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Translating Polish Fantasy – translational challenges and problems concerning culture-rooted elements

For the last thirty-forty years, the growing popularity of the fantasy literary genre may be observed. This trend is present not only in Poland, where it has started rather late due to the political situation in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but mostly abroad, especially in English-speaking countries. Works of many prominent fantasy authors such as J.R.R. Tolkien, U. LeGuin, A. Norton or P. S. Beagle, to name just a few, have been translated into numerous languages and introduced worldwide. This peculiar literary genre which is difficult to classify is no longer considered to be suitable only for children and young people but also has become a favourite genre of many adults as well. Although set in different realities and times, in spite of the fact that the authors introduced supernatural elements, which until then could be found only in fairy tales, or maybe thanks to all of the above, readers have started to search and ask for such literary works, creating demanding and critical readership.

In Poland, the most known and popular fantasy authors started to publish in the 90's, among them are, *inter alia*, Andrzej Sapkowski, Maja Lidia Kossakowska, Andrzej Pilipiuk, Jacek Dukaj or Jarosław Grzędowicz. The most popular and well-known Polish fantasy cycle is *Saga o Wiedźminie* ("Wiedźmin's Saga", transl. mine), not only because it

was one of the first originally Polish fantasy works but due to the fact that it has been adapted to a TV series and a movie in 2001, and became a computer game in 2007. Although the cycle was published within the years 1993-1999 and since then has been translated into many European languages, among others, German, Czech, Spanish, Italian, Swedish, it has not been, however, until 2007, when they were translated into English by Mrs Danusia Stok. Since then, only two parts of the seven-part cycle have been translated into English, the third is to be published in the nearest future, although, it has been rescheduled earlier a few times already.

Translation from Polish into English may pose problems and challenges for translators due to the rather low popularity and presence of the Polish language and culture in the Anglo-American countries. However, translating Polish fantasy is of a different nature and a translator has to take into consideration various factors concerning the genre's origins and history in Poland.

The present article aims to discuss the characteristics of the fantasy genre, in particular, the features which may pose a challenge during rendition into English. Moreover, the available translations of Sapkowski's novels and their English translations will be discussed in detail, especially concerning the translator's approach towards elements of Slavic origin. It is essential for this article to show how, because of the genre's characteristics, it is different in terms of translation from other popular literary genres. It is important to take into consideration what the readership expects and what it is used to. Therefore, the normal translator's approach towards the target text readers' reaction to elements of foreign culture which are unknown to them and whether it would influence the selling of a book is not the most important thing in the case of fantasy literature as it is not predetermined that the target readership will be discouraged by the presence of foreign elements.

Characterization of the fantasy genre

It is difficult to determine the boundaries of the fantasy genre in literature due to the blurry borders set by scholars. If one decides that every piece of literary work containing some supernatural unrealistic elements may be considered as fantasy literature, then almost every work, beginning

with Homer to Swift and Updike may be counted as such. Some critics would agree, some would not, and perhaps everybody would be right.

That is why dictionaries and encyclopaedias provide various definitions, descriptions and characteristics of this literary genre. In Cuddon's *Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory* [Cuddon, Preston, 1999], there is no separate entry for the fantasy genre, fantasy novel or even fantasy. J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* which by many critics is considered the greatest example of modern fantasy, is included in the science fiction's entry and described in this work as scientific romance because although it is read by SF (science-fiction) fans it could not be counted as proper SF literature. It is not the only example of the appearance of the fantasy genre in this entry but it is the most striking one.

In *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* edited by Margaret Drabble, the following description is provided:

The essence of fantasy fiction, however, is liberation from the constraints of what is known, coupled with a plausible and persuasive inner coherence. The reader of fantasy accepts the rules set up by the fiction, and ignores, or relishes, the contrast with the rules of everyday reality, often glimpsed in fantasy as a horrific world of tedium and mediocrity [Drabble, 2000: 350].

She also states that the genre has been the most productive since the second half of the twentieth century. Fantastic and unrealistic elements, however, can be found in the greatest and widely known works of Shakespeare and Malory as well as in Arthurian legends or mythology. What is also important, Drabble writes that fantasy literature "can draw on a seemingly inexhaustible reservoir of concepts and characters from the age-old, international, and pre-literary genre of the folk tale, or tale of wonder" [Drabble, 2000: 350]. It is said that this genre was considered by critics and authors of the realistic novel to be of low quality and appropriate only for children. Literary critics argued also that this genre does not deal with important, real life issues. Drabble claims that the popularity of this genre in the twentieth century has been achieved because fantasy was a way of an escape from the ordinary world. She concludes, however, that: "Fantasy, has, [...], also shown itself ready to deal with questions of the utmost contemporary importance, in particular, with the nature and origins of evil" [Drabble, 2000: 351].

Another description of fantasy works can be found in *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms* by Peter Childs and Roger Fowler [2006]. There is also no separate entry entitled “fantasy” but it is mentioned under the entry “fantastic”, which, although similar to fantasy in use of supernatural elements, is not the same and fantasy, according to authors, may not be classified as fantastic. There is a following description of fantasy works:

Works of fantasy, such as Tolkien’s fiction and C.S. Lewis’s Narnia series, create their own coherently organized worlds and myths. References to familiar everyday activities render these worlds more homely and comprehensible. The everyday details are integrated into the other world, extending its range of reference; the combination of ‘real’ and ‘supernatural’ suggests a world of greater opportunity and fullness than one consisting of ‘real’ elements alone. If the ‘real’ world is also depicted separately (as in Lewis), movement between the two worlds happens at specific points in the text, so that any character is always in either one world or the other. The reader is invited to feel not bewilderment at but respect for the order of the ‘supernatural’ world, even awe and wonder [Childs, Fowler, 2006: 82-83].

The authors differentiate between fantastic, when the reader is not sure whether something is real, and fantasy as described above.

The next two works which will be discussed are dedicated exclusively to the fantasy genre. The first one is *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* edited by John Clute and John Grant [1996], who try to position this specific genre within world literature and fantastic literature in general. They claim that: “fantasy’s specific location in the spectrum of the fantastic is a matter of constant critical speculation; there is no rigorous critical consensus over the precise definition and ‘reach’ and interrelation of any of the terms referred to above [entries which may be connected more with fantastic than fantasy as such]” [Clute, Grant, 1996: 337]. Therefore it is difficult to define whether a literary work may be classified as fantasy genre or not. The authors also provide the following definition of fantasy: “A fantasy text is a self-coherent narrative. When set in this world, it tells a story which is impossible in the world as we perceive it; when set in an otherworld, that otherworld will be impossible, though stories set there may be possible in its terms” [Clute, Grant, 1996: 338].

The second source focused partly on fantasy is the study *English-Polish Translations of Science Fiction and Fantasy* by Dorota Guttfield [2008]. It is common to discuss these two genres together because of their similar characteristics. Guttfield provides the following view upon both genres:

What the genres present is a vision different from such consensus normalcy in at least one element or respect, described in such a way as to give the vision the appearance of an equally authorised version of the reality, or a reality which, with some willing suspension of disbelief, might exist in other time, space, universe or plane. The precise «location» of such as imagined world or its precise distance from the reader need not be revealed explicitly in the text itself, but the fantastic quality of at least one phenomenon has to be visible and important enough if the text is to be counted as science fiction or fantasy [Guttfield, 2008: 102].

She also states that contrary to science fiction, in fantasy non-existing elements are rooted in mythology rather than science [Guttfield, 2008: 102]. Guttfield claims that what distinguishes science fiction and fantasy from other genres in that one can find non-existing elements is the “quantity, usage and treatment of the imaginary” [Guttfield, 2008: 102]. The range of use of these elements is wider in science fiction and fantasy than in realistic fiction. They are also interconnected and they build up the whole world or story, and what is important, seem to be ‘natural’ to this given world or story [Guttfield, 2008: 102].

All of the above-mentioned definitions, descriptions, views and opinions are important for the present article because fantasy, as a particular literary genre, poses peculiar problems in translation, especially, as it is the case with Sapkowski’s *Wiedźmin* where some elements are not only imaginary and unique for a given genre or book but are also rooted in other cultures, both in the source culture and the target culture.

1.1. Fantasy in Polish literature and *Wiedźmin* as its representative

The beginning of the fantasy genre in Polish literature started with publishing of the Polish translation of Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* (1961-1963). However, the number of copies published was too low to constitute a considerable breakthrough of this genre. Later, in 1983,

Barańczak's translation of *The Wizard of Earthsea* by Ursula LeGuin was published and in the same year in "Fantastyka", a new magazine concerning science fiction and fantasy works, Norton's *Witch World* was published in a series [Guttfeld, 2008: 72]. This resulted in a growing popularity of this genre and the creation of a loyal fandom.

However, it was mainly after 1989, when political and economic changes allowed fantasy to be truly appreciated and popular. Foreign authors were freely published without restrictions imposed by the censorship. This situation, contributed to the development of some distinct features that are present in the Polish fantasy of the 1980s and 1990s. Before 1989, most fantasy works were available only in the original version, and only for those who were able to buy them abroad. As the standards of the knowledge of the English language were rather low, amateur translations known as *klubówki* were popular. Fantasy fans, known as fandom, were gathered together in clubs and associations where those translations were circulated. According to Guttfeld [2008: 74], this situation helped Polish readers to accept English sounding names in the fantasy books. This tendency lasted on a large scale until recently. Even Polish fantasy writers not only used non-Polish names for their characters but also wrote under English sounding names [Guttfeld, 2008: 74]. It was after Andrzej Sapkowski's *Wiedźmin* saga, in which he used elements derived from Slavonic mythology, that it became popular to use Polish sounding names or even to set stories in Poland [Guttfeld, 2008: 74].

Before 1989, the most popular science fiction and fantasy writers in Poland were of Polish origin i.e. Stanisław Lem or Janusz A. Zajdel. After this year, the situation changed and nowadays most of published fantasy writers in Poland and abroad are English or American [Guttfeld, 2008: 86]. This also shows the weaker position of Polish fantasy literature in comparison with the Anglophone one because availability and variability of foreign fantasy works is higher than native ones. Moreover, thanks to a new Western trend of filming fantasy literature in the USA, potential readers i.e. young adults and adults, are more aware of English fantasy books being published as their promotion and popularity is extensive.

Andrzej Sapkowski is considered to be "the most influential figure of Polish fantasy" [Guttfeld, 2008: 91] and his first major work, *Wiedźmin*,

is considered to be the most popular within the fantasy genre in Poland [Guttfeld, 2008: 91]. This series, comprising seven books, the first two being collections of separate stories, is set in an imaginary world, with heroes possessing magical abilities and creatures derived from various mythologies. It is the first fantasy work in Poland in which elements of Slavonic mythology are used [Guttfeld, 2008: 91].

2. Possible problems and dangers during translation process

The above-mentioned definitions and characterisation of the fantasy genre are the main reasons for specific problems which may occur during the translation process. Dorota Guttfeld [2008], in her book *English-Polish Translations of Science Fiction and Fantasy*, presents problematic situations and consequences of translational actions that result from the translator's unawareness of the particularity of the fantasy genre as well as from the translator's ignorance.

As was mentioned earlier, some works of the fantasy genre, such as Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* or Sapkowski's *Wiedźmin*, are set in an imaginary world, or as it will be, after Sapkowski [2001], hereinafter referred to as Never-Never Land. Though it seems that every part of such a world is a product of the author's imagination, very often, as it is in the case of the above-mentioned works, some elements are taken from the author's culture or the ones known to him/her. These can be creatures from various mythologies, quotations from famous works, or allusions to items existing in the real world. Guttfeld claims that it is important for a translator to:

[...] at least try to assess the ontological status of a text, because different world-types treat the reader in a different way, condition the predominant type of cultural problems translators may encounter, and limit their possibilities of coping with cultural items. Since in SF&F one of the most delicate tasks is to uphold the logical coherence of the text, it is vital that translation help the reader co-build the imaginary world and not cause cracks to appear in the vision [Guttfeld, 2008: 126].

It is also stated later that the translator's task is to help the reader understand the foreign world and events which occur in the story. Guttfeld claims that sometimes a translator would have to remove some allusions

to the real world or even to correct the source text in order to eliminate associations which may make the text self-contradictory or make the text mislead the reader and cause misunderstanding of the author's intentions [Guttfeld, 2008: 126].

Another problem that may occur while translating fantasy works which is presented by Guttfeld is the situation when a translator introduces some elements which are unacceptable for the story. This is the case when heroes set in a given world use expressions which cannot be real and are awkward in the given world. In order to make a dialogue or story more natural and close, a translator introduces e.g. expressions used by people on a daily basis. However, if the story is set in a world similar to the medieval one, it is logical that modern expressions cannot be used in such situations. Guttfeld [2008: 129-130] advises that it is better to be close to the source text in order to avoid undesirable allusions.

Guttfeld claims that in the case of books set in imaginary worlds, without any references to known cultures, authors use neologisms and invented proper names. She also claims that "if an adequacy-oriented translation is undertaken, some data about the imaginary world may become unrecoverable for monolingual and monocultural target text readers" [Guttfeld, 2008: 129-130].

In her work, Guttfeld states that a specific tendency of the fantasy genre concerning writing books in cycles also may cause translational problems. It is easier when a cycle is completed and has one translator because he or she is able to see the entire imaginary world created by the author and build his own comprehensive and logical world. In the case when a cycle is open or has many different translators, a translator's task is not only to acquaint himself with every translation but also to be careful not to introduce elements that may be contradictory to the already translated fragments [Guttfeld, 2008: 129-130]. That is the case with Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* where various translators used different translation techniques when translating proper names. It caused a division among readers, some of them preferring Aragorn to be *Łazik* (Jerzy Łoziński's translation, 2002) or *Obieżyświat* (Maria Skibniewska's translation, 1961), not to mention the situation in which the reader reads each part translated by a different translator, which is entirely possible. It can cause serious confusion whether it is still the same hero. Guttfeld claims that "particularly in extended cycles, the management of

cultural items is not only a question of keeping their translations within the limits of the imaginary world, and preserving cycle consistency with respect to particular items, but also of maintaining consistency within emerging classes of cultural items" [Guttfeld, 2008: 141].

A similar case concerns open cycles that are very popular, e.g. *Star Wars*. Guttfeld states that it is reasonable to leave some symbols which are associated with the cycle intact "so that target texts are perceived as faithful copies of the successful global brand" [Guttfeld, 2008: 143]. She also claims that it is better to be adequate rather than creative with such cycles because of the tendency the fantasy genre's authors to produce prequels, sequels, ties, spin-offs etc. Such practices may cause difficulties for translators, who would want to use creative renderings in every part of the cycle and may result in inconsistency within the cycle [Guttfeld, 2008: 143].

Although Sapkowski's saga is a work of fantasy and is set in the Never-Never Land, it is also full of items taken from real cultures and mythologies, not to mention specific proper names invented by the author. Furthermore, Sapkowski introduces in his books allusions to other works of literature, both Polish and foreign. In his saga a reader may find such elements from Celtic mythology as *elves* and *kelpies*, from Muslim mythology – *ghuls*, also from Hispanic legends – *bruxa* etc. Stories and characters in his books are based on popular fairy tales and stories. He introduces a female character accompanied by seven gnomes, whose history is very similar to that of Snow White, or a history of a selfish young man turned into a beast, who can be turned back only by a woman who really loves him, which is similar to the story of the Beauty and the Beast. Professions in the story are those that one can find in the real life and cultures i.e. merchants, archers, craftsmen, teachers, priests etc. Names of places and geographical regions are sometimes descriptive as *Zarzecz*, *Wiedźmińskie Siedliszcz* or *Borsuczy Jar*. There are also proper names such as *Skellige*, *Yaruga* or *Kaedwen*. Names of people are similar to those of places and geographical regions, some are descriptive as *Dziecko Niespodzianka*, *Geralt Biały Wilk* or *Dziecko Starszej Krwi* and some are invented by the author, e.g. *Yennefer*, *Dijkstra* or *Triss Merigold*. Sapkowski, when asked by Stanisław Bereś what his intentions in naming characters were, replies as follows: "Sometimes names are drawn from «materia magica». However, I invent most of names and

I always try to make them sound nice and fit neatly into the phrase's rhythm and flow, especially in the dialogue" [Bereś, Sapkowski, 2005: 268].

Therefore, although *Wiedźmin* saga is set in the Never-Never Land it contains many elements which are present in real cultures and this fact forces a translator to render them in such a way that the loss of information or allusion is minimal.

Because culture-bound items are usually deeply rooted in a given culture, they may constitute a translational problem. Krzysztof Hejwowski [2004: 129] claims that it is impossible to render culture-bound items ideally, as every culture is different. There are means, however, that can be used to render them which allow preserving some of their functions and meanings.

Transferring an item without any additional information i.e. gloss, footnote etc. may cause confusion and discouragement in a reader who does not know the foreign language and culture. Items rendered in such a way may mislead readers who can interpret them wrongly and either do not understand the message or give up reading the book [Hejwowski, 2004: 136]. Although transferring an item along with an explanation may seem a better and more convenient way of dealing with culture-bound items, it also has its drawbacks. According to Hejwowski: "explaining to the target reader what was meant by a given phrase simplifies the reconstruction process and may spoil some of the pleasure of reading" [Hejwowski, 2004: 136]. What is more, when it is overused and explanations or footnotes are too long it may resemble an encyclopaedia or an instruction book which usually is not intended by the author of a translated text.

Another way of rendering the culture-bound item is to translate it word by word. It can result, however, in the situation when a reader understands each word but is not aware that it is significant and that it has a deeper meaning within the culture it comes from i.e. some quotations or phrases from literature which are deeply rooted in a given culture and either symbolize or convey a particular message or thing. Moreover, it may be similar and thus misleading, to some items or phrases existing in the target culture, and a reader would not interpret correctly the message intended by the author [Hejwowski, 2004: 138-139].

Hejwowski claims that using the recognized equivalent is the best option and should be used whenever possible, though it also may cause

problems as a translator is not really sure how widely known the equivalent is. When a reader does not know it, it may cause the same problems as the transferring of an item [Hejwowski, 2004: 138-139].

According to Hejwowski [2004: 140-141], it is also possible to replace a culture-bound item with an element of similar meaning that is present in the target culture. Risks of such action include: possible loss of meaning, cultural connotations and an interpretation which is not intended by the author.

It is also possible to translate a culture-bound item by describing it i.e. providing a definition or description of a given item. It can, however, result in the loss of meaning and symbolism of the item [Hejwowski, 2004: 142].

The last and maybe the most drastic way of rendering a culture-bound item is to omit the item [Hejwowski, 2004: 142]. Not preserving a given item is a very invasive action. The item has been introduced by the author intentionally and its absence may cause some losses to the entire literary piece.

Translating culture-bound items is not an easy task even for an experienced translator. They may convey different messages and emotional loads, not to mention that they may be used to symbolize particular values or features. Rendering them will also depend on the text's genre, cultural origin and setting along with the position of the source and target languages.

3. Examples of selected renditions derived from the English translation of Sapkowski's *Ostatnie Życzenie* [Sapkowski, 1993] (*The Last Wish* [Sapkowski, 2007]) and *Krew Elfów* [Sapkowski, 1994] (*The Blood of Elves* [Sapkowski, 2008])

It was stated earlier that fantasy authors usually draw deeply from various kinds of cultural heritage i.e. legends, mythologies and religions. Due to the history of this genre in Polish literature, the reader and the translator may find in these authors' literary output elements from Western as well as from Slavonic and Eastern culture. Examples provided and discussed below are drawn from two available translations of Andrzej Sapkowski's *Wiedźmin* i.e. *The Last Wish* [2007] and *The Blood of Elves* [2008].

The first culture-bound item a reader comes across is the term *rusalka*, a creature present in Slavonic mythology which, according to Aleksander Gieysztor [2006], is a dead girl's soul, known in Byelorussia and Ukraine, a beautiful and usually naked girl wearing only a flower wreath and dancing under the moon. A *rusalka* can lure humans and tickle them to death caused by convulsive laughter [Gieysztor, 2006: 261]. The term appeared several times in both novels and the translator has decided to render them differently according to the context they appear in. In the first one, where a woman is compared to a *rusalka* during an intimate situation the term is translated as *water nymph* which is a completely different creature but such replacement is understandable within a given context. The reader may not be familiar with the Slavonic meaning of such a creature but it is very likely that the English term may be more transparent than the Polish one. The aim here was to highlight the slenderness of the woman's body. Other contexts within which the word appears are enumerations of other usually violent creatures harmful to humans, and then the original term is preserved by the translator.

A different example is the rendition of the Polish word *upiór*. According to Bohdan Baranowski [1981: 51-52], the word has Russian roots and refers, among others, to vampires or, more general, to all souls that after death stayed on earth. The contexts within which the term appears in the source text are the same – enumerations of various harmful magical creatures, however, the translator decided to render them in three different ways: as *kobold*, *spectre* and *ghosts*. In the source text it is used as a reference to vampires or just an undefined violent supernatural creature which is dangerous to humans. The renditions *spectre* and *ghosts* seem to be the most suitable though the original *upiór* has more pejorative meaning while *spectre* is rather neutral. As for the word *kobold*, originating from German mythology [Dowden, 2000: 229], it refers to a spirit or a creature that takes care of the household. In Polish mythology, there is a similar creature – the *chobold* [Gieysztor, 2006: 274]. They are not deadly harmful for humans but just troublesome when not given some treats e.g. milk or bread. Therefore the use of this term by the translator seems unjustified as in the source text the rendered word appears among creatures very dangerous to humans e.g. werewolves, dragons. Such rendition may be misleading and confusing to a knowledgeable reader.

Another example is the rendition of the Russian *leszy*, a personification of the spirit of the forest, unpleasant for humans, that can lure them into the woods where they usually get lost [Gieysztor, 2006: 263-264]. They are mentioned in the source text in two contexts, the first as an enumeration – in the target text it is transferred as *leshy*, in the second one it is one of the possible creatures that could attack a human in the forest. The other creature in this context is a wildcat. In that context the term *leszy* is translated as *harpy*, known from e.g. Virgil's *Aeneid*, it is a creature from Greek mythology with woman's body and wings, they were violent beings, also known to torture souls in Tartar. The author of the source text used the term *leshy* in the context referring to a scene in the forest, where the presence of *leshy* and wildcat is probable, however, it is unlikely for a *harpy* to be there. Therefore, it seems that the use of the latter in such context is unjustified and may be confusing for the reader.

The next selected rendition is the case of the term *czarownik*, a man who uses magic and has supernatural abilities. In this form, however, it is neutral, and does not indicate whether he is, to put it simply, good or evil. In the source text it is used in three contexts. Firstly, as a negative statement concerning such kind of people as charlatans and frauds. In this context *czarownik* is translated as *sorcerer*, according to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* [Hornby, Turnbull, 2010] it is a person who possesses magic powers and is aided by evil spirits, *The Oxford Colour Dictionary* [Stevenson, Elliot, Jones, 2001] refers to it only as a person who practices magic. It seems that it is the most suitable rendition of such an ambiguous word. The second context it is used in, refers directly to Geralt, the title hero, a mutated human that possesses some supernatural powers and uses it along with his ability to fight and slay monsters. He is a *wiedźmin* which, in the target text has been translated as *a witcher*. And in the second context, the word *czarownik* is replaced by the term *witcher*, which, although not a faithful translation, seems justified. The third context also has a negative connotations, as the word *czarownik* appears with the adjective *hired* which suggests the lack of knowledge and skills and also questionable reputation. The term *czarownik* is substituted with *magician*. According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* [Hornby, Turnbull, 2010] it is a person who does magic tricks, or who possesses magical powers. It seems that the phrase *hired magician*, although

still conveys negative connotations, has more comical undertones suggesting a person usually hired at circus or village fairs.

The above examples are selected from culturally-loaded items, the next ones are usually invented by the author, however, because of their nature and character it is important to mention them here. They are geographical names and names of characters appearing in novels. The exemplary names of regions or countries in the source text are: *Wyzima*, *Temeria*, *Mahakam*, *Novigrad*, *Ellander*, *Murivel*, *Rivia*, *Assengard* and similar. The usual names for characters appearing in the novels are *Geralt*, *Yennefer*, *Medell*, *Vizimir*, *Nenneke*, *Nivellen*, *Vereena* etc. They are not specific for the Polish language; what is more, for a Polish reader, they would sound foreign and seem to be rather of Anglo-American than Polish origin. It is, as it was mentioned earlier (see 1.1. and 2 above), connected with the history of the fantasy genre in Polish literary tradition. Thanks to their English sounding character, it was possible for the translator to transfer them with only minor changes concerning a removal of a letter e.g. *Wyzima* – *Wyzim*, just to make them more grammatically correct for an English reader.

4. Conclusions

Translation is a complex and difficult process forcing every translator to make decisions that will influence the target readership, book's selling and its success in the target culture. The translator has to decide which of the possible renditions is more suitable and justified in a given context, has to consider all losses and gains of his or her actions. It is even more challenging when translating into a language that is considered to be more popular in comparison with the source language. It happens when translating from Polish into English, which is the subject of the present article. What is more, the literary genre of interest in this particular case – the fantasy genre. Although recently it became very popular among young as well as adult readers, contains usually numerous culture-bound elements and thus requires special treatment and consideration, not to mention a very broad knowledge of literature and other cultures.

Due to the history of the fantasy genre in Polish literary tradition which is immensely influenced by the well-known Western fantasy authors as J.R.R. Tolkien, U. LeGuin and others, works created by Polish

authors contain many allusions and elements which are specific for Western cultures. This definitely helps in the translation of these novels into Western languages. Polish fantasy authors, however, draw extensively also from their own culture and mythology which may pose a challenge for a translator taking into consideration the well-known fact that foreign and difficult elements may discourage and estrange the target reader and may influence the book's selling. The advantage of the fantasy genre over other literary genres, however, is that it is usually addressed to a specific readership that is prepared for abstract and foreign items.

The selected examples provided above, have been drawn from available translations of well-known saga about *wiedźmin* (a *witcher*) by Polish fantasy author Andrzej Sapkowski. The aim of this article was to show what kind of challenges and problems are faced by a translator of such kind of literature and culture. Even though Sapkowski's novels contain most of all elements derived from Western cultures, the translator sometimes decided to replace items specific for Slavonic culture with those known in the target culture or with general terms. As a result, the target reader is deprived of the possibility to acquaint himself with elements specific for the foreign culture, also sometimes such action may cause confusion and ambiguity.

The selected examples constitute only a small part of the entire number of culture-bound items present in novels and their translations; however, they provide the overall picture of possible elements a translator may come across during his or her work. Each rendition made by a translator has its advantages and disadvantages, the challenge though is to choose wisely, based on one's knowledge and experience in order to minimise losses, which are unavoidable.

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STRESZCZENIE

Tłumacząc polską fantasy – wyzwania i problemy tłumaczeniowe związane z elementami kulturowymi

Niniejszy artykuł porusza kwestię trudności i problemów, które może napotkać tłumacz podczas przekładu polskich powieści z gatunku fantasy na język angielski. Zwrócono szczególną uwagę na charakterystykę i specyfikę gatunku oraz jego historię w polskiej tradycji literackiej. Druga część artykułu została poświęcona możliwym wyzwaniom towarzyszącym przekładowi gatunku fantasy zaprezentowanym przez Gutfeld [2008] oraz związanym z tłumaczeniem elementów nacechowanych kulturowo omówionym przez Hejwowskiego [2004]. W trzeciej części podano wybrane przykłady elementów kulturowych i ich tłumaczeń zaczerpnięte z dostępnych tłumaczeń powieści fantasy Andrzeja

Sapkowskiego. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest ukazanie, jak trudnym wyzwaniem jest tłumaczenie zwiększającego swoją popularność gatunku literackiego, jakim jest fantasy.

Słowa kluczowe: fantasy, przekład, Sapkowski, elementy kulturowe

SUMMARY

The present article discusses the difficulties and problems that a translator may face while translating Polish fantasy novels into English. Special attention is given to the characteristics of this literary genre and its history in Polish literary tradition. The second part of the present article is devoted to possible challenges of translating the fantasy genre presented by Gutfeld [2008] and those concerning the rendition of elements rooted in cultures discussed by Hejwowski [2004]. The third part contains selected examples of culture-bound items, along with their translations, derived from two available translations of novels written by Polish fantasy author – Andrzej Sapkowski. The aim of this article is to show how difficult and challenging translating fantasy genre is, whose popularity currently increases.

Key words: fantasy, translation, Sapkowski, culture-bound items