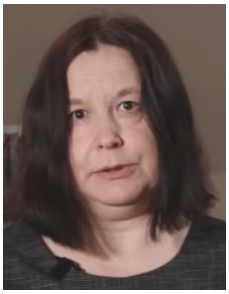
Colloquium Area "Modern Studies in Fiction Literature Translation"

LEXICAL CHOICE AND PRAGMATIC MEANING IN THE TRANSLATION OF THE NOVEL "DANDELION WINE" BY RAY BRADBURY



Inna COLENCIUC, Lecturer, PhD
(Free International University of Moldova (ULIM))

icolenciuc@yahoo.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6404-7498

Received: December 24th, 2025 | Reviewed: December 27th, 2025 | Accepted: December 28th, 2025
UDC 81`255.2 | https://doi.org/10.62413/cqm.2026.05

Abstract

This article examines lexical choice as a key factor in achieving pragmatic meaning in the translation of Ray Bradbury's novel Dandelion Wine. Adopting an analytical and comparative approach, the study focuses on lexical transformations and their role in preserving or, conversely, diminishing the novel's imagery and emotive impact. Particular attention is paid to how pragmatic equivalence is achieved through lexical adaptation, substitution, and modulation. The analysis is grounded in pragmatic and translation theories developed by Umberto Eco, Peter Emery, Peter Grundy, Geoffrey Leech, and George Yule. The findings highlight the translator's role in mediating between lexical meaning and pragmatic effect to maintain the author's intent.

Keywords: *literary translation, equivalence, pragmatics, pragmatic approach, meaning, lexical transformation, adaptation, substitution, modulation, imagery*

Employing an analytical and comparative framework, the present study examines lexical transformations in Ray Bradbury's *Dandelion Wine* as rendered in the Russian translation by E. Kabalevskaya, with the aim of determining how these transformations contribute to the preservation—or, in some cases, the attenuation—of the novel's imagery and emotive resonance. Special emphasis is placed on the achievement of pragmatic equivalence through such strategies as lexical adaptation, generalization, specification, compensation and modulation.

Dandelion Wine is a lyrical, semi-autobiographical novel that captures the essence of childhood and the fleeting magic of summer in the fictional place of Green Town, Illinois. Centered on twelve-year-old Douglas Spaulding, the narrative unfolds as a series of episodic memories that blend everyday experiences with moments of wonder, fear, and revelation. The symbolic motif of dandelion wine—bottled at the height of summer—embodies the attempt to preserve joy, innocence, and the vitality of life against the inevitable passage of time.

The main topic of the novel is human perception and awareness of the surrounding world. It is represented in the form of three main concepts each of which can be further split into micro-ideas that will help us understand the broader theme.

Concept of life: Understanding one's own life, the difference between "living (*i.e.* existing)" and "realizing that you are alive"; Everyday life is full of wonders when viewed from a certain angle; All living things are interconnected and you ought to pay your dues to people who helped you.

Concept of death: You cannot truly die if you have a family (equally, the concept of life); Fear of death and pain are forces that are always present in people's lives (equally, the concept of life).

Concept of time: Each of us is a time machine. Mechanization and urbanization of society kill individuality (Литвинова/Litvinova, 2009).

A characteristic feature of Bradbury's idiostyle is a constant shift in the angles of view, ambiguity in the interpretation of a particular concept. He often uses comparisons, which enhances expressiveness and forms a certain image in the reader's imagination. The use of phraseological units is also common to enrich and intensify the mental image. On the syntactic level, a common trick is to use parallel constructions that serve, like the aforementioned tools, to increase the effect, emphasize, or express certain values or images.

Expressiveness is also often realized at the verbal level with the help of rhetorical questions that emphasize the sincerity of words. The pragmatic intention of the author consists of urging the reader to come to the intended conclusion himself, to accept his point of view (Лапина/Lapina, 2022, p. 107).

Understanding of these concepts in the framework of the socio-cultural processes of society as a whole, as well as in the context of Bradbury's entire body of work and this story in particular, is necessary when studying the issue of translation because the author's views and beliefs should be conveyed correctly, and not in a distorted form.

Pragmatic equivalence is the most important type of equivalence if viewed from the semiotic angle. Any TLT must be pragmatically equivalent to the SLT, *i.e.* have identical (or, at least, as close as possible) communicative function, which means the translated text should have the same effect, same impact on the reader as the original text has (Grungy, 2000, p. 18).

There are a lot of discrepancies that are manifested in the type of semantic structure of the word that can be observed in the lexical systems of English and Russian languages. Any word, *i.e.* a lexical unit, is part of the lexical system of a particular language, which explains the peculiarity of the semantic structure of words in different languages. Lexical transformations in translation refer to systematic changes in the lexical structure of a source text aimed at achieving semantic, stylistic, and pragmatic equivalence in the target language. Such transformations are required when direct lexical correspondence between languages is absent or insufficient due to differences in semantic scope, cultural specificity, or usage norms. Therefore, the essence of lexical transformations is "replacing individual

lexical units of the original language with lexical units of the translating language, which are not their dictionary equivalents and have a different meaning than the units of the source language that they transmit in the translation" (Vinay & Darbelnet, 2005, p. 22).

The most common types of lexical transformations include *calque* (literal translation of word components), *lexical substitution* (replacing a word with a more appropriate equivalent), *generalization* (using a broader term), *concretization* (using a more specific term), and *modulation* (changing the perspective or semantic emphasis). Another frequent transformation is *descriptive translation*, where the meaning of a word is explained rather than directly translated.

Lexical substitution, as can be inferred from the name itself, stands for replacement of one word with another. It often occurs if the semantic structures of the SL and TL differ, and the choice of the appropriate word depends on the word combinability (Рецкер/Recker, 2004, p. 42).

Deliberate substitution used as a translation technique can be of different subtypes.

Concretization means that something in the TL is usually expressed using concepts with narrower meaning or when retaining the original concepts would result in a clumsy translation. This refers to the words of great semantic volume, which belong to different parts of speech, e.g. *matter, thing, point, nice, fine, bad, to say, to go, to come, to involve,* etc. As the meaning of such words is relatively vague they can be used in different contents, and their valency is therefore extremely broad (Burak, 2004, p. 21).

En: Yes, *sir.* / Ru: Хорошо, *папа.*

In this case, the translator chose to substitute a simple adverb "yes" with a specification of action - agreement and the fact that children are listening to their father. Syntactically, the translation is completely different from the SLT, however it is pragmatically justified.

En: The summer *was moving* through its streets. / Ru: Лето *шагало* по улицам города.

The abstract verb *was moving* is rendered by the more concrete and expressive *шагало*, which intensifies imagery and reflects Bradbury's poetic style.

Generalization deals with the substitution of words of a narrow meaning to more generalized ones. Most times, when this type of substitution is used, it means that this level of specificity is irrelevant to the story and can thus be changed to something more neutral (Комиссаров и Коралова/Komissarov & Koralova, 1990, p. 31).

En: The leopards trotted soundlessly off through *darker lands* where eyeballs could not turn to follow. / Ru: Леопарды неслышно прошли дальше во *тьму*, и глаза уже не могли за ними уследить.

The original sentense is metaphorical; the Russian version preserves the atmosphere of stealth and disappearance. The phrase through "darker lands" is com-

pressed "во тьму", which intensefies metaphoric sense and preserves effect of the mood of elusiveness.

En: *The screen doors* slammed all down the street. / Ru: По всей улице хлопали *двери*.

The specific cultural detail *screen doors (Defined by Cambridge online dictionary as a door fitted with a mesh screen or fiber glass instead of solid glass or wood. Its main purpose is to let fresh air in while keeping insects out)* is generalized to *двери*, as the original object is not typical in Russian culture. This *generalization* avoids unnecessary explanation while maintaining narrative flow.

En: The wind sighed over his *shelled* ears. / Ru: В ушах, как в *раковинах*, вздыхал ветер.

The translator preserved the semantic aspect of "shelled" and kept it in her translation, resorting to the use of comparison.

En: "*Fox grapes*!" said Father. "We're in luck, look here". / Ru: *Дикий виноград*, – сказал отец. – Нам повезло. Смотрите-ка.

"Fox grapes" is a species of grapevines that are native to North America, where the events of the novel take place, and there is no official name for this in the Russian language. Kabalevskaya changed the actual species name to be "wild", which, while it gives the reader more food for imagination, is still untrue - the fox grapes has been cultivated in the North America since the 19th century. In our opinion, the best way to translate "Fox grapes" would be to omit the adjective completely as irrelevant to the plot, thus resorting to generalization.

Modulation happens with a logical development of a notion by the word, *i.e.* when the direct word for word translation would sound awkward, the author of a translation comes up with an equivalent that would sound much better in a given context (Burak, 2004, p. 28).

En: Dad was standing high above him there in the green-leaved sky, laughing, *hands on hips*. / Ru: Отец, *подбоченясь*, стоял высоко над ним и смеялся; голова его упиралась в зеленолистый небосвод.

The translator combined the thee-word expression in one, a very colourful word, which helps to bring the story to life.

En: The days were full of *motion* and heat. / Ru: Дни были наполнены *суетой* и зноем.

The abstract noun *motion* is modulated into *суетой*, introducing an interpretive, figurative nuance that better conveys experiential meaning in Russian.

En: He felt the *town breathing around him*. / Ru: Ему казалось, что *город жил своей жизнью*.

The metaphor *breathing* is modulated into *жил своей жизнью*, changing the physiological image into a broader existential one while preserving personification.

Compensation is a translation technique whereby a loss of meaning, stylistic effect, or expressive nuance in one part of the source text is offset by introducing a similar effect elsewhere in the target text. It is used when a certain element (wordplay, metaphor, connotation, rhythm, or stylistic colouring) cannot be di-

rectly reproduced due to structural, cultural, or linguistic differences between languages (Vinay & Darbelnet, 2005, p. 38).

En: *It was a quiet morning, warm and full of promise*. / Ru: *Утро было тихое, тёплое – утро ожиданий*.

The rhythmic simplicity and emotional understatement of the English sentence cannot be reproduced syntactically. The translator compensates by adding lexical parallelism (*утро… утро*) and a slightly elevated phrase (*утро ожиданий*), maintaining the lyrical mood of the passage.

En: *Dandelion wine. The words were summer on the tongue*. / Ru: *Вино из одуванчиков. Эти слова были вкусом лета*.

In the original sentence, the metaphor *summer on the tongue* combines sensory imagery (taste) with abstraction. A literal translation (*лето на языке*) would sound unnatural in Russian. The translator therefore loses the physiological image (*tongue*) but compensates by introducing *вкусом лета*, which restores the sensory and emotional effect in a form natural for Russian literary style.

Antonymic translation is a type of grammatical and lexical transformation, which substitutes an affirmative construction for a negative one or vice versa with some accompanying lexical change, usually replacing an antonym with the original word (Рецкер/Recker, 2004, p. 48).

En: *The night was not quiet*. / Ru: *Ночь была тревожной*.

The English negated adjective *not quiet* is rendered through the positive antonym *тревожной*. This type of antonymic translation avoids clumsiness and strengthens emotional expressiveness in the target text.

En: *Nothing much ever happened in Green Town*. / Ru: *В Грин-Тауне жизнь текла спокойно и размеренно*.

The English sentence is built on *negation* (*nothing much ever happened*), while the Russian version replaces it with an *affirmative construction* (*жизнь текла спокойно и размеренно*) containing an implicit antonymic shift (*happened ↔ спокойно текла*). The change allows the translator to preserve the pragmatic meaning and narrative tone while adapting the structure to Russian stylistic norms.

Descriptive translation is a strategy employed when a source-language unit—such as a word, phrase, or culture-specific concept—has no direct or adequate equivalent in the target language. In such cases, the translator replaces the original unit with an explanatory description that conveys its denotative meaning, connotations, and functional value. Rather than striving for formal correspondence, descriptive translation prioritizes semantic clarity and pragmatic adequacy, ensuring that the target reader fully understands the referent and its role in the text (Komissarov, Koralova, 1990, p. 30).

En: *Dandelion wine was summer caught and stoppered*. / Ru: *Одуванчиковое вино – это было пойманное и закупоренное лето*.

The metaphorical phrase *caught and stoppered* is rendered descriptively to preserve imagery and symbolism. This is a case of descriptive translation combined with metaphorical calque, ensuring interpretability for the target reader.

The most common type of transformation is a complex one. Complex transformation is defined by any type of deliberate change of the word structure by another one because the word for word (or any other similar type of translation) equivalent of it in the TL is unable to create the same sort of impact upon the reader as the SL structure does. Here are several examples:

En: *Flowers were sun and fiery spots of sky strewn through the woodland*. / Ru: *Лесистые холмы были усеяны цветами, будто осколками солнца и огненными клочками неба.*

Translating this sentence, E. Kabalevskaya resorted to syntactic adjustment, (Landscape first - *лесистые холмы*, metaphor second), modulation (*fiery spots of sky - огненными клочками неба*: subtle shift from "spots" to "patches/clumps" (клочки) emphasizes a more tangible, poetic image. Metaphor of flowers as fragments of sun and sky is preserved, keeping the poetic imagery.

En: *His fingers trembled, bright with blood, like the bits of a strange flag now found and before unseen, and him wondering what country and what allegiance he owed to it.* / Ru: *Пальцы его дрожали, розовея на свету стремительной кровью, точно клочки неведомого флага, прежде невиданного, обретенного впервые… Чей же это флаг? Кому теперь присягать на верность?*

The original sentence is highly metaphorical and introspective, combining physical sensation with abstract reflection. The Russian translation successfully recreates this dual imagery resorting to syntactic transformation (segmentation). Modulation - (*bright with blood - розовея на свету стремительной кровью)* The translator replaces a static attribute ("bright") with a dynamic image ("розовея"), intensifying the visual effect and emotional tension. Concretization- *bits of a strange flag - клочки неведомого флага.*

En: *He heard the twin hearts beating in each ear, the third heart beating in his throat, the two hearts throbbing his wrists, the real heart pounding his chest.* / Ru: *В каждом его ухе стучало по сердцу, третье колотилось в горле, а настоящее гулко ухало в груди.*

The Russian translation is incomplete in comparison with the source text. In the original sentence, six "hearts" are mentioned: two in the ears, one in the throat, two in the wrists, and the real heart in the chest. In the Russian version, the image of the hearts throbbing in the wrists is omitted, which results in a semantic loss.

The expressiveness of the text is closely tied to the interpersonal function, as it shows a person's attitude towards the topic of what they are talking about, their emotions toward this subject when mentioning it, regardless of what the response may be.

Emotive semes, or emosemes for short, are the bits of meaning that help the author express their emotional attitude towards the subject.

En: The bees followed and the smell of fox grapes and yellow summer followed as he walked *heavy-laden* and *half drunk*, his fingers *wondrously callused*, arms *numb*, feet *stumbling* so his father caught his shoulder. / Ru: Он шел, *опьяненный*, со своей *тяжелой*

ношей, а за ним плыли пчелы, и запах дикого винограда, и ослепительное лето; на пальцах вспухали *блаженные мозоли*, руки *онемели*, и он *спотыкался*, так что отец даже схватил его за плечо.

Expressing emotions is not limited to the notional emotive words. Interjections play a great part in this process, too:

En: Precious as diamonds, *my gosh.* / Ru: Такой клад больше нигде не сыщешь, *хоть тресни*.

The interjection "my gosh" (*хоть тресни*) intensifies the meaning of Tom's delight at the miracle that is a snowflake preserved until the very summer.

Summing up, we would say that the pragmatic approach is a very complicated issue in literary text translation. It persists through many sentences while analyzing the novel *Dandelion Wine* by Ray Bradbury. Pragmatic adaptation is a process that makes the translator resort to a great number of transformations dictated by the inherent semantics of the text.

Through the skillful use of lexical transformations such as modulation, concretization, compensation, and stylistic substitution, pragmatic and aesthetic equivalence can be achieved, allowing the target text to evoke responses comparable to those of the original. Ultimately, a successful translation of *Dandelion Wine* not only conveys Bradbury's narrative content but also recreates the sensory and emotive experience of childhood, memory, and time, ensuring the novel's enduring impact across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

References

Bradbury, R. (2009). *Dandelion Wine.* Iris Press.

Burak, A. (2002). *A Practical Introduction to Written Translation*. Intrada.

Eco, U. (2001). *Experiences in Translation.* University of Toronto Press.

Emery, P. (2004). Translation, Equivalence and Fidelity: A Pragmatic Approach. *Babel,* 50(2), 34-38.

Grundy, P. (2000). *Doing Pragmatics.* Arnold.

Komissarov, V., Koralova, A. (1990). *A Manual of Translation from English into Russian.* High School

Leech G. (1983). *Principles of Pragmatics.* Longman.

Vinay J.-P., Darbelnet, J. (2005). *Comparative Stylistics of French and English: A Methodology for Translation.* John Benjamins.

Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics.* Oxford University Press.

Брэдбери, Р. (2019). *Вино из одуванчиков* (Э. Кабалевская, перев.). Эксмо / Brèdberi, R. (2019). *Vino iz oduvančikov* (È. Kabalevskaja, Trans.). Èksmo.

Лапина, Л. (2022). Предпереводческий анализ системы образных сравнений художественного текста. *Гуманитарные исследования. История и филология*, 8, 107-121 / Lapina, L. (2022). Predperevodčeskij analiz sistemy obraznyh sravnenij hu-dožestvennogo teksta. *Gumanitarnye issledovanija. Istorija i filologija*, 8, 107-121.

Литвинова, В. (2009). *Базовые приемы создания образности в романах Рэя Брэдбери «Вино из одуванчиков» и «451° по Фаренгейту»* / Litvinova, V. (2009). *Bazovye priemy sozdanija obraznosti v romanah Rèja Brèdberi "Vino iz oduvančikov" i "451° po Farengejtu"*. https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/bazovye-priemy-sozdaniya-obraznosti-v-romanah-reya-bredberi-vino-iz-oduvanchikov-i-451-po-farengeytu.

Рецкер, Я. (2004). *Теория перевода и переводческая практика. Очерки лингвистической теории перевода.* Р. Валент / Recker, Ja. (2004). *Teorija perevoda i perevodčeskaja praktika. Očerki lingvističeskoj teorii perevoda*. R. Valent.