

# Translation of Humour and Satire in The Importance of Being Earnest by Oscar Wilde and Its Adaptation for the Theatre

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Master's thesis / Diplomski rad

2023

Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj: **Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences / Sveučilište Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku, Filozofski fakultet**

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:142:095146>

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Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2025-01-08**



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Dvopredmetni sveučilišni diplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti –  
prevoditeljski smjer i mađarskog jezika i književnosti – komunikološki smjer

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Znanstvena grana: anglistika

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U Osijeku, datum 3.9.2023.

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## **Abstract**

Oscar Wilde was a famous 19<sup>th</sup>-century author and playwright. He was best known for his plays and satires. Even nowadays, his works and plays are translated into numerous languages. Translation is a process of transcending text from one language to another without losing the intended meaning. However, when it comes to translating humor and jokes, this is not always the easiest task. This is why this MA thesis deals with two different translations of Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest* from English into Croatian, one by Ivo Juriša and the other by Martina Aničić. It examines 25 examples of jokes, puns, and other humorous statements. The translations are compared, analyzed, and commented on. The aim of this paper is to examine possible solutions and techniques translators use when it comes to translating humor, satire, and different types of jokes. Since the play is written to be performed on a stage, this MA thesis also briefly discusses the difficulties and possibilities for its adaptation to the theatre. Both English and Croatian theatre versions are examined.

**Key words:** Oscar Wilde, translation, humor, satire, theatre translation



## **Sažetak**

Oscar Wilde bio je poznati pisac i dramatičar 19. stoljeća. Najpoznatiji je bio po pisanju drama i satira. I danas su njegova djela i drame prevedene na brojne jezike. Prijevod je proces prenošenja teksta s jednog jezika na drugi bez gubitka željenog značenja. No, kad je riječ o prevođenju humora i šala, to nije uvijek najlakši zadatak. Stoga se u ovom magistarskom radu obrađuju dva različita prijevoda Wildeove drame „Važno je zvati se Ernest” s engleskoga na hrvatski, jedan prevoditelj je Ivo Juriša, a drugi Martina Aničić. Rad sadrži 25 primjera šala, igri riječi i drugih duhovitih izjava. Dva dana prijevoda uspoređena su, analizirana i kratko prokomentirana. Cilj ovog rada je ispitati moguća rješenja i tehnike kojima se prevoditelji služe pri prevođenju humora, satire i različitih vrsta šala. Budući da je drama napisana za kazališnu izvedbu, u ovom se diplomskom radu ukratko govori o poteškoćama i mogućnostima njezine adaptacije za kazalište. Rad uključuje analizu i engleske i hrvatske kazališne verzije.

Ključne riječi: Oscar Wilde, prijevod, humor, satira, kazališni prijevod

## Introduction

Humor and satire are important tools Oscar Wilde uses throughout his work. Wilde's works, especially plays, are translated into numerous languages and are still one of the most famous and most performed plays throughout the world. Therefore, this MA thesis deals with translating humor and satire present in Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* into Croatian. When it comes to translation, there are certain difficulties when translating humorous and satirical literary devices.

This MA thesis deals with those difficulties, it discusses possible strategies and suggestions by researchers for translating these elements. To achieve that, this paper analyses Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest* and its translation into Croatian.

In addition, this paper aims to find solutions for the successful translation of both humor and satire, as well as other literary devices, such as paradox and irony. It also gives an overview of Wilde's most common humorous devices, and their importance in achieving humorous effects, and offers possible translation solutions.

Firstly, it is crucial to briefly discuss Wilde's life and achievements, as they strongly influenced his writing style. It is also important to understand what elements Wilde uses to create the uniqueness of his writing style. Those will briefly be discussed and explained. To appreciate the translation, it is necessary to understand what type of play this is and its main goals and ideas, which is why the examples of satire and humor are also analyzed.

The second part of this MA thesis includes a theoretical framework for the translation itself and an explanation of humor and satire. The list of the most common strategies researchers propose when it comes to translating humor and satire is included. Those strategies will be discussed and used in the third part of the paper.

The third part of this paper is an analysis of the above-mentioned translation into Croatian. It will include various examples of humor, jokes, puns, irony, and paradox in the play, as well as their translations by the two translators, Ivo Juriša and Martina Aničić. After each example, a concise explanation of the context will be given, as well as a comment on the translation and the used strategy. In some instances, a suggestion for the improvement of the translation will be also given in addition to an explanation of the used literary or rhetorical device.

The fourth part will discuss the play's adaptation for the theatre and explore the inherent challenges involved in bringing it to the stage.

## Biography

Oscar Wilde, born in Dublin on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1854, was one of the most popular and controversial literary figures of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His literary output is quite diverse since he was a playwright, poet, critic, and novelist. Wilde grew up in a well-to-do family as his father, Sir William Wilde, was Ireland's leading ear and eye surgeon, and his mother was a revolutionary poet. The environment in which he grew up strongly influenced his life and career: "His professional and literary parents played a pivotal role in his early years. His father's extensive reading collection helped him shape his creative mind, however, his mother's linguistics skills left a deep influence on his life and later work" (Literary Device).

As he studied at Trinity College in Dublin and Magdalen College in Oxford, Wilde began with his creative writing early on and even won the Newdigate Prize in 1878 with his long poem, *Ravenna*. He was inspired by the English writers John Ruskin and Walter Pater, whose teachings speak of the importance of art in life. Wilde accepted the doctrine that art exists for the sake of its beauty alone. This created a European art movement called aestheticism, and Wilde became a representative of this ideal. During his education, he also wrote a collection of poems. Although he wrote only one novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), his reputation lies largely on it as it made him famous. He was more prolific when it came to plays as he wrote hugely successful society comedies, such as *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), *An Ideal Husband* (1895), and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895).

Since Wilde grew up in a wealthy family, he skillfully entered high society. Famous for his flamboyant clothes and style, he was also admired as a scandalous writer, mainly due to his writing style, which includes both reality and fantasy, thus creating a previously unimaginable combination. As an acknowledged writer, he even lectured in The United States and Canada in 1883, after which he moved back to Great Britain. In 1884 Wilde married Constance Lloyd, daughter of a prominent Irish barrister, with whom he had two children. However, in 1891 he met Lord Alfred Douglas, an English poet, and journalist, with whom he developed a close, intimate, but stormy relationship. Douglas's father did not approve of their relationship, so he publicly accused Wilde of homosexuality. Wilde sued him for criminal libel but was found guilty and was later sentenced to two years of hard labor in Reading. In May 1897 Wilde was released, bankrupt and humiliated. He went to France and wrote his last work *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898), in which he expressed his worry about the bad prison conditions in England. In November 1900 he died suddenly of acute meningitis.

## The Importance of Being Earnest and the Victorian Era

Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest*, or in its full title *The Importance of Being Earnest, A Trivial Comedy for Serious People*, was first performed on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1895 in London. This play marks the artistic peak of Wilde's career as it was widely played on the London stage. When first performed, it was thought to be a light comedy and classified as entertainment for Victorian society. However, the play is a satire that mocks society itself and is considered Wilde's greatest dramatic achievement. *The Importance of Being Earnest* was an enormous success. The first critics admired the play's writing and performability, as well as its humor and satire. However, many people disliked Wilde as a person, so some individual critics stated the play had no substance. But the overall impression was positive, so the play was regarded as original, witty, and humorous.

Although this was the peak of his career, it was also the era of the greatest scandal in Wilde's life – the time of the defamation trial, which led to Wilde's arrest. The scandal threatened Wilde's career as it destroyed the successful run of the play. First, his name was removed from the program, but ultimately, the play was seized from performing, having run 83 times.

Even though the play was banned due to the author's personal life and issues, it remained popular as it became the most famous and the most performable Wilde's play. The play is still performed in English theatres, but also in many different languages worldwide, and it has been adapted into numerous movies, stage productions, and operas.

The Victorian society, in which Wilde lived, was highly conservative, and it valued dignity, morality, responsibility, and restraint. Its main values were those referring to family, domestic propriety, and sexual repression. Women were expected to be pure, innocent, and moral. The upper class enjoyed their life, they did not work since their wealth came from land and inheritance, while the poor struggled to survive and escape poverty. The upper class enjoyed cultural events and the theatre, and they also valued education. A family name that was somehow relevant or famous had an important role – this is how men proved their value in society.

On the other hand, the Victorian era was also a progressive time; in this period technology and science were rapidly developing. This is why the Victorian era is called an era of doubleness. As expected, values like family, marriage, and morality were the main themes of literary works of that period. Another example of doubleness is the Aesthetic movement. The Aesthetic movement challenged Victorian values by foregrounding sensuality and pleasure. The

followers of this movement cherished the cult of beauty and believed that art should not be moral. To aesthetes, the whole life was an artistic endeavor, and as Wilde put it: “One should either be a work of art or wear a work of art”. Oscar Wilde, with his flamboyant and luxurious lifestyle, is a typical representative of this movement, and “Wilde’s writing” is no exception since he “also threw off Victorian ideas about earnest and serious argument, instead relishing playfulness and paradox” (Burdett).

Aesthetes played with the opposites — life and art, which is especially true for Wilde, who claimed that life imitates art and not the other way around. *The Importance of Being Earnest* is Wilde’s play that uses humor, satire, and witty language to mock Victorian society, the upper class, and its values, such as marriage, social customs, and the pursuit of love.

### Wilde’s Writing Style

Witty, controversial, and sophisticated - all these adjectives can be used to describe Wilde’s writing style. Perhaps Oscar Wilde's style in general is best described as vivid. He fantastically included both fantasy and reality to form his art. By using realistic dialect and unusual imagery, usually morbid such as blood, death, corpses, or murder, he successfully combined these two incompatible genres.

An important part of Wilde’s style is definitively the existence and acceptance of evil. Wilde understood the deepest, darkest parts of the human mind and was not afraid to express them in his works. Throughout his opus, he has shown an incredible talent for morbidity and evil and emphasized the darker side of human nature. Wilde preferred witty dialogue over action. His works are characterized by the lack of action as he uses his work to express his ideas through rich, clever, and entertaining characters’ dialogue. To highlight this, Wilde used exaggerated and absurd situations, and the characters use nonsensical language.

### Humor in Wilde’s Writings

To understand Wilde’s style in its entirety, it is important to define some basic terms crucial for his opus in general. Humor is “the ability to find things funny, the way in which people see that some things are funny, or the quality of being funny” (Cambridge Dictionary). Humor is the main device Wilde used in both his personal and professional life. To understand how much

significance it holds in his life it is enough to know that upon arrival in the New York Customs House in January of 1882, he supposedly stated: “I have nothing to declare except genius”.

## Satire

Since *The Importance of Being Earnest* is a satire of Victorian society, it is of essence to understand that term as well. The Cambridge Dictionary defines satire as “a way of criticizing people or ideas in a humorous way, especially in order to make a political point, or a piece of writing that uses this style” (Cambridge Dictionary). Satires are a powerful tool to express one’s ideas and thoughts, to comment on something, or even to provoke and call into question a certain person, tradition, or social custom. It is important to understand that satires do not only ridicule and entertain but also inform and encourage people to think. This is why satires are often called the oldest type of social commentary. There are three most common types of satires. The first type is the Horatian Satire, which simply wants to entertain the audience, without trying to warn about any particular social problem. The second type, Juvenalian Satire, is darker and more serious, as it attacks individuals, organizations, and leadership to expose hypocrisy. The third type is called Menippean Satire, and it focuses on specific human traits and flaws, or different philosophies, such as racism or homophobia.

## Usage of Literary Devices

Recognized in society as a witty persona, Wilde also showed this particular talent in his works. To successfully ridicule Victorian society, he had to use various literary and humorous devices, such as paradox, symbolism, exaggeration, metaphor, irony, and rhetorical devices. In *The Importance of Being Earnest* the most obvious ones are paradox and irony. Paradox is “a situation or statement that seems impossible or is difficult to understand because it contains two opposite facts or characteristics” (Cambridge Dictionary). As such, the paradox is a useful tool Wilde uses to mock Victorian values. In literature, there are two types of paradoxes - situational, and rhetoric.

“A situational paradox is a circumstance that is contradictory, whereas a rhetoric paradox is a seemingly contrasting comment made by a character” (Hasa, 2020).

Similarly, irony is “a literary device in which contradictory statements or situations reveal a reality that is different from what appears to be true” (Literary Devices). There are three main types of irony, situational, verbal, and dramatic irony.

1. Situational irony is when something completely opposite of the expected happens.

2. The verbal type of irony is when the intended meaning of an utterance changes and the expressed meaning greatly differs from it.
3. The last, dramatic irony represents the situation in which the audience knows more than the character, for example, in a play.

There are, however, more types of irony that can be found in literature. For example, cosmic irony, when a character's life is completely out of their control. There is also historical irony that represents enormously ironic events that are more common in real life. To illustrate this type of irony, gunpowder was invented by Chinese alchemists, who wanted to find the elixir of life. Socratic irony can be found when a character pretends to be ignorant for his personal gain. This helps the audience understand the plot. Wilde successfully handles different types of irony that are often found in his works.

Wilde was usually not straightforward when expressing his ideas, but he used symbols to convey a certain message; this is called symbolism in literature. To complete this verbal evasion, Wilde often uses various metaphors – “expressions that describe a person or object by referring to something that is considered to possess similar characteristics” (Cambridge Dictionary). Metaphors and symbolism are rhetorical devices that are used to influence, persuade, or evoke the reader's emotional reactions. Exaggeration, a literary device used to make something sound better or worse, is used by Wilde to add more stress and influence to the statements.

## Humor and Satire in *The Importance of Being Earnest*

*The Importance of Being Earnest* is classified as a satire, but also as a comedy of manners – “a funny play, film or book that shows the silly behavior of a particular group of people” (Oxford Dictionary). The targeted group, in this case, is Victorian society and its values. Wilde made fun of the false morality it represented. People lived by strict rules and valued the morals of that era. They allegedly respected the union of marriage, honesty, morality, personal responsibility, and self-reliance. Women were expected to be submissive to their husbands, and they were supposed to be prude and pious.

Of course, people strayed away from these imposed values. In practice, these principles were often violated. Characters in the play, Cecily and Gwendolen both broke the norm according to which “The normal expectation is that the young ladies will be delicate, romantic, dependent,

and the young men will be sufficiently practical and experienced in the ways of the world to act as protectors for the young ladies — that they will have all the talents that high society demands of the escorts for its young women” (Jordan 102). However, throughout the play, we see that “The refined young ladies turn out to be hard-headed, cold-blooded, efficient and completely self-possessed and the young gentlemen simply crumple in front of them” (ibid.). However, Gwendolen and Cecily’s actions differ from their attitude towards women in society – this creates yet another paradox as Cecily declares: “I don’t quite like women who are interested in philanthropic work. I think it is so forward of them” (Wilde 107).

Victorian era was also the time in which women became slightly more independent as it was the time of the suffrage movement. The suffrage movement was a movement fighting for women’s rights to vote. It started in 1903 when Emmeline Pankhurst founded the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU). After years of fighting, protests, struggle, and adversity, women finally achieved the same voting rights as men due to Equal Franchise Act in 1928.

Wilde mocks pretentious thinking and Victorian attitude toward the world in this play. “Wilde’s basic formula for satire is their assumption of a code of behavior that represents the reality that Victorian convention pretends to ignore” (Reinert 15). Firstly, he mocks the Victorian hypocrisy and the alleged sincerity since both Algernon and Jack use their false name “Ernest” in order to escape social duties, enjoy life, and to be able to pretend to be someone else. Jack uses this doubleness by being Jack in the country and using the name Ernest in the city. The usage of the name “Ernest” forms a pun because of its meaning – serious or honest – which both men clearly are not. Algernon suggests that even in marriage one is expected to “bunbury”, that is, to escape their real duties by pretending to be someone else: “You don’t seem to realize, that in married life three is company and two is none” (Wilde 56).

The whole society is the main cause of mockery in this play. Wilde wanted to highlight the shallowness of the people – women in the play do not care about genuine human values, but only about superficial things. He mocked this phenomenon so the characters in the play worry only about trivial things, for example, the name of their spouse as Gwendolen admits “...and my idea has always been to love someone of the name of Ernest. There is something in that name that inspires absolute confidence. The moment Algernon first mentioned to me that he had a friend called Ernest, I knew I was destined to love you” (Wilde 63).

Wilde successfully represents the desire of the upper class to show off and convince others (and themselves) that they are much better than the rest of society. An excellent example of this is



Algernon, who is a part of the upper class, however, Lady Bracknell warns Cecily: “Dear child, of course you know that Algernon has nothing but his debts to depend upon” (Wilde 132). Clearly, Algernon has financial problems, but he does not allow them to stop him from living extravagantly. He does nothing for a living, and he tears up his bills. Nevertheless, he hides his problems by “bunburying”, and he manages to live lavishly as he was called out by Jack for dressing excessively: “Well, at any rate, that is better than being always overdressed as you are” (Wilde 100).

Another important social custom that Wilde mocks is marriage. Marriage and social status are intertwined since people marry solely for gaining status and money. Lady Bracknell admits having a list of “suitable husbands” for Gwendolen: “I feel bound to tell you that you are not down on my list of eligible young men, although I have the same list as the dear Duchess of Bolton has” (Wilde 67). At the same time, she shows how important it is to keep up with other members of high society. Lady Bracknell also shows how an ideal husband for Gwendolen should come from money: “You have a town house, I hope? A girl with a simple, unspoiled nature, like Gwendolen, could hardly be expected to reside in the country” (Wilde 68). Lady Bracknell’s behavior is absurd since her statements are contradictory, after her conversation with Algernon she argues: “But I do not approve of mercenary marriages” (Wilde 132).

In addition, both couples, Algernon and Cecily, and Gwendolen and Jack, emphasize their immense love. However, they declare this great love immediately upon first meeting, showing the shallowness of their marriages. The ladies would not even be interested in them if it weren’t for their pseudo name – Ernest.

### Challenges in translating humor - some methods and strategies (proposed by researchers)

Generally speaking, translating humor is one of the most difficult tasks translators face. In order to understand this phenomenon, we must understand what translation, humor, and satire are.

According to Wills (as cited in Kashgary 50), “Translation is a transfer process, which aims at the transformation of a written SL text into an optimally equivalent TL text, and which requires the syntactic, the semantic and the pragmatic understanding and analytical processing of the SL.” This transformation is especially difficult when one must transform something considered funny since “Humor is a complex phenomenon. There is no general theory of humor or even an agreed definition” (Ostrower, qtd. in Bruce). It is not only difficult because the mere understanding of humor is subjective - something can be funny to us, while others will not

experience it that way, but other different factors also play a role in translating the humor. Firstly, humor is a culture-based phenomenon that uses culturally specific terms and to translate it one must be thoroughly familiar with the source language and the context of the joke. Some jokes are universal, but humor can be an integral part of the culture in which it was created, and “...each culture can have its own special sense of humor that might be tied to its history, traditions, values, and beliefs” (Translating Humor is a Serious Business). This means that some jokes can only be funny to people who belong to that specific culture and transcending it to another language would usually “kill” the joke.

There are two broad classes of textual humor – referential and verbal. “Referential (or conceptual) humor uses language to convey some meaning (e.g., a story, a description of a situation or event) which is itself the source of humor, regardless of the medium used to convey it” (Chiaro 34). The problem with cultural references represents this type of humor. The second class of humor is verbal which “...relies on the particular language used to express it, so that it may use idiosyncratic features of the language...” (ibid.).

This type of humor represents a further problem for translators, and it comes in the form of puns and wordplay. “Puns are jokes that make use of words that sound alike or nearly alike but have different meanings. Wordplay is verbal wit based on the meanings and ambiguities of words” (Translating Humor is Serious Business). Wordplay uses various techniques: spelling, alliteration, slang, rhymes, phonetics, and semantics. This is clearly a serious problem for translators since words do not sound nor are written the same in different languages.

Before translating, Low suggests that translators try “diagnosing the joke” by asking themselves the following questions:

- (1) “What is the work’s genre/context/tone/situation/purpose?”
- (2) Is the humor obscure/clumsy/complex/hilarious/offensive?
- (3) Is the humor language-specific or not?
- (4) Is the humor culture-specific or not?” (Low 60)

Also, translators must be aware that jokes consist of three components and Chapman lists them as follows:

- I. Linguistic Content refers to the speech patterns in which a humorous message is encoded,

- II. Semantic Content refers to the topic and theme of the joke, and
- III. Cognitive Content refers to the cognitive complexity of the joke.

The translators face a dilemma when they come upon a joke as they must decide on the technique they are going to use (there are three most common ones). However, the translator's primary factor must be to transport the humorous effect while dealing with humor translation.

One option is to keep the original meaning, or in other words – to use word-for-word translation. This is the easiest and quickest way of dealing with humorous content, but it is not always the best one. Jokes, when simply translated into another language, to a large extent, will not be perceived as funny or amusing.

The second solution translators could use is transcreation. “Transcreation is the process of adapting a message from one language to another, whilst maintaining its style, tone, context and intent. It takes into consideration the cultural differences between the original material and the target country, region or group of people” (Gauld). Although translators always strive to remain as faithful as possible to the original, when it comes to humor, sometimes, it is necessary to completely change the content. A translator should combine his knowledge of the source language and its culture to successfully transcend the message into the target language and its culture. To properly do this, translators must be creative and flexible to change the structure of the joke, to replace the words, but to keep the essence of the original.

The third option available is to exclude the translation. The translator can simply just explain the joke to the audience. The explanation can be in the form of footnotes or simply inserted instead of the joke, depending on the type of the text. This is not a widely used technique since it sacrifices the humor in the joke, and sometimes it can be hard to find an adequate explanation.

When it comes to translating puns, Low suggests six techniques:

- I. Replicate the pun (when possible).
- II. Create a new pun that would be somehow connected to the source text.
- III. Use a different humorous device when humor is more important than the meaning.
- IV. Use compensation in place to put wordplay near the pun.
- V. Expanded translation, or in other words – explaining the pun.
- VI. And the last option is to simply ignore the pun.

## Challenges in Translating Satire and its Literary Devices

As already defined, satire is a literary work that aims to criticize some social behavior, custom, or norm to both amuse and warn the audience. To manage this, authors must include various literary devices, such as irony or paradox. Those devices usually represent a challenge for translators due to cultural and linguistic differences between languages.

The most important thing a translator must do, as with the translation of humor, is to study the text well to be sure to spot the places where these literary devices appear. Then (as in the case of humor translation) the best strategy should be chosen in order to transfer the message from the source text to the target text. It is important for a translator to understand the text in its entirety. If the translator misses the meaning of irony, “just as any type of humour, a failure to signal the intention to joke may compromise laughter and the necessary quickness of response” (Mateo 172).

In her article *The Translation of Irony*, Marta Mateo suggests 13 strategies when it comes to translating irony:

1. “ST irony becomes TT irony with literal translation
2. ST irony becomes TT irony with “equivalent effect” translation
3. ST irony becomes TT irony through means different from those used in ST  
(e.g. verbal irony becomes kinetic irony, the use of intonation is replaced by lexical or grammatical units, etc.)
4. ST irony is enhanced in TT with some word/expression
5. ST ironic innuendo becomes more restricted and explicit in TT
6. ST irony becomes TT sarcasm (criticism is overt now, no feeling of contradiction at all)
7. The hidden meaning of ST irony comes to the surface in TT. No irony in TT therefore
8. ST ironic ambiguity has only one of the two meanings translated in TT. No double-entendre or ambiguity in TT therefore
9. ST irony replaced by a “synonym” in TT with no two possible interpretations

10. ST irony explained in footnote in TT
11. ST irony has literal translation with no irony in TT
12. Ironic ST completely deleted in TT
13. No irony in ST becomes irony in TT” (Mateo 175).

Chachachiro, however, lists only two possible strategies for irony translation:

- (1) “Translating by using different form with similar function, and
- (2) translating by substitution, addition and/or omission” (Chakhachiro 17).

## Analysis

### Puns

#### 1 The Importance of Being Earnest

Važno je zvati se Ernest

In the English version, the mere title of the play represents a pun – Earnest / Ernest. The word earnest, according to the Oxford Dictionary, means “very serious and sincere” (Oxford Dictionary). It is convenient how in the English language the name Ernest represents a homophone with this adjective. The adjective “earnest” is translated into Croatian as “iskren” or “ozbiljan”. These two adjectives do not sound like any proper name in Croatian, so the translators decided to sacrifice the pun and ignore the doubleness of the meaning. This is the sixth strategy Low suggested when it comes to translating puns.

Some languages were able to transcend the same meaning, in other words, they recreated the pun by using names that sound like the adjective of similar meaning (honest, serious) in their languages. For example, Brazilian Portuguese version is *A importância de ser prudente*, translated by Petrucia Finkler. “Prudente” is an old Brazilian name and an adjective with a similar meaning to the English “earnest”.

#### a) Jack

On the contrary, Aunt Augusta, I’ve now realized for the first time in my life the vital Importance of Being Earnest. (Act III, pp. 147)

Jack

Ne, tetko Augusta, ja sam samo shvatio da je u životu jedino važno zvati se Ernest. (Čin III, str. 103.)

Jack

Naprotiv, teta Augusta. Tek sam sada, po prvi put u životu shvatio od kakve je važnosti zvati se Ernest. (Čin III, str. 67.)

The pun Earnest / Ernest appears throughout the play. In this example, the spelling of the word is *Earnest*, however, the translators chose to change this to *Ernest*. The translators, again, sacrificed the humor Wilde intended. This is another example of Low's sixth translation strategy – ignoring the pun. This is not ideal, but at least the translators stayed consistent. When it comes to Mateo's strategies, this would be the eighth – ST's double meaning is not entirely translated, only one meaning is transcended.

b) Jack

It isn't Ernest; it's Jack.

Algernon

You have always told me it was Ernest. I have introduced you to everyone as Ernest. You answer to the name of Ernest. You look as if your name was Ernest. You are the most earnest looking person I ever saw in my life. It is perfectly absurd your saying that your name isn't Ernest. It's on your cards. Here is one of them (Taking it from case) 'Mr Ernest Worthing, B.4, The Albany'. I'll keep this as a proof that your name is Ernest if ever you attempt to deny it to me, or to Gwendolen, or to anyone else. (Act I, pp. 52)

Jack

Ne zovem se Ernest, zovem se Jack.

Algernon

Uvijek si mi govorio da ti je ime Ernest. Predstavljao sam te svakome kao Ernesta. Odazivaš se na ime Ernest. Ne poznajem nikoga kome bi to ime bolje pristajalo. Zaista je smiješno što tvrdiš da ti ime nije Ernest. To piše i na tvojim posjetnicama. Evo jedne. /Uzme je iz kasete/ "Gospodin Ernest Worthing, B 4, Albany". Zadržat ću je kao dokaz da ti je ime Ernest ako bi ti ikad palo na pamet da to porekneš preda mnom ili pred Gwendolen ili pred bilo kime. /Stavi posjetnicu u džep/. (Čin I, str. 8.)

Jack

Ne zovem se Ernest, nego Jack.

Algernon

Uvijek si govorio da se zoveš Ernest. Svima sam te predstavljao kao Ernesta. Odazivaš se na ime Ernest. Izgledaš kao netko tko se zove Ernest. Ti izgledaš kao najprirodniji Ernest na svijetu. Savršeno bi glupo bilo reći da tvoje ime nije Ernest. Nalazi se na svim tvojim posjetnicama. /vadi jednu iz tabakere/ “G. Ernest Worthing, B./4, The Albany”. Spremit ću je kao dokaz da se zoveš Ernest, ako ti ikad padne na pamet da tu činjenicu porekneš meni, Gwendolen, ili nekom trećem. /stavlja posjetnicu u džep/ (Čin I, str. 8.)

In this example, both translators completely ignored the pun. The word “earnest” was not translated as a name nor as an adjective, but as a paraphrase. In the first example, the translator tried to convey the meaning of the original – “you are the most earnest looking person”, but when it is translated into Croatian as “Ne poznajem nikoga kome bi to ime bolje pristajalo” it loses its meaning since the name Ernest does not include the meaning “iskren” or “ozbiljan”. The second translation also paraphrased the sentence, but also did not include the pun: “Ti izgledaš kao najprirodniji Ernest na svijetu”.

## 2 Cecily

They are approaching. That is very forward of them. (Act III, pp.123)

Cecily

Približuju se. Bezobraznici! (Čin III, str. 81.)

Cecily

Približavaju se. To je zbilja bezobrazno. (Čin III, str. 54.)

According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the word “forward” can mean: “lacking modesty or reserve” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary), but also “moving, tending, or leading toward a position in front” (ibid.). The translators were aware of this doubleness, but it was again impossible to recreate the pun. The translators focused only on one meaning of this word –

sacrificing the pun. In Mateo's list, this is also the eighth strategy – transcending only one meaning of the joke.

3 Lady Bracknell

Mr Worthing, is Miss Cardew at all connected with any of the larger railway stations in London? I merely desire information. Until yesterday I had no idea that there were any families or persons whose origin was a Terminus. (Act III, pp. 129)

Lady Bracknell

Gospodine Worthing, je li gospodjica Cardew na bilo koji način u rodu s kojim od većih londonskih kolodvora? Ja samo želim da budem upućena. Do jučer nisam imala ni pojma da postoje obitelji ili osobe koje lozu vuku od željezničke stanice. (Čin III, str. 87.)

Lady Bracknell

G. Worthing, da li je gđica Cardew na neki način povezana s kojom od većih londonskih željezničkih stanica? Pitam tek informacije radi – do jučer pojma nisam imala da postoje ljudi i obitelji čiji se korijeni nalaze na peronu. (Čin III, str. 57.)

A complicated pun by Lady Bracknell is used to express her dissatisfaction with Algernon and Cecily's engagement. She has already shown disapproval of Jack's origin and suspects that Cecily's background is similar since she is Jack's ward. According to the Cambridge Dictionary the word "terminus" is "the last stop or the station at the end of a bus or train route" (The Cambridge Dictionary). The first stop on a railway line is known as the "origin", hence the pun.

A railway station is as far back as Jack can trace his origin and Lady Bracknell humorously refers to it as his origin. In the translation, this double meaning is lost since the names of the first and last stops on a railway line are culturally specific. The translators ignored these meanings and focused simply on the humor that one's origin is the railway station.

4 Lady Bracknell

The cloak-room at Victoria Station?

Jack

Yes. The Brighton line.

Lady Bracknell



The line is immaterial. Mr Worthing, I confess I feel somewhat bewildered by what you have just told me. (Act I, pp. 71)

Lady Bracknell

U garderobi kolodvora Victoria?

Jack

Da. Na liniji za Brighton.

Lady Bracknell

Linija nije važna. Gospodine Worthing, moram priznati da sam donekle zbunjena onim što ste mi upravo rekli. (Čin I, str. 27.)

Lady Bracknell

U garderobi na stanici Victoria?

Jack

Da. Radilo se o liniji za Brighton.

Lady Bracknell

Sasvim je svejedno o kojoj se liniji radilo. Gospodine Worthing, moram priznati da me sve ovo što ste maloprije rekli prilično razljutilo. (Čin I, str. 20.)

Lady Bracknell is a character that represents the conventional upper-class Victorian society. Throughout the play, she overtly expressed her views on the importance of one's origin and family history. This example represents a pun with the word "line". "Line" can refer to both, the family and the train line. Lady Bracknell states how the line is not important, referring to the train line, while clearly being concerned about Jack's family line. The translators, however, ignored the pun by using the word "linija" which is not equivalent to "family line". The translator preserved only one meaning of the joke.

## Paradoxes

### 5 Algernon

Lane's views on marriage seem somewhat lax. Really, if the lower orders don't set us a good example, what on earth is the use of them? They seem, as a class, to have absolutely no sense of moral responsibility. (Act I, pp. 46)

Algernon

Čini mi se da Lane nema dovoljno poštovanja prema braku. Ako nam niži slojevi ne budu prednjačili dobrim primjerom, kakva nam onda korist od njih? Čini mi se da oni, kao klasa, nemaju baš nikakav osjećaj moralne odgovornosti. (Čin I, str. 2.)

Algernon

Laneovi pogledi na svijet čine se pomalo nedorečenima. Zaista, ako nam niži slojevi ne pružaju dobar primjer, čemu onda uopće služe? Čini se da oni kao klasa uopće nemaju osjećaja za moralnu odgovornost. (Čin I, str. 4)

This represents a paradoxical statement by Algernon about the classes in the Victorian era. It would be expected that the upper classes serve as an example to the lower classes. However, Algernon states his worry about the lower classes not setting a good example for the aristocracy. This creates a paradox – a rhetorical one since it was an absurd remark by a character in the play. The translation follows the original text closely without losing its meaning. It successfully transcended the paradox. The second translator replaced “views on marriage” with “pogledi na svijet”.

## 6 Cecily

It is always painful to part from people whom one has known for a very brief space of time. The absence of old friends one can endure with equanimity. But even a momentary separation from anyone to whom one has just been introduced is almost unbearable. (Act II, pp. 101)

Cecily

Uvijek je bolno rastati se od ljudi koje tek kratko poznajete. Odsutnost starih prijatelja može se ravnodušno podnijeti. Ali čak i privremeni rastanak od osobe koju ste tek upoznali gotovo je nepodnošljiv. (Čin II, str. 57.)

Cecily

Uvijek je bolno kad se čovjek mora rastati od nekoga koga poznaje razmjerno kratko vrijeme. Odsutnost starih prijatelja može se podnijeti ravnodušno. Ali čak i najkraća razdvojenost od nekoga koga smo tek upoznali gotovo je nepodnošljiva. (Čin I, str. 39.)

Cecily's statement about people and parting from them is quite paradoxical. She insists that it is easier to part from people one has known for a long time, than from those one has just met. Clearly, this is a rhetorical paradox since it is a paradoxical comment made by a character in a play. The translation is literal in both cases.

#### 7 Lady Bracknell

You are perfectly right in making some slight alteration. Indeed, no woman should ever be quite accurate about her age. It looks so calculating— (Act III, pp. 135)

Lady Bracknell

Imaš potpuno pravo što unosiš male izmjene. Nijedna žena ne bi trebala da bude sasvim precizna u pogledu svojih godina. To djeluje tako proračunato... (Čin III, str. 92.)

Lady Bracknell

Potpuno si u pravu kad unosiš te male promjene. Zaista, žena nikad ne bi smjela biti precizna kad su u pitanju njezine godine. To zvuči tako proračunato. (Čin III, str. 61.)

Lady Bracknell's remark about women and their age is paradoxical. She says that women should lie about their age because that would be calculating. Cambridge Dictionary defines calculating as “often controlling situations for your own advantage in a way that is slightly unpleasant and causes people not to trust you”. Lying is also a way of deceiving people so Lady Bracknell's statement is quite paradoxical. The translators followed the original and transcended the meaning literally.

#### 8 Algernon

It is awfully hard work doing nothing. However, I don't mind hard work where there is no definite object of any kind. (Act I, pp. 77)

Algernon

Ništa ne raditi vrlo je naporno. Međutim, ja ne zazirem od napora ako ne postoji nikakav odredjeni cilj. (Čin I, str. 32.)

Algernon

To je strašno težak posao, ne raditi ništa. Ali, nije važno. Meni ne smeta težak posao, samo ako nema nikakve određene svrhe. (Čin I, str. 23.)

Another paradox stated by Algernon. His statement is contradictory – he says that doing nothing is awfully hard work. The first translator truthfully follows the original, but it sounds a bit clumsy due to the word order. “Vrlo je naporno ne raditi ništa” would sound more natural. Aničić’s translation sounds more natural and it also follows the original.

9 Algernon

Well, one must be serious about something, if one wants to have any amusement in life. I happen to be serious about Bunburying. What on earth you are serious about I haven’t got the remotest idea. About everything, I should fancy. You have such an absolutely trivial nature. (Act II, pp. 119)

Algernon

Pa čovjek u nečemu mora biti ozbiljan ako se u životu želi zabaviti. Ja sam ozbiljan u pogledu banberiranja. U čemu si ti ozbiljan zaista nemam ni pojma. U svemu vjerojatno. Ti si potpuno beznačajne naravi. (Čin II, str. 76.)

A few sentences by Algernon are all filled with paradoxes. Two contradictory terms – seriousness and amusement are connected. He also states that Jack is serious about everything and concludes that it makes his personality trivial. Translating “trivial” as “beznačajan” is fine, but when it comes to personality, a better solution would be “površan”.

Page 52 is missing from Aničić’s translation.

Irony

10 Algernon

Oh! there is no use speculating on that subject. Divorces are made in heaven— (Jack puts out his hand to take a sandwich. Algernon at once interferes) Please don’t touch the cucumber sandwiches. They are ordered specially for Aunt Augusta. (Takes one and eats it)

Jack

Well, you have been eating them all the time. (Act I, pp. 49)

Algernon

O, nema smisla da o tome raspravljamo. Brakovi se rastavljaju u nebu. /Jack posegne za sendvičima. Algernon odmah intervenira/ Molim te, ostavi sendviče s krastavcima na miru. Oni su spremljeni za tetku Augustu. /Uzme sendvič i stavi ga u usta/.

Jack

Pa ti ih stalno jedeš. (Čin I, str. 4.-5.)

Algernon

Nema koristi od razmatranja tog predmeta. Razvodi su nebeski izum /Jack posiže za sendvičem, Algernon se umiješa/ Molim te, ne diraj sendviče od krastavaca. Pripremljeni su posebno za tetu Augustu.

Jack

Ako smijem primijetiti, ti ih stalno jedeš. (Čin I, str. 5.)

Algernon and Jack's dialogue is an example of situational irony. Algernon warns Jack that the sandwiches are made strictly for his aunt Augusta. After forbidding Jack to try the sandwiches, Algernon is caught eating one himself. This is a clear representation of situational irony since Algernon's behavior is unexpected and humorous. Situational irony relies more on the situation than on the words, so the translators literally translated the irony. However, Aničić chose to translate "divorces are made in heaven" as "nebeski izum" which is a better solution than Juriša's "brakovi se rastavljaju u nebu" since Aničić's highlights the importance of "heaven" – conveying the meaning that divorces are a good thing (satirical comment on the Victorian values) which is not so clear in Juriša's translation.

## 11 Cecily

Oh yes. Dr Chasuble is a most learned man. He has never written a single book, so you can imagine how much he knows. (Act II, pp. 106)

Cecily

O da, doktor Chausuble je nadasve učen čovjek. On nikada nije napisao ni jednu jedinu knjigu, možeš dakle zamisliti koliko on zna. (Čin II, str. 63.)

Cecily

O, da, pastor je vrlo učen čovjek. Nikad nije napisao ni jednu knjigu, pa možeš misliti koliko zna. (Čin II, str. 43.)

Cecily's remark about Dr Chasuble is a perfect example of verbal irony. Her words contradict her real meaning. A man who has never written a book would not usually be regarded as a man who knows a lot. This is an ironical statement that ridicules the Victorian era's values and education. Juriša emphasizes the part "a single book" by translating it as "ni jednu jedinu knjigu". This is the fourth strategy Mateo suggests: ST irony is enhanced in TT with some word or expression. Aničić, however, highlighted the irony by using "možeš misliti koliko zna".

## 12 Gwendolen

Five counties! I don't think I should like that. I hate crowds.

Cecily (Sweetly): I suppose that is why you live in town?

Gwendolen bites her lip, and beats her foot nervously with her parasol (Act II, pp. 113)

Gwendolen

Pet grofovija! Mislim da mi se to ne bi svidjelo. Mrzim mnoštvo.

Cecily (ljubazno)

Zato vjerojatno živite u gradu?

/Gwendolen se ugrize za usnu i nervozno se suncobranom lupne po nozi/ (Čin II, str. 70.)

Gwendolen

Pet pokrajina? Mislim da mi se to ne bi svidjelo. Ne volim gužvu.

Cecily /slatko/

Pretpostavljam da zbog toga živite u gradu.

Gwendolen /ugrize se za usnu i nervozno gleda naokolo/ (Čin II, str. 47.)

This is an example of verbal irony by Cecily. Gwendolen states how she hates crowds, and yet she lives in town. Cecily realizes how absurd that is by asking an ironic question that meant the opposite of the uttered. Both translators follow the meaning of the original sentence without losing the ironic meaning, however Aničić's translation is more natural due to the usage of the vocabulary, Juriša used "grofovija" while Aničić preferred "pokrajina". Juriša translated "crowd" as "mnoštvo" – which is not the best choice. Aničić, more naturally, translated this as "gužva". Aničić also changed the ironic question by Cecily into a statement. This highlights the irony of the statement. This is the third strategy Mateo suggests: ST irony becomes TT irony through means different from those used in ST.

### 13 Algernon

If it was my business, I wouldn't talk about it. (Begins to eat muffins) It is very vulgar to talk about one's business. Only people like stockbrokers do that, and then merely at dinner parties. (Act II, pp. 120)

Algernon

Da je to moja briga, ne bih o tome govorio. /Počne jesti mafine/ Vrlo je vulgarno govoriti o vlastitim brigama. To čine samo ljudi kao što su burzovni mešetari, i to samo kod večera. (Čin II, str. 77.)

Algernon criticizes talking about someone else's business while he is doing exactly that. This represents situational irony because it is not expected that he would do the same thing he criticizes in others.

As already mentioned, situational irony does not depend on the verbal elements so the translator literally followed the original text.

The page 52 is missing from Aničić's translation.

### 14 Gwendolen

But we will not be the first to speak.

Cecily

Certainly not.

Gwendolen

Mr Worthing, I have something very particular to ask you. Much depends on your reply.  
(Act III, pp. 124)

Gwendolen

Ali mi nećemo prve progovoriti.

Cecily

Nikako.

Gwendolen

Gospodine Worthing, moram vam postaviti važno pitanje. Mnogo toga ovisi o vašem odgovoru. (Čin III, str. 82.)

Gwendolen

Ali mi nećemo prve progovoriti.

Cecily

Jasno da nećemo.

Gwendolen

G. Worthing, postavit ću vam jedno sasvim otvoreno pitanje. Mnogo toga ovisi o vašem odgovoru. (Čin III, str. 54.)

Gwendolen and Cecily's dialogue represents situational irony. Gwendolen insists on the girls not being the first to start a conversation with Algernon and Jack. Cecily agrees with her, and yet Gwendolen is the first to talk. This is unexpected and ironic, creating situational irony. In this case, the translator does not have many options since this type of irony is based on the situation and not on the verbal elements. Therefore, the translators provided a literal translation.

15 Gwendolen

I never change, except in my affections.

Cecily

What a noble nature you have, Gwendolen! (Act III, pp. 144)

Gwendolen

Ja se nikad ne mijenjam, osim u svojim osjećajima.

Cecily



Kako si plemenite naravi, Gwendolen! (Čin III, str. 101.)

Gwendolen

Postojana sam u svemu osim u svojim bolestima.

Cecily

Kako ti imaš plemenitu narav, Gwendolen! (Čin III, str. 66.)

This is another dialogue between Cecily and Gwendolen in which verbal irony is situated. Cecily said how noble Gwendolen is, but when we examine the context in which she said that, she meant quite the opposite. Juriša followed the source text and managed to express the irony literally. Aničić translated “affections” as “bolesti”, but conveyed Cecily’s irony literally.

16 Lady Bracknell

Do you smoke?

Jack

Well, yes, I must admit I smoke.

Lady Bracknell

I am glad to hear it. A man should always have an occupation of some kind. There are far too many idle men in London as it is. How old are you? (Act I, pp. 67)

Lady Bracknell

Pužite li?

Jack

Da, moram priznati – ja pušim.

Lady Bracknell

To mi je drago. Muškarac se uvijek mora nečim baviti. U Londonu ima i suviše dokonih muškaraca. Koliko vam je godina? (Čin I, str. 25.)

Lady Bracknell

Pužite li?

Jack

Da, moram priznati da pušim.

Lady Bracknell

Drago mi je što to čujem. Muškarac uvijek mora imati nešto čime će se zabavljati. U Londonu je danas ionako previse besposlenih muškaraca. Koliko vam je godina? (Čin I, str. 18.)

Lady Bracknell's conversation with Jack is full of verbal irony. This type of irony is used to highlight Lady Bracknell's disapproval of Jack. She mocks his lifestyle, origin, and personality. In this example, she says she is glad to hear that Jack smokes, but from her response it is clear that she means quite the opposite.

17 Gwendolen

This suspense is terrible. I hope it will last. (Act III, pp. 142)

Gwendolen

Ova neizvjesnost je strašna. Nadam se da će još potrajati. (Čin III, str. 99.)

Gwendolen

Ova napetost je nepodnošljiva. Nadam se da će potrajati. (Čin III, str. 65.)

This statement about the suspense by Gwendolen represents verbal irony. Considering that she said how terrible it is, she ironically hopes the uncomfortable situation lasts even longer. Other possible translations for "terrible" are "grozna" or "užasna" since those solutions are more negative.

18 Algernon

Oh! I am not really wicked at all, Cousin Cecily. You mustn't think that I am wicked.

Cecily

If you are not, then you have certainly been deceiving us all in a very inexcusable manner. I hope you have not been leading a double life, pretending to be wicked and being really good all the time. That would be hypocrisy. (Act II, pp. 87)

Algernon

O, ja zapravo uopće nisam pokvaren, sestrično Cecily! Vjerujte da nisam pokvaren.

Cecily

Ako niste, onda ste nas sve neodgovorno varali. Nadam se da niste živjeli dvostrukim životom i pretvarali se da ste pokvareni, a u stvari bili cijelo vrijeme dobri. To bi bila hipokrisija. (Čin II, str. 42.)

Algernon

Oh, ali ja uopće nisam pokvaren, rođakinjo Cecily. Ne bi smjela tako misliti o meni.

Cecily

Ako niste pokvareni, onda smo svi mi na neoprostiv pokvaren način prevareni. Nadam se da ne vodite dvostruki život, pretvarajući se da ste pokvareni, a zapravo ste cijelo vrijeme dobri. To bi bilo licemjerno. (Čin II, str. 30.)

Cecily's opinion of Algernon's behavior is an example of dramatic irony. She worries about him leading a double life and this is exactly what he does – he pretends to be his invalid brother Bunbury in order to escape his obligations and social duties. The audience knows that he “bunburies”, but Cecily does not, and this is what creates dramatic irony. The translators chooses to literally translate the irony.

#### 19 Miss Prism

Do not speak slightingly of the three-volume novel, Cecily. I wrote one myself in earlier days.

Cecily

Did you really, Miss Prism? How wonderfully clever you are! I hope it did not end happily? I don't like novels that end happily. They depress me so much.

Miss Prism

The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means. (Act II, pp. 83)

Gdjica Prism

Ne govorite s potcjenjivanjem o romanu u tri knjige. U ranijim danima i sama sam napisala takav roman.

Cecily

Zaista, gospodjice Prism? Kako ste vi pametni! Nadam se da nije sretno završavao? Ne volim romane sa sretnim završetkom. Tako me deprimiraju.

Gdjica Prism

Dobri su završavali sretno, a zli nesretno. To je ono što znači mašta. (Čin II, str. 39.)

Miss Prism

Cecily, nemoj govoriti prezirno o romanima. I ja sam napisala jedan kad sam bila mlađa.

Cecily

Ozbiljno? Vi ste tako strašno pametni! Nadam se da nije sretno završio. Ne volim romane koji sretno završavaju, to me jako deprimira.

Miss Prism

Dobrima je završio sretno, lošima nesretno. To ti se zove beletristika. (Čin II, str. 28.)

The conversation about the three-volume novels contains both absurd and verbal irony. Cecily says that novels that end happily depress her, this represents an absurd since it is contradictory. Verbal irony is present in Cecily's statement "How wonderfully clever you are!" since she means the opposite.

Miss Prism's statement about the fiction is satirical since she implies that the good ending happily, and the bad unhappily can only be a work of fiction. Juriša literally conveyed the meaning. However, the word "fiction" is translated as "mašta" which is acceptable, but probably a better solution would be "fikcija" considering they are talking about a literary genre. Aničić avoided this mistake by translating it as "beletristika".

## 20 Algernon

Literary criticism is not your forte my dear fellow. Don't try it. You should leave that to people who haven't been at a University. They do it so well in the daily papers. What you really are is a Bunburyist. I was quite right in saying you were a Bunburyist. You are one of the most advanced Bunburyists I know.

Jack

What on earth do you mean? (Act II, pp. 53-54)

Algernon

Književna kritika nije tvoja jaka strana, dragi moj. Ostavi se toga. Prepusti to ljudima koji nemaju sveučilišne naobrazbe. Oni to tako dobro čine u dnevnoj štampi. Znaš li što si ti? Ti si banberist. Imao sam pravo kad sam rekao da si banberist. Ti si jedan od najizrazitijih banberista.

Jack

Što to zaboga znači? (Čin II, str. 10.)

Algernon

Književna ti kritika nije baš najjača strana, mladiću. Bolje nemoj ni pokušavati. Prepusti to onima koji nisu studirali – oni to sjajno rade, osobito u dnevnim novinama. A ti, ti si zapravo banburator. Bio sam u pravu kad mi je to palo na pamet. Ti si jedan od najnaprednijih banburatora uopće.

Jack

Ali što ti to, dođavola, znači? (Čin II, str. 9.)

By saying that those who never went to University are better at literary criticism than those who went, Algernon uses verbal irony. The translation is literal, but Juriša chose the archaic word “štampa” instead of “novine” for “daily papers”. It is a good choice considering that the work was created in 1895. When it comes to translating the invented word “Bunburyst”, both translators invented a word in Croatian as well, Juriša went with “banberist“, while Aničić chose “banburator“.

## 21 Algernon (Picking up empty plate in horror)

Good heavens! Lane! Why are there no cucumber sandwiches? I ordered them specially.

Lane (Gravely)

There were no cucumbers in the market this morning, sir. I went down twice.

Algernon

No cucumbers!

Lane

No, sir. Not even for ready money. (Act I, pp. 59)

Algernon /zaprepašteno podignuvši prazan pladanj/

Sveti bože! Lane! Zašto nema sendviča s krastavcima? Izričito sam ih naručio.

Lane /ozbiljno/

Jutros nije bilo krastavaca na tržnici. Dvaput sam odlazio onamo.

Algernon

Nije bilo krastavaca!

Lane

Ne, gospodine. Čak ni za gotov novac. (Čin I, str. 14.)

Algernon /s užasom drži prazan pladanj/:

Zaboga! Lane! Zašto nema sendviča s krastavcima, kad sam izričito naredio da se pripreme?

Lane /dostojanstveno/: Danas u dućanu nije bilo krastavaca. Dva puta sam odlazio.

Algernon

Nije bilo krastavaca?!

Lane

Ne, gospodine, čak ni za gotovinu. (Čin I, str. 12.)

This dialogue between Algernon and his servant Lane happens right after Algernon's warning to Jack that the cucumber sandwiches are for his aunt Lady Bracknell. However, Algernon is the one who ate them all so none are left for his aunt. The dialogue represents dramatic irony since the audience knows more than the characters. The audience knows that there were cucumbers for the sandwiches, but Algernon ate them. The humor is translated literary without losing the meaning.

## Other Jokes and Humor

22 Lady Bracknell

Me, sir! What has it to do with me? You can hardly imagine that I and Lord Bracknell would dream of allowing our only daughter—a girl brought up with the utmost care—to marry into a cloak-room, and form an alliance with a parcel? Good morning, Mr Worthing!

Lady Bracknell sweeps out in majestic indignation (Act I, pp. 72)

Lady Bracknell

Mene, gospodine! Kakve to ima veze sa mnom? Ne zamišljate valjda da bismo ja i lord Bracknell mogli i pomisliti da dopustimo našoj jedinjoj kćeri – nada sve brižljivo odgojenoj djevojci – da se uda u kolodvorsku garderobu i da stupi u bračnu vezu s paketom. Dobar dan, gospodine Worthing!

/Lady Bracknell veličanstveno ozlojedjena ponosno izadje/ (Čin I, str. 28.)

Lady Bracknell

Mene, gospodine? Kakve to veze ima sa mnom? Nadam se da ne mislite da bismo ja i lord Bracknell dopustili svojoj jedinjoj kćeri, djevojci kojoj je pružen najbolji odgoj, da se uda u garderobu na stanici Victoria i uđe u mesalijansu s jednim zamotuljkom?! Želim vam ugodan dan, g. Worthing. /izlazi s veličanstvenom indignacijom/ (Čin I, str. 20.-21.)

This comment by Lady Bracknell about Jack's origin is humorous because she directly says that his only home is a cloak-room and calls him a parcel. Juriša's choice to translate "a parcel" as "paket" is quite literal. It is an equivalent, but it sounds odd. In Croatian, it is unclear why he is called a "paket". It would be better if the translator explained and paraphrased: "da stupi u bračnu vezu s osobom koja je pronađena na kolodvoru". "Zamotuljak" by Aničić is not a perfect solution, but it is better than "paket" since it refers to a baby (babies are wrapped into blankets etc.). Aničić highlighted Lady Bracknell's dissatisfaction with Jack and Gwendolen's marriage by using the word "mesalijansa" that refers to a marriage with an unsuitable person.

### 23 Jack

I am sick to death of cleverness. Everybody is clever nowadays. You can't go anywhere without meeting clever people. The thing has become an absolute public nuisance. I wish to goodness we had a few fools left.

Algernon

We have.

Jack

I should extremely like to meet them. What do they talk about?

Algernon

The fools? Oh! about the clever people, of course.

Jack

What fools! (Act I, pp. 74)

Jack

Do grla sam sit duhovitosti. Svatko je danas duhovit. Čovjek ne može nikamo izaći, a da ne sretne duhovite ljude. To je već postala prava javna napast. Da nam je bar ostala još po koja budala.

Algernon

Ostala nam je.

Jack

Baš bih volio da ih upoznam. O čemu oni razgovaraju?

Algernon

Budale? O... o duhovitim ljudima, dakako.

Jack

Kakve budale! (Čin I, str. 29.-30.)

Jack

Ja postajem smrtno bolestan od tvoje duhovitosti. Danas su svi duhoviti. Ne možeš se ni maknuti da ne sretneš duhovite ljude. Da nam je bar ostalo nekoliko budala!

Algernon

Ostalo nam je.

Jack

Strašno bih volio da ih upoznam. O čemu oni pričaju?

Algernon

Budale? O duhovitim ljudima, naravno.

Jack

Kakve budale. (Čin I, str. 22.)

The conversation between Algernon and Jack is humorous since Algernon is implying that Jack is a “left fool”. But, he says that those fools talk about clever people, and since he is also talking about them – he can also be interpreted as a fool. The word “clever” means “mentally quick and resourceful” (The Merriam-Webster Dictionary). Both translators chose to translate this as “duhovit” which is not an equivalent. The better choice would be “pametan”. Its meaning is closer to the meaning of “clever” and it fits the context better since a fool is “a silly or stupid



person; a person who lacks judgment or sense” (Dictionary.com). The possible solution would be: “Do grla sam sit pametnjakovića. Danas je svatko pametan. Čovjek ne može nikamo izaći, a da ne sretne pametnjakoviće.”

#### 24 Lady Bracknell

It really makes no matter, Algernon. I had some crumpets with Lady Harbury, who seems to me to be living entirely for pleasure now.

Algernon

I hear her hair has turned quite gold from grief. (Act I, pp. 60)

Lady Bracknell

To zaista nije važno, Algernon. Poslužila sam se uštipcima kod lady Harbury koja, čini mi se, sad živi još samo za užitak.

Algernon

Čujem da joj je od tuge kosa dobila zlatanu boju. (Čin I, str. 15.)

Lady Bracknell

Zbilja nije važno, Algernone. Pojela sam nekoliko čajnih kolačića kod lady Harbury; čini se da se ona u posljednje vrijeme prepustila uglavnom užicima.

Algernon

Čuo sam da joj je od teške boli kosa postala posve zlatna. (Čin I, str. 12.)

Lady Bracknell mentions how she visited Lady Harbury, who is recently widowed. She explains how Lady Harbury now looks “...quite twenty years younger“ (Wilde 59) and lives for pleasure now. This is Wilde's way of satirizing the Victorian ideal of love and marriage – a woman has changed for the better after her husband's death. To highlight this, Algernon says that her hair turned gold from grief, implying that she inherited money from her late husband. Juriša recreated the statement by saying that her hair has gotten “zlatanu boju“. Similarly, Aničić phrased this as “kosa postala posve zlatna“. These are clever solutions, but more convenient would be to say “od tuge joj se pozlatila i kosa”.

25 Gwendolen

If you are not too long, I will wait here for you all my life. (Act III, pp. 141)

Gwendolen

Ako ne bude predugo trajalo, čekat ću te ovdje cijelog života. (Čin III, str. 98.)

Gwendolen

Ako se ne budeš dugo zadržao, čekat ću te ovdje čitavog života. (Čin III, str. 64.)

Gwendolen declares her love for Jack and is willing to wait for him her whole life – only if he comes back soon. This is another example of how Wilde satirizes love and relationships of the Victorian era. The translators successfully conveyed the meaning of the satire.

## Translating for the Theatre

Translating for the theatre is one of the most challenging areas since it is a process of translating written text that will be spoken and performed on a stage.

Translators are commonly called traitors and betrayers who mercilessly change, or “betray“, the original text. There are, however, translations that faithfully follow the source text, but when it comes to translating for the theatre, “betrayal” is a necessity.

There are various reasons for this inevitable act. For example, when it comes to a novel that includes culturally specific terms, a translator can provide readers the explanations in the footnotes, but when it comes to the live performance, the audience must imminently grasp the meaning of the dialogue performed on the stage. Considering the used language or phrases, the reader can take his time to try to replicate unknown or archaic words, while the actors on the stage must fluently pronounce the words. Probably the most important aspect of the dialogue is that it has to be speakable as the actors must be able to deliver the lines in a natural, fluent, and convincing manner. Performability is rendered as the most important aspect of theatrical translation.

When it comes to translating plays, “The translator’s problem is that he is a performer without a stage, an artist whose performance looks just like the original, just like a play or a song or a composition, nothing but ink on a page” (Wechsler 7, cited in Zatlin 7), but Zatlin argues that

theatrical translators do need to translate with a stage. The theatrical translators should be trained in the theatre. The literal translation should be avoided since the simple translation word-for-word will not yield performable dialogue. The translators should understand the difference between literature and theatre, and adapt their translations accordingly.

Various researchers gave their opinion and advice to improve the translations for the theatre. for example, “Rick Hite (1999: 304) advised theatrical translators to become actors and listen to their work so that they may perceive ‘the problems of translating from spoken text to spoken text’ and ‘become more sensitive to the vocal idiosyncrasies of both languages, of their inherent rhythms, patterns, and stress” (as cited in Zatlin 2). The translators should write for actors, but their “first draft” is to be tried out on the stage, discussed and changed, and published only after that. The theatrical translators should, as already mentioned, be present during the rehearsals: “If they are involved in the rehearsal process, the translators’ contribution may be similar to that of a dramaturg: a consultant to a theatre company who knows the text well and can clarify details for the actors and director” (Zatlin 5), but this is rarely the case. Not only do the translators not participate during the rehearsals but are also omitted from the credits and the play’s reviews – rendering them invisible!

### Fidelity - Collaboration or Servitude?

Since translators are usually seen as traitors of the author but are still obliged to convey the meaning to the target audience, it is crucial to try to find a solution to this problem.

Louis G. Kelly statement “Fidelity will mean either collaboration or servitude” (Kelly, 1979: 207 cited in Zatlin 5) gives us two ideas of how to override the given issue. Since servitude of complete fidelity to the original will probably yield unperformable results, collaboration with the original author can provide the best possible results. This is, of course, if the author is willing to cooperate and is willing to give the translator the freedom to adapt the work. Some possible problems the translator could discuss with the author are the name of the play itself, the names of the characters, various cultural references and gaps, and intertextual references to movies, songs, and books. The author could provide his own opinion, suggestions, or clarifications. Together, the author and the translator can agree on the best solutions in order to transfer the text to the source audience.

When it comes to translating the works of the deceased authors, some translators try to “put themselves into the spirit of their source” (Zatlin 7) so they “have determined what a particular writer would have said were he living today in the target culture” (ibid.) This is, however, quite an unreliable technique, giving the translator freedom when it comes to adaptation and interpretation.

### English Adaptation of the Satire

The three English adaptations will be briefly examined, Bethany Lutheran College’s, BBC’s, and Mammoth Lakes Repertory Theater's versions, that is, the adaptation of the first act of the play.

All adaptations follow Wilde’s original script almost perfectly faithfully. This shows how talented Wilde was when it came to playwriting and adapting it for the theatre. His plays are immediately written to be spoken and are therefore easily performable.

BBC’s adaptation is more serious than the other two. The actors are less expressive and a bit stiff, while the other two versions’ actors are more open and expressive with the usage of body language and hand gestures. This contributes to the humor of the drama itself, making the satire more clear and obvious. Bethany Lutheran College’s version of Algernon is probably the best since he is a wealthy, carefree, and frivolous young man, and this is perfectly depicted in this adaptation. The actor uses facial expressions and body language to portray Algernon’s extravagance as closely as possible. Lady Bracknell is the most pompous in this adaptation. She represents Victorian society and is, as such, powerful and arrogant. Other characters are also energetic, and by gesturing they add humor to the already witty and amusing dialogue. Mammoth Lakes Repertory Theater's adaptation is the most satirical one since the actors' performance can hardly be taken seriously. In other words, the satire is direct and openly expressed, which is the opposite of the BBC's adaptation.

When it comes to scenery, all adaptations are performed in a lavishly decorated living room – Algernon's house. Bethany Lutheran College’s and Mammoth Lakes Repertory Theater's stage is bright and spacious, while BBC's version is somewhat darker.

## Croatian Adaptation

Croatia is not immune to the popularity of this play. There are several different adaptations of the play in Croatia. One, by the Croatian National Theatre (*Hrvatsko Narodno Kazalište*), kept the original names of the characters, it faithfully follows Wilde's script as the play is located in London. The two other versions, one from *Karlovac*, and the other from *Split*, adapted the play's features more vividly.

*Zorin dom Karlovac* adapted the play completely as the plot is set in Karlovac during the 1930s. The characters' names are changed accordingly. Algernon Moncrieff became *Otokar Mihanović*, John Worthing *Ivan Generalić*, Gwendolen Fairfax *Grozdana Bošković*, and Cecily Cardew *Dragica Karas*. Other characters' names were also adapted so Lane became *Darko*, Miss Prism *gospođica Drakulić*, and Lady Bracknell *Agneza Bošković*.

Similarly, *Gradsko kazalište mladih Split (Split City Youth Theatre)* adapted the play to fit the life and customs of Split and its inhabitants in the 19th century. The play's name is changed to "Važno je zvat se Ernešto", and the main character's name is *Jere Duplančić*. In this play, the characters did not only change their names but also their character traits. The speech became more direct to achieve a new dose of naturalness and cynicism.

All these changes were made to transfer the purpose and meaning of the play more effectively to the target audience. By changing the names of the characters, the play becomes more natural and easier to grasp for the Croatian audience. All the changes highlight the intended humor, while also making it more understandable.

## Conclusion

Oscar Wilde was a prominent Irish playwright known as the father of the Aesthetic Movement. The most significant works of his oeuvre are plays that are, even today, widely performed worldwide. Since Wilde's plays are usually humorous and witty, their transfer into other languages can represent a huge venture for translators.

Wilde's most famous play *The Importance of Being Earnest* is no exception, it is a satire that mocks the Victorian Era and its imposed values. The play is full of paradoxes, irony, different jokes, and puns that are sometimes impossible to translate literally. This is why this MA thesis analyzes two translations from English into Croatian. One translation is by Ivo Juriša, and the other is by Martina Aničić. The analysis includes 25 examples of puns, irony, paradoxes, and other types of jokes. The techniques and strategies proposed by Mateo and Chachachiro gave a short overview of possible translation solutions, but the most common strategies of our translators were omission or literal translation.

When it comes to puns, both translators completely ignored the double meaningness of the puns since there were no possible solutions in the Croatian language that would convey both meanings of the jokes.

The three types of irony, situational, verbal, and dramatic, are all present in the play. Situational irony depends more on the situation than on the language so the translation is always literal. Similarly, dramatic irony depends on the audience's knowledge of something that a character in a play does not know; therefore translation is also literal. When it comes to verbal irony and paradoxes, the translators sometimes slightly changed the uttered sentences, but without using the humorous and satirical meaning originally intended by Wilde. The same applies to the other jokes present in the play. In some cases, the usage of different words, e.g. archaic ones, helped convey the meaning in a more natural manner.

Since the play was written to be performed, this MA thesis briefly analyses the problems a translator faces when it comes to adapting the text for the stage. Since Wilde's writing style is already "performable", the English adaptations faithfully follow the original text. However, the Croatian adaptations show more diversity since all versions changed the place of action and the names of the characters.

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