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Stylistic and structural values of a literary text vs. the process of translation: appraisal of the Polish translation of *The PowerBook* by Jeanette Winterson

✦ Кључне речи:
*translation, stylistic devices,
 metaphors in translation,
 translation strategy,
 domestication, foreignisation,
 hybrid technique of translation.*

Циљ овог рада је анализа начина превођења *Чудесне књије* Џанет Винтерсон на пољски. Као што је потврђено, процес превођења таквог доследног и у исто време двосмисленог романа подразумева пажљиво структурирану интерпретацију у вези са њеним специфичним начином приповедања. Штавише, језичка структура енглеског језика пружа могућност да се у оригиналном тексту не наводи пол говорника, што се не може лако постићи у једном словенском језику. Сви ови аспекти чине преведени текст вредним анализе са становишта стилских, као и језичких вредности које је овај пољски преводац очувао или сам унео.

Introduction

Jeanette Winterson has received England's Whitbread Prize for the best first novel and has been compared to an unlikely pantheon of literary figures, from Flannery O'Connor through Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Italo Calvino, Milan Kundera and Virginia Woolf. Undoubtedly, such comparison is

justified since it identifies 'the originality of her voice, her distinctive mix of romanticism and irony, erudition and passion' (Shepart 1993). Winterson herself has admitted that she is 'the only true heir of Virginia Woolf' and sees herself in the high-modernist, anti-realist tradition of the writer. Moreover, she has been known to harass interviewers and reviewers who make a less

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enthusiastic assessment of her gift (compare: Pritchard 1995).

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Winterson's language may be described as 'quite simple but lyrical, generally striking and occasionally beautiful'. She successfully cares about art and passion. 'Her tales and their ambiguous tellers can be too precocious and too convoluted, and she is not above (over)using hackneyed and simplistic expressions. Her dialogue is often too simple, with too few words (and these all too heavy with meaning). The writing can be precious – and yet it can also shine'. Hence, 'Winterson is a craftsman and an artist'. (Arsdale 1999)

However, Jeanette Winterson is not known for being an "easy read". In fact, she is one of the most complicated, 'confounding writers, the kind of old-fashioned fiction magician who can leave one wondering how she got from A to Z without once mentioning the intermediate letters of the alphabet', says Sarah Van Arsdale (1999).

Winterson cannot resist making metaphors. In fact, she uses the metaphor of e-mail to tell the story about the woman having an affair with a married woman and to discuss sexual freedom and power. Apparently, the novel has been designed to suggest the appearance and the technique of virtual reality, with a cover like a computer handbook and chapter divisions of hard drives, icons and documents. As a result, in *The PowerBook* Winterson creates an endless series of love stories – the triangular affairs of lovers in the contexts of imaginative versions of contemporary and classic fairytales, in London, Paris, Capri and cyberspace.

Another aspect of the novel, which needs carefully constructed interpretation, is the complexity of its climate related to the specific way of narration (to some degree influenced by Virginia Woolf's texts). Lin-

guistic structure of English language gave the author an opportunity not to specify gender of a speaker whenever she tried to create an ambiguous situation or relationship between the protagonists. Unfortunately, no such device is possible in Polish. To translate this way of telling the story into a different formal system poses quite a challenge and might be achieved only after constructing a certain conceptual structure by the translator (compare: Wójcik-Leese 2000: 47).

All the features mentioned so far make the novel exceptional and at the same time extremely difficult to translate into another language preserving the original linguistic and stylistic values. Gabriela Janowska is the one who made an effort to approach the novel's complexity.

Strategy of translation

The main problem for the translator is how to comply with text issues referring to a certain culture and reality, i.e. to decide which issues take priority, whether the cultural aspects of the source language community, the cultural aspects of the target language community, or perhaps a combination of the two, a compromise between two or more cultures? The choice of translation strategy may result in source-culture bound translation (the translation stays within the source language culture – so called foreignisation), target-culture bound translation (the translation stays within the target language culture – so called domestication) or in a 'hybrid', where the translation is a product of a compromise between two or more cultures.

The terms 'domestication' and 'foreignisation' are extensively used in the works referring to translation studies. 'Domestication' in the broader sense means the domestic

assimilation of a foreign text. A full explanation of its meaning is to be extracted from the following paragraph:

Translation is often regarded with suspicion because it inevitably domesticates foreign texts, inscribing them with linguistic and cultural values that are intelligible to specific domestic constituencies. This process of inscription operates at every stage in the production, circulation, and reception of the translation. It is initiated by the very choice of a foreign text to translate, always an exclusion of other foreign texts and literatures, which answers to particular domestic interests. It continues most forcefully in the development of a translation strategy that rewrites the foreign text in domestic dialects and discourses, always a choice of certain domestic values to the exclusion of others. And it is further complicated by the diverse forms in which the translation is published, reviewed, read, and taught, producing cultural and political effects that vary with different institutional contexts and social positions. (Venuti 1998:67)

The concept of a hybrid text as a feature of contemporary intercultural communication that could contribute to translation studies has been described by Christina Schäffner and Beverly Adab in their article *Translation as intercultural communication – Contact as conflict* (1997). The authors presented four independent opinions of the following panelists: Anna Trosborg, Sonja Tirkkonen-Condit, Candace Séguinot and Ieva Zauberga, who participated in a discussion invited on some selected questions connected with the problem of hybrid texts.

A hybrid text has been provisionally defined as follows:

'A hybrid text is a text that results from a translation process. It shows features that somehow seem 'out of place'/'strange'/'unusual' for the receiving culture, i.e. the target culture. These features, however, are not the result of a lack of translational competence or examples of 'translationese', but they are evidence of conscious and deliberate decisions by the translator. Although the text is not yet fully established in the target culture (because it does not conform to established norms and conventions), a hybrid text is accepted in its target culture because it fulfils its intended purpose in the communicative situation (at least for a certain time)'. (1997: 325)

Even though the concept of hybrid texts applies mainly to political texts or legal documents, some of its aspects refer also to the majority of literary texts which come to existence as a compromise between various cultures and 'are arrived at as an outcome of negotiations between different languages and cultures and may involve features which are contradictory to target language and target culture norms' (330). As a matter of fact, the Polish version of *The PowerBook* by Jeanette Winterson, entitled *Wolność na jedną noc*, can be considered as an example of a hybrid technique of translation.

The strategy of 'domestication' only to some degree applies to the Polish text. The cases of domestication intersperses between the numerous examples of foreignisation. Janowska preserved the original plot with its location, names and culture. She did not transpose the setting from

London, Paris and Capri to Poland. What she transposed, however, are literary allusions, quotations and sayings, which have been quite frequently replaced by references from another literature or culture, as it can be seen in the following example:

He was his own call to prayer (15)¹⁾
Sam sobie był sterem i okrętem (15)²⁾,

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where a quotation from *Oda do młodości* by Adam Mickiewicz is substituted for the English saying. Such a solution makes it possible for the reader to share the cultural knowledge presupposed by the author and to understand the deeper meaning of a text. Apparently, the strategy of 'domestication' has been used here in order to assimilate or change those elements which may have been too alien to the reader (because of some limitations concerning his knowledge).

However, this technique of translation occurred not to be a welcome tool for translating some of the other literary references used by Jeanette Winterson, which could be observed in the allusions to *Orlando* by Virginia Woolf. *Via Orlandini* (88) has been left unchanged in Polish text as *via Orlandini* (112) with no explanation, even though the Woolf's novel is not widely known and easily recognisable by Polish readers (unless, of course, they are educated on English literature).

Another reference to Woolf's style is the narrative voice of *The PowerBook* and the concept of shifting gender. English language gives an opportunity not to specify gender of a speaker, which in the literary texts of Woolf and Winterson was used as

a tool to achieve a high level of ambiguity, like in the following quotation from the last story referred to *Orlando*:

Downstairs, I switched on the screen and watched the familiar blank space surface towards me to be filled. Blank spaces are my domain.

Here's the story...

The rain was thick as glass. For many days I had eaten, drunk, slept, walked, cased in glass. I felt like the relic of a saint. I felt like an Eastern curiosity. I stared out of the running walls of my prison, able to move, unable to escape.

In the forest every solid thing was changing into its watery equivalent. Whatever I grasped for purchase – root, branch, rock – slipped its hold. My fingers closed on nothing. The leaf-deep forest floor was a moving raft of brown water. The trees were water columns. In the liquid forest, I was the only solid thing and already my outline was beginning to blend with other outlines that were not me. I said my name again and again – 'ORLANDO! ORLANDO!' (279–280)

Unfortunately, in Polish there exists no such possibility; it is unavoidable to use either masculine or feminine forms. For that reason the process of translating the text into Polish must involve a better understanding of the original and careful interpretation of the novel; otherwise the novel's conceptual potential would be lost or at least limited by the change of the plot.

- 1) Winterson J. *The PowerBook* – New York, Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf New – 2000. All English quotations illustrating certain devices and solutions are from this edition.
- 2) Winterson J. *Wolność na jedną noc, przeł.* Gabriela Janowska – Poznań: „Rebis” – 2003. All Polish quotations illustrating certain devices and solutions are from this edition.

In some cases it is really difficult to establish whether the narrative voice belongs to a man or to a woman, since both situations are probable and no explanatory phrase has been appended to the original. And then the translator's decision might seem unjustified. As an example we can see here the Polish version of the English text quoted above:

Włączyłam ekran i patrzyłam, jak znajoma pusta przestrzeń wynurza się ku mnie, czekając, aż ją wypełnię. Puste przestrzenie to moje królestwo.

A oto opowieść...

Deszcz gęsty jak szkło. Przez wiele dni jadłem, piłem, spałem, spacerowałem – cały spowity w szkło. Czuję się niby święta relikwia. Jak osobliwość Wschodu. Wyglądałem zza ciekłych ścian mojego więzienia, zdolny do ruchu, niezdolny do ucieczki.

W lesie każda rzecz zmieniała się w swój wodnisty odpowiednik. Wszystko, cokolwiek bym schwycił z wysiłkiem – korzeń, gałąź, kamień – wymykało mi się z rąk. W zaciśniętych palcach nic nie zostawało. Leśna ściółka przeobraziła się w ruchomą tratwę z brunatnej wody. Drzewa stały się wodnymi kolumnami. W tym płynnym lesie byłem jedyną substancjalną rzeczą, a jednak moja sylwetka już zaczynała się zlewać z innymi liniami, które nie należały do mnie. Co i rusz powtarzałem swoje imię: „ORLANDO! ORLANDO!” (218–219)

The English version of *The PowerBook*, following the source text of the allusion, does not specify gender of Orlando. Using masculine or feminine forms in translation seems determined by the translators' interpretation, which here is not justified by any author's clue or suggestion. Moreover, equally difficult here is to appraise the trans-

lator's decision since the only person entitled to do it is the author herself.

However, bearing in mind Winterson's fondness of metaphor and ambiguity, is groundless the following Janowska's reworking:

Your marrow is in my bones. My blood is in your veins. Your cock is in my cunt. My breasts weigh under your dress. My fighting arm is sinew'd to your shoulder. Your tiny feet stand my ground. (80)

Twój szpik jest w moich kościach. W twoich żyłach płynie moja krew. Mój penis wypełnia twoją waginę. Moja pierś rozsadza twoją szatę. Moje orężne ramię zrasta się ścięgnami z twoim barkiem. Twoje drobne stopy stąpają po mojej ziemi. (62–63)

All the changes introduced to the text of translation, resulting from the differences between English and Polish formal systems as well as from the translator's interpretation, influenced its perception by the Polish reader, who cannot participate in the game to which the English reader is invited.

Stylistic devices

As has been mentioned in the Introduction, Winterson's language and style are strikingly simple. She is able to express the whole idea of the presented world in only few words, using stylistic devices such as metaphor, alliteration or repetition of some phrases as well as single words.

In her translating work, Janowska apparently values the simplicity of the original structure and makes attempts to preserve this feature in a different formal system,

which can be observed in the example quoted below:

I loved the fire. The coals were my books. Heated to story temperature, they burst into flame and I read in them the stories that no one would read to me.

‘What can you see?’

It was my mother’s voice roaring from miles away. I shook out of my trance by the fire.

‘Another world.’

‘There isn’t one.’

I pointed to the road winding through the flames. She was angry with me.

‘The fire will be out soon enough. There’s nothing in the ashes but ash.’

She went to bed. My father went to bed too. They left me alone as they usually did, to sleep and half-wake by the dying fire. When the novelty of myself had worn off, they had given up tucking me into my galvanised bed and I either went there or not, as I felt.

The fire was grey. The road was gone. I had to stay young. I had to look in the right place. I had to keep the fire going. I had to believe in the treasure. I had to find the treasure too. (170–171)

Uwielbiałam ogień. Węgla były moimi książkami. Podgrzane do temperatury narracyjnej buchały płomieniami i wtedy czytałam w nich te opowieści, których nikt nie chciał mi czytać.

— *Co widzisz?*

Głos matki wrzeszczał do mnie z odległości wielu mil. Otrząsnęłam się z transu.

— *Inny świat.*

— *Nie ma takiego.*

Wskazałam drogę wijącą się wśród płomieni. Matka rozzłościła się na mnie.

— *Ogień zaraz zgaśnie. W popiołach nie ma nic prócz popiołu.*

Poszła się położyć. Ojciec też poszedł do łóżka. Jak zwykle zostawili mnie samą, żebym to przysypiała, to na pół czuwała przy dogasającym ogniu. Kiedy już im spowszedniałam, przestali utulać mnie na noc w moim cynkowanym łóżeczku; albo kładłam się do niego sama, albo nie, jak mi się podobało.

Ogień zszarzał. Droga znikła. Musiałam pozostać młoda. Musiałam umieć szukać we właściwym miejscu. Musiałam podtrzymać ogień. Musiałam wierzyć w skarb. Musiałam też znaleźć skarb. (130–131)

It can be easily observed that although in many cases Janowska successfully limits Polish sentences to short and simple structures, quite frequently she cannot resist using additional and superfluous elements. The Polish version of the sentence *I read in them the stories that no one would read to me* includes a kind of retrospective interpretation of the parents’ behaviour when the narrator says: *i wtedy czytałam w nich te opowieści, których nikt nie chciał mi czytać*.

Janowska’s method of translating formal stylistic devices is subject to variation. She seems intent upon finding an equivalence of both form and meaning; in cases where this proves impossible she tries to convey the meaning and sacrifice the formal effects.

Sometimes Janowska succeeds in rendering the sense as well as contriving the same kind of a stylistic device, as in the following example:

Palms were taller than towers (18)

Palmy rosły tam wyższe od wież (17),

where in the comparison *wyższe od wież* we can observe not only alliteration but also a play on the consonant [ż].

Successfully and effectively she also translates repetition (example 1–3), and a pun on the word ‘świat’ (example 4):

[1] To avoid discovery I stay on the run. To discover things for myself I stay on the run. (3)

W ciągłym ruchu, żeby uniknąć rozpoznania. W ciągłym ruchu, żeby poznać. (7)

[2] My search for you, your search for me, is a search after something that cannot be found. Only the impossible is worth the effort (...) Love is worth death. Love is worth life. My search for you, your search for me, goes beyond life and death into one long call in the wilderness. (90–91)

Moje poszukiwanie ciebie i twoje poszukiwanie mnie to poszukiwanie czegoś, co nie może być znalezione. Tylko niemożliwe jest warte wysiłku (...) Miłość jest warta śmierci. Miłość jest warta życia. Moje poszukiwanie ciebie, twoje poszukiwanie mnie wykracza poza życie i śmierć, w jeden długi zew dziczy. (70–71)

[3] Freedom for a night, you say. Just for one night the freedom to be somebody else. (3)

Wolność na jedną noc, mówisz. Wolność bycia kimś innym, tylko przez jedną noc. (7)

[4] He was a man of the world and a worldly man... (14)

Kapitan był obieżyświatem i światowcem... (14)

It would be worth, however, focusing our attention on the examples [1] and [3]. In the first case, Janowska renders the sense and provides repetition of only the first part of the sentence and the word-play in the second one. In order to preserve alliteration in the initial parts of each sentence, she decided to convert the word order.

The same process of changing the word order in the example [3] gives an opportunity to gain a repetition of initial words in each sentence (not introduced by the author) but at the same time alters the logical value of the sentence: in the original text the stress is put on the words *just for one night*, while the Polish version emphasises the part *wolność bycia kimś innym*.

However, preserving both meaning and artistic values was not always possible. Another group of examples shows different stylistic devices lost in the process of translation:

[1] asyndesis

Tulips, every one – and hundreds more – each distinctively different, all the same. (9)

Każdy tulipan – a są ich setki – jest zupełnie inny, choć wszystkie takie same. (11)

[2] syndesis and alliteration

Frame by frame, that Friday night was shot and exposed and thrown away. (41)

Piątkowy wieczór filmowany klatka po klatce, wywoływany i odcucany. (35)

[3] a word-play (pun)

‘Drink this.’

You sipped noisily from the edge of the cup.

'Too strong.'
 'I thought you like it strong.'
 'A liquid should not be a solid.'
 'It will get you going.'
 'Going where?' (131)

— Wypij to.
 Upiłaś hałaśliwie z samego brzeżka
 filiżanki.

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— Za mocna.
 — Myślałam, że lubisz mocną.
 — Płyn nie powinien mieć konsystencji
 ciała stałego.
 — Postawi cię na nogi.
 — A czy ja się dokądś wybieram?
 (100)

Concentration on meaning rather than acoustic values of a phrase or sentence seems inevitable in the process of translation when two different formal language systems are taken into consideration. Semantic and grammatical features typical of a source-language, responsible for creating sound instrumentation or play on words, quite rarely can be found in a target-language. For this reason translation of some stylistic devices is often regarded as a process that involves fields of untranslatability (compare: Bałuk-Ulewiczowa 2000).

Aware of this fact, from time to time Janowska goes further than restoring of the original; when possible, she extends repetitions, introduces new alliteration and word-plays or tries to create particular image (reproducing the Winterson's style):

[1] The sun rose. The ship hoisted sail. I lifted my arms and waved and waved. Then, adjusting my tulip, I went below. (13)

*Wzeszło słońce. Statek rozwinął żagle.
 Podniosłam ręce; machałam, machałam i*

*machałam. A potem zeszłam pod pokład,
 poprawiwszy najpierw tulipana.* (13)

[2] There were women at the roadside selling hard-boiled eggs and homemade dolma (13)

*kobiety sprzedawały jajka na twardo
 i domową dolmę* (14)

[3] Behind us, the Friday-night cars were queuing in a wrapper of brake lights and exhaust haze; the toxic red of hometime. (35)

Za naszymi plecami sunął sznur piątkowo-wieczornych samochodów skrytych za otuliną ze świateł stopu i spalin; toksyczna czerwień zamykania się w domach. (31)

[4] The shop – *Exterminateur des Animaux Nuisibles* – has been in the old meat market since the 1920s, and its wood and glass shopfront, and its high-polished counter, have never changed. (49)

Sklep, Exterminateur des Animaux Nuisibles, został założony przy dawnym rynku mięsny, jeszcze w latach dwudziestych i od tamtych czasów jego wygląd i wystrój – witryna z drewna i szkła, lśniąca mosiężna lada – nigdy nie zostały zmienione. (40)

[5] The evening was cooling. (53)
Wieczór przepelniał chłodem. (43)

[6] As he knots himself into a history that never happened and a future that cannot have happened, he is like a cross-legged Turk who knots a fine carpet and finds himself in the pattern. (254)

Gdy wplata się w historię, która nigdy się nie zdarzyła, i w przyszłość, która nigdy

nie będzie mogła się zdarzyć, jest jak siedzący po turecku Turek, który wyplata arcypiękny dywan i odnajduje samego siebie we wzorze. (199)

The last example deserves especial attention since it provides a very clear illustration of how stylistic value of a text is conditioned by linguistic features. 'A cross-legged Turk' in English describes only a certain sitting position while the Polish construction 'siedzieć po turecku' not only denotes the way of sitting but also refers it to a particular nationality. Such lucky coincidence gave an opportunity to create a Polish annomination, which was impossible in the English language system.

Conclusion

Gabriela Janowska took up the challenge of translating *The PowerBook* – an extremely ambiguous and deceitful novel where the sentences are simple on the surface but complex and insidious in their meaning, and successfully dealt with the task.

As we could observe, in the process of translation she is equally concerned to preserve the meaning and the stylistic individuality of the original. She uses different techniques and strategies of translation, in order to achieve most accurate and faithful replica of Winterson's book and to make it possible for the Polish reader to 'touch' the specific world and climate created in the original. Quite frequently, as a compromise between the two aspects: meaning and style, Janowska

was forced to sacrifice one of them and, where possible, compensate for all that is lost – by introducing new elements of her own creation.

As a second author (an author of a text translated) she has the right to convey the story according to her own perception and artistic imagination. At the same time, however, she is under obligation to translate as close to the original as possible. Moreover, position of a translator also involves responsibility for linguistic and stylistic choices. Unfortunately, in numerous cases the language used by Janowska sounds awkward, unnatural and inappropriate. It is really difficult not to pay attention to some lexical or stylistic mistakes, such as *własne imię mnie ocembruje* (219) as an equivalent of *my name would contain me* (280), or unjustified choice of a highly colloquial and incorrect phrase in the dialogue:

'I can't be an exile from my own past.'
'I don't want your past.' (239)

— *Nie mogę być wygnańcem z własnej przeszłości.*

— *Mi nie zależy na twojej przeszłości.*
(280)

This disappointment, however, cannot diminish the high value of the Polish version of *The PowerBook* and the translator's inventiveness. As a conclusion it should be pointed out that Janowska successfully deals with all the elements singled out for consideration here because of the special problems they usually pose for the translator.

резюме

Σ Стилистические и структурные особенности литературного текста в процессе перевода: оценка польского перевода романа Джанет Винтерсон *The PowerBook*

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Настоящая статья представляет собой попытку анализа способов перевода стилистических и лингвистических средств текста Джанет Винтерсон *The PowerBook*, учитывая прежде всего структурные особенности подлинника.

Автор статьи обращает внимание на сложность процесса перевода текста, созданного на основе специфического способа повествования. Как доказывают приведенные примеры, английский язык дает возможность использовать такие языковые средства, при помощи которых читатель не в состоянии определить пол главного героя. Такая стратегия оказывается совсем невозможной в польском языке, система которого требует использования лексических средств в зависимости от их грамматического рода. В связи с этим перевод многозначного, хотя одновременно необыкновенно связного текста вызывает у переводчика необходимость внимательного анализа и интерпретации текста оригинала в поисках наиболее соответствующей стратегии.

Source materials:

Winterson 2000: **Winterson Jeanette**. *The PowerBook* – New York, Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf.
Winterson 2003: **Winterson Jeanette**. *Wolność na jedną noc*, przeł. Gabriela Janowska – Poznań: „Rebis”.

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