

TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES IN SONY PICTURES ANIMATION FEATURE FILM TITLES - A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF BULGARIAN AND RUSSIAN TRANSLATIONS

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Abstract: Titles are indispensable in their role of introducing a product - they create the indelible first impression and to a large extent determine the degree of interest a particular production will receive from the audiences. With regards to the reality of media distribution in the present day and the fact that global markets dictate a need to cater to international and multilingual, as well as multicultural consumers, titles need to be effective, attractive and memorable not only in the original language of the production but also in translation. These factors dictate the interest in the topic of the present article, namely the specific translation techniques employed in the translation of the original, English-language titles of animated feature films into Bulgarian and Russian. The current research focuses specifically on the titles of productions by *Sony Pictures Animation*.

The article works with an ad hoc corpus of all animated feature films produced by the *Sony Pictures Animation* studio and distributed in cinemas in Bulgaria and Russia, which is done in order to ensure the comparability of sources. Following the aforementioned criteria, the corpus has come to comprise 19 original titles and their Bulgarian and Russian translated variants, or 57 units of analysis in total. Longitudinally, the research spans the period between 2006 and 2023 - the period of operation of the studio.

In terms of methodology, the article recognizes the existing plethora of approaches to defining the term techniques, strategies and methods among as well as within the various schools and traditions of translation theory and practice. Nevertheless, the present paper does not aim to resolve the existing confusion and ambivalence, but instead focuses on applying one specific approach to the corpus - namely the one formulated by Albir and Molina. This framework places clear distinction between translation strategies, methods and techniques, viewing strategies and methods as pertaining to the process of translation itself, whereas the techniques are visible in the product of the translation. Hence, they provide ample opportunity for textual analysis of the titles included in the corpus and help draw conclusions regarding the preferences and practices of translating animated feature film titles from English into Bulgarian and Russian, respectively. The resulting observations are considered to be of interest since the process of translation of these types of products is itself quite obscure not only due to interference from potential marketing factors but also due to its very nature - the work of the translator is to a great extent hidden from direct observation until the results become available. The countless procedures and choices and the specific criteria and factors which inform them are very difficult to observe and enumerate and would require interviewing the translators themselves and having them retrace their steps, which are potentially made too quickly and not always in a fully conscious manner to be reproduced or noted. Therefore, the present research offers a look at the textual level of the micro-unit of translation - the translation techniques.

Keywords: translation techniques, Sony Pictures Animation, animated feature films, movie titles, Bulgarian, Russian

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper deals with the translation techniques utilized in the translation into Bulgarian and Russian respectively of original titles of animated feature films produced by the Sony Pictures Animation Studio. The research is based on a specially-created corpus of 57 units of analysis that includes all animated movies by the aforementioned company produced up to 2024, which have also been distributed to theaters in Bulgaria and Russia. The information regarding the original titles and the promoted translated options is gathered from the respective Wikipedia pages dedicated to the Sony Pictures Animation list of productions (Wikipedia US, Wikipedia Bulgaria and Wikipedia Russia) together with the available information on the TMDB website (The Movie Database).

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Theoretically, the paper aims to apply the classification method of Albir and Molina (2002, 509-511), within which translation strategies, methods and techniques are clearly distinguished. This framework accepts that translation strategies and methods are related to the process of translation, whereas techniques are observable on the level of text as the result of the process. Therefore, these selected translation techniques can be identified within the actual corpus and analyzed in terms of preference and productivity within as well as among different languages. The techniques proposed by Albir and Molina (ibid.) include adaptation - the substitution of realia from the source

culture with ones from the target culture; variation - a change in the tone, style dialect, sociolect etc.; generalization - the use of a more general or neutral term; particularization - the use of a more specific term, the opposite of generalization; literal translation - translation of an expression word for word; linguistic compression - compressing/shortening linguistic elements as in simultaneous translation or subtitling; linguistic amplification - the addition of linguistic elements, the opposite of compression; borrowing - the introduction of a word or expression from a foreign language without change in the original spelling or through naturalization/transliteration; substitution - substituting linguistic elements with extra-linguistic ones and vice versa; reduction - omitting information-carrying elements from the source text; amplification - the addition of explanatory details and specifications which are not present in the source text, such as explanatory paraphrase, translator's notes - the opposite of reduction; calque - the literal translation of a foreign word or expression; compensation - introducing a stylistic or informative element in a different place in the translation to compensate for an element somewhere else in the original; modulation - a change on the cognitive level; description - the substitution of a term or expression with a description of its form/function; discursive creation - setting up temporary equivalence which is not obvious outside of context; transposition - a shift in grammatical category and, lastly, established equivalent - the use of previously accepted and established terms and expressions for the translation of idioms or collocations.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Bulgarian and Russian versions of the title *Open Season* employ the technique of particularization - the original term "open season" is more general in meaning and can be understood literally as well as metaphorically. The Cambridge Online Dictionary (2024) defines "open season" on the one hand as a season when it is allowed to hunt a specific species of animal (equal to the Bulgarian notion of "ловен сезон"/"hunting season"), and on the other hand as a situation (generally speaking) when a particular object is under attack. The Bulgarian and the Russian titles - "Ловен сезон" ("hunting season") and "Сезон охоты" ("hunting season") - are based on only the first of these definitions, which limits the range of meaning of the original.

The Bulgarian and the Russian variants of the *Surf's Up* movie use a number of techniques. The Bulgarian title "Всички на сърф" ("everyone (go) surfing") exhibits the use of modulation in the overall cognitive restructuring of the original phrase, with "сърф"/"surf" and "сърфиране"/"surfing" no longer being the subject as in "surf is up", and a fragment instead with the animate subject "everyone"/"всички" and the prepositional "на сърф"/"to surf", without an explicit predicate. In terms of meaning, the original expression has a literal meaning - "surf's up" denotes an appropriate time for surfing due to the availability ("up") of waves ("surf"). On the other hand, this expression has a layer of idiomatic meaning which denotes the appropriate time to do something, to take action (Wictionary, 2024). In addition, we have linguistic amplification (the Bulgarian title consists of 3 separate elements instead of two) and amplification (the meaningful elements "всички"/"everyone" and "на"/"to" have been added). The shift in the tone/sociolect in the exclusion of the idiomatic aspect in the target language expression signals the use of variation - instead of using the more colloquial and similar in style "яхвай вълната"/"ride the wave" or "на гребена на вълната"/"on the crest of the wave", for example, which would activate a play on words based on the idiomatic meaning of the expression, the selected variant uses a more neutral idea of surfing and the right time for surfing. This keeps the Bulgarian version closer to the key word "surf" from the original. The resulting title can also be considered as an example of discursive creation since there is no obvious equivalence between it and the original outside the context.

The Russian title of the same movie, "Лови волну!" ("Catch/ Grab the wave!" in English), also utilizes modulation to restructure the phrase by using imperative mood, amplification ("лови"/"catch") and variation. The variation in the tone substitutes the original expression from the discourse of surfing with a polysemantic Russian expression which the KartaSlov website (2024) claims to be traditionally associated with the radio - this results in a wordplay effect based on the multiple meanings of the term "wave" as pertaining to water and liquids on the one hand and to frequency on the other ("radio wave"). Alternatively, the Russian expression in question can also be viewed as an established equivalent formed through calquing - contemporary Russian sources from the area of business, marketing and advertising use this expression in a sense similar to the original English idiom - as taking advantage of an opportunity. Slobodyanyuk (2021) and the Russian translations of Moazed and Johnson (2019) use the expression in the following manner: "Если вы поймаете волну, то сможете достичь отличных результатов, не прикладывая героических усилий каждый день"/"If you catch the wave, you could achieve excellent results without exerting heroic effort every day" and "Если же компании удастся поймать волну, перед ней откроются, без преувеличения, многомиллиардные возможности"/"If the company manages to catch the wave, before it will open, without exaggeration, multibillion opportunities". The final result can also be considered discursive creation as the equivalence between the original "surf's up" title and the Russian "catch the wave!" is far from explicit out of context.

The title *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* is based on an expression typical of the weather discourse which denotes a type of weather conditions characterized by the presence of clouds (“cloudy”) and a possibility (“with a chance of”) of precipitation of some sort (rain/snow). In translating this idea, the Bulgarian (“Облачно с кюфтета”/ “cloudy with meatballs”) as well as the Russian (“Облачно, возможны осадки в виде фрикаделек”/ “cloudy, possible precipitation in the form of meatballs”) title use an easily recognizable in the respective target language established equivalent. For Bulgarian this is the expression “облачно с превалявания/валежи от ...” (“cloudy with rainfall/snow”), and in Russian - “пасмурно, возможны осадки в виде ...” (“overcast/murky, possible precipitation in the form of ...”). The specific application of these expressions, however, differs between the two languages, with the Bulgarian title omitting the part “a chance of” and using linguistic compression, resulting in a final result which is much shorter than the original (3 elements instead of 6). The Russian title, on the other hand, keeps closer to the original in terms of structure and length, and even the choice of using the lexeme “облачно” (“cloudy”) instead of the more typical and natural in the context of precipitation “пасмурно” (“murky, overcast, mainly cloudy”) signals the more literal approach and as a result helps with the recognizability of the original title in the translated version.

The title of the second movie of this franchise, *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs 2*, is identical with the one of the first film except for the added numeral “2” which designates the order of the films. In translating this second film, the Bulgarian and the Russian title use the already established titles from the first part and respectively the already listed techniques - established equivalent (in both languages), linguistic compression and reduction (in the Bulgarian). To this constant first part of the title is added, however, not only the numeral as it is done in the original, but instead are used quite creative amplifications, linguistic amplification and discursive creation. The use of these techniques is based on the movie plot (the idea of revenge by the mutated living food which has escaped annihilation after the re-establishing of the normal order of things at the end of the first movie) and on one of the slogans of the production - “something big was leftover”. formally, the use of “leftover” in this position is a cohesive anomaly, since according to the rules of the English grammar, the spelling should be “something big was left over”. However, in order to achieve the effect of wordplay the final two elements are spelled as one and thus allude to “leftovers”, leftover food. Since the Bulgarian language lacks an adequate equivalent to this noun, and a descriptive translation would sound quite clumsy, the Bulgarian team uses instead a term which is different but similar to the original idea - “огризки”/ “(food)scraps”. This results in the Bulgarian title “Облачно с кюфтета 2: Отмъщението на огризките”/ “cloudy with meatballs 2: the revenge of the scraps”. The Russian “Облачно, возможны осадки в виде фрикаделек 2: Месть ГМО”/ “cloudy, possible precipitation in the form of meatballs 2: the revenge of the GMO”, uses the same approach but here the basis is taken to be not the idea of food leftovers but instead the fact that we are dealing with mutant organisms, hence the term “GMO” and their revenge.

The *Smurfs* franchise includes 3 separate parts with the first two titles employing the characteristic continuity between the titles with the use of a numeral. The Bulgarian and Russian translations of these titles employ borrowing with naturalization of the term “smurf” - “Смърфовете”/ “Смърфовете 2” (in Bulgarian) and “Смурфики”/ “Смурфики 2” (in Russian). The title of the third movie, however, differs in that it removes the definite article and changes the overall structure with an additional part - *Smurfs: The Lost Village*. The lack of a definite article signals that we are no longer talking about the specific solitary group of smurfs from the first two movies but instead denotes them more generally, since in the third movie a new smurf village is found. In Bulgarian and Russian, however, this change is not visible - the titles in both target languages, “Смърфовете: Забравеното село” (“the smurfs: the forgotten village”) in Bulgarian and “Смурфики: Затерянная деревня” (“(the) smurfs: the lost/forgotten village”) in Russian, respectively, retain the form from the first movie. The second part of the title of the third movie is translated by using similar techniques for Bulgarian and Russian - reduction, amplification and discursive creation. The Bulgarian title also employs variation by using the diminutive “село” (“small village”) instead of the neutral “село” (“village”).

Hotel Transylvania, the most successful Sony Pictures Animation franchise production up to date, includes four movies - *Hotel Transylvania*, *Hotel Transylvania 2*, *Hotel Transylvania 3: Summer Vacation*, *Hotel Transylvania: Transformania*. The approach of the Bulgarian and the Russian teams in translating these titles differs considerably, with the Bulgarian titles remaining as close as possible to the original by employing literal translation (with some exceptions in the third movie title) while the Russian titles are much more creative in using techniques such as discursive creation, modulation, reduction, amplification and variation. The Bulgarian titles of the first two parts - “Хотел Трансилвания” and “Хотел Трансилвания 2” are examples of literal translation with the same technique employed in the constant first component of the titles in the remaining parts. In translating the title of the third movie the Bulgarian title uses discursive creation by reducing the element “summer” and substituting it for the element “чудовищна” (“monster” as an attribute) through amplification. The fourth title in Bulgarian becomes “Хотел Трансилвания 4: Трансформация” (*Hotel Transylvania: Transformania*) with the amplification and

linguistic amplification through adding the numeral “4”, in addition to using borrowing with naturalization for the element “transformania”.

The Russian titles of the franchise demonstrate a different approach as early as the first two movies, translated as “Монстры на каникулах” (“monsters on vacation”) and “Монстры на каникулах 2” (“monsters on vacation 2”), respectively, where the discursive creation technique results in a title whose relation to the original is not obvious out of context. In addition, we have reduction of the lexemes “hotel” and “Transylvania”, amplification in the adding of the semantically meaningful elements “монстры” (“monsters”) and “каникулах” (“vacation”), linguistic amplification in the addition of the preposition “на” (“here, “on”), which makes the title longer than the original by 1 element. The addition of the element “на каникулах” (“on vacation”) also signals the use of modulation with a cognitive shift from the substitution of “hotel” from the original with the vacation associated with it - hence, “на каникулах” (“on vacation”) substitutes the place. The third movie title, “Монстры на каникулах 3: Море зовёт” (“monsters on vacation: the sea calls”), also exhibits the use of discursive creation combined with reduction of the two elements “summer vacation” and amplification by adding “море зовёт” (“the sea calls”), which substitutes the more general idea of vacation with the place where it is often spent - the sea. The fourth title in Russian, “Монстры на каникулах 4: Трансформация” (“monsters on vacation 4: transformania”), uses the already mentioned discursive creation, modulation, reduction and amplification, in addition to linguistic amplification. The term “transformania” is translated via borrowing with naturalization - hence, “трансформация”. The difference between Bulgarian and Russian is striking in terms of the approach to the toponym “Transylvania” - in Bulgarian it is retained along with the associations of vampires it brings, whereas the Russian titles omit it entirely and substitute it for the more general “монстры” (“monsters”).

The two movies *The Angry Birds Movie* and *The Angry Birds Movie 2* are translated into Bulgarian and Russian, respectively, by using the technique borrowing without naturalization in the part related to the characters in the films, the “angry birds”. This technique is combined with modulation in the restructuring of the title. In Bulgarian this results in “Angry Birds: Филмът” (“angry birds: the movie”) and “Angry Birds: Филмът 2” (“angry birds: the movie 2”), while in Russian we have “Angry Birds в кино” (“angry birds in theatre”) and “Angry Birds в кино 2” (“angry birds in theatre 2”) with the use of the technique established equivalent for the “the movie” construction - “в кино” (“in theatre”).

The movies *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* and *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse* are based on the comic-book protagonist Spider-Man. In Bulgarian there exists an established equivalent for his name from the 1990s (Bairne, Andreani, Makhayo, 2024) - “Човека Паяк” (“the spider man”, a calque). It was not used, however, in the Bulgarian titles, and is substituted by the naturalized borrowing “Спайдър-Мен” (“Spider-Man”). The Russian titles, on the other hand, do not use borrowing but calquing, which results in “Человек-паук” (“the spider-man”). The original titles are interesting in that they are almost identical with the exception of a different preposition (“across” or “into”) and with the presence of a specific fictional term - the so-called “spider-verse”, analogical to universe and blended with “spider”. The Bulgarian version of this notion is achieved by implementing a combination of discursive creation and calquing, resulting in “спайди-вселена” and the titles “Спайдър-Мен: В Спайди-вселената” (“Spider-Man: in/inside the Spidey-verse”) and “Спайдър-Мен: През Спайди-вселената” (“Spider-Man: through/across the Spidey-verse”). The resulting titles are quite close to the originals both in terms of the fictional terms and the overall structure. The Russian titles are much more creative and the localized version is closer to the target language. The first movie title, “Человек-паук: Через вселенные” (“Spider-Man: through/across the universes”), uses discursive creation combined with reduction of the preposition “into” and amplification with the element “через” (“through”). The element “spider-verse” is also omitted and substituted with “вселенные” (“universes”) without the idea of “spider” or “net” as characterizing the universes in question. The second title, “Человек-паук: Паутина вселенных” (“Spider-man: the web of universes”), combines reduction (of the preposition “across”) with modulation - “spider-verse” is transformed into “паутина вселенных” (“the web of universes/ the universe web”).

The title of first of the remaining four standalone productions, *Arthur Christmas*, is translated into Bulgarian as “Тайните служби на Дядо Коледа” (“the secret services of grandfather Christmas”) through the use of discursive creation based on the movie’s plot where “Christmas” is a family name and the title of “Santa Claus” (or “grandfather Christmas”) is hereditary. Thus the original title of “Arthur Christmas” refers to Santa Claus’s grandson, which in Bulgarian would be literally “Артър Коледа”. In the Bulgarian title the name “Arthur” is reduced, in combination with linguistic amplification (the addition of “тайните служби на Дядо ...”/ “the secret services of grandfather ...”) and amplification (5 elements in Bulgarian as opposed to two). The approach of the Russian title is the same - discursive creation with reduction, linguistic amplification and amplification - “Секретная служба Санта-Клауса” (the secret service of Santa Claus).

The title of *The Pirates! Band of Misfits* is translated in Bulgarian as “Пиратите! Банда неудачници” and as “Пираты! Банда неудачников” in Russian. The titles use only literal translation and keep most closely to the original. The same approach is accepted with the title *The Emoji Movie* which in Bulgarian becomes “Емоджи: Филмът” (“Emoji: the movie”) and in Russian “Эмоджи фильм” (“Emoji movie”) via the use of naturalized borrowing (“emoji” is retained instead of using the established equivalent “емотикон” in Bulgarian or “эмотикон” in Russian), as well as modulation of the structure of the title in the two target languages.

The translations of the title of *Peter Rabbit* movie use a larger variation of techniques. The Bulgarian variant, “Зайчето Питър” (“the rabbit Peter”) uses transposition where the proper noun “Rabbit” (which is the surname of the main character, hence the capital letter) is transformed into a common noun with variation - the diminutive “зайчето” (“the little rabbit”) instead of the neutral original “rabbit”. The Russian variant, “Кролик Питер” (“the rabbit Peter”), employs transposition of the same elements as well, although without the additional variation (“rabbit” is translated as the neutral “кролик”).

4. CONCLUSIONS

Sony Pictures Animation productions can be grouped into two categories in terms of whether they belong to a franchise consisting of a series of movies or exist as standalone films. The feature films *Open Season* and *Surf's Up* are somewhat different in this sense as they are technically of the franchise type but in actuality the movies after the first one are published directly on video, which puts them in the standalone category for the purposes of the study. Other standalone feature films include *Arthur Christmas*, *The Pirates! Band of Misfits*, *The Emoji Movie* and *Peter Rabbit*, whereas the franchise category is made up of the 4 installments of *Hotel Transylvania*, the three of *The Smurfs*, and two each for *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*, *The Angry Birds Movie* and *Spider Man*. The overall distribution of standalone to franchise productions is more than twice for the franchise ones - 6 standalone movies as opposed to 13 franchise installments.

The original titles of the separate parts of the franchise productions demonstrate an interesting lack of continuity - the practice of distinguishing different parts of a franchise by adding a numeral to the original title of the first part is observed in the two *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* movies and the 2 *The Angry Birds Movie* productions, as well as in the titles of the first two parts of the *Hotel Transylvania* and *The Smurfs* series. The titles of the rest of the movies included in these franchise productions, however, either do not have the added numeral (and have a second part added to the original title in the case of the last *The Smurfs* and *Hotel Transylvania* movies), or the numeral is used in combination with that second add-on. The *Spider Man* series also does not use numerals for separating the parts, with employing a two-part title for each of the movies - one part remaining constant and the other being different in order to distinguish the movie.

The qualitative analysis of the data shows an overall preference for the use of 13 out of the 18 techniques of translation, while adaptation, generalization, substitution, compensation and description are not used at all. Linguistic compression, particularization and transposition are the three least popular techniques among the utilized ones, with only 2 total occurrences. In the case of linguistic compression, both of these occurrences are in the Bulgarian titles, while the other two techniques have one occurrence in each language. Calquing and variation are twice as popular across the two languages, with 2 to 3 uses in Bulgarian and Russian titles and 4 or 5 uses total. Next in terms of popularity are established equivalent and literal translation with seven total occurrences, 5 in one language and 2 in the other. The six most utilized techniques are modulation (4 Bulgarian, 8 Russian, 12 total uses), linguistic amplification (6 Bulgarian, 7 Russian, 13 total uses), discursive creation (6 Bulgarian, 9 Russian, 15 total uses), borrowing (9 Bulgarian, 7 Russian, 16 total uses), reduction (6 Bulgarian, 10 Russian, 16 total uses) and amplification (6 Bulgarian, 11 Russian, 17 total uses). It is an interesting detail that although amplification is the most popular technique used in both languages, the Russian usages are twice as many as those in Bulgarian, similarly to the situation with reduction, the second most popular technique, and modulation, the sixth most popular. Out of the 118 techniques used in total across the Bulgarian and Russian titles, 53 occur in Bulgarian as opposed to 65 in - a difference of 22.6%. In addition, the Bulgarian titles are more balanced in their usage of techniques, giving a preference to borrowing with 9 occurrences and 6 occurrences each to the five other techniques in the top. Russian, instead, shows a much stronger preference for amplification and reduction with double-digit occurrences.

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