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## **TRANSLATION OF PUNS IN ENGLISH PRESS HEADLINES**

***Abstract:** Translation of headlines is one of the most interesting and challenging aspects. In order to translate a headline, it is not enough to search for the definition of its components if we speak about the headlines of political or economic articles. The present article reveals problematic aspects in translating puns in English press headlines. It also suggests particular methods of their analysis and translation. This article will be interesting for the students and professors of linguistics and international affairs departments, and for those, who is engaged in the sphere of translation from English into Russian.*

***Keywords:** puns, wordplay, headlines, English press, translation.*

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## **ПЕРЕВОД ИГРЫ СЛОВ В ЗАГОЛОВКАХ АНГЛОЯЗЫЧНОЙ ПРЕССЫ**

***Аннотация:** Перевод заголовков – один из наиболее интересных и вместе с тем сложных аспектов. Для качественного перевода заголовка недостаточно просто подобрать к его составляющим русские эквиваленты из словаря, что*

особенно актуально при переводе заголовков статей политического и экономического характера. Настоящая статья раскрывает проблемные аспекты передачи игры слов в заголовках англоязычной прессы на русский язык и предлагает конкретные методы их анализа и перевода. Данная статья будет интересна студентам и преподавателям департаментов лингвистики и международных отношений, а также тем, кто работает в сфере перевода с английского на русский.

**Ключевые слова:** игра слов, языковая игра, заголовки, англоязычная пресса, перевод.

Today, a great variety of printed matter is available to people all over the world. As soon as a reader takes an issue, a particular attention is paid to headlines, which, if skillfully written, can involve a reader into kind of logical game. The idea of the game is to make the reader figure out the hints of what issue is covered by the article. Nonetheless, sometimes it is complicated to extract the meaning of the headline when it comes to *puns*, also known as *wordplay* [6].

It is no coincidence that puns have been chosen as one of potential obstacles in understanding and translating the headlines. Since a pun is «*a humorous use of a word or phrase that has several meanings or that sounds like another word*» [6], pushing through the meaning of a foreign headline can be one of the hardest challenges for a non-English-speaking person.

In order to demonstrate the difficulty in translating headlines, «The Economist», a British magazine, was taken as a basis for the present article. «The Economist» is famous for its sophisticated headlines, which are often based on the wordplay. «The Economist» exploits such headlines to communicate with the readers informing them of its own view of a particular issue. That is why the translator's objective is to render the headlines properly and to convey the author's message to the readers.

While translating the headlines, a translator cannot feel equal with an author, but instead, to be a linguistic mediator. Therefore, the translator's own opinion should be left outside the process of interpretation [1]. Moreover, according to a Russian linguist A.D. Shveitser, a translator shall consider that there are cultural differences, such as

initial knowledge about phenomena or events, rules of conduct and interpretation. Thus, being a mediator between two cultures, a translator makes an original form of perception similar to the one inherent to the readers of a translated text. Even though this may apply to the translation of headlines, it is not sufficient for making a good translation of puns. Conditionally, there may be some possible principles to translate puns:

- learning what parts of the pun have been intentionally changed or substituted (in case of polysemy or homophony);
- interpreting the components of the pun before proceeding to an overall translation;
- scrutinizing the content of an article that follows a headline, in order to decode some parts of a pun;
- translating pun according to the standards of the Russian language and to the reality of its culture.

We have translated 10 headlines containing puns following the pattern mentioned above. However, the present article does not allow to comment on all the cases reviewed. Therefore, only some of them are analyzed, and the rest have been used as extra examples.

1. «Communal relations in India. **Ram rod.**» [3, p. 33-34] (based on homophony [2])

In this particular example, the pun is based on homophony. In spoken language «*ramrod*» can mean «*a person who takes responsibility for accomplishing or running things*» [8]. The word was divided into two separate parts. That is why, it is important to learn their meaning before proceeding to the translation of the pun. As a noun «*ram*» means «*a piece of equipment used to hit something and force it open or break it*» [6], and as a verb it means «*to hit or push something with force*» [6]. The noun «*rod*» means «*a long, thin pole made of wood, metal, or other material*» [6]. If we put both parts words together, we shall obtain the word «*ramrod*», which means «*a long, thin rod used for pushing explosives, bullets, etc. into old types of gun*» [6]. Taking into account the topic of the article (a decision to grant the land for reconstruction of a mosque,

demolished in the course of a religious conflict between Hindu and Muslims, taken by India's Supreme Court and not discussed with the natives), it is possible to translate the headline as «*Кнудом, а не пряником*» since «*ram*» is a verb synonymous to «*hit*», and the natives were not in favour of the decision taken by the Court. Thus, «*ram rod*» here is an allegory of the court members «*hitting*» the locals with their decision.

## 2. «**Impoachment**» [5, p. 32] (based on phonological similarity [2])

The word «*impoachment*» reminds of a distorted political term «*impeachment*». The syllable «*peach*» has evidently been replaced with «*pooch*», an informal variant for «*dog*» [7]. The question is what served as the reason to create such a word play. The content of the article helps to solve this issue showing that there is only a little political context since right after the headline comes the phrase «*How «impoachment» could bring the country together*». Perhaps, the latest news about Donald Trump's impeachment warmed up the idea, which generated the pun. Impeachment usually results from a unanimous decision made by the House of Representatives. The key word is «*unanimous*». According to the topic of the article, «*America's obsession with dogs*» can make the country more united. Thus, «*pooch*» is definitely used by purpose. Taking into consideration all the facts mentioned above, it is possible to translate the headline as «*Любовь к собакам как залог единства американской нации*» since it does not reveal the overall content of the article but conveys the general idea. Moreover, it is quite short and catchy. Similar examples of phonological nature have been found. They are represented hereunder and translated respectively:

- «**Northern blights**» [4, p. 69-71] – «Бедствия севера» (The word «*blights*» sounds like «*lights*» but has a completely different meaning: «*something that spoils or has a very bad effect on something*» [6].);

- «**Dependant's day**» [3, p. 14-15] – «День независимости от пенсионного обеспечения» (The noun «*dependant's day*» resembles the name of an US national holiday called «*Independence Day*». However, the noun «*dependant*» means «*someone who depends on you for financial support*» [6]. Moreover, according to the information provided by the article, the United States experience «*the pensions crisis*» resulting in the fact that many employees of the private sector do not get

pensions at all, and the retirees of a public sector have been underfunded for a long period of time.);

- «**Nat guilty**» [3, p. 36-37] – «Кто виновен в радикальных настроениях индуистов?» (The word «*nat*» resembles the word «*not*», which is quite appropriate in the context with the word «*guilty*». The point is that Hindus do not want Islam to stay within their territory, and they are compelled to use radical methods in order to get rid of an alien religion.)

- «**Spin doctors**» [3, p. 51-52] – ««Врачи» от консервативной партии» (The word «*spin*» sounds like «*spine*» but can be used in the following meaning: «*to tell a story, either to deceive someone or for entertainment*» [6]. Therefore, the so-called «*doctors*» used in the headline are not true ones but the members of two leading parties of the UK, which hope to obtain more votes by putting pressure on hospitals and «*talking about the NHS*».)

### 3. «The opposition **twitches**» [3, p. 35] (based on polysemy [2])

Since the pun is of polysemantic nature, it is important to find the word, which has two or more definitions. In this case, it is «*twitch*», which also serves as another shortened name for «*couch grass*», which is «*a troublesome weed*» [7]. As a verb «*twitch*» means «*to make a sudden small movement with a part of the body, usually without intending to*» [6]. With regard to the topic of the article (releasing one opposition, Hun Sen, a Cambodian politician and the president of Cambodian People's Party, wants to take the attention of the local public out of another newly arisen opposition), it is possible to assume that the pun has been generated through the following: getting rid of one weed, we have to deal with another. Thus, the translation of the headline can be «*Оппозиционные сорняки*». Similar examples of polysemantic nature are represented hereunder and translated respectively:

- «**Rainbow resignation**» [3, p. 31-32] – «Оставляя расколотую страну» (The word «*rainbow*» can be used in the following meaning: «*of or relating to a political grouping together by several minorities, especially of different races*» [7].)

- «**Spring flames**» [3, p. 35-36] – «Весенние страсти» (The word «*flames*» can be used in the meaning of «*a feeling of passion or anger*» [7].)

- «**Stony** ground» [3, p. 44-45] – «Бесплодная земля» (The adjective «*stony*» is synonymous to «*cold*», «*hostile*», «*harsh*» [7] and, therefore «*barren*».)

The translations analyzed in the course of the article points at the fact that there is little possibility of wordplay transmission from English into Russian. There are particular reasons for this:

- *purely linguistic divergence*, arising from different words used as a basis for puns, i.e. a word, which can be distorted in English, cannot be always distorted the same way in Russian (for instance, «*blights*» translated in Russian as «*беды*» cannot convey the same meaning which has been reported to «*lights*» by adding -b in English);

- *cultural or social divergence*, arising from different realia used as a basis for puns (for instance, in today's Russia *impeachment* does not have the same importance as it does in the United States and, therefore, this word cannot be the subject for jokes or wordplay);

- *peculiarities of translation from English into Russian* (lexical and grammatical transformations, such as change of grammatical forms, addition, meaning extension are widely applied, which helps decipher the wordplay in foreign language but does not let transfer it into Russian unchanged).

Knowing that above-mentioned differences are impossible to overcome, the lexical and grammatical transformations are the most appropriate way to translate the puns in the English press headlines. Although this method of translation does not allow to retain the original look of a headline, it can convey the major idea of an article adequately and make the headline understandable and equally catchy for a Russian-speaking reader.

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