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# Cucumbers and Creeps: Errors in Translation Studies and in the Polish Translation of Robert Macfarlane's *The Old Ways*<sup>2</sup>

In memory of Krzysztof Hejwowski (1952-2019),  
the dearest friend and my guide to the world of translation studies

**Abstract.** Forty years ago, André Lefevere wrote a paper in which he exposed some of the ‘howling’ errors made by American translators of Berthold Brecht and declared the theme of errors to be unconstructive in the field of contemporary translation studies. Krzysztof Hejwowski, a Polish translation studies scholar, believed that the notion of errors should not be forgotten, no matter which way translation studies are heading. This paper is both a homage to Hejwowski and his ‘conservative’ agenda and an attempt to map the errors in the Polish translation of *The Old Ways* by Robert Macfarlane.

**Keywords:** Lefevere, Hejwowski, translation studies, errors, Robert Macfarlane.

## Translation studies and errors

In 1982, in the early days of translation studies as an academic discipline, André Lefevere published an article entitled “Mother Courage’s Cucumbers: Text, System and Refraction

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2 This article is a slightly altered version of a paper delivered on 7 July 2022 at the University of Tartu, Estonia, during *Borders & Crossings: Transdisciplinary Conference on Travel Writing*. I am aware of the fact that, with its focus on errors in one particular translation, it goes against the mainstream of translation studies, but at the same time I hope that even though it may be read as a confrontational *erratum* in itself, it will begin a discussion on the problems translators face, as well as on strategies and techniques which they use while approaching narratives of travel.

in a Theory of Literature”. Over the next few years Lefevere was to become one of the leading scholars (together with Theo Hermans and Susan Bassnett) responsible for ‘the Cultural Turn in Translation Studies’ and “Mother Courage’s Cucumbers” has become one of the most often anthologized pieces of the rapidly developing academic discipline. It is included, for example, in *The Translation Studies Reader*, edited by Lawrence Venuti (1997) and, in Polish translation, *Współczesne teorie przekładu: Antologia [Contemporary Theories of Translation: An Anthology]* edited by Piotr Bukowski and Magda Heydel (2009).

“Mother Courage’s Cucumbers” opens with Lefevere’s statement that “translation studies can hardly be said to have occupied a central position in much theoretical thinking about literature” and that he will try to show “[...] how translations or, to use a more general term, refractions, play a very important part in the evolution of literatures” (2012: 203). In the long second paragraph, Lefevere at first clearly cherishes describing errors American translators committed rendering Bertold Brecht’s *Mutter Courage und Ihre Kinder* into English; for example, he shows how in the translation of H. R. Hays, “the prayer book Mother Courage uses to wrap her cucumbers becomes transformed into a ledger, and the innocent cucumbers themselves grow into an imaginary town, Gurken<sup>3</sup>, supposedly the point the last transaction was entered into that particular ledger” (2012: 203). Having described a few such errors, “howlers” as he refers to them (2012: 204), Lefevere announces: “I have no desire, however, to write a traditional ‘Brecht in English’ type of translation-studies paper, which would pursue this strategy to the bitter end” (2012: 204). Instead, he declares, “translations can be used in other, more constructive ways” (2012: 204), and argues that “[a] writer’s work gains exposure and achieves influence mainly through ‘misunderstandings and misconceptions’, or to use a more neutral term, refractions. Writers and their work are always understood and conceived against a certain background, or, if you will, are refracted through a certain spectrum” (2012: 204).

Lefevere’s treatment of translations as refractions in which “misunderstandings and misconceptions” are inevitable became dominant in the burgeoning translation studies, and, as a result, translation errors have for a long time been thought of as belonging to the old, pre-theoretical and ‘linguistic’ period of the development of translation studies. One of the few scholars who opposed this approach was Krzysztof Hejwowski. In his *Translation: A Cognitive-Communicative Approach* (2004), he tackled head-on Lefevere’s “more constructive approach” from “Mother Courage’s Cucumbers”. He argued that the “howlers” Lefevere quoted do not stem from “any refraction through a certain spectrum” but from the translator’s mistakes. He added that “[s]uch mistakes can (and should) be pointed out and rectified” (2004: 199). In *Iluzja przekładu* (2015), Hejwowski (2015: 289) claimed that in Lefevere’s (and Hermans’s) approach, some of the old, key

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3 The German *Gurken* means cucumbers.

questions of translation studies (about equivalence, translation errors, translator's competence, freedom, and responsibility) are unnecessarily "annulled".

Hejwowski's 'traditional' approach to translation errors and his taxonomy of these errors prove to be particularly useful when we approach translations in which the frequency of errors as well as their variety are truly excessive, and I am strongly convinced that the Polish translation of Robert Macfarlane's *The Old Ways* is such a case.

## The Polish translation of *The Old Ways*

In 2019, while working on a book, the working title of which is *The Socio-Cultural Dynamics of Translating Anglophone Travel Books into Polish*, I read closely, sentence by sentence, *The Old Ways* by Robert Macfarlane, first published in 2012, and its Polish translation, by Jacek Konieczny, published in 2018 as *Szlaki* by Wydawnictwo Poznańskie. As my list of notes on mistranslations of various kinds in *Szlaki* was growing surprisingly quickly, I was growing more and more curious about the translator himself, suspecting at first that he must be a novice in his trade and that, for some reason, the editor of the book, as well as the proof-reader, did not do a satisfactory job either. I was surprised to learn that Jacek Konieczny is a very experienced translator, with more than fifty books translated, and that in his interview for *Dwutygodnik*, he answered the question of whether the fact that he graduated in sociology and does not hold a degree in English is not detrimental [in his job as a translator] by saying that it is not detrimental, because "the command of the foreign language is not the most important [thing]. It is the faculty of being able to write in one's own language which is more important, and so I owe much more to my teacher of Polish in the primary school [...] than to a hypothetical English Department" (my translation G. M.).<sup>4</sup> Unlike Konieczny, I am firmly convinced that in order to be a competent translator one has to possess a very firm command in L1 and L2, and I will try to prove my point by providing some examples of what I consider to be errors in the Polish translation of *The Old Ways*, most of which could have been avoided. My present version of the notes to the chapter on the Polish translation of *The Old Ways* is more than fifty pages long, even though I still have not started with the theoretical considerations on the more general nature of the mistranslations in *Szlaki*. However, because of the limits on the length of the present paper I will provide here only a sample of the problems I have detected, organized according to a taxonomy of errors that follows the one presented by Hejwowski in *Translation: A Cognitive-Communicative Approach*. At this point I would also like to express thanks for lively discussions and brainstorming to Piotr Kozłowski, a former student of mine, who (under my supervision) defended (in July

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4 "Nie, bo znajomość języka obcego nie jest najważniejsza. Istotniejsza jest umiejętność pisania we własnym języku, więc znacznie więcej zawdzięczam mojej polonistce ze szkoły podstawowej, [...] niż hipotetycznej anglistyce" (<https://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/7236-dwa-zale.html>).

2021) his M.A. dissertation entitled ‘Translating Travel. Robert Macfarlane’s *The Old Ways* in Jacek Konieczny’s Translation’.

## Translating the title

Gérard Genette, in his influential study *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretations* (1987, trans. to English 2001), coined the term ‘paratext’ to refer to the territories of the book—like titles, forewords, epigraphs or footnotes—which mediate between text and readers. The crucial role of paratexts in travel writing has been recognized by many travel writing scholars.<sup>5</sup> In this section I will focus on just one example of paratext mistranslation in *Szlaki*: that of the very title of the book. The full title of Robert Macfarlane’s book in the original is *The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot*. In Jacek Konieczny’s it becomes *Szlaki: Opowieści o wędrówkach*. I am convinced that both parts of the title in translation are wanting. Let us start with “the old ways”. “Way” is used in the title in the meaning of a road/path/route which people used a long time ago, like “the Icknield Way” or “the Pilgrims’ Way”, which appear numerous times on the pages of the book. The word “szlaki”, which is usually translated as ‘routes’, could be used in this context if it were preceded by the adjective “stare” (“old”) [with “dawne” (also “old”) as a weaker alternative]. But I am convinced that there is a better word in Polish to use in this context: the word “trakt” (“way”, “road”). In the region of Podlasie, where I live, there are several “trakty napoleońskie” (“Napoleon’s ways”), country dirt roads, leading more or less from west to east, on which Napoleon’s *Grande Armée*, at least in the collective memory of the region’s inhabitants, walked in 1812 on their way to Russia, and also, in a less organized fashion, on their way back a few months later. There are numerous “trakty królewskie” (“Royal Ways”) in Poland, the most famous of which is the one in Warsaw that originally led from the Royal Castle in the Old Town of Warsaw in a southerly direction. Therefore, “stare trakty” seems to be a better solution than “szlaki” for the first part of the title.

The ‘extended’ title of Macfarlane’s book is “A Journey on Foot”. Konieczny renders it as “Opowieści o wędrówkach”, which literally means “Stories (tales) of wanderings (trips)”. This time I would like to challenge both words of the translation and suggest that one more word should have been used in the translation of this part of the title. There is no word for “stories” in the original title and I do not see any reason why it should be introduced in the translated title. The word “wędrówki” (wanderings, trips) is in the plural, while in the original we have “a journey”, which is one journey. Why did Robert Macfarlane decide to use “a journey” in the title in the singular even though in the sixteen chapters of his book he described eleven separate journeys/trips? Presumably,

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5 See, for example, A. Watson, *The Garden of Forking Paths: Paratexts in Travel Literature*. In : J. Kuehn & P. Kuehn (eds.), *New Directions in Travel Writing Studies*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, 54-70.

he wanted to convey the meaning of all his external wanderings being, in fact, ‘one (internal) journey’. There are numerous references to and musings on this external and internal nature of his “journeys” in *The Old Ways*, the first of them at the very beginning, in one paragraph paratext entitled “Author’s Note”, when he states: “Above all, this is a book about people and place: about walking as a reconnoitre inwards” (Macfarlane 2013: xi). I think that the best Polish word to use in this situation is the word “podróż” (journey), which could carry similar ‘external’ and ‘internal’ connotations [“wędrowka” in the singular could also be considered as an alternative for “podróż”].

Whereas “opowieści” is an unnecessary addition, “on foot” remains untranslated in the Polish title. Even though two chapters (number 5 “Water—South” and number 6 “Water—North) are about sea trips during which the narrative persona used feet to a very limited extent, the overall title is “a journey on foot”. The first two sentences of the above-mentioned “Author’s Note” reads:

This book could not have been written by sitting still. The relationship between paths, walking and imagination is its subject, and much of its thinking was therefore done— was only possible—while on foot. (Macfarlane 2013: xi)

Therefore, leaving this important phrase “on foot” untranslated seems to be an error. The Polish phrases which are usually used to cover “on foot” are “pieszo” or “na piechotę”, and therefore the second part of the title, if I were to translate the book, would be “wędrowka piesza”, and the whole title “Stare trakty; wędrowka piesza”, a long way from Konieczny’s “Szlaki; opowieści o wędrowkach”.

Titles are, obviously, very important paratexts. The decision to change the phrase “the old ways” into the simple “szlaki” not only ‘weakens’ the title itself and makes it blander, but it also influences (in a negative way) those moments, and there are plenty of them in *The Old Ways* when Macfarlane plays with this phrase in various manners. The first example of this can be found on the second page of the first chapter, “Track”:

<p>This is the path I’ve probably walked more often than any other in my life. It’s a <i>young way</i>; maybe fifty years old, no more. (Macfarlane 2013: 6)</p>	<p>Żadną inną ścieżką nie przeszedłem w życiu tyle razy. Nie jest specjalnie stara. Ma najwyżej pięćdziesiąt lat. (Macfarlane 2018: 14)</p>
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So, Macfarlane calls the route he walks in the first chapter “the path”, but it also becomes “a young way”, in clear contrast to the old ways which he will be walking in the following chapters. Had Konieczny decided to use “stare trakty” (old ways) for his title, it would be easy to use the phrase “młody trakt” (young way) in contrast to “stary trakt” (old way), and in this way he would have also preserved the oxymoronic effect (which

I am convinced was intended by the author) of “a young way” (“młody trakt”). Instead, he comes up with the phrase “nie jest specjalnie stara” (it is not particularly old), which misses not only the oxymoron but also the fact that Macfarlane used two different words about the same object: “the path” and “a young way”, whereas in translation we only have “ścieżka” (path).

## Errors of syntagmatic translation

I will start with some basic lexical problems I have detected while comparing the English original of *The Old Ways* with the Polish translation. The lexical mistranslations in *Szlaki* begin at the level of misreading, the translator translating not the English word Macfarlane used, but another English word, with just one letter different from the original. The list here consists of four pairs: copse-corpse, parson-person, haunting-hunting, county-country. I consider the copse-corpse misreading as the most ‘howling’ or ‘spectacular’ of them:

<p>I like the country we are [...]. It's open hilly chalk country with great ploughed fields and a few <i>copses</i> on the hilltops. (Macfarlane 2013: 329)</p>	<p>Podoba mi się kraina, w której się znajdujemy [...]. Jest to otwarty, pagórkowaty, kredowy krajobraz z wielkimi zaoranymi polami i nielicznymi <i>zwłokami</i>, leżącymi na wierzchołkach. (Macfarlane 2018: 374)</p>
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This is part of a description of northern France written down by Edward Thomas in a letter to a friend in February 1915; Thomas was sent there to fight in the Great War. For some reason the translator thought that the word used by Thomas and later by Macfarlane was “corpses” rather than “copses”, so we get this surrealistic description of the country Thomas likes with great ploughed fields and a few corpses (sic!) on the hilltops. However, the word “copse”, when it appears some twenty-five pages later in *Szlaki*, is correctly translated as “młodniak” (Macfarlane 2018: 401).

<p>These practices have their parallels elsewhere in the country: in the line of white marker stones that used to run across Bodmin Moor from Watergate to Five Lanes, for instance, set there in the mid-1800s <i>by a parson</i> who wished to traverse his trackless and often fog-bound parish without getting lost or enmired. (Macfarlane 2013: 144)</p>	<p>Odpowiedniki tych praktyk możemy znaleźć w innych częściach kraju; w linii białych kamieni, która biegła przez kornwalijskie wrzosowisko Bodmin Moor z Watergate do Five Lane, ustawionych w połowie XIX wieku, <i>przez osobę</i>, która chciała móc pokonywać ten pozbawiony dróg i często spowity mgłą obszar, nie ryzykując, że się zgubi albo wpadnie w bagno. (Macfarlane 2018: 165)</p>
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In the original the person who put up white stones is a “parson”, meaning a rector or a vicar of a Protestant church. The “parson” was translated as “osoba” (person). Almost, but not quite. As this person is not a parson in the Polish translation, the parish is not necessary, and therefore it disappears in the translation.

<i>Haunting</i> and Fear (Macfarlane 2013: 305)	<i>Polowanie</i> i strach (Macfarlane 2018: 347)
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Here, “haunting” becomes “polowanie”, that is “hunting”, even though in the text of the chapter there are almost two pages on ‘haunting’ and no reference to ‘hunting’ at all.

[...] the <i>county’s</i> most exclusive golf course. (Macfarlane 2013: 8)	[...] najbardziej luksusowe pole golfowe w <i>kraju</i> . (Macfarlane 2018: 16)
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In the Polish translation this golf course is the most exclusive “w kraju”, meaning in the country. It should be “najbardziej luksusowe pole golfowe w (tym) (naszym) hrabstwie” (the most exclusive golf course in our county) or “hrabstwie Cambridgeshire” (in Cambridgeshire). The translator also had problems with the word “county” in this fragment:

Such moments are rites of passage that reconfigure local geographies, leaving known places outlandish or quickened, <i>revealing continents within counties</i> . (Macfarlane 2013: 78)	Takie chwile są rytuałami przejścia rekonfigurującymi geografie danego regionu, za którym znane miejsca zaczynają się wydawać obce albo przesunięte. <i>Ujawniają kontynenty ukryte w obrębie kontynentów</i> . (Macfarlane 2018: 92)
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The phrase “revealing continents within counties” was translated as a separate sentence which literally means: “They reveal continents within continents”. While in the previous example “county” became “country”, here it becomes “continent”.

The more typical kinds of lexical mistranslations are the result of the situation when the translator decides on the wrong one out of a few different meanings of a word or a phrase. In this category, in my opinion, the most ‘spectacular’ mistranslation in *Szlaki* happened with “the creep”:

<p>The timing and aiming of the <i>creep</i> has to be precise: synchronized between batteries [...]. (Macfarlane 2013: 333-34)</p>	<p>Moment i kierunek wystrzeliwania <i>tych skurwieli</i> należało zgrać z niezwykłą precyzją. (Macfarlane 2018: 378)</p>
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The translator here translated the word “the creep” as “tych skurwieli” which means, more or less, “these motherfuckers”, which is as vulgar as it is ridiculous. The whole phrase “wystrzeliwania tych skurwieli” in Polish is not only a mistranslation; it is also ambiguous. The phrase used by Konieczny literally means “shooting these motherfuckers”, and “these motherfuckers” could be either Germans or shells. This is a surprising mistake, as the word “creep” appears in the previous sentence, the beginning of which reads “The offensive will begin *with the creeping artillery barrage* – the ‘hurricane bombardment’” (Macfarlane 2013: 333), and the translator managed this bit quite well “Ofensywa zacznie się *od postępującego ostrzału artyleryjskiego*—‘huraganowego bombardowania [...]” (Macfarlane 2018: 377), where the phrase “creeping artillery barrage” is more or less correctly translated as “postępujący ostrzał artyleryjski” (literally ‘advancing artillery barrage’, although Polish military historians usually translate this phrase more literally as “pełzający wał ogniowy”<sup>6</sup>). Why did the translator not connect “creeping barrage” with “the creep” in the next sentence and decide to translate the singular noun “the creep” as “tych skurwieli” (“these motherfuckers”)? Probably because of the combination of two factors: a not very firm grasp of English, and translating in a hurry.

The translator’s problems with the English word “estate” resulted in a series of mistranslations:

<p>The sound of an engine behind us, then the honk of a horn: <i>an estate Land Rover</i> bounced past, hardly slowing to let us leave the track. (Macfarlane 2013: 189)</p>	<p>Warkot silnika za naszymi plecami, potem ryk klaksonu: <i>land rover kombi</i> przetoczył się obok nas w podskokach, nie zwalniając nawet zbyt, żeby dać nam czas na uskoczenie z drogi. (Macfarlane 2018: 216)</p>
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Here, “an estate Land Rover” becomes “land rover kombi” in Polish, which, when retranslated back to English renders “land rover estate”. The translator here mistakenly took the expression “an estate Land Rover”, meaning a Land Rover car belonging to the estate, as “a Land Rover estate”, that is a Land Rover station-wagon (to use the American term for this type of car). The word “estate” appears in the next sentence of the description “A mile further we passed the estate shooting lodge” (Macfarlane 2013: 189). This is translated as “chata myśliwska”, that is “hunting lodge”; so this time the “estate” is left

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, <http://www.historycy.org/index.php?showtopic=50168&st=135>.

untranslated. When the term “estate” appears for the third time in the very same paragraph: “I was glad to get away from the estate roads and out onto the unmetalled footpaths [...]” (Macfarlane 2013: 189) the phrase “the estate roads” is translated as “prywatne tłuczniowe drogi” (Macfarlane 2018: 217), that is “private gravel roads”. So, in the Polish translation, there is absolutely no connection between “estate Land Rover”, “estate hunting lodge” and “estate roads”; no idea of the narrator describing a specific estate with a Land Rover car, a shooting lodge and its own roads.

The translator had problems with the word “feather”, used by Macfarlane in two different chapters of his travel book to refer to the same ‘structure’:

<p><i>It was a feather, a foot-and-a-half-long stone feather, made of a polished black rock with green flecks. [...] The feather was cool in my hands and impossibly heavy. (Macfarlane 2013: 175)</i></p>	<p><i>Było to skrzydło, półtora stopowe kamienne skrzydło, wykonane z wypolerowanej czarnej skały poprzetykanej zielonymi drobinkami. [...] Pióro było chłodne w dotyku i absurdalnie ciężkie. (Macfarlane 2018: 200-201)</i></p>
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The strange ‘structure’ described by Macfarlane, made by his friend Steve Dilworth out of dolerite and whalebone, is “a feather”. The word is repeated twice in the first sentence and then used once again some ten lines later. In the Polish version, it becomes “skrzydło”, which is a ‘wing’. The word is repeated twice. But by the time the translator gets to the next “feather” he has ‘learnt’ to translate it (correctly) as a “pióro”. So the same object is first “skrzydło” (wing) to be transformed into “pióro” (feather), which obviously confuses Polish readers. When, seventy pages later, the narrative persona picks up another feather, he makes this comment.

<p><i>When I picked it up it weighed almost nothing: an inverse echo of Dilworth’s dolerite and whalebone structure. (Macfarlane 2013: 256)</i></p>	<p><i>Podniosłem je, wydawało się nic nie ważyć, odwrócone echo dolerytu Dilwortha i rzeźby przedstawiającej kość wieloryba. (Macfarlane 2018: 290)</i></p>
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This time Dilworth’s ‘feather’ is described by the persona as a “dolerite and whalebone structure”; while the translator has apparently forgotten about this object, which he called both “skrzydło” (wing) and “pióro” (feather) earlier. Here, he probably thought that there are two objects being referred to (even though the noun “structure” is used in the singular in the original): “doleryt Dilwotha i rzeźby przedstawiającej kość wieloryba”, which literally means “Dilworth’s dolerite and a sculpture representing a whalebone”, rather than one “structure” made by Dilworth of dolerite and whalebone.

Sometimes, using too general terms (hypernyms) may lead to some cultural misunderstanding:

<p>An hour later I went for a walk with <i>a flask of whisky</i> to keep me warm. (Macfarlane 2013: 6)</p>	<p>Godzinę później wyszedłem na spacer z <i>butelką whisky</i>; chciałem mieć coś na rozgrzewkę. (Macfarlane 2018: 14)</p>
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A flask is a type of bottle but not exactly a “butelka” (bottle). In English the term “hip flask” often gets shortened to “flask”, as is the case here. The equivalent in Polish is “piersiówka”. The word derives from “piers” (breast), suggesting an alternative placement of such a useful implement. Yet “flask”, although a type of “bottle”, differs from an ordinary bottle in that it is usually much smaller than a standard bottle (of whisky). It is handier because of its flat shape and is usually made of some durable stuff, like stainless steel, and for all these reasons it is much more practical to carry on you (either on your hip or your breast) than an ordinary bottle. Although Macfarlane makes it clear on several occasions in *The Old Ways* that he is not a teetotaler, he probably would not want to be seen by his Polish readers leaving his Cambridge house late on a December evening carrying a *bottle* of whisky on his hip.

Sometimes, the translator’s lack of precision is not so culturally poignant, and merely clumsy:

<p>[...] edited of its <i>golfers</i> by the darkness [...] the county’s most exclusive golf-course [...]. (Macfarlane 2013: 8)</p>	<p>[...] pozbawione, jak to nocą, <i>zawodników</i> [...] to najbardziej luksusowe pole golfowe w kraju [...]. (Macfarlane 2018: 16)</p>
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The word “golfers” is translated as “zawodnicy”, a word which means “competitors”; this word is much more general and not precise in the sense that not all “golfers” take part in “zawody” (competitions). So, it should be translated as “golfiści”, a word which means “golfers”, or alternatively as “gracze” (players).

Sometimes, such too-general terms result in a loss of comprehension:

<p>South and uphill where I stood, big humps surrounded what appeared to be a small lake with a <i>flagstick</i> in its centre. (Macfarlane 2013: 7)</p>	<p>Na południe, czyli w górę zbocza, zobaczyłem wielkie białe garby otaczające, jak się zdawało jeziorko z zatkniętym <i>masztem</i> po środku. (Macfarlane 2018: 16)</p>
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Robert Macfarlane describes here a golf putting green (although it is now not green, but white, because it is covered by snow) with “a flagstick” in its centre. Konieczny translates the term “flagstick” as “maszt” (mast), which is not only not precise, but also misleading.

What we have here is a long stick with a flag on top; such a “flagstick” stuck in a hole is a very characteristic feature of golf courses. Konieczny, instead of using a descriptive term like “(długa) tyczka z flagą na szczycie” ([long] stick with a flag on top) or “kij z flagą pokazujący położenia dołka” (a stick with a flag showing the position of a hole)<sup>7</sup>, uses a hypernym, “maszt”, usually reserved for taller and more substantial vertical structures. Moreover, he ‘forgets’ about the “flag”. In this way, whereas it is clear from Macfarlane’s original fragment that he is describing “a golf putting green”, even though he does not use the term, and the green is not green but white or grey in the moonlight, Konieczny, through a wrong selection of words, makes the description distinctively less clear and confusing to readers.

Finally, the translator felt free to move far beyond the range of meanings connected with a given word/phrase, for example:

<p>[...] mix of excitement, incompetence, <i>ennui</i>, adventure and epiphany. (Macfarlane 2013: 31)</p>	<p>[...] mieszanina podekscytowania, niekompetencji, <i>uwznioslenia</i>, przygody i epifanii. (Macfarlane 2018: 42)</p>
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“ennui” is translated as “uwznioslenie”, which means “ennoblement”.

## Realization errors

Sometimes in *Szlaki* lexical mistranslation is probably the result not of a lack of linguistic competence but, most probably, of too quick and perfunctory reading of the original, and working under the pressure of time, a similar phenomenon which has been suggested above in the case of pairs of words like ‘copse-corpse’. Here are some more examples:

<p>They looked at us, unsmiling [...] They knew the boat and they knew Ian, but the implication was clear enough: Keep away, this is our day, our rock. Ian waved the greeting, <i>they nodded back</i>. (Macfarlane 2013: 136)</p>	<p>Spoglądali na nas nie uśmiechając się [...] Znali łódź, znali Iana, ale ich sylwetki sugerowały wyraźnie jedno. “Trzymajcie się z daleka, to nasz dzień, nasza skała.” Ian pomachał im na powitanie, <i>oni odpowiedzieli w ten sam sposób</i>. (Macfarlane 2018: 157)</p>
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The last sentence in translation means “Ian waved the greeting, they answered the same way”. Whereas in the original they did not answer in the same way, that is they did not wave, but merely “nodded back”, quite a different reaction. In fact, the narrator goes

<sup>7</sup> See, *Angielsko-polski słownik golfowy* (English-Polish golf dictionary), [www.golfowy.pl/słownik\\_golfowy](http://www.golfowy.pl/słownik_golfowy).

quite a long way to describe this tense, even if brief, meeting between the *guga* hunters and Ian (with his crew), and the effect is spoilt at the end in the Polish translation.

<p>Kierkegaard speculated that the mind might function optimally at the pedestrian pace of <i>three</i> miles per hour [...]. (Macfarlane 2013: 27)</p>	<p>Kierkegaard wysunął tezę, że umysł funkcjonuje optymalnie w czasie wolnego spaceru z prędkością <i>ośmiu</i> mil na godzinę. (Macfarlane 2018: 37)</p>
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The optimal pace for the human mind to function in the translation is changed from “three miles an hour” in the original to eight miles per hour; definitely a trot, rather than a “pedestrian pace”.

<p>[...] <i>two</i> yellow-striped dolphins broke water [...]. (Macfarlane 2013: 106)</p>	<p>[...] <i>trzy</i> pokryte żółtymi pasmami delfiny wyskoczyły nad wodę [...]. (Macfarlane 2018: 123)</p>
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Two dolphins from the original become “trzy” (three) dolphins in the translation. In a similar manner:

<p>Scouring the beach, I discovered <i>a single white stone</i>, the size and shape of an ostrich egg. (Macfarlane 2013: 111)</p>	<p>Przeglądając plażę, odkryłem <i>dwa pojedyncze białe kamyki</i> o rozmiarach i w kształcie strusiego jaja. (Macfarlane 2018: 130)</p>
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“[A] single white stone” becomes “dwa pojedyncze białe kamyki” which means “two single white pebbles”. The word used by the translator for “stone” is “kamyk”, which is a diminutive of “kamień” (stone). So, “kamyk” is a small stone, something like a pebble, a word which should not be used in the context of a stone the size of an ostrich egg. How a single white stone has been translated as two single white pebbles is beyond my comprehension. One more comment, “przeglądając plażę”, is not a good translation of “scouring the beach”. The Polish word “przeglądać” (to survey, to browse, to scan) does not connote well with “the beach”. I would go for “przeczesując plażę, odkryłem [...]” (while combing the beach I discovered [...]).

<p>With Finlay’s help I managed to confirm more facts about Manus’s Stones and <i>the man who had laid them</i>. Manus had indeed lived as a crofter [...]. (Macfarlane 2013: 149)</p>	<p>Dzięki pomocy Finlaya udało mi się potwierdzić kolejne fakty na temat Kamieni Manusa i <i>ludzi, którzy je ustawili</i>. Manus rzeczywiście był zagrodnikiem [...]. (Macfarlane 2018: 171)</p>
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In the original we have three nouns in the singular. The narrator states that Finlay helped him to confirm facts about “Manus’s Stones”, that is about one person named Manus, and that he also confirmed more facts about “the man who had laid them”, that is about this man called Manus. And the next sentence gives one more confirmed fact about Manus (that he had lived as a crofter). In the Polish translation the fact about Manus’s Stones is translated correctly, but afterwards we have “i ludzi którzy je ustawili”, which means “and the men who laid them”, the plural noun (ludzi) with the plural ending for the verb (ustawili). And then we move to the correctly translated phrase that Manus had really been a crofter. So, whereas in the original it is clear that Manus laid Manus’s Stones, in the Polish translation some mysterious “men who laid them” appear.

<p>They had an acre of the land behind the house which ran up to the treeline of the forestry and <i>seventeen</i> acres of rough marshy pasture [...]. (Macfarlane 2013: 193)</p>	<p>Dziadkowie mieli akr ziemi wznoszącej się ku skrajowi lasu oraz <i>siedem</i> akrów nierównego, bagnistego pastwiska. (Macfarlane 2018: 222)</p>
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Seventeen acres of rough marshy pasture becomes “siedem akrów” (seven acres).

<p>When Edward Thomas travelled to fight <i>on the Western Front</i>, [...] (Macfarlane 2013: 198)</p>	<p>Kiedy Edward Thomas pojechał walczyć <i>na froncie wschodnim</i> [...] (Macfarlane 2018: 228)</p>
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The Polish translator sent Edward Thomas not to the Western Front, but the Eastern Front (“na froncie wschodnim”).

<p>I passed the elderly Spanish men, shirtless in the noon heat. (Macfarlane 2013: 256)</p>	<p>Minałem starszego Hiszpana, który w południowym upale rozebrał się do pasa. (Macfarlane 2018: 291)</p>
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While the narrative persona passed at least two shirtless “elderly Spanish men”, in the translation he passed just one “starszy Hiszpan” (an elderly Spanish man).

<p>Near Bariton, near the county border with Sussex. (Macfarlane 2013: 313)</p>	<p>Pod Bariton, na granicy hrabstwa Essex. (Macfarlane 2018: 354)</p>
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Thus, Bariton is moved from the border of Sussex to the border of Essex.

## Mistaking two SL syntagms or verb frames

In *Szlaki*, mistranslation of a syntactical and/or grammatical nature is not as common as mistranslation caused by lexical complexities of words and phrases, but it is not particularly rare. Here are some examples:

<p><i>The brown sails of the cattle boats have gone from the Minch. On slipways and jetties from Skye to Kintyre, thrift grows undisturbed in the crannies of stones [...]. (Macfarlane 2013: 191)</i></p>	<p><i>Brązowe żagle statków z bydłem wypływały z cieśniny Minch. Pochylnie i mola, od Skye do Kintyre, porasta zawciąg zapuszczający korzenie w szczelinach pomiędzy kamieniami [...]. (Macfarlane 2018: 219).</i></p>
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This is the beginning of the quotation Macfarlane used from a book by A. R. B. Haldane, *The Drove Roads of Scotland*. The first sentence was translated as “Brązowe żagle statków z bydłem wypływały z cieśniny Minch” (“The brown sails used to go from the strait of Minch”), misunderstanding the “have gone”, which here means, “have disappeared” and translating the sentence in the past tense with the verb “wypływały” (sailed out of). It is not only an example of mistranslation, but also of clumsy Polish, for in the first sentence it is not the ships themselves, but their brown sails which “wypływały z cieśniny Minch” (sailed out of the Minch). Of course, this sentence does not connect with the second one in the Polish translation. The first one is about the cattle ship which sailed out of Minch, and the second correctly uses the present tense and conveys the idea of “thrift growing undisturbed”.

The next example shows a problem that is partly grammatical, concerning the third conditional and the fact that it refers to the past, and is partly culture-bound:

<p><i>If the Broomway hadn't existed, Wilkie Collins might have had to invent it. (Macfarlane 2013: 60)</i></p>	<p><i>Gdyby Broomway nie istniała, mógłby ją wymyślić Wilkie Collins. (Macfarlane 2018: 70)</i></p>
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Macfarlane uses the third conditional here, referring to the past, and referring to a well-known 1859 novel by Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White*, which opens with Walter Hartright, one of the novel’s narrators, describing his meeting at night on the road outside London with the ghost-like figure of “a woman in white”. Konieczny changes the conditional to the present, and his sentence means: If the Broomway did not exist, Wilkie Collins could invent it. Which does not make much sense in view of what has been written above. The Polish sentence “Gdyby nie istniała Broomway, Wilkie Collins byłby zmuszony ją wymyślić” refers to the past, and the fact that Collins might have *been forced* (“might have had to”) to invent it. However, without the knowledge of Collins’s novel, this sentence in Polish is pretty enigmatic. Should a translator’s footnote be

added here? How many more translator’s footnotes should be added to hundreds of Macfarlane’s footnotes? It is an open question. The kind of question I would prefer to be asking rather than complaining about errors.

## Omissions (elisions)

Hejwowski is strict about omissions. He declares that they “are hardly ever justified – in translations of more ambitious literary works probably never” (2004: 226). It is individual words, short phrases, and whole sentences which are omitted in *Szlaki*. I will start with two examples in which whole sentences are elided, in an attempt to show the detrimental effect omission has on comprehension:

On one July evening in 1932, 16,000 people boarded special scheduled Southern Railway trains in London to follow a moonlit walk over a stretch of the Downs, gathering to watch sunrise from the Ring. *But then in 1987 the Great Storm blew in and wrecked Chanctonbury*. It’s now missing most of its main trees, and its interior has reverted to a sprout scrub of ash and bramble. (Macfarlane 2013: 317)

For some reason, in the Polish translation the whole sentence “But then in 1987...” is left untranslated. This sentence is important in this paragraph, as it ‘connects’ the first and third sentences of the quoted fragment. Without it, the whole paragraph is not logical and lacks clarity.

<p>They were shot at from the banks. Warlordism was rife here. <i>There were no casualties</i>. But to come under fire before they’d even reached the mountain [...]. (Macfarlane 2013: 268)</p>	<p>Zostali ostrzelani z brzegu. W okolicy roiło się od watazków. Wszystko rozumiem, że ale żeby zostać ostrzelanym zanim w ogóle dotarło się pod górę [...]. (Macfarlane 2018: 302)</p>
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The whole short sentence “There were no casualties” is left untranslated, which changes the perception of the fragment considerably. Moreover, the next sentence is not very clear because there is one word which is unnecessary and the sentence is not grammatical. “że ale żeby zostać ostrzelanym” means “that but to come under fire”, the unnecessary word is “że”, which here means “that”; this “że” is probably some overlooked remnant of an earlier version of this sentence.

Sometimes the elision of a phrase is only a part of a sentence, but such phrases in Macfarlane’s precise, even though poetic, prose are rarely redundant:

<p>The event had outraged the Sabbatarians on the island (of whom there were many) and delighted the secular modernizers (of whom there were fewer, <i>Finlay being one</i>). (Macfarlane 2013: 145)</p>	<p>Zdarzenie to wzbudziło oburzenie ludzi fanatycznie czczących świętość niedzieli (których było wielu) i uradowało świeckich zwolenników postępu (których było mniej). (Macfarlane 2018: 166)</p>
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The phrase “Finlay being one” is left untranslated. This might seem not a very crucial deletion if we look at this sentence only. But this sentence comes at the end of a long paragraph devoted to Finlay MacLeod, “naturalist, novelist, broadcaster, oral historian, occasional selkie-singer and seal-summoner and an eloquent speaker in both English and Gaelic” (Macfarlane 2013: 144-45), and therefore the omission of the “Finlay being one” markedly reduces the rhetorical passion of the narrative persona.

<p>Yet, it still seems to sail upon the flatlands that surround it, <i>as Ely does upon the Fens</i>. (Macfarlane 2013: 257)</p>	<p>Mimo to miasto wydaje się żeglować po otaczającej ją równinie. (Macfarlane 2018: 291)</p>
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The simile used by Macfarlane here of Segovia and Ely, a cathedral town in the Fens some fifteen miles north of Cambridge, is left untranslated. Besides, the pronoun in the Polish translation should be “je” rather than “ją” as it refers to the word “miasto” (town), which in Polish is neuter in gender and should have the pronoun “je”, not the feminine pronoun “ją”. The elision of the simile with Ely and the Fens is similar to another elision in the sentence “The house has been recently constructed *on Morrisian principles*” (Macfarlane 2013: 338), where “Morrisian principles” is elided in the Polish translation. It is difficult to assess to what extent these two examples are the result of some conscious “domesticating strategy” of the translator, or whether they point to the haste in which he was translating *The Old Ways*. Sometimes, the elision of just one word causes a profound change in the meaning:

<p>This convention—born of a region that did not pass through centuries of feudalism, and therefore <i>has no inherited deference to a landowning class</i> [...]. (Macfarlane 2013: 16).</p>	<p>Obyczaj ten—zrodzony w części świata, która nie została poddana wielowiekowym wpływom feudalizmu, <i>a przez to nie odziedziczyła odrębnej klasy posiadaczy ziemskich</i> [...]. (Macfarlane 2018: 23-24)</p>
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The Polish translation literarily means: “This convention—born of a region which was not subjected to centuries of feudalism and therefore has not inherited a separate class of landowners.” It is not an inheriting “landowning class” which is crucial in the original

but an inherited “deference to a landowning class”. There is no “deference” (szacunek) in the Polish translation. One word is missing but the meaning is changed a lot.

## Translation of culture-bound items

And, finally, just two examples of mistranslation in the category of culture-bound items:

<p>Now and then I treat myself to a night in a <i>bed &amp; breakfast</i> [...] but mostly I sleep just wherever I am walking. (Macfarlane 2013: 313)</p>	<p>Od czasu do czasu pozwalam sobie <i>na spędzenie nocy w łóżku i śniadanie</i> [...] ale zazwyczaj śpię tam, gdzie akurat dojdę. (Macfarlane 2018: 355)</p>
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Here the translator did not recognize that “a bed & breakfast” means a *pension*, a cheap hotel, and he translated the phrase as “Now and then I treat myself to a night in bed and to a breakfast”.

<p>A former student of mine, Matt Lloyd, had walked the full <i>Camino</i> one autumn, with a knapsack and a ukulele. (Macfarlane 2013: 243)</p>	<p>Jeden z moich dawnych studentów, Matt Lloyd przeszedł jesienią całą <i>drogę św. Jana</i> z plecakiem i ukulele. (Macfarlane 2018: 275)</p>
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Here “Camino” becomes “droga świętego Jana” (“the road of St. John”). Why St. John and not St. James? Why did the translator not leave the Latin/Spanish word “Camino”, used also in English and Polish, but instead venture out on his own little translational pilgrimage, changing saints on his way?

## Final remarks

There are many more instances of what I consider errors in *Szlaki*; they have not been presented because of the editorial limits on the length of the present paper. I am convinced that the selection of errors presented and discussed is comprehensively representative of the whole range of problems present in this translation. While embarking on the theme of problems encountered in Polish translations of Anglophone travel writing, I imagined that I would be focusing mostly on slightly more ‘sophisticated’ issues connected with the translation and publication of travel writing, such as the extent to which translators’ and/or editors’ footnotes should be used to help Polish readers with specific issues. It turned out, instead, that while working on the Polish translations of *The Old Ways* by Robert Macfarlane (as well as on *The Road to Wigan Pier* by George Orwell), I was making longer and longer lists of items I considered to be errors, many of which are of a relatively basic, rudimentary nature. At the beginning of my travel/translation research, I came across a statement Elżbieta Tabakowska made in the chapter entitled

“Polish Tradition” in Mona Baker’s *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, that after “the political upheaval of 1989 [...] [i]n addition to international best-sellers a large number of substandard books began to appear in equally substandard Polish translations” (1998: 529). Then, I was taken aback by the boldness with which the (slightly bizarre) dichotomy was constructed between “international best-sellers” and “substandard books”, and also by the apparent relish with which the derogatory label “substandard” was used twice in the same sentence to refer both to books and to their translations. I still believe that such labelling and dichotomising should be avoided by researchers at all costs, but I now see that a serious problem exists in this area. Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, a renowned Polish publishing house of long-standing, published a travel book by a renowned British writer that few scholars or critics would call ‘substandard’. The graphic layout of the translated book, with a photo by Filip Springer, a celebrity writer, and photographer, is fully professional, with all the appropriate blurbs by the appropriate celebrity writers. But then, despite two “series editors”, Sylwia Smoluch and Bogusław Twardowski, one book editor, Piotr Chojnacki, one proof-reader, Anna Gradecka, (whose names and functions are listed on page 2), we get a translation riddled with errors at various levels, making the complex, poetic and artistic prose of Robert Macfarlane, at many points, clumsy and difficult for the Polish reader to comprehend.

It is not directly a problem of Jacek Konieczny’s lack of a degree in English. Obviously, such a degree helps but is not necessary to have a firm grasp of the language from which one translates. Konieczny, despite his lack of an English degree, is convinced that he is a competent translator from English, particularly considering the fact that he has translated and published more than fifty books. My working hypothesis, which I would like to test and/or develop, is that with this huge increase in the number of books translated from English into Polish after 1989 (including travel books), there has been a great increase in the number of professional translators making their living out of it. But the book market in Poland has not increased much in size, which means that with literally thousands of new books published each year, many of them translations from foreign languages, the average number of copies of a given title sold is diminishing, although this is only a supposition because such data are considered confidential. As translation costs constitute a considerable part of the expenditure encumbered by publishers, it is natural that publishers try to reduce these costs by paying translators as little as possible. This, in turn, means that translators, in order to survive, must ‘produce’ many, many pages of translation a day. This means that they make mistakes, at least some of which they would not have made if allowed to work at a more relaxed pace. And then three editors and a proof-reader employed by Wydawnictwo Poznańskie also work so quickly and perfunctorily that they let all these errors remain, together with such misspellings as “należay” (instead of “należący”), “takih” (instead of “taki”) or “śmierci” (instead of “śmierci”) (Macfarlane 2018: 252, 255, 367).

Another hypothesis worth venturing is that the translation of Anglophone non-fiction travel books (travel writing) offers, on average, more challenges to a translator than the translation of a love story, fantasy novel, or thriller. The combination of complex, ‘artistic’, often poetic language, yet grounded in a non-fictional paradigm often supported by many discourses—in the case of *The Old Ways* such discourses include: naturalistic, geological, sporting, tourist, academic—is prone to result in mistranslation on a much larger scale than the same translators commit while translating, for example, popular detective fiction.

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