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DOI:10.17951/lsmll.2022.46.2.31-43

## Error in Literary Translation: F. S. Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* in Three Polish Renditions

### ABSTRACT

The research was inspired by Dehnel's translator's note on his rendering of *The Great Gatsby* and Kopeć-Umiastowska's vehement criticism of this translation, based on evidence of errors. The fragments criticized are juxtaposed with the parallel sections in Polak's neglected translation of the same novel, which demonstrates that Polak's solutions usually conform to the critic's expectations. However, further examination of Kopeć-Umiastowska's argumentation identifies her criterion of error as mostly arbitrary and unfit for literary translation assessment. It is postulated to understand the error in literary translation as a departure from the original that cannot be defended with any valid translation strategy.

Keywords: Jacek Dehnel, Ariadna Demkowska-Bohdziewicz, Jędrzej Polak, translation criticism, translation strategy

### 1. Introduction

The research presented in this paper was inspired by two texts devoted to the most recent, third Polish rendering of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*: Jacek Dehnel's (2013) translator's note and Barbara Kopeć-Umiastowska's (2014) critical essay on his translation. In his translator's note, Dehnel (known mainly as a writer in his own right) casually mentions the existence of a second Polish translation which is hardly ever referred to in relevant literature. He writes: "Half a century sharply divides the first – and so far, the only one that is still republished – Polish translation of *The Great Gatsby* of Ariadna Demkowska's feather (the second – authored by Jędrzej Polak – appeared only once) and the book you are holding in hand" [translation mine] (Dehnel, 2013, p. 217). Then, he focuses on the first Polish translation, by Ariadna Demkowska-Bohdziewicz emphasizing its merits, listing some (minor) errors and pointing to its conventional style as well as to the fact that it was made behind the iron curtain, perforce without assistance of modern translation aids like google. Finally, he justifies the need for a new translation with the time lapse: "I have the impression, though, that since we have

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had a conventional translation for fifty years, it its worth reading Fitzgerald's work in its wilder shape, more difficult to attain (and surely not free of errors, distortions and mistakes, which I truly apologise for)"[translation mine] (Dehnel, 2013, p. 220).

A retranslator does not have to justify their work. As spelt out by John Trevisa (1378) more than six centuries ago, no translation is good enough to exclude the possibility of being improved. Berman (1990, p. 1) reiterated this idea in more sophisticated words pointing at the "espace d'accomplissement", a space for accomplishment that each existing translation leaves for further attempts – always intended to excel the previous ones. Based on Berman's claim that, unlike the originals, translations age (p. 1), it is sometimes claimed that a translation becomes obsolete after fifty years (cf. Mathijssen, 2007, p. 17), which neatly coincides with the gap between the first Polish translation of Fitzgerald's novel and the most recent one.

What we do not learn from Dehnel's note, though, is that Polak's translation was launched in 1994 – so it was only nineteen in 2013, thus obviously produced in the time free of the iron curtain. There is no reason to suspect that Dehnel deliberately skipped the publication date of Polak's translation, but this omission arouses curiosity and entails questions: Why does he dismiss Polak's translation with just a casual remark while paying all tribute to Demkowska-Bohdziewicz's achievement? Is he avoiding open criticism on an experienced, reputable colleague's *bad* work which, perhaps, appeared only once because of its poor quality?

Jędrzej Polak (1958–2020) was a university graduate in English and a respectable, prolific translator of the American literature. However, as he admitted in a private communication with Bartosz Warzycki, in 2018 he did not even remember having rendered *The Great Gatsby* into Polish at an early stage of his translator's career and did not possess a copy of this translation. (Warzycki, 2021, p. 62). Besides, *The Great Gatsby* is not listed among his translator's achievements in the dedicated Wikipedia article nor is it mentioned in any of the memorial notes issued after his death in 2020, so, maybe Jędrzej Polak was not proud of this work himself and thus it was only right not to inquire into it?

The mystery was soon solved, when Mr. Dehnel (personal email communication, January 2, 2022) honestly admitted that he had never read Jędrzej Polak's translation., which did not, of course, answer the question about the quality of Polak's achievement but touched upon a vital problem of (re)translation studies': It cannot be taken for granted or even assumed that a retranslator is familiar with all previous renderings of a given piece of literature and is attempting to improve them in full awareness of their shortcomings.

Interestingly, Kopeć-Umiastowska (2014) – a recognised translator herself, who conceives of Dehnel’s rendering as a complete failure – sometimes quotes Demkowska-Bohdziewicz’s solutions to illustrate what she considers the translator’s good decisions, without ever mentioning the existence of Polak’s work. This made the question of the quality of the latter even more urgent and more intriguing.

## 2. Purpose and Method

In what follows, Dehnel’s solutions castigated by Kopeć-Umiastowska (hereinafter: KU) are confronted with Polak’s corresponding translations with the aim to establish to what extent, if at all, her criticism is applicable to the latter, too. In other words, Polak’s solutions are related to KU’s expectations, as expressed in her review of Dehnel’s translation. On this basis, a preliminary assessment of Polak’s translation quality is made and hypothesised for further research.

Because of space limitation, the material has been reduced to twenty-three examples identified in six text excerpts, which constitutes nearly two thirds of the cases discussed by KU. Insofar, considering a small amount of the samples, the present research can be perceived as a pilot study.

Dehnel’s translations which were criticized by KU, were in consultation with forty-four Polish students of English for their sound in the ears of native speakers of Polish. The consultants were not asked to determine whether the utterances complied with the valid linguistic norms but only to point at disturbing issues, if any.

The applicability and importance of the argument in translation quality assessment, as postulated by Bittner (2020, p. 14) is demonstrated in the polemic section.

Since the material is composed of translation solutions which were qualified as errors, only an error-based translation quality assessment seems suitable for this research, which is not meant to invalidate other approaches to translation quality assessment.

## 3. Theoretical Background: Translation Error

Hansen’s (2010) article in *Handbook of Translation Studies* is titled *Translation “Errors”*, which visually renders the controversy of this notion. The author provides a commonsense rather than scholarly causal definition by stating that “translation ‘errors’ occur because something has gone wrong during the transfer from ST to TT” (Hansen, 2010, p. 385). She adds that “[t]he perception of what constitutes a translation ‘error’ varies according to translation theories and norms” (ibid.). It is so because in order to recognise a *translation* error one needs to establish first what translation is, and it is impossible to identify a *translation error* without pointing at the norm that was violated.

In her functionalist approach, Kupsch-Losereit (1985, p. 172) understands a translation error as

an offence against 1. the function of the translation, 2. the coherence of the text, 3. the text type or text form, 4. linguistic conventions, 5. culture- and situation-specific conventions and conditions, 6. the language system.

Similarly, Nord (1997 p. 187) sets translation error in strict connection with the translation skopos and comprehends it as “a failure to carry out any one of the translating instructions” (p. 30), where translation instructions (her own expression) are identical with what other scholars call commission, assignment or brief and may be also decided by the translators themselves (p. 30). Nord classifies translation errors, in a hierarchical order, into pragmatic, cultural, linguistic and text-specific ones (1997, pp. 75–76), which corresponds to a large extent with Kupsch-Losereit’s categorisation.

Pym (1992, p. 282) classifies the errors in translation into binary and non-binary ones: “For binarism, there is only right and wrong; for non-binarism there are at least two right answers and then the wrong ones”. He observes that “all *translational* errors are non-binary” (ibid. 283, emphasis added). This entails that a translation error is gradable and boils down to choosing a solution which is not optimal, in Pym’s words, the translation “is correct, but...”, whereas a binary error is identical to a *wrong* choice as a matter of language competence and is not *translational* in essence. This implies that that a *translation* error should not be confused with any error encountered in a target text but is limited to imperfect translation solutions on the level of target text production. However, it is not always possible to tell binary errors from non-binary ones, especially on the microlevel since, for example,

Hejwowski’s (2004, pp. 38–39) provocative question if a wolf can be legitimately substituted with leopard might be occasionally answered in affirmative. It is noteworthy that non- binary errors as Pym understands them are identified as such by the evaluator who believes to have a better idea how to render a given expression, which confirms their subjective character. Bittner (2020, p. 176), whose theory of translation quality assessment relates to Pym’s classification, points out that an error-based evaluation of translation quality requires from the evaluator a proposition of a better solution supported with an argument. Importantly, though, the evaluator – whose skills should be equal to the translator’s skills – is expected to side with the translator first and try to understand their decision, searching for arguments that support it rather than those that contest it.

House (1997, 2015), whose works have been quoted in most books and papers on translation quality assessment for decades, highlights the key role of equivalence

in translation and translation quality assessment, emphasising “that equivalence means ‘of equal value’ and that it is not at all about sameness or, worse still, identity, but about approximately equal value despite some unavoidable difference – a difference, we might add, that stems from the (banal) fact that languages are different” (2015, p. 6). The acceptance of equivalence as an evaluation criterion facilitates this.

Based on his long-year experience as a practicing translator of English language literature, Hejwowski, too, advocates the concept of equivalence in translation and translation studies – against all trends towards its elimination – and maintains that “there are no ‘perfect’ translations (in fact, nobody claims that there are) but there are acceptable, decent, professional translations and one of their main characteristics is that they are equivalent to the source text” (2004, p. 60). In his cognitive-communicative approach,

Hejwowski (2004, pp. 199–234) discerns four major translation error categories: errors of syntagmatic translation (resulting from the lack of interpretation) misinterpretation errors (resulting from insufficient knowledge of the source language or culture), realization errors (generated at the stage of target-text production) and meta-translation errors (resulting from insufficient knowledge of valid translation principles). Still, they contain errors, most of them due to misinterpretation, that are worthy of studying and analysing – in Hejwowski’s opinion mainly for the purposes of translation teaching. Considering the above approaches, I propose the following definition of a translation error that allows, in my view, to reduce the subjective aspect of judgment, challenging, at the same time, the evaluator’s competence: A translation error is a departure in the target text from the original text that cannot be defended with any valid theoretical argument.

#### 4. KU’s Criticism

KU does not conceal that her criticism is meant as a lesson in humility that she decided to teach Jacek Dehnel for his – in her view unpalatable – condemnation of another translator’s work<sup>1</sup>. In order to render her review a professional touch, KU quotes selected excerpts from the novel in the original and in Dehnel’s translation, then points to what she considers a failure, justifies her opinion and usually suggests a better translation. Her procedure misses the crucial component of Bittner’s recommended model, namely an attempt to defend the translator first, which is understandable regarding her motivation. KU’s reasoning is summarized below, firstly without a polemic that is reserved for a dedicated section. The criticized expressions are italicized and – if semantically different from the

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<sup>1</sup> Hanna Pawlikowska-Gannon’s Polish rendering of Alan Hollinghurst’s novel *The Stranger’s Child*.

original or relocated – back translated in squared brackets. Back translations of the whole excerpts are not offered for space limitation. In explanations, individual Polish words are first indicated in their inflectional forms appropriate in the quoted sentence, followed by their basic forms in square brackets, unless both are identical.

#### 4.1. Excerpt 1

A chauffeur in a uniform of *robin's egg blue* crossed my lawn *early that Saturday morning* with a surprisingly formal *note* from his employer – *the honor would be entirely Gatsby's*, it said, if I would attend his „little party” that night. *He had seen me several times and had intended to call on me long before, but a peculiar combination of circumstances had prevented it – signed Jay Gatsby in a majestic hand* (F, p. 47)<sup>2</sup>.  
*W ową sobotę o poranku* [on that Saturday early morning] szofer w uniformie  *błękitnym* [azure]  *jak jajko rudzika przemierzył* [traversed] mój trawnik z zaskakująco oficjalnym  *bilecikiem* [little card] od swego pracodawcy:  *uczyniłbym, jak mogłem wyczytać* [I could read],  *prawdziwy honor Gatsby'emu*, gdybóym zechciał wziąć udział w jego „skromnym przyjęciu” tego wieczora. Widział mnie już kilkakrotnie i zamierzał mnie zaprosić [invite me] znacznie wcześniej, lecz uniemożliwił mu to niecodzienny splot okoliczności – podpisano,  *majestatycznym charakterem pisma* [in majestic handwriting], Jay Gatsby (FD, p. 53)<sup>3</sup>.

Out of altogether eight errors qualified as such, six belong to Hejwowski's category of realization errors, generated at the stage of target-text production. The reviewer argues that the employed Polish expressions are either clichéd or too sophisticated and unnatural in comparison with the simplicity of Fitzgerald's narration. Two other errors are described as semantic, with reference to the real colour of a robin's egg (that of a turquoise) and the primary meaning of the phrasal verb *call on somebody* (to pay somebody a visit), respectively – they represent Hejwowski's misinterpretation errors.

Polak's translation reads as follows:

*Owego sobotniego ranka* [that Saturday morning] mój trawnik  *przeciął* [cut across] szofer ubrany w  *błękitny* [azure] niczym jajko  *gila* [bullfinch] uniform i podał mi zaskakująco oficjalny  *list* [letter] od swojego pracodawcy:  *pan Gatsby będzie niezmiernie zaszczycony, było tam napisane* [it was written there], jeśli zechcę wziąć udział w jego „skromnym przyjęciu tego wieczoru. Widział mnie już kilkakroć i już dawno miał zamiar  *złożyć mi wizytę* [pay me a visit], czemu niestety stawał na przeszkodzie niespodziewany splot okoliczności – podpisano Jay Gatsby,  *z królewskim zawijaszem* [with a royal squiggle] (FP, p. 62)<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Here and below, F stands for: Fitzgerald, F. S. (1926/1994). *The Great Gatsby*. London: Penguin Books.

<sup>3</sup> Here and below, FD stands for: Fitzgerald, F. S. (2013). *Wielki Gatsby* (J. Dehnel, Trans.). Kraków: Znak.

<sup>4</sup> Here and below, FP stands for: Fitzgerald, F. S. (1999). *Wielki Gatsby* (J. Polak, Trans.). Poznań: SAWW.

The first two italicised expressions (*Owego sobotniego ranka* and *przeciął*) do not stylistically differ from Dehnel's propositions, so KU's criticism applies to them, too. But in the third problematic phrase, the discrepancy between the real egg's colour and the employed colour name *blekitny* is eliminated through the substitution of robin with bullfinch that lays light blue eggs. Then, the *note*, what *it said*, and the phrasal verb *call on* are rendered without any sophistication, and the remaining two utterances (that include the adjectives *zaszczycony* and *królewski*) correspond with the critic's own suggestions (p. 424).

#### 4.2. Excerpt 2

*As soon as I arrived I made an attempt to find my host but the two or three people of whom I asked his whereabouts stared at me in such an amazed way and denied so vehemently any knowledge of his movements that I slunk off in the direction of the cocktail table – the only place in the garden where a single man could linger without looking purposeless and alone* (F, p. 48).  
*Kiedy tylko dotarłem na miejsce, usiłowałem odnaleźć gospodarza, ale dwie czy trzy osoby, które zapytałem, gdzie mógłbym na niego natrafić, popatrzyły na mnie z takim zdumieniem i tak kategorycznie zaprzeczyły, by miały jakiegokolwiek pojęcie o miejscu jego przebywania, że przemknąłem [flitted] w kierunku stołu z koktajlami – jedyne miejsce w całym ogrodzie, gdzie człowiek mógł sobie postać [keep standing up], nie wyglądając na pozbawionego celu i samotnego* (FD, p. 54).

In the initial sentence, the reviewer highlights a discrepancy between a point in time (“as soon as I arrived“ and its translation) and the durative aspect of the Polish verb “usiłowałem”, which cannot be denied. The following two italicized sentences she finds too literal, unnatural and clumsy – which they truly are, as confirmed by forty-four Polish university students who were asked to express their opinion. The verb “przemknąłem” [przemknąć] – without the reflexive pronoun “się” renders, as she rightly observes, the fast pace of movement but not its specificity important in the context, namely furtiveness, and the long adverbial at the end lost, in her view, its entire lyrical aspect in translation – due to the prolonged inflectional endings “-ego” (p. 425). Polak proposes the following wording in this place:

*Zaraz po przyśściu spróbowałem odnaleźć gospodarza, lecz dwie czy trzy osoby, które zapytałem, gdzie mógłbym go spotkać, spojrzały na mnie z takim zdumieniem i tak energicznie zapewniały, że nie mają pojęcia o jego ruchach, iż wycofałem się [I withdrew] w stronę bufetu z koktajlami, który był jedynym miejscem w ogrodzie, gdzie samotny mężczyzna mógł bląkać się nie sprawiając wrażenia, że znalazł się tu przypadkowo i nie wie, co ze sobą zrobić [the only place in the garden where a single man could meander without making the impression that he found himself here by accident and has no idea what to do]* (FP, p. 63).

The first sentence is rendered exactly in the way KU proposes to do it (p. 425). The following two sentences sound (as confirmed by the same group of Polish students) very natural, apart from the noun “ruchach” [ruchy] that substitutes “movements” – because of its colloquial connotation. In the action described as “slunk off”, the component of withdrawal is preserved by the verb “wycofałem się” [wycofać się]. The final adverbial constitutes a semantic departure from the original and a considerable extension of the already long description at the expense of its piercing pointedness, which could support the critique but can also be defended with a strong argument – as will be shown below.

#### 4.3. Excerpt 3

[...] *conducted themselves according to the rules of behavior associated with amusement parks* (F, p. 47). [...] *zachowywali się w sposób typowy dla wesołego miasteczka* [they behaved in a way typical of amusement parks] (FD, p.5) In this Polish utterance, the logical language error is obvious, even though only after a careful structural analysis which confirms that attributes a behaviour to amusement parks instead of people. Polak’s translation is free of this mistake:

[...] *mogli dalej zachowywać się tak, jak w lunaparku* [they could continue behaving like in a lunapark] (FP, p. 62).

#### 4.4. Excerpt 4

Champagne was served in glasses bigger than *finger bowls*. [...] *I had taken two finger bowls of champagne* [...] (F, p.53).

Podano szampana w kieliszkach większych niż *miseczki do obmywania palców* [bowls for washing fingers] [...]. *Wlałem w siebie szampana z dwóch miseczek do płukania palców* [I poured into myself champagne from two bowls for rinsing fingers]...(FD, p. 60).

KU dislikes the descriptive equivalent of the vessels called finger bowls but does not suggest a better solution. She strongly disapproves of rendering the simple statement “I had taken” with a verb that denotes pouring in Polish, “which – in combination with rinsing fingers – suggests a kind of unhygienic bathroom treatment” (p. 426) and complains about the humour of these utterances that is missing from Dehnel’s wording.

Polak’s translation:

[...] *podano szampana w kieliszkach większych niż miseczki u manicurzystki* [champagne was served in glasses bigger than the bowls at a manicurist’s [...]]

*Wypiłem dwie miseczki manicurzystki szampana* [I drank two manicurist bowls of champagne] ... (FP, pp. 69-70).



Obviously, the function of finger bowls is not preserved, which could give rise to criticism, but the humour is conveyed instead. Moreover, no undesired associations with any scripts or scenes are generated.

#### 4.5. Excerpt 5

We talked for a moment about *some wet, grey little villages* in France (F, p.53).

Pogadaliśmy sobie o kilku [several] wilgotnych [moist], szarych *wioseczkach* we Francji (FD, p.61).

From the perspective of the whole novel, the reviewer argues that the qualifier “some” denotes indefiniteness of the referent, in Polish: *jakichś* [jakieś] rather than a small number, in Polish: *kilku* [kilka]. Moreover, she finds the phrase “wilgotnych wioseczkach” inadequate and even funny. The consulted students perceived it as disturbing because of the tender sound of the diminutive “wioseczkach” [wioseczka] that clashes with both attributives. The critic subscribes to Demkowska-Bohdziewicz’s translation which differs from Polak’s in one place only. Polak translates:

Rozmawialiśmy przez chwilę o *jakichś* przesiąkniętych deszczem [soaked with rain] szarych *wioskach* we Francji (FP, p.70),

whereas Demkowska-Bohdziewicz renders “wet” as “rozmokłych” [rozmokłe – swamps] (FDB, p. 64).<sup>5</sup> The qualifier *some* [jakichś; jakieś] is indefinite, and the neutral sound of the noun *wioska* allows for multiple collocations.

#### 4.6. Excerpt 6

There was dancing now on the canvas in the garden, old men pushing young girls backward in eternal graceless circles, *superior couples holding each other tortuously*, fashionably and *keeping in the corners* [...] (F, pp. 52-53).

W ogrodzie trwały teraz tańce, podstarzali mężczyźni popychali przed sobą młode dziewczyny, zataczając nieskończone, niezgrabne kręgi, bardziej wyrobione pary trzymały się raczej narożników estrady, przybierając *powyginane*, modne *pozy* [...] (FD, pp. 59–60).

KU disapproves of the expressions “bardziej wyrobione pary” [more accomplished couples] substituted for “superior couples” – on grounds of the obsolescence of the word “wyrobione”. She dislikes the sentence “trzymały się

<sup>5</sup> Here and below, FDB stands for: Fitzgerald, F. S. (1962/1982). *Wielki Gatsby* (A. Demkowska-Bohdziewicz, Trans.). Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza.

narożników” representing the original utterance “keeping in the corners” – because of the connotation of the noun “narożnik” with the boxing ring. Moreover, she does not accept the phrase “powyginane pozy” [bent poses] which is meant to reflect the adverbial tortuously, arguing that only a physical object can be bent. She proposes to render this fragment like this:

Na obitych brezentem deskach w ogrodzie [On boards covered with canvas in the garden] zaczął się już dancing, starsi panowie popychali przed sobą młode dziewczyny, w nieskończoność zataczając krzywe kółka, wprawniejsze pary trzymały się z boku, splecione w modnych, wymyślnych uściskach [...] (pp. 426–427).

Polak’s translation reads:

W ogrodzie, na obitej płótnem estradzie [In the garden, on a stage covered with canvas] rozpoczęły się tańce; starsi panowie popychali przed sobą młode dziewczyny, zataczając niezdarne, odwieczne kółka, lepsze pary [better couples] splotły się w bolesnym [painful], modnym uścisku i wirowały po bokach [swirled on the sides] (FP, p. 69).

Polak’s translation contains an obvious false-friend error (“tortuous” was confused with “torturous” and rendered accordingly). But the adjectives describing superior couples and the dancers’ positions seem unproblematic, and no connotation of boxing has been produced. The polemic with KU will be continued in the following section but it cannot be left without a comment right now that she too – like Polak – misinterpreted the phrase “on the canvas” which relates to boxing, or at least can be understood so (insofar as a boxer who was knocked down is on the canvas) and thus justifies the connotation created by Dehnel. It cannot be ignored, either, that Polak’s translation – once again – is a replica of Demkowska-Bohdziewicz’s solution (FDB, p. 62).

## 5. Interim Summary

To sum up this section: Twenty-three solutions recognised by KU in Dehnel’s rendering as errors have been discussed and juxtaposed with Polak’s translations. If we assume that all these solutions are errors indeed (although it will be argued otherwise, the conducted comparative analyses evidence that Polak avoided most of them, and besides, sometimes his translations concord with the critic’s propositions. But the samples examined are not free from rookie errors either. Altogether, as long as KU’s list of Dehnel’s errors is valid (and only that long), Polak’s translation seems to contain fewer errors than Dehnel’s and thus come closer to the vague picture of a good translation measured by the errors alone. In what follows, Bittner’s recommended method of translation quality assessment will be applied to Dehnel’s solutions criticized by KU: justifications will be looked for first and only in the case of their absence will her criticism be accepted.

## 6. Discussion

KU's criticism seems to be based entirely on the traditional equivalence concept which includes Catford's (1965) formal correspondence, and Koller's (2004) denotative equivalence, this is to say both the semantic contents and the linguistic form of the texts. She argues from the angle of the microcontext and the viewpoint of a bilingual recipient. Most importantly, she does not discuss the very notion of translation error which – in her argument – appears as absolute and identifiable through a mere comparison of the parallel text excerpts.

As far as Excerpt 1 is concerned, each of the eight solutions stigmatized as errors can be defended. Most importantly, like some other colours, blue has a symbolic value in Fitzgerald's novel (Zhang, 2015, p. 43): Gatsby's Garden is blue and so are the leaves falling off the trees in the area. The blue flower as a symbol of romantic solitude and longing is sometimes called *blekitny kwiat* in Polish (Kamionka-Straszakowa, 1983). Dehnel preserves the symbolic value of blue that overweighs the importance of the real looks of colour known robin's egg blue. Out of the novel's macrocontext, it seems logical to render Gatsby's intention to "call on" Nick as his plan to invite the narrator (via chauffeur who actually performs the action) since Gatsby needs him at the party. Regarding the other reproaches, the exaggerated, partly obsolete phrases, seem to match Gatsby's overall image of a self-made man who struggles with language when desperately trying to catch up with the people of high society who will never accept him as equal. Thus, whatever represents him before he enters the stage in person: his letter, its contents and looks as well as his chauffeur's pace and uniform colour appear as unusual and displaced like himself.

In the case of Excerpt 2, a similar argument could be used to impair the criticism. In this fragment, Nick describes his first experiences at Gatsby's party. He feels lost, confused and bewildered and so is his language: clumsy, odd, on the verge of acceptability. The questioned solutions may be defended, in line with Bittner's postulate, from the perspective of Dehnel's strategy which aimed, as can be read in his note, at creating a work characterized by an exceptional, unconventional style" [translation mine] (Dehnel, 2013, p. 220). However, such argument may sound unconvincing: the reader knows that Nick wrote for a university magazine at Yale and uses immaculate language.

The forty-four native speakers of Polish disapproved of his idiom in Dehnel's translation and found it rather disturbing. But they did not notice any dissonance between the verb aspects in the first sentence (point in time versus duration). What is more, similar examples could be encountered in the corpus of the Polish language<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://sjp.pwn.pl/korpus/szukaj/usi%C5%82owa%C4%87;2.html> (retrieved on March 22, 2022).

In Excerpt 3, the Polish sentence contains a logical error of information distribution (constituting a binary error in Pym's classification) and cannot be defended with any plausible argument.

Regarding Excerpt 4, KU fails to suggest a better, competing solution for rendering the noun "finger bowls", which undermines her right to criticize in light of Bittner's theory (which correspond to people's common attitude towards critique of anything, also in everyday life). There is no handy counterpart in Polish, so the translator reaches for what Newmark (1988, p. 83) calls a descriptive equivalent. At the same time, the effect of "an unhygienic bathroom treatment" – as the critic puts it – generated through the inappropriate word selection, can be perceived as amusing, contrary to her opinion that Fitzgerald's humour got lost in Dehnel's translation in this place.

In Excerpt 5, in Dehnel's translation, the topic of Gatsby and Nick's conversation (namely the war) is belittled or even ridiculed. The macrocontext of the novel cannot support this shift because the topic belongs to Gatsby's war memories he shares with pride and seriousness. Thus, the translator's stylistic frivolity seems impossible to defend.

As mentioned before, in Excerpt 6, Dehnel clearly avoids the error committed by Demkowska-Bohdziewicz which was obviously copied by Polak and recommended as a good translation by KU, which only affirms that a critic can be wrong as well.

## 7. Conclusion

At least four firm conclusions can be drawn from the above analyses.

First, complying with most suggestions by KU and thus resistant to her severe criticism of Dehnel's solutions, Polak's translation has its unquestionable merits and as such deserves scholarly attention that can rescue it from oblivion. The reasons why it was published only once should be sought beyond its quality: They may relate to the copyright agreement and the fact that the small publishing office SAWW closed its business and cannot even be tracked back anymore.

Second, it is highly risky to assess literary translation using an intuitive error criterion, based on mere denotation of individual words or phrases. Criticism of this sort can be always countered from a viewpoint of an alternative concept of error and acceptability in literary translation.

Third, asking for the translator's possible reasons to have made a given choice that appears wrong before passing a deprecatory judgment corresponds with the good social practice of listening to both parties involved and taking into consideration attenuating circumstances.

Finally, as rightly observed by Hejwowski (2015, p. 65), there is a plethora of excellent translations and no scarcity of very bad ones, which does not contradict Newmark's (1981, p. 129) opinion that "ten different translations of the same text may be equally acceptable". It is both sensible and advisable to discuss translations in terms of well-defined errors in order to maintain constructive

discourse on translation quality, but it seems both unproductive and unfair to devastate acknowledged translations relying solely on the critic's perception of what is right or wrong.

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