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O' Henry's "Midsummer Masquerade" Unmasked

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This article explores "A Midsummer Masquerade" by O' Henry in terms of culture-specific markers of the author's individual style and cultural metaphors as potential interpretation gaps. An attempt is made to elicit implicit information on quasi-words and malapropisms, allusions to the Bible, references to historical personages and political events. Approaches to short story translation are considered in light of P. Newmark's insights into the nature of this genre and his typology of short story specific characteristics, which are relevant for translation. The conclusions draw on key points of the general cognitive theory of translation and modern Americans' comments on the selected fragments. Through showing the potential diversity of interpretation, this research highlights the importance of background cultural knowledge and considers some cases of untranslatability.

Keywords: general cognitive theory of translation, short story, metaphor, allusion, picaresque, parody.

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Research area: philology.

"A Midsummer Masquerade", the seventh of the fourteen short stories of the collection "The Gentle Grafters", was published in 1908 by "Doubleday & McClure Company" in New York and remains one of the least studied and commented on works authored by O' Henry. The four published Russian translations of the story were performed by M. L. Lozinsky, Z. D. L'vovsky, S. A. Adrianov and M. I. Becker; the examples of individual fragments analyzed here are selected from the latter translation. In this article we highlight linguistic markers encoding culture-specific information and characteristics of O' Henry's individual style, which deepen the understanding of the author's message and might present a challenge for translation. The

examples of Russian translation are selected from M. Becker's version [O' Henry (c)].

According to Peter Newmark, the short story "as the most intimate and personal form of writing in imaginative literature" is characterized by "compactness, simplicity, concentration, cohesion", while "its symbolic and connotative power transcends its realism and its denotative effect" (Newmark, 1995, p. 49). To reveal the connotative power of "A Midsummer Masquerade", we will first focus on the social and cultural situation in the days of its creation and briefly outline the recurrent motifs of O' Henry's prose, which permeate the story.

The "Gentle Grafters", as a final mark in the series of O' Henry's trickster stories, indicated

the climax of the evolution of picaresque genre. Picaroon – swindler and scalawag – appeared in American literature long before O' Henry, but its heyday fell on the turn of the century. Social and political situation in the country predetermined emergence of a large number of the unemployed in the East. Economic crisis and closure of frontier in 1890 brought about the emergence of a large number of hobos – migratory workers, who moved from one place to another to earn their living. Being unbound with legal rules and moral principles, these people created their own subculture, code of honor and language.

In 1843 E.A. Poe published his short story "Diddling considered as one of the exact sciences", M. Twain's "Catechism revised" appeared in 1871, B. Harte's "My friend the tramp" – in 1877. These stories reiterated relevance of the phenomenon of picaroon. Harte's picaroon is someone who despises religious and social norms and travels taking odd jobs and not wishing to undertake any obligations. He is depicted as a savior of the weak, whereas O' Henry's picaroon acquires parodic features.

The very motif of renegade and cast-off is not new for O' Henry – his first personages of this kind appeared in prison stories. But with time his views changed – he now longer restricted his criticism to individual vices but expanded it to the whole political system. Critical comments are often put into the mouth of Jeff Peters – sarcastic and sharp-witted swindler, the recurrent hero of several stories.

"The Gentle Grafter" is a parody of American reality of the time. Adventures of petty filchers are confronted to large-scale ventures of business dealers, which became possible to a large extent due to Roosevelt's policy in the early XX century. In "Diddling considered as one of the exact sciences" E. A. Poe defines diddler as a "financier", explaining that this "word conveys the diddling idea in every respect except that of

magnitude. A diddler may thus be regarded as a banker in petto" [Poe]. Roosevelt's political doctrine and laws enforced in his time often became the target of O' Henry's refined satire. Jeff Peters and his companion Andy Tucker "living hand to mouth, heart to heart with the people, throwing heads or tails with fortune for his last coin" [O' Henry, (b)] earn their living hit and miss through petty swindling exploiting people's greed, vanity and stupidity, now and then swallowing the bait of their more successful peer colleagues.

Jeff Peters combines features of eastern and western picaroon. He is a western dealer in the sense of being experienced in small-scale trade, which required ingenuity and foxery. But he keeps himself aloof from settled life style, he hankers for adventure and so he is always on the way. No moral principles or obligations burden him, and in this sense he is a true vagabond rogue living by his wit. But uncovering affairs of larger-scale swindlers he himself plays by their rules.

The very plot of the story is unsophisticated: Jeff Peters and Andy Tucker agree to help out of a scrape their old friend Smoke-'em-out who declared a shabby house in the middle of nowhere a "private hotel called Woodchuck Inn". In order to attract visitors he announced that Robert Peary and the Duke of Marlborough would stay there. This advertisement did lure several "specimens of the fair sex" who aspired to meet the celebrities. There was no chance, however, for "auspicious personages" to arrive, so Jeff and Andy undertook to play these characters for the right to stay at the inn. They neglected to agree who was to play whom and Andy's absurd and senseless conversation with the ladies disclosed the whole affair.

The narration saturated with proper names, allusions, direct and indirect references seems to aim at a multiplicity of meanings, which often tend to be misinterpreted not only by non-native

English speakers, but also by Americans of the XXI century. The paragraphs that follow are concerned with implicit information enclosed in selected fragments of the story.

As a master of short story – a small epic genre – O' Henry considerably expanded its boundaries. He contributed to the American literature not only fascinating humorous narrative with a happy end. Most of his works are specimens of severe criticism of social and political domains depicted as absurd and anti-humane phenomena. His peculiar style is part and parcel of this idea.

Burlesque citation is one of his permanent strategies; he quotes the Bible and famous British and American writers, inventing puns and distorting the initial meaning. Thus, Jeff Peters attributes the phrase "He always finds somebody for idle hands to do" to "old Dr. Watts or St. Paul or some other diagnostician", whereas originally it is a Biblical statement: "Devil finds work for idle hands". Putting it in the mouth of "Dr. Watts or St. Paul" is meant to mock the sententious didactics of Isaac Watts recognized as the "Father of English Hymnody". The comic statement "'I want to loaf and indict my soul", as Walt Whittier says" implies a mythical hybrid of John Whittier, poet and abolitionist, often criticized for sentimentality and excessive preaching, and Walt Whitman, poet and essayist, who was known for social pathos and eschewing literary conventions.

O' Henry's narration is a sophisticated tapestry of styles, dialects and sublanguages – from tabloid journalism through to cooking recipe, sentimental melodrama, scientific and pseudoscientific style to reference books and business papers.

Specificity of narration style may intentionally provoke cognitive dissonance in readers, which grows when it comes to translation. In this paper we draw on the definition of

cognitive dissonance postulated by the general cognitive theory of translation as "recognition of restrictions on the selection of target language means required to pursue one of the two key translation intentions (either "to conform to the structure" or "to conform to the experience") by overall parameters of source language and target language discourses" [Voskoboinik, 2004, p. 227]. We group specific examples, which are prone to arouse cognitive dissonance, into four categories: quasi-words and malapropisms; name-specific references; Biblical allusions; political satire. We analyze their meaning through comments of American native speakers and research into cultural and historical background, and discuss their amenability to translation.

I. Quasi-words and malapropisms are among O' Henry's favorite devices designed to both amuse and confuse the reader. Many of them are so multi-faceted and ambiguous that they are really hard to decipher.

One of such inventions is "looeey door" mentioned in the description of hypothetical holiday of a preacher "as dropping a couple of looeey door" and translated as "проиграл в рулетку два-три золотых" [O'Henry, (a)]. Comments of modern Americans concerning the word "looeey door" vary considerably:

1. looeey door – I don't know about this one. I could not find a definition or explanation. I suspect that it does refer to spending money on frivolous things, perhaps in France?

2. looeey door might be money; on rouge – for a woman, perhaps an affair with the widow is meant.

3. "dropping a couple of looeey door on rouge" would be playing roulette.

4. "dropping a couple of looeey door on rouge" – spending some gold (Louise d' or) on wine (on rouge).

The four informants show no unity of views: № 1 and № 3 class "dropping a couple of

looney door" as spending money on women, № 4 associates it with roulette and № 5 – with wine. M. Becker's translation "два-три золотых" is very much in line with Newmark's view of metaphor translation: "in fact all tropes, metaphor in particular, unless they occupy a paragraph or longer, usually have to be reduced to sense" (Newmark, 1995, p. 112).

Old Smoke-'em-out describes himself as "the host and perpetrator of Woodchuck Inn" – "хозяин и сотворитель "Лесного сурка"". "Perpetrator" does have a meaning of creator, as it originates from Latin "pater", but the nuclear concept of the word is "wrong-doer", "criminal". Smoke-'em-out is most unlikely to have intentionally called himself a criminal, he actually meant "proprietor", but the truth came out through malapropism. The same strategy is used, when Smoke-'em-out calls his inn "an obscure hustlery" translated as "заштатное деревенское заведение". "Hustlery" means a shady affair, an expression Smoke-'em-out would hardly use on purpose to describe his undertaking, he

rather meant to say "hostelry", but the real sense prevailed over the speaker's intended meaning. These shades of combined meanings could not be rendered in translation.

II. Name-specific references function as key words, which P. Newmark defines as "often repeated words, phrases or images to indicate theme" (Newmark, 1995, p. 48), which "normally have to be reproduced in translation" [ibid.]. The motif of Lieutenant Peary and the Duke of Marlborough permeates the story in the form of references to their public images and biographic events. Taken separately, each pair of expressions depicting the "auspicious personages" may not be understood as related to them (Table 1).

These features fall under the category of Newmark's cultural and universal (encyclopedic) references, and "the translator has to decide how many of these he can afford to explain economically within the text" [ibid.]. They are rendered in M. Becker's translation, and even rhyming nouns are retained in example № 3. These successive pairs of references to

Table 1

	Source text	Target text
1	...two gentlemen whose names are famous from long association with icebergs and the Coburgs.	двух джентльменов, чьи имена прославлены благодаря их продолжительной связи с айсбергами и Кобургами
2	...the polar regions and the portals of Blenheim are conspiring to hand you prosperity on a hall-marked silver salver	Северный полюс и порталы замка Бленхейм вступили в заговор с целью вручить вам золотые горы на серебряном блюде высшей пробы
3	...from the aurora borealis to the ducal portcullis.	от северного сияния до герцогских фриз и карнизов.
4	...Arctic or matrimonial expeditions.	экспедиции арктические или matrimониальные
5	So I gave an answer that would cover both cases. "Well, ma'am," says I, 'it was a freeze out – right smart of a freeze out, ma'am."	Поэтому я дал ответ, подходящий для обоих случаев. – Ах, сударыня, – говорю я ей, – я получил ледяной душ, изрядный ледяной душ, сударыня.
6	The next time,' says Andy, 'that I go after the North Pole all the Vanderbilts in Greenland won't be able to turn me out in the cold – I mean make it hot for me.	В следующий раз, когда я поеду за Северным полюсом, все гренландские Вандербилты вместе взятые не осмелятся оказать мне холодный прием, то есть, вернее, задать мне жару.

R. Peary and the Duke of Marlborough act as major leitmotifs of the narrative thread, since Jeff and Andy have to remind both themselves and their audience of who they are expected to be.

Robert Peary, the famous American explorer of the North Pole, and Charles Richard John Spencer-Churchill, the 9th Duke of Marlborough, were people of almost unsurpassed popularity at the turn of the century. Intricate combination of true and false information granted both of them a rather controversial public image. Robert Peary's several attempts to reach the North Pole, his pioneer survival strategies and studies of Inuits' way of life and customs on the one hand, and lack of scientific validation of the actual outcome of his expedition and his treatment of natives on the other hand, made him an object of heated discussions.

The 9th Duke of Marlborough, upon inheriting the dukedom, found himself near-bankrupt and managed to solve financial problems through a mercenary marriage. His family life with Consuelo Vanderbilt, the daughter and wealthy heiress of American railway magnate, gained notoriety as an example of financially advantageous, but loveless marriage. Consuelo was forced into this marriage by her parents who wanted to see their daughter as a duchess, so references to cold and freeze (examples № 5 and № 6) reflect her lack of desire to accept the Duke. They are fully reproduced in the translation, but only knowledge about "expeditions" of R. Peary and the Duke of Marlborough would help understand the idea of "freeze out" and "making it hot" for the spontaneously invented mixture of the two.

III. Another specific feature is multiple **references and allusions to the Bible**. The events described in the story take place in North Carolina, in the vicinity of Asheville, which is near the boundary with Tennessee. Both states are parts

of the Bible Belt incorporating south-eastern and south-southern states, which have traditionally been the stronghold of various Christian denominations. Intensely imposed religious dogmas naturally provoked counteraction in the form of grotesque satire and parodical rephrasing. Below are several examples of Biblical references and their translations (Table 2).

Four American native speakers were asked to explain why the quotation reads "He always finds somebody for idle hands to do" and not "He always finds something for idle hands to do" (**example № 1**).

1. Satan deals with people, not things. Satan is finding someBODY to occupy his time with. Ever since his (Satan's) first encounter with people in the Garden of Eden, he has sought to influence people.

2. This, I think, is a play on words. You probably knew that "to do" somebody can mean to have sex with them, so they're indicating that people with nothing better to do will have an affair while on vacation.

3. This is a very unusual formulation. My guess is that somebody is used instead of something because the devil is the subject – but it's still a curious wording.

4. I think he's contrasting how it's harder working for Satan than for God. The first: ["Satan," said Jeff Peters, "is a hard boss to work for. When other people are having their vacation is when he keeps you the busiest. As old Dr. Watts or St. Paul or some other diagnostician says: "He always finds somebody for idle hands to do"]. Yes, the normal expression from the Bible (Proverbs) is "Idle hands are the Devil's workshop", so this is a conscious humorous variant that emphasizes that when idle (on vacation) folk are the most vulnerable to being caught by Satan in some indiscretion.

The variety of the respondents' comments shows that the misquotation of the Biblical phrase

Table 1

	Source text	Target text
1	"He always finds somebody for idle hands to do".	"Для праздных рук всегда найдет он дело".
2	Now, with a preacher it's different. He can throw off his responsibilities and enjoy himself. On the 31st of May he wraps mosquito netting and tin foil around the pulpit, grabs his niblick, breviary and fishing pole and hikes for Lake Como or Atlantic City <u>according to the size of the loudness with which he has been called by his congregation.</u>	То ли дело проповедник — он может бросить все свои обязанности и предаться радостям жизни. 31 мая он закрывает свою кафедру фольгой и москитной сеткой, хватает клюшку для гольфа, тревник и удочку и отправляется бродяжничать вокруг озера Комо или по Атлантик-Сити — <u>в зависимости от того, насколько громогласно зовет к нему его паства.</u>
3	...texts to cover and exculpate such little midsummer penances as dropping a couple of looey door on rouge or <u>teaching a Presbyterian widow to swim.</u>	...цитаты, чтоб искупить свои мелкие летние грешки вроде того, что проиграл в рулетку два-три золотых или <u>давал уроки плавания вдове пресвитерианина.</u>
4	I reckon the first passenger agent in the world was <u>that man Genesis. But there wasn't much competition in his day, and when he said: "The Lord made the earth in six days, and all very good," he hadn't any idea to what extent the press agents of the summer hotels would plagiarize from him later on.</u>	Я всегда считал, что первым в мире агентом бюро путешествий был этот <u>субъект по фамилии Генезис. Однако в его время не было никакой конкуренции, и когда он сказал: "Господь сотворил землю за шесть дней и увидел, что это хорошо весьма", ему и в голову не приходило, до какой степени пресс-агенты летних гостиниц будут впоследствии изощряться в плагиатах с его писаний.</u>
5	why this <u>jeremiad?</u>	К чему вся эта <u>иеремиада?</u>

in the original involves numerous and sometimes controversial connotations. As a culture-bound expression it fails to be translated in the entirety of its semantic structure, but the very reference to the Bible enclosed in semi-poetic rhythmic configuration in Russian does reproduce O' Henry's irony.

In evangelical church preacher is not appointed, but chosen and called by the congregation, who pays him for the service. So "the size of the loudness" of calling (**example № 2**) means the size of his salary. Depending on what he can afford, the preacher either goes to Lake Como in Italy, a fashionable retreat for well-to-do aristocracy, or to Atlantic City, a large casino center known as Las Vegas of the East. The idea of congregation paying the preacher does not seem to be reflected in translation.

And translation "отправляется бродяжничать вокруг озера Комо или по Атлантик-Сити" standing for "hikes for Lake Como or Atlantic City" somehow lowers he status of the person described.

"Teaching a Presbyterian widow to swim" (**example № 3**) is a highly ironic phrase, but the irony only shows to the reader who knows that Presbyterians practice baptizing through aspersion and not immersion. So the very image of a Presbyterian is never associated with water, but the comic undertone of this sentence is not obvious to those who ignore this tradition; it is even less comprehensible to Russian readers.

Example № 4 refers to Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament; so Jeff calls it "that man" either by intent or through ignorance. The phrase apparently refers to "consecrating

the seventh day to rest", which, as the Biblical quotation reproduced among people of the Bible Belt, indeed was an efficient advertisement tactic for making people spend money at resorts. The Russian translation is perfectly adequate – Genesis is presented as a human being and the idea of plagiarism is reproduced, but the source text reference to the Bible in this case implies population of the Bible Belt regions as the target audience of travel advertisements due to specific significance of the Bible texts for this category of American citizens. The very choice of the original imagery, though fully rendered in the Russian translation, may not be clear to its readers.

The word "jeremiad" (**example № 5**) is a derivative of Jeremiah – the weeping prophet, author of the Book of Lamentations. The archaic and allusive nature of the source text unit is recreated in the target text; understanding both would rely on readers' background knowledge.

IV. Political satire. Among less obvious cultural references in the story is "tennis cabinet": "Even Andy, whose brain rarely ever stopped working, began to make noises like a tennis cabinet» [O' Henry, (a)]. "Даже Энди Таккер, чей мозг работает почти без передышки, начал скрипеть, как пресс для теннисной ракетки" [O' Henry, (c)]. The translation does not seem to reflect the concept of Tennis Cabinet, which was quite obvious for Americans of the time. The comments of contemporary American respondents mostly testify to their knowledge of the subject.

1. I think this refers to what was called Teddy Roosevelt's "Tennis Cabinet". These were his friends that he played and socialized with, who advised him, perhaps more than the official government cabinet heads. So this Andy in the story wants to leave his serious job behind, and just have fun without consequences for the summer.

2. Hmm. I've never heard this term before. The only definition I can find is very specific: President Theodore Roosevelt's advisers were a group of very athletic friends dubbed the "Tennis Cabinet". It's a definition very specific to American history, and even most modern Americans wouldn't get any reference. My other guess, yes, would be a case for tennis equipment... perhaps one that creaks and groans and generally looks and sounds "tired".

3. I had to look this one up – it's a reference to Teddy Roosevelt and his unofficial "tennis cabinet" of advisors. In this case, "making noises like a tennis cabinet" means that Andy, who normally would be a thoughtful, hard worker, is more interested in leisure and relaxation.

4. Tennis cabinet is a cabinet for tennis equipment

Theodore Roosevelt, the 26th President of the United States, assumed presidency in 1901 at the age of 42 becoming the youngest President in the history of the country. In his love of strenuous life he liked to spend some time hiking, climbing cliffs, riding horses and playing tennis in the company of a group of friends referred to as his "Tennis Cabinet", which included friends from his days in the West, diplomats, comrades in arms. "The men exercised their minds as they worked their bodies, discussing and debating the pressing issues of the day and planning out the best way to proceed". "This group of men was just as beloved to TR as his Rough Riders, and he told Pinchot they were much closer to him than his official cabinet. Roosevelt bid farewell to his time as President by holding a luncheon for members of his Tennis Cabinet" [McKay, 2010].

So "tennis cabinet" in the given context represents a metaphor, which "forms invariant interpretation context in virtue of its specific structure" (Voskoboinik, 2004, p. 231). The

invariant nature of initial metaphorical image inevitably causes replacement of a metaphor in translation with another metaphor to entail an interpretation gap due to the loss of invariant correlation between cognitive structures of source domain and target domain. The source domain in this case is a true tennis cabinet – a box for keeping equipment; **comment № 4** is based on this direct understanding of the expression. The target domain is the group of President Roosevelt's associates. The "clanking sound" apparently illustrates politicians' efforts made to resolve certain issues and further extends the metaphorical sense, as a real tennis cabinet is unlikely to be perceived as making any sounds. Therefore, transformation of the "tennis cabinet" into "пресс для теннисной ракетки" does destroy the invariant correlation. Metaphorical projection is unidirectional, and shift of its focus unavoidably ruins it. As translation of fiction is aimed to achieve phenomenological identity as opposed to positivist identity, it requires a certain experience of interpretation in the internal time of ego. And such experience

builds within the domain of native language and culture.

The opposition between "translatable" and "untranslatable" has proven to be too complex of a problem for linguistic and linguocultural analysis, which gave rise to approaching translation as negotiation process. The concept of negotiation presumes social communication as a tool to overcome untranslatability. Such negotiation requires from the participants of communication common cultural background and knowledge of the context of situation, so the above examples of references to historical figures may fail to be understood through purely linguistic treatment.

Cognitive dissonance reflecting "remaining differences between the contents of communication in SL and TL (Voskoboinik, 2004, p. 19) invariably accompanies the translator on his path towards phenomenological identity of the source and target texts, resulting in "regular re-assessment of the earlier results of translation" [ibid.]. The present paper embraces both exposed and implied contextual and linguo-cultural phenomena, which escape straightforward interpretation.

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О' Генри: маски «Летнего маскарада»

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Статья посвящена исследованию культурно-специфических аспектов и метафор рассказа О' Генри «Летний маскарад», маркирующих идиостиль писателя. Потенциальный «зазор» интерпретации выявляется на основе реконструкции имплицитной информации, кодируемой квазисловами и малапропизмами, библейскими аллюзиями, отсылками к политическим событиям и историческим персонажам. В основе выбора объектов анализа лежит типология ключевых характеристик жанра короткого рассказа в контексте принципиальной переводимости, предложенная П. Ньюмарком. Интерпретативный потенциал рассматриваемых единиц обсуждается с использованием данных, полученных от информантов, на основании основных положений общей когнитивной теории перевода. Множественность возможных интерпретаций избранных фрагментов текста подтверждает необходимость сближения культурных контекстов автора и рецептора для достижения феноменологического тождества.

Ключевые слова: общая когнитивная теория перевода, короткий рассказ, метафора, аллюзия, пикаро, пародия.

Научная специальность: 10.00.00 – филологические науки.
