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**PLAY ON WORDS TRANSLATION AND CREATIVE THINKING:  
DESIGNING A UNIVERSITY COURSE**

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*Abstract*

Creative thinking is a skill required for the positions which involve ideation and creative solutions. These jobs could not be replaced by robots even in the Era of Automation. Translation and interpreting also require a creative mind which can be developed in different ways. The present study was conducted to develop a university compulsory course on play on words translation, which is considered as one of the most serious translation challenges. To design the course, we made a research on the specifics of play on words creation, revealed translation strategies, methods, and procedures. To improve the quality of the course we carried out a survey in order to identify the attitude of the students to the problem of play on words translation and to reveal the most interesting topics. The results of the survey indicated that most of the student have already dealt with the translation of play on words, and consider it as a problem. It was identified that the students have a practical view. They are interested in developing creativity and improving practical skills in the translation of play on words used in the media, literary and audiovisual works. Translation of play on words is an effective way of developing a creative mind. Taking "Translation of play on words" compulsory course as part of the "Translation and Interpreting" bachelor degree program will help the participants to develop problem-solving creative thinking.

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## 1. Introduction

Creative thinking is a skill required for the positions which involve ideation and creative solutions for challenging problems. These jobs could not be replaced by robots even in the Era of Automation and artificial intelligence when many tasks are automated. Translators and interpreters, as well as the other professionals in linguistic sphere, need a creative mind to solve insight problems. For example, creative thinking is mentioned in Federal State Education Standard of Russia as one of the professionally-specialised competences (PSC) of specialist degree students of “Translation and Translatology” program: the ability to adapt to the new conditions of work, creative use of knowledge, skills and competences outside the professional sphere (PSC 3.3) (Prikaz No 1290, 2016); as one of the common competences (OC) of bachelor degree students of “Foreign Regional Studies” program: the ability to creatively implement the task (OC-10) (Prikaz No 202, 2015); 3) as one of the common competences (OC) of master degree students of “Russian Regional Studies” program: the readiness to self-development, self-realisation, use of creative potential (OC-3) (Prikaz No 1301, 2015) and others.

## 2. Problem Statement

Creative mind can be developed in different ways. One of them is the use of humour. Humour is considered as a component of creative thinking (Koestler, 1964; Mednick, 1962; Torrance, 1966). The close connection between humour and insight problem solving was proved (Korovkin, 2010; Martin, 2006; Gick & Lockhart, 1995; Dikaya & Dikiy, 2015).

Korovkin and Nikiforova (2014) established four common characteristics of humour and insight problems: the instantaneous character of understanding; positive feelings which accompany the understanding; the opposition of two cognitive schemes; the breach of the taboos (pp. 39–40). Play on words is a type of verbal humour, which becomes more and more popular nowadays. It is used in the media, literal and audiovisual works. Play on words becomes the challenge for translators and interpreters and sometimes even can be considered as “untranslatable”, but there are a lot of cases in which it cannot be omitted. One of the ways to develop creativity in higher school is to design a university course, which could be useful to develop creative thinking. The way of developing creative thinking depends on the professional area of the student.

## 3. Research Questions

Before designing the course, we need to find out the students’ opinion about the advisability of the course. When designing a course, we need to understand: 1) how taking the course should change students and what skills should they gain; 2) how does this course relate to other courses of program; 3) what topics to include into the syllabus of the course; 4) what teaching methods and tools to choose; 5) how to evaluate students learning; 6) what materials to use.

#### 4. Purpose of the Study

The present study was conducted to prove and develop a university compulsory course on the translation of play on words, which is considered to be one of the most serious translation problems. The course is aimed at linguists, translators, interpreters, specialists in intercultural communication and other specialists, whose professional activity is connected with languages. The main goal of the course is to develop creative thinking of the course participants.

#### 5. Research Methods

The research methodology is a systematic combination of empirical and theoretical methods. To prove the necessity or lack of necessity of the course we developed a questionnaire. We used the questionnaire to make a survey of students' opinion about the course, and to identify their attitude to the problem of the translation of play on words. To design the course, we made a research on linguistic typology and the specifics of play on words creation in English, French, and Russian traditions; developed translation typology; revealed translation strategies, methods, and procedures. To improve the quality of the course, we made a survey to reveal the most interesting and important course topics for the students. To systematise and analyse the results of the research and the survey we used quantitative, descriptive and comparative methods.

“Translation of play on words” course syllabus: content, method, materials.

The main goal of the course is to develop creative thinking of students by teaching them to solve insight problems connected with the play on words translation.

This course can be identified as an advanced compulsory course, rather than an introductory or a fundamental because it requires the basic knowledge in translation and translatology. The length of the course is 18 hours (10 lectures and 8 discussions).

In accordance with the course goal, the syllabus of the course was composed. To create the schedule, we used Bloom's (1956) Taxonomy of Educational Objectives. Previously the course included the 8 topics see Table 01.

**Table 01.** The content of “Translation of play on words” course (initial version)

| Type of cognitive process     | Topic to be covered  | Type of teaching method | Hours |
|-------------------------------|--|-------------------------|-------|
| Knowledge (memorization)      | Play on words: structure and typology<br>Play on words in different structure languages: typological characteristics and specifics of creation | Lectures                | 4     |
| Comprehension (understanding) | Translation typology of play on words  | Lectures                | 2     |
| Analysis (dissection)         | “Quasi-translation” as a specific translation activity: model, strategies, tactics, operations, procedures<br>Methods and algorithms           | Lectures                | 4     |
| Synthesis (creation)          | The use of methods and algorithms for play on words translation  | Discussions             | 4     |

|                       |   |             |   |
|-----------------------|---|-------------|---|
| Evaluation (judgment) | Translation of play on words in literary works<br>Translation of play on words in audiovisual works | Discussions | 4 |
|-----------------------|---|-------------|---|

The following topics were offered as supplementary for self-learning:

1. New structural types of the Internet pun-based joke.
2. The influence of the genre on the specifics of play on words.
3. Humour as a translation problem.
4. The problem of “untranslatability”.
5. Pun translation variability.
6. Classifications of play on words.
7. Translation of play on words in the media and advertisement.
8. The problem of translating puns in animated films.

When choosing the materials, it was identified that the course goals will be best met by using of the following published materials, that were evaluated in accordance with the content of the course (Abayeva, 2016, 2017; Aleksandrova, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2017, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c; Aleksandrova & Astafyeva, 2015; Ermolovich, 2016, 2017).

Developing a questionnaire to improve the quality of the course

In order to improve the quality of the course, we made a survey of students’ opinion about their attitude to the problem of play on words translation and the content of the course.

Participants were 66 undergraduate students of “Translation and Interpreting” department. They were given a questionnaire containing the 10 questions:

Do you think that you are a creative person?

Do you think that you need to develop your creative potential to be able to solve professional tasks in the future?

Have you been offered a possibility to develop your creativity at university?

Do you like to solve insight problems (tasks)?

Do you consider verbal humour as a translation problem?

How important is a good quality translation of verbal humour in literary works?

How important is a good quality translation of verbal humour in audiovisual works?

How important is a good quality translation of verbal humour in the media?

Have you ever dealt with the problem of translation of verbal humour?

Do you think that translating verbal humour contribute to develop creative thinking?

When answering questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, and 10, the students had to choose between three answers: 1) “yes”; 2) “no”; 3) “not sure”. When answering questions 6, 7, and 8, the students had to evaluate on a scale of one to seven. The students were asked to tick the topics from the above list, that they would like to learn during the course.

## 6. Findings

The results indicated that 63% of students consider themselves as creative people (“no” 16%, “not sure” 21%). The same number of people stated that their future profession requires creativity (“no” 16%, “not sure” 21%) and consider verbal humour as a translation problem (“no” 21%, “not sure” 16%).

Only 42% of participants stated that they were given an opportunity to develop creativity during the studies (“no” 27%, “not sure” 31%).

More than half of the students 58% like to solve insight tasks (“no” 21%, “not sure” 21%).

Most of the student 79% have already dealt with the translation of play on words and think that solving insight problems contribute to the development of creative thinking (“no” 21%).

The necessity of good quality translation in literary and audiovisual works was estimated as highly important by 75% of students, in the media by 42% of the participants.

During the analysis of the course syllabus topics the most popular among the students, it was identified that the students have a practical view of the problem. They are interested in developing their creativity and getting practical skills in translation of play on words, represented in mass media, advertisement, literary works, audiovisual works (movies, cartoons, stand-up shows). The survey revealed that students want to find out about the most relevant translation strategies, methods, and procedures. The sequence of the topic is given from the most interesting to the least interesting see Table 02 (supplementary topics are italicised).

**Table 02.** The results of the student survey

| Topic  | % of students interested in the topic |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| The problem of “untranslatability”   | 69%                                   |
| Translation of play on words in the media and advertisement  | 63%                                   |
| Humour as a translation problem  | 54%                                   |
| “Quasi-translation” as a specific translation activity: model, strategies, tactics, operations, procedures | 48%                                   |
| The problem of translating puns in animated films  | 45%                                   |
| Translation of play on words in literary works   | 42%                                   |
| Translation of play on words in audiovisual works  | 42%                                   |
| New structural types of the Internet pun-based joke  | 33%                                   |
| The use of methods and algorithms for play on words translation  | 33%                                   |
| Translation typology of play on words  | 30%                                   |
| Pun translation variability  | 30%                                   |
| Play on words in different structure languages: typological characteristics and specifics of creation      | 27%                                   |
| The influence of the genre on the specifics of play on words   | 21%                                   |
| Methods and algorithms   | 18%                                   |
| Play on words: structure and typology  | 15%                                   |
| Classifications of play on words   | 15%                                   |

In accordance with the results of the survey, the schedule of the course was redesigned see Table 03.

**Table 03.** The content of “Translation of play on words” course (revised version)

| Type of cognitive process     | Topic to be covered   | Type of teaching method | Hours |
|-------------------------------|---|-------------------------|-------|
| Knowledge (memorization)      | Play on words: structure and typology   | Lectures                | 2     |
| Comprehension (understanding) | Translation typology of play on words   | Lectures                | 2     |
| Analysis (dissection)         | The problem of “untranslatability”  | Lectures                | 2     |
| Synthesis (creation)          | “Quasi-translation” as a specific translation activity: model, strategies, tactics, operations, procedures<br>The use of methods and algorithms for play on words translation | Discussions             | 4     |
| Evaluation (judgment)         | Translation of play on words in literary works<br>Translation of play on words in audiovisual works<br>Translation of play on words in the media and advertisement            | Discussions             | 6     |

The course became more practically oriented. It involves 6 lectures and 12 discussions, which could improve student practical skills.

## 7. Conclusion

Translation of play on words can be considered as an effective way of developing creative mind of students studying linguistics, translation and translatology, intercultural communication, and literature. When designing a course, it is important to find out the students’ point of view of the problem. Course designing is a continuous process. The course needs to undergo revision after the survey of potential student opinion and then after evaluation student learning. Taking “Translation of play on words” compulsory course as part of the “Translation and Interpreting” bachelor degree program will help the participants to develop problem-solving creative thinking.

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