Could you please close the door? VS. Zatvaraj vrata! Translation of directive speech acts from English into Serbian and from Serbian into English

This paper presents a qualitative analysis of directive speech acts and their translations between English and Serbian. The study aims to highlight subtle differences in the translation of directives, considering both linguistic/typological and cultural factors. The research sample consists of three plays originally published in English and translated into Serbian, as well as plays written in Serbian and translated into English. Directive speech acts are categorized into three broad types—direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect directives—with numerous subcategories (Blum-Kulka et. al. 1989). Both English and Serbian employ various strategies for issuing directive messages, with imperatives being the most direct. Some morphological forms in Serbian that convey directive messages and carry emotional weight—such as the imperative construction *Zatvaraj vrata*, where the verb *zatvaraj* implies urgency and hierarchy—lack direct formal equivalents in English. Conversely, translations from English into Serbian sometimes exhibit a shift in directness, where indirect English directives (e.g.. *Could you close the door?*) are occasionally rendered as more direct forms in Serbian, often using imperatives (e.g. *Zatvori vrata.*). Similarly, Serbian imperative constructions tend to be translated into English using more indirect forms, such as questions examining preparatory conditions. These deviations can be attributed to cultural and politeness differences, with English favoring negative politeness strategies more than Serbian (Prodanović 2014, Zečević 2016, Panić Kavgić 2019). This raises the question of when such shifts are acceptable and when the original form should be preserved, particularly since both languages can employ similar indirect structures. The analysis considers interlocutor relationships to provide insights into this issue. Examples for the analysis were manually extracted rather than software-generated, with each play carefully read, and illustrative examples noted first from the original texts and then from their translations. Both original and translated instances were classified into direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect directive categories, allowing the study to systematically depict how directives are translated between the two languages. Preliminary results indicate that deviations in translations from English into Serbian primarily stem from cultural factors, whereas deviations in translations from Serbian into English are more often due to morphosyntactic mismatches. Additionally, it appears that the level of conventionality is inversely proportional to the level of (in)directness. In other words, conventionally indirect utterances are more likely to be translated directly, while non-conventionally indirect utterances typically preserve their original form in translation. A comparative analysis of this kind is valuable for translation studies, as it examines a specific issue from the perspective of two languages. Therefore, translators should be aware that unnecessary deviations from the original forms can deprive the target audience of the nuances of directness, as well as the cultural and emotional weight embedded in the source language.

List of references

Austin, J. (1962) *How to do Things with Words*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Blum-Kulka, Sh. (1987). Indirectness and Politeness in Requests, *Journal of Pragmatics, 11*, 131–146.

Blum-Kulka, Sh., House, J. and J. Kasper, J. (1989). *Cross-cultural pragmatics: requests and apologies*, Norwood: Ablex.

Brown, P. and Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambrigde University Press.

Marković, S. (2023). Realization of directive speech acts in the American sitcom *Friends* and their subtitled translations into Serbian. *English Studies at the Interface of Disciplines* (*ESIDRP*). Skopje. Ss Cyril and Methodius University, R. N. Macedonia, 35–47.

Panić Kavgić, O. (2021). Influence of directness and indirectness on verbal politeness and politic behaviour in subtitled translations from English into Serbian. *Nasleđe, 48*, 185–201.

Panić Kavgić, O. (2019). *Učtivost pri neslaganju i slaganju u engleskom i srpskom jeziku*. Novi Sad: Filozofski fakultet.

Prodanović, M. (2014). *Kontrastivna analiza sredstava za ublažavanje govornih činova koji ugrožavaju obraz sagovornika u engleskom i srpskom jeziku.* PhD available at http://nardus.mpn.gov.rs/handle/123456789/4276 [Accessed: July 2nd, 2022].

Searle, J. (1975). Indirect speech acts. In P. Cole and J. I. Morgan (eds.). *Syntax and Semantics 3: Speech acts*. 59–82. New York: Academic Press.

Zečević, D. (2016). *Govorni čin davanja predloga u odabranim dijalozima iz tri novija srpska i američka filma*. Unpublished master thesis. Novi Sad: Filozofski fakultet.