

DIFFICULTIES IN ENGLISH-POLISH TRANSLATION OF U2 LYRICS

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U2 lyrics present different aspects of human life; of which love comes to the foreground. "One" is the song that has been played by U2 at every concert for 15 years, deeply moving crowds of spectators. There are two meanings of the song. The first one can be interpreted as a conversation between the young man, who is dying of AIDS, and his father. Father does not accept his son's lifestyle and is not able to forgive him. This interpretation illustrates the need to put a blame on somebody else. The son has a chance to vent his frustration and fury caused by his father's attitude. Despite deep-rooted prejudices, his father tries to come to terms with him. In this context the song "One" can be considered as discussion about intolerance to AIDS victims and sexual minorities. The key point is that although we are not the same, we live in the same world. Thus, we have to help each other:

One love, one blood, one life
With each other, Sisters, Brothers
One life, but we're not the same
We got to carry each other
One...

The second meaning of the song is more universal. It can be interpreted as a song about unhappy love. Here, the man addresses the woman. There was a time when a strong feeling of love joined them together. Nowadays, they cannot understand each other:

Well it's too late, tonight
To drag the past out into the light
Where love used to rule, there remained bitterness and emptiness:
You gave me nothing
Now it's all I got

The feeling disappeared and the couple cannot forget the mistakes committed in the past:

Will it make it easier on you
Now you got someone to blame

Reading the Polish translation of the song "One", I have noticed that the second meaning is more significant and, at the same time, universal. An average listener may deduce such a conclusion. However, it is a false interpretation. On the cover of the single "One" there are the photos of David Wojnarowicz, an American artist infected with HIV, and the photo presenting the herd of buffalos chased by Indians to the brink of precipice. This is an allegory of the homosexuals being in emotional crisis because of AIDS. The consciousness of sexual diversity can be self-destroying. This is the main meaning of the song, which the reader will not find out in the Polish translation. The above mentioned photos are the key to the right interpretation. The Polish translation does not reflect the complete sense of the song "One".

U2 is known as a band that deals with political and cultural affairs in the world. The members of U2 oppose to IRA, support Greenpeace and Amnesty International. The leader of U2, Bono Vox, has been striving for the cancellation of the financial debts of poor African countries to the USA. This political theme can be found in " Sunday, Bloody Sunday ". The title of the song refers to the tragic events in Ireland in 1920 and in Northern Ireland in 1972. According to their principles, the members of U2 did not support either side of the political conflict. In their opinion the humanity has to win, even without weapon. In that song they oppose violence:

Broken bottles under children's feet
Bodies strew across a dead end street

The armed fighting cannot lead to the peace and confidence that are necessary to realize political changes. We should forget about the past and aim at the peaceful future:

How long must we sing this song?
Tonight we can be as one

At the beginning of 80's U2 supported Solidarity, a political movement in Poland, and its leader Lech Wałęsa. According to me a good reflection of the above idea is the song entitled " New Year's Day ". Here, Bono shows the power of spirit that arises when two people become one and stay face to face with the enemy world, although they are separated:

Though torn in two
We can be as one

The Martial Law in Poland was abolished on the 1st January 1983, that also has a reference to the title of the song.

The themes of " Sunday, bloody Sunday " and " New Year's Day " concern very important problems for Polish people. Throughout our history there have been many wars, battles, rebellions. The song " New Year's Day " makes reference to the latest revolt in the history of Poland – events from the Martial Law. Adam Clayton of U2 said: " We wrote that song as a support of Solidarity and its activity ". The second verse of " New Year's Day " emphasizes it:

Under a blood-red sky
A crowd has gathered in black and white
Arms entwined, the chosen few
Newspapers say, it says it's true, it's true
And we can break through
Though torn in two we can be as one

The lyrics of U2 also have subjects connected with human feelings. Moreover, the members of the group are ordinary people with their weaknesses, emotions, hesitations. In the song "The Fly" Bono presents a great fight within consciousness, a battle between good and evil. The evil is presented as a " bad guy " who cannot be faithful to somebody or something and moves from place to place. The fly from the title is the personification of swindle and lie burning with desire. All this is emphasized by the double voice in the refrain, that can be interpreted as a conversation between an angel and a devil. The hero of the song shows human weaknesses, but he cannot face up to them. If he could, he would do it:

Look I gotta go
Yeah I'm running outta change
There's a lot of things
If I could I'd rearrange

The Polish translation of "The Fly" tries to present a dilemma in the hero's mind, but it is a difficult task. Listening to the song, low and gospel voices alternate so that the contrast in the refrain is quite clear. However, in the translation of the lyric, the translator can only render the words' meaning. For an average reader of translation it is not difficult to understand a position of voices in the refrain, but it is difficult to comprehend the full message, not hearing the levels of voices.

In another song entitled "The Unforgettable Fire" the character stands on the edge of his own precipice. However, he wants to run away from his fall and weakness, out of this world, saying: "Don't push me too far". All the pictures in his head resemble pieces of a dream, a nightmare. There is a stream of thoughts running through his anguished mind. In these thoughts appear the eyes as black as coal and the ice-cold rivers that are another reference to the problem of drugs:

Ice your only rivers run cold
Duck from the night
Your eyes as black as coal

In the original text the rhymes create melody, pace and fluency. These features are not rendered in the Polish translation, making it chaotic; some lines have not got any connection with each other and all song is incomprehensible for the translation's reader. In my point of view the Polish translation of "The Unforgettable Fire" is not so appealing as the original text and, in the result, the song loses its value.

The themes presented in U2 songs are various and concern many aspects of human life. The songs are like poems and should act as the message for the contemporary world that is going towards destruction. The full comprehension of the presented themes requires a lot of attention from the readers of both the original and the source text.

U2 is one of the music groups which can express the mood of songs in a proper way. The words and rhymes are chosen very carefully. They make an adequate reference to the title and theme of song. Moreover, U2 cares about the audience. They know that the mood of song affects the listener's feelings. The mood opens their minds and hearts in a different way. It is only through a suitable mood that the song achieves its full expression.

That can be found in the mood of the song "The Sweetest Thing". The mood is achieved by two elements that contrast with each other throughout the lyric. On the one hand, there is love for a woman, a strong feeling and happiness. On the other hand, sorrow, gloom and bitterness are presented, because the woman is leaving:

The sweetest thing
Baby got blues skies overhead
But in this I'm a rain cloud
I'm losing you

These hesitations proceed till the end of the song when a strong feeling wins, even if the hero actually loses his woman. Love itself is the sweetest thing, even if it has a destructive power:

Eternal fire
She turned me to straw
Ain't love the sweetest thing?

In the Polish translation of "The Sweetest Thing" the mood is rendered properly. The reader follows the hero's hesitations. The repetition of the phrases "the

sweetest thing " and " I'm losing you " in the translation has a big influence on the comprehension of the contrast as these phrases create the mood of the song.

In the song entitled " All I Want Is You " love wins again, but here no contrasts can be found. The mood is really romantic, full of love, passion and desire:

You say you want a diamond on a ring of gold
Your love not to grow cold
You say you'll give me eyes on a moon of blindness
A river in a time of dyeness

In fact the man's wish is earthly-minded. There is the woman who is the only value for the man. And whatever happens, love will always win:

All the promises we break
From the cradle to the grave
When all I want is you

In the Polish translation the reader can sense the mood of the song. It is caused by the phrase in the title, which finishes every verse and makes the song coherent and powerful. Without the words " all I want is you ", creating the mood, the song would be blank and cold.

In " With or Without You " the singer is torn between life without love and life in an unsatisfactory relationship: "with or without you, I can't live ". The whole song is full of sexual and spiritual manipulation. The abandoned singer is looking for tranquillity in the relationship, that brings him pain:

On a bed of nails she makes me wait
And I wait... without you
My hands are tied
My body bruised
She's got me with

The reader of the Polish translation will hardly find the mood of abandonment. The words " with or without you ", that appear in the title and in the refrain, suggest the hero's nostalgia and resignation. The reader has the impression that the singer has lost his belief in love and life and that nothing is important to him. The words that finish the last verse support it:

Nothing left to win
And nothing else to lose

In my opinion the Polish translation does not render the mood of the original text. The translated words seem to be empty without the music.

A similar misunderstanding occurs in the lyric " Twilight ". Here, Bono presents the source of his anxiety and fear:

My body grows and grows
It frightens me, you know

The song deals with adult life and responsibility. The reader of the Polish translation may interpret the theme as the adolescence crisis. As far as the theme is concerned we can find some allusions to the awakening sexuality of a boy and his curiosity arising about it. The line " in the shadow boy meets man ", which constitutes a background of refrain, supports such an interpretation. However, this is a wrong interpretation because the words actually present the boy's confusion which can be noticed in the refrain:

Lost my way
Night and day

Can't find my way
In the shadow boy meets man

As we can see, it is another example of incoherence and misunderstandings that can appear in the course of the translation.

The young, growing rebel in the "Like a Song" is associated with anxiety caused by pop culture. The mood of the song is sublime, full of anger and grievances:

The generation without name, ripped and torn
Nothing to love, nothing to gain
Nothing at all

We can hear a voice sounding the alarm as an attempt to wake up those who refuse to accept the truth: the generation has been losing slowly its chance to change the world, the world of fear of atomic bomb. Bono sings:

Like a song I have to sing
I sing it for you
Like the words I have to bring
I bring them to you

The lyric says that the singer wants to change something and that is why he appeals to his generation for help:

If you can't help yourself
Well, take a look around
When others need your time
Revolution once again
And in lather, lace or chain
We stake our claim

The reader of the Polish translation will be easily absorbed by this mood. The song is meant for the youth who create the future. The boundaries and divisions have to be broken down, the conflicts have to be stopped – this is a rebellious mood.

The song "Walk on" expresses very powerful ideas. The very title provokes strong feelings in the reader. The mood of the song is optimistic and raises the spirit as the first lines show:

And love is not an easy thing
The only baggage you can bring
Is all that you can't leave behind

The following words and verses just confirm the mood and they are the development of the above mentioned quotation. Moreover, they persuade the reader not to worry, to leave all misfortunes and defeats behind and give a spiritual power:

Walk on, walk on
What you got they can't steal it
No, they can't even feel it
Walk on, walk on
What you've got they can't deny it
Can't sell it or buy it

Having heard these words, the Polish listener would feel better. The optimistic mood of the song has a positive influence on his or her mind. With each line the reader becomes stronger, conscious of his own value, open to new opportunities and ready to forget all his worries:

And I know it aches
When your heart it breaks
Walk on, walk on

Leave it behind
You've got to leave it behind

As we can see, the mood of U2 songs is not so easy to render in translation. The difficulty is also connected with the necessity to translate the rhythm. Moreover, it is impossible to translate particular sounds that have strong influence on the audience. A song can go on in quite a steady way and suddenly explode in the most unexpected moment. Sometimes, one line or even word may change the mood. The translator's duty is to identify that moment and render it in the translation in the most accurate way. In the songs discussed above, this requirement has not always been observed.

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