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### SUSPENSE, SURPRISE AND INFORMATION SUPPLY IN POLISH TRANSLATIONS OF DETECTIVE FICTION

**Abstract.** If the key to suspense and surprise is the careful dealing out and withholding of knowledge, how do translators and their readers deal with the tendency for translations to clarify texts? Sometimes this clarification is forced on translators by the nature of the target language. Polish, for example, must specify the gender of the subject in past tense singular constructions. The English author may not have wanted this information to be made clear. How do translators prevent their language and customs from forcing them to reveal too much? This article studies the problem of information supply in Polish translations of Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler and Ross MacDonald. It finds that in fact translators' preconceived notions about the detective fiction are more likely to give the game away.

**Key words:** suspense, surprise, translation, detective fiction.

In chapter 13 of Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None*, the body of the judge is found, adorned with wool and a curtain to mimic his judge's robes and wig. The occupants of the house had missed the wool and the curtain earlier. One of them, Vera, now says "So this is what they wanted them for..." (Christie 1983: 143). But Vera cannot know that "they" is the correct pronoun to use. Here Agatha Christie practically gives the game away. The Polish translator avoids this blunder. In his version Vera uses the passive voice and thus the question of "whodunit" remains unanswered: "Właśnie w tym celu została zabrana – wyszeptwała Vera" (Christie 1992: 176) (*'So that's why they were taken,' Vera whispered*).

Noël Carroll proposes a question and answer model of suspense. That is, the plot generates questions, which the reader does not necessarily verbalise, that are later answered (Carroll 1990: 130–133). A scene or event in narra-

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tive may pose or answer a question, “sustain an ongoing question” (Carroll 1990: 134), “incompletely answer a reigning question,” or it may “answer one question, only to introduce one or more other questions” (Carroll 1990: 135). Carroll divides the outcomes of suspense-questions into four categories:

- I. moral and likely
- II. evil and likely
- III. moral and unlikely
- IV. evil and unlikely

In general, suspense arises from questions whose outcomes are evil and likely (II) or moral and unlikely (III). Here, moral/evil corresponds to desirable/undesirable (Carroll 1990: 138).

Dennis Porter defines suspense as a “state of anxiety dependent on a timing device,” which occurs when “a perceived sequence is begun but remains unfinished” (Porter 1983: 328). The main way to create suspense in detective fiction is to impede or retard the action (Porter 1983: 330). Porter gives many examples of retardation techniques, including the detective who does not reveal his thought processes to the reader (Porter 1983: 332). The subject is also dealt with by the Russian Formalist, Viktor Shklovsky, in “The connection between devices of *Syuzhet* construction and general stylistic devices,” though he sees the purpose of retardation as a means to have the reader focus on the telling of the story, rather than its outcome (Shklovsky 1973).

Alfred Hitchcock gave an even more succinct description of suspense in conversation with François Truffaut. As summarised by McGowan: “Surprise occurs when a film confronts spectators with the unexpected and thereby creates a momentary shock, whereas suspense involves confronting them with that they know is coming” (McGowan 2011: 508). Hitchcock gave the example of a conversation about baseball that becomes fraught with suspense if we know that under the table at which the speakers sit there is a bomb (Gottlieb 2003: 86-87).

For our purposes (English to Polish translation) it is enough to regard suspense and surprise as the result of a careful paying out of information. Too little advance information can turn suspense into surprise; too much, and there is neither suspense nor surprise. The author—not to mention the classic, first-person private investigator telling the story in the past tense—knows “whodunit” but retells the “story of the investigation” (Todorov 1977: 44)—red herrings, false leads, setbacks and all – without shortcuts and very often without revealing his suspicions. For example, Marlowe, when he takes Carmen Sternwood for some target practice in *The Big Sleep*, must

know she is a killer because he loads her gun with blanks but he does not tell us this. He does hint, however: “It made a swell target. If she missed the can, which she was certain to do, she would probably hit the wheel. That would stop a small slug completely. However, she wasn’t going to hit even that” (Chandler 2000: 156).

We could posit two readers at this point: one suspects Carmen is a killer and that Marlowe is in danger; the other has no suspicions about Carmen. For the first reader, Chandler’s hint may even spoil the suspense; for the second, it should increase the tension: although she will not kill him, *some* kind of a showdown is coming. Many more readers could be hypothesised but the absence of the hint in translation (for absent it is, in the Polish) changes the effect – whether of suspense or surprise – quite markedly for all of them.

Many readers of this scene will know something is afoot simply because they will wonder why Chandler is introducing this digression (the target practice). It seems entirely irrelevant to the plot. Here, familiarity with the genre’s convention of tight plotting—not to mention Marlowe’s character and Chandler’s style—provide vital information about what is coming next. However, any competent translator should be able to reproduce that information simply by not adding or leaving out entire episodes. As for familiarity with the genre’s conventions, as will be seen, the problem in the Polish case is more likely to be over-familiarity with the genre’s general conventions at the expense of its particular exponents.

If the key to suspense and surprise is the careful dealing out and withholding of knowledge, how do translators and their readers deal with cases where the target language’s grammar demands more information than the source language? For example, the translator who has two characters speak to each other using the informal form of address gives us information about their relationship that the English-speaking author did not necessarily want to have revealed yet. But the issue of how characters address one another cannot be ducked. It is therefore what might be called a “forced revelation,” in the English-Polish language pair at least. This would correspond roughly to “obligatory explicitation” (Baker and Malmkjaer 1998: 82–83).

There are times when English is vague but Polish cannot be. English “I was there” is in Polish “Byłem tam” or “Byłam tam” depending on whether a male is speaking or a female. One could realistically write an entire first-person novel in English without revealing the narrator’s gender. One could conceive of a Polish translation that also kept the secret but it

would require a great deal of verbal gymnastics or artificiality (the neuter pronoun could be used). This—if it were readable at all—would draw attention to the gender question. The revelation in the original that the tough-talking, foul-mouthed, two-fisted, hard-drinking private eye was a woman all along would be a lot less surprising in a Polish translation. Any suspense based on the PI's gender would also be ruined by excess information. Katherine Mansfield's short story, "The Young Girl," though hardly a thriller, does not state the first person narrator's gender. The curious reader must figure it out from the narrator's behaviour. The reader of the Polish translation need make no such educated guesses: the translator unmistakably makes the narrator a male on page one.

Gender in Polish is also revealed—and must be revealed—by adjectives and thus the ambiguity of Henry James's "Yet when she finally drifted toward him, distinctly handsome, though ever so much older—older [...]" (James 1964: 353) is lost in Polish, which must specify which of the two people is handsome, though older. The Polish translator opts for "her:" "Skierowała się w końcu w jego stronę – bardzo ładna, choć o wiele starsza, [...]" (James 1961: 294) (*Finally she went in his direction—very beautiful [fem.] though much older [fem.]*).

Forms of address are another problem. English "you" can be translated into Polish as "Pan," "Pani," "Ty," "Wy," "Państwo," "Panie" or "Panowie," all of which are more precise than the English. Context takes care of many problems: if the people being addressed include men and women, "Panie" (*ladies*) and "Panowie" (*gentlemen*) are ruled out—or are they? The translator may decide that the speaker has in mind only the men or only the women in the group being addressed. He or she is forced into taking interpretative decisions for the reader, who is therefore deprived of an ambiguity, which, to quote Carroll, may "sustain an ongoing question." If we narrow the range of options down to the familiar form of address versus the formal, the question becomes more acute. It is usually obvious whether the speaker is addressing one man or two men and a woman, for example, but the relationship between speakers is not always so clear, especially not at the outset of their interaction.

In addition to such grammatical constraints, there are numerous collocations and phrases that simply work differently in both languages. These are best treated case by case, rather than as abstractions, and examples are given below.

Turning to the authors studied (Chandler, Hammett and MacDonald), our first examples are rather trivial in themselves but they illustrate the point. In

the Polish version of *The Maltese Falcon* Spade and Tom Polhaus address each other using the informal “Ty” (*you*) (Hammett 1963: 15). This is a perfectly reasonable interpretation of their relationship. The translator of *The Big Sleep* shows poorer judgement. Here, although Marlowe and Bernie Ohls (the District Attorney’s investigator) obviously know each other quite well, the translator has Ohls use the formal term of address to Marlowe in his translation of “Know him?” (Chandler 2000: 35) (“– Znał go pan?” (Chandler 1985: 54)). Marlowe, in turn, uses the polite form in “Leave the old man out of it, if you can” (Chandler 2000: 36) (“– Niech pan pozostawi starego generała w spokoju” (Chandler 1985: 55) (*‘Leave the old general in peace’*)). Establishing Marlowe’s relations with the authorities is quite important since he spends so much of his time in conflict with them (“I test very high on insubordination [...]” (Chandler 2000: 8)). The option chosen (formal “Pan” instead of informal “Ty”) is just that—an option, which can be disputed or defended—but the decision is more or less forced on the translator. The same translator has Marlowe address Joe Brody in the polite form, even when the sentence is “You got the books, Joe” (Chandler 2000: 56). Here Marlowe is imposing himself on Brody and although, as two men who do not know each other, “Pan” is strictly speaking correct, one might argue that a casual, even presumptuous “Ty” might better render the relationship forming between the two men.

In MacDonald’s *The Barbarous Coast*, the Polish translator, perhaps unwittingly, drops clues as to Lew Archer’s age at the very start of the book, when Archer first meets George Wall, a “young” man in both English (MacDonald 1990: 7) and Polish (MacDonald 2007: 8). When Archer says to him “You better do what he says” (MacDonald 1990: 8), this is translated into Polish using the familiar form (MacDonald 2007: 9), implying that Archer is older than he or that he does not take Wall seriously, as an equal.

Returning to *The Maltese Falcon*, the problem of you plural versus you singular comes up in the following exchange between Spade and Gutman, who are alone in the room: “I told that punk of yours that you’d have to talk to me before you got through. I’ll tell you now that you’ll do your talking today or you are through” (Hammett 2010: 106). The translator uses you plural. That is, Spade in Polish is reckoning with some or all of the group – Cairo, O’Shaughnessy, Wilmer – rather than just Gutman. This can be seen again in “You haven’t done so bad. You’re staying out of jail and you’re getting the falcon. What do you want?” (Hammett 2010: 186). Here too, the translator used the plural.

When Joel Cairo first meets Brigid O’Shaughnessy in *The Maltese Falcon*, he doffs his hat and bows, yet—in Polish—he uses the familiar form of address (Hammett 1963: 68). The translator appears to have jumped the gun: the two do know each other well but the reader does not know this just yet. It very soon becomes apparent that they know each other from before so the damage done by revealing their closeness is slight and, indeed, a study of *The Maltese Falcon*, *The Barbarous Coast* and, to a lesser extent, *The Big Sleep* in translation turns up few examples of “forced revelation” and very few that might spoil the suspense.

On the borderline between forced and unforced revelations are instances where the translator reveals more than is strictly necessary, not because of grammar or lexical differences but because of Polish norms and expectations, corresponding roughly to “optional explicitation” (Baker and Malmkjær 1998: 83). It is considered good style in Polish to use a variety of reporting verbs and thus, while in one five-page stretch of dialogue from *The Barbarous Coast*, the word “said” appears twelve times (MacDonald 1990: 22–25), the Polish uses eight different verbs, ranging from “warknąć” (*growl*) to “zaprotestować” (*protest*) and “doradzić” (*advise*) (MacDonald 2007: 27–31). This wordiness might seem to alter the deceptively simple style of the source text but Poles accept it more readily than the repetition of one verb.<sup>1</sup> However, the fact remains that the translator has added information.

The chances of spoiling suspense are somewhat greater when it comes to the Polish translations’ tendency to explicitate, even when grammar does not demand it: “‘You read about the killing in the papers?’” the Continental Op says in “The Golden Horseshoe” (Hammett 1984: 76). In Polish this becomes “‘the killings’” (*‘zabójstwa’*) (Hammett 1988: 28)—and indeed, there were three victims. At the end of this story a slightly unclear passage is clarified: “‘What do you think a jury will make out of that, Ed?’ He laughed at me. [...] ‘Of course you did,’ I said” (Hammett 1984: 89). In Polish this is, in back translation: *‘What conclusion do you think a jury will come to out of that?’ He laughed [...] ‘That you killed him, of course’* (Hammett 1988: 41). In “The Tenth Clew,” the Continental Op examines some bullet cartridges and says “‘These in the car, too?’” (Hammett 1984: 31). The Polish version does not use a pronoun, preferring instead to spell it out: “– Naboje też znalezione w samochodzie?” (Hammett 1988: 49) (*‘Were the cartridges*

<sup>1</sup> By contrast, Mira Michałowska’s Polish translation of Hemingway’s “The Killers”—like the original—uses a sharply limited number of reporting verbs. It seems Poles must adjust to Hemingway but MacDonald must be adjusted to Poles.

*also found in the car?*). Where the source text of “The Main Death” has ““We know that, because other people heard the shot [...]” (Hammett 1984: 198), the Polish translator steps in to tell us that these other people were neighbours (Hammett 1987: 6). In “Fly Paper” we come across the line ““Sue was sick as hell, but she wouldn’t let me get a croaker for her. That was kind of funny, because she was scared stiff” (Hammett 2005: 62). The Polish explains that she was afraid of sickness (Hammett 1987: 45). This might be a little too much information, as the story revolves around a poisoning. When, in “The Girl With Silver Eyes,” Axford says to the Continental Op ““I want you to find Burke before he does something else” (Hammett 1984: 125) this is explicitated in the Polish version: “Chcę, żeby pan odnalazł Burke’a, zanim narobi jeszcze gorszego kłopotu” (Hammett 1988a: 40) (*I want you to find Burke before he makes even worse trouble*). In “The Scorched Face,” a stylistic change in the translation has a momentary effect on the state of the reader’s knowledge. The Continental Op asks a Mrs. Correll if she has heard from the two girls whose disappearance he is investigating. She says she has not, and the sentence that follows is typical of Hammett’s unadorned, matter-of-fact style: “She moistened her mouth before she said it” (Hammett 2005: 71). In Polish this becomes “Lecz zanim to powiedziała, zwilżyła językiem usta” (Hammett 1988b: 8) (*But before she said it she moistened her lips with her tongue*). The addition of the word “but” (*lecz*) interprets, for the reader, the meaning of Correll’s gesture.

Examples could be multiplied but it would be a careless translator indeed who spilled the beans in this way. Even taken together, all the small changes are unlikely to add up to a serious loss of suspense or to spoil a surprise revelation. Rather, the clipped, “knowing” style of the original is sometimes damaged. The original Continental Op stories treat the reader almost like a partner in crime, someone to whom not everything need be explained. The translations assume a reader less familiar with the seamy side of life.

A little knowledge is a dangerous thing and there are instances when translators—forearmed with knowledge of how the book proceeds—reveal more than they should. In *The Maltese Falcon* that foreknowledge is that Miles Archer was killed by a woman, not a man. In the original, Spade reconstructs the murder of his partner with the assumption that the killer was a man: ““He was shot up here, huh? Standing where you are, with his back to the fence. The man that shot him stands here” (Hammett 2010: 12). The Polish avoids using the straightforward, unambiguous “mężczyzna” (*man*), going instead for “napastnik” (*attacker*), grammatically masculine (Hammett

1963: 16). There exists a feminine version, “napastniczka” (*female attacker*) but this would be strongly marked: it would only be used if Spade knew the killer’s sex. “Napastnik,” then, despite being grammatically masculine, functions as a gender-indeterminate noun. The original is deliberately misleading, the translation slightly less so. The killer, Brigid O’Shaughnessy, cannot be called a “mężczyzna” but could be called a “napastnik.”

Another two examples come from the translation of Hammett’s “The Gatewood Caper.” The Continental Op examines a ransom letter “postmarked *San Francisco, September 20, 9 P.M.* That was the night she had been seized” (Hammett 2005: 160). For the laconic second sentence the Polish version has, in back translation: *So the letter had been sent immediately after the kidnapping* (Hammett 1988b: 37). This is important because one of the clues that leads the Op to the solution (that the kidnapping was fake) is precisely this: the promptness with which the ransom demand was posted. In the Polish version, the speed with which the alleged kidnappers posted the letter is foregrounded, unnecessarily. The first paragraph of the same story concerns the difficulty the Continental Op has in getting past secretaries, office boys and doorkeepers to talk to Harvey Gatewood. This also is a clue to the solution. The difficulty is accentuated in the Polish, where reference is made to an army of secretaries etc. blocking (“zagradzali”) the detective’s path (Hammett 1988b: 35). That is, the clue is again made a little more obvious in the Polish (though it would be a sharp-witted reader indeed who as a result figured out the ending).

The three unforced revelations given so far do little enough harm but the translation of *The Big Sleep* abounds in misinformation. The translator sometimes denies Polish readers information and sometimes blabs too much. Marlowe takes the trouble to tell us he is sober when calling on General Sternwood: “neat, clean, shaved and sober, and I didn’t care who knew it” (Chandler 2000: 3). This vague threat of alcoholism (it is about 11 in the morning) is missing from the Polish. Sternwood’s daughters are in the “dangerous” twenties in English, while Carmen’s teeth are “predatory” (Chandler 2000: 4), but not in Polish, where the daughters are simply in their twenties and Carmen’s teeth merely sharp. The suggestion of impending danger in “It was going to rain soon. There was pressure in the air already” (Chandler 2000: 13) is weakened, if not lost altogether, in Polish: “Deszcz wisiał w powietrzu” (Chandler 1985: 18) (*rain was hanging in the air*). Vivian’s threat, too, (“People don’t talk like that to me” (Chandler 2000: 14)) is absent in Polish, which in back-translation is ‘*how dare you talk to*



*me like that?*' (Chandler 1985: 21). All these examples come from a few short pages that do much to raise the tension, hinting as they do at Carroll's second category: an evil and likely outcome. As can be seen, the Polish version fails to plant the knowledge that—in Hitchcock's terminology this time—there is a bomb under the table.

These mistakes might be put down to carelessness; that is, they were not caused by the translator's advance knowledge of how the book ends. However, it seems highly likely that foreknowledge interfered with the translation of the General's simple statement "I'm very fond of Rusty" (Chandler 2000: 8). As far as anyone has a right to know, Rusty is alive but the translator uses the past tense: "Lubiłem Rusty'ego" (Chandler 1985: 11) (*I liked Rusty*). The source text soon moves to the past tense too, since Rusty has left the General, but the Polish reader's first impression is not the same as that of the English reader's.

*The Big Sleep's* translation also provides us with an example of information loss caused not by the grammar of Polish but by its lexicon. This time it is harder to blame the translator, who in fact makes a good attempt to preserve the image. Vivian Sternwood says to Marlowe: "You're not much of a gusher, are you, Mr Marlowe? But he wants you to find him [Rusty Regan, her husband], doesn't he?" (Chandler 2000: 13). "Gusher" is a word used to describe a well from which oil flows without even being pumped – source of the Sternwood wealth and where Rusty was killed. In Polish it is: "Nie jest pan zbyt wylewny" (Chandler 1985: 19) (*you don't talk a lot*). "Wylewny" is derived from the verb meaning "pour out" but it has been lexicalised as "loquacious" and would be unlikely to arouse associations with oil in the unmistakable way that "gusher" does.

*The Barbarous Coast* supplies a similar example: "Cross your heart and hope to die.' 'Cross my heart,' I said. It felt like the kind of lie that would bring bad luck. It was. 'And hope to die'" (MacDonald 1990: 64–65). The Polish saying, as it happens, does not have quite so explicit and morbid a reference to death: "–Niech pan przysięgnie na własne życie i wszystko" (MacDonald 2007: 84) (*Swear on your life and all*). Nor—a few lines later—does the translator use the word "zabijanie" (*killing*) to describe the children's "killing games" (MacDonald 1990: 65), though he could have. Instead he opts for "bawiły się w strzelaninę" (MacDonald 2007: 84) (*they were playing at shooting*).

Another example is "On the face of it [...]," which the Continental Op says at the very start of "The Scorched Face" (Hammett 2005: 67). This

cannot readily be translated with a Polish word for face (“twarz,” “oblicze”) and the published translation reads “– Z pozoru [...]” (Hammett 1988b: 5) (*‘apparently, it seems’*), while the story’s title, “Osmalona fotografia,” back-translates as “*The scorched photograph*.” Here, again, the problem hinges on a *loss* of information in the target text. It might be possible to introduce a reference to “face” in the Polish but it would mean “marking” the text. This would go very much against Hammett’s laconic, business-like and “un-literary” style as exemplified by his descriptions of people, which are often just lists of physical features (height, weight).

The revelations translators are forced to make by the nature of the language, as can be seen, are usually trivial, while the unforced revelations are more harmful. The translation of *The Big Sleep* is simply not good, while missing sentences and misunderstandings in the translations of Hammett’s short stories are fairly numerous (though the quality is still much better than that of *The Big Sleep*). However, the translations of *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Barbarous Coast* are at the very least competent. Yet here, too, there are changes that do some harm to the atmosphere of suspense. In *The Maltese Falcon* there is a tendency—certainly not forced on the translator by the nature of Polish—to “clean up” Sam Spade. Arguably, this reduces the tension since it turns the story of a morally dubious PI, who may or may not be prepared to deal with the gang, into a more clear-cut tale of good guys versus bad guys. Steven Marcus describes Spade (as played in the film by Humphrey Bogart, using large parts of the dialogue from the book, unchanged) in his introduction to *The Continental Op* in terms of moral ambiguity: “He connived with crooks, for his own ends and perhaps even for some of theirs. He slept with his partner’s wife, fell in love with a lady crook, and then refused to save her from the police, even though he could have. Which side was he on? Was he on any side apart from his own?” (Hammett 1984: 12).<sup>2</sup>

A straightforward example of this cleaning up of Spade’s character comes at the start of the book. Spade looks “rather pleasantly like a blond satan” (Hammett 2010: 1) but in Polish it is “Wyglądał dość sympatycznie” (Hammett 1963: 5) (*he looked quite pleasant*) with no suggestion of the devil about him. The reference to Satan is also missing in the translation of “Spade nodded his blond satan’s head” (Hammett 2010: 4), although it is

<sup>2</sup> Kate Sturge has noted “a taste for moral clarity” in narrative fiction translations in Nazi Germany (Sturge 2010: 66).

kept—albeit in altered fashion—in the words “His eyes were shiny in a wooden satan’s face” (Hammett 2010: 54), which becomes “Oczy mu świeciły w szatańsko opanowanej twarzy” (Hammett 1963: 58) (*his eyes glittered in his satanically/devilishly controlled face*).

When Spade grins “wolfishly” and says to Archer “‘You’ll play hell with her, you will’” (Hammett 2010: 8), the Polish has merely “– Tak, zabawisz się z nią, no nie? – Spade wyszczerzył w uśmiechu zęby” (Hammett 1963: 12) (*‘Yes, you’ll have a good time with her, won’t you?’ Spade bared his teeth in a smile*), with no mention of hell or wolfishness. This wolfishness is also absent in Spade’s encounter with Joel Cairo: “‘Sorry,’ Spade said, and grinned wolfishly, showing his jaw-teeth [...]” (Hammett 2010: 46). In the Polish description of his grin, mention is only made of his exposed lower teeth (Hammett 1963: 50). It is also missing in the scene where Spade confronts Brigid O’Shaughnessy with the killing of Archer: “Spade smiled wolfishly with his lips, but not at all with his eyes” (Hammett 2010: 204). The Polish, in back-translation, is *Spade smiled, but only with his lips, not his eyes* (Hammett 1963: 212). In fact, “wolfishly” is used a total of five times to describe Spade in English but not once in Polish, where Spade instead smiles maliciously (“złośliwie”) and slyly (“chyttrze”) (Hammett 1963: 73, 162).

The Polish Spade also comes across as somewhat less mercantile or cynical in the translation of “‘I mean that you paid us more than if you’d been telling the truth,’ he explained blandly, ‘and enough more to make it alright’” (Hammett 2010: 31), from which the last seven words are missing. Also, the Polish Spade is slightly more sentimental—or at least less callous—about Archer, whom he describes as childless and insured for \$10,000. When Brigid protests he says, in the source text, “‘That’s the way it was’” (Hammett 2010: 32). This is softened in the Polish to “– Tak, niestety, było” (Hammett 1963: 35) (*‘That, unfortunately, is the way it was’*). In the wheeling and dealing that comes later in the novel, the Polish version presents, at one point, a less selfish, manipulative Spade. In the source text he says to Cairo “‘How in hell are we going to get it [the falcon] if I don’t play along with her?’” (Hammett 2010: 93). The dishonesty of “playing along” is absent from the Polish, which has in its place “jeżeli nie będziemy z nią w zgodzie?” (Hammett 1963: 98) (*‘if we are not in agreement with her?’*).

While Spade’s character is softened slightly, his speech is on occasion toughened up. Where the original has the flat, unadorned menace of “I’ll kill him. I don’t like him. He makes me nervous. I’ll kill him the first time

he gets in my way. I won't give him an even break. I won't give him a chance. I'll kill him'" (Hammett 2010: 107), the Polish has, in place of the last four short sentences, "Niech mi tylko wejdzie w drogę, zabiję jak psa" (Hammett 1963: 113) ('Let him get in my way and I'll kill him like a dog'). This is despite Spade's own words: "The cheaper the crook, the gaudier the patter" (Hammett 2010: 116).

Lew Archer's narrative voice is toughened up in the Polish translation of *The Barbarous Coast*. George Wall, in English simply a "young man" (MacDonald 1990: 8), becomes an "osiłek" (MacDonald 2007: 8) (*heavy, thug*) in Polish. What Archer calls "guns" in English (MacDonald 1990: 26) are "gnata" (MacDonald 2007: 33) (*'rod, piece'*) in Polish. Elsewhere, too, "gun" (MacDonald 1990: 20) is translated as "spluwa" (MacDonald 2007: 25) (*'heat, iron'*) and "gunman" (MacDonald 1990: 35) becomes the slangy "cyngiel" (MacDonald 2007: 44) (lit. *'trigger'*). "Don't kill him" – says Archer at one point – "Strange as it may seem, I have a use for him" (MacDonald 1990: 181). In Polish this last part is "[...] ten padalec jest mi potrzebny" (MacDonald 2007: 237) (*'I need this reptile/worm/scumbag'*).

Even when the talk is not of guns, gunmen and thugs, the Polish Archer is extra hard-boiled. In the original, he says "A friend of mine, newspaper man from the east, wants an interview" (MacDonald 1990: 48), while in the translation the newspaperman becomes a "pismak" (MacDonald 2007: 62) (*'hack'*). Archer does at times talk "like a private eye," as in the following lines: "Somebody knocked off Stern to get hold of this gun [...] Your boss thug tried to buy me. He's in the Vegas clink with a body to explain" (MacDonald 1990: 206). The Polish version is a close match, with underworld jargon used to translate "knock off" and "clink" (MacDonald 2007: 271–272), so it appears the addition of words like "padalec" is not a compensation technique.

It seems we are dealing here with preconceptions about what a PI is and how he should talk and behave. Poles were not so cut off from the West (and in any case the translation of *The Barbarous Coast* is from post-communist times) as to be unaware of the detective that talks tough but is, in Chandler's often quoted words, "not himself mean" (Scaggs 2005: 56). Thus, Archer talks tougher in Polish than in English, while Spade is less mean in Polish than in English. The translator of Spade seems to have had Marlowe in mind. The translator of Archer seems to have been influenced by stereotypical ideas of what hard-boiled dialogue is supposed to sound like—ironically enough, if we remember Spade's description of cheap crooks' language,

given above, and Marlowe's description of Joe Brody's patten: "Pictures have made them all like that" (Chandler 2000: 56).

In sum, the strictures of Polish do little to spoil the effect of either suspense or surprise by forcing the translator to reveal too much information. There are situations where Polish must convey information hidden in the original but in practice this rarely spoils the suspense, as, indeed, the success of translated mystery and suspense novels would suggest. When it comes to "unforced revelations" it turns out that the problem is at least as likely to stem from *cutting* information as from giving it too freely. The causes may be traced, perhaps, to detective fiction's relatively low status. This would explain, for example, the surely accidental omission of three lines beginning with the words "His ridiculous little face [...]" (Hammett 1984: 200) from the translation of "The Main Death." Low status would also account for the very poor translation of *The Big Sleep* (that is, the job was not thought important enough to deserve proper care and attention). Better translations too were marred by preconceptions and generalisations. Spade, Marlowe and Lew Archer all come out like stock characters: tough talking but with their hearts in the right place. It seems unlikely that Polish translators of Faulkner, Hemingway or Steinbeck would be so cavalier in their treatment of these authors' characters.

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NAPIĘCIE, ZASKOCZENIE I DOZOWANIE INFORMACJI  
W POLSKICH TŁUMACZENIACH POWIEŚCI DETEKTYWISTYCZNYCH

Streszczenie

Jeśli kluczem do zbudowania napięcia i uzyskania efektu zaskoczenia jest staranne dozowanie i zatajanie informacji, w jaki sposób tłumacze i ich czytelnicy podchodzą do tego, iż tłumaczenia wykazują tendencję do wyjaśniania tekstów? Czasami ujednoznacznienie może być wymuszone na tłumaczu charakterem języka docelowego. W języku polskim, na przykład, użycie czasu przeszłego w liczbie pojedynczej wymusza określenie rodzaju gramatycznego podmiotu. Autor tekstu anglojęzycznego mógł nie chcieć podać takiej informacji. W jaki sposób tłumacze nie pozwalają, aby ich własny język i nawyki zmusiły ich do powiedzenia za dużo? Niniejszy artykuł poddaje analizie problem dozowania informacji w polskich tłumaczeniach Dashiella Hammetta, Raymonda Chandlera oraz Rossa MacDonalda i pokazuje, że w rzeczywistości przyjęte z góry przez tłumacza założenia dotyczące powieści detektywistycznej mogą w znacznym stopniu przyczynić się do zdradzenia zbyt wiele.

*Streścił Robert Looby*

**Słowa kluczowe:** napięcie, zaskoczenie, przekład, kryminał, powieść detektywistyczna.