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THE ONOMASTIC UNIVERSE OF THE GRAPHIC NOVEL *THE SANDMAN* BY NEIL GAIMAN: STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES OF THE UKRAINIAN TRANSLATION

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*The article provides a comprehensive translation analysis of the onomastic system in Neil Gaiman's graphic novel *The Sandman* within the context of its modern Ukrainian translation. This study explores how proper names function as essential meaning-bearing elements in a unique intermedial setting. The onomasticon incorporates diverse mythological traditions – Ancient, Norse, and Sumerian – alongside biblical allusions and significant links to DC Comics lore. Within the theoretical framework, the definitions of "onomastic", "onym", and various sub-types of onyms are clarified, allowing for a more precise classification of the names of fictional entities and locations within the graphic narrative. It is substantiated that onyms in Neil Gaiman's text serve not only as means of nomination but also as powerful cognitive markers performing informational, pragmatic, and individualizing functions. Onyms are among the most interesting units of a literary text, as they do not merely distinguish an object from a series of similar ones but also endow it with additional expressive and semantic characteristics. Particular attention is paid to the analysis of translation strategies for rendering various categories of onyms, specifically theonyms (names of gods), anthroponyms, and toponyms. The study provides an overview of the methods used to achieve translational equivalence, including transcoding (transliteration and transcription), calquing, and the use of established historical equivalents. It is demonstrated that to preserve the author's multilayered intent, the translator frequently resorts to combined techniques. The research demonstrates that the Ukrainian rendering of *The Sandman's* onomastic landscape represents a highly effective cross-cultural and linguistic transfer. The study further highlights that the translator acts as a crucial cultural mediator, ensuring that the symbolic and stylistic layers of Gaiman's universe remain both accessible and relatable for the Ukrainian audience.*

Keywords: *onomastics, translation, translation method, graphic novel, transcoding, calquing.*

Василенко І. Ю. Ономастичний світ графічного роману "Пісочний чоловік" Ніла Геймана: стратегії та виклики українського перекладу.

У статті представлено комплексний перекладацький аналіз ономастичної системи графічного роману Ніла Геймана "Пісочний чоловік" у контексті його сучасного українського перекладу. У цьому дослідженні розглядається, як власні імена

функціонують як важливі смислові елементи в унікальному міжмедійному середовищі. Ономастичний корпус поєднує різноманітні міфологічні традиції – античну, норвезьку та шумерську – поряд із біблійними алюзіями та значущими зв'язками з всесвітом DC Comics. У теоретичній частині роз'яснюються визначення понять «ономастика», «онім» та різних підтипів онімів, що дозволяє більш точно класифікувати імена вигаданих персонажів та місцевостей у графічному оповіданні. Доведено, що оніми у тексті Ніла Геймана слугують не лише засобами найменування, а й потужними когнітивними маркерами, які виконують інформаційні, прагматичні та індивідуалізуючі функції. Оніми є одними з найцікавіших одиниць літературного тексту, оскільки вони не просто відрізняють об'єкт від низки подібних, а й наділяють його додатковими експресивними та семантичними характеристиками. Особлива увага приділяється аналізу перекладацьких стратегій відтворення різних категорій онімів, зокрема теонімів (імен богів), антропонімів та топонімів. У дослідженні наводиться огляд методів, що застосовуються для досягнення перекладацької еквівалентності, зокрема транскодування (транслітерація та транскрипція), калькування та використання усталених історичних еквівалентів. Доведено, що для збереження багатозначного задуму автора перекладач часто вдається до комбінованих прийомів. Дослідження показує, що українське відтворення ономастичного ландшафту "Пісочного чоловіка" є надзвичайно ефективним міжкультурним та лінгвістичним перенесенням. Дослідження також підкреслює, що перекладач виступає в ролі важливого культурного посередника, забезпечуючи, щоб символічні та стилістичні шари всесвіту Геймана залишалися доступними та близькими для української аудиторії.

Ключові слова: ономастика, переклад, методика перекладу, графічний роман, транскодування, калькування.

Introduction

In today's cultural landscape, comics have gained recognition as a significant form of multimodal text that harmoniously combines verbal and visual elements. The focus of this article is the first volume of Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* comic series, as it is key to understanding the atmosphere and concept of the entire graphic novel series. The Ukrainian translation was done by translator Olena Oksenysh.

The relevance of this study derives from the rapid growth of the Ukrainian graphic novel localization market and the need for a theoretical analysis of the translation strategies applied to texts with a high density of intertextual connections. The scholarly problem lies in resolving the contradiction between the need to preserve the multilayered etymology of the onyms used in the work and the necessity of adapting them for the Ukrainian reader, since each name serves as a key to a particular image or archetype.

The aim of the article is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the onomastic universe of the graphic novel *The Sandman*, to identify the main strategies and challenges faced by translator, and to evaluate the effectiveness of the applied

transformations in preserving the author's intent within a different linguistic and cultural context.

Theoretical Background

In today's cultural and media environment, comics occupy an important place as a unique narrative form that combines verbal and visual elements into a single semiotic system. The renowned American cartoonist Scott McCloud interprets comics as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (McCloud, 1993, p. 9). This approach allows us to view comics not merely as a form of entertainment, but as a complex multimodal text in which meaning is constructed through the interaction of various semiotic modes – linguistic, visual, and graphic. As noted by Nørgaard, Busse, and Montoro (2010), multimodality refers to "multiplicity of semiotic modes that go into communication" (p. 117). This means that meaning in a text is created not only through the verbal component, but also through the synergy of visual, typographical, and spatial elements. In this context, the onomastic component of comics takes on particular significance, specifically the proper names of characters, place names, and other nominative units, which not only identify objects in the fictional world but also carry significant semantic, cultural, and stylistic weight.

Neil Gaiman's graphic novel *The Sandman* is an example of a multimodal work that combines mythology, history, religion, and popular culture, as reflected in its rich system of proper names. These proper names perform not only an identificatory role but also carry significant cultural, symbolic, and narrative functions.

Although comics have gained considerable popularity, the theoretical aspects of comic book translation remain a relatively new field of research. Notable researchers in this area include K. Kaindl, F. Zanettin, and N. Celotti. Some aspects of translating proper nouns into Ukrainian are discussed in the works of V. I. Karaban, I. V. Korunets, O. E. Syniavska, O. V. Kovtun, O. S. Pomazan, and others.

Methodological notes

The methodological framework of the research is based on a comprehensive approach to the analysis of proper names (onyms), grounded in a combination of general scientific and specialized linguistic and translation methods. The study was conducted in three stages: 1) classification of onyms in Neil Gaiman's graphic novel *The Sandman*; 2) comparative analysis of the original proper names and their

Ukrainian equivalents; 3) interpretation of the results and identification of dominant translation strategies. Descriptive and comparative methods were employed throughout the study. The comparative method is fundamental to the practical part of the work, as it allowed for the identification of formal, semantic, and functional differences between the onyms in the source text and their renderings in the Ukrainian translation.

Furthermore, semantic and componential analysis methods were utilized. Given that the onyms in *The Sandman* often possess deep mythological, literary, or historical backgrounds, the componential analysis method was applied to decompose the meaning of a name into individual semes. This approach enabled the determination of which specific semantic components were preserved and which were lost during the translation process.

Results and Discussion

The theoretical foundation for the study of proper names is rooted in the achievements of onomastics. This branch of linguistics is dedicated to the comprehensive study of onyms – proper names. The scope of onomastic research includes the analysis of the origin and transformation of designations within the context of the literary language and territorial dialects. The differentiation of proper names based on their characteristics makes it possible to clearly separate the spheres of onomastic research. Primary among these are anthroponymy, which focuses on personal names, and toponymy, which examines the names of geographical locations (Holianych, Stefurak, & Babii, 2011, p. 150).

O. V. Boka asserts that proper names serve as unique cultural-historical and linguistic indicators that integrate both linguistic and extralinguistic factors (Boka, 2008, p. 15). This implies that an onym does not merely designate an object but also embodies the collective memory of an era, social order, and the ethno-cultural identity of a nation. Consequently, the analysis of proper names allows for the reconstruction of fragments of the linguistic picture of the world that were shaped by the influence of external historical processes.

In a literary text, a character's name serves not only as a means of identification but also as a key reference point within the work's chronotope. Utilizing the original appellative meaning of a name allows for the revelation of a character's nature, where both the given name and surname become effective tools of portrayal. This is most distinctly manifested in "speaking" anthroponyms (charactonyms). The connotative load of an image is shaped through the phonetic composition, morphological

structure, and etymology of the name's root, as in literary discourse, the function of characterization prevails over the purely nominative one.

The nature of a proper name is determined by the need for individualization: it singles out a specific object from a general class, making it recognizable and endowing it with the status of a unique unit within the linguistic system. As noted by researchers, "Every literary name acquires a certain stylistic load, becomes an additional means of characterization, and enhances the emotional impression of the entire work" (Kovtun, Pomazan, 2016, p. 48).

Among the methods for translating proper names, L. P. Polishchuk and T. M. Pushkar (2024) identify transcription, transliteration, transposition, and calquing. I. Korunets (2003) emphasizes the importance of preserving historically established variants. Specifically, he asserts that certain names "should be translated into English as close to their source language form as possible unless other of their forms are historically or traditionally established" (p. 104). It should be noted that the selection of a specific translation strategy is rarely arbitrary; rather, it is dictated by the functional load of the proper name within the discourse and the communicative priorities of the target text. While transcription and transliteration are instrumental in preserving the "national flavor" and phonetic authenticity of the source culture, methods such as calquing and transposition facilitate smoother integration into the grammatical and semantic structures of the target language. Complementing this view, Syniavska (2023) identifies calquing as the most productive method for translating names, particularly due to its capacity to convey the semantic meaning inherent in a proper noun. Therefore, achieving an adequate translation requires a nuanced balance between maintaining the onomastic identity of the original name and ensuring that it is understandable to the target audience.

M. P. Kocherhan classifies proper names into: 1) anthroponyms (names of people); 2) toponyms (geographical names); 3) theonyms (names of deities); 4) zoonyms (names of animals); 5) astronoms (names of celestial bodies); 6) cosmonyms (names of regions of outer space and constellations); 7) chrononyms (names of time periods associated with historical events); 8) ideonyms (names of objects of spiritual culture); 9) chrematonyms (names of objects of material culture), etc. (Kocherhan, 2005, p. 187). This comprehensive classification provides a necessary framework for understanding the diverse challenges inherent in onomastic translation. By identifying the specific type of proper name, the translator can better determine whether to prioritize phonetic preservation or to uncover the underlying cultural and historical meaning for the target audience.

The onomasticon (collection of proper names) in Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* is extremely complex, as it combines the author's neologisms, real-world place names, borrowings from various mythologies, and intertextual references to DC Comics.

The first major group of onyms found in the comic book consists of theonyms and mythonyms. These are deities and beings from real-world mythologies that Gaiman integrates into the plot. The comic book features characters from Sumerian, Germanic-Norse, and Ancient Greek mythologies, among others. Neil Gaiman constructs a complex system where various religious layers coexist within a single narrative. For their translation, transcoding (transliteration and transcription) was primarily employed. A case illustrating the application of this method is the rendering of *Namtar* as *Намтар* – the god of misfortune and disease in Sumerian-Akkadian mythology – as well as the name of his mistress *Allat*, as *Аллат*. In the Ukrainian translation, transliteration was used; these names retain their traditional forms, which emphasizes the archaic nature and inevitability of the forces they personify. This group of proper names also includes biblical anthroponyms that have become archetypal names: *Cain* and *Abel* (*Кайн та Авель*). These two names were replaced with their traditional equivalents, which have become established over time.

In the graphic novel, the protagonist appeals to the deities of fate to assist him in his search for lost tools. These deities appear in various guises, united under the name *Three-in-one*, which was rendered in Ukrainian as *Триєдина*. By employing calquing, the translator successfully preserves the conceptual triad. Later in the text, these deities are addressed as *Hecateae*, translated into Ukrainian simply as *Геката*. The original English term utilizes the Latin suffix *-eae*, which denotes both the feminine gender and the plural form, thereby emphasizing the collective nature of the female character. Unfortunately, the Ukrainian language lacks a direct morphological equivalent to maintain this nuance of multiplicity within a single persona.

Furthermore, the deities of fate reveal other names by which they may be recognized, necessitating several translation strategies. The most frequently used method is transcoding (transliteration and transcription). For instance, *Urth*, *Verthandi*, and *Skald* – rendered as *Урт*, *Вертанді*, *Скальд* – are the author's stylized variations of the three Norns from Germanic-Norse mythology (traditionally *Urd*, *Verdandi*, and *Skuld*), who govern human destiny. Subsequently, they are identified as *Tisiphone*, *Alecto*, and *Megaera* (*Тісіфона*, *Алекто*, *Мегера*). These names of the Furies are translated according to the Ukrainian tradition of translating the names of ancient characters. Other examples include *Atropos* (*Ампонос*), one of

the three Greek Moirai, and Morrigan (*Морріган*), the triple war goddess of Irish mythology.

The translation of Neil Gaiman's mythological and infernal onomasticon demonstrates a sophisticated interplay between standardized transcoding and cultural adaptation. While theonyms of biblical origin, such as *Beelzebub* – *Вельзевул*, are rendered according to long-standing Ukrainian orthographic traditions, more obscure or author-specific names like *Azazel* – *Азазель*, *Choronzon* – *Хоронзон*, *Etrigan* – *Етриган* rely on direct transliteration to preserve their phonetic exoticism.

Moving on to the proper names of human characters, or anthroponyms, it is notable that the majority of figures in the comic book possess traditional Anglo-Saxon names. In accordance with modern translation standards, these units are reproduced based on their phonetic form, that is, through transcoding: *Roderick Burgess* – *Родерік Берджесс*, *John Hathaway* – *Джон Гетевей*, *Ethel Cripps* – *Етель Кріннс*, *Ruthven Sykes* – *Рутвен Сайкс*, *Ellie Marsten* – *Еллі Марстен*, and *Unity Kinkaid* – *Юнімі Кінкейд*.

The following examples belong to the category of so-called "speaking names" (charactonyms). In the case of *Mad Hettie* (rendered as *Навіжена Гетті*), the epithet *Mad* is translated semantically to convey the social perception of the character, while *Hettie* is preserved via transcription. *Doctor Destiny* (*Доктор Доля*) serves as an example of full semantic adaptation, as the word *destiny* here functions not merely as a surname but as a fundamental characteristic of the antagonist.

The case of translation of *John Dee* (another name for *Doctor Destiny*) demonstrates how translation can effectively address the problem of homonymy present in the source text. In the Ukrainian version, a distinction is carefully preserved between *Destiny* (*Судьба*), the eldest of *the Endless*, and *Doctor Destiny* (*Доктор Доля*), a human antagonist. The use of *Судьба* for the anthropomorphic embodiment is a conscious stylistic decision rather than a direct borrowing: it introduces an archaic, fatalistic tone and, importantly, preserves the "C" alliteration characteristic of the Ukrainian translations of *the Endless* (*Смерть*, *Сон*, *Страждання*, *Снага*, etc.). In contrast, the more neutral and commonly used *Доля* is chosen for the human character, ensuring clear differentiation between the two figures despite their identical names in the original English text.

Since *The Sandman* is an integral part of the DC Universe, the text features names of well-known superheroes and anti-heroes, such as *John Constantine* (*Джон Костянтин*) and *John* (*Дж'онн*). A noteworthy example is the translation of the character named *Scott Free* as *Скотт Фрі*, which functions as a "pun-name"

(derived from the English idiom *scot-free*, meaning to escape unpunished or unharmed). In the Ukrainian version, the pun is lost, as the translation preserves only the phonetic form of the name.

The toponyms within the work are divided into two primary categories: transcribed names of the real-world places and calqued names of metaphysical locations. Most of the Earth-based locations are centered in England. For instance, the estate where the plot begins is located in a place called *Wyeh Cross – Вуч Кросс*. The text also mentions *Gotham – Готем* and *Jutland – Ютландія* – the latter being a historical-geographical region for which an established Ukrainian equivalent is used. Names of dimensions that do not belong to the material world require deeper semantic adaptation, as they carry a heavy conceptual load. The realm of *Sandman* is referred to as *Dreamtime – Сно-час*, a term that conveys the integrity of this state of being existing outside of linear time. Another example is the *Garden of Forking Ways – Сад з розгалуженими шляхами*. For locations within Hell, the author employs both classical mythological names and descriptive constructions, such as *Dis – Діме* and *The Wood of Suicides – Гай самогубців*. A separate group consists of institutions that have become iconic in mass culture, such as *Arkham Asylum – Лікарня Аркем*. The Ukrainian translation preserves the distinction between places: the names of real locations remain "foreign" due to transcription, while metaphysical settings become more familiar through calquing.

Ukrainian translator also effectively employs transliteration and transcription in combination with alliteration. For instance, the translation of gargoyle names as *Gregory – Грегори*, *Gazpacho – Гаспачо*, *Gormagon – Горматон*, and *Ganymede – Ганімед* illustrate this approach. Thanks to this method, names take on a universal character, as they are not subject to the lexical limitations of the target language. A notable pattern is the consistent use of the letter "G", which is rendered in Ukrainian through alliteration on "Г". This example shows that it is important to preserve not only the meaning but also the phonetic form that links the names to the characters' appearance (*gargoyle – таргуля*).

A significant challenge was the naming convention for *The Endless*, whose names in the original all begin with the letter "D" (*Destiny, Death, Dream, Destruction, Desire, Despair, Delirium*). The Ukrainian translator brilliantly resolved this task by selecting equivalents starting with the letter "с" (*Судьба, Страждання, Снага, Схибленість, Сон, Смерть*).

However, certain challenges remain, such as the translation of the character *The Fashion Thing* as *Модниця*. In English, the word *thing* implies something

unrecognizable, impersonal, and alien – an *it* rather than a being. *The Fashion Thing* is the embodiment of fashion as an abstract concept. In contrast, *Модниця* refers to a specific person.

Further instances of semantic reduction can be observed in the translation of the characters *Brute* and *Glob*. *Brute* represents aggressive, primal force – a beast; however, the Ukrainian *Здоровань* carries a nice, almost cartoonish connotation. Similarly, *Glob* refers to a thick mass or a clot – something unpleasant to the touch – whereas the Ukrainian *Кулька* sounds diminutive and cute.

Conclusions and Perspectives

In summarizing the results of this study on the onomastic space of Neil Gaiman's graphic novel *The Sandman*, it can be asserted that proper names in this work perform complex semantic, symbolic, and stylistic functions, serving as a vital component of the multimodal narrative. Their translation into Ukrainian requires not only formal correspondence but also a profound reproduction of the conceptual, cultural, and emotional layers embedded in the original text.

The analysis demonstrates that translator actively employs strategies such as transcoding, calquing, and cultural adaptation, that provide a balance between accurately reproducing the original proper names and ensuring clarity for the target audience. Simultaneously, the research highlighted a series of translational challenges related to conveying the expressiveness and connotative richness of specific onyms.

Ultimately, the translation of *The Sandman*'s onomasticon is a complex, multi-level process in which the translator acts not merely as a linguistic mediator but as an interpreter of the artistic world. Further research could be directed toward a deeper analysis of the interaction between verbal and visual components in translation, as well as studying the reception of Ukrainian onymic equivalents among readers.

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