



## How does education influence the reception of English film title translations in Poland?

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### Abstract

The aim of the paper is to check if and how education in a particular area changes the reception of differently rendered translations on the basis of film title translations, as there are many methods of transferring them, from translocation to complete reformulation.

In order to answer the question surveys among three groups of receivers were conducted: among those not knowing the foreign language from which a title is translated (English), those who learnt it and those who are additionally educated in the art of translation. The study shows if they evaluate titles rendered with various methods in the same way or if there are any differences dependent on their knowledge.

### Keywords

film titles, reception of translation, knowledge of English, translation methods

Translation studies may be considered from many different points of view. The areas of the discipline were shown by Holmes in his work "The name and nature of translation studies". One of the part of his famous map of translation studies was translation criticism, belonging to the applied branch of the discipline. It contains "the evaluation of translations, including the marking of student translations and the reviews of published translations" (Holmes in Munday, 2001, p. 10-13). However, this area is relatively underrepresented in publications on translation studies, although it is quite crucial for the examination of the translation process. The reception study lets us ascertain if a translation is successful or not, as it does not exist in vacuo – it is the receivers for whom the texts are translated, and they can evaluate the translation.

According to Hans J. Vermeer's skopos theory, "the claim that the translator has no specific addressee or set of addressees in mind" is unfounded, because "one must in fact be orienting oneself towards a certain restricted group of addressees, not necessarily consciously – but unconsciously. (...) [the set of addressees] certainly exists, vague in outline, but clearly present (...). In many cases such an addressee-type may be much more clearly envisaged, more or less consciously, than is assumed by advocates of the claim that translations lack specific addressees" (Vermeer, 2004, p. 226- 227).

Who are the receivers of movie titles? Considering reception, one must also bear in mind that “the TT is normally read as if the work had originally been written in the TL, the translator's contribution being almost completely overlooked” (Munday, 2001, p. 157), therefore it seems that smoothness and fluency of the translation should be valued most. However, naturally translators focus also on other aspects, like fidelity towards the original, or transference of some culture-specific connotations. Therefore, many translation techniques are used, accentuating different attitudes and placing different factors as foremost. The diversity of transfer methods is especially perceptible in translating titles. One can enumerate a plethora of techniques and, what is more, they all are more or less evenly represented and it seems that no guidelines for their use exist; it is mainly a translating person's decision. For instance, Anna Gavling analysing the English-Swedish book titles translations, observed as many as nine methods:

- “Keeping the original title;
- Translating the title literally;
- Literal translation with modifications;
- Keeping part of the original title and adding a literal translation;
- Adding a Swedish tag to the English title;
- Adding a Swedish tag to the literal translation;
- Translation with an omission;
- Creating a new title loosely related to the original title;
- (...) Creating a completely different title” (Gavling, 2008).

Movie titles rendition techniques are as fruitful as literary ones, but they appear to be more troublesome for receivers, who more often compare them to the original ones. For instance, Tanış Polat writes that Turkish versions of German film titles are often criticized (Tanış Polat, 2013). The same situation is with English-Polish film titles, which this article focuses on. On the Internet and in the observation of every-day talk, one can encounter some statements made by viewers, who notice that a Polish version of an English title is an example of an unsuccessful translation. The situation is much rarer when it comes to book titles.

How may the reception of the translated film titles be studied? The method which seems most appropriate is using questionnaires, since thanks to them a researcher can reach different groups of viewers, which is not possible e.g. while using reviews in which only professionals' opinion is given. A film is a mass product intended for varying publicity and it should be evaluated by them, not by some chosen group of people. At this moment the question arises: who exactly



are the movies translated for? It was said that there is always some recipient, even if sometimes not precisely stated. As film is a mass product, can a recipient be anyone, an “average man”? Indeed, but it also sounds reasonable to claim that a recipient should be a person who does not know the source language and therefore needs translation. And now it is the time to wonder about the prominent role of education in reception. Are the viewers criticizing translation mainly those who do know the source language? If yes, what do they need the translations for? Is the translation intended also for them? How does the language knowledge change the perception of translation in regards to the methods used in it? How does the knowledge of translation skills influence the reception?

In order to answer the above-mentioned questions, a study on reception was conducted. The same questionnaire concerning the film title reception study was designed and filled out by three different groups of the Polish receivers: those who do not know the English language at all or know only single expressions (which does not allow them to communicate), those who have at least communicative language competence and to translators, who apart from graduating from the English philology possess also the professional knowledge and experience concerning the art of translation (it was a general translation knowledge, not limited to those who deal only with film or literary translation). The groups will be afterward referred to as group A (not-knowing English), group B (knowing English) and group C (translators).

In the research sixty three people were questioned. Each group consisted of twenty one people, therefore the division was very even. The main difference between the respondents was the above mentioned level of comprehension of English. Apart from that, each of the groups constituted of varied people – of different age, sex and place of living (different regions of Poland, cities and villages) to avoid a situation that some other factor will influence their choice (e.g. if one group consisted only of males and some other of females, their preferences could differ because of that, not because of their level of education). However, one additional factor – age was connected with the factor of education – as there are younger people who know English and are translators than older ones. This is a natural effect of the country’s education policy: the older people mostly did not learn English during their schooltime, unlike the younger ones.

The aim of the study was to examine how titles transferred by diverse methods are received by the various groups and if there are any noticeable differences in this. The methods chosen for the survey were based on those aforementioned by Anna Gavling, but in a reduced number. The methods used



were: keeping the original title, literal translation, literal translation with modification, keeping part of the original title and translating the other part, keeping the original title and adding a sub-title in Polish, translation with a change, creating a completely new title.

Firstly, the respondents were to determine their knowledge of English in this way dividing into two first groups. The questionnaires for translators were sent directly to them.

The next question concerned the evaluation of seven real-life examples of Polish versions of the English titles, each rendered via a different method (from among the above mentioned). The respondents were to decide about each title, if they find it very good, good, average, poor or completely unsuccessful. They had to give grades to the titles that would correspond to their evaluation (very good – 5, and the worse, the lower grade). The titles were chosen accidentally to imitate the real-life situation of a list of movies, that could be found e.g. in a cinema's repertoire. Of course, in some cases the respondents could know a movie, which could influence their choice, but also while choosing a film to watch people have some additional knowledge apart from the title, very often they know the plot from reviews or from other people and have other information, for instance about the actors starring.

The third question was similar, but this time the English original versions of the titles were provided in brackets, which could suggest to the respondents that they evaluate translations, not original titles (however, they were again asked to evaluate titles). This was to check if there are any differences in reception of the target text if one is aware of the source one, or if there is no difference. Obviously, it concerns more the people who know the language, but even those who do not may notice, for instance, that the Polish title is much longer, or that some international word from the English title is not present in the Polish one.

In the last question, the respondents were presented with seven invented Polish versions of an invented English title. These were also transferred in seven ways: literally, literally with a subtitle, literally with slight modifications, in a completely new way, with original version left, with original version left and literal translation and with original translation left and a sub-title in Polish. Again, the task was to evaluate the titles, which they consider the best, etc. and also provide appropriate grades. This part of questionnaire was necessary, as it allowed to focus on the titles alone, not being disturbed by other factors. It was to check if there is any difference between the evaluation of title translation in context and without context, which would additionally show how considerably the context influences the reception of the translation.

As it turned out, the results in each group were not extremely divergent, however a few interesting observations could be noticed. Firstly, as far as the overall grade of the titles evaluated is concerned, it was the biggest in the group A. It was more similar in the remaining groups, but slightly lower in the translators' group.

The exact results are presented in the table below:

Table1

Group	Overall grade (number of points)
A	1459
B	1381,5
C	1364,5

The difference may be attributed to the fact, that the respondents knowing English were not only looking at the translated titles as such, but were more sensitized to the comparison with the original, and more critical. This thesis can be supported by the fact that translators seemed to be even more critical than the people knowing English. In the translators' group there was also a great difference between titles with no English version provided and the two with the English version. The number of points was respectively 508, 5; 449 and 407. This also shows that the translators were more critical when they knew they dealt with translations. In the group A the evaluation of the titles with only Polish versions was also the highest, but the differences were smaller (507/490/462) and in the group B it was not the highest (488/490/403,5).

As it can be seen, in all of the groups the last group of titles (different versions of one English title) was graded the lowest. One of the explanation can be that the originally invented English version (*The Scent of Paper*) was not very encouraging to watching in itself and as a result all its Polish versions were not either. Contrarily, in the case of the titles from other groups, they were mixed and next to poor titles there were also better ones, which made the overall grade higher.

Having discussed the general evaluation, let us move to the more specific one, relating to the evaluation of titles rendered by different methods. Firstly, the result of assessment of the titles without their Polish version will be discussed. Despite the lack of the English version, the rendition techniques are also visible – for instance in translocation or combining English and Polish phrases in the titles. Moreover, it can be visible if the decisions to change a title or translate it literally



contributes to a title's success. As these were real-life examples, some of the respondents could know the English versions from elsewhere and bear them in mind while evaluating.

It turns out, that according to the group A, a title *Underworld: Bunt Lykanów* (*Underworld: Rise of the Lycans*) – part translated, part kept in the original was regarded as the worst (grade: 49), The best was for them a newly created title, *Tajemnica Zielonego Królestwa* (*Epic*) – grade 87. The second worst was a translocated, left in the original title – *Spring Breakers* (grade: 67), and the second best was *Lot* (*Flight*) translated literally (grade: 80).

In the group B the worst graded titles were again *Underworld: Bunt Lykanów* (62) and *Spring Breakers* (63). The best turned out to be *Lot* (77) and *Jak urodzić i nie zwariować* – *What to Expect When You're Expecting* – changed in translation but related to the source version. In the case of group B the differences between the titles were nevertheless not as conspicuous as in the group A. There is a possibility that they could be slightly different if the respondents were different.

In the group C, the differences between the best and the worst graded titles were again greater. The worst graded title was *Spring Breakers* (51,5) and *Underworld: Bunt Lykanów*, but it was evaluated much higher than in the remaining groups – 72. The best graded were, similarly to group A, *Lot* (83) and *Tajemnica Zielonego Królestwa* (81).

As the results show, the evaluations of the seven titles translated differently are similar in each group. This shows that when no source version is provided for comparison, titles with English elements are not the most encouraging for a movie watching. Changing title in translation may make sense and make the title interesting, but also the literal translation is regarded good if it is smooth. The results can be also caused by the fact the respondents evaluated movies, not the titles, but if it was the case in some single situations, it certainly was not to a bigger extent (even if most of them knew all the movies, which is very little probable), because: a) in the questionnaire there was a stipulation highlighting that the titles in themselves should be evaluated, not the movies, b) the movies were not necessarily graded as their titles elsewhere, for instance in a Polish Internet movie database Filmweb.pl *Underworld: Bunt Lykanów* scores 7,2 points, whereas *Tajemnica Zielonego Królestwa* – 7,0 (data from 20.03.2014) and c) some respondents added their comments to the questionnaire – and in them they focused on the titles, not the movies, e.g. one person claimed she liked the title *Lot* because it was short and concrete, another person wrote that *Underworld: Bunt Lykanów* sounds weird.

In the case of real-life translations with their source language versions

provided in brackets, the group A evaluated *Po prostu walcz* (*Never Back Down*), a literal translation with modifications, as the best (grade: 81). Second best was entirely literally translated title *127 Godzin* (*127 Hours*) –77. As far as titles graded as the worst are concerned, these are a created title, in which changes are unrelated to the source version – *Najpierw strzelaj, potem zwiedzaj* (*In Bruges*) – 62, as well as a similarly graded translocated title, *Broken Flowers* and a title with English version and Polish addition: *Wielki Mike. The Blind Side* (*The Blind Side*). They both had 63 points.

In the group B, the best graded title is literal translation *127 Godzin* (81), the next is *Po prostu walcz* (75), and the least attractive turned out to be *Wielki Mike. The Blind Side* (63) and *Resident Evil: Zagłada* (*Resident Evil: Extinction*), part translated, part left in the original – 64.

In the group C the best graded title was *127 Godzin* (87), the next was *Po prostu walcz* (76). Among the worst graded there found themselves *Najpierw strzelaj, potem zwiedzaj* (45) and *Wielki Mike. The Blind Side* (52, 5).

It seems that having the translation all respondents tended to value more literal translations and disliked changes as well as clumsy double titles. The first group, perhaps because they do not know English, evaluated English only title very low, although in the remaining groups the results were different. Apart from that the results were very similar in all three groups. Were the titles chosen as best particularly excellent as such and those chosen as worst did not sound good in Polish or were the respondents also influenced by the method of rendition? The last analysis will help to answer this question.

In the last question the respondents were asked to grade the different versions of one invented English title (*The Scent of Paper*). Because the versions were perforce similar, less divergent that it was the case when the titles related to different movies, therefore, the grades were also more similar:

In the group A the highest grade was obtained by the title translated literally with modifications – *Zapach książki* (79). Next, there was a word-for-word translation – *Zapach papieru* (69). As the worst version the respondents regarded double titles – original English version with a literal translation – *The Scent of Paper. Zapach papieru* (56) and original version with a sub-title in Polish: *The Scent of Paper: Historia drukarza* (62).

In the group B the best titles were firstly *Zapach papieru* (66) and then *Zapach książki* (61,5). The worst turned out to be *The Scent of Paper: Historia drukarza* (47) and a literally translated version with an additional sub-title in Polish: *Zapach papieru: Historia drukarza* (53).

In the last group the best title was again *Zapach papieru* (68) and a literal



translation with a sub-title in Polish: *Zapach papieru. Historia drukarza* (63,5). The worst were *The Scent of Paper. Zapach papieru* (49,5) and a translocation from English, *The Scent of Paper* (51,5).

As it can be visible, the results with the titles devoid of any context are similar to the results in case of the real-life titles (more literal translations are preferred, double titles, especially combining English and Polish are rather disliked).

## Conclusion

Summing up, can any regularities be observed? Does education influence the perception of translated film titles? Firstly, as far as the general grade is concerned, the education has an impact on awareness of translation non-perfection and more critical approach towards it. As for the preferences concerning certain translation methods, the differences are less striking than similarities, which shows that a title appeals in the same way to every recipient, no matter the level of knowledge (there was only one case in which a title, *Zapach papieru. Historia drukarza*, was regarded as the best in one group and the worst in some other). Every viewer is the same recipient, when s/he deals with a translation. Generally longer titles (with explanations, half English/half Polish titles) were evaluated poorly by all the groups. Of course, it does not mean such versions should not appear – sometimes their appearance may be justified – when e.g. a movie is based on a computer game, its name appears in the title and some sub-title in Polish in relation to a title is added. The respondents noticed that the English titles in most cases do not sound well and are unnecessary, what is more an original title often appears on a movie poster, so there is no need to put it again in the Polish title. The questioned people from all of the groups also referred to such titles as translations – according to them, not only do they sound awkward, but also cannot be named “translations” at all.

As far as titles modified in translation are concerned, they were found relatively interesting and encouraging in themselves, but when the respondents were aware of the original versions, they preferred more literal renditions (sometimes with modifications). Some changed titles may sound well, but comparing them to the original a receiver may feel deceived that s/he gets something different. Even if somebody does not know the source language, s/he can see that a title is built differently. One of the respondents from the group A wrote that he does not like when the title creators exaggerate with changes and modifications.

It would seem that the preference for leaving a title in the original will depend of the level of source language knowledge, but the questionnaire did not indicate



this difference. *Spring Breakers* was evaluated low by all of the groups, *Broken Flowers* additionally by group A and *The Scent of Paper* by group C (which, however, could also testify about translators' awareness of the viewers' needs, not only about their own preferences). They were rather not preferred by any of the group.

In conclusion, the translation of film titles should be done for all viewers, it does not matter too much on the education, but rather on individual preferences. The study shows however the prevailing preferences in the Polish society.

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