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Verbal-Visual Punning in Translational Perspective

Aims and preliminaries

The aim of the present contribution is to discuss a specific phenomenon at the interface of intersemioticity and translation. Intersemiotic punning occurs when a relation of equivoque obtains not between two meanings encoded in the same semiotic layer, the verbal one, but between two different layers, e.g. verbal text and image. Such puns have been present in cultures since antiquity: Egyptian hieratic texts could flaunt their pictorial qualities to offer "an alternative visual reading" (Brotherston: 211–212). Intersemiotic puns, as heterogeneous complexes, are an object of enquiry of more than one discipline, as will be manifest in the way the discussion below is structured, with some examples pertaining to textual (literary) domain and some to visual arts. Translation studies, itself an interdiscipline, seems an ideal platform for examining the phenomenon.

The aim of the paper is to exemplify and analyse in translational perspective verbal-visual equivoques (the material is restricted to puns involving text and image). I intend to diagnose translational implications of the presented examples, to indicate the level of translatability and possible solutions to the tasks. It will be shown that intersemiotic puns – grouped according to the semiotic composition and the priority of the respective layers within it – occur in a surprising variety of media, and a tentative algorithm for translation options will be formulated.

Linguistic punning has been abundantly written about by translation scholars and practitioners (Delabastita; Kaindl; Ginter; Ланчиков, to cite just a few examples). The reflection on the topic made possible an algorithmisation of procedures in the Russian translation theory. Notably, Viktor Vinogradov identified the so-called stimulant and resultant in respective components and their relation as the mechanism behind a pun, the understanding of which makes possible a conscious, rather than intuitive, search for an equivalent mechanism in the target language (Виноградов: 203). Implications of the theory have found their way to translation handbooks (cf. Калинина: 130–134).

Verbal-visual puns have not been, to the best of my knowledge, the subject of a separate study in translational perspective despite the developments in recent years in studying the translation of polysemiotic texts like films, comics, illustrated books, art and pop songs, theatre or advertisements. Equivoques are not mentioned (or in passing – 2001: 227) in the important collection *MultiMedia Translation* (2001) but it is there that an urge was made by Aline Remael to study, in practical terms, "texts that do have a verbal [and visual] constituent, but in the study of which special attention is paid to their multimodal functioning" (Remael: 14). In fact, until recently translation scholars, even dealing with manifestly multimodal texts, tended to focus exclusively on linguistic qualities. This limited perspective has been critically noted by Klaus Kaindl (Kaindl: 174–175). Kaindl draws attention to the fact that the activity in this sphere and studying it requires a shifting of – and a broader – perspective: "From playing with words to playing with signs" (Kaindl: 176) and provides, on the material of comics, an exemplary translation analysis which embraces non-verbal elements of the polysemiotic text.

In practice, the interplay of the visual and the verbal often seems to leave scholars at a loss. For instance, Juan José Martínez-Sierra does include the visual in his taxonomy of humorous elements in AVT (2005) among other, variously stratified, mainly linguistic aspects (which constitute a tacit dominant of the classification) but, as can be seen particularly from his example, the author refers to monomodal humour (to use Kaindl's terminology), apparently leaving out of his study semiotically complex units of meaning:

> *Visual elements* comprise a differentiation between the humour produced by what we can see on the screen and those elements that in fact constitute a visually coded version of a linguistic element.
> Example: [Situation] Homer is trying to escape from the aliens. He reaches the space ship's cockpit. We can see and hear how he hits the control panel in his attempts to start the engine (Martínez-Sierra: 291).

It is only in the endnote that Martínez-Sierra admits "[…] I understand that we may receive humour from the merging of visual and written component" (Martínez-Sierra: 295). In the context of this powerlessness it is worth to cite not only Riitta Oittinen's plea to consider the image together with the text when translating a multimodal message, but also her claim that doing it – and studying it – requires "knowing the language," i.e. a visual literacy (2000: 114).

Outlining the complicated, diverse and methodologically pluralistic theoretical background of the translational enquiry into varied multimodal texts lies beyond the scope of the present article. The interface of translation and intersemiotics is discussed broadly in another text (Kaźmierczak, 2017); in further remarks below I mention some of the key concepts that have informed my approach. It proves useful to extrapolate various observations made in the research on comics, illustrated books and audiovisual translation.

Assumptions

The following analysis is underpinned by a set of assumptions, which will now be set forth.

1. The first one concerns understanding and defining the studied phenomenon. Intersemiotic punning occurs when a relation of equivoque obtains not between two meanings encoded in the same semiotic layer, the verbal one, but between two different layers, in our case: verbal text and image. It does not, however, necessarily entail a combination of image and text (in the sense assumed in the typology of Clüver: 26–17), or even the presence of both: one may speak of an intersemiotic pun when an image brings to the fore a relation between words (cf. Kaindl: 176) or when the image is only implied (described verbally) but the interplay with the implied visual is essential for creating sense.

2. An intersemiotic equivoque does not have to be comical.

The intention may be, for instance, persuasive, as in the case of a Polish poster urging to help a Ukrainian student by displaying an image of an orange: if the colour symbolises the Orange Revolution, so can *an* orange (whose name in Polish forms the base for the colour-word, cf. Szymczak, 2002, s.v. *pomarańczowy*) stand for Ukraine (poster reprinted as a translation task in Bednarczyk 2009 [CD, n.pag.]). What is essential for an equivoque is not the comic effect, but the duality of perspective, a "bisociation" of two incongruous meanings, considered defining by Arthur Koestler (Koestler: 64).

3. Verbal-visual equivoques have to be distinguishd from (purely) visual puns.

This deserves stressing in view of the fact that the two kinds have often been discussed in media studies under one caption. The distinction is, however, important in translatology, because visual puns do not essentially need interlingual mediation (cf. assumption 5), whereas verbal-visual ones fall within the scope of interest of both translators and translation scholars. A visual pun should be understood as a *single image* with two or more meanings which, once combined, yield a single yet layered message, or, as Koestler puts

Illustration 1. Wiktor Górka, poster, 1973, Wrocławska Galeria Polskiego Plakatu

Source: http://www.galeriaplakatu.com.pl/plakat0397-cabaret-oryginalny-polski-plakat-filmowy.html.

it speaking of "optical" puns, "a single visual form" connected "with two different functional contexts" (1964: 182). An example of a visual pun can be found in the Polish poster for the famous American film (illustr. 1). The play entails merging pictorial components and can stand alone; the verbal element – the title – is not part of it (although it is necessary for the poster's essential informative function).

Verbal-visual puns, in turn, are bisemiotic as their name indicates and, as with other multimodal texts, "[t]he more intricate the interplay between words and pictures, the more complex the task of translating" (O'Sullivan: 114).

4. The visual element is (most often) beyond the translator's intervention and it is this fixedness that accounts for the difference from translating verbal punning.

This assumption does not stem from any belief that the pictorial language be universal – note the criticism of the idea of the supposed "visual Esperanto" by Kaindl (Kaindl: 183). The non-intervention into the image is here assumed for a few reasons: 1) by analogy with translating media such as film (cf. Tomaszkiewicz: 97) and comics; although redrawing is no longer a technical impossibility, in some publishing cultures it is still often refrained from even when desirable (cf. complaints in Wójcik: 149); 2) because the cost of making changes to pictures (cf. Kaindl: 175) will often prevent it; 3) because in cases where the intellectual and aesthetic stimulus derives primarily from the pictorial (see the visual-verbal category in the analysis below), a redrawing in translation would be unthinkable for artistic reasons; 4) out of ethical concerns – in the same category of works intervention into the visual challenges the authorship of a work (esp. true for a single artwork; cf. Gonçalves de Assis: 253 against redrawing in comics translation).

If the inalterability of the image is acknowledged, verbal-visual punning emerges as a particularly restricting situation from the point of view of interlingual translation. When dealing with a purely verbal pun, the translator can decide which of the two meanings is pivotal in the context and may adjust the pun to retain the effect, or may substitute the source-text wordplay with an altogether different target-language wordplay (in the same semantic field or even in a different one, cf. Ланчиков: 20–22). Here, with one of the meanings encoded visually, however, one of the elements is by default

unalterable (in this respect it resembles translating verbal puns based on proper names, where the stimulant is also fixed, cf. Виноградов: 204–213). This, in consequence, imposes an additional constraint on the translation and may cause untranslatability.

5. The field of activity is translation (proper), if at the intersection with intersemioticity.

Although it involves two semiotic layers, translating verbal-visual puns does not entail transposing from one system of signs to another, no change of code. As such, it does not fit Roman Jakobson's definition of transmutation (114–118) and therefore is not a form of intersemiotic translation (cf. similar caveats made by Aline Remael with regard to multimedia translation, Remael: 13–14). Neither does it constitute "translating pictures" (O'Sullivan), "translating illustrations" (Fu, 2013), or "graphic translation" (Jankowski) – in a set of terminology with which I do not feel comfortable, unless it actually means a change in the visual (like in Fu's study or in Oittinen: 113). If an intersemiotic pun is rendered as an intersemiotic pun as well, then translation occurs, it would be most appropriate to say, between two "semiological complexes," to borrow Teresa Tomaszkiewicz's description of audiovisual translation (Tomaszkiewicz: 100). And what obtains here is what I choose to call *intersemiotic aspects of translation (proper).* The term refers to such *a situation of mediating between languages (or comparing language versions) in which taking into account other semiotic codes/ layers apart from the verbal one is characteristic or even obligatory* (for a broader contextualisation of the concept see Kaźmierczak).

Anna Bednarczyk's theoretical proposition envisages that when one of the semiotic layers is dominant, a translation should prioritise this layer as well (2010: 411). However, it seems reasonable to expect that in the case of verbal-visual punning no *intersemiotic dominant of translation* can be chosen, but rather both codes accommodated for a fully successful rendition (cf. *ibid*.). This assumption will further be tested.

Analysis of verbal-visual puns and their (possible) translations

Having established these preliminaries, let me proceed to analysis. It will be structured according to types into which the material can be classified. The possible semiotic composition of puns involving text and image and the

priority of the respective layers within it suggests distinguishing four types. The name of the first group overlaps with the name of the whole category (verbal-visual) but, hopefully, in the context it will normally be clear whether the broader or the narrower referent is meant. Out of concern for the length of the study, the exemplification has been limited to two items in each category. In terms of natural languages involved, the material encompasses English, Polish and Russian in mutual translations. In some cases possibilities of intercultural mediation rather than actual renditions are discussed. Throughout the text, verbal components of the puns are given glosses or back translations into English by the present author.

Puns according to their semiotic composition

1. Puns resulting from a text and an accompanying image (verbal-visual)

The first type encompasses puns resulting from combining a text with an accompanying image – it assumes the physical presence of both and the primary role of the verbal. Instances can be found in literary texts and various other media. For the sake of the present overview an example has been drawn from Mark Twain's 1869 tongue-in-cheek travelogue *The Innocents Abroad.* At one point, the "innocent" narrator retells the story of Heloise's love, beginning thus:

> Heloise was born seven hundred and sixty-six years ago. She may have had parents. There is no telling. She lived with her uncle Fulbert, a canon of the cathedral of Paris. I do not know what a canon of a cathedral is, but that is what he was. He was nothing more than a sort of a mountain howitzer, likely, because they had no heavy artillery in those days. Suffice it, then, that Heloise lived with her uncle the howitzer and was happy (Twain, 1869: 141–142).

There is a linguistic pun in its own right ("canon" – "cannon"), and as such it has even been briefly discussed by Viktor Lanchikov (Ланчиков, 2013: 20). However, the first edition of *The Innocents Abroad* contains numerous illustrations, mostly by True Williams, one of which adds a visual dimension to the punning (see illustr. 2). The caption stylizes the image as an exhibition object. Even when the foreign editions consulted do not carry the original pictorial material, in terms of intersemiotic aspects of translation it is a pertinent

question whether the rendition of the text makes it theoretically possible to reprint the source image in question (say, on republication).

Illustration 2. True Williams (?)
Source: Twain, 1869: 142.

Let us begin with Russian translations, whose authors obviously had to face a problem, as the Russian word for *cannon* (gun), i.e. *пушка* [puška], displays no similarity to any Russian designation for a clergyman.

> Элоиза родилась семьсот шестьдесят шесть лет тому назад. Быть может, у нее и были родители, но история об этом умалчивает. Она жила у своего дяди, Фюльбера, **каноника** Парижского **собора**.[1] Я не совсем хорошо знаю, что такое каноник собора, знаю только, что таково было звание дяди Элоизы. Довольно того, что Элоиза жила у своего **дяди** и была счастлива (Твэн, 1899 vol. 9: 317–318, trans. A. Bogayevskaya, spelling modernised – M.K.).

> [(…) She lived at her uncle Fulbert's, a **canon of** the Paris **cathedral**. I do not know well what a canon of a cathedral is, but that was his title. Suffice it to say that Heloise lived with her **uncle** and was happy (back trans. mine – M.K.).]

> Элоиза родилась семьсот шестьдесят шесть лет тому назад. Возможно, у нее были родители. Точных сведений об этом не сохранилось. Она жила у своего дяди Фульберта, **каноника парижского собора**. Я точно не знаю,

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[1] All emphases in the quotations (and in glosses) added for the sake of argumentation by the author of the paper.

что такое каноник, но во всяком случае он был каноником. По-видимому, это **что-то родственное капониру и канонаде**; скорее всего это была какая-нибудь легкая пушка, вроде горной гаубицы, поскольку в те дни тяжелой артиллерии еще не было. Но так или иначе, Элоиза жила со своим **дядей-гаубицей** и была счастлива (Твен, 1959, trans. Irina Gurova).

[(…) She lived at her uncle Fulbert's, a canon of the Paris cathedral. I don't know precisely what a canon is, but at any rate a canon he was. It must be something **akin to a caponier or to cannonade**; sort of a small gun, like a mountain howitzer, likely (…). Anyway, Heloise lived with her **uncle the howitzer** and was happy.]

As can be seen, preserving the illustration in a Russian edition is not possible in either of the cases. In Bogayevskaya's 1898 translation there is no play at all; the fragment was compressed, with all allusions to the artillery elided. As for Irina Gurova, her way of rendering the pun breaks the connection with the visual element (very probably not known to her). A "caponier" is a fortification structure, a covered ditch in a fort (OED); moreover, an action (cannonade) appears instead of an object, precluding a comparison with a person. As a result, translation additions which provide linguistic linking of the concepts prevent the use of a simple equating caption "two guns." Gurova's solution is driven, as observed by Lanchikov, by the fact that the "cannon," unlike the "canon," "is not directly present in the text" (Ланчиков: 20, trans. mine) and can be freely substituted with a different resultant. With the third dimension added to the pun by the illustration, this liberty is gone, because the cannon becomes directly present. It is not a case of an intersemiotic dominant wrongly chosen but of the translator not being aware of the intersemiotic dimension of the text.

The only Polish translation, by Andrzej Keyha, is based on an illustrated edition,[2] but itself carries no images. The examined fragment is rendered as follows:

Heloiza przyszła na świat dokładnie siedemset sześćdziesiąt sześć lat temu. Pewnie miała rodziców. Historia milczy o nich. Wychował ją wujek Fulbert, **kanonik** paryskiej **katedry**. Nie wiem, czym zajmuje się w katedrze **kanonik**, ale taką miał właśnie funkcję. Jeśli był **kanonierem**, to chyba niskiej rangi, bo w owych czasach

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[2] Joanna Dybiec-Gajer (2011: 335) points out that the information given in colophon is imprecise and makes impossible identifying the text from which the translation – significantly abridged – was made.

artyleria była w powijakach. Wystarczy, że Heloiza mieszkała sobie z **wujkiem kanonierem** i dobrze im się wiodło (Twain, 1992: 85).

[(…) a **canon of** the Paris **cathedral**. I do not know what a **canon** does in a cathedral, but that's what his function was. If he was a **gunner**, than surely of some low rank, because in those days artillery was still in its infancy. Suffice it that Heloise lived with her **uncle the gunner** and they fared well.]

The rendition of the excerpt makes retaining the illustration possible, although a change of caption (which is not necessarily Twain's text) would be required, as the original homophony is replaced by paronymy in the target language. In the Polish edition the caption could read, e.g., *kanonik-kanonier* ("canon the gunner"). Keyha's translation, however, offers yet another possibility for anchoring a verbal-visual pun, in the immediately following fragment of Heloise's story:

She spent the most of her childhood in the convent of Argenteuil – never heard of Argenteuil before, but suppose there was really such a place. She then returned to **her uncle, the old gun, or son of a gun**, as the case may be, and he taught her to write and speak Latin, which was the language of literature and polite society at that period (Twain, 1869: 142).

[…] Potem pewnie wróciła do **wuja kanoniera** (**niech go kule biją!**), a on nauczył ją czytać i pisać po łacinie […] (Twain, 1992: 85–86).
[(...) She then apparently returned to her uncle the gunner (blow him!/'let bullets/ cannonballs hit him') and he taught her to read and write Latin (…).]

The epithet *son of a gun* is variously explained by dictionaries as jocular or affectionate (OD), or a euphemism (MW). In the utterance of Twain's narrator it is obviously humorous but disapproving (cf. OED). The Polish expressive interjection *niech go kule biją!* renders the emotional charge very well, is stylistically appropriate for a 19th-century text (as rather obsolete) but its particular advantage is the mental image underlying it. It can be back-translated on the pragmatic level as "blow him!," but its literal composition amounts to 'let bullets/cannonballs hit him.' It would be thus possible to re-create the verbal-visual pun in a target-language edition by equipping the illustration presenting a clergymen and a gun with the (somewhat menacing) caption: *Niech go kule biją!* (and shifting the illustration to the next page, if need be).

The reading of the intersemiotic equivoque would rely on a literalisation of a metaphor, but the fact that an association between Fulbert and artillery has been established in the target text will be helpful as well. Joanna Dybiec-Gajer complains that Twain's book in Polish is allowed humour "on the translator's terms" (Dybiec-Gajer: 339). If it is so, in this case the result appears fortunate, even though it cannot be ascertained whether this solution was motivated by an awareness of an intersemiotic or polysemiotic dominant of the source text. (To compare, in both Russian versions the bolded segment from the latter discussed excerpt is compressed to just "she returned to her uncle," cf. Твен, 1899 vol. 9: 318; Твен, 1959).

It should be noted that there exists a Russian edition of *The Innocents Abroad* actually equipped with original pictorial material (Твен, 1911). In Mikhail Engelhardt's translation a canon is said to correspond to a "licorn," i.e., a Russian muzzle-loading howitzer invented in mid-18th cent. (cf. OED) – "Должно быть, это нечто в роде маленького горного орудия, единорога" (Твен, 1911: 107, spelling modernised – M.K.). A humorous undertone is introduced inasmuch as the designation for the gun is *единорог*, 'a unicorn,' serving to present Fulbert as a rare creature – cf. a further sentence "She lived with her uncle the unicorn, and was happy." The literal rendition, however, leaves the association between the clerical and the military unmotivated (the humour may well be a by-product of the translator's reluctance to use the borrowing *гаубица* for a howitzer); then, reproducing the original illustration with an equally literally treated caption "Две пушки XII века" ("Two 12th-cent. [*sic*] guns") strengthens the impression of arbitrariness. The translator's footnote explains "an untranslatable play on words" (*ibid.*), which, together with the correction of the factual error in the time reference testifies to the intention of probity on the part of the edition's makers. Nonetheless, the combination of the "documentary" decisions proves confusing instead of artistically pleasing. It would have been much more reasonable to reword the caption into "Two unicorns," in accordance with Engelhardt's lexical choice, and to forgo the explanatory paratext.

The other example in this category comes from a popular scientific book by Patricia Fara, a British historian of science. When writing about early attempts at using electricity in medical treatments, Fara describes and reprints

(Fara: 85–86) a period caricature. In this case the possibilities of translation rather than an existing target text will be considered (a Chinese rendition exists, which proves that this is not empty speculation, yet this language version remains outside my competences).

> Medicine was highly competitive, and society physicians often denigrated their rivals as quacks or charlatans, as in Illustration 10 [here illustr. 3 – M.K.]. In the 1780s, London's most famous electrical physician was James Graham, shown in the left in this caricature, standing on a gambling table and accompanied by a quacking duck, a typical Enlightenment visual pun (Fara: 85).

Illustration 3. 'The Quacks': James Graham and Gustavus Katterfelto, 1783 engraving, Wellcome Institute (Fara: 86)

Source: Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Two_unorthodox _medical_practitioners,_J._Graham_and_G._Kater_Wellcome_V0016204.jpg.

The sememe of being charged with charlatanry is indispensable for the author's argumentation; the duck, in turn, cannot be altered, because it is "made present" by the engraving. Admittedly, there is a certain likelihood of finding a similarity between the equivalents of *to quack* (or *a duck*) and *a quack* that would give room for wordplay in some potential target languages, yet it is not the case in Polish or Russian: *kwakać/kaczka – szarlatan*, and *кракать/ утка – шарлатан*. Theoretically, the translator could decide that the bird is drawn sketchily enough to allow a change for another kind of fowl with a more promising target-language phraseology. In Polish, for instance, a reference to

a goose generates secondary figurative meanings: *gęś* ('a goose' – 'a silly female'), *gęganie* ('gaggling' – senseless or boring talk, cf. Szymczak). Russian, in turn, offers a range of synonyms for a witch doctor (*знахарь*, *знатец*, *травник*, *шептун*, *целитель*), which widens the possibilities of finding a corresponding resultant, e.g. even anchoring the pun in another graphic element. However, the possibility of substituting the wordplay in translation is blocked by the fact that it is not a literary but a scientific text and that the quoted fragment describes (in detail, further on) an authentic, not a fictitious engraving. Moreover, Fara is documenting the customs of the period in terms of linguistic and artistic usage. This documentary dimension prevents manipulating the contents of what she says for the sake of formal qualities. Consequently, the translation of this fragment will demand a descriptive account of why the caricature presents a duck next to a physician as part of a sign-play challenging his authority. (Even should the foreign publisher discard illustrative material, Fara's description and the generic qualities of the text would necessitate such an approach).

The examples presented so far make it possible to distinguish two strategies that can be adopted in translating intersemiotic equivoques: 1) a dynamic approach – cf. Keyha's inventive rendition of Twain's pun as a springboard for a caption; 2) a documentary approach – *explaining* the source pun to the target audience, unless a fortuitous correspondence between languages allows an identical or a very similar play (when translating an academic or popular scientific text, like Fara's book). At this stage a preliminary hypothesis could be formulated that the applicability of the two methods may be divided along the line of the division into literary and non-literary texts. The pragmatic failure of the quasi-documentary approach in the illustrated Russian edition of *The Innocents* seems to confirm this, but it will be verified in the further analysis.

2. Puns resulting from an image accompanied by text (visual-verbal)

This category is distinguished from the previous one in connection with the priority of the visual/pictorial component. This is in keeping with Kaindl's observation that the roles played by the respective visual and linguistic element in creating an effect influence (or should influence) the translation strategy (2004: 176). This type of interplay of signs is characteristic of posters.

The exemplification will be drawn from the oeuvre of Vagrich Bakhchanyan (1937–2009), a popular Russian satirist, painter, cartoonist and conceptual artist of Armenian origin. In 1974 he emigrated to the USA and collections of his works are housed in the Museum of Modern Art in New York and Getty Center, Los Angeles. Since his works, whose verbal tissue remains Russian, function in American exhibition spaces and more broadly – in international art market, the issue of translating his works or explaining them for members of other cultures is of some importance. Specimens of his conceptual art have indeed been considered in translational context. Bednarczyk mentions the piece below (illustr. 4) as a "very difficult" translation task in view of its intersemiotic character, yet without going into details (2010: 411).

Illustration 4. Vagrich Bakhchanyan, graphic art (Бахчанян: 104)
Source: http://tapirr.com/art/b/bakhchanian.html; at: tapirr.com.

The work constitutes a rebus, of which the first element is encoded visually, the other – in the text imposed on the image of the animal. The "solution" is the title of Sergei Eisenstein's film and the name of the eponymous historical battleship, *Броненосец «Потёмкин»*. The verbal element of the pun is a proper name given in the Cyrillic, the appropriate translation procedure therefore consists in transcribing it into the Latin, in accordance with the target-language rules: *Potiomkin* in Polish, *Potemkin* in English and German, *Potemkine* in French, etc. The decoding in Polish presents no difficulty, because, exactly as in Russian, the same lexeme expresses the two concepts: *pancernik*. Although not all languages rely on the same metaphorical conceptualisation of armadillo and battleship – as English proves – the artwork, one might posit, remains

translatable on the conceptual level.[3] The armadillo represents the battleship on basis of a certain associative logic: they are both equipped with an "armour."

Nonetheless, such a rebus-like composition of the artwork means that there is no degree of overlap of information carried by particular semiotic channels. This example therefore shows pointedly that intersemiotic redundancy – a quality or factor which improves reception and eases the work of interpreters and audiovisual translators (Pedersen: 125) – is hardly at play in intersemiotic puns.

In another artwork by Bakhchanyan (illustr. 5) such an overlap can be observed.

Illustration 5. Vagrich Bakhchanyan, graphic art, *Перекуем мячи на орала!*
(Бахчанян: 52)

Source: http://tapirr.com/art/b/bakhchanian.html; at: tapirr.com.

The textual component of the poster, *Perekuyem myachi na orala!*, translates as "Let's beat balls into plowshares" and verbalises the visual layer, a silhouette of a man with a hammer, preparing to strike a football placed on an anvil. The play relies on a reference to Isaiah, 2:4,[4] and on the similarity (effective homophony

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[3] An additional translation barrier may be imposed by intertextuality, i.e. the recognised title of Sergei Eisenstein's film in a given target culture.

[4] "And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah, 2:4, KJV).

in the form used, i.e. plural accusative) between the Russian lexemes denoting swords (*мечи*) and balls (*мячи*). In a direct translation into a language in which no such relation obtains, the artwork remains comprehensible (for those Bible-literate), but the humour shifts towards the absurd, because the choice of a ball as a replacement for the sword looks completely arbitrary.

A redrawing, as mentioned above, would be out of the question, for intellectual property reasons (unless done by the artist himself): it would undermine the integrity of the work, consisting in a single image – unlike with book-length comics, where a redrawing of details does not challenge the authorship of the whole.[5] It must therefore be the verbal that takes adjusting in translation, yet in such a way that it still accommodates the image. While no translation into English could be located, the present writer can think of a Polish rendition: "Przekujmy *piły* na lemiesze!". *Piła* denotes a saw, a sharp and potentially dangerous instrument, yet it is also an augmentative of *piłka*, a ball.[6] The visual-verbal pun is thus preserved, because the noun maintains the identity of the object "forged" in the text and in the picture, and simultaneously a different, more "logical" meaning than the visual one becomes activated, facilitating an association with the biblical pre-text of renouncing weapons (in Polish: "Wtedy swe miecze przekują na lemiesze," cf. *Pismo Święte*, Iz 2,4).

It should also be noted that depending on the context of publication or presentation possibly different translation strategies can prove appropriate. A creative rendition of the textual component like the solution just proposed will more probably be chosen for a book publication, with a re-lettering of the verbal component within the image. For an exhibition caption, however, a documentary strategy may be deemed more appropriate by the translator, or by the commissioner.

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[5] Compare the case of a complete redrawing of comics books while preserving the text – within the same cultural and linguistic environment (Weissbrod, Kohn).

[6] *Piłka* itself can denote a little handsaw, but vis-à-vis the "literal" ball in the image this secondary meaning will not be activated in the reception; with *piła* the hierarchy of meanings and the precedence of associations is reversed.

3. Puns relying on implicit verbal-visual relations,
but expressed only verbally

Puns may also rely on *implicit* verbal-visual relations, that is, they may be encoded in a verbal text but one which evokes an image that forms part of an equivoque or play. In fact, such an example is quoted in the first Polish book on translation studies, Olgierd Wojtasiewicz's 1957 *Wstęp do teorii tłumaczenia* [Introduction to translation theory] – an old Chinese anecdote (Wojtasiewicz: 56–57). A learned man was invited by an acquaintance for "half of the duchy of Lu"; intrigued, he went to visit and was treated to a dinner of fish. He returned exactly the same invitation, but he seated his guest on a sunny terrace and entertained him with conversation. When his guest alluded to a meal, the host said that he had meant the *other* half of the duchy of Lu. The pun and the practical joke depend on the visual components of the ideogram which signified the duchy of Lu. Wojtasiewicz cites this not in the context of punning but to exemplify systemic differences between languages as a cause of untranslatability, in this case – a different system of writing (Wojtasiewicz: 54–57). The scholar himself offers explanations (on the way, as the miniplot unfolds; in my retelling they have been purposefully postponed), yet he distinguishes explaining from translating in the real sense (cf.: 57, 84). If we assume, however, that it *is* a translation, then his verbal metatext interwoven in the story is a translation done in the documentary vein, a logical choice of strategy, given the context in which the anecdote appears – exemplification in an academic work. However, should it be published as a literary text, say, in a collection of stories from Chinese, a different solution is possible: printing the ideogram together with the text – it would be more intellectually and aesthetically pleasing. A native informant, Ms Rong Yue, reconstructed the ideogram as in illustrations 6 and 7. In the printed form it remains rather hermetic, but the hand-painted sign is much better legible: the upper part is the sign meaning fish, the lower – one signifying the sun. Applying this strategy will entail converting the verbal source text implicitly referring to the visual into a verbal-visual target text, i.e. making the visual explicitly present.

top: 鱼 (fish), bottom: 日 (sun)

Illustration 6. The Chinese ideogram, in the print form

Illustration 7. The Chinese ideogram, as drawn by Rong Yue

Image courtesy of Ms Rong Yue.

Let us move to another medium, theatre, and Aleksandr Blok's 1906 metatheatrical symbolist drama *Балаганчик* (*Balaganchik*). The author clashes antithetic worlds: the mystical and the mundane, and uses stock characters who become masks (cf. Pollak: 217). At the beginning of the play a stage direction characterizes Columbine, entering, in the following way:

> необыкновенно красивая девушка с простым и тихим лицом матовой белизны. Она в белом. Равнодушен взор спокойных глаз. За плечами лежит заплетенная **коса** (Блок: 12).

> [an exceptionally beautiful girl, her face simple, calm, complexion dull and pale. She is wearing white. Indifferent look in tranquil eyes. Her hair is plaited into a braid [*kosa*] (trans. mine – M.K.).]

Pierrot welcomes the girl as his beloved, yet other characters, a circle of mystics, insist that she is Death (in the Slavonic cultures Death is personified as a woman). They claim so on basis of her appearance, the crowning argument being *kosa* – the scythe.

> ПРЕДСЕДАТЕЛЬ: Неужели ты не видишь **косы** за плечами? Ты не узнаешь смерти? (Блок: 13)

> [CHAIRMAN: Can't you see the scythe [*kosa*] over her shoulders? Don't you recognize death?]

The pun relying on homonymy is then ironised, as the character of Author intervenes to challenge it, seeing that his play has gone out of hand:

АВТОР: Я не признаю никаких легенд, никаких мифов и прочих пошлостей! Тем более – аллегорической игры словами: неприлично называть косой смерти женскую косу! Это порочит дамское сословие! (Блок: 14)

[AUTHOR: I do not acknowledge any legends, any myths or other such trivialities! And especially – no allegorical word play: it's indecent to call a woman's braid – a death's scythe! It offends womankind!]

Translation in this case may be facilitated by cognateness of languages as the lexeme in question has proto-Slavonic origins (cf. Brückner: sv. *kosa*). In Polish there is the word *kosa* for scythe, and *kosa* for braid, albeit the latter does not belong to modern usage (Szymczak). Therefore the translator working into Polish could well have rendered all the pertinent passages syntagmatically. Yet, this is not the case with Jerzy Zagórski's version of the play (Błok). Admittedly, the mystic's question remains anchored in the source text, but the Author's cue contains several significant additions:

PRZEWODNICZĄCY: Czy nie dostrzegasz **kosy**? Nie poznajesz śmierci? (Błok: 10)

[CHAIRMAN: Can't you see the scythe [*kosa*]? Don't you recognize death?]

AUTOR: Nie uznaję żadnych legend, żadnych mitów i podobnych banałów! Tym bardziej alegorycznej, **pretensjonalnej** gry słów, **restytuowania pseudoludowych wyrazów, które już wyszły z obiegu**. Nie godzi się nazywać **kosą** kobiecego **warkocza**! To obraża płeć piękną! (Błok: 11)

[AUTHOR: I acknowledge no legends, no myths or any such banalities! And especially no **pretentious** allegorical word play, **restitution of pseudo-folkloric words which have long been out of circulation**. It is unseemly to call a woman's **braid** – *kosa*/**scythe**! It offends the gentle sex!]

The additions are of metalinguistic nature (even metatranslational if the target text is read alongside the original), since they point to the stylistic value of the lexeme *kosa* as referring to the braid, its obsoleteness and folkloric connotations. This translational move remains in keeping with the peculiar

fusing of folk tradition with an elite character of the play (cf. Евдокимова: 79). The treatment of the Author's last argument is also worth attention. Zagórski's "it is unseemly to call a woman's braid *kosa*/scythe" confronts two nouns, *warkocza – kosą*, as opposed to Blok's "неприлично называть **косой** смерти женскую **косу**" ("it's unseemly to call a *kosa* of death what is a woman's *kosa*"). Zagórski could have imitated Blok's discursive strategy and use one, polysemous word, but he chose to foreground the metalinguistic aspects again. As a result, what in the source text is a vertical pun (cf. Delabastita: 128), relying on a repetition of the same word, with two meanings encoded, becomes a horizontal pun in the target text, due to an interplay of an old and a modern/neutral designation for a braid). The intersemiotic tension, importantly, persists: the scene in the translation remains clearly focused on whether what you see *is* what you see.

In English there obtains no similar relation between the two concepts invoked by Blok, as has been manifest already in the difficulties with providing precise enough glosses for the quotations above. So how does *A Puppet Show* fare in translation? Timothy C. Westphalen equips one of the cues describing Columbine with a footnote:

THIRD MYSTIC: Over her shoulders, a braid*.

* Blok introduces at this juncture a vital, but untranslatable, motif for the first time. The word "kosa" means either "braid" or "scythe," and Blok exploits both meanings throughout this text and other texts (Blok: 24).

This solution – an instance of a documentary treatment – is the only intervention. The text is elsewhere translated closely, without attempts at re-creating or compensating the intersemiotic pun or at facilitating the comprehension for the English reader otherwise. The Author denies responsibility in a manner which assumes the linguistic possibility of identifying braid and scythe:

AUTHOR: I don't acknowledge any legends, myths, or any other such banality! And especially allegorical plays on words. It is indecent to call a woman's braid the scythe of Death! (Blok: 26–27)

This is of course a solution that is only possible on the page, and even then not one very satisfying aesthetically. Westphalen's choice of intersemiotic

dominant, oriented at the verbal text, does not take into account the possibility of performance. *Balaganchik*, however, is by no means a closet drama. Difficult as it may seem for all its "magic," it has been staged – in the original Russian, famously by Vladimir Meyerhold in 1906 (Pollak: 222), but also in Polish (*Buda jarmarczna* & *Dwunastu*, dir. Jan Dorman, Będzin 1968, see: *Encyklopedia teatru polskiego*). The verbal-visual or visualised pun poses, however, an obvious obstacle for a staging in English: the dichotomy of love and death both embodied in Columbine constitutes a central motif, on which the play pivots, and itself it pivots on Columbine's attribute, *kosa*. It is therefore interesting to see if theatre makers should try to bypass this difficulty by employing some other solutions, departing from the original scenario.

At the University of Oregon the play was staged in March 2013 as a bilingual adaptation: *Balaganchik – The Puppet Show*. The show extends Blok's text with material ranging from Russian songs to cues in English with topical allusions, and gives the drama a modern twist as Pierrot's relationship with Columbine and other characters' love problems are commented by a 21st-century psychoanalyst (cf. the psychoanalytical perspective in a recent paper by Ludmila Yevdokimova, Евдокимова: 80–84). While the cast play and sing, predominantly in Russian, somebody periodically stops the action and in English addresses "Dear Abby" with his or her problems. In the first such speech Pierrot complains about Colombina's [*sic*] "highly unusual" make-up, very white and used in excess. Even if "it looks great on her," he says, "it really bothers me when our friends call my fiancée 'Miss Death'" (*Balaganchik*: 9'07"–10'00" [video, online]). Thus, the metaphorical dimension to Columbine is created in the English performance by putting much emphasis on another attribute, paleness, which was present in Blok's original text as well (see quote above).[7] Admittedly, it is done in an overexplicit and not too subtle a way, if one compares that with the poet's source text, but it belongs with the intentional crudeness of the "modern" intrusions in the University of Oregon adaptation. Importantly, this solution suggests the possibilities of re-creating verbal-visual

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[7] Each of the actresses playing the character (the protagonists are doubled) wears a braid as well. This attribute is referred to in the line spoken in Russian (*Balaganchik*: 3'20"–3'24" [video, online]), using the words from the original: "ТРЕТИЙ МИСТИК: За плечами – коса" (Блок: 11).

punning in translation: by shifting the emphasis to a different characteristic which is a potential carrier of the same/desired meaning.

4. Visual equivoques with implicit verbal layer

A category complementary to the previous one should now be presented, that is, puns in which a message is physically only encoded visually, but the linguistic element remains implied and necessary for appreciation (note that it is not the case of the poster for *Cabaret*, illustr. 1, as it is concepts, not representations of words, that are fused visually there). This type will be treated briefly, for the reason that, since such semiotic complexes include no "palpable" verbal elements, they contain little that could be subject to translation, at least within the framework adopted here. They could need explanation (however, cf. Wojtasiewicz's distinction above). More often than not they will prove untranslatable, with both the stimulus and the resultant fixed against any transformation (neither can be substituted or creatively manipulated if both are anchored in the visual, which is presumed inalterable).

It is for these reasons that the example here will be drawn not from an original work translated or demanding a translation, but rather from a target text (secondary text) which relies on such an effect:

Illustration 8. The opening line of *Emoji Dick, or the Whale*,
trans. Amazon Mechanical Turk, ed. F. Benenson
Source: Benenson 2010: 15; http://www.czyborra.com/unicode/emojidick.pdf.

It lies beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the "equivalence" of this translation, its *skopos* or its comprehensibility (the interlinear presentation speaks for itself in that respect). In the context of the present considerations it is, nonetheless, interesting to note that the first sign of this message, 📞 , although pictorial, clearly evokes a linguistic unit and relies for communicating

the intended meaning on the polysemy of the *verbal* element: *calling* in the sense of phoning is harnessed to denote *calling* as addressing someone. No such equivoque can be read into Melville's (verbal English) text. In a further translation from emoji into any natural language other than English (if such an enterprise can be contemplated) it will not be feasible to re-create the equivoque. While the pun is linguistically anchored in English, in the rudimentary emoji code it apparently serves as an elementary means of expression rather than an intentional artistic device.

Puns emerging in the translation

The last example has already introduced an issue which will close this presentation: intersemiotic puns that are a product of translation. This group, if not specific from the point of view of how a pun is semiotically composed, is relevant for translation studies, especially for the process-oriented research. The phenomenon can be exemplified by another work from the Polish School of Posters.
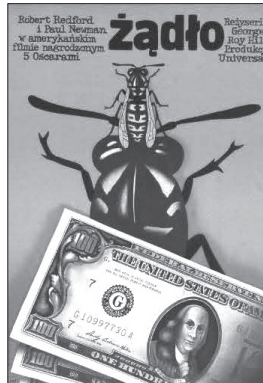

Illustration 9. Elżbieta Procka, poster 1973
Source: http://ossolineum.pl/old/wystawy/obrazki_plakaty/zadlo.jpg.

The work of Elżbieta Procka probably remains enigmatic to members of the source (Anglo-Saxon) culture as a representation of George Roy Hill's

film, because it relies for its effect on the notorious mistranslation of the title. While in the original the name of the 1973 film refers to *sting* as "an elaborate confidence game" (MW), in the Polish culture the film has become known as *Żądło* – the translation focusing on the meaning of *sting*(*er*) as a structure for injecting venom. By drawing banknotes, the artist alludes to the objective of the clever plan that constitutes the plot, extorting money. Still, her placing of the dollars over an insect's body, and precisely where a stinger would be, creates a verbal-visual pun with the Polish title and corroborates the mistranslation. The equivoque in the poster can hardly be appreciated in target communities that have rendered the film title correctly (to Russians, e.g., it is known as *Афера*).

Conclusions

Let me summarise the observations yielded by the analysis. Although small in size – usually one image, one segment of text – verbal-visual puns prove to be highly complex multimodal messages. As a translation task, they seem to demand a rendition that accounts fully for both layers: this assumption has been generally confirmed. With the third group of puns, the implicit visual element should be focused on as the intersemiotic translation dominant (cf. Bednarczyk, 2010), as the example of Blok in English shows. The fixedness of the visual component is an additional constraint and may cause untranslatability (unless a similar play obtains in the target language) and the difficulty grows further, given that in verbal-visual puns intersemiotic redundancy is very limited or not present at all. Translatability can be enhanced by creative approaches somewhat similar to techniques deployed in re-creating linguistic equivoques. Communicating the intended message may be achieved by manipulating the semiotic composition: in puns with implied image, the implicit can be directly visualised.

Two general approaches seem to be possible, a documentary and a dynamic one. The respective strategies tend to be bound to certain types of texts, but not exclusively (the "documentary" approach appears appropriate for scientific prose, yet it has also been applied to literary works, if rather infelicitously).

Nonetheless, documentary translation is not adequate for stage or screen, as proved by the case of Blok's poetic drama.

The number of examples had to be limited, but I hope to have shown that intersemiotic puns occur in a surprising variety of media, from belles-lettres and film to posters, descriptions of art objects and scientific contexts. Despite belonging to so-called special translation problems, they are not restricted to some one specialised, narrow sphere. Consequently, rather than being a marginal issue, they constitute a practical challenge for many translators dealing with various fields. Hence, it seems only proper to conclude with a tentative algorithm for procedures suggested for the practitioners:

1. Does the verbal-visual pun lend itself to translation easily?
   – Yes → translate literally / closely,
   – No → 2.
2. Is it still understandable on the level of concepts (cf. the armadillo)?
   – Yes → translate closely,
   – No → 3.
3. Consider the genre and context of publication or presentation and choose between
   – documentary approach,
   – dynamic approach → 4.
4. Choose from the dynamic options:
   – modify the verbal component,
   – add image (cf. ideogram),
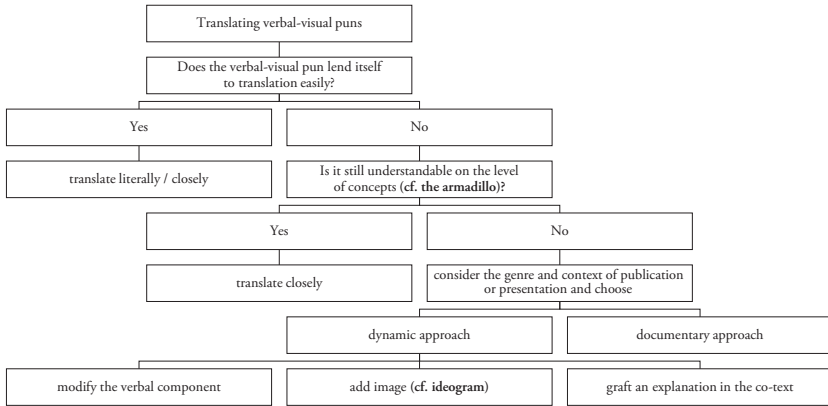   – graft an explanation in the co-text.

Figure 1. Algorithm of procedures suggested for translating verbal-visual equivoques

Further research into intersemiotic punning will doubtlessly bring more theorisations and more propositions of empirical solutions.

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Verbal-visual punning in translational perspective

Summary

In the paper a specific phenomenon at the interface between intersemioticity and translation is discussed. Intersemiotic punning occurs when a relation of equivoque obtains not between two meanings encoded in the same semiotic layer, the verbal one, but between two different layers, e.g. verbal text and image. In the contribution renditions (actual and potential) of verbal-visual puns between English, Polish and Russian are considered. It is demonstrated that intersemiotic puns take different forms, which results in varied degrees of translational difficulty. A typology is proposed, including verbal-visual equivoques, visual-verbal ones, puns relying on implicit verbal-visual relations but expressed only verbally, or only visually. Translational implications of the presented examples are indicated, as well as possible solutions to the tasks and the limits of translation. It is illustrated that intersemiotic equivoques occur in a surprising variety of media, and therefore constitute a practical problem for translators working in many fields. To address this, an algorithm for translation procedures is outlined.