

Literary Title Translations from English to Hungarian

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Abstract: This paper examines titles, as metatexts, from a linguistic aspect. The title is an integral part of a text, especially of a literary piece. More particularly, it focuses on translation strategies and how they are applied by translators in the context of translating titles of American novels to Hungarian. This study differentiates five groups of translation strategies based on notable linguists' works, such as Kinga Klaudy and Eugene Nida, supplementing them with an original one, and specifying them with several subgroups. The main categories are the following: Direct Translation, Specification, Generalization, Omission, and Total Transformation. Each category is introduced with specific examples. Based on the collected material, this paper argues that when translating titles of American novels to Hungarian, priority is attributed to the source language text as faithfully as possible, not only in its content but also in its form.

Keywords: translation, titles, Eugene Nida, dynamic equivalence, specification, generalization, omission, total transformation

Reading is considered to be an integral part of human culture almost all around the world. Due to globalism and the growing tendency of subcultures merging with each other, the book publishing market must take into account the demand of the people: translating novels written in different languages, hence overcoming the language barrier. Beyond domestic novels, people tend to have the desire to read works from authors of other cultures and nations written in different languages. The work of translators is obviously crucial. Although there are several works and much research that elaborate on translation in general – such as the works of Catford (1965), Nida (1969), and Kommissarov (1972), and the studies from the prominent Hungarian linguist, Kinga Klaudy (2003), – there has been hardly any study so far that focuses on the translation of titles in particular, especially in the field of translation from English to Hungarian.

The aim of this research is to survey and analyze different strategies and methods of translating literary titles since the title is an essential part of literary works. The process of translating titles is influenced by many different factors, such as the translator's individual preferences or certain translation strategies. There are also other factors which might influence the outcome, for instance, marketing factors. This research deals with the different approaches translators take when translating the titles of literary works. It applies a descriptive analysis of title translations based on an assembled collection of American novel and short story titles. 251 titles of novels of American authors and the corresponding Hungarian titles of these works have been collected.

The collection is based on two criteria. The first criterion, six American authors have been chosen: Philip K. Dick, Kurt Vonnegut, Philip Roth, William Faulkner, Howard Fast and John Updike. All of their works that have been translated into Hungarian have been analyzed. The other criterion is based on the publication date of the first edition of the Hungarian translated pieces. A five-year' time-frame has been chosen to meet this criterion. Every American novel published in Hungarian between 1990 and 1994 has been studied.

Based on the research, five different main groups of strategies were distinguished that translators use when translating titles due to Kinga Klaudy's work and Eugene Nida's theory of equivalence. It might be important to note that during the process of grouping the titles based on the translation strategies which were carried out, an overlap between the categories could be observed. However, these overlaps were overlooked since from the approach of this study they are irrelevant.

Direct Translation

The first major group, *Direct Translation* includes two subgroups, *Literal Translation* being the first. Although the name indicates that no change takes place if this translation strategy is the one applied, there are inevitable modifications that cannot be avoided because of the obvious grammatical and structural differences. The omission of articles appeared in about one-fourth of the studied translations, which means that 23 times out of 94 cases the translator decided to omit the articles. Kinga Klaudy argues in one of her lectures that the definite article is needed in the Hungarian translation if the modifier is part of the term, for example, "unemployment rates" should be translated to a "munkanélküliségi ráta". However, there is no need for the definite article if the modifier is informative and it specifies or describes the noun which follows it, for example, "increasing prices" should be translated to "növekvő árak" (Klaudy 2015). It must be clarified that Klaudy made her argument regarding the process of translating a table of contents. This aspect must not be neglected when speaking of translating literary titles. Paul Bowel's novel, *The Sheltering Sky* was published in Hungarian with the title *Oltalmazó ég* (Zaymus 2018: 38, 47). This example is a perfect representative of the method described above and how relevant it is in relation to literary titles. *Sheltering sky* is not a fixed term, the word *sheltering* has a function of modifying the following noun, *sky*. The translator of the novel, Tibor Szilágyi, following the above-mentioned pattern, omitted the article from the translation, thus the Hungarian title, *Oltalmazó ég*.

The other subgroup of *Direct Translation* is referred to as *Dynamic Equivalence*, based on Nida's translation studies. According to Nida, dynamic equivalence is applied if the translator focuses on the relationship between the reader and the message rather than the message itself (1964: 266). The Hungarian translation of the novel, *Martians, Go Home* by Fredric Brown has the title *Marslakók, mars haza* (Zaymus 2018: 38, 47). In Hungarian, the word *Mars*, the word for the relevant planet, and the word *mars*, that is a playful equivalent of the English verb *go*, are homonyms. The translator, Éva Simóné Avarosy took advantage of the homonyms and through this pun the style of the novel – whose genre is a science fiction comic novel – is already foreshadowed by the translated title for the Hungarian readers. On account of implying that, she added extra meaning to the title by introducing the diction of the novel. Hence, this title transformation is an example of an overlap, in this particular case, the overlap of addition and dynamic equivalence.

Specification

The second major group is *Specification*, which splits into 3 subgroups: title transformations of *grammatical specification*, *lexical specification* and *addition* of a new element, by which the Hungarian title becomes more specific. Furthermore, this had been subdivided based on arbitrariness: the first type is when there is no possible choice, when it is not the result of a conscious decision of the translator, but the acknowledgment of the differences between languages. This type is represented by title transformations, when the translator must adapt to the grammatical conditions of the target language. Therefore, specification, – from the aspect of ambiguity – is sometimes a case of necessity. In some cases, there is no choice for the translator but to acknowledge the differences between the English and Hungarian language,

and, as a result of that, accept the possible loss of ambiguity. In other cases, the translator can choose from the possibilities based on his individual preferences.

Philip Roth's novel, *I Married a Communist* was translated into *Kommunistához mentem feleségül* by Katalin Sóvágó (Zaymus 2018: 37, 46). While the gender of the first-person singular is not implied by the original English title, in the Hungarian translation it is revealed that the speaker is female. In Hungarian one can say *feleségül mentem hozzá* or *feleségül jött hozzám*. Although Hungarian is not a gender-specific language, in this case, in Hungarian, the *határozó ragos személyes névmás* (hozzá, hozzám) has the same role, and it unveils whether the subject is female or male. If the original title were 'I married him, the Communist', the translation *Kommunistához mentem feleségül* would not say more about the subject than the English title does. However, in the title of this Philip Roth novel, the object is a noun which does not reveal the speaker's gender, whereas the Hungarian translation does; hence, it can be claimed that this translation belongs to the specification category. Another example of grammatical specification is the translation of Joseph Heller's novel, *Picture This*. This was translated by Tibor Szilágyi into *Képzeltjétek el* (Zaymus 2018: 37, 46). The original title has no particular addressee, while the Hungarian translation does, it speaks to 'you'. In the English language, the imperative form does not require to mark to whom the request is addressed, whereas in Hungarian, the addressee cannot be invisible. This small but crucial grammatical difference makes the Hungarian title more specific since the suffix *-jétek* indicates that the addressees are you, which is the second person plural.

As for *Arbitrary Specification*, the novel, *Two Weeks in Another Town* by Irvin Shaw was translated into *Egy amerikai Rómában* by György Odze (Zaymus 2018: 39, 48). While the time frame indicated by the original English title is omitted from the Hungarian title, the latter ensures that the reader is aware of the subject being an American and the *other town* he stays in is Rome. The reason for this change may be the geographical differences. Since Irwin Shaw was an American author, his novel's domestic readers are reading the novel in the country from where the main character hits the road, America. For a Hungarian reader, both America and Rome, Italy, are foreign places, hence a Hungarian reader is much more an outside observer than an American reading the book written by an American author.

Addition is the third subgroup of *Specification*. Lexical addition is a standard transfer operation whereby new meaningful elements, which cannot be found in the source language text, appear in the target language text. The reason for adding meanings is the same as for omitting them, namely differences in the background knowledge of the source language and target language readers. If the given brand name, street name, etc. represents important information in the context of a particular textual environment, and the translator does not want to omit it, they may use an explanatory addition. (Klaudy 2003: 249)

Addition as a type of specification is in many cases based on the translator's individual, rhetorical preference, such as in the case of the translation of a Bernard Malamud's novel, *Dubin's Lives* (Zaymus 2018: 37, 46). The Hungarian title of the book is *Dubin megannyi élete*. The addition of the information of the word *megannyi* – that translates into *many* in English – was not necessitated by grammatical differences between the source and the target language, hence it is presumptive that it was the translator's arbitrary decision.

Generalization

The cause for applying *Generalization* for the process of title translation many times lies in cultural differences. The novel *Navy Seals* written by James B. Adair (Zaymus 2018: 38, 47), for example, was translated into Hungarian by Géza Kovács, with the title *Elit kommandó*. The Hungarian title in English would be approximately 'Elite Commando'. This title translation

belongs to this translation strategy group because the English title *Navy Seals* refers to one specific elite military force, The United States Navy's Sea, Air and Land Teams. Whereas the Hungarian translation covers all the elite commandos which exist all around the world. This transformation was necessary as an acknowledgment of the differences between the source and target language culture. In Hungary, there is no equivalent military force along the lines of Navy Seals; hence, the translator put emphasis on the characteristics of the Navy Seals rather than translating it word by word, which would not evoke the same information for the Hungarian readers. The Hungarian title is a descriptive translation as it shows that the military unit in question is not ordinary but elite, and the members of it are not everyday soldiers but part of a commando unit. By performing this transformation some loss of the meaning is inevitable. Consequently, the description of the particular army unit in the English title, *Navy Seals*, must come with generalizing the meaning of the original title in the Hungarian translation.

Omission

Lexical omission is a standard transfer operation by which meaningful lexical elements of the source language text are dropped. In the case of omissions, certain meanings are lost in the target language text without being incorporated into other meanings. The reason for lexical omission, in most cases, is due to the differences in the background knowledge of source language and target language readers (Klaudy, *Languages in Translation* 2003: 236). The original title of one of Howard Fast's novels is *The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti: A New England Legend* (Zaymus 2018: 43, 52), in which the part after the colon is considered to be a subtitle. The Hungarian translation of the novel was published with the title *Amerikai legenda*. The reason why the translator, Miklós Szentkuthy omitted the main part of the title might be the following. "Sacco and Vanzetti: for a generation of Americans, the names of the two Italian anarchists are forever linked. Questions surrounding their 1921 trial for the murders of a paymaster and his guard bitterly divided a nation" (Linder 2001: 1). Since Hungarian readers are less likely to be familiar with the case of Sacco and Vanzetti, the translator decided to omit their names from the title, and translated the subtitle only – additionally, a *generalization* took place, since *New England* had been translated to *Amerikai*, generalizing the area in the Hungarian title.

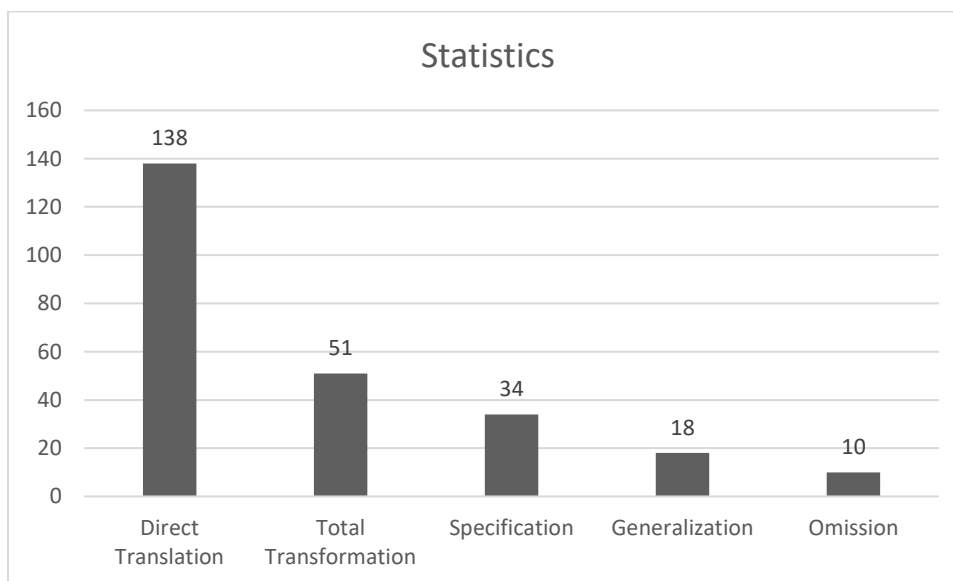
Total Transformation

This category includes those title transformations when the Hungarian title has no seemingly logical correspondence to the original English title of the first published book. This phenomenon, when the translator creates an entirely new title, can be caused by many reasons, for instance, the different lexical characteristics of the English and Hungarian languages. When analyzing translated titles where the translator applied *total transformation*, external factors must be taken into account.

Kurt Vonnegut's novel, the *Player Piano* was translated by Gábor Vajda in 1972 (Zaymus 2018: 36, 45). The title of the Hungarian translation is *Utópia 14*, which has nothing to do with the original title. The reason for this transformation was initiated by the American publisher. This science fiction novel was first published in America by the publisher Charles Scribner's Sons in 1952. To drive sales with readers of science fiction, Vonnegut's publishers made him change the title of his book. Science fiction was very popular in the 1950s when Vonnegut began writing, and it remains so today. To boost sales, his publishers emphasized the science fiction elements of his novels by adorning their covers with spaceships and Martian colonies. They even changed the title of *Player Piano* to *Utópia 14* to make it sound more like a conventional science fiction novel. In 1952, Vonnegut's first effort, *Player Piano*, was greeted by a favorable review in the New York Times, but it did not sell very well. When Bantam

brought out the paperback version in 1954, they gave it a new title, *Utopia-14*, and a garish cover intended to make it appeal to science fiction fans. This probably boosted sales of the book (Marvin 2002: 22-23). The Hungarian title *Utópia 14*, in contrast with the original English one *Player Piano*, appears to be a completely new title. Nevertheless, the title of the Hungarian translation of this novel is none other than the adaptation of the second title, which was given by the author's publisher, Bantam Books, according to Marvin.

Based on the collected data and the analysis performed, it can be stated that although title translation is affected by factors with which literary translation is not directly influenced, the translation strategies cited in Klaudy's and Nida's works are to be found in the process of translating titles. The occurrence of these strategies, and the additional one, *Total Transformation* were as follows. The most popular strategy that translators use during literary title translation is *Direct Translation*, 138 out of out of 251 times. Fifty-one times the translator created a completely new title or generated a new aspect within the title by *Total Transformation*. *Specification* occurred twenty-nine times, *Generalization* eighteen times and *Omission* ten times out of all the title transformations collected in the Appendix. According to the numbers listed above, it can be argued that most of the time the translator attributes priority to the source language text as faithfully as possible, not only in its content but also in its form. However, if there is any kind of modification, transformation during the process of translating the title, in most cases, the translator opts for *total transformation*.



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