

The slang used by James Joyce in the chapter ‘Circe’ from Ulysses: A challenge of translation for Mircea Ivănescu

Abstract:

This paper researches how slang is transferred from a source text into a target text, using the example of the chapter ‘Circe’ from the Irish novel Ulysses by James Joyce and the challenges faced by the translator Mircea Ivănescu when rendering English and Irish slang in Romanian. In addition, the paper deals with a view on structural perspectives of slang in Ulysses, the composition of which began in 1914. It was published in 1922 and is considered to be one of the most difficult works of literature to read. The range of styles that the writer uses is one of the reasons that the book is held up as one of the key texts of literary modernism, a movement characterised by overturning traditional manners of writing. Joyce fills his narratives with some of the most imaginative uses of language in his devotion to portray the grandeur of ordinary life and what goes on in his characters’ minds moment by moment, a style emblematising his signature: the stream of consciousness.

The Romanian translator, Mircea Ivănescu, is a postmodernist poet who prefers to employ an ordinary language in his writings. Moreover, he is a self-taught man of letters who did not even receive a degree in the languages he translated. However, ‘Ulise’ is an acclaimed Romanian translation and critics have repeatedly praised Ivănescu’s skills and use of language. This paper focuses on the choices made in the process of cultural transposition of slang and on the changes in form and structure of words and expressions when rendered from one language to another.

Keywords: Slang; Structural perspectives; Cultural context; Challenge in translation; Etymology.