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https://orcid.org/0009-0009-3103-2084
Zbigniew Głowala
Jagiellonian Language Center
Jagiellonian University, Kraków

TRANSLATING THE UNTRANSLATABLE: THE VERNACULAR IN TRANSGRESSIVE FICTION OF IRVINE WELSH AND MARTIN AMIS

Abstract: Standard English seems to reign supreme in ESL classes. A vernacular is occasionally present in translation classes, albeit to a limited extent. However, the introduction of colloquial language into English courses might enrich both standard and specialised courses, particularly those that focus on dialect translation. The article examines excerpts from two novels (Irvine Welsh's *Glue* and *London Fields* by Martin Amis) in which protagonists speak in vernacular and use slang. The passages have been compared with their Polish translations. The aim of the article is to show that colloquial language used in transgressive fiction can be effectively analysed in class. The article also presents transgressive fiction as a valuable source of language teaching materials.

Keywords: vernacular, dialect, slang, transgressive fiction, translation class

TŁUMACZĄC NIEPRZETŁUMACZALNE: JĘZYK WERNAKULARNY W POWIEŚCI TRANSGRESYJNEJ IRVINE'A WELSHA I MARTINA AMISA

Streszczenie: Język ogólny jest niejednokrotnie częściej obecny na zajęciach języka angielskiego niż język kolokwialny. Język wernakularny, dialekt oraz slang są okazjonalnie analizowane w trakcie specjalistycznych zajęć z tłumaczenia. Artykuł ma na celu udowodnienie, że wykorzystanie niestandardowego języka w klasie może wzbogacić lekcje. Ponadto artykuł pokazuje, że powieść transgresyjna stanowi cenne źródło materiałów dydaktycznych do wykorzystania na zajęciach językowych. Jako przykład podano fragmenty dwóch powieści: *Klej* Irvine'a Welsha oraz *Pola Londynu* Martina Amisa. W obu książkach postacie używają języka kolokwialnego oraz slangu. Wyjątki z obu powieści zostały porównane z ich polskimi tłumaczeniami.

Słowa kluczowe: język wernakularny, dialekt, slang, powieść transgresyjna, zajęcia specjalistyczne

Transgressive fiction achieved its popularity in the 1990s and the genre presumably owes it to the highly successful screen adaptations of some of the works written by the most prominent authors of transgressive literature. Bret Easton

Ellis, for instance, published his *American Psycho* in 1991. It was made into an acclaimed but controversial film nine years later. *Trainspotting*, a book by Irvine Welsh, was published in 1993 and adapted by Danny Boyle for an enormously successful film in 1996. In the same year, Chuck Palahniuk published probably his best-known work, *Fight Club*, which regained its popularity three years later when David Fincher directed a feature film starring Brad Pitt and Edward Norton based on Palahniuk's novel. The books and their adaptations enjoyed great success which encouraged the authors to write their sequels. Welsh wrote *T2 Trainspotting* in 2017 which was also adapted for a film and Palahniuk, together with Cameron Stewart, created a graphic novel entitled simply *Fight Club 2*. Ten issues were published in 2015 and 2016.

Transgressive fiction has provoked controversy from the very beginning. What some of the critics and probably nearly all readers find so shocking and aggravating is, of course, the themes that the genre touches upon and its exaggerated protagonists. *American Psycho* is a story of a psychopathic and murderous yuppie, Patrick Bateman, who commits gruesome murders and manages to evade capture. His perception of reality has been largely distorted and Ellis draws a thin line between what is real and what is a product of Bateman's hallucinations. Welsh's *Trainspotting* revolves around the theme of heroin addiction and its main characters are offenders and drug addicts. In Palahniuk's *Fight Club* the protagonist, a white-collar worker who suffers from split personality, gets involved with an underground fist fighting club. All these novels attempt to make critical comments on the poor condition of modern society, its unquenchable consumerism and they also stress the feeling of senselessness and the lack of purpose prevalent among members of Generation X. In the article that explains why transgressive fiction has been largely ignored by the academic community, Molly Hoey notes that works that belong to this genre "expound the Sadean paralogy of violence, mutilation, cruelty and deviance for the pleasure of the sovereign individual, where the desires of the depersonalizing subject can be projected onto the passive object" (Hoey, 2014: 26). Therefore, transgressive fiction may prove challenging for some readers, given the difficult and shocking subject matter it covers. Nevertheless, she argues that it is not what these books are about that makes it so difficult for some readers to wade through the text. What makes it so challenging is actually "the Transgressive text's refusal to be entertaining, thought provoking or pleasurable" (Hoey, 2014: 28). Hoey also points out that some critics and reviewers consider transgressive fiction to be "sophomoric, misanthropic and psychotic" and "too hackneyed, too boring and too despicable to have any claims to literary or cultural merit" (Hoey, 2014: 27–28). However, apart from having a considerable amount of shock value, transgressive fiction is also a product of its authors' great creativity in the use of language and their ability to create compelling stories. The plots are well-crafted, albeit touching on delicate and thorny issues, and the language that characters use is appropriately adapted to match their backgrounds. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that it is actually

the language, slightly stylized and distorted, that makes some of the transgressive novels an appropriate source of teaching material for translation classes. The article will examine the excerpts from transgressive texts and compare them with their Polish translations. Some of these extracts were discussed in my translation classes for students of English studies.

In her article Hoey mentions the foremost representatives of the genre whose novels were published in the 1990s (Hoey, 2014: 26). It is important, however, to note that the roots of the transgressive fiction should be traced back to as early as the 1950s. The progenitors of this genre include, for instance, William S. Burroughs, the author of *Junkie* and *Naked Lunch*, Gore Vidal, whose *Myra Breckinridge* divided critics down the middle, and Jerzy Kosiński with his most famous novel, *The Painted Bird*. The English authors who merit a mention are Ian McEwan, who wrote *The Cement Garden* and a short story collection entitled *First Love, Last Rites* and Martin Amis, the author of *London Fields* which was published in 1989 (rather appropriately, given the fact that transgressive fiction is a product of the 1990s). The language used in Amis's novel will be examined in this paper. Even though *London Fields* is not a typical example of a transgressive novel, it still possesses certain qualities which allow this work to be categorized as such.

The first novel to be analysed in this article is *Glue* by Irvine Welsh. *Glue* is a story of four friends whose turbulent lives are depicted in four stages (childhood, teen years, young adulthood, middle age) and the book covers the period from the 1970s to the beginning of the 2000s. In the first chapters the author introduces the protagonists' fathers and also outlines their backgrounds: a broken home, crime, financial hardship and a working-class environment. The main characters speak in a Scottish dialect which renders the book almost incomprehensible to, for example, non-natives or those readers who are unfamiliar with the local vernacular and Scottish slang in general. In her review of *Glue*, Linda Gardiner, an Edinburgher herself, quotes Amy Benfer of *Salon* (2001) who wrote in her article that "reading anything by Irvine Welsh is sort of like reading Chaucer if you are not fluent in Middle English" (qtd. in Gardiner, 2001: 26). However, Gardiner also argues that "the dialogue that apparently baffles these readers is lovingly transcribed in a quasi-phonetic style that would delight the heart of Henry Higgins, but actual Scots words and phrases are – to this reader – surprisingly thin on the page" (Gardiner, 2001: 26). Eventually, she writes: "For whatever reason, there's little sign of the vivid vernacular I remember from my own childhood" (Gardiner, 2001: 26). It may be true, however, that the language used by Welsh in *Glue* (and also in his debut novel entitled *Trainspotting*), even though difficult, may have helped to popularise a Scottish dialect and for this reason it deserves careful and detailed scrutiny. In an interview with Ian Peddie, when asked if he agrees that his work "helped to bring the vernacular onto centre stage" (Peddie, 2007: 137), Welsh says:

> Standard English is an imperial language. I wanted something with more rhythm. I actually tried to write *Trainspotting* in standard English and it sounded ridiculous and pretentious. The vernacular is the language in which we live and think. And it sounds better, much more real. But I'm not sure that I have contributed towards its popularity or not; you can't think of these things when you write or you'd be so self-conscious that you'd get nothing done (Peddie, 2007: 137).

The assertion that the vernacular is more real than standard English may be a vital factor in deciding why it should be examined in translation classes and ESL classes in general. The latter may benefit from analysing Scots dialect lexis, syntax, and natural (albeit mildly exaggerated and, as Linda Gardiner [2001: 26] observes, written in a "quasi-phonetic style") language. One of the positive consequences of introducing the vernacular to ESL courses would be the elimination of the impression of artificiality that permeates classes in standard English in favour of colloquial and authentic language. Welsh's texts also make interesting teaching materials in these translation classes that concentrate primarily on dialect translation. This article will discuss and compare the extracts from the opening chapters of *Glue* with their translations done by Jacek Spólny for the 2004 Polish edition of the novel.

In his book entitled *Dialect in Translation*, Leszek Berezowski notes that dialect was "claimed to owe its untranslatability primarily to the fact that it alludes to those subvarieties of the SL which are rich in language specific connotations clearly inaccessible to the readership of the TL version" (Berezowski, 1997: 28). He also draws attention to what Olgierd Wojtasiewicz (1957) writes in *Wstęp do teorii tłumaczenia* about the ineffectiveness of translating the vernacular into the dialect of the target language (TL). Berezowski writes that Wojtasiewicz instances an effort at substituting the vernacular characteristic of Podhale for the dialect of inhabitants of the Highlands (Berezowski, 1997: 28). Therefore, the source language (SL) in *Glue* may not be easily (or directly, for that matter) translatable into the target language and Spólny decides not to replace the Scots vernacular with any Polish dialect or argot. Instead, he opts for standard Polish and reduces the use of slang. This article will present the excerpts of Welsh's book alongside their translations.

The first passage to examine comes from the chapter in which Duncan Ewart and Wullie Birrell, the protagonists' fathers, meet at Duncan's home after the birth of Wullie's son. Wullie emotionally compares his newborn child with his firstborn while talking to his host, his wife and their son, Carl.

A wee boy. Seven and a half pounds. It's our second wee laddie. Came oot kickin and screamin, and eh's never stoaped since, Wullie explained with a nervous grin. – No like the first yin.	Chłopak. Siedem i pół funta. Drugi chłopak. Przyszedł na świat, kopiąc i wrzeszcząc, i do tej pory nie ustaje – tłumaczył Wullie z nerwowym uśmieszkiem. – Pierwszy jest zupełnie inny.

He's quiet. Ages wi this yin here, he remarked, smiling at Carl, who was examining this stranger, though staying close to his mother. – Ye got any mair? (Welsh, 2002: 23)	Spokojny. W wieku twojego. – Skinął w stronę Carla, który przyglądał się obcemu, ale nie odstępował matki na krok. – Jedynak? (Welsh, 2004: 30)

Spólny appears to miss some nuances of meaning that can be detected in the text since the expressions used by Welsh do not translate easily into Polish. Nevertheless, they may provide students with a lot of room for interpretation. The word "chłopak," for instance, does not seem to faithfully reflect the meaning of such phrases as "a wee boy" or "a wee laddie" in which the Scottish adjective "wee," meaning "small," may suggest a certain dose of affection that Wullie has for both his sons. What is more, the meaning of the expression "kicking and screaming," which means that one resists doing something that they are forced to do, has not been fully expressed with the Polish phrase "kopiąc i wrzeszcząc." It is a literal translation which presents only the action without explaining the motivation. Additionally, the sentence "Ages wi this yin here," translated correctly as "W wieku twojego," is an interesting collocation which, according to *WordSense Dictionary*, is primarily Scottish.[1]

In the same chapter Duncan and Wullie discuss a set of cardinal principles that their sons should adhere to once they grow up. The rules will later become what Ian Peddie calls "a kind of communal *modus operandi*" (Peddie, 2007: 132). They are later mentioned by a now-adult Carl in a form resembling the Ten Commandments (Welsh, 2002: 407–408).

Wullie was feeling guilty that he was being unintentionally a bit hard on his son, in front of people he hardly knew. – Eh's a good wee felly but, ah mean ye try tea teach thum right fae wrong… he slurred, himself now feeling the drink and the tiredness. – It's a difficult world now, no like the yin we grew up in, Duncan said. Ye never know what tae teach them. Ah mean, there's the basic stuff like back up yir mates, never cross a picket line… – Nivir hit a lassie, Wullie nodded.	Wullie miał wyrzuty sumienia, że niechcący krytykuje syna przy ludziach, których w zasadzie nie zna. – To dobry chłopak, lecz, wiecie, trzeba go uczyć, co jest dobre, a co złe… – zaczynał sam bełkotać pod wpływem alkoholu i zmęczenia. – Czasy zrobiły się ciężkie, za naszej młodości było inaczej – stwierdził Duncan. – Czasami nie wiadomo, czego ich uczyć. Jasne, są rzeczy podstawowe, że trzeba pomagać kolegom, nie przechodzić na drugą stronę barykady… – Nie bić kobiet – podjął Wullie.

[1] https://www.wordsense.eu/be_ages_with/ [accessed: 1 December 2022].

– Definitely, Duncan agreed sternly, as Maria looked at him with a you-just--try-it-pal expression, – Nivir shop anybody tae the polis…
– …neither friend nor foe, Wullie added,
– That's what ah think ah'll dae, replace the ten commandments wi ma ain ten commandments. They'd be better for kids thin that Spock, or any ay thaim. Buy a record every week, that'd be one o' mine… ye cannae go a week withoot a good tune tae look forward tae…
– If you want tae give yir sons some kind ay code tae live by, what about try not tae line the pockets of the brewers and the bookies too much, Maria laughed (Welsh, 2002: 26).

– Nigdy w życiu – potwierdził Duncan, którego Maria obrzuciła zuchwałym spojrzeniem, jakby chciała powiedzieć: „Tylko spróbuj". – Nie wydawać nikogo policji…
– …ani przyjaciela, ani wroga – przytaknął Wullie.
– Można by zastąpić dziesięć przykazań swoimi własnymi. Dzieci wyszłyby na tym lepiej, niż jakby słuchały Spocka albo innych. Co tydzień kupuj płytę, to by było jedno z moich przykazań… bez dobrego kawałka nie dałoby się przeżyć nawet tygodnia…
– Jeśli chcecie wymyślać swoim synom jakieś kodeksy postępowania, to może byście im powiedzieli, żeby nie nabijali kiesy browarom i księgarzom.
– Zaśmiała się Maria (Welsh, 2004: 33).

Wullie calls his older son "a good wee felly" which Spólny translates as "dobry chłopak." However, in keeping with Welsh's use of the vernacular, other colloquial expressions should be chosen. It seems that, for instance, "spoko koleżka" or "spoko gość" would be more accurate. When Duncan says that one should "never cross a picket line," he presumably means strikebreaking. Spólny, however, picks an expression that means "to change sides" ("przejść na drugą stronę barykady"). The choice of this expression might have been motivated by the lack of proper context. "Lassie" (and its variant "lass") is yet another Scottish word worth discussing in class and it may be compared with its male equivalent "laddie" ("lad"). Students may also want to examine why Spólny skips the adverb "sternly" in his translation and instead uses the word "zuchwały" ("sassy," "feisty" or "bold" in English) in order to describe the way Maria looks at her husband. The line "Maria looked at him with a you-just-try-it-pal expression" seems challenging to translate. However, Spólny substitutes simple "tylko spróbuj" for the hyphenated part and, at the same time, he emphasises the feistiness of a look that Maria gives to Duncan. Thus, the author of the translation avoids verbiage and manages to keep the meaning of the original. Another sentence that deserves students' attention is "Nivir shop anybody tae the polis." Spólny once again uses here a standard language and translates the informal verb "to shop" as "wydać" which means "to turn somebody in." However, a similar colloquial expression does exist in the Polish language ("sprzedać kogoś") which actually means "to sell somebody" and corresponds closely to the verb used by Welsh. At the end of the passage Maria says that their sons should not "line the pockets of the brewers

and the bookies too much." Spólny translates "to line the pockets" as "nabijać kiesę." His translation is accurate since this colloquial expression means "to fill a coin purse." However, his translation of the word "bookies" seems incorrect as he chooses the term "księgarze" ("booksellers") instead of a more proper noun "bukmacher."

The next passage comes from a short chapter in which Andrew Galloway, one of the protagonists, recalls in a monologic style the moment when his father got arrested. Andrew, a little boy who idolises his dad because "he could batter anybody" (Welsh, 2002: 28), realises that now that his father is gone, he has become "the man ay the hoose" (Welsh, 2002: 30). He believes, however, that his father left his family to help the police to fight crime and he will be back soon. Andrew considers himself a tough boy, just like his dad, and his early admiration for unhealthy masculinity is already visible when he mocks Terry (another main character) for crying at school:

> Terry gret at the school oan the first day ah nivir gret but Terry did, gre-tin-fae-haced The-ray… sittin oan the platform whaire Miss Munro hus her desk and eh gret n gret.
> Miss Munro hud him oan her knee and that was lucky for Terry. Ah'm gaunny marry Miss Munro because she smells nice and is kind n ah pit ma airm roond Terry cause eh's ma pal n ah telt um tae try n be a big boy n Terry wis feart that ehs ma widnae come back but ah kent mines would cause she said we'd go for a cone at Mr Whippy's (Welsh, 2002: 28–29).
>
> Terry beczał pierwszego dnia w szkole, ja nie, za to Terry ryczał, beksa-lala Terry… siedzi na podeście, gdzie jest biurko panny Munro, i ryczy, i ryczy.
> Panna Munro wzięła go na kolana, ten Terry to ma szczęście. Ja się ożenię z panną Munro, bo ona ładnie pachnie i jest miła, a ja objąłem Terry'ego ramieniem, bo to mój kumpel, powiedziałem mu, żeby nie zachowywał się jak dziecko, że jest już duży, ale Terry się bał, że mama po niego nie przyjdzie, a ja wiedziałem, że moja przyjdzie, bo obiecała, że pójdziemy na lody do pana Whippy'ego (Welsh, 2004: 35–36).

In this excerpt Spólny's translation mirrors Andrew's straightforward and natural language. The verb that deserves the particular attention is "gret." According to Craig Fowler (2014) of *The Scotsman*, the word "greeting" can "describe the action of somebody crying."[2] As Polish equivalents Spólny proposes "beczeć" and "ryczeć" which both mean "to sob" or "to snivel." They are frequently used to refer to a crying child or a woman. The expression "gre-tin-fae-haced" has been translated as "beksa-lala," a Polish equivalent of a "crybaby." Actually, Andrew calls his friend the "greeting-faced Terry." Other similar examples can be found in *Dictionaries of the Scots Language* (for instance, "Yer lik a couple a greetin faced

[2] https://www.scotsman.com/arts-and-culture/scottish-word-week-greeting-1526781 [accessed: 1 December 2022].

weans," a sentence taken from a play by John Maley and Willy Maley entitled *From the Calton to Catalonia* [1990]) together with a definition borrowed from *The Patter* by Michael Munro (1985). It explains that "someone who perpetually looks miserable or displeased may be described as greetin-faced."[3]

At one point the author of the translation seems to have fallen into the trap of producing wordiness and translates "ah telt um tae try n be a big boy" as "powiedziałem mu, żeby nie zachowywał się jak dziecko, że jest już duży." The Polish version appears to be somewhat too long and Spólny overexplains the phrase "a big boy." The expression he uses, which in English means "not to act like a child," might suggest that Terry is much older than he actually is and that to act like a child is undignified for him. It is probably Spólny's intention to stress the fact that Andrew considers himself to be grown-up and the head of the family. "Stop acting like a child" is, after all, something that an adult might say to their child (or another grown-up person, for that matter). Nevertheless, Spólny's translation could be more concise and, for example, a phrase "duży chłopiec" might prove equally effective (for instance, "powiedziałem mu, żeby zachowywał się jak duży chłopiec"). It is an expression that conveys both meanings: that Terry is still a child and that he, like Andrew, should try to act like a grown-up.

Welsh also introduces here another typically Scottish word "kent." According to stooryduster.co.uk, it means "known, knew, to have known" and, as an example, the website cites a sentence that has also been interpreted in standard English: "ah kent it wis yirsel aw the time" ("I knew it was yourself […] all the time").[4] A Scottish adjective that is also worth mentioning and can be found in the passage is "feart" which appears to be fairly self-explanatory when used in a sentence. *Macmillan Dictionary*, however, clarifies that "feart" means "frightened, especially without good reason."[5] Both words have been properly translated by Spólny. Additionally, it may be worth pointing out that Andrew says "cone" instead of "ice cream." What is more, "Mr Whippy's" might have been wrongly translated as "pan Whippy" which implies that Mr Whippy is an owner of a shop or an ice cream parlor. Actually, it is a name of a British company and a brand of ice cream and as such it should have been left untranslated.

The second novel whose language this article will discuss is *London Fields* by Martin Amis. In this postmodern work the narrator is Samson Young, a writer himself, who attempts to recount the story of a murder that has yet to happen. The victim is Nicola Six who actually wants to be killed and orchestrates her own murder. The murderer is Keith Talent who, according to Sam, is "a very bad guy" (Amis, 2003: 4) and a cheat:

> Keith worked as a *cheat*. There he stands on the street corner, with three of four colleagues, with three or four fellow *cheats*; they laugh and cough (they're always

[3] https://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/greet_v_n1 [accessed: 1 December 2022].

[4] https://stooryduster.co.uk/scottish-word/kent/ [accessed: 1 December 2022].

[5] https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/feart [accessed: 1 December 2022].

coughing) and flap their arms for warmth; they look like terrible birds… On good days he rose early and put in long hours, going out into the world, into society, with the intention of cheating it (Amis, 2003: 6).

In his book entitled *Contemporary British Fiction* Nick Bentley argues that *London Fields* is a novel that "presents a series of stereotypes" and points out that Amis's protagonists "are so overplayed that they are parodies of the stereotypes" (Bentley, 2008: 38). According to Bentley, Keith Talent conforms to the stereotype reinforced by "a provocative representation of working-class masculinity" since the protagonist's "cultural pursuits revolve around darts, football, pornography and TV" (Bentley, 2008: 38). Additionally, Bentley writes that "all of Keith's negative attributes can be identified in society (and more significantly within what is constructed as working-class culture by certain sections of the middle classes)" (Bentley, 2008: 39). Of course, they are also identified in the language that Keith speaks. Keith, a "violent petty criminal who preys on the weak and vulnerable" (Bentley, 2008: 38), uses colloquial English and speaks in brief, laconic sentences. His speech has been translated by Anna Kołyszko for the Polish edition of *London Fields* released in 1995. The extracts discussed below were analysed in a translation class (dialect in translation) that I conducted for students of English studies. Just like the excerpts from *Glue*, they will be presented alongside their translations.

Sam meets the would-be murderer in the first chapter of the novel in which Keith gives the narrator a ride from Heathrow to London. Even though at first the protagonist says only a few sentences, the conversation depicts certain characteristics of Keith's manner of speaking:

How do I know, for instance, that Keith works as a cheat? Because he tried to cheat me, on the way in from Heathrow. I'd been standing under the sign saying TAXIS for about a half-hour when the royal-blue Cavalier made its second circuit and pulled up at the bay. Out he climbed.
'Taxi, sir?' he said, and picked up my bag, matter-of-factly, in the line of professional routine.
'That's not a taxi.'
Then he said, 'No danger. You won't get a cab here, pal. No way.'
I asked for a price and he gave me one: an outlandish sum.
'Limo, innit,' he explained.

Skąd wiem, na przykład, że Keith pracuje jako oszust? Bo usiłował oszukać mnie, w drodze z Heathrow. Stałem chyba z pół godziny na postoju taksówek, kiedy Cavalier w kolorze królewskiego błękitu zrobił drugie okrążenie i zatrzymał się w zatoce. Kierowca wysiadł.
– Taxi, łaskawco? – zagadnął i ze smykałką zawodowca poderwał jak gdyby nigdy nic moją walizkę.
– To nie jest taksówka.
– Nie ma bidy – odparł. – Tu Pan nie złapie taryfy, szefie. Żadną miarą.
Spytałem o cenę, no więc mi podał – niebotyczną sumę.
– Limuzyna, nieprawdaż – wyjaśnił.

‘That’s not a limo either. It’s just a car.’ ‘We’ll go by what’s on the clock, yeah?’ he said (Amis, 2003: 11).	– Jaka tam limuzyna. To przecież zwykły samochód. – To jak, jedziemy na licznik? – spytał (Amis, 1995: 20).

Actually, Kołyszko’s translation seems to depict the protagonist’s casual and slangy speech more directly than it has been done in Spólny’s text. When Keith asks “Taxi, sir?” he apparently means to come across as well-mannered and gentlemanlike (which is emphasized by his professional manner). Kołyszko, however, exposes the protagonist’s real self immediately and translates “sir” as “łaskawca” which in English may mean, for example, “a benefactor”[6] or “kind sir”[7] (“łaskawy” actually means “kind” or “benevolent”). Despite the fact that it is still polite, these days one can hear this rather archaic term, for instance, when asked by a drunkard for spare change. Therefore, Kołyszko manages to keep the fake politeness of Keith’s question and, at the same time, she reveals his impertinence and a lack of social grace.

The phrase “no danger” is, of course, a variant of “there’s no danger of” getting a taxi here. Kołyszko has chosen a colloquial expression “nie ma bidy” as an equivalent but, unfortunately, it may mean something else and it leaves too much room for interpretation. It seems that a better option might be to use “nie ma lekko” (“tough luck”) or, for example, a slightly more ironical expression “nie ma strachu/obaw.” The latter can be translated into English as simply “no worries” or “no fear!”

Kołyszko’s translation of “cab” and “pal” is accurate. “Taryfa” is an informal term for a taxi and the noun “szef” (“boss” or “chief”) is a word frequently used by impudent individuals who behind a polite façade hide their condescension. “Żadną miarą” has been chosen as a Polish equivalent of “no way” as they have the same meaning. However, in order to maintain a hint of politeness in Keith’s speech, Kołyszko decides to translate an informal question tag “innit” as “nieprawdaż” which, although similar in meaning, is less colloquial. It may actually seem rather formal and even slightly old-fashioned. Therefore, a question “co nie?” might be more effective since it is direct and conversational. An expression that also deserves students’ attention is “to go by what’s on the clock” which has been accurately translated as “jechać na licznik.”

When it turns out that Keith tries to charge a higher fee for his service, Sam obviously protests. Talent tries to defuse the situation:

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6 https://www.diki.pl/slownik-angielskiego?q=%C5%82askawca [accessed: 1 December 2022].

7 https://tr-ex.me/t%C5%82umaczenie/polski-angielski/%C5%82askawco#gref [accessed: 1 December 2022].

‘What it is is,’ he said, ‘what it is is – okay. I seen you was asleep. I thought: “He’s asleep. Looks as though he could use it. I know. I’ll pop in on me mum.” Disregard that,’ he said, jerking his head, in brutal dismissal, toward the clock, which was of curious design and possibly home manufacture and now said £63.80. ‘Don’t mind, do you, pal?’ […] ‘She’s sick like. Won’t be five minutes. Okay?’ (Amis, 2003: 12)

– Co jest, to jest – odparł – co jest, to jest, w porządku. Zobaczyłem, że pan śpi. Pomyślałem sobie: „Gościu śpi. Widać, że mu to dobrze zrobi. Już wiem. Skoczę do matki”. Nie patrz pan na szafę – dodał, szarpnąwszy głową na znak brutalnego lekceważenia w stronę taksometru o dziwnym kształcie, być może domowej roboty, który wskazywał £ 63.80. – Chyba mi pan nie masz za złe, co, szefie? […] Matka jest, ten tego, chora. Uwinę się w pięć minut. W porządku? (Amis, 1995: 21)

The colloquial expression “w porządku” (“all right” or “fair enough”) seems to be a proper equivalent of “okay.” It must be noted that Keith speaks ungrammatical English which is noticeable in the second sentence he utters: he drops the auxiliary verb and ignores subject-verb agreement. It has not been reflected in Kołyszko’s translation. Instead, the translator once again emphasises Keith’s civility – the protagonist calls Sam “pan” (“sir”) and the whole sentence is grammatically correct. However, she then switches to the vernacular and accurately translates the sentence “I’ll pop in on me mum” as “skoczę do matki.” The colloquial determiner “me” (instead of “my”) remains untranslated, though. What is noteworthy is the way Kołyszko translates the sentence “she’s sick like.” The word “like” suggests that Keith’s mother is not sick but she may, in fact, act as if she were. It also implies that he actually lies about his mother and tries to find a good excuse to leave Sam in a car (probably to do something that he does not want to inform his customer about). Kołyszko translates “like” as “ten tego,” a casual expression used when one refers to something that is ambiguous (it may be used, for instance, as sexual innuendo). It may also indicate that Keith is slightly abashed by what he is about to do and he is simply confused by his unusual attempt to invent a believable pretext. Sam also refers to the protagonist’s colloquial language in his narration when the readers learn that Keith did not, in fact, visit his mother: “What he was doing (as he would later proudly confide) was wheelbarrowing a lightly clad Analiese Furnish around the living room while her current protector, who worked nights, slept with his legendary soundness in the room above” (Amis, 2003: 12). Of course, both Keith and Sam allude to a sex position (“to wheelbarrow”) and Kołyszko translates this expression using a rather vulgar term “posuwać na taczkę” (Amis, 1995: 21) (“posuwać” means “to have sex”).

Lastly, it must be mentioned that Marin Amis, unlike Irvine Welsh, does not attempt to transcribe his protagonist’s speech. Even Sam himself explains that it is not possible to imitate Keith’s manner of speaking. Nevertheless, the narrator does try to describe it:

> I wish to Christ I could do Keith's voice. The *t*'s are viciously stressed. A brief guttural pop, like the first nanosecond of a cough or a hawk, accompanies the hard *k*. When he says *chaotic*, and he says it frequently, it sounds like a death rattle. 'Month' comes out as *mumf*. He sometimes says, 'Im feory…' when he speaks theoretically. 'There' sounds like *dare* or *lair*. You could often run away with the impression that Keith Talent is eighteen months old (Amis, 2003: 29).

Even though Amis depicts Keith's language in standard English, it still possesses the characteristics of a lower-class dialect. Its rawness remains visible, if not in the protagonist's pronunciation, then at least in his choice of colloquial vocabulary.

Various readers may find transgressive fiction challenging for different reasons. Some may find the subject matter provocative and taboo. Others may struggle with the language, deem it unreadable and eventually put it away in frustration. However, it is actually the language of some of these works that deserves to be discussed and analysed in class. Except for the novels examined in this article, the books that are also worth studying include, for instance, other works by Irvine Welsh (*Trainspotting* is probably the most renowned example) or *A Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess for which the author created Nadsat, a slang used by the protagonists. There are two Polish translations of Burgess's novel, both done by Robert Stiller (*Mechaniczna pomarańcza*, 2020 and *Nakręcana pomarańcza*, 2016). This list should also contain *Requiem for a Dream*, a novel by Hubert Selby Jr., in which the protagonist's language, distorted and exaggerated, appears to be a form of New York argot. Thus, the idiomatic, casual and, more often than not, vulgar language of transgressive novels matches their provocative plots brimming with themes of violence, sex and addictions. Transgressive fiction should not be, however, dismissed as cheap, lowbrow and obscene. Instead, it should be appreciated for what it may become: an invaluable and fertile source of linguistic (chiefly dialectal) data to be examined in a translation class.

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