LEXICAL BLENDING AS A METHOD FOR TRANSLATING LANGUAGE-SPECIFIC JOKES FROM ENGLISH-LANGUAGE SITCOMS INTO UKRAINIAN

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When translating lexical blends[1] from English-language sitcoms into Ukrainian, translators often omit the wordplay inherent in mixing two source words. Based on our analysis of three seasons of the American sitcom, "How I Met Your Mother", we concluded that the most common methods used in translating English blends include the following:

- rendering the meaning of a single source word, either with the closest analog in the recipient language—for example, the blend "ruttine" (from "rut" + "routine") is translated as "styl' žyttja" 'lifestyle'—or with a hypernym of the source word—for example, "Golden Reliever" (from "Golden Retriever" + "relieve", describing a dog urinating) is translated as "pes" 'dog';
- loaning the source-language word via transliteration. For example, "revertigo" (from "revert" + "vertigo", which refers to associative regression, i.e. a phenomenon whereby, when you are around people from your past, you start behaving like you did in the past) is translated into the Ukrainian language as "revertiho", while "Kwanzaapolitan" (from "Kwanzaa" + "Cosmopolitan", which refers to a novelty drink consumed on Kwanzaa) is rendered as "kvanzapoliten";
- rendering the meaning by employing two-word phrases. For example, "Thankstini" (from "Thanksgiving" + "martini") is translated as "martini podjaky", and "slappetizers" (from "slap" + "appetizers", which refers to appetizers on a made-up holiday, the day when friends give each other slaps) is translated as "peredljapasna zakuska".[2]

The above methods do not render the humour intended by the writers of the script. However, ignoring jokes in the translation of a sitcom is inexcusable, as it effectively defeats the show's purpose of trying to make the audience laugh.

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[1] In this article, we will use the definition of lexical blends proposed by Winters (2017: 40): blends are words formed by merging two or more source words which do not constitute an existing compound or phrase. Such merging of the source words must involve either clipping of the source words or an overlap of the source words' homophonous fragments and is intentional.

[2] To date, we have also identified one case in which a blend was translated as a compound (namely, "stovenkerator"—from "stove" + "oven" + "sink" + "refrigerator"—was translated as "plytoxolodyl'nyk"— "oven" + "refrigerator") and several blends which, however, were mostly borrowed from the source language and transliterated in Ukrainian ("Fiero-asco"—from "Fiero" + "fiaso"—translated as "fierasko" and "Bromageddon"— from "Bro" + "Armageddon"—translated as "bramahedon") or did not require much effort from the translator (e.g. "Barnana"—from "Barney" + "banana", referring to Barney's reproductive organ—was translated as "barnan").

The literature on the translation of language-specific jokes generally focuses on puns, anagrams, spoonerisms, parody, and transformed allusions (Delabastita 1994, Lehrer 2007, Chiaro 2008, Pidhrušna 2015, Bondarenko 2017), but not blends. Thus, translation of English-language blends has been understudied, which presents a problem for the theory of translation and interpretation, since the number of English blends is constantly growing, especially in comedy (Winters 2017). Research on translation of sitcoms also does not discuss blends (Bondarenko 2017). The few discussions of the challenges in translation of blends have focused only on translations of blends in "Alice in Wonderland" (Demurova 1970, Weaver 1964) and in modern political discourse (Vašyst and Bondarenko 2018). This research project focuses specifically on translating[3] English blends in sitcoms and is relevant for the following reasons: the existing gap in the theory of translation, inadequate translation of blends in sitcom being analyzed, and the growing popularity of precisely Ukrainian sitcom translations versus Russian translations of sitcoms among Ukrainian viewers.

This research has two primary objectives:

- Propose an optimal method of translating English blends with methodology and concrete examples as outlined.
- Test the perceptions of translations by conducting a survey of native speakers of Ukrainian.

The optimal method for translating English blends is to create Ukrainian overlap blends, i.e. words formed by merging two source words that share homophonous or near-homophonous sequences (Winters 2017:15). Merging can involve clipping of one or both source words.[4] For example, the Ukrainian overlap blend below "kartopovyj" is formed by merging source words "kartopljanyj" and "topovyj", which share the homophonous sequence /tɔp/[5]. The formation of this blend involves the clipping of the source word "kartoplianyj" to "kartop-".

(1)   Engl.: spudtacular (restaurant) < spud + spectacular
       Ukr.: kar<u>top</u>ovyj (restoran) < kar<u>top</u>ljanyj 'potato' + <u>top</u>ovyj (top)

Translation of English blends by means of forming Ukrainian overlap blends has at least three advantages over the other methods. First, this method enables a translator to provide the viewers with so-called "Eureka!" moments when they successfully identify source words in the blend. An interesting overview of the effect of these "Eureka!" moments on perception of text is provided by Topolinsky and Reber (2010), as well as Sedivy and Carlson (2011). Second, when forming a blend, a translator preserves the wordplay inherent in the original meaning (see Lehrer (2007) and Mattiello (2013) for

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[3] To be succinct, we will use the term "translation" when talking about rendering source-language words in a target language. However, all our proposals equally apply to translation and interpretation.

[4] It should be mentioned that classifications of blends based on structure also include blends with clipping but without overlap: for example, brunch < br(eakfast) + (l)unch.

[5] Phonemic transcription in this article is provided based on the overview of the phonemic system of Ukrainian proposed by Winters (2017, 81-82).

discussion of wordplay involved in blending). Third, semantic priming experiments conducted by Winters revealed that Ukrainian native speakers can correctly recognize source words in overlap blends only when they are presented auditorily, but not in substitution blends without overlap (Winters 2017: 241). Therefore, overlap blends are recommended for translation of English blends since this structure helps facilitate the understanding of hidden meanings within a joke.

Taking into account the arguments presented above, we created Ukrainian overlap blends to translate the blends identified in seasons 1-3 of the sitcom, "How I Met Your Mother". Ten examples of our translation are provided below:

(2)   Engl.: ruttine < rut + routine
         Ukr.: ustomlenyj < ustalenyj 'routine'+ stomlenyj 'tired'

(3)   Engl.: spudtacular (restaurant) < spud + spectacular
         Ukr.: kartopovyj (restoran) < kartopljanyj 'potato' + topovyj (top)

(4)   Engl.: Kwanzaapolitan < Kwanzaa + Cosmopolitan
         Ukr.: Pasxeres < Pasxa 'Easter' + xeres 'sherry'

(5)   Engl.: Marshgammon < Marshall + backgammon
         Ukr.: Maršašky < Maršal 'Msrshall' + šašky (checkers)

(6)   Engl.: *Rice-A-Roni* < rice + macaroni
         Ukr.: makarysny < makrony 'macaroni' + rys 'rice'

(7)   Engl.: legendairy < legendary + dairy
         Ukr.: kosyrno < kozyrno 'cool' + syr 'cheese'

(8)   Engl.: Golden Reliever < Golden Retriever + relieve
         Ukr.: napudyl' < pudel' 'poodle' + napudyty 'urinate'

(9)   Engl.: slappetizers < slap + appetizers
         Ukr.: ljapetajzery < ljapas 'slap' + apetajzery 'appetizers'

(10)   Engl.: slappetite < slap + appetite
         Ukr.: ljapetyt < ljapas 'slap' + apetyt 'appetite'

(11)   Engl.: revertigo < revert + vertigo
         Ukr.: nazadpamoročennja < nazad 'back' + zapamoročennja 'vertigo'

Note that the Ukrainian translation can be not equivalent to the original in terms of source words (for example, "spectacular" is rendered as "topovyj" 'top'). We agree with Low's argument that equivalency between translation and the original is relevant and that, when translating humour, one can sacrifice content equivalency for the sake of preserving stylistic and pragmatic equivalency. According to Low, translation of jokes requires wit and a translator needs to have the freedom to be creative (Low 2011: 59).

Formation of blends is a challenging task, both in terms of finding source words which share homophonous sequences and in terms of selecting the most optimal blend out of all the candidates available. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a system of rules and criteria which would help a translator in selecting the optimal blend from all the possible options. The formation of blends in this research is based on the overview of blending in various languages, including Ukrainian, presented in the relevant literature.

The rule of overlap blending is quite simple: < -(…A)BC(D…)- + -(…X)BC(Y…)- → -(…A)BC(Y…)- … > (Winters 2017: 142). However, it is important to note that we agree with Mattiello (2013: 134), as well as a number of other researchers, that the overlapping fragments do not have to be fully homophonous. As mentioned above, source words in some blends, for example, "kartopovyj" (translation from "spudtacular"), have fully homophonous sequences. However, overlap is also possible in those cases in which fragments of source words are nearly homophonous in terms of phonological features. This can be illustrated with the blend "kosyrno" in (7). Namely, the overlapping fragments are nearly, as opposed to fully, homophonous.

Compare /zɨr/ and /sɨr/. The initial phonemes in these fragments differ in terms of the phonological feature [voice], as /z/ is [+voice], and /s/ is [-voice]. However, the similarity between the fragments /zɨr/ and /sɨr/ is sufficient to motivate the merging of these source words into a blend. Moreover, the overlapping phonemes do not have to be arranged contiguously (Mattiello 2013: 122, Winters 2017: 16). For example, in the blend "ustomlenyj" in (1), the source words share homophonous sequences /st/ and /lenɨj/, but /om/ and /a/ are different.

Research on blending also discusses the fact that the rhythmical contour of one of the source words, i.e. the number of syllables and the position of the main stress, is usually preserved (Winters 2017: 170). Winters refers to the source word, the rhythmical contour of which is preserved, as the matrix word. In (2) – (11), the rhythmical contour is preserved in the following blends: "ustomlenyj", "kartopovyj", "makarysny", "kosyrno", "ljapetajzery", and "ljapetyt". The main reason for a change in rhythmical contour of some blends (for example, "Pasxeres", "Maršašky", and "napudyl'") is the need to make the overlap possible. For example, in "Pasxeres" the overlap is possible only if the source words are combined in such a way that the first source word is clipped to one syllable and the second source word is intact. This produces a tri-syllabic blend that combines two bi-syllabic source words.

Another reason to not preserve the rhythmical contour of the source words is the need to maximize the amount of phonological material in a blend to make it easier to recognize the source words and, therefore, interpret the blend correctly. For example, if we were to form the blend "zadpamoročennja", in which the rhythmical contour of one source word would be preserved—as opposed to "nazadpamoročennja" in (11) above—to translate "revertigo", it would be easy to misinterpret the blend. Therefore, we chose to maximize the amount of phonological material and form the blend "nazadpamoročennja".

Having formed the blends in (2)-(11), we tested the perceptions of translations produced by this method with a survey of 30 native speakers of Ukrainian. In this survey,

the participants were asked to evaluate the wittiness of different translations of English blends into Ukrainian. One group, which consisted of 15 participants, was shown 10 video fragments from the American sitcom, "How I Met Your Mother" in "Novyj Kanal" translation, which is available to the public online. This translation included such methods as translation of one source word only (see, for example, (17)), transliteration of English blends (see, for example, (14)) and rendering of the source words with a phrase (see, for example, (19)).

(12)   ruttine – styl' žyttja 'lifestyle'

(13)   spudtacular (restaurant) – znanyj 'known'

(14)   Kwanzaapolitan – Kvanzapoliten

(15)   Marshgammon – Maršgemon

(16)   *Rice-A-Roni* – rys z ovočamy 'rice with vegetables'

(17)   legendairy – lehendarno 'legendary'

(18)   Golden Reliever – pes 'dog'

(19)   slappetizers – peredljapasna zakuska 'pre-slap appetizer'

(20)   slappetite – apetyt 'appetite'

(21)   revertigo – revertiho

The other group of 15 participants was shown the same 10 video fragments, but with a different translation, all the English blends were rendered as Ukrainian blends (see (2-11) above). The lines from the 10 fragments are provided in (22-31).

(22)   Barney: You are in a rut. And I am a rut buster. I'm going to bust your rut.
Ted: It's not a rut, okay? It's a routine, and I like it.
Barney: Ted, what's the first syllable in "**rut-tine**"? (*How I Met Your Mother*, season 1, episode 3)

(23)   Ted: Kids, when you visit New York, there's countless fun things to see and do. And yet Coleen and Lindsay took us to *Tater-Skinz*.
Lindsay: This is our favourite restaurant in the city.
Ted: Yes, I'm sure it's the best one of their 57 "**spudtacular**" east coast locations. (*How I Met Your Mother*, season 3, episode 2)

(24)   Ted: You want a good holiday drink, try his ***Kwanzaapolitan***. (*How I Met Your Mother*, season 1, episode 9)

(25) Barney: Just for that, when I win all the prizes, the only thing you guys are getting is ***Rice-A-Roni*** and *Turtle Wax*. (*How I Met Your Mother*, season 2, episode 20)

(26) Marshall (about a board game he invented): It's called **Marshgammon.** (*How I Met Your Mother*, season 1, episode 15)

(27) Barney (about a party in Philadelphia, the homeland of Philadelphia cheese): It's gonna be legend… Wait a second. I hope you are not lactose intolerant because the second half is "dairy". **Legendairy**! (*How I Met Your Mother*, season 1, episode 3)

(28) Barney (about a video of a dog urinating): There is another one. It's called "Golden **Reliever**". (*How I Met Your Mother*, season 3, episode 8)

(29) Marshall (on Slapsgiving, a holiday he invented, on which friends exchange slaps): **Slappetizers!** (*How I Met Your Mother*, season 3, episode 9)

(30) Barney (on Slapsgiving, a holiday Marshall invented, on which friends exchange slaps): Marshall, you are not eating. Did something spoil your **slappetite?** (*How I Met Your Mother*, season 3, episode 9)

(31) Marshall (about Robin's childish behaviour caused by her re-uniting with an old boyfriend from her teenage years): Robin, your **revertigo** is really starting to affect your work. (*How I Met Your Mother*, season 3, episode 16)

Sometimes, we provided context on the survey material in order to help facilitate understanding of the jokes so participants would not have to watch the whole episode. The goal of the survey was to test the following hypothesis: translation by means of forming overlap blends is perceived as wittier than translation by means of other methods (for example, translation of one source word, transliteration or translation with a phrase).

The results of the survey confirmed the proposed hypothesis. The translation with overlap blends received significantly higher ratings than the translation by means of other methods. On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means "not witty at all" and 10 means "extremely witty", the participants of the survey gave the translation available online an average rating of 1.9, while the translation with overlap blends was given an average rating of 8.4 (see Figure 1).

8.4

1.9

Translation available online   Translation with overlap blends
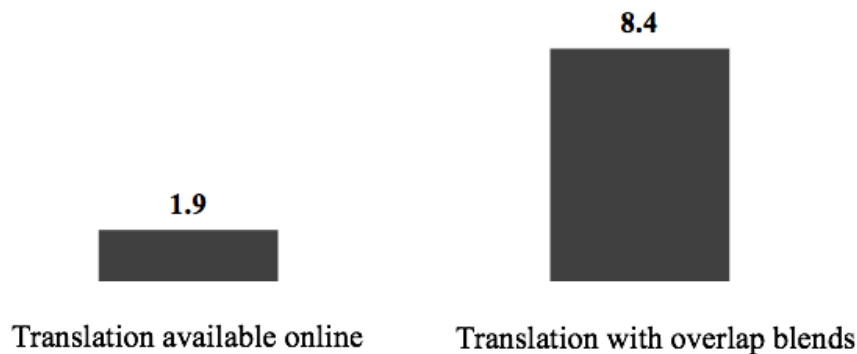
Figure 1. Average rating of translations (1-10 scale)

The ratings of the translation available online varied from 1 to 3 out of 10 points (see Figure 2), while the ratings of the overlap blend translations varied from 6 to 10 out of 10 points (see Figure 3). Therefore, we conclude that translation by means of forming overlap blends is perceived more favourably by Ukrainian speakers than by means of other methods.
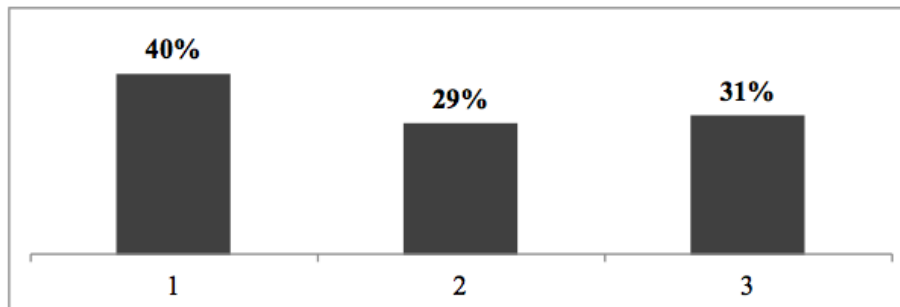
40%

29%   **31%**

1   2   3

Figure 2. Rating of translations available online (1-10 scale)

27%   **31%**

26%

6%   **10%**
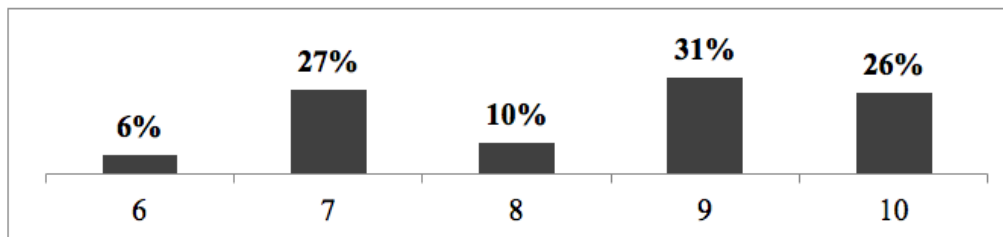
6   7   8   9   10

Figure 3. Rating of translations with overlap blends (1-10 scale)

In conclusion, the formation of Ukrainian overlap blends, as a way of rendering English blends in sitcoms, has a number of advantages as compared to other methods of translation. The method proposed here provides the viewers with "Eureka!" moment", preserves the wordplay and facilitates the correct interpretation of the blend. Moreover, it has been revealed that viewers evaluate wittiness of translation of English blends considerably higher when the translation includes Ukrainian overlap blends. A compelling direction for future research is to compare perceptions of each of the translation methods separately (for example, rendering a blend with a phrase in the target language, transliteration, etc.).

This would help one understand which translation methods are more effective and, therefore, should be employed when it is hard or not possible to produce a blend in the target language to render a source-language blend. Another direction for future research is to study the effect of the structure of a blend on its perception by viewers (for example, whether overlap blends will be perceived as wittier, compared to substitution blends).

This research makes a contribution to the question in the theory of translation which has not been sufficiently studied: the translation of blends in English-language sitcoms. We proposed a method of translating English blends and discussed its advantages over alternative methods. What is more, this research supports, and encourages, the trend observed among Ukrainians in recent years: watching television, including sitcoms, in Ukrainian, rather than Russian.

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