best interest of the restaurant into account, even though the restaurant owners themselves might not consider the shape of the translated menu to be particularly important. Additional complicating factors include the number of varieties of English which differ in their preferred equivalents and require discernment, although generally British English should be preferred in Polish restaurants due to the geographical proximity of the United Kingdom.

I am aware of the fact that this journal deals with folklore studies and thus its readers would be interested in Polish eating habits or customs rather than in the specific translation issues. Still, I believe that the objective difficulties encountered by the menu translators as well as complications experienced by scholars trying to define the notion of equivalence and by linguists trying to bring together meanings and things "out there" – all discussed in the present article – are all very well compatible with the interests of folklorists in what is universal and what is culture-specific. Polish food culture comes out from my examples as highly heterogeneous, with influences of Russian, Lithuanian, German, French, Turkish or Hungarian cultures, all very significant in Polish history. On top of that, the cuisine is regionally diverse (the Highlander and Subcarpathian culture come out among the examples) and affected by recent past and the communist period (that of the Polish People's Republic). Still, the national tradition is not absent from the culture either, especially the hunting tradition and the related one of eating game, which points to the importance of gentry cuisine culture and places itself on the apparently opposite pole to the peasant food culture (berry and mushroom picking as well as potato eating culture). With regard to the type of food, soups and pasta go hand in hand with a variety of meats, Polish cuisine ranging across pork, beef, and mutton down to chicken and other poultry, while vegetables all start and end with potatoes,

but of course there are quite a few other vegetables which make it to the Polish table. The brief description of Polish food cannot fail to mention bread and its special varieties, which are the everyday staple for every Pole. The translation difficulties associated with all that variety concern objective problems in rendering food terms (both native and foreign) as well as specific and subjective issues, such as spelling of the names of French dishes (the knowledge of French has been steadily going down among Poles).

Addressing the tongue-in-cheek title of the present contribution, one might say that the process of menu translating indeed has some features of the mythical never-ending labour of Sisyphos, but when enough care is exercised and a sophisticated strategy is selected, Sisyphos can actually see the top of the mountain he so much desires to reach.

NOTES

[1] No references are made to the sources of the examples, since I do not intend to criticise particular restaurants for the lack of carefulness, but my goal is to discuss typical translation issues. In fact, they are all actual translations that have been collected from three specific Polish restaurant menus in southern Poland as well as very numerous internet menus, where I attempted to find variants for the culture-specific Polish menu items that I selected for discussion in the study.

[2] Most questionable choices in my examples are marked with italics.

[3] Bartnicki (2010) accepts *pirog* as an equivalent of *pieróg*, side by side with dumpling, while for the plural he accepts the phonetically adjusted *pirogi* as well as *pierogi* and dumplings.

[4] The term preferred by Bartnicki (2010) for *bigos myśliwski*, while he chooses the loan on other occasions.

[5] Notably, *mincemeat*, spelled as one word, has a very clearly culture-specific reference in Britain as a sweat mixture of dried fruit, alcohol, and spices and should not be confused with minced meat.

[6] Bartnicki (2010) chooses minced meat cutlet.

[7] Bartnicki (2010) accepts the transliterated *kolduny*, probably due to its use in the Cyrillic too, side by side with meat dumplings.

[8] Bartnicki (2010) selects Hungarian-style potato pancake.

REFERENCES

Bałuk-Ulewicz, Teresa 2016 [2002]. Dzieje innych miłości, czyli o nieprzekładalności bezwzględnej w tekstach o wartościach w sztuce. [Story of Other Loves, or on Absolute Untranslatability in Texts on Values in Art.] In: W. Chłopicki (ed.) *Język a komunikacja 4.2: Polszczyzna a języki obce: przekład i dydaktyka*. Kraków: Tertium, pp. 9–17. Republished in *Tertium Linguistic Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1–2. http://dx.doi.org/10.7592/Tertium2016.1.2.Baluk.

Bartnicki, Krzysztof 2010. *Słownik kulinarny.* [Culinary Dictionary.] Krakow: Tertium.

Eco, Umberto 2001. *Experiences in Translation.* Transl. from Italian by Alastair McEwen. Toronto & Buffalo & London: University of Toronto Press. Available at https://archive.org/details/UmbertoEcoEXPERIENCESINTRANSLATION, last accessed on 9 February 2018.

Jakobson, Roman 1959. On Linguistic Aspects of Translation. In: Reuben Arthur Brower (ed.) *On Translation*. Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 23. Harvard: Harvard University Press, pp. 232–239. https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674731615.c18.

Kwieciński, Piotr 2001. *Disturbing Strangeness: Foreignisation and Domestication in Translation Procedures in the Context of Cultural Asymmetry*. Toruń: Edytor.

Langacker, Ronald W. 2008. *Cognitive Grammar: A Basic Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Levý, Jiří 2011 [1963]. *The Art of Translation.* Transl. by Patrick Corness. Amsterdam*:* John Benjamins. DOI: 10.1075/btl.97.

Lewicki, Roman 2000. *Obcość w odbiorze przekładu.* [Strangeness in the Reception of Translation.] Lublin: UMCS.

Pascual, Nieves 2012. Translational Cookery. *Food, Culture & Society*, Vol. 15, No. 4, pp. 599–621. http://dx.doi.org/10.2752/175174412X13414122382845.

Robins, Robert Henry 2013 [1967]. *A Short History of Linguistics*. Fourth edition. London and New York: Routledge.

Venuti, Lawrence 1995. *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. London & New York: Routledge.

Wojtasiewicz, Olgierd 1996 [1957]. *Wstep do teorii tłumaczenia.* [Introduction into Translation Theory.] Warsaw: Tepis.