Lexical Blending as a Method for Translating Language-Specific Jokes from English-Language Sitcoms into Ukrainian

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The literature on the translation of language-specific jokes generally focuses on puns, anagrams, spoonerisms, parody, and transformed allusions [1-3, 6, 10-11]. The few discussions of the challenges in the translation of blends have focused only on translations of the blends in "Alice in Wonderland" [4, 12]. As the number of English blends is growing [14], developing a strategy for their translation into other languages is becoming increasingly necessary.

When translating lexical blends from English-language sitcoms into Ukrainian, translators often omit the wordplay inherent in mixing two source words and simply render the meaning of a single source word. For example, the blend ruttine [15] (from rut + routine) is translated as styl' žyttja 'lifestyle', and spudtacular [16] (from spud + spectacular, describing a restaurant called "Tater Skinz") is translated as strelyščnyj 'cool'. 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.

In this study, we developed and tested the comedic efficacy of a method for translating blends in English-language sitcoms into Ukrainian. Inspired by an overview of the literature on the processing of blends, we created overlap blends by combining two words which share homophonous sequences in Ukrainian, as shown in (1) and (2) below. Note that these blends may occasionally sacrifice faithfulness to the source-language components of the blend (as in, e.g., rendering spectacular as top).

(1)	ruttine	<	rut	+	routine
	ustomlenyj styl' žyttia	<	stomlenyj	+	ustalenyj styl' žyttia
	'tired steady lifestyle'		'tired'		'steady lifestyle'
(2)	spudtacular (restaurant)	<	spud	+	spectacular (restaurant)
	kartopovyj (restoran)	<	kartoplja	+	topovyj (restoran)
	'top potato (restaurant)'		'potato'		'top (restaurant)'

Overlap blends enable a translator to, first, ensure that viewers experience the pleasurable "Aha!" moment when they successfully unpack the combined sources for the blend (see [8] and [9] for a discussion of the effect on the audience of reaching a linguistic insight). Second, overlap blends successfully capture the playfulness inherent in blending in the source language (see [5] and [7] for a discussion of the wordplay by means of blends). Finally, semantic priming experiments have revealed that Ukrainian speakers are only able to accurately decompose auditorily presented blends when they are overlap blends, rather than substitution blends, in which source words are clipped and then juxtaposed. Overlap blends thus facilitate semantic processing for the listener.

We tested the effectiveness of this proposed method by conducting a survey of 30 native Ukrainian speakers, in which they evaluated the wittiness of different blend translations in Ukrainian. 15 survey participants saw 10 fragments of How I Met Your Mother that contained an English blend with the translation available online, while another group saw the same fragments with overlap blend translations. Overlap blends were rated as significantly more humorous than the non-blended translations; on a 1-10 scale, the mean score for the translations available online was 1.9 points, while the mean score for the overlap blend translations was 8.4 points.

Our results indicate that overlap blends provide many advantages over single-source translations of English blends, as they provide an "Aha!" moment to their listeners, preserve the intended playfulness and also facilitate the processing. Additionally, these findings fill a gap in the theory

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of translation by providing a clearer understanding of the problems inherent in rendering blends into a target language. The proposed method may also support the growing trend among Ukrainians to consume Ukrainian rather than Russian translations of contemporary sitcoms.

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