Apropos of Language Varieties and Multilingualism in Audiovisual Translation

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Abstract. The article considers some of the main factors of dealing with multilingualism and language variation in AVT. It analyses several American hit TV series and their dubbed versions in Ukrainian and Russian from the standpoint of L3 segments translation challenge / opportunity.

Keywords: translation, audiovisual translation, multilingualism, dubbing, characterization, TV show.

Multimedia narrative storytelling is exemplary rich when it comes to incorporating different language varieties and multilingualism as means of reflecting reality in its non-linear, non-binary and often complex or even bizarre facets. Thus, audiovisual translation possesses a jetset collection of illustrative material for research on ways and challenges of rendering multilingualism in translation. Thus, the aim of the article is to scrutinize the instances of multilingualism in live-action English-language productions and their translations into other languages from the standpoint of correlation between translation choices/ solutions and the impact of multilingualism/ language varieties function in the original on the localised product.

Multilingualism is one of the few constants of life in the XXI century. If that is an over- or an understatement depends on the personal experience of everyone. In BC the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus proclaimed "change" to be the "only constant in life". In 2004 a renown Franco-American intellectual, novelist and scholar G. Steiner in his article on translation explores the correlation between multilingualism and a human being: "It is multilingualism, it is the condition of the polyglot which have compelled and made possible the evolutionary exploitation of our cerebral potentialities. It is the fantastic variousness and density of our representations of and performative responses to the empirical ecology, the "world frame" of our biological, social and historical being, made necessary by "Babel", which have made of our species the "language-animal", the imaginer of worlds" [5: p.2]. Steiner attempts to rationalize the multimodality of linguistic entity within the human being and vice versa, encrypted in the history of storytelling. In their research article on L3 in film translation (2011) M. Corrius and P. Zabalbeascoa highlight the fact that despite the more and mor recurring use of multilingualism and language varieties in movies "it is something that is not new or exclusive to audiovisual texts; rather, multilingual texts have existed over the centuries, in different languages and different formats." [1: p.115]. The researchers are the first to use L3 as a term to define "secondary languages in an audiovisual (AV) source text, such as a film or TV product to be translated, whose main language (L1) is English" [1: p.114]. They also outline types of L3 as well systemize solutions for its rendering by working out nine operations for L1 and L3 segments. In their article M. Corrius and P. Zabalbeascoa classify L3 as "a simply textual feature translators need to deal with" [1: p.126]. Further we will consider how they deal with it on the examples of some hit TV shows (with English as L1) and their translations (with Ukrainian as L2). In this article L3 is used in the meaning proposed by M. Corrius and P. Zabalbeascoa, encompassing both a language variety of English (non-native English, dialect, sociolect etc.) and another foreign language. The illustrative material for the study comprises such internationally acclaimed American hit shows as TV drama Ray Donovan (2013-2020) and sitcom "The Big Bang Theory" (2007-2019).

Multilingualism or language variation is most oftenly used as means to create humorous effect. Therefore, the first most important factor in dealing with multilingualism in AVT is its contextual function. A fine example of L3 segments creating an enmeshment of genres is provided by "Ray Donovan" – one of the most iconic American crime drama series, starring Liev Schreiber, Jon Voight, Paula Malcomson, Eddie Marsan, Marion "Pooch" Hall Jr, Steven Bauer, Susan Sarandon etc. The series premiered on Showtime on June 30 2013 and became an undeniable hit ever since. The main factor of its success is the unexpected twist in the essence of the show itself. Being a crime drama about the dealings of a Hollywood fixer Ray Donovan (Liev Schreiber) for the rich and the famous, it covers the common issues of a dysfunctional families and couples, going into deep psychoanalytical roots of certain behaviour patterns as well as such popular topics as redemption, forgiveness, values etc. The drama characters are the main stakeholders with Ray's father – Mickey Donovan (Jon Voight) – being at the top of the greatest thugs in the movie history and counterintuitively one of the most likeable characters of the show. An absent father, a con, a convict – all that is about Mick but what makes him such a charismatic protagonist despite all that is the peculiar everlasting, almost incredibly resilient, sense of humour. Let us consider the following example of Mickey's talk with his fourth son Daryll (Marion "Pooch" Hall Jr), a professional boxer, in Mexico (three Donovan brothers – Ray, Terry and Bunchy – are white and Daryll Donovan is black and the son of Mickey's "love of his life" – an Afro-American beauty Claudette). Mexican kids are opening the dialogue by bringing boxing flyers of the upcoming fight:

a. Boy: Are you a fighter?

Daryll: Yes, I'm. You gonna come tonight? Oh, you want my autograph?

Boy: Yes.

Daryll: *El Negro*. What kind of s*** is this? Pop, they are calling me *n***** down here.

Mickey: It's *El Negro*. It's Mexican. It's…It's different.

а.а.Мальчик: Ты боец?

Дэрил: Да. Придешь сегодня? Тебе мой автограф нужен?

Мальчик: Ну да.

Дэрил: *Эль Нигро*. Пап, что это еще за д***. Они меня тут *нигрой* называют.

Микки: Это "*Эль Нэгро*". По-мексикански. Это… Это другое.

The boxing flyer says "10 rounds. La Fuerza vs. El Negro", which is understood by the viewers if they have a certain level of fluency in Spanish. Irrespective of their proficiency in L3 the communicative situation created by its presence is funny, which is unexpected for a crime drama of the kind. Dialogue in the example a. is a conspicuous case of using multilingualism (Spanish as L3) to create a humorous situation: Daryll, having no knowledge whatsoever of Spanish misinterprets the Spanish word "el negro", which means "black" (colour) and is pronounced with an 'e' sound, as an offensive n-word and his father confidently repeats the same Spanish word, meaningfully adding that it's in Mexican, which is a very obscure kind of explanation. The comic element is unexpectedly introduced to the crime drama by showing two people, who are clearly on the same level of understanding L3, however one of them (Mick) is posing as the one with profound knowledge of it. In the example a. a. the dubbing transcript in Russian (by Amedia) showcases the operation of repeating L3 in the target text, which according to M. Corrius and P. Zabalbeascoa may result in changing the connotation or function of L3 segments [1: p. 126]. However, the function of the L3 segments is preserved in TT. In this case the humorous effect is retained due to the internationally unacceptable word, which sounds similar in languages like English, Spanish and Russian and thus is equally recognizable to SL and TL viewers. However, if L3 segments are represented by a regular or neutral lexis and are kept in TT the change in function or connotation can be inevitable. For example, the opposite colour to black is white, which is blanco in Spanish. The word doesn't have any potential in offence and sounds differently in English (white) and Russian (белый). At the very end of the season 2 episode 1 "Yo soy capitan" Mickey celebrates his big win, after Deryll's loss to La Fuerza, his second son Ray Donovan enters in Cantina (bar):

b. Mickey: Ray! Ray-Ray…what are you doing here? My son! My son.

Man: We thought the other one was your son.

Mickey: That was my son. That was *El Negro*. This one's *El Blanco*.

b. а. Микки: Рэй! Рэй-Рэй…ты что тут делаешь? Мой сын! Мой сын.

Мужчина: Мы думали тот другой твой сын.

Микки: Тот тоже мой сын. Тот *Эль Нэгро*, а этот *Эль Бланко*.

It is evident from the example b.a. that in L3 segments are preserved in L2 (Russian) but the level of recognition of *blanco* in English and Russian differ, for example Blanca is a popular female name among Hispanics etc. Thus, the functioning of the L3 segment as a punch line in TT is unclear, which proves that the distance and the contact between all the languages involved in the AVT is a second most important factor in dealing with multilingualism.

In his new book on subtitling Spanish translation scholar J. Díaz Cintas says that "dubbing's ultimate fabrication is to make viewers believe that the characters on screen share the same language as the viewer" [2: p.8]. L3 segments are the most potentially taxing in the process of making that perception due to the different linguistic and even (geo-) political situations of SL and TL, which can affect the range of choices a translator has. The macro-context gets even more entangled with L3 segments in AVT due to the nature of dubbing – a process of collaboration between different agents (dubbing supervisor, dubbing director, translator, dialogue writer etc.). In her book on English language animated films in Italian dubbing V. Minutella highlights the role of translator's decision-making process as well as the sometimes nonsensical requirement for literal translation, which later will be redone by a dialogue writer: "The translators of film dialogue could perhaps be given more credit and be acknowledged for their important work" [4: p. 35]. Thus, L3 segments bestow a certain parity on translator and dialogue writer (if that is not one person) in terms of creating a common challenge, which constitutes a third factor in dealing with multilingualism in AVT.

The fourth and probably the most important factor is the L3 feature of characterization. This invaluable function of multilingualism and language variety in the audio-visual productions plays an enormous role in narrative creation and is worth scrutiny.

One of the main characters of the hit American TV sitcom "The Big Bang Theory", starring Johnny Galecki, Jim Parsons, Simon Helberg, Kaley Cuoco etc. (aired on CBS from September 24, 2007 to May 16, 2019), which is considered to be "the longest-running multicamera comedy in TV history" [3] is Howard Wolowitz (Simon Helberg) – an aerospace engineer, who later becomes an astronaut. Howard's character is one of the most productive contributors to the comic part of the situational comedy. He is easy-going and laid-back but when it comes to women as shy as the rest of the characters with one small distinction – he acts despite all the odds or complexes. Thus, when Howard first sees the new girl next door – Penny (Kaley Cuoco) – a beautiful blond, who moves in to the apartment on the same floor with his friends Sheldon (Jim Parsons) and Leonard (Johnny Galecki), he is determined to impress her. Apparently, he considers languages to be his forte:

c. Penny: Hey, is there a trick to getting it to switch from tub to shower. Oh. Hi, sorry. Hello!

Howard: *Enchantee Madamoiselle*. Howard Wolowitz, Cal-Tech department of Applied Physics. You may be familiar with some of my work, it's currently orbiting Jupiter's largest moon taking high-resolution digital photographs.

Penny: Penny. I work at the Cheesecake Factory.

Leonard: Come on, I'll show you the trick with the shower.

Penny: Ok.

Howard: *Bon douche*.

Penny: I'm sorry?

Howard: *It's French for good shower*. It's a *sentiment* I can express in six languages.

From the dubbing transcription (example c.) of the dialogue in the original language as from any other written text escapes the quality of L3 segment pronounciation – Howard's French sounds good, which adds to the surprising effect. Moreover, such a socially awkward man uses a French standard phrase "enchantee", which means "nice to meet you" in reference to a female ("enchante" – to a male), which makes the scene funny indeed. When Penny retreats to the bathroom with Leonard to show her how to switch on the shower, Howard pronounces in French "Bon douche", which means "Have a nice/ good shower". The comicality of the situation is underpinned by Howard's classification of the said L3 words as a "sentiment". Thus, irrespective of the SL audience's level of proficiency in French, the dialogue is funny. The following examples of dubbing transcripts from the series dubbed in Ukrainian (example c.a.) and Russian (example c.b.) showcase that preserving L3 segments, if L3 doesn't match L2, is not challenging (although the dubbing supervisor/ director decides on the way it should be dubbed – with or without the dubbing actor). However, the distance between the languages can influence the TL (L2) consumers perception differently, thus changing the connotation:

c. a. Пенні: Щоб перемкнути на душ є якась хитрість? Ой, вибачте, здравствуйте..

Говард: *Enchantee Madamoiselle*. Говард Воловітц – факультет прикладної фізики Каліфорнійського технологічного. Можливо Ви знайомі з однією з моїх робіт, зараз вона робить високоякісні фото з орбіти найбільшого місяця Юпітера.

Пенні: Пенні, працюю в Cheesecake Factory.

Леонард: Ходімо, я покажу як увімкнути душ.

Пенні: Гаразд.

Говард: *Bon douche.*

Пенні: Вибач?

Говард: *Французькою "приємного душу"*. Це *побажання* я можу вимовити шістьма мовами.

c. b. Пенни: Слушайте, а как воду с крана на душ переключить? Ой, простите, здрасте…

Говард: *Enchantee Madamoiselle*. Говард Воловитц – отделение прикладной физики Калифорнийского университета. Возможно Вы знакомы из некоторыми моими работами, одна из них в настоящий момент летает вокруг одной из самых больших лун спутника Юпитера и снимает фотографии в высоком разрешении.

Пенни: А я Пенни, в кафешке работаю.

Леонард: Пойдем, покажу тебе как душ включать.

Говард: *Bon douche.*

Пенни: Что, простите?

Говард: *Это французкое "с легким паром"*, эту *фразу* я могу повторить на шести языках.

Dialogue lines from examples c.a. and c.b. show that in both versions French politeness cliché (*Enchantee Madamoiselle*) is rendered literally and due to the internationally known word "Madamoiselle" the level of ridicule of the situation is preserved in both L2 versions. As for the Howard's "sentiment" "Bon douche", it is worth stating that in both Ukrainian and Russian there is a word "душ" (shower), which is pronounced the same way French "douche" is, since it is a borrowing from French.

Thus, "*приємного душу*" ("nice shower") in Ukrainian dubbing is indeed a wish (*побажання*) and is understandable to the viewer, though not a common comment in terms of communicative situations. In fact, that is what makes the lines funny and not the literal translation. In Russian dubbing (example c.b.) the phrase ("*фраза*") "*с легким паром*" is a culture-specific term – wishing someone to have a good steam bath. In terms of the concrete scene, where Penny wants to take the shower at her neighbor's because hers is not functioning, the idiom is not appropriate. However, the cognitive dissonance based on the idea of the French having steam baths is conspicuously ridiculous and has a potential of making people laugh and shape the image of Howard as a very funny and odd character. Therefore, we can state that the framing of L3 segments in the AVT production has equally important role in obtaining the ultimate goal – preserving their function, such as characterization.

One of the most curious cases of L3 segments and their functioning in the AVT is created when L3 of the source text matches target language (L2). The following examples are also taken from "The Big Bang Theory" and its Ukrainian and Russian dubbed versions, they represent the continuation of Howard's attempts at impressing Penny with his multilingualism. This time he adheres to Russian (though spoken with a strong accent):

d. Penny: Oh. Okay, great, I'm having some furniture delivered tomorrow, and I may not be here, so… Oh! Hel…hello!

Howard: *Ты очень красивая девушка.*

Penny: I'm sorry?

Howard: Haven't you ever been told how beautiful you are in flawless Russian?

Penny: No, I haven't.

d. a. Пенні: О, чудово, завтра привезуть меблі, мене може не бути… О, привіт!

Говард: *Ты очень красивая девушка.*

Пенні: Що?

Говард: Тобі не казали, що ти вродлива чистою російською?

Пенні: Ні, не казали.

d. b. Пенни: Мне тут должны мебель привезти, а меня скорее всего не будет днем дома, так что…О, здрасте.

Говард: *Ты очень красивая девушка.*

Пенни: Что, прости?

Говард: Тебе когда-нибудь говорили комплимент на безупречном русском?

Пенни: Нет, не говорили.

In example d. we see that Penny is clearly talking to someone (Leonard), when suddenly appears Howard (with Raj and Sheldon) and pays her a compliment in "flawless" Russian ("*Ты очень красивая девушка*" means "You're a very beautiful girl"). In both Ukrainian and Russian dubbing the original actor's voice is not dubbed when he pronounces the compliment in "pure" ("чистою") and "immaculate" ("безупречном") Russian. The phrase is recognizable to the audiences of both L2s but what makes it work is the terrible accent of Howard and the self-confident assertion that immediately contradicts the reality just heard. In case of Russian L3 is L2 and the humorous connotation risks being lost in case of

literal translation (keeping the original soundtrack) but the language variation (the accent) and the framing gives way to the comedy.

Thus, the most important factors to deal with multilingualism and language variation in AVT are the function of L3 segments in the original production, the contact between the languages involved in the process of AVT (L1, L2, L3), the common challenge for different agents of dubbing and the characterization on the protagonists of the narrative. Though literal translation (keeping L3 segments in L2) is the most common strategy in AVT, its success is defined by the abovementioned factors as well as the framing of L3 elements, especially in cases of L3 matching L2. Therefore, multilingualism and language variation constitute not just a challenge for a translator and other agents of AVT (dubbing supervisor, dialogue writer etc.) but a great inspiration for genious translation choices. Palma non sine pulvere.

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