

TRANSLATION IN CULTURE

(IN)FIDELITY IN TRANSLATION

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Och, awa' wi' you **British Workin' Class Pronunciation** **Spelled 'n' Translated into Polish**

ABSTRACT: *The Queen and I*, a 1992 novel by Sue Townsend, is a significant piece in terms of the discussion about the class inequality in the UK as it describes the confrontation between the realm of the wealthiest group in the country, that is, the Royalty, and the everyday, grey reality of a council estate where the working class normally lives. It may be argued that this satirical work portrays the majority of the most important class differences and that it exhausts every possibility of showing these disparities in a funny but respectful manner. For this reason, *The Queen and I* poses a considerable challenge for translators. It is necessary for a translator to convey all of the culture-related plotlines and puns so that the translated text, apart from conveying the same information and being as amusing as the original, evokes the same reaction from the translation reader as the original does from the British reader.

This arduous task becomes almost impossible to complete when it comes to the subject of scenes based on social peculiarities that do not appear in the target language culture. In this paper, I would like to focus on translation problems which emerge from expressing in the book, by means of spelling, specific pronunciation by representatives of the British working class, such as 'Oo left the bleedin' door open?' This feature of working class language has been stressed for a number of reasons: to draw readers' attention to social differences between characters, to manifest their ethnical affiliation and to create them (Hejwowski 2010). All these aims lead to the main goal which is to depict social class differences (in this case: those of linguistic nature) in perceiving and understanding the world in a humorous way.

The Polish 'class division' is more ambiguous. Although there are cultural features that mark the difference between sophisticated, well-educated people and those literal-minded, less educated and not well-adjusted, firm pronunciation differences do not exist in Poland except for the differences stemming from belonging to various ethnic groups (e.g., in Kashubia or Silesia), in which case the difference is not educational but merely geographical. Attempts to convey the aforementioned peculiarity by using varieties of pronunciation would seem artificial.

In the only translation of the book into Polish, done by Hanna Pawlikowska-Gannon, this problem has been solved in various ways. The aim of this article is thus to compare her solutions with the original, evaluate them, examine applied

translation techniques, and contribute to the general debate on fidelity and content lost in translation.

KEYWORDS: literary translation, cultural differences, class division, over-standard stylization, functional equivalence

Differences between the source language culture (SL culture) and the target language culture (TL culture) are always a base for translation problems that may be solved in numerous ways; most have already been extensively discussed in the literature of the subject. Some solutions assume that losing a part of the content or context of the original in translation is unavoidable or at least acceptable in particular instances – it is one of the translator's tasks to assess whether the text they are working on may lose some of its original meaning or feel. In a broader perspective, the translator chooses between two approaches: foreignisation and domestication (Venuti 2008). When applying foreignisation, a translation strategy vigorously advocated by Venuti, translators ought to make sure that their readers are provided with a text that is as faithful to the original as possible. Foreignisation assumes the preservation of all the cultural and linguistic peculiarities of the original in the translation. Domesticated translations should be tailored to the assumed knowledge and awareness of the reader of the translation so that they are easy, undemanding reads. Although foreignisation is a more faithful solution that guarantees the preservation of culture-specific items and connotations, it is to be shown that in some instances foreignisation may result in producing confusing translations that neither provide the reader with insights into a foreign culture nor read well.

The general aim of this article is to show that content lost in translation may refer to the stylistic devices used in the narrative; that requires applicable translation solutions. Specifically, this text will stress and analyse an unusual stylistic problem in the translation process stemming from a particular discrepancy between two languages.

The problem appeared upon the translation of an English novel by Sue Townsend, *The Queen and I*, into Polish. The original was first published in 1992, its only Polish version was rendered by Hanna Pawlikowska-Gannon in 1994. It tells a fictitious story of the abolishment of the British Royal Family by the Republican government. After forced abdication,

Queen Elizabeth II and her immediate family are transferred to a working class council estate, where they are to live from that moment on. The novel describes their attempts to adjust to the new environment, new neighbours, and new lifestyle after being deprived of their privileged position.

Inasmuch as presumably every reader sees the irony of this plot, only British citizens or people involved in the social or political life of the UK are expected to react emotionally, that is, to derive deep satisfaction from the idea of the end of the Monarchy, to frown upon such blasphemy, or, if one does not experience stronger feelings about the Monarchy, to sympathise with the ex-royal characters, who have always been a vital element of British reality. Someone who is not familiar with the life of the British cannot share these reactions or even understand the controversy surrounding the general idea of the book, let alone more specific cultural and linguistic puns, comments and references that appear throughout. Thus, the question that may be posed is: "How does one render these problematic peculiarities in translation?" A text firmly embedded in the culture of the country of its origin, like *The Queen and I*, poses innumerable challenges of various level of complexity. One of the most elusive and taxing issues is the subject of this article.

Since the core of *The Queen and I* is the striking disparities in lifestyle and worldview of the Royals and the working-class people, the question of social class is an important motif in the novel. The differences in pronouncing utterances serve as a foundation for many humorous scenes. They also constitute a source of many communication problems between the Windsors and their new neighbours. The Royals' elaborate manner of speaking is highlighted by intricate syntax and sophisticated vocabulary, while the speech of working-class people is characterised not only by a simplicity and sometimes incorrectness in terms of grammar and lexis, but also by marking their non-standard pronunciation in writing. Here are a few examples:

"No 'urry" (Townsend 2002, 15)

"Dunno, sir" (Townsend 2002, 190)

"Yeah, I got an axe, but I ain't 'anding it over to 'im" (Townsend 2002, 21)

"Guid girrl" (Townsend 2002, 39)

"'Ardly more than a bag a' spuds" (Townsend 2002, 100)

"You shun't be doin' that" (Townsend 2002, 225)

British readers will presumably find this stylisation not only funny, but also realistic. Readers unfamiliar with the British reality may be unable to appreciate it or even understand this stylistic device at all. This fact poses a formidable challenge to a translator who attempts to create a foreign variation of the piece – in this case a Polish one.

The main problem is that there are no cultural equivalents of this stylisation in Polish reality. Social inequalities in Poland are not as clearly categorised as they are in Britain. This stems from the historical tribulations that were haunting Poland for almost 200 years. In 1795 Poland ceased to exist as a result of the third partition: its remaining lands were divided between Prussia, Austria-Hungary, and the Russian Empire. Poland regained independence in 1918. During the interwar period it restored some of the social divisions established during the turbulent reality enforced by the Prussian, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian occupants. This gradual and complex process was disrupted by the outbreak of World War II. Poland fell to Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. Some of the most violent events of the war were an underlying cause of the fall of Polish class division: the mass extermination of Poles in concentration camps, the aftermath of the Warsaw Uprising (most of the city was destroyed as a result of bombardment), and the 1940 Katyn Forest massacre, when around 22,000 Polish representatives of upper classes – soldiers of various ranks, teachers, lawyers, physicians, etc. – were executed by the Soviets. After the war, Poland was controlled by the Soviet Union and became its puppet entity called the Polish People's Republic. Democracy was reintroduced to Poland in 1989, and it has been developing ever since.

In contrary to Poland, the UK has never been occupied, its citizens decimated or its borders wiped off the map of the world. World wars took their toll on Britain, but it was nowhere near comparable to the havoc they wreaked on Poland. The reality of living in a communist state did not allow society to return to the class stratification present in the past. At the same time, British society was able to develop and maintain quite

firm social class division throughout the second half of the twentieth century, which exists to date.

The Polish equivalent of class division is a fluctuating categorisation of the population according to their occupation and salary (Bendyk 2013), neither as rigid as British class division, nor as embedded in the historical background of the society. For these reasons, one-to-one cultural equivalence between British and Polish class divisions in any aspect cannot be established.

Although such cultural correspondence does not exist, one may notice clear distinctions between highly educated and poorly-educated people. Such division is present in most European societies, Poland included. Since the differences between classes in *The Queen and I* are based mainly on the education level of the representatives of the two groups, this may be used by a Polish translator as an equivalent of British class division. Inasmuch as many linguistic peculiarities may be reflected in the translation, one particular stylisation which has been mentioned above – stressing the non-standard pronunciation in writing – cannot be rendered into Polish for one simple reason: both highly-educated and literal-minded Poles pronounce words in a fairly similar way. The dialectal variations in Polish are regional and not particularly broad; it is highly unlikely that they would cause difficulties in communication. The exception from this rule may be Silesian and Kashubian, which are considered to be separate languages by some.

Throughout *The Queen and I*, numerous instances of this challenge were dealt with by one of the three solutions described by Krzysztof Hejwowski (2010, 48–51): neutralisation, over-standard stylisation, functional equivalence.

Neutralisation, the strategy Pawlikowska-Gannon used most frequently, involves eliminating stylistic peculiarities from the text. Consider the following example in Table 1.

One of the central motifs of the novel is to stress the social differences between the privileged Royals and the working class. Varieties in pronunciation serve as one of the most vivid examples of social inequalities – here in terms of education. By neutralising it, this stylisation and the impact it carries are lost. If a particular stylisation is dominant in a text – as we may say is the case in *The Queen and I* –

this strategy may lead to a “translational disaster,” as Hejwowski puts it (2010, 49).

TABLE 1. An example of neutralisation in *The Queen and I*

Original text	Translation by Pawlikowska-Gannon	Back translation
An' there's kids playin' in this wreck 'tendin' to be Cinderella on their way to the – wassa place? (Townsend 2002, 75)	A w nim bawią się dzieciaki i udają Kopciuszka, który jedzie na – no, gdzie tam jechał? (Townsend 1994, 58)	And there are kids playing inside and they pretend to be Cinderella, who is going to – well, where was she going to?

In over-standard stylisation the translator attempts to convey non-standard utterances, usually incorrect or overly colloquial ones, in a way that they are just as non-standard in the translation. This approach was used in a few instances in the Polish version of *The Queen and I*, when the scene, or a part of it, was constructed on the basis of the differences in pronunciation. In such cases neutralisation could not be exercised, as it would leave the scene incomprehensible. Compare the following extract and its Polish translation (Table 2).

The first question in this extract (“Excuse me, but would you have an axe I could borrow?”) asked by the Queen was translated appropriately, with an adequate level of sophistication reflecting the Queen’s original manner of speaking. Readers’ reactions are likely to be similar in both texts. It is Tony’s response that will alter the perception of the extract.

Tony Threadgold, a new neighbour of the Royal Family, is a textbook representative of a working-class person. His reply to the Queen’s request (“*An ix?*”) falls into category of over-standard understanding of speech (although usually over-standardisation described by Hejwowski applies to words produced, not heard). Polish translation (“*To co?*”) was based on over-standard stylisation, also uncommon and inventive, but hardly appropriate in this case.

Tony’s response in the original indicates that the Queen uttered the word “axe” in a way that is incomprehensible to him: in effect he was not able to understand what she demanded, even though he heard her clearly and correctly.

TABLE 2. An example of over-standard stylisation in *The Queen and I*

Original text	Translation by Pawlikowska-Gannon	Back translation
'Excuse me, but would you have an axe I could borrow?	– Przepraszam, czy zechcieliby państwo łaskawie pożyczyć nam topór?	– Excuse me, would you kindly borrow us an axe?
'An ix?' repeated Tony.	– To co? – powtórzył Tony.	– A <i>what</i> ? – repeated Tony.
'Yes, an axe.' [...]	– Topór [...]	– Axe [...]
'An ix?' puzzled Beverley.	– <i>Opór</i> ? – zdziwiła się Beverley.	– <i>Defiance</i> ? – puzzled Beverley.
'Yes.'	– Tak.	– Yes.
'I dunno what an „ix” is,' Tony said.	– Nie wiem, co to jest potór – oświadczył Tony.	– I don't know what a potór is – stated Tony.
'You don't know what an axe is?'	– Nie wie pan, co to jest topór?	– You don't know what an axe is?
'No.'	– Nie.	– No.
(Townsend 2002, 21)	(Townsend 1994, 20)	

His response in the Polish translation indicates that he misheard the Queen. It is impossible to pronounce the word “topór” in Polish so that some groups of people are not able to understand it. Moreover, the knowledge of the meaning of this word is rather common. Although the synonym “*siekiera*” would be a bit more applicable in the context of chopping wood, Pawlikowska-Gannon chose “topór” probably because this word is associated with axes used during battles or those that were used to decapitate people thus may bring dark-humoured connotations with the mediaeval era of the British Monarchy. Nonetheless, this solution does not convey an important element of the differences in education and class between the Queen and Tony Threadgold.

After Tony's crude question, the Queen repeats her request. She pronounces the word *axe* in the same way, hence neither Tony, nor his wife (who repeats the “strange” sound after the Queen this time) can

understand her. In the Polish translation, the Queen repeats the same simple word “topór” pronounced in the same universal manner. The Threadgolds cannot understand her because they seem to mishear her, which leaves the Polish readers confounded. The conversation takes place on a quiet street, in the evening, outside of the Threadgolds’ house: the conditions for talking are perfect. It is rather unlikely that Tony and Beverley cannot comprehend the word “topór.”

In the original, the Threadgolds inform the Queen that they are unaware of what an *ix* is. They pronounce it just as she did, so the misunderstanding is not likely to be clarified. In the Polish translation, Tony seems to hear that the Queen says “potor,” which is extraordinary since there are no distractions around that would distort sound. Moreover, it is highly unlikely to mishear any utterance in Polish as “potor” since this word does not exist.

The first part of the extract shows conclusively that over-standard stylisation was an ill-advised technique in the translation of select scenes of *The Queen and I*. In the original, the pun was based on different modes of pronouncing words – the scene indicates the problem and convincingly depicts the problems of communication present in the book. In the Polish translation the scene confuses the reader, who is unable to understand the origins and nature of the communication problems due to inadequate translation decisions.

Finally, Hejwowski describes functional equivalence, a strategy that is also present in Pawlikowska-Gannon’s rendering. Functional equivalents are replacements of particular culturally-embedded items or references from the original with corresponding items from the target language culture. It aims at making the reaction of the reader of the translation similar to that of the reader of the original. Compare the following examples (Table 3).

In the first extract, the non-standard spelling (“bin”) was accompanied by the unusual, and incorrectly inflected, use of a phrasal verb “take off,” in this context probably used as a synonym to “rob.” This stylisation was conveyed by incorrect inflection of a pronoun “oni” (“they”), as seen in Table 3.

The second example carries a word “cowin.” “Cowing” is a Welsh expression that means “extremely” (Tovey 2012), which does not really

make sense in the sentence. The reason for it may be the fact that it was said by Prince Harry, then 8 years old, who is absorbing a new manner of speaking in a school where the “Queen’s English” is not accepted by his peers. Thus, he might use some expressions incorrectly. The translator’s solution was to use a colloquialism “morda,” which is a crude expression for an animal face, but it can also be used as a rude way to describe a human face. Also, the word “obić” means to bruise a piece of fruit or to upholster furniture, but in the context of hitting someone’s face it is sometimes used as coarse colloquial expression “obić mordę,” which was used in the text.

TABLE 3. An example of functional equivalence in *The Queen and I*

Original text	Translation by Pawlikowska-Gannon	Back translation
No, we got kids but they’ve bin took off us. (Townsend 2002, 94)	Nie, mamy dzieciaki, ale nam ich wzięli. (Townsend 1994, 71)	No, we have kids, but they took their from us.
If I speak proper I get my cowin’ face smashed in. (Townsend 2002, 133)	To by mi mordę obili. (Townsend 2002, 99)	They’d beat my muzzle up.
[...] – wassaname? (Townsend 2002, 118)	No, jak jej tam? (Townsend 2002, 89)	What is her name anyway?

The final example contains a word “wassaname,” which was conveyed by using another colloquial question “Jak jej tam?” which is a query regarding a girl’s or woman’s name which reflects lack of respect and indifference to that person. Preceded with a not very elegant phatic expression “No,” it reflects the speaker’s (in this case a potentially homeless drunkard) unmannerly attitude just as the original text does.

Although the stylisation was not rendered in any of the examples, its aim, namely underlining their poor education and social background, was preserved by means of some equivalent techniques. In the case of translating the stylisation in question, functional equivalence seems to be the best solution, which presents the differences between the characters’ social class without confusing the reader.

A few conclusions may be drawn from this brief analysis. First and foremost, translators must acknowledge that translatability, or the lack of it, may be dictated not only by the intricacy of the language of the original or the creative use of it, but also by the realm of the text; in this case, the British reality in the 90s and the British social class division, with all its cultural implications. The process of translation demands not only excellent command of the source and target languages, but also a keen awareness of both the source and target language cultures.

The issue discussed in this article calls for creative translation measures due to the lack of correspondences between cultures in this particular field. This vividly shows that the craft of translation is not limited to a mere search for linguistic equivalents; a variety of solutions should be applied to the translator's best judgement in order to convey meaning, cultural connotations and the feel of the original text as much as possible.

The analysis gives us a broad scope of themes which demand further research. First and foremost, how does functional equivalence fit with the ethics of translation? Can such a creative solution be deemed as too great an interference from the translator's part? Is this issue an example of what some may bill as the untranslatable? Investigation into the issue of spelling out non-standard pronunciation (be it caused by levels of literacy, social class or by regional features of the spoken language) and translation decisions made to solve them in various language combinations would contribute immensely to the discussion.

Moreover, if functional equivalence is deemed to be the most applicable solution which gives justice to the stylisation in question, it may be worthwhile to retranslate the entire text with that approach in mind, since the most commonly used strategy in the 1992 version is impoverishing neutralisation, as Figure 1 indicates:

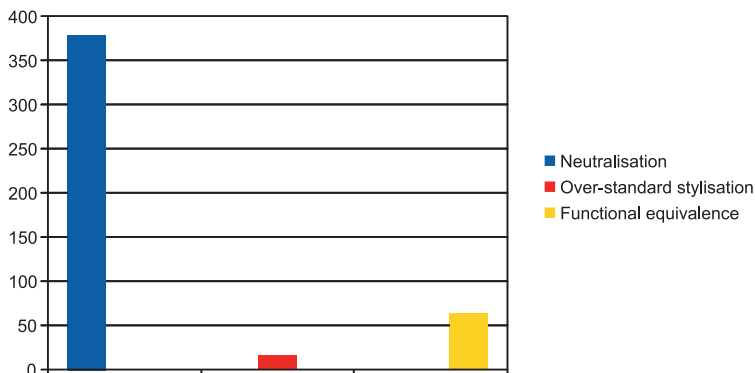


FIGURE 1. Frequency of strategies used in translation of terms where spelling reflected non-standard pronunciation in *The Queen and I* (author's own work).

Prior to this, a close evaluation of other potential translation challenges of the novel should be conducted.

The general conclusion is that even if the translator believes that foreignisation is the best translation method, headstrong determination to pursue foreignisation (or any other translation strategy that the translator believes is correct) at all times may lead to clumsy or baffling renditions. This analysis shows that translators ought to be open-minded and adopt various strategies in order to, paradoxically, create a concise and homogeneous translation that is clear and comprehensible to the reader and, if the original is as deeply rooted in its culture as *The Queen and I*, that it provides perceptive insights into the source language culture.

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Jerzy Skwarzyński

Och, awa'wi'you

Wymowa brytyjskiej klasy robotniczej zapisana i przetłumaczona na język polski

STRESZCZENIE: Wydana w 1992 roku powieść Sue Townsend *The Queen and I* porusza problem nierówności klasowych w Zjednoczonym Królestwie poprzez skonfrontowanie grupy zajmującej najwyższą pozycję w społecznej hierarchii, czyli rodziny królewskiej, z szarą codziennością egzystencji na osiedlu zamieszkiwanym przez klasę robotniczą. Utwór w zabawny sposób przedstawia wiele istotnych różnic na tle klasowym, dzięki czemu próba jego przetłumaczenia stanowi nie lada wyzwanie. Tłumacz powinien oddać wątki oraz żarty związane z kulturą w taki sposób, by przekład był nie tylko zgodny z oryginałem pod względem treści, ale także by wywoływał taką reakcję, jaką na brytyjskim czytelniku wywarł tekst wyjściowy.

To niełatwe zadanie staje się niemal niemożliwe do wykonania w przypadku scen opartych na zjawiskach, które nie występują w kulturze tekstu docelowego. W prezentowanym tekście skupiam się na trudnościach tłumaczeniowych wynikających ze szczególnego sposobu wymowy przedstawicieli brytyjskiej klasy robotniczej, który oddano w książce poprzez niestandardowy zapis wypowiedzi, np. "Oo left the bleedin' door open?" zamiast "Who left the bleeding door open?". Ten zabieg został wykorzystany z kilku przyczyn: by zwrócić uwagę czytelnika na różnice między postaciami, by podkreślić ich przynależność do danej grupy oraz jako element tworzenia poszczególnych postaci w świecie przedstawionym (Hejwowski 2010). Wszystkie te cele sprowadzają się do najważniejszej kwestii, czyli do humorystycznego zaprezentowania odmienności klasowych (w tym przypadku manifestujących się w języku) w sposobach odbierania i rozumienia świata.

W jedynym polskim przekładzie powieści tłumaczka Hanna Pawlikowska-Gannon wykorzystwała szereg rozwiązań dla tego problemu. Celem tekstu jest porównanie ich z oryginałem, omówienie ich, analiza wykorzystanych technik tłumaczeniowych oraz

dołączenie do ogólnej dyskusji dotyczącej wierności przekładu i treści utraconych w tłumaczeniu.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: przekład literacki, różnice kulturowe, podział klasowy, stylizacja ponadstandardowa, ekwiwalent funkcjonalny

Jerzy Skwarzyński

Och, awa' wi' you

Das ausgesprochene ‚n‘ der britischen Arbeiterklasse in der polnischen Übersetzung

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG: Der 1992 herausgegebene Roman *The Queen and I* von Sue Townsend berührt das Problem der Klassenungleichheit im Vereinigten Königreich, indem die Gruppe, die die höchste Position in der sozialen Hierarchie einnimmt, d. h. die königliche Familie, mit dem grauen Alltagsleben der von der Arbeiterklasse bewohnten Wohnsiedlung konfrontiert wird. Das Werk präsentiert auf unterhaltsame Weise viele wichtige Klassenunterschiede, daher ist es eine echte Herausforderung, es zu übersetzen. Der Übersetzer sollte die mit der Kultur verbundenen Handlungsstränge und Witze so wiedergeben, dass die Übersetzung nicht nur mit dem Original inhaltlich übereinstimmt, sondern auch dieselbe Reaktion wie der Ausgangstext auf den britischen Leser hervorruft. Im Falle von denjenigen Szenen, die auf solchen Phänomenen beruhen, die in der Kultur des Zieltextes nicht vorkommen, ist diese schwierige Aufgabe kaum mehr zu bewältigen. Im vorliegenden Text konzentriere ich mich auf diejenigen Übersetzungsschwierigkeiten, die sich aus der besonderen Aussprache von Vertretern der britischen Arbeiterklasse ergeben, die im Buch durch eine nicht standardmäßige Aufzeichnung von Aussagen wiedergegeben wird, z. B. 'Oo left the bleedin' door open?' statt 'Who left the bleeding door open?'. Dieses Verfahren wurde aus mehreren Gründen angewendet: um den Leser auf die Unterschiede zwischen den Figuren aufmerksam zu machen, ihre Zugehörigkeit zu einer bestimmten Gruppe zu betonen und um einzelne Figuren in der präsentierten Welt zu erschaffen (Hejwowski 2010). Alle diese Ziele sind auf den wichtigsten Aspekt zurückzuführen, d. h. auf die humorvolle Darstellung von Klassenunterschieden (die sich in diesem Fall in der Sprache manifestieren) in Bezug auf die Wahrnehmung und das Verständnis der Welt.

In der einzigen polnischen Übersetzung des Romans verwendete die Übersetzerin Hanna Pawlikowska-Gannon eine Reihe von Lösungen für dieses Problem. Der Zweck des Textes besteht darin, sie mit dem Original zu vergleichen, sie zu diskutieren, die eingesetzten Übersetzungstechniken zu analysieren und die allgemeine Diskussion über die Wiedergabetreue und die bei der Übersetzung verlorenen Inhalte zu erweitern.

SCHLÜSSELWÖRTER: literarische Übersetzung, kulturelle Unterschiede, Klassenteilung, überdurchschnittliche Stilisierung, funktionales Äquivalent