Irony Expressed by Adjectives and Verbs in English Literature

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Abstract: In the article, the translation of “The Master and Margarita” by Russian writer Mikhail Bulgakov is studied by several translators with an in-depth analysis of examples of irony expressed by adjectives and verbs.

Key words: irony, method of generalization, adjective, verb, grammatical changes, functional substitution, method of neutralization.

Introduction. One of the characteristics of the English language is that some adjectives appear ironically. In the English translation of “The Master and Margarita” by Russian writer Mikhail Bulgakov, the translators tried to preserve irony using various methods. In the following case, the phrase “good people” is used in an ironic sense in the work, and it is clear that this adjective contradicts the original meaning. In fact, good people are not “abandoned like dogs” to other people. The irony in the lexeme is understood within the meaning of the sentence, depending on the meaning of the text and comparison.

The good people fell on him like dogs on a bear.

Main part. Linguistic scientists R. Peever and L. Volokhonskaya used the method of generalization in the ironic expression of this word. Good is “яхши” and this quality gives itself the meaning of “раҳмдил”, that is, the translators have replaced this very narrow word with a broad one.

These good men threw themselves at him like dogs at a bear.

Philologists M. Gleny and M. Ginsburg also used the method of generalization to convey the irony in this text.

The good men threw themselves upon him like dogs upon a bear. (M. Gins)

In this example taken from M. Bulgakov's “The Master and Margarita”, Woland's appeal to Baron Michael, that is, the adjective “меҳрибонгинам” has an ironic character, because such an appeal is the opposite of Woland's real attitude towards the baron, and the increasing level of the adjective increases the irony.

– Ҳаа, меҳрибонгинам барон Майгель…

“Ah, my dearest Baron Meigel,” Woland, smiling affably, addressed the guest. The following example uses a full translation to reflect irony. The lexical meaning is preserved: according to the dictionary of the English language, the adjective dear can be translated as “қадрдоним” in the address, the accusative degree of the adjective is also preserved in the translation.

“Ah, my dear Baron Maigel,” Woland said with a welcoming smile to his guest…

In M. Glenn's translation, the irony is given in a full translation with subtle grammatical changes, but no accusative degree of the adjective is preserved.

“In, my dearest Baron Meigel,” Woland turned a welcoming smile to the guest… (M. Gins)

In M. Ginsburg's translation, the irony in this text completely corresponds to R. Peever and L. Volokhonskaya’s style of translation.
The sarcastic use of the adjectives “муҳтарам, қимматли” (“respectable, precious”) means that Woland does not address the guest properly, as in the previous example.

…мен сизларга муҳтарам барон Майгелни таништиришдан мамнунман, – деб мехмонларга муружакат билан юзланди Воланд… (…I am pleased to introduce to you the honorable Baron Maigel, - Woland addressed the guests).

R. Peever and L. Volokhonskaya used a full translation method with minor lexical changes: they used an adjective close in meaning to the original adjective.

“I am happy to introduce to you”, Woland turned towards his guests, “Baron Maigel…

M. Glenn’s translation omits the address word “муҳтарам” (“honorable”) thus avoiding the sarcasm. M. Ginsburg’s translation does not contain this text.

In this work, the verb "getting ready" acquires an ironic meaning in the following example. Irony is reflected in the unusual use of the word. In the ordinary text, the word is used to refer to fruits and vegetables, but here it is used to refer to future writers. This sounds like ridicule and a hidden mockery of the house of literary critics MASSOLIT and writers.


“Perfectly correct”, Korovyev agreed with his inseparable companion, “and a sweet awe creeps into one’s heart at the thought that in this house there is now ripening the future author of a Don Quixote or a Faust, or, devil take me, a Dead Souls. Eh?” In this case, the translators resorted to the method of full translation using functional substitution to give a temporary verb form.

“Quite so”, agreed his inseparable companion Korovyev, “and what a delicious thrill one gets, doesn’t one, to think that at this moment in that house there may be the future author of a Don Quixote, or a Faust or who knows--Dead Souls?”

M. Glenny uses the neutralization method. It replaces the ironic verb with its neutral variant. As a result, the ironic meaning of the word is lost.

“Perfectly true,” Koroviev agreed with his inseparable companion. “And a sweet chill numbs your heart to think that a future author of a Don Quixote or a Faust, or, the devil take me, a Dead Souls may be ripening here, right before your eyes! Eh?” (M.Gins).

M. Ginsburg to reflect irony uses a method of complete translation with minor grammatical changes.

In the following example, the verb “helped” is used ironically because its meaning is the opposite of the original meaning of the word. The fact that Korovyyev did not actually help the firefighters is clear from Woland’s next statement. In this situation, “of course, it will be necessary to build a new building”.

➢ Сен талон-тарож билан шугулланганнингда Коровьев нима килаётган эди? – сўради Воланд. (What was Korovyyev doing while you were robbing? – asked Woland).

➢ Мен ўт ўчирувларга ёрдам бераётгандим, мессир, – деб жавоб берди Коровьев, йирилган шимини кўрсатиб.

“I was helping the firemen, Messire”, replied Korovyev, pointing to his torn trousers.

“I was helping the fire brigade, messier”, answered Koroviev, pointing to his torn trousers.

Conclusion. In the English translation of “The Master and Margarita” by R. Piver, L. Volokhonskaya and M. Glenn used a method of temporary complete translation by means of grammatical changes of the verb form. This text is not available in M. Ginsburg's translation. It can be seen that when translating literary works into English, the ways of conveying irony are different and depend on the skill of the translator.
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