

## Book review

**Klos, Sylwia. (2020). *Humour and Translation in Children's Literature. A Cognitive Linguistic Approach*. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego.**

A tomato in a bowl or a clown's red nose and white mouth? Or both at the same time? The picture on the cover of Sylwia Klos's book may be viewed as the designer's witty visual explanation of conceptual blending of mental spaces, an idea which is instrumental in the author's endeavour to demonstrate how humorous blends are produced in the selected works of children's literature and how their Polish and Portuguese translators could have arrived at some of their lexical choices.

The case studies included in Chapter Four, which is preceded by three theoretical chapters, concern *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, *The BFG* by Roald Dahl, and the *Horrid Henry* series by Francesca Simon. The final section 4.3, which deals with two original stories by Simon and their translations by Maria Makuch, is the shortest in Chapter 4. On the contrary, plenty of attention is given to Polish and Portuguese translations of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, as the author selected examples from as many as three Polish versions by Antoni Marianowicz, Maciej Słomczyński, and Elżbieta Tabakowska, a European Portuguese version by Margarida Vale de Gato, and a Brazilian Portuguese version by Sebastião Uchoa Leite. One Polish, one European Portuguese, and one Brazilian Portuguese translation of *The BFG* are discussed, which were produced, respectively, by Jerzy Łoziński, Susana Ferreira and Bárbara Soares, and Angela Mariani.

The selected works of fiction are all representatives of the transgressive, subversive trends in humorous English-language children's literature, which are considered its hallmark, particularly in the recent decades (see e.g. Cross 2014). In Klos's analyses the topsy-turvy world is an important component of the "mental space based on the knowledge of the literary work" (LWMS), which fuses with lexical mental spaces (LMS) to produce blends (pp. 73-74). Therefore, it may be a little surprising that she decided to examine Słomczyński's translation: in his foreword to Carroll's book he demonstrates that his understanding of *Alice's Adventures* is slightly different and explicitly states that blends are evidence of the oneiric quality of what Alice found *Under Ground* (2008: 5-6), which is not tantamount to invertedness. Another surprise is the exclusion of Grzegorz Wasowski's rendition (2015), which received the prize of the Polish literary journal *Literatura na Świecie*. His "unfaithful translation," as he calls it, virtually teems with blends, many of them being the translator's additions. The central position of blends in Wasowski's version is clear once we read his new-fangled title. Importantly, Elżbieta Tabakowska's translation (2012) is not "the most recent" (p. 103).

Before the readers can delve into the last, analytical part of the book, in Chapter 1, the author offers them an overview of several cognitivist concepts (mapping, categorisation, domains, frames, scripts, mental spaces) and introduces conceptual blending, as proposed by Gilles Fauconnier & Mark Turner (2002: 40-42). Chapter 2 is both linguistically and psychologically oriented, providing a survey of superiority, relief, and incongruity theories of humour and then discussing the ability of children of various ages to comprehend and enjoy different types of humour. What is commendable is that Section 2.5 refers to many authoritative

sources on developmental psychology, which is a rare practice even in those studies that focus specifically on the child reader (cf. Oittinen 2000, who mentions only Vygotsky, Piaget, and Tucker). The title of Chapter 3 states that it deals with “Translating humour in children’s literature,” while in fact it amalgamates multifarious views on translation (not specifically on translating humour) of literary works (not necessarily for children) as well as reiterates some findings of developmental psychology. It closes with a highly eclectic translation procedure, which is used in the analyses in Chapter 4 and is

based on the theory of mental spaces and conceptual blending combined with the skopos theory (Hans J. Vermeer, Katharina Reiss, Christiane Nord), Stanisław Barańczak’s concept of the semantic dominant, developmental psychology (Jean Piaget, Paul McGhee) and Bruno Bettelheim’s theory on the function of children’s literature (p. 75).

Of course, this embarrassment of riches shows that the author is aware of many complexities of the translation process, and we can see that on several occasions: she enumerates them in the Introduction (p. 11), then, somewhat mechanistically, talks about the translator as an engineer and the text as a device in Chapter 3 (pp. 56-57), and ultimately composes a neat ten-item checklist for the translation of wordplays in Chapter 4 (pp. 76-77). Given Sylwia Klos’s multifaceted methodology and desire to discuss as many aspects of translation as possible, it is unexpected, especially in a book on translating wordplay (this term is used interchangeably with blend), that relatively little attention is paid to the creativity of the translator.

The translator’s tasks are treated mainly deontologically: the translator, using mental maps, ought to decide “what should be preserved in the translation in order to find the text in the target language faithful to the original” (p. 62) and, to pass judgement on his/her achievement, conceptual blending is to “serve as a starting point for the analysis of the translations as to their equivalence with the original text.” (NB we never learn how the author defines faithfulness and equivalence and what position she takes on them *vis-à-vis* the skopos, even though on p. 55 she refers in passing to Barańczak’s essay “Rice pudding and kaszka manna” [2004: 67-77], where this issue is all too present.) The translator must “decode” and “establish the meaning of the text” (pp. 40 and 66 respectively), and carry out research which is necessary to get acquainted with the literary and extra-literary context of the translated work. Sylwia Klos assumes that it is always possible to “reconstruct” any wordplay in the target language, having dissected it in the source language (pp. 70, 77). Although the impossibility of any ultimate, “objective” reading is hinted at (p. 68) and the uniqueness of any individual interpretation is appreciated (p. 67), the focus is chiefly on the capabilities of the child reader, and only occasionally (e.g. p. 73) on the hermeneutic effort of the translator reader and his/her ability to produce rather than reproduce.

The actual co-authorial competence of the individual translators may be hard to assess due to the fact that Klos’s book deals with just a few selected aspects of verbal humour: “wordplays, phrases created by adding humorous elements [i.e. Gobblefunk in *The BFG*] and funny proper names” (p. 75). Portmanteau words, blends, wordplays, present in Carroll’s and Dahl’s works, are an excellent choice for an analysis based on conceptual integration. Funny character names from the *Horrid Henry* stories seem less obvious candidates. For instance, why are they considered blends if the pairing hinges upon the alliteration while the semantic component and etymology of a given name can be ignored? And if they are blends, what type of integration network and what vital relations can we identify here? Why does the generic space hold the idea of what is proper and improper behaviour, when the input spaces comprise an adjective, a first name, and situations in which the character is involved (p. 140)? This last question is a vital one, for some of the subversion and humour in Simon’s books lies in that the readers tend to identify and empathise with Henry, the *enfant terrible*, rather than with Perfect Peter, who, despite his perfection, is not a likeable figure at all.

These remarks concerning the potential of the shortest section intend to show that it would have been possible to apply the principle of parsimony and consistently follow one line of thought to produce an in-depth discussion of the selected linguistic phenomena occurring within the chosen literary works. The areas of improvement might include a more detailed presentation of mental spaces and conceptual integration in Chapter 1. We are told that conceptual blending is a result of a fusion of (at least two) input spaces, and the other two obligatory elements of the model are generic space and blended space, which, however, are not adequately explicated and distinguished (pp. 34-35). Fortunately, this has no negative impact on the clarity of argumentation in Chapter 4 thanks to additional notes in Figures 4.1-4.26, which are variants of the austere Figure 1.5 (p. 36). Similarly laconic is the description of the differences that are present in Figures 3.1 and 3.2 (pp. 58-59), where the former diagram is for “decoding the original text,” and the latter “to be used by the translator as a tool for reconstructing the code in the target language.”

On the other hand, the case studies in Chapter 4 give some clues about which material in the theoretical chapters is redundant. For instance, it is possible to analyse Słomczyński’s renditions of the names of school subjects (*Uglification* and *Laughing and Grief*) without any reference to the metaphors of “more/less beautiful” or “more/less positive emotions,” but just building up the content of the input space holding rules of Carroll’s upside-down world (pp. 112-113). The inclusion of conceptual metaphors leads to the farfetched interpretation of Marianowicz’s decision to render *Uglification* as *mrozenie*, which purportedly is to represent the taboo idea of death (p. 105), but for which no evidence is cited.

Regrettably, throughout her discussion of the passage in which the Mock Turtle talks about his education, the author sticks to her misreading of “Drawling, Stretching, and Fainting in Coils” (p. 81 and in the subsequent tables) – which in the ordinary school would be Drawing, Sketching, and Painting in Oils – although the accurate reading is visible in the renditions offered by Marianowicz and Słomczyński (pp. 105, 110). Another risky claim is that Mystery in the Mock Turtle’s school replaces History, because mysterious stories are more enjoyable to students (p. 84). It is not corroborated by any reference to literary criticism, etc., and could have been replaced by the realisation that History is perhaps enigmatic and incomprehensible in Carroll’s upended world. Apart from the drawbacks listed above, the publication contains some spelling and grammar errors (such as *Retoric*, p. 46; *Liddel*, p. 78; *these information*, pp. 56, 68, 76; *subtraction* confused with *substraction* in several Tables; misspelt German title of Vermeer and Reiss’s article, pp. 62 and 153; *Mcghee*, p. 151).

Summing up, Sylwia Klos’s book is an extensive presentation of her comprehensive knowledge of cognitivism, humour studies, and translation studies, and her acquaintance with many Polish and Portuguese translations of the selected children’s classic, yet her attempt to combine various approaches aggravates the problems that have already been observed, e.g. by Ritchie (2004), in the application of mental spaces and conceptual blending. In some cases it is debatable, for instance, what particular input spaces may include or why we multiply the entities and introduce generic spaces at all, especially as some of them contain elements only from one input space or really none of them (p. 139). It is clearly visible that the book’s argument could have been based on a reduced number of theoretical notions, such as *conceptual integration* exclusively – given that LWMS, namely the mental space based on the knowledge of the literary work, is an extremely capacious category which can embrace practically any contextual information – or the *semantic dominant* (as proposed by Barańczak 2004: 13-63; possibly with Anna Bednarczyk’s further division into the *translative dominant* and the *translator’s dominant*, see Bednarczyk 2008: 17-19), the more so that Klos realises that the semantic dominant identified by the translator is related to the characteristics of the intended target audience (p. 79)

and thus, to some extent, the skopos. Surely, the space of this analysis could have been travelled lighter, with a less heavy methodological portmanteau.

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