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Not only foulmouthed words: suggested methods for slang translation

“Slang is a language that rolls up its sleeves, spits on its hands and goes to work.” The author of the quotation is the American poet Carl Sandburg; the quote itself was published in the *New York Times* on February 13, 1959¹. One may consider it as a simple yet descriptive way of defining slang – the language of the working class, a particular group of people who may have more in common than just their own variety of their mother tongue and means of expressing it among themselves. Still, such statements may unfortunately connote with negative aspects and feelings, such as poverty, vulgarity or animosity. Yet I believe that the world of slang can be truly fascinating from both the translational, as well as the sociopsychological perspective.

The subject area of my paper concerns the topic of slang, more precisely English slang terms and their possible adequate equivalents in the Polish language, either slang terms or non-slang countertypes carrying the same or similar meaning as the original term. Slang as an area of research within the translational field can be worth scrutinizing because, apart from carrying lingual and lexical significance, cultural and psychological importance can be nowadays applied to the notion of slang, as it is an inherent part of the modern society. In this paper I wish to cover several

¹ D. Crystal, H. Crystal, *Words on Words: Quotations about Language and Languages*, Penguin Books Ltd, Great Britain 2000, p. 210.

selected slang expressions from the translational viewpoint by presenting the target language outcomes with the use of slang translation techniques. These techniques, or methods as it may also be called, shall be presented along with some examples from various categories that may be difficult and problematic to translate. Slang terms can be quite commonly used by people, especially by students, and almost everyone can come across such terms in the media, in music and in various publications². Therefore in such way it may be easier to learn and understand their meaning and to be able to propose an equivalent in another language, especially one that is generally accepted in the target language. On the other hand, some slang terms are not that frequently used or appear only within a particular variety of the English language, for instance Australian English, or among a specific group of people, like prisoners, students or soldiers, and therefore it is much more challenging to think out the meaning of such terms and find an adequate counter-type in the target language. In the case of *categories*, managing numerous slang terms is easier by grouping them together according to their common traits (e.g. adjectives that describe people, their appearance, character and behaviour) or to things, concepts, activities to which various slang terms actually refer to (e.g. drugs, alcohol, work, etc.)³.

Before moving on to the translational aspects of slang it would be worth to explain what slang is exactly and what are its characteristics and purpose, along with the nature and perception of slang expressions and also a brief mention of the possible origins of slang.

Slang is mostly regarded as an informal part of spoken and written language⁴. One might say that the rule of slang is to avoid any rules – that is the rules of the given standard language. As slang is mostly spoken it does not have to follow strict grammatical rules and misspellings are frequently made on purpose. One of its main functions is to allow people identify with a certain group or to sound more original and unconventional. Therefore we can distinguish many types of slang according to specific groups that use specific slang terms. We may talk about school slang or teenage slang, criminal or street gang slang, working class slang, student slang, army slang, police slang, sport slang, Internet slang, homosexual slang and the

² C.C. Eble, *Slang and Sociability: In-group Language Among College Students*, The University of North Carolina Press, United States of America 1996, p. 88–95.

³ J. Green, *The Vulgar Tongue: Green's History of Slang*, Oxford University Press, United States of America 2015, p. 2.

⁴ O. Hargraves, *Slang Rules!: A Practical Guide for English Learners. (Practical Guides for English Learners)*, Merriam-Webster, United States of America 2008, p. a1.

list may go on. It is a way of expressing oneself and showing affiliation. One of the largest groups of slang users are those who are still undergoing their education: young people, teenagers and students who use slang in order to differentiate themselves from adults and teachers by manifesting a sense of independence and to sound more unique⁵. It helps them find their place within a group and be accepted by others⁶. A teenager using slang might sound 'cool' and present themselves at an advantage – that is, he or she will most likely be seen as someone who is up-to-date with popular terms, trends and topics and be widely accepted by their peers. Such teenagers show that they know their way around among people of the same or similar age. However, by looking at this particular purpose of slang one might assume that instead of sounding unique, a teenager uses slang expressions mainly in order to impress their peers and classmates and to be accepted by them and not labelled as 'uncool' or 'lame'. Overusing certain slang words and popularising them among more and more people may cause them to lose their initial uniqueness⁷. Eventually, such slang words may appear more commonly in the vocabulary of people who are no longer pupils or students. Also one must not forget that when a person finishes his/her education and graduates it does not mean that they will abandon the slang terms they tend to use. What is more, new slang terms are born because a newer and younger generation of students or pupils start their education⁸. A newer generation may be unfamiliar with or may reject some slang expressions that were used by their predecessors at the same school or another educational institution, while some expressions are preserved but their meaning has changed⁹. This may also be the case of the coming and going of subcultures and other social groups. Summing up, certain slang terms may over time become obsolete or undergo a change in their meaning.

The use of slang can also be perceived as a kind of rebellion and a way of expressing one's feelings, especially those that are either negative or passionate. I mentioned the tendency of pupils to differentiate themselves from adults and teachers, but also other individuals or groups may rebel by using slang in order to separate or vary from the rest of the society and show their disregard to others and to standard principles and rules. In this

⁵ Y. Fan, Y. Zhou, *A Sociolinguistic Study of American Slang*, "Theory and Practice in Language Studies" 2013, vol. 3, p. 2211.

⁶ J. Coleman, *The Life of Slang*, Oxford University Press Inc., New York 2012, p. 3.

⁷ J. Légauhaité, *Understanding Slang in Translation*, "Filologija" 2010, vol. 15, p. 92.

⁸ J. Coleman, *The Life of Slang*, p. 3–6.

⁹ C.C. Eble, *Slang and Sociability: In-group Language Among College Students*, p. 13–16.

case one may discern psychological and sociological aspects of slang use. At this point the notion of identity is worth mentioning. At present one may choose their own identity; people have at their disposal a wide range of patterns of behaviour and values which are provided by the society itself, which is constantly evolving, and by the development of technology. In the past of certain societies, the selection of different identities was more difficult due to limited stimuli¹⁰ – identity, to a certain point of time, was “passed on” from one generation to another due to a limited source of information. As with identity, several types were proposed by Tomasz Szkudlarek and Zbyszek Melosik¹¹. Slang is a form of defining identity, in a way similar to the aforementioned patterns of behaviour and values, as well as fashion all of which can be transitory and constantly changing. One of these identities¹² is the so-called “razor identity”, which pays attention to essentialism and differences, while separating itself from other identities¹³. The representatives of this kind of identity can be characterised by their behaviour pattern and the choice of both attire and language – in the case of the latter, the choice to use slang in order to differentiate themselves from other social groups. It may be treated as an “us against them” model of behaviour which may be perceived as rebellious.

It has to be mentioned that probably the largest group of slang terms are words or phrases that are considered to be vulgar, pejorative and offensive. In such cases slang can be used to express anger, contempt, prejudice, disapproval and a different point of view of the slang user that may or may not be approved by the majority. These may be the reasons why some people may connote slang with something that is bad, juvenile, offensive and immature. In my opinion this is not far from the truth because many slang words are indeed vulgar and pejorative, however not all of them should be lumped together. Slang also provides a possibility for language users to invent new words or apply existing words to different meanings. I have noticed that many slang words are very inventive (like *gobbledygook* which stands for ‘nonsense’ and ‘unintelligible language’), may sound funny (like *jam sandwich* which stands for ‘police car’) and intriguing (like *AC/DC* as ‘bisexual’), some may have interesting origins (*gung-ho*, which

¹⁰ T. Miczka, *O zmianie zachowań komunikacyjnych. Konsumenci w nowych sytuacjach audiowizualnych*, Księgarnia św. Jacka, Katowice 2002, p. 151–153.

¹¹ T. Miczka, *O zmianie zachowań komunikacyjnych...*, p. 168.

¹² The other identities proposed by the authors are: “transparent global identity” (*przezroczysta tożsamość globalna*), “each global identity” (*tożsamość globalna każda*), “supermarket identity” (*supermarket*) and “pro-American identity” (*tożsamość proamerykańska*) (Miczka 2002, 168–170).

¹³ T. Miczka, *O zmianie zachowań komunikacyjnych...*, p. 170.

stands for 'enthusiastic', originally was an item of army slang derived from Chinese) or are descriptive (like *gatecrasher* which stands for 'an unwanted guest')¹⁴. Due to its offensive and aggressive side, slang may be associated with the lower and working class, albeit it may be used by members of all classes, as it is one's choice to use slang in their everyday speech.

Slang probably originated as the language of criminals and the demimonde which served as a secret language so that criminals could communicate without the risk of drawing attention of the police or unwanted listeners¹⁵. In this way their conversations were encoded and only the selected ones knew the true meaning behind such slang terms and could decipher their hidden message. Of course no crime slang terms could last forever as sooner or later the police would finally work out or discover their true meanings – presumably by infiltration or by informants – and therefore newer slang terms were born to substitute the old ones. Nowadays slang is still popular among criminals, especially by street gangs who invent slang terms in order to differentiate themselves from others. The slang of street gangs might even reach the point where it is incorporated by other groups and people that have nothing to do with crime. Probably the most common slang invented by gangsters and used widely by noncriminal civilians is the street talk of African-American street gangs, several examples are: *yo* (a greeting), *homie* (a friend), *crib* (one's living place), *hood* (neighbourhood)¹⁶, or *banging* (shooting) or *to bang* (which is *to shot*). Possibly such terms were first incorporated by rappers who were well-versed with such environments and later the particular slang expressions were adopted by a wider audience of different race, nationality and social status¹⁷.

The different functions of slang and the broad range of slang terms referring to a staggering number of various things and concepts may cause difficulties while translating slang terms from one language to another. Obviously, not all expressions will be problematic to translate, as some slang words are more commonly used than others and, as long as English slang is concerned, their meaning is generally known by both native and non-native language users. Such expressions can also be encountered in television, music, video or computer games, books, magazines – one may simply say in any type of media. If the target language user is unfamiliar with

¹⁴ Zespół redakcyjny Lingea Sp. z o. o., *Wazzup? Słownik slangu i potocznej angielszczyzny*, Lingea Sp. z o. o., Kraków 2012, p. 7, 65, 68, 71, 83.

¹⁵ J. Green, *The Vulgar Tongue: Green's History of Slang*, p. 3, 5–7.

¹⁶ Zespół redakcyjny Lingea Sp. z o. o., *Wazzup? Słownik slangu i potocznej angielszczyzny*, p. 43, 78, 197.

¹⁷ C.C. Eble, *Slang and Sociability: In-group Language Among College Students*, p. 90–91.

any meaning behind certain slang words then they have at their disposal a wide range of various slang dictionaries (either general dictionaries, like British English slang dictionaries, or more thematic ones, like teenage slang dictionaries). Slang words which are less known, rarely used or are used by a limited group may pose more difficulties while translating if the translator does not have access to reliable sources. The difficulty of translating slang depends on the frequency of its use¹⁸. Ignorance is one of the main causes of errors in translations and it would be advisable for translators to carry out research whenever they encounter problematic and difficult slang phrases or wording. The number of slang expressions is vast and it is clear that no one is able to be familiar with all; fortunately there is a wide range of various slang dictionaries that translators can use to broaden their knowledge. These sources may significantly aid the translator, so that he or she can overcome any language obstacle in order to deliver a coherent and proper translation.

While studying the translation of English slang into Polish I have noticed that translators have the tendency to translate slang terms by using several different techniques. By basing on these observations and being familiar with the idiom translation techniques proposed by Hejwowski, I have decided to describe these techniques (or methods) of translating slang for which the translators opted. For this purpose I have also prepared a specific nomenclature. The English slang expressions and their Polish counterparts that are discussed further on in this paper can be found in several biographies of well-known rock and metal bands. For the research I have chosen three books by a British music journalist Mick Wall and their translations in Polish: *When Giants Walked on Earth: A Biography of Led Zeppelin* (*Biografia Led Zeppelin. Kiedy giganci chodzili po Ziemi*, translated by M. Kapuściarz), *Black Sabbath. Symptom of the Universe* (*Black Sabbath. U piekielnych bram*, translated by L. Haliński) and *AC/DC. Hell Ain't a Bad Place To Be* (*AC/DC Diabelski Młyn*, translated by J. Rybski). Such nonfictional publications can be abundant with slang terminology – the reason behind this might be the fact that most members of rock and metal bands originate from the working or lower class, at least those musical groups mentioned in the publications selected for this paper. These slang translation techniques are represented by the following:

Slang to slang translation (S-S) – the translation of the original source language slang term is a slang equivalent of the original term in the target language. This is the best option to choose while translating slang;

¹⁸ O. Hargraves, *Slang Rules!: A Practical Guide for English Learners...*, p. a1.

Slang to non-slang translation with an expression that gives the meaning of the slang expression (S-SM) – the translation of the original source language slang term is no longer a slang term in the target language although it carries the same meaning as the original slang term. This option is acceptable but not as perfect as the S-S method;

Slang to non-slang translation with an expression that fails to give the meaning of the slang expression (S-NS) – the translation of the original source language slang term in the target language is neither a slang term nor a word or expression that carries the meaning of the original slang term. This method ought to be avoided while translating slang;

Omission of slang or its meaning in the translation (S-O) – an equivalent of the original source language slang term is absent in the target language text.

These methods are illustrated with selected examples which I have encountered during my study. All these examples of slang translation are accompanied with my commentary and observations. These are mostly dominated by S-NS examples. While preparing such techniques I have been inspired by the work of scholar Krzysztof Hejwowski, who in his *Kognitywno-komunikacyjna teoria przekładu* presented his ideas for translation techniques while translating idioms¹⁹. The idea of idiom translation techniques was further expanded in *Iluzja przekładu*, also by Hejwowski²⁰.

At this point it is worth mentioning other methods for translating slang. Jolanta Lėgaudaitė in her article *Understanding Slang in Translation* mentioned three possible slang translation methods and illustrated them with the use of English-Lithuanian translations: *softening*, *stylistic compensation* and *direct transfers*²¹. The first method, *softening*, is oriented towards the target language speakers' perception of the translated text. The author states that "the language of the TT should be formulated in such a way that it would sound natural for the reader"²². The second method is *stylistic compensation*. This one is very similar to the aforementioned S-SM method: in this case the translator provides words or phrases similar to the source text's slang expressions. The final method is *direct translation* (also known as *literal translation*). The rule behind this method is to straightforwardly translate the words in the source text into the target text while maintaining the proper grammar of the target text²³. The author

¹⁹ K. Hejwowski, *Kognitywno-komunikacyjna teoria przekładu*, Warszawa 2006, p. 109.

²⁰ K. Hejwowski, *Iluzja przekładu*, Katowice 2016, p. 253.

²¹ J. Lėgaudaitė, *Understanding Slang in Translation*, p. 93–96.

²² J. Lėgaudaitė, *Understanding Slang in Translation*, p. 94.

²³ J. Lėgaudaitė, *Understanding Slang in Translation*, p. 95.

states that “the use of this method of translation is becoming more widely used in the case of *slang* translation²⁴.”

The following are the selected examples of slang terms and their equivalents (in bold):

1) Antsy – this word is an adjective and it means ‘in an anxious or nervous state’²⁵.

Source text sentence: “With Plant still **antsy** about the thought of embarking on any long tours – refusing point-blank to even contemplate returning to America – Grant bided his time before making any definite plans²⁶.”

Target text sentence: „Plant nadal był **przeciwny** jakiegokolwiek długiej trasie promującej nowy krążek – odrzucając z góry jakiegokolwiek myśli o powrocie do Stanów, Grant postanowił poczekać na lepszy moment z podjęciem decyzji.²⁷”

Observation: This example is a case of overinterpretation. At this stage of life Robert Plant, the vocalist of Led Zeppelin, had a very hard time as he had lost his son and survived a car crash, therefore he was unsure and hesitant of going on another tour. On the other hand, while bearing these events in mind, the Polish translation would make sense, as Plant may have been against another tour in such state. But the slang term has not been preserved and has been changed into a different word with a different meaning. Therefore I consider it to be an example of a S-NS translation.

Possible alternative(s): Slang terms of the target language that carry a similar meaning (*he was antsy*) are for instance *spinał się*²⁸, *peniał się*²⁹, *cykał się*³⁰, *dygał się/był zdygany*³¹, or *spiał jana*³².

2) Gatecrasher – this one is a noun and describes ‘a person who attends a party or other social event without receiving an invitation from the host or without a valid ticket’³³.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 95.

²⁵ T. Thorne, *Dictionary of Contemporary Slang*, A & C Black Publishers Ltd, London 2007, p. 9.

²⁶ M. Wall, *When Giants Walked on Earth: A Biography of Led Zeppelin*, Orion Books Ltd, London 2009, p. 417–418.

²⁷ M. Wall, *Biografia Led Zeppelin. Kiedy giganci chodzili po Ziemi*, Poznań 2014, p. 371.

²⁸ Miejski.pl, a Polish online dictionary of slang and colloquial speech, <https://www.miejski.pl/slowo-spina> [accessed: February 2018].

²⁹ <https://www.miejski.pl/slowo-spenia%C4%87> [accessed: February 2018].

³⁰ A. Tkaczyk, *Mini leksykon slangu dla nastolatków*, Wydawnictwo ASTRUM Sp. z o.o., Wrocław 2016, p. 11.

³¹ Ibid., p. 11.

³² <https://www.miejski.pl/slowo-spina%C4%87+jana> [accessed: February 2018].

³³ Wiktionary, the free dictionary, <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/gatecrasher> [accessed: February 2018].

Source texts sentences:

a) “For if 1969 was the year the party turned nasty, Zeppelin were very much the drunken **gatecrashers**³⁴” and;

b) “As the razzed-up Eighties arrived like a drunken **gatecrasher** at the now winding-down party that was once the Seventies, it was no longer the figure of the svelte golden god, standing astride the mike, long mane of hair framing a coquettish pout, that embodied the face of rock³⁵.”

Target texts sentences:

a) „Jeżeli w 1969 roku był koniec imprezy, Zeppelin wydawali się **tymi, którzy chcą z niej wyjść ostatni**³⁶” and;

b) „Kiedy żywiołowe lata osiemdziesiąte jak **nieproszony gość** na bani przybyły na dogorywającą imprezę, którą była kiedyś dekada lat siedemdziesiątych, już nie smukły złoty bóg stojący przy mikrofonie z długą grzywą włosów okalającą kokieteryjnie wydęte usta był ucieleśnieniem muzyki rockowej³⁷.”

Observation: In the case of sentence **a)** the translator failed not only to provide an equivalent for the slang term but also to maintain the correct meaning of the sentence, that is why I labelled it as S-NS. The translation suggests that Led Zeppelin were willing to be the last who leave the party, whereas in the original sentence it is implied that they joined the “party” which was the year 1969, when many popular rock bands flourished. The original author may have wanted to imply that no one wanted Led Zeppelin around but they did it their way and joined the music scene after all. Meanwhile in sentence **b)**, the translator simply opted for providing a non-slang equivalent which carries the meaning, therefore S-SM. It is also worth mentioning that the translator provided a slang expression which is not present in the original text: *na bani*, which refers to the state of being intoxicated by alcohol.

Possible alternative(s): In Polish one may say *wbić na krzywy ryj*³⁸, which refers to arriving at a place without prior invitation.

3) Ball (somebody) – this slang term is a verb and it means ‘to copulate with another person’³⁹.

³⁴ M. Wall, *When Giants Walked on Earth: A Biography of Led Zeppelin*, p. 173.

³⁵ M. Wall, *AC/DC. Hell Ain't a Bad Place To Be*, Orion Books Ltd, London 2013, p. 340.

³⁶ M. Wall, *Biografia Led Zeppelin...*, p. 159.

³⁷ M. Wall, *AC/DC Diabelski Młyn*, In Rock, Czerwonak 2013, p. 450.

³⁸ <https://www.miejski.pl/slowo-Na+krzywy+ryj> [access: February 2018].

³⁹ T. Thorne, *Dictionary of Contemporary Slang*, p. 22.

Source text sentence: “*It’s like, the chicks would walk up to you and go, I wanna ball you and I’d think, What the fuck does that mean*⁴⁰?”

Target text sentence: „*Panienki podchodziły do nas i mówiły: „Chcę się z tobą pokulać”*. *Myslałem sobie wtedy: „Co to, kurwa, znaczy?”*⁴¹.”

Observation: This is an example of what may be regarded as an incorrect slang translation. For some reason, instead of using any of the many Polish slang terms for having sex, the translator decided to invent their own term. On one hand we have a non-existing word but on the other hand this newly invented word is similar to the original term: both expressions refer to a round shape. Additionally, I see no obstacles for *pokulać* to become a new Polish slang term. Theoretically it could be possible to spread this new word around the Internet while maintaining its sexual connotation – this way a new slang word would be born. It is also worth mentioning that *to ball somebody* is an item of American English, as the quote which has been provided in the source text sentence belongs to Ozzy Osbourne who is British. One can observe that a British person had no clue what this slang expression meant. Thus, a Polish person may not necessarily understand the meaning of both *to ball somebody* or *pokulać*, not only in the context of this very sentence. To sum up, I see this as a S-NS translation but if somehow *pokulać* becomes widely accepted as a slang term for having a sexual intercourse, then I would consider it to be a S-S translation.

Possible alternative(s): Many slang terms could have been chosen, like *posuwać*⁴², *bzykać*⁴³, *ciupciać*⁴⁴, *pukać*⁴⁵. The list could be easily expanded with more expressions⁴⁶. Another possibility is the term *zabalować*. The pronunciation of the Polish word may connote with the word *ball*. Moreover, it refers to the act of spending time in a fun and pleasant way – this meaning can be subsumed under a sexual theme.

4) Knackered – this slang term is an adjective and it has two meanings. It may stand for either ‘broken’ and ‘destroyed’ or ‘tired’ and ‘exhausted’⁴⁷.

Source text sentence: “*And you were still out most nights, singing or watching other singers, turning up for work the next day knackered, the adding machine figures swimming before your poor red eyes*⁴⁸.”

⁴⁰ M. Wall, *Black Sabbath. Symptom of the Universe*, Orion Books Ltd, London 2014, p. 76.

⁴¹ M. Wall, *Black Sabbath. U piekielnych bram*, In Rock, Czerwonak 2014, p.88.

⁴² Zespół redakcyjny Lingea Sp. z o. o., *Wazzup? Słownik slangu i potocznej angielszczyzny*, p. 138.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁴⁴ <https://www.miejski.pl/slowo-Ciupcia%C4%87> [accessed: February 2018].

⁴⁵ <https://www.miejski.pl/slowo-Puka%C4%87> [accessed: February 2018].

⁴⁶ A. Strzeszewska, D. Beynon, *Słownik slangu angielskiego*, Toruń 2013, p. 195, 197–198, 200, 202, 205–206.

⁴⁷ T. Thorne, *Dictionary of Contemporary Slang*, p. 109, 257.

⁴⁸ M. Wall, *When Giants Walked on Earth: A Biography of Led Zeppelin*, p. 111.

Target text sentence: „Na drugi dzień wracałeś do pracy **skacowany**, a rzędy cyfr z kalkulatora przelatowały ci przed czerwonymi ze zmęczenia oczami⁴⁹.”

Observation: An example of either misinterpretation or overinterpretation which I have labelled as a S-NS translation. From what we know from the original sentence, John Bonham, the former drummer of Led Zeppelin, used to spend the night participating in singing or watching others sing and having fun: in consequence he used to turn up to work exhausted. Throughout the book it has been stated that Bonham was addicted to alcohol, therefore the translator probably thought that it would be suitable to change it into *skacowany* which means to be hangover. The translator assumed that Bonham used to drink during his nights out. Unfortunately, an incorrect equivalent for the original slang term has been provided.

Possible alternative(s): Possible equivalents for knackered are *wyrąbany* or *przytyrany*.

5) **Zonk out** – this term is a verb and it means ‘to pass out because of drug and/or alcohol consumption’⁵⁰.

Source texts sentences:

a) “It was one thing for Bill **to be zonked out** all the time on cider, dope and cocaine; quite another for him to raise any objections to the more ‘sophisticated’ music, as Tony saw it, that presented itself on the new album⁵¹” and;

b) “There were other girls then hanging around Lansdowne Road that would top up their purses by working shifts in massage parlours, and others that liked to **zonk out** on smack⁵².”

Target texts sentences:

a) „Dopóki **był ciągle pod wpływem** cydru, trawy i koki, nie było jeszcze tak źle⁵³” and;

b) „Wokół domu przy Lansdowne Road kręciły się dziewczyny, które regularnie uzupełniały zawartość plastikowych torebek, pracując na zmianę w salonach masażu, i takie, które po prostu lubiły **odjechać** po herze⁵⁴.”

Observation: In the case of example a) there is a mistake here because for me *zonk out* means that Bill Ward, the former drummer of Black Sabbath, was passed out because of the overconsumption of alcohol while

⁴⁹ M. Wall, *Biografia Led Zeppelin...*, p. 107.

⁵⁰ T. Thorne, *Dictionary of Contemporary Slang*, p. 493.

⁵¹ M. Wall, *Black Sabbath. Symptom of the Universe*, p. 98.

⁵² M. Wall, *AC/DC. Hell Ain't a Bad Place To Be*, p. 138.

⁵³ M. Wall, *Black Sabbath. U piekielnych bram*, p. 111.

⁵⁴ M. Wall, *AC/DC Diabelski Młyn*, p. 192.

the Polish equivalent *był [...] pod wpływem* means *was under the influence* therefore it does not necessarily mean that he was actually passed out and/or unconscious at that particular moment. I have labelled this as an S-NS translation. In the case of the second source text sentence, I consider it to be a S-S translation. In the Polish language, *odjechać* is a slang expression for either the feeling of euphoria after drug consumption or for taking too much drugs and, as a result, losing consciousness.

Possible alternative(s): In the case of sentence **a**), the translator could have used the same equivalent as in sentence **b**), which is *odjechać*. An alternate form is *odlecieć* (it connotes with flying)⁵⁵.

6) Poke, root, toke and toot – all these slang terms refer to drug usage and appeared in a single sentence. Both ‘poke’ and ‘toke’ are verbs and refer to smoking marihuana⁵⁶. ‘Root’ stands for ‘marihuana’ and is a noun⁵⁷, while ‘toot’ can be either a noun (‘cocaine’) or a verb (‘to inhale cocaine’ or ‘to smoke marihuana’)⁵⁸. The author made all these expressions appear to be nouns in the source text sentence.

Source text sentence: “Geezer, who had sworn off heavy drugs after his emotional collapse the year before, still liked to drink, still liked a **toke** and a **toot** and a **poke** and a **root** when the fancy took him, but now kept himself to himself; still unsure of what to make of the all-new Sabbath that Tony had forged ahead and built without him, for now he was simply along for the ride, wondering what the hell would happen next⁵⁹.”

Target text sentence: „Geezer wprawdzie odstawił cięższe narkotyki po kryzysie, jaki przeszedł w poprzednim roku, lecz ciągle lubił sobie wypić, **zajarać** i pobzykać⁶⁰.”

Observation: The translator decided that instead of finding proper Polish slang terms for each of these expressions they would simply bring *poke*, *root*, *toke* and *toot* into a single word which is *zajarać* and it means *to smoke*. I am not satisfied with this option because I believe that Mick Wall, the author of the biography, wanted to emphasize Geezer Butlers’ (original Black Sabbath bassist) marihuana addiction. Other than that, in the Polish language *zajarać* may also refer to smoking cigarettes but on the other hand the narcotic connotation is more common. This single equivalent is also

⁵⁵ A. Strzeszewska, D. Beynon, *Słownik slangu angielskiego*, p. 92-93, 95, 97, 101.

⁵⁶ R. A. Spears, *NTC’s Dictionary of American Slang and Colloquial Expressions*, NTC Publishing Group, United States of America 2000, p. 317, 436.

⁵⁷ T. Thorne, *Dictionary of Contemporary Slang*, p. 368.

⁵⁸ An online dictionary of English slang and colloquialisms used in the United Kingdom, <http://www.peevish.co.uk/slang/t.htm> [accessed: February 2018].

⁵⁹ M. Wall, *Black Sabbath. Symptom of the Universe*, p. 185.

⁶⁰ M. Wall, *Black Sabbath. U piekielnych bram*, p. 202.

problematic in terms of applying a slang translation method to it; I see it as a combination of both S-O and S-S may be regarded as mutually exclusive.

Possible alternative(s): Possible equivalents are *trawka* (for *root*, therefore the vegetative connotation is preserved)⁶¹; *jaranko*⁶², *jaranie*⁶³, *bakanie*⁶⁴, *buchanie*⁶⁵, or *kopcenie* (for *poke*, *toke* and *toot*)⁶⁶.

7) Trainspotter – a noun slang term which stands for ‘a person obsessed with a hobby or trivia’⁶⁷.

Source text sentence: “As anal as any **trainspotter**, you would file, catalogue and rate your ever-growing collection of treasures⁶⁸.”

Target text sentence: „Zgrabnie katalogowałeś, oceniałeś swoją rosnącą kolekcję skarbów⁶⁹.”

Observation: This one is an example of S-O which is slang omission (the word *anal* was also omitted). *Trainspotter* is a quite interesting slang term; it originally referred to hobbyists and enthusiasts of cataloguing train numbers and nowadays its meaning extended to all kinds of hobbies or trivia obsessions⁷⁰. The meaning of the term is even depicted in the source text sentence. The target text sentence also maintains this particular issue of collecting but the term for such a person is missing. However one cannot blame the translator for the Polish language not having a similar slang term, although the translator could have used words such as *zbieracz*, *kolekcjoner* or *hobbysta*. These terms however do have some flaws, because they either are not slang terms nor do not precisely match the original expression, as they can be used to refer to simple and normal collectors and gatherers (not necessarily obsessed).

Possible alternative(s): In this case one could use *człowiek/gość/koleś z bzikiem*⁷¹/*zajawka*⁷²/*zajafka*⁷³. A descriptive translation (like *obserwator*

⁶¹ A. Strzeszewska, D. Beynon, *Słownik slangu angielskiego*, p. 96, 98–99, 101.

⁶² <https://www.miejski.pl/slowo-Jaranie> [accessed: February 2018].

⁶³ *Ibid.*, [accessed: February 2018].

⁶⁴ A. Tkaczyk, *Mini leksykon slangu dla nastolatków*, p. 57.

⁶⁵ <https://www.miejski.pl/slowo-Bucha%C4%87> [accessed: February 2018].

⁶⁶ Narkoslang.pl, an online drug dictionary, http://www.narkoslang.pl/slowniczek_wyrazen.html [accessed: February 2018].

⁶⁷ Dictionary.com, an online source for English definitions, as well as slang phrases, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/trainspotter?s=ts> [accessed: February 2018].

⁶⁸ M. Wall, *When Giants Walked on Earth: A Biography of Led Zeppelin*, p. 32.

⁶⁹ M. Wall, *Biografia Led Zeppelin...*, p. 38.

⁷⁰ The word was popularized by a 1993 novel written by Irvine Welsh, titled *Trainspotting*. In 1996 a film based on the novel was directed by Danny Boyle and it bears the same title as the book.

⁷¹ <https://www.miejski.pl/slowo-bzik> [accessed: February 2018].

⁷² <https://www.miejski.pl/slowo-Zajawka> [accessed: February 2018].

⁷³ Deliberate misspelling of *zajawka*.

pociągów) is not recommended as it would be bizarre and confusing. However, due to the popularity of *Trainspotting* (both the novel and the film adaptation), the term might become a borrowing in the Polish language.

8) Drop a bollock – an intransitive and idiomatic slang expression which is considered as vulgar. It means ‘to make a mistake’⁷⁴.

Source text sentence: “I really did think, *I’ve fucking **dropped a right bollock** here*⁷⁵!”

Target text sentence: „Myślałem sobie: „*Może, kurwa, **robię błąd***”⁷⁶.”

Observation: This term is a bit vulgar in the source text and the translation represents the S-SM method. Here the translator used the phrase *robię błąd* which in English is *I’m making a mistake*; the meaning is suitable to the source text term, although it is not a slang. It also lacks its vulgarity but the sentence itself is quite vulgar, with the use of a swear word, thus making it sound informal. Considering the fact that a slang counterpart in the Polish language probably does not exist, in my opinion the translator provided an acceptable translation.

Possible alternative(s): A vulgar slang term for making a mistake is *zjechać* (the past tense is *zjechałem*)⁷⁷.

9) Jook-joint – a noun slang term which refers to a place where one can eat and drink while listening to music from a jukebox (usually blues music), as well as participate in gambling activities or dance to the music⁷⁸. Its alternate forms are ‘juke joint’ or simply one word without the hyphen.

Source text sentence: “Such fanciful ideas were lent unsettling credence by the fact that so many early blues songs were built on notions of eternal damnation begun here on Earth, the outsider following his lonely doom-laden path, itself a perversion of the real roots of the music, which lay in preaching, the church, gospel and the praise of God, but which the blues now delivered unto the **jook-joints**, roadhouses and dollar-a-go brothels populated by gun-toting, fatherless men and evil, duplicitous women to whom it was a foregone conclusion po’ boy would surely lose his soul⁷⁹.”

Target text sentence: „Te dziwaczne pomysły były podparte przekonaniem, że tak wiele wczesnych piosenek bluesowych zbudowanych było na wyobrażeniu wiecznego potępienia egzystencji ziemskiej, outsiderów

⁷⁴ T. Thorne, *Dictionary of Contemporary Slang*, p. 142.

⁷⁵ M. Wall, *Black Sabbath. Symptom of the Universe*, p. 37.

⁷⁶ M. Wall, *Black Sabbath. U piekielnych bram*, p. 48.

⁷⁷ <https://www.miejski.pl/slowo-Zjecha%C4%87> [accessed: February 2018].

⁷⁸ Wiktionary, the free dictionary, https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/juke_joint#English [accessed: February 2018].

⁷⁹ M. Wall, *When Giants Walked on Earth: A Biography of Led Zeppelin*, p. 220.

podążających swoją samotną drogą, będących wypaczeniem prawdziwych korzeni muzyki – które przecież tkwiły w kościele, gospel śpiewanym ku chwale Bożej, a które blues sprowadził do **spelun** i tanich burdela gdzie bywalcami byli wywijający bronią zdeprawowani bezdzietni mężczyźni, a mieszkankami złe, zepsute kobiety, które niechybnie skradły ich dusze⁸⁰.”

Observation: This is an example of a S-S translation, the term is a combination of two words: *Jukebox*, a machine that plays music after inserting a coin, and *joint*, which is also a slang term for a public place like a club, bar, nightclub or restaurant that is either dirty and cheap or not necessary in a bad condition. In this case, the translator provided a Polish slang term which is very similar to the original (because it does refer to a place where one can drink and eat), although it does not imply that it plays music from a jukebox or from any other device at all. It is very likely that there are no wordings for these public places with jukeboxes in the Polish language, even though such places do exist in Poland. To sum up, the translator used the most similar in meaning slang word there is.

10) Nick – the last slang expression is a verb term for stealing⁸¹. This term appeared in all three source books during my study.

Source texts sentences:

a) “Especially when you’d bring him 200 Benson & Hedges or a bottle of whisky you **nicked** from the shop⁸²”;

b) “We used to smoke dope and get pissed all the time, **nick** a fucking case of beer off the back of a truck⁸³” and;

c) “First time I ever saw Bon Scott was on a talk show on Australian television, said Angus, something to do with some pop bloke **nicking** one of his songs, and the interviewer was being totally condescending thinking he was this stupid rock and roller⁸⁴.”

Target texts sentence:

a) „Szczególnie kiedy przynosiłeś karton fajek Benson & Hedges albo butelkę whisky, którą **zwędziliłeś** ze sklepu⁸⁵”;

b) „Zdarzało się nam **ukraść** skrzynkę piwa z tej czy innej ciężarówki⁸⁶” and;

⁸⁰ M. Wall, *Biografia Led Zeppelin...*, p. 199–200.

⁸¹ T. Thorne, *Dictionary of Contemporary Slang*, p. 308.

⁸² M. Wall, *When Giants Walked on Earth: A Biography of Led Zeppelin*, p. 141.

⁸³ M. Wall, *Black Sabbath. Symptom of the Universe*, p. 44.

⁸⁴ M. Wall, *AC/DC. Hell Ain't a Bad Place To Be*, p. 83.

⁸⁵ M. Wall, *Biografia Led Zeppelin...*, p. 132.

⁸⁶ M. Wall, *Black Sabbath. U piekielnych bram*, p. 55.

c) „Chodziło o coś takiego, że jakiś popowy koleś **zajumał** jedną z jego piosenek, przy czym prowadzący traktował go bardzo protekcjonalnie, bo myślał, że Bon jest tępy rockandrollowcem⁸⁷.”

Observation: The same slang term in all three source texts and three different possibilities for translating the word. In two cases we have S-S translations, particularly in sentence a) and c), where the translators opted for slang equivalents in the Polish language. These are, in order, *zwędzileś* and *zajumał*, apparently both are non-vulgar. In the case of sentence b), the equivalent falls into the S-SM category. Here the translator used a regular, common and non-slang word for stealing which is *ukraść*. To sum up, all equivalents are correct but I would opt for the slang counterparts, as there are numerous slang words in Polish that refer to stealing and theft⁸⁸.

Possible alternative(s): In the case of sentence b) the translator could have translated slang into slang, given that there are many words to choose from: *zajumać*, *buchnąć*⁸⁹, *skroić*⁹⁰, or *zwędzić* are instances of non-vulgar equivalents for *nicking* and *to nick*.

The terms discussed above were selected slang terms which I encountered during my study; I have come across many interesting slang terms that may be difficult to translate. What I have concluded while analysing slang is that I see two possibilities that a translator may take into account while translating slang expressions. The first and the most recommended one is the S-S method, as it conveys the source text phrase in the target text: it is much closer to the original. The second best option is to apply the S-SM method in cases when there is no existing slang equivalent in the target language. Even though the translator does not provide the target text reader with a slang equivalent, they do preserve the original meaning behind the source text slang expressions. The slang is lost but the meaning is still present in the target text sentence, which I consider to be an important aspect while delivering a translation. As we saw with the case of *trainspotter*, it is impossible to find a perfect slang term in the Polish language (until the day someone invents and spreads around such a term). Finally, the S-O and S-NS methods should be avoided while translating as they result in translation loss or an incorrect equivalent being used.

To conclude, slang might be both important and problematic while translating. In a hypothetical case, when a translator properly understands the meaning of the slang present in the source text and conveys the

⁸⁷ M. Wall, *AC/DC Diabelski Młyn*, p. 121.

⁸⁸ A. Tkaczyk, *Mini leksykon slangu dla nastolatków*, p. 75, 81.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 75, 81.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 75, 81.

meaning during the translation process, but by presenting it in a non-slang version can it then be regarded as incorrect? Judging by what I stated about the S-SM method being second best, the translators' action may be justified. As far as slang translation is concerned, I believe that a cognitive approach to its translation is advisable. The reason behind this is that slang may be regarded as a linguistic phenomenon – it requires the cognition of the background of a given slang term in order to fully understand its meaning and functioning within a certain group of people. If the translator is working on a novel translation in which slang expressions occur rarely then it may not be such a big loss if the S-SM method is applied. However, assuming that there is a hypothetical situation in which the translator is translating a novel about the trials and tribulations of teenagers or about the life of street gangs, the authors of such books would probably use slang words to help the readers dive into the worlds that they read about and imagine the action, events, characters and the specific lifestyle. Readers should be given the possibility to feel and experience the environment from a safe perspective and to help them believe that during this process they identify with the characters. Moreover, readers should be given the possibility to acknowledge new words and phrases and learn how language may vary, in terms of both formal and informal language. I believe it is obligatory for translators to preserve that feeling and the opportunity of acquiring new vocabulary by providing slang equivalents in the target text to be as close to the original as possible. Following a certain method or technique while translating problematic words is recommended – I find Hejwowski's conception of the idiom translation methods valuable⁹¹, as it can serve as a perfect proving ground for establishing methods which may aid translators at their work. One should bear in mind that slang is not only an informal and colloquial style of both speech and writing; it is also a product of a given society and can be regarded as an instance of sociolect⁹². Slang may reflect one's personality, social status, way of living or personal beliefs – for these very reasons the choice of slang usage by either a certain individual or group may be justified.

⁹¹ K. Hejwowski, *Iluzja przekładu*, p. 246–274.

⁹² Y. Fan, Y. Zhou, *A Sociolinguistic Study of American Slang*, p. 2213.

Maciej Niemiec

Not Only Foulmouthed Words: Suggested Methods for Slang Translation

Slang is an informal variation of language and is usually limited to a specific group of people. The instability and evanescence of slang reflects the character of the groups that use it, especially those groups which composition undergoes rapid changes, as in the case of school youth. As a consequence, some expressions gain new meanings, adequate to current trends, while others are forgotten. Moreover, slang is more than just words: it can be used by people as a particularly sensitive tool to express their feelings or ideas. It is closely related to the more or less conscious construction of group identity in opposition to mainstream culture; being a manifestation of difference, it also creates a sense of belonging. Due to the complexity of the language layer and its cultural background, slang can pose problems when translating it from the source language to the target language in such a way that it retains its original meaning. In my article, I proposed methods of translating slang based on cognitive approach and presented them with the use of examples. These examples are various slang terms that have appeared in selected publications - these expressions were analyzed from a translational point of view and in terms of their actual meaning.

Keywords: slang, translation methods, informal language, identity

Słowa kluczowe: slang, metody tłumaczenia, język nieformalny, tożsamość