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“EVENTUALLY YOU’LL MEET HIM ANYHOW”¹: MICHAL TALLO’S POETRY, ITS UKRAINIAN TRANSLATION AND SOME REVISION OF TRANSLATION PRINCIPLES²

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The aim of the paper is to explore the Slovak-language poetic collection “Antimita” by Michal Tallo and its Ukrainian translation by Oleksandra Kovalchuk. Tallo published his poetry collection in 2018, and it was fully translated into Ukrainian. Although the collection is relatively small, translating it in its entirety was a thoughtful decision, as it offers readers a complete view of the author’s work and the overarching concept of the poetic cycle. Unfortunately, the translation received attention only within literary circles, and no formal reviews were published. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to assess the quality of the Ukrainian translation of Tallo’s poetry and to draw broader conclusions about the translation of experimental poetry in general.

Literary texts reflect both reality and culture, expressing the author’s perspective while resonating with a broader community. Contemporary poetry, in particular, often challenges traditional structures through ambiguity and paradox, favouring layered and fluid meanings over fixed interpretations. Key elements in understanding such poetry include language, recurring concepts, aesthetic form, and underlying ideology. Among these, language operates on the surface, while ideology and poetics shape the deeper structure and intent. Ambiguity itself often becomes an ideological stance, resisting definitive meaning and embracing multiplicity. Unlike classical poetry, which follows clearer norms, experimental poetry defies conventional analysis and calls for new interpretive approaches. These texts are often hybrid and nonlinear, requiring translation strategies that preserve complexity and intentional ambiguity rather than simplifying them. Tools from cognitive semantics can support this by helping translators navigate and recreate the semantic innovation of the original.

Key words: poetry translation, experimental poetry, Slovak literature, translation quality assessment, Ukrainian, poetics.

Introduction. Poetry translation has been long and widely discussed. The room to deepen the conversation appears in the domain of the very poetic forms, because poetry itself evolves,

¹ This is the opening phrase of Tallo’s poem “b.” (the collection “Antimacy”) in the translation of John Minahane. All the poem titles in Tallo’s collection start with a non-capital letter.

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and translation practices have to reflect new aesthetic transformations. While much attention has been dedicated to classical and modern poetry, newer, form-breaking or hybrid forms (e.g. visual poetry, digital poetry, spoken words) pose fresh translation challenges: how it is possible to render the original’s layout, typography, or interactivity? The classical poetry is assessed through the essence of rhyme and rhythm, whereas newer poetry experiments with sound-based effects and efficiency.

Previous Research in the Area. Poetry translation today balances fidelity to meaning with the preservation of rhythm, sound, and cultural nuance, making it both an art and a negotiation (e.g. [8]). Advances in machine translation have improved basic comprehension, although human translators remain essential for capturing poetic voice and metaphor (cf. [1]). Collaborative and multilingual translation projects are increasingly common, enriching interpretations through diverse perspectives (cf. [5]). Scholars and poets debate whether a “perfect” translation is possible or if each version becomes its own unique work (e.g. [6]). Overall, poetry translation is thriving as a creative, interpretive act that bridges cultures while embracing the inevitable transformation of the original (cf. [7]). Poetical experimentation and its preservation in translation are theorised much less.

Methodology. Theoretical Prerequisites. Each literary text mirrors reality and, thus, culture. Each author renders their experience as well as shares the experience of a reading community. André Lefevere reduced the complex of relations between a text and literature, culture and reality to four parameters: ideology, poetics, universe of discourse and language [3, p. 748–749]. Extrapolating this division upon the understanding of contemporary poetry, we can judge that language is the most superficial level: the system of codes is transformed by a translator mechanically or creatively. Universe of discourse is a collection of key concepts or words (or micro ideas) in a poem or in a poetic cycle. Poetics should be levelled to the aesthetic essence of an utterance. Ideology is supposed to reflect the world view behind the original, although in contemporary poetry, the paradoxical use of language destabilizes fixed interpretations, inviting the reader into a space where ambiguity is not a flaw but a method. Ambiguity, actually, transforms into a kind of ideology, when a word’s meaning resists closure, authority, and linear thought. In this sense, contemporary poetry often prefers the possibility of meaning over its firmness, using paradox not just to challenge semantics but to gesture toward a world that is fractured, provisional, and multivocal.

“Paradoxical semantics” can be meaningfully treated as a defining characteristic of contemporary poetry, and the paradox itself is a central stylistic and conceptual tool. In this mode, meaning is not only layered but often self-undermining or self-complicating. The concept of a linguopoetic norm is well-accepted in the studies of classical poetry (cf. [12, p. 97]), however it remains blurred in experimental texts that calls for a different set of analytic tools for describing poetry and assessing its translation quality. The non-essentialist approach to text which sees a text as an open-ended system with variable sense [11, p. 83] serves an overall methodology for interpreting contemporary poetry. In general, it supports the view that contemporary text, which may also be identified as hybrid one because of its deployment of mosaic and sometimes controversial interpretation (like a play of code- and context-switching), promotes a view that translation should not “flatten” this complexity but preserve intentional ambiguity and recreate untranslatable elements. Contemplations from

cognitive semantics have the power to explain the author's semantic experiments and help the translator render them into the target language.

Results and Discussion. Historical and Textual Prerequisites. The material of this paper is taken from Slovak-Ukrainian literary translation, presenting its most recent period and genre.

Michal Tallo (born 1993) is a Slovak author, translator, and radio presenter. Writing in both Slovak and English, he is the author of three poetry collections: *Antimita* (Antimacy, 2016), *Δ* (Delta, 2018), and *Knihatmy* (The Book of Darkness, 2022). His latest work, a short story collection titled *Všetko je v poriadku, všade je láska* (Everything's Fine, Love Is Everywhere, 2024), won the 2024 Tatra Banka Foundation Prize. In recent years, Tallo has received multiple writers' residencies in Norway, Poland, and Czechia, and has showcased his work at numerous international festivals across Europe. He is also the coordinator of the *Básne SK/CZ* poetry prize and the chief editor of *Lentikular*, a poetry imprint of Brak publishing house. His poetry engages with the complexities of identity, balancing between revelation and concealment, while frequently addressing themes of love and loss. It blends vivid imagery with sharp observation. Tallo's poems and short stories have been translated into numerous languages, including Ukrainian.

Oleksandra Kovalchuk is a Ukrainian translator and educator. She graduated from the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, obtaining degrees in journalism and Slovak language and literature. She has contributed to the spread of Slovak literature in Ukraine and strengthened cultural ties between the two countries. She translated writings by Vladimír Balla, Mária Ferenčuhová and Erik Šimšík (all in 2018). In addition, Kovalchuk is an active participant in Ukraine's literary scene, cooperates with international literary festival in Ukraine and Slovakia as well as teaches and propagates Slovak language and culture. Kovalchuk is generally known for her skill in capturing the stylistic nuances of the original texts, making her translations not only accurate but also emotionally rich.

Tallo published his poetic collection in 2018, and it was fully translated into Ukrainian. The size of the collection is not large, and it was a good idea to translate the whole collection, presenting the author and the idea of the entire poetic cycle. Unfortunately, this event was made known among litterateurs only, and no published reviews came out. This is why the purpose of this paper is to provide the translation quality assessment of Tallo's poetry in the Ukrainian translation as well as draw conclusions for experimental poetry in general.

New ideology or new semantics. Contemporary poetry often derives its power from an uncharacteristic sense of a word, bending language into unfamiliar shapes to evoke layered, unexpected meanings. Older authors exploited existing polysemies, weaving richness from known ambiguities, while contemporary poets forge new polysemies from plain-looking words, unsettling meaning to make language feel newly alive. This raises a compelling question: how ideological is their poetry? Are contemporary poets constructing an alternative ideological vision through their inventive use of language, or are they merely extending semantics as a preliminary gesture – reshaping meaning not for its own sake, but as a strategic tool to serve later ideological, rhetorical or aesthetic aims? Perhaps, we should characterize paradoxical semantics – and the paradox as such – as a principal stylistic device in contemporary poetry.

The context manages a poem’s logic, but in contemporary writings, a separate “line” functions as an independent meaningful unit without the influential support of neighbouring textual unit. The line “interiér vo vedomom rozklade” (nenarativ) sounds completely context-free. It looks like an entire sentence-thought, though, from a grammatically purist stance, it lacks a verb. In Slovak – and in Ukrainian, – it is absolutely permissible, but requires that a reader decode it in this way and treat it as a dynamic utterance.

Thus, the line from the poem “nenarativ” can describe: 1) a room interior is in the deliberate decomposed parts; 2) an interior is a result after a known destruction; 3) an interior experiencing a conscious progressive decline. This multiplicity of interpretation makes a text dynamic and vibrant when it evokes different imagery during the following rereadings. The Ukrainian original – “інтер’єр в свідомому руйнуванні” – is quite univocal: an unnamed doer (the author? or their roommate?) is deliberately ruining the room interior. “Руйнування” denotes a process, and in contemporary speech, it can be seen as a result of clandestine and continuous Russification in the Ukrainian language, since Russian merges the notion and its process in single *-ние* forms (видыхание, показание), and Ukrainian discriminates them into two – shorter and longer – forms (видих – видихання; показ – показання). Indeed, the employment of the basic, shorter and more frequent form “руїна” can provide more interpretative variants for the quoted line by applying the stances of either dilapidated state, or the remnants of the once-existing object, or the process of destruction, or complete devastation and decline. The doer is not mentioned; thus, this omission offers space for the reader to put accents on a doer, on a place, on a process, or consequences. And this is not the end of the interpretative row. Remembering that “lexical variability as manifested in polysemy is conditioned by the *open-endedness* of the linguistic system and the *creative role* of the speaker and hearer in their conceptualization of outside reality” (the author’s italics. – *T. Sh.*) [4, p. 87]. These major factors multiply sensual variants. In poetry, regular polysemy ends, and vagueness starts a myriad of consequential interpretations.

Discourse with or without key words. In classical poetry (“classical” in the broadest meaning), a prepared reader easily identifies expected key tools and ideas, and an unprepared reader has to find and appraise them. In experimental poetry, a reader is always unprepared. How can they be sure that what they see is the very key word or not? Quantitatively, it is quite complicated to reveal key words before the criticism summarizes them, or before the author’s canon becomes unchanging (postmortem?), or before the macro poetic text is unified by final similarities (poetic cycles and collections does not seem sufficient, and we return to critical studies).

The expression “nacvičená textová podoba” (the poem “bezkontaktné”) appears in two lexical chains: one is connected with text production, another is the description of a human. The source text expectations are around the merge of living and unliving essences, thus humanizing the writing process. The Ukrainian expression “завчена текстова форма” is purely material and unliving. It denotes a ready-made sign and does this quite clearly. The original and translation are equally bisensual because they also incorporate the sense of insincerity. However, the Ukrainian text is static. The reader misses some action. Behavioural associations are present in the wider context, but they are not vivid or hidden. The lexeme “nacvičený”, etymologically, contains more large-scale actions that “завчений”: training may

take more efforts than memorizing. This is why the Ukrainian lexeme “наганий” would be proper here as well. It might be more behaviour-oriented.

Slovak and Ukrainian are cognate languages. The Ukrainian translator successfully avoids frequent pitfalls connected with the translator’s false friends. However, interlingual homonyms can add fascinating overtones to the original message. The Ukrainian word “подоба” triggers associations with the behaviour based on social conventions, and they can definitely bring more word play into this piece.

Seeing experimental texts (both originals and translators), critics may often ask how different the audiences who receive poetry are. We have to mean the plural audiences of the same-language poetry. In interlingual and intercultural communication, equivalence in rendering experimental poetry is equal to the sameness of aesthetic and pragmatic influences. The old idea that every translation is a new original is much truer in this genre than in any other genre. Moreover, the meaningful connection between the form and the contents is unique not only in poetic text, but in every unique reading, and the entire structure of a separate poem is viewed as a polysemy which shapes semantic inexhaustibility [15, p. 13, 62]. Thus, the reader comes to decode the poetics of situatedness and assess the aesthetics of uniqueness.

The aesthetics of polysemy. The aim of irony is to create a contrast between appearance and reality, or expectation and outcome. Typically, it is widely used politics, religion, or social discourse, however, its witty effect finds place in experimental poetry for deepening the meaning and engaging the reader. Although it is dubious to claim that in today’s poetry, irony makes the audience think critically and reveal deeper truths, the stimulus to read between the lines and juxtapose the surface message and the underlying reality can be an intriguing poetical exercise.

The line “na požiadanie konkrétne zdokumentovateľný odpor” (the poem “hnus”) is again polysemantic: a reader at least has a choice of senses between resistance and dislike. The title (“disgust”) moves the reader to the aware choice of the latter sense, but the collision of bureaucratic and emotional spheres (or mental spaces) evokes irony in the final part of the poem. As KlaudiaWengorek-Dolecka proves, “ironic utterances constitute a signal for activating and on-line construction of rich configurations of interconnected cognitive domains” [9, p. 272]. Actually, irony helps preserve both present mental spaces and both conflicting senses. This principle secures polyphony in contemporary poetry.

Often, irony is intertextual and theoreticians recommend to orient not at subjective associations, but at national and cultural senses integrated in a target culture [14, p. 159–160]. Certainly, culture as national experience exists even in the text which seems to be too personal or subjective. This is why the advice to follow the target culture context and the observation about the stable co-existence of conflicting mental space in a phrase are valid guidelines for rendering experimental poetry. The Ukrainian translator rendered the phrase as “за проханням докладно задокументована відраза” which may sound more emotive because the word “прохання” is both a personal request and an official statement.

In the source text, the line of division between the bureaucratic and emotional strictly separates the two mental spaces (four words of bureaucracy and one word of the emotional sphere). The target text is mosaic: two words of ambivalence (dubious because they represent both the emotional and bureaucratic spheres), two words of bureaucracy and one word of

the emotional sphere. The strict borderline between the two mental spaces could have been preserved by the use of the technical terms “клопотання”, “заява”, “подання”, or “рапорт” which predominately or straightforwardly refer to bureaucracy.

Worldview versus narration. Classic and contemporary poetry has always exceeded the textual boundaries and entered the staging sphere. Translating poetry has covered the transformation of the original’s sound, rhythm, and – what is indeed imperative – performance. Today’s poetry is easier perceived as a poetry when pronounced and heard. The move from well-known stanza arrangements creates the rejection and denial of its poeticism *per se*, while seeing it as narration reveals its power of emotive and suggestive pragmatics. In the history of poetry translation, some genres from Oriental literatures which deliberately cultivate semantic tensions, and where words seem to mean both more and less than they should, provide some experience in translation strategies (like in translated texts from Japanese literature (cf. [10, p. 14]) which are applicable to contemporary experimental poetry.

Keeping in mind Levefere’s idea about the connection between worldview, ideology and the representation of the national poetical self, critics face the dilemma of how to reveal, identify and measure such parameters in contemporary poetry. Translation analyst could simply choose the most repeated words and plot-constructing expressions, and partially, they will be correct. However, it is an unanswered question if it is correct to evaluate all key words in a text as dimensions of the author’s entire worldview realized in a textual range (a poetic cycle or a long novel). The answer may be worth searching for in imagology: translations do create animagotype of the source culture in the target culture [13, p. 76]. Thus, we reach another question how well Tallo’s poetry generates the imagotype of Slovak culture, and whether it is ruined in translation.

The metaphor of text as a substitute of communication, language and life has a long history. Its macro context links the areas of communication, writings, authors, readers and some more. Therefore, “text” is a repeated word, but it is necessary to check if it generates an invented and intended polysemy depending on the contextual features and if they can become the very specific features of a source culture.

Contrasting the definitions of the Slovak “text” and the Ukrainian “текст” discloses more cultural and historical information in the Ukrainian lexeme. The Slovak lexeme is oriented at a semiotic product and a fixation of personal communication. The Ukrainian lexeme refers to an author’s words, paper product, printed object, literary and cultural phenomenon (including religious – biblical – associations). Thus, all the lexemes “text” in Tallo’s poems “bezkontaktne”, “A.” and “B.” offer less interpretative potential than in the relevant Ukrainian translations just because of the associative voluminosity of the Ukrainian lexeme.

Even in the poem “A.”, the author might think about his phrase “hovoriť a milčať v prvej osobe” as a genuine coinage. The Ukrainian phrase “говорити й мовчати в першій особі” is a successful loan translation, although it has more cultural associations. Among Ukrainian readers, fresh is the reminiscence of Russia’s annexation of the Crimea which was often commented with an evoking observation: “In Russia, people don’t speak Russian; they keep silence in Russian”. This interpretation adds even political reverberation of speaking matters.

As Roger Keesing states, “cultural knowledge is organized hierarchically, including specific routines and understandings appropriate to particular contexts and more general conceptions and assumptions about the social and natural world” [2, p.16]. The lexemes “autor / автор”, “obsah / зміст” (“A.”), “literatúra / література”, “teoretické zázemie / теоретичне підґрунтя” (“virálne videá”), “komunikácia / комунікація”, “napísať / написати” (“B.”) and some others are incorporated in the complex hierarchical network of the concept “text”. Although the networks look identical in both Slovak and Ukrainian, the total informational load is asymmetrical in the two languages. The Ukrainian “написати” has an additional sense of “providing wide literary activities; being a writer”. The Slovak “komunikácia” emphasizes the verbal contact between speakers while the Ukrainian “комунікація” denotes friendly and business connections. The Slovak imagotopy is lost in the Ukrainian translation.

Conclusions. Contemporary experimental poetry poses a challenge of defining how much of the translator’s own voice can seep into the poem. The known division into domestication and foreignization does not work at this stage of translating such poems. They sound absolutely source-text-oriented, and there is no space in the target text where a translator can bring their cultural perspective. This state of art expands the boundaries of the target language’s lexicon. The specifically invented polysemy becomes a desirable effect of experimental poetry on the mental and literary progress of the society, and the century-old debate about intended stylization returns factually in the present translation praxis.

Like other genres, even experimental poetry has to deal with the asymmetry of linguistic and cultural knowledge between the source and target languages. Authors might want to separate linguistic and cultural knowledge in order to create pure poetic forms, being equally and universally understood and accepted. However, readers’ experience and background make this enterprise impossible.

Tallo’s style is grounded in the extensive application of polysemy and semantic paradoxes. It may look that the author invites speakers to express much more of their attitude or evaluation towards his utterances. Turning a reader into a pseudo author (or a real author of a new bright interpretation) causes more problems for a translator who has to perform the roles of a reader and an author simultaneously and extremely creatively. Contemporary poetry seems plain in many dimensions, but more scrupulous examination of lexemes and their meanings show how they can really extend the measures of a language. Kovalchuk generally coped with the pitfalls of experimental poetry, although the lingual asymmetry between the source and target languages caused some deviations, generating either translation losses or translation gains. This conclusion indicates that experimental poetry can provide even more cases of translation multiplicity than readers and analysts could expect earlier.

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Мета статті – розглянути словацькомовну поетичну збірку “Антимність” Міхала Талло та її український переклад Олександри Ковальчук. Талло опублікував свою поетичну збірку у 2018 році, і її цілком переклали українською мовою. Хоча збірка відносно невелика, її повний переклад – це дуже продумане рішення, оскільки вона пропонує читачам всеохопне уявлення про творчість автора та загальну концепцію поетичного циклу. На жаль, переклад викликав зацікавлення лише в літературних колах, і офіційних рецензій не опубліковано досі. Тому метою цієї статті є оцінити якість українського перекладу поезії Талло та зробити ширші висновки щодо перекладу експериментальної поезії загалом.

Літературні тексти відображають і дійсність, і культуру, виражаючи погляд автора, водночас знаходячи відгук у ширшій читацькій спільноті. Сучасна поезія, зокрема, часто кидає виклик традиційним формам через неоднозначність та парадокс, надаючи перевагу багатозначним та плінним значенням над фіксованими інтерпретаціями. Ключовими елементами розуміння такої поезії є мова, повторювані концепти, естетична форма та засадничі ідеї. Якщо мова функціонує на поверхні, то ідеологія та поетика формують глибшу структуру та намір. Сама багатозначність часто стає ідейною позицією, опираючись стабільному значенню та вдаючись до інтерпретаційної множинності. На відміну від класичної поезії, яка дотримується чіткіших норм, експериментальна поезія не піддається традиційному аналізу та вимагає нових інтерпретаційних підходів. Такі тексти часто є гібридними та нелінійними, що вимагає стратегій перекладу, які зберігають складність та навмисну багатозначність, а не спрощують їх. Інструменти когнітивної семантики можуть зарадити перекладачам краще орієнтуватися в семантичних інноваціях оригіналу та відтворювати їх.

Ключові слова: переклад поезії, експериментальна поезія, словацька література, оцінка якості перекладу, українська мова, поетика.