

THE TRANSLATION OF BRITISH SLANG INTO UKRAINIAN (*MISFITS* CASE)

La traducción de la jerga británica en ucraniano (el caso de Misfits)

Kateryna BONDARENKO

Volodymyr Vynnychenko Central Ukrainian Pedagogical University
katerinabond@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: Slang peculiarities have been an object of sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic and translational studies since slang has always been linked to society and its verbal manifestation. This paper presents the results of a study on how slang as linguistic means liberating carnivalesque laughter is translated into Ukrainian. The aim was to map out the strategies used by translators in response to conceptual and linguistic challenges. Of special interest was concentrating not only on a quantitative analysis of lexical data but on understanding the translator's behavior, given the cultural environment and AVT peculiarities. The analysis is conducted on a corpus of the British TV series *Misfits*. The source scripts are analyzed to spot the phrases containing slang (271 cases). Source-target pairs provided data for analyzing the solutions proposed in the translation process. Our hypothesis was that slang serves as a verbalization of the carnivalesque worldview which is more or less similar in European cultures and mostly may be translated.

Keywords: slang; humour; componential analysis; semantic space; audiovisual translation; equivalence.

1. INTRODUCTION

TV dramas are often thought of as a sort of re-creation of modern society. The protagonists use language more or less typical for a community depicted. The British comedy *Misfits* portrays a group of juvenile delinquents doing mandated community service together and serves an example of demeaning working-class stereotypes.

Despite differences, characters are united by their lower social status. The characters are peculiar for their appearance, or crimes they are caught for, but all five are using modern British slang that stands for producers' desire to represent young people of all backgrounds. A disregard for authorities and an overall culture of drug and alcohol abuse and sexual depravity is accompanied by an active usage of strong language. All characters use (general) slang (e.g. *bruv*, *mate*) including abusive words (e.g. *prick*, *fucking*) that proves the common denominator of slang terms to be "their undeniable lack of dignity and their deliberate, widespread use within a social group...to defy social or linguistic convention" (Dumas and Lighter 1978, 16).

Slang is a language pulsating nerve, unlike standard language it's not restricted by PC rules and is free to nominate taboo objects. Its mechanisms correlate rather with primeval instincts ruled by "childishly simple-minded censors" (Freud 2002) than with civilized cultural layering. The primeval worldview preconditions a special value system ("forbidden wishes") with human survival and successful reproduction being the most valuable. The latter is perceived unconsciously but remains the core principle of the studied phenomena that defines humour culture (Mattiello 2008).

Considering humour and translation studies (Arampatzis 2012, Bucaria 2007), it is obvious that humour is often culture-dependent, resulting in challenges for translators. At the same time world history is the kind of drama in which every act was accompanied by a laughing chorus (Bakhtin 1984) and it's

highly likely that the reasons for laughter, the “lynchpins” to be laughed at and linguistic means (often – substandard language) for creating the humour effect should not differ much.

Although a significant amount of research has been carried out on the peculiarities of audiovisual products, little attention continues to be paid to the cultural and linguistic adaptation that such cross-cultural transformations require. Particularly when it comes to humour based on controversial, “taboo” lexemes and topics, the source is often mangled in translation. The problems of slang translation were highlighted by numerous scholars (Ranzato 2015, Beseghi 2016, Arampatzis 2012, Chiaro 2007, Chaume 2013, Díaz Cintas 2012, Dore 2017) that stated that translators often resort to its neutralization to ensure the semantic equivalence with the target and with respect to possible restrictions for films’ distribution. The Ukrainian translation of *Misfits* shows more creative solutions which are analyzed in the article.

1.1 *Data and objectives*

The English source text of *Misfits* and its dubbed Ukrainian counterpart have been analyzed to spot the phrases containing substandard lexemes (slang and jargon). Source-target pairs (271 cases) provided data for analyzing the solutions proposed in the translation process. The results are first analyzed in the light of the humour (satirical) worldview realized through the semantics of slang expressions. The investigation proceeds with qualitative and quantitative analyses where the collected vocabulary in the source and respective target texts is analyzed to highlight translation solutions.

1.2 *Methodology*

Componential analysis has been applied to source and target slang terms. A strict componential technique cannot be applied to the entire vocabulary but is quite successful with slang terms –since they are mainly monosemantic and attached to the only referent with a special focus on fight, physiology, food and symposy, etc. Due to semantic decomposition slang terms can be assigned to definite semantic domains consisting of sets of meanings which share a significant semantic feature in common.

Besides defining the domains relevant for humour-making, componential analysis serves as a reliable tool for translation studies: “the detailed comparison of meanings, whether intralingually or interlingually thus providing a more adequate basis for translational equivalences” (Nida 1964).

1.3 *Semantic space of Misfits carved out by slang*

Having scrolled through slang lexemes used in *Misfits* one may think that their semantic peculiarities as well as the reasons for using them in the film are unsystematic and unorganized. But the process of encoding the message implies certain intents in communication realized with regard to the source (in our case –audiovisual product), message (humour delivered through taboo topics discussed in “low” language), and receptor (audience more or less of the same worldview). Audiovisual media and its translation play a special role in the articulation of cultural concepts, such as femininity, masculinity, race and otherness, among others (Díaz Cintas 2012).

Message, i.e. verbal constituent of audiovisual product is of major importance in this study. The domains “attracting” the biggest quantity of slang terms in *Misfits* are mainly the images of the material bodily lower stratum that are key pillars of humour culture (Bakhtin 1984): effective componential analysis requires a well-defined corpus of related terms and the possibility of finding in the real world certain characteristics determinant as to the features in question.

Our objectives at this stage were to determine the limits of a “closed corpus”; define the slang terms as precisely as possible on the basis of referents involved; identify the distinctive features standing for contrasts in meaning; and make an overall conclusion by means of “mapping” the semantic space of *Misfits*. As mentioned, the data there were 271 slang term usage cases in the source text of *Misfits*. The

terms were extracted and defined with the help of specialized dictionaries (Dalzell & Victor 2007, Partridge 2006, Stavtys'ka 2003, Kondratiuk 2006). Common and distinctive semantic features have been identified to refer to the definite semantic domains. It turned out that some domains appeared to be considerably hierarchical.

Since on a certain level of semantic deep structure all the lexemes denoting entities are mostly represented by nouns, actions –by verbs, characteristics– by adjectives, our first step followed this “instinctive” pattern. Among 271 slang terms 65% were qualified as nouns (e.g. *pusy*, *bollocks*, *wind-up*), 27% as verbs (e.g. *to screw*, *hook up*), 7% as adjectives (e.g. *un-fucking-believable*, *freaked out*), 11% as other parts of speech.

Furthermore, the intermediate classes subordinate to the domains of “Entities”, “Actions”, “Characteristics” were distinguished. The process may be illustrated as follows. According to slang dictionaries certain slang terms (e.g. *stab*, *masb*, *batter*) in the source text of *Misfits* share the component of ‘injure physically’. Semantic elements are not equally important, since the dominant semantic element (seme) organizes all the other ones which may be more or less important for the meaning of the lexeme (Lyons 1995, Leech 2016). The extra semantic features ‘injure + weapon’ (e.g. *to stab* ‘poking with a *knife*’), ‘injure + sentiment’ (e.g. *to switch off* ‘injure *not caring* about anyone’s feelings’) explain how the terms are related to one another and are used for differentiation.

Under “Entities” we distinguished “Human beings” and “Artifacts”; “Actions” are represented by “Physiology (mainly sex)” and “Socialising (mainly arguing)”, “Characteristics” embraced two domains: more or less impersonal behavior assessment and “pure” invectives.

“Human beings” and “Artifacts” are the biggest domains containing slang terms in *Misfits*. The first one contains terms with the dominant semantic element ‘unpleasant, obnoxious’ (e.g. *wanker*, *arse-kisser*, *knob*). Other semantic elements may be neglected since the only communicative aim judging from other constituents of the audiovisual product (gestures, body language) is an insult. The “Characteristics” domain follows more or less the same pattern (e.g. *fucking*, *crappy*, *bloody*) with the same dominant semantic element. One of the highly nominated domains are those referring to sexual relations and human physiology (e.g. *pusy*, *bollocks*, *dick*, *tits*, *arsehole*) with the dominant semantic element of ‘reproductive and excretive organs’. Verbs denoting sexual activity (e.g. *fuck*, *hook up*) are numerous as well as those verbalizing excretive activity (e.g. *shit*, *puke*, *piss*). The slang term *hook up* seems to render the core concept of sexual relations in *Misfits* semantic space. A *hookup* implies that an act of physical intimacy, whatever it may be, is performed outside of the bounds of a relationship, relationship expectations, and emotional attachments and shows non-equivalence with Standard English (Slota 2016) but can be easily rendered into Ukrainian by the corresponding lexemes (e.g. *замушуму*, *зв'язу*). It should also be noted that the bodily element as well as fertility, growth, and a brimming-over abundance are the fundamentals of carnival culture. Manifestations of this life refer not to the isolated biological individual, not to the private, egoistic economic man, but to the collective ancestral body of all the people (Bakhtin 1984).

As seen there's far less arbitrariness than one may suppose. We presume that the domains attracting the slang terms are exactly the same that underwrite humour as a universal phenomenon.

2. INTERLINGUAL SEMANTIC CORRESPONDENCES AND TRANSLATION EQUIVALENCE

Slang terms' semantic mapping may be fruitful in determining the quality of translation. The identity of domains doesn't only determine the degree of synonymy between terms in one language but also provides a reliable source for correspondences on a multilingual level since translation equivalence can mainly be achieved due to the interlingual synonymy of the term (Hartmann 2012). It should be mentioned nevertheless that to describe the procedure of decoding the message of the source text and delivering it in the target one goes beyond mere “picking up” of semantically correspondent lexemes. At

the same time the componential analysis of terms facilitates translators' and reviewers' task making quality assessment more impartial and unprejudiced.

Lexical meanings can be related to one another in four ways: inclusion, overlapping, complementation and contiguity (Nida 1964). Presuming that slang lexicon in different lingvocultures is concentrated within the same semantic domains one may easily define how the terms are related in different languages and state the equivalence level accordingly.

In 189 (70%) source-target pairs semantic contiguity is observed between English and Ukrainian slang terms and they may be called the closest natural equivalents.

English	Ukrainian	Back translation
– That is <i>rubbish</i> .	– Це <i>відстій</i> .	– That is <i>rubbish</i> .
– She is <i>proper slut</i> .	– <i>Ото вже справжня давалка</i> .	– That is a <i>proper slut</i> .

Table 1: Semantic contiguity in English-Ukrainian translation of *Misfits*.

Quite often Ukrainian is quite elaborative in suggesting quite a number of equivalents to the English terms. To transfer the meaning of *prick* 'a fool, an idiot; a contemptible person' Ukrainian translators suggested many terms (e.g. *урод, мудило, вищупок*) which are the closest natural equivalents both intralingually and interlingually. See the following table with more examples of the variability of slang terms in translation.

Source term	Meaning	Target (Ukrainian) terms
<i> fucking (adj.)</i>	inferior	<i>довбаний, гръбаний, сраний, кончений</i>
<i>bullshit (n.)</i>	nonsense, rubbish	<i>лайно, лажка, параша, шняга</i>
<i>slut</i>	a promiscuous female	<i>шльондра, давалка, манда</i>
<i>shut up</i>	to stop talking	<i>закрийся, завались, заткнись, заглохни</i>

Table 2: Lexical variability in English-Ukrainian translation of *Misfits*.

Partial equivalence was observed in 27% pairs. Overlapping (15%), and inclusion (12%) are among the most typical ways of correspondences between source and target slang terms. Sometimes the meaning of the target term can be said to be included in the meaning or overlap the meaning of the source but for some minor features that serve to distinguish the more restricted area. Inclusion is often observed when one should render concepts, one of which ('*chav*') is a key point for the plot of *Misfits*. '*Chav*' is a derogative term that describes a young person of a type characterised by brash and loutish behaviour and the wearing of designer-style clothes (esp. sportswear); usually with connotations of a low social status. Unlike equivalents in the USA (e.g. *trailertrash, the Springer crowd*) or Australia (e.g. *bogans*) *chav* refers not only to an uncultured underclass but rather to a new attitude to consumer behaviour on the implication that tasteless vulgarity and self-assertment shows the modern transitions in society. Chavs' hair-style, clothing and flashy accessories become fashion and culture statements presumably non-transferable and hardly translatable without the significant losses (Thorne 2007).

Componential analysis based on dictionary definitions suggests the following semantic structure of the slang term *chav*: (low) *social class* + *lack of education* + *ribaldry* + *showing off*.

In the Ukrainian translation some lexemes are suggested as partial equivalents to *chav* each of them rendering the dominant semantic component 'ribaldry' but lacking the peripheral ones. The suggested Ukrainian lexemes (e.g. *лоховка* and *будло*) refer mainly to 'an unrefined and loutish person, often from a lower socio-economic area' lacking the semantic feature of 'showing off'.

English	Ukrainian	Back translation
– Do you know if you call me “ <u>chav</u> ” one more time I will kick you so hard in the gut your mum will feel it.	– Ще раз назвеш мене <u>доховка</u> , я так заб’їгарю тобі між ног, що твоя мати почув’є.	– If you call me <u>daft Doris</u> one more time I will kick you so hard in the gut your mum will feel it.
– I was a horrible <u>chav</u>	– Я вела себе як <u>бидло</u> .	– I was a horrible <u>hellcat</u> .
– Oh my God I’m thinking about <u>shagging a chav</u>	– О, Боже, я хочу <u>натягнути</u> цю <u>шмапу</u> .	– Oh my God I’m thinking about <u>shagging a prissy</u> .

Table 3: Partial equivalence in English-Ukrainian translation of *Misfits*.

The last case suggests another variant of rendering the meaning with a special accent on promiscuity, presumably associated with the lack of proper education. Ukrainian *шмапа* lacks other semantic components of ‘chav’ (‘social class’, ‘showing off’), and consequently may serve as an example of partial equivalence with the target term.

Overlapping (15% cases) describes the type of relations when one term may stand for the other in certain contexts. Those are mainly words that may be called synonyms (as they have the identical semantic structure) but cannot be substitutable in any and all contexts. As Coleman stated, “by choosing to use a slang term in preference to a Standard English synonym, we’re providing information about ourselves and about our relationships and interests” (Coleman 2012, 110). We presume that the social-stylistic marker (the core of slang and jargon terms) is the one that signals the overlapping of terms. Ukrainian *брехня*, for example, is a much more frequent (standard) term to denote ‘nonsense, rubbish’ of the counterpart *bullshit*. The translator has refused absolute equivalents existing in Ukrainian slang (e.g. *муфта, херня, хуйня*) that has led to significant losses in terms of connotation.

English	Ukrainian	Back translation
– That’s the biggest <u>bullshit</u> I have ever heard.	– Це найбільша <u>брехня</u> , яку я коли-небудь чув.	– That’s the biggest <u>lie</u> I have ever heard.

Table 4: Neutralization in English-Ukrainian translation of *Misfits*.

It should be noted nevertheless that the mentioned neutralization is not peculiar for Ukrainian translation unlike Italian, for instance, when the parts of original texts are toned down, modified or omitted, especially when referring to sexual or other sensitive topics (Dore 2017). The reasons are mainly ideological, suggested by official censorship (Díaz Cintas 2012).

Numerous cases (29) of “disphemization” – rendering the standard term by a substandard – are more peculiar for the Ukrainian translation of *Misfits*. The suggested Ukrainian variants are identical semantically but for the social-stylistic component referring the term to slang lexicon.

English	Ukrainian	Back translation
– That stuff <u>makes you crazy</u> .	– Ця хрінь <u>башино</u> <u>рєє</u> на <u>раз</u> .	– That stuff drives you <u>off your conk</u> .
– Oh, you are not <u>serious!</u>	– Та ти <u>зониш!</u>	– Oh, you are <u>scamming!</u>

Table 5: Disphemization in English-Ukrainian translation of *Misfits*.

The Ukrainian dubbing team has tried to make the translation even more substandard than the original version. In particular, they have used *рєєти башино* for *to make crazy*. The translator has successfully retained that semantic meaning of expression, but the social-stylistic component has been added to make the statement even lower.

Disphemization strategy in translation is usually peculiar for cybersubtitling. The unconventional and creative translation strategies contribute to a new kind of translator visibility that diverges from more traditional translation practices. The parallels between Rabelsian carnival culture described by M. Bakhtin and the modern digital spaces with the humans in the pursuit of individual freedom and breakdown of hegemony can easily be drawn (Cintas 2018). The fansubs build a second world and a second life outside officialdom. Bakhtin pre-admonished that:

if we fail to take into consideration this two-world condition, neither ... cultural consciousness nor the culture ... can be understood. To ignore or underestimate the laughing people ... also distorts the picture of European culture's historic development (Bakhtin 1984, 6).

The numerous studies prove that the “official” dubbing or subtitling is much more standardized than fansubbing (Díaz Cintas & Muñoz Sánchez 2006) due to censorship and other restrictions. The Ukrainian case shows considerable standardization of the official dubbing with ethnic self-awareness being the main reason. Ukraine witnesses a considerable growth of products translated into the national language that usually is a marker of a national self-determination (Kilborn 1993, Danan 1991, Zabalbeascoa 2001).

With due consideration to the fact that Ukrainian localization strategies of reproducing foreign films through mechanisms of translation and adaptation is still under development, it can hardly boast of both official and fansubs on a regular basis. Centuries of national language oppression translated into its marginalization involved the lack of popular, folk, or humour culture that could not be perceived as primitive and antiquated. Those are presumably the inner reasons for “carnivalizing” the official dubbing, stating its potential power not for destruction but rather for the re-building of national culture.

3. RESULTS

Slang and its contribution to the humour effect is one of the most challenging issues in audiovisual translation. As this study shows, slang is employed in *Misfits* so as to typify the characters. Semantic mapping of slang terms used in *Misfits* showed definite regularities consistent with the key pillars of humour culture. The fact that slang belongs to the definite community, makes it difficult for the translator to render all lingvocultural peculiarities. It should be noted nevertheless that there was a relatively small amount of slang terms that remained neglected (not translated) and the neutralization, typical for many other language pairs, was not common in Ukrainian translation. The present study shows that retaining, and at times intensifying slang usage is a peculiar feature of Ukrainian audiovisual translation at the modern stage. Ukrainian policy towards translation shows definite freedom and contributes to the quality of audiovisual products. It can be presumed that the “soft limitations” on the rough terms may help to compensate for the loss of other units in the process of translation. At the same time the “carnivalization” of officially dubbed versions realized in disphemization strategy contributes to the popular humour culture neglected in Ukraine during the Soviet regime.

REFERENCES

- Arampatzis, Christos. 2012. “Dialects at the Service of Humour within the American Sitcom: A Challenge for the Dubbing Translator”. In *Language and Humour in the Media*: 67-81.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhaïlovich. 1984. *Rabelais and his world*. Indiana University Press.
- Beseghi, Micòl. 2016. “WTF! Taboo language in TV series: An analysis of professional and amateur translation”. *Altre Modernità: Rivista di studi letterari e culturali*, 1: 215-231.

- Bucaria, Chiara. 2007. "Humour and other catastrophes: Dealing with the translation of mixed-genre TV series". *Linguistica Antverpiensia, New Series—Themes in Translation Studies* 6. Accessed October 30, 2018. <https://lans.ua.ac.be/index.php/LANS-TTS/article/viewFile/190/121>
- Chaume, Frederic. 2013. "The turn of audiovisual translation: New audiences and new technologies". *Translation Spaces* 2.1: 105-123.
- Chiara, Delia. 2007. "Not in front of the children? An analysis of sex on screen in Italy". *Linguistica Antverpiensia, New Series—Themes in Translation Studies* 6. Accessed October 30, 2018. <https://lans-tts.uantwerpen.be/index.php/LANS-TTS/article/view/191>
- Coleman, Julie. 2012. *The life of slang*. OUP Oxford.
- Dalzell, Tom, and Terry Victor. 2014. *The concise new Partridge dictionary of slang and unconventional English*. Routledge.
- Danan, Martine. 1991. "Dubbing as an Expression of Nationalism". *Meta: Journal des traducteurs/Meta: Translators' Journal* 36.4: 606-614.
- Díaz Cintas, Jorge and Muñoz Sánchez, Pablo. 2006. "Fansubs: Audiovisual translation in an amateur environment". *The Journal of Specialised Translation* 6: 37-52.
- Díaz Cintas, Jorge. 2012. "Clearing the smoke to see the screen: Ideological manipulation in audiovisual translation". *Meta: Journal des traducteurs/Meta: Translators' Journal* 57.2: 279-293.
- Dore, Margherita. 2017. "The Italian Dubbing of Dialects, Accents and Slang in the British Dark Comedy Drama 'Misfits'". *Status Quaestionis* 11. Accessed October 30, 2018. <https://ojs.uniroma1.it/index.php/statusquaestionis/article/view/13835>
- Dumas, Bethany K., and Jonathan Lighter. 1978. "Is slang a word for linguists?" *American speech* 53.1: 5-17.
- Freud, Sigmund. 2002. *Wild analysis*. UK: Penguin.
- Gilmore, David D. 1998. *Carnival and culture: Sex, symbol, and status in Spain*. Yale University Press.
- Hartmann, Reinhard Rudolf Karl. 2012. *Interlingual Lexicography: Selected Essays on Translation Equivalence, Contrastive Linguistics and the Bilingual Dictionary*. Vol. 133. Walter de Gruyter.
- Kilburn, Richard. 1993. "Speak my language: current attitudes to television subtitling and dubbing". *Media, culture & society* 15.4, 641-660.
- Kondratiuk, Tetyana. 2006. *Slovník suchasnogo ukrajinskogo slenhu*. Kharkiv: Folio.
- Leech, Geoffrey N. 2016. *Principles of pragmatics*. Routledge.
- Lyons, John. 1995. *Linguistic semantics: An introduction*. Cambridge University Press.
- Mattiello, Elisa. 2009. "Difficulty of slang translation". *Translation Practices: Through Language to Culture*. 65-83.
- Nida, Eugene A. 1964. *Towards a science of translating: with special reference to principles and procedures involved in Bible translating*. Leiden, EJ Brill. Google Scholar.
- Partridge, E. 2006. *The New Partridge Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English: JZ (Vol. 2)*. Taylor & Francis.
- Ranzato, Irene. 2015. "Dubbing Teenage Speech into Italian: Creative Translation in *Skins*". In *Audiovisual translation: Taking stock*, ed. by Cintas Díaz, Jorge; Neves, Josélia. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 159-176.
- Slotta, James. 2016. "Slang and the semantic sense of identity". In *Proceedings of the 24th Annual Symposium about Language and Society* April 15-16, 119-128.
- Stavyts'ka, Lesya. 2003. *Korotkyi slovník zhargonnoyi leksyky ukrajyns'koyi movy*. Kyiv: Krytyka.
- Thorne, Tony. 2007. *Shoot the puppy: A survival guide to the curious jargon of modern life*. UK: Penguin.
- Zabalbeascoa, Patrick; Izard, Natàlia and Santamaria, Laura. 2001. *Disentangling audiovisual translation into Catalan from the Spanish media mesh*. Benjamins Translation Library.