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Language Play in Translation: Character and Idiom in Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*

Abstract: Shakespeare's comedy *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (first performed in 1597) has been commented on widely in the context of bilingual punning because of the Latin lesson and translation scene at the beginning of act four. This essay focuses on character-specific language play and its translation into German over time (i.e. since the late eighteenth century to the most recent translation by Frank Günther in 2012). The examples refer to three characters: Nim, Mistress Quickly, and Sir Hugh Evans.

The character of Nim presents a problem to translators as he constantly refers to "humour" in an undifferentiated manner, i.e. on all kinds of occasions but with different connotations. With regard to the specific idiom of Mistress Quickly and her use of malapropism, more recent German editions have tended towards substitution and interpretation rather than translation. Sir Hugh Evans poses a double problem to the translator: for one, Shakespeare marks his accent to be Welsh; moreover, Evans speaks an idiolect that is yet again different from that of Nim and Mistress Quickly, including word formation, wrong or strange grammar, overly complex syntax and wrongly understood idioms. Translators have approached his character in various ways, for instance, by having him speak in a German dialect or by inventing a "new" dialect, which, however, may lead to confusion and incomprehensibility.

The survey of language play in translations of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* foregrounds how wordplay, character, and translation can be linked to each other. It aims to show, firstly, how wordplay and "verbal tics" related to characters and their idiolect are rendered in translations, and to ask, secondly, whether translation adequately represents the characters in question.

Keywords: character, comedy, communication in drama, dialect, English literature, homonymy, idiom, idiolect, interpretation, language play, malapropism, punning, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, translation, William Shakespeare

1 Introduction

Shakespeare's comedy *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (first performed in 1597) has been commented on widely in the context of bilingual punning with regard to the Latin lesson and translation scene at the beginning of act four.¹ But there is much else that deserves attention in this comedy when it comes to character-specific language play and its translation into German over time (i.e. since the late eighteenth century to the most recent translation from 2012).² *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is a play in which wordplay contributes to the comedy³ and which presents a wide range of different *kinds* of language play that accordingly offer an equally wide range of challenges to the translator.⁴

In the present context, the focus will be on the translation of those instances of language play that contribute to – or, rather, are at the basis of – the personal style of a character and his or her idiom,⁵ i.e. what Vickers (1968: 142) calls “verbal tics, an individualizing group of oddities” (see also Vickers 1968: 161). This means that the focus is on characters for whom wordplay is central, whose recognizability as a character is based on wordplay,⁶ and who are highly con-

1 See, e.g., Vickers (1968); Rackin (1990); Parker (1991: esp. 227–328); Delabastita (1993: 101, 156); Melchiori (2000a); Outland (2011: 324–327).

2 The translations considered in the following are Eschenburg (1778); Dippold (1810); Meyer (1831); Tieck (Wolf Graf Baudissin) (1832); Gundolf (1911, based on Tieck); Rothe (1957); Bader (2000); Günther (2012). Rothe's (1957) translation is included although the characters of Nim and Evans do not appear in this rendering, which means that a lot of wordplay is lost in this translation. Rothe, in the preface to the edition, links this to a particular agenda of staying true to the spirit of the text rather than the letter (see Shakespeare 1957: 6). – For an overview of all translations of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* until 2000, see Blinn and Schmidt (2003: 165–168).

3 “Departures from standard English are essentially comic” (Davies 2006: 196).

4 The notion of language play in this contribution goes slightly beyond that of wordplay (see Winter-Froemel 2009; Zirker and Winter-Froemel 2015) as it includes the play with verbal tics and dialect. For reflections on the translation of wordplay see, e.g., Delabastita (1993 and 1997: 9); Offord (1997); Veisbergs (1997); and Henry (2003). Dictionaries (Grimm for German and the *OED* for English) will be used whenever historical semantics is relevant.

5 See Delabastita: “Thus, whether characters produce wordplay in a certain type of situation, or not, and how often, and what their puns look like, and so forth – all these data can act as markers of character, i.e. as sub-signs constitutive of the macro-sign of the character in question” (1993: 139).

6 Falstaff has been established as one of the prime punsters in the Shakespeare canon by a number of critics but is rather complex as a character; he will, therefore, not be considered here. Mahood, for example, notes that “Falstaff [...] speaks about a third of the puns in each of the plays in which he figures”, which she regards as an “expression of overflowing high spir-

sistent with regard to their idiom: Nim, Mistress Quickly, and Sir Hugh Evans.⁷ Nim uses a tag word, “humour”, as a homonym that is particularly difficult to translate, since Germ. *Humor* or *Witz* has a different range of meanings than *humour* had in early modern England; hence, his is a case in which “language difference and translation are foregrounded” (Delabastita 2005: 162). Mistress Quickly is famous for her use of malapropisms, a subtype of punning (cf. Delabastita 1997: 6); the Latin scene in 4.1 is a case in point but she uses words wrongly or inappropriately throughout the play. Sir Hugh Evans is a Welsh character; his idiolect is marked as such by Shakespeare and leads to punning. The survey of language play in translations of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* thus highlights the links between wordplay, character and translation, and its objective is at least two-fold: (1) to show how wordplay and “verbal tics” related to characters and their idiolect are rendered in translations; and (2) to see whether translation adequately represents the characters in question.

2 Nim’s “humour”

The character of Nim presents a peculiar problem to the translators of the play as he constantly refers to “humour” in an undifferentiated manner, i.e. on all kinds of occasions but with different connotations and even denotations. In German translations of the play, the rendering has mostly been either “Humor” (e.g. by Tieck 1832) or, most recently, “Nerven” (Günther 2012); the latter, however, does not really correspond to English “humour”, while the former is just as ambiguous as its English equivalent.⁸ The question in this context is how these

its” and “vitality” ([1957] 1968: 168). See also Barton (1985); Empson (1986); Freeman (1981); Kinney (1993 and 2002 / 2003); and Lair (2003 / 2004).

⁷ These characters are *humour characters* in the sense of Ben Jonson: “As Asper explains to Mitis and Cordatus in the Induction of *Every Man Out of His Humour*: ‘As when some one peculiar quality / Doth so possess a man, that it doth draw / All his affects, his spirits, and his powers, / In their confluence, all to run one way, / This may be truly said to be a humour’ [Induction 103–107]” (Bauer and Bross 2013: 197); their linguistic style refers to their general disposition. See *OED* (2014): “humour, *n.*” 8. and 5.a. See also Müller (1981) and the notion of *the style is the man* (e.g. ch. 3: 40–51). Nim’s verbal tic of referring to “humour” in all circumstances is a comic reflection on the concept of the humour character; in his utterances, however, it is polysemous (see below, subsection 2).

⁸ See Grimm (1877: 1905): “Humor, *m. stimmung, laune.*” See in particular meaning 4), where Grimm refers to the English origin of Germ. “humor” (cf. *n7*); the entry altogether reflects on the

connotations are taken up explicitly in the co-text and whether they are established at all.⁹

When Nim makes his first appearance in the play, he says:

- (1) Slice, I say! *Pauca, pauca*, slice, that's my humour" (Shakespeare 2000a: 1.1.124)¹⁰

The context of this utterance is a confrontation between Slender and Falstaff with his men.¹¹ Slender accuses them of having "made [him] drunk, and afterward picked [his] pocket" (119). Bardolph in answer to this accusation calls Slender a "Banbury cheese" (120), after which Slender withdraws, twice saying "Ay, it is no matter" (121, 123), either because he considers Falstaff's men beneath his dignity or because he is intimidated (cf. Shakespeare 2000a: 133n121, 123). It is then that Nim calls out his first line in the play. He refers both to Bardolph's utterance as well as to an earlier one by Sir Hugh Evans, who stopped Falstaff by saying "*Pauca verba*, Sir John, good worts" (113).¹² As Melchiori points out in the notes, Nim is probably aware of the meaning of "*pauca verba*" as is "Pistol, who, in *H5* 2.1.79, renders it with 'There's enough'" (Shakespeare 2000a: 132n113). In his verbal outbreak, he thus suggests to "slice" Slender like a Banbury cheese and to diminish him in size (Lat. "*paucus*"; cf. Shakespeare 2000a: 133n124): Nim wants no words to be spoken but deeds to be done. This is Nim's humour, and he is thus characterized as a man of deeds; his "that's my humour" refers to his fancy of acting accordingly (see *OED* 2014: "humour, *n.*" 6.).¹³

various meanings of "humour", from the bodily liquids according to Galen to a funny mood, similar to its uses in English.

⁹ See Henry: "L'élément textuel le plus important est le contexte" (2003: 14); see also her chapter 3.3 (159–170).

¹⁰ All references in the following are to the Arden 3 edition of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Shakespeare 2000a), unless otherwise indicated.

¹¹ The approach here is similar to the one proposed by Henry, "interpréter pour traduire" (2003: 63; see also 66 and 106), i.e. to first establish the meaning and interpretation of a passage and then look at its translations.

¹² See Delabastita (1993: 86) for a brief analysis of Evans's exchange with Falstaff.

¹³ There is quite some disagreement with regard to the meaning of Nim's utterance in the various editions of the play: Melchiori writes that it means "cut it, make it short (*pauca*); with an allusion to the slicing of the Banbury cheese [line 120], the definition that Bardolph had given of Slender" (Shakespeare 2000a: 133n124); "As his name implies, Slender is a thin man, in the same way as cheeses made at Banbury were proverbially thin" (132n120). Craik, in the Oxford edition, writes: "In conjunction with *pauca, pauca* (few [words]), this clearly means that Nim's

Nim's sentence is rendered as follows in the translations:¹⁴

Tab. 1: Translations of 1.1.124

Eschenburg (1778) ¹⁵	Dippold (1810)	Meyer (1831)	Tieck (1832)	Gundolf (1911)	Bader (2000)	Günther (2012)
Nur ein bis- chen, sag' ich, pauca, pauca; ein bischen, das ist mei- ne Sache. (181)	Gemach, sprech ich; pauca, pau- ca: nur ge- mach, das ist mein Humor. (13)	Behutsam, sag' ich! pau- ca, pauca; behutsam! das ist mein Humor. (11)	Blitz! sage ich, pauca, pauca; das ist mein Humor. (92)	Blitz, sage ich! Pauca, pauca... Blitz, das ist mein Humor. (12)	Kurzen Pro- zeß, sag ich! Pauca, pau- ca, Kurzen Prozeß! Mir steht danach. (49) ¹⁶	Schlitzten, sag ich; kein Drum- rum, schlitzten; hätt ich Nerv zu! (18)

As we can see in Tab. 1, there are a few variations that make quite a difference in the interpretations of this line. Dippold's and Meyer's translations offer an opposite reading of Nim's character: in their renderings, he is trying to calm down the situation ("Softly"). "Humour", Nim's verbal tic, is rendered isomorphically as "Humor",¹⁷ while his use has a specific meaning which may be confined to English and the context of the humour character: in the English original, he plays the *humour* of the braggart.¹⁸ Tieck and Gundolf (who follows Tieck and only slightly modifies his rendering) offer a contrary meaning with "Blitz!" (i.e.

fancy (*humour*) is for sword-strokes and not for words. There is no need to connect his verb with slicing a Banbury cheese" (Shakespeare 1989: 84n121). While there may be no need to make the connection, his use of "slice" is certainly motivated by Bardolph's epithet. Oliver, in the second Arden edition, notes: "Probably Nym is carrying on the 'cheese' metaphor and suggesting that Slender be sliced up" (Shakespeare 1971: 11n122); whereas Crane suggests: "'Slice' looks like dangerous, bullying, underworld argot for sword or knife fighting. 'Pauca' is for *pauca verba*" (Shakespeare 2010a: 49n107).

¹⁴ Nim is cut from Rothe's translation.

¹⁵ In Eschenburg, the scene division differs and this incident takes place not in 1.1 but in 1.3.

¹⁶ Bader reads "humour" as referring to a whim (see Shakespeare 2000: 49n43).

¹⁷ Cf. Henry, who distinguishes between isomorphic, i.e. identical, homomorphic (e.g. an anagram for an anagram etc.), i.e. similar, heteromorphic, i.e. different, e.g. through substitution, and free translation (2003: 176–192).

¹⁸ See above, n7.

“lightning”, something that is to happen quickly¹⁹); but they similarly stick to “Humor.” Eschenburg takes up the meaning of “pauca” in “nur ein bisschen” and has “das ist meine Sache” for “that’s my humour”, which disambiguates the word but also gives it a different meaning that does not reflect on Nim’s mood. Bader gets more closely to the original meaning with his “Kurzen Prozeß, sag ich! Pauca, pauca, Kurzen Prozeß! Mir steht danach”; as does Günther with the onomatopoeic “Schlitzen” for “Slice.” His overall translation of “humour” as “Nerv”, however, changes the meaning completely and, throughout the play, does not appear to be adequate.

Günther in the appendix “Aus der Übersetzerwerkstatt” (‘From the translator’s workshop’) notes that *humour* is most often translated with “Humor”, which actually renders utterances incomprehensible (see 2012: 219); he refers to the theory of humours during the Renaissance. In his view, “Nerven” is less anachronistic and more neutral an expression (221). He calls his way of translating the word “monotony with variations” (see 222). The problem is, however, that – as little as humour necessarily always means cheerfulness (“Heiterkeit”; Günther 2012: 219) – *humour* does not denote “Nerven” either, and that there is no variation as “Nerven” is – unlike humour – not polysemous. The word is used with various denotations and connotations in the play and therefore should not be translated as the same word in each and every context.

In Nim’s next lines, things become even more complex because he uses the word “humour” twice, but not necessarily with the same meaning:

- (2) Be advised, sir, and pass good humours. I will say ‘marry trap with you’, if you run the nuthook’s humour on me – that is the very note of it.
(1.1.154–156)

The utterance is conspicuous in at least two ways: the use of plural *humours* and singular *humour*, and the variation of his tag line from *Henry V*, “that’s the humour of it”,²⁰ into “that is the very note of it.” A paraphrase could be something

¹⁹ This rendering is probably due to the fact that, in German, the context of “Banbury cheese” and the proverbial “As thin as Banbury cheese” is unknown. Dippold has “Du Käsegesicht”; Meyer “Du Bindfaden”; Fleck and Gundolf “Ihr schmaler Ziegenkäse”; Bader “Ihr Dreikäsehoch”; and Günther “Du Dreikäsehoch, du dreikäsiges.”

²⁰ As Melchiori (2000b: 121) notes, the line is “repeated six times in the Folio and eight in the Quarto version” in *Henry V* but “constantly varied in *MW*.” The Folio version largely varies from the Quarto (see Shakespeare 2000a: 135 textual note). – In a further step, one might consider Nim’s verbal tic in relation to Falstaff’s use of “honour” in *1H4* and *MW*. On “honour” see Mahood ([1957] 1968: 178–179).

like: 'Heed my advice, sir, and be agreeable. I will say 'shut up' if you try to threaten me with the constable. That is my meaning / the gist of what I am saying'.²¹ In the first case, "humours" refers to the attitude of Slender, i.e. Nim wants him to be friendly; in the second case, "humour" describes the "habitual frame of mind"²² of the nuthook, i.e. literally the tool that is used "to pull down the branches of nut trees" (Shakespeare 2000a: 135n155), metaphorically someone (e.g. the constable) who catches thieves. This combination of plural and singular (i.e. the metaphorical meaning) is translated as follows:

Tab. 2: Translations of 1.1.154–156

Eschenburg (1778)	Dippold (1810)	Meyer (1831)	Tieck (1832)	Gundolf (1911)	Bader (2000)	Günther (2012)
Laßt Euch rathen, Herr, und macht mich nicht böse. Ich werde mein Spiel mit Euch haben, wenn ihr mich böse macht; das müßt ihr wissen. (183)	Laßt euch rathen, Sir, und guten Humor pas- siren: „Er- tappt, er- tappt“ will ich mit euch rufen, wenn ihr den Hu- mor eines Langfingers auf mich los laßt. Das ist die wahre Weise davon. (15)	Laßt euch rathen, Sir, und laßt den guten Humor in Ruh. Rich- tig erwischt, wird' ich mit euch sagen, wenn ihr mir mit dem Nuß- hakenrumor kommt; das merkt euch bei dieser Gelegenheit. (12)	Merkt auf Avis und laßt guten Humor gelten! Ich werde rufen: in der eignen Grube attrap- piert, wenn Ihr Euren Nußknacker- humor auf mich loslaßt; das ist der wahre Ton. (93)	Merkt auf Avis und lasst guten Humor gelten! Ich werde rufen: in der eignen Grube attrap- piert, wenn ihr euren Nussknacker- humor auf mich loslasst. Das ist die wahre Notiz davon. (13)	Nehmt mei- nen Rat an, mein Herr, und behaltet Eure gute Laune. Ich will sagen, klümmert Euch um Eu- ren eigenen Kram, wenn Ihr mir als Schnüffler kommt. Das ist der Stand der Dinge. (50)	Wenn Sie 'n Schlag Rat wolln, Herr: im- mer sonnigen Nerv bewahrn, ja? Denn wer an- dern was gräbt, also, dann schö- nen Grubenfall, wenn Sie mir die Knüppelschwin- gers auf die Ner- ven hetzen, klar?, wer ich echt nervolabil bei so was, klar? und so spielt die Musik. (21)

We see the difficulty in the translation here: Neither "Humor", "Laune" nor "Nerv / Nerven" represents the complexity of meaning in the original utterance. Eschenburg offers a paraphrase that does not at all echo the verbal intricacies of the original but at least makes the utterance comprehensible. Meyer and Tieck

²¹ Cf. notes in Shakespeare (2000a: 135) and Shakespeare (2010a: 51).

²² See OED (2014): "humour, *n.*" +P1 "in one's usual or habitual frame of mind. *Obs.*"

come up with corresponding renderings when writing “laßt den guten Humor in Ruh” and “laßt den guten Humor gelten”, meaning that the good humour(s) should not be infringed. The rendering of “nuthook’s humour” is equally difficult: while, in English, the phrase is idiomatic, “Nussknackerhumor” in German is not.²³ Only Meyer has “Nußhaken”, the equivalent to “nuthook”, but then renders *humour* as “rumor” in this instance, which does not make any sense at all. And how a constable can be set upon someone’s nerves (as in Günther) remains utterly unclear even if a metaphorical reading is assumed. As to Nim’s concluding statement, Tieck and Günther render “note” with a musical allusion that is, in Günther’s case, also idiomatic; Dippold uses the ambiguous “Weise” which may equally refer to *manner* and *melody*. In most cases, the translations change the meaning of the whole utterance completely, making it enigmatic to the point of gibberish.

The word “humour” and its connotations hence seem to be particular challenging when it comes to translation. In the third scene of Act 1, Nim makes another appearance; he first speaks in lines 20–25 and then again in 48–54, where he uses “humour” twice as a noun and then as a verb:

- (3) Nim. The anchor is deep: will that humour pass?
 Falstaff. Now, the report goes she [Mistress Ford] has all the rule of her husband’s purse: he hath a legion of angels.
 Pistol. As many devils attend her! And ‘To her, boy!’ say I.
 Nim. The humour rises: it is good. Humour me the angels. (1.3.48–54)

Again, the use of “humour” in line 48 is ambiguous: Melchiori, following Hibbard, notes, “either Nim asks for approval (*pass muster*) of his newly coined phrase (*humour*), or he wonders whether that of Falstaff (and of Mistress Ford) is only a passing inclination (*humour*)” (Shakespeare 2000a: 149n48).²⁴ The am-

²³ In Grimm, all idioms related to “Nussknacker” have completely different meanings (see Grimm 1889: 1016). The equivalent term of “nuthook” is “Nuszhaken”, which is used idiomatically in ‘fingers as stiff as a nuthook’. “Nuszbengel” – ‘nut-chap’, a tool to beat down nuts from the tree – would have been semantically most apt to play with the notion of getting someone’s habitual humour onto Nim.

²⁴ The newly coined phrase is “The anchor is deep” (cf. Shakespeare 2000a: 149n48), which can be read as an allusion to a topos familiar from other plays by Shakespeare, based on the comparison of a ship and a woman; see, e.g., Sir Toby to Andrew Aguecheek in *Twelfth Night*: “You mistake, knight. ‘Accost’ is front her, board her, woo her, assail her” (Shakespeare 2008: 1.3.54–55); and Petruchio in *The Taming of the Shrew*: “Tell me her father’s name and ‘tis enough, For I will board her” (Shakespeare 2010b: 1.2.93–94).

biguity, however, seems to rather reside in the notion of either the passing of the humour in a temporal sense (with regard to either Falstaff or Mistress Ford; see Melchiori's "passing inclination") or if it will be accepted (by Mistress Ford). In the latter case, the utterance is not self-referential (to Nim) but still refers to Falstaff and Mistress Ford: will his / her mood continue / will she accept his whim?

The passage is further complicated by the pun on "angels", in the sense of gold coin, which is embedded in a biblical quote (Mt 26:35: "legions of angels"; see Shakespeare 2000a: 149n50) and reinterpreted in that sense when Pistol answers with "many devils." This punning is cue for Nim to exclaim "The humour rises", in the sense of 'the wit is improving' or 'the plot is thickening' (cf. Shakespeare 2000a: 149n53–54) or in the sense of a bawdy allusion to Falstaff (cf. his utterance in lines 38–45). He proceeds with a syntactic pun (cf. Offord 1997: 234) on "humour", namely from the nominal to the verbal use: "Humour me the angels."²⁵ The meaning implied here refers – yet again – to the psychophysiological semantics of "humour": Nim encourages Falstaff to act accordingly, so that the angels may come to him.²⁶

The various translations of this passage hinge on the implicature in "humour me."

²⁵ Melchiori paraphrases the latter as: 'I enjoy the joke about angels' as well as 'spirit away the cash' (Shakespeare 2000a: 149n53–54). See also Shakespeare 1989: 98n52. The syntactic construction of "humour me" is described by Oliver as an "ethic dative" (Shakespeare 1971: 25n52, 54); it is repeated by Falstaff two lines later "to reinforce the meaning of the verb" (Shakespeare 2000a: 149n54).

²⁶ See *OED* (2014): "humour, v." trans. 1.a. "To accommodate the mood or humour of; to soothe or gratify by indulgence or compliance; to comply with, indulge"; and 1.b. "In extended use. To comply with the peculiar nature or exigencies of (a thing); to adapt or accommodate oneself to; to act in compliance or agreement with; to fit, suit." The verbal use of "humour" was introduced by Shakespeare around 1597, e.g. in *Richard II* (Shakespeare 2002: 3.2.160–170); and *Love's Labour's Lost* (Shakespeare 1998: 3.1.10–13).

Tab. 3: Translations of 1.3.48–54²⁷

Eschenburg (1778)	Dippold (1810)	Meyer (1831)	Tieck (1832 ²⁸)	Bader (2000)	Günther (2012)
N. Der Anker ist tief. <i>Wird der Humor passiren?</i> F. Nun geht das Gerücht, daß sie ihres Mannes Geld ganz unter ihren Händen hat; sie hat eine Legion von Engeln. P. Wie viele Teufel zu halten pflegen. Auf sie los, Bursche, sag' ich. N. <i>Der Humor steigt</i> ; das ist gut; <i>humorisiert mir die Engel.</i> (197)	N. Der Anker geht tief: <i>wird der Humor passiren?</i> F. Wie ich vernommen, soll sie das ganze Vermögen des Mannes unter sich haben; sie hat eine Legion von Engeln. P. Die eben so viele Teufel unterhalten. Nur zu, mein Jungchen, sag' ich. N. <i>Der Humor steigt</i> ; das ist gut: <i>humore mir die Engels.</i> (30)	N. Der Anker ist nicht leicht; <i>wird der Humor da zureichen?</i> F. Dabei geht das Gerücht, sie haben den Geldbeutel ihres Mannes unter den Händen: Legionen von Engeln sind in ihrer Gewalt. P. Nimm eben so viele Teufel an, und geh' auf sie los, Bursche; so denk' ich. N. <i>Der Humor steigt</i> , das ist gut; <i>humorisiert mir die Engel her.</i> (20)	N. Der Anker ist tief: <i>soll dieser Humor gelten?</i> F. Nun, das Gerücht sagt, daß sie den Knopf auf ihres Mannes Beutel regiert; er besitzt ein Regiment von Engeln. P. Nimm gleichviel Teufel dir in Gold, und auf sie los, mein Sohn! – N. <i>Der Humor steigt</i> ; recht gut; <i>humorisiert mir diese Engel.</i> (99)	N. Der Anker liegt tief. <i>Wird diese Idee wohl Erfolg haben?</i> F. Nun, man erzählt sich, sie habe volle Verfügungsgewalt über den Geldbeutel ihres Mannes. Er hat eine Legion Engel / Dukaten. P. So nimm ebensoviele Teufel in deinen Dienst, – und ich sage: „Ihr nach, Mann!“ N. Die Sache nimmt Gestalt an, – das ist gut. Hütet mir die Engel / Dukaten. (68)	N. Ein Anker-Manöver. Wie lang dieser Nerv ihn wohl juckt. F. Und das Gerücht sagt, sie hätte die Hand auf dem Beutel ihres Mannes; und in dem klingelt's ganz himmlisch. P. Dann klau ihr die Klöten ²⁹ ganz höllisch – „Ran an die Klunker!“ sag ich. N. Satter Nervenkitzel, das; gut so. Hab Nerv für's himmlische Klingeln von Klunkern. (35–37)

The early versions (Eschenburg to Tieck) include the ambiguity of “will that humour pass” in their renderings “passieren” and even “gelten” and “zureichen” as these are open enough to have them refer both to Mistress Page and Falstaff. The translation of “humour” as “Humor” still entails the same problems as indicated above. Bader’s and Günther’s translations ascribe the idea (“Idee”) or

²⁷ The phrases the analysis focuses on have been italicized; the passage is, however, given in full for each translation in order to represent the context.

²⁸ Gundolf is, in this case, almost identical with Tieck, esp. with regard to the rendering of “humour” in this passage (see Shakespeare 1911: 21).

²⁹ *Klöten* is a German bawdyism, referring to testicles; “Kröten” as an idiomatic term for money would have made much more sense here in terms of wordplay.

“Nerv” to Falstaff alone. With regard to the verbal rendering, one can see differences between each of them: while the early translations only vary to slight degrees with the use of “humorisiert” (Eschenburg, Meyer, and Tieck) vs. Dippold’s “humore”, and Meyer makes the direction of “humour” clear in having Nim say ‘to me’ (Germ. “her”), the more modern renderings diverge from the original version to quite some extent. Bader’s “Hütet mir die Engel / Dukaten” extends (cf. Veisbergs 1997: 165) the translation by giving the literal as well as the actual meaning of “angels” in this context (and thus includes a metalingual comment); Günther’s turn of phrase is rather colloquial and alliterative but in fact has very little to do with the original sentence. Wordplay, as Veisbergs has it, “is usually more than just a decorative frill, but serves some precise semantic or pragmatic goal which in a functional perspective on translation may justify the sacrifice of the original idiom and its transformation. [...] What matters in the end is whether the overall semantic, stylistic and pragmatic effect of the original has been reproduced” (1997: 172).³⁰ What most translators achieve is an association between Nim’s idiolect with the word *humour* – or “Humor” in German; Günther is an exception. What they fail to transmit are the various shades of meaning linked to the word in English, i.e. the pun is lost, which has to do with the diachronic change in the meaning of the German equivalent. Overall, the latent bawdiness in the context of Nim’s utterances is equally lost in translation. This problem, however, becomes even more pertinent with regard to Mistress Quickly.

3 “They mistook their erection”: Mistress Quickly’s Malapropisms

Mistress Quickly and her malapropisms have troubled translators in various ways.³¹ With regard to her specific idiolect, more recent German editions have tended towards substitution rather than equivalent translation, while older

³⁰ See Veisbergs, who also notes that “exact literal translation [...] [is] only possible in the rather unlikely case of the relevant languages showing full equivalence with regard to both the idioms and their component parts” (1997: 163). And, even then, “some of the elements [...] fail to have a counterpart in the target language” (1997: 163).

³¹ Delabastita notes that “[i]n malaproprian mistakes [...] the wordplay does not only confront two conceptual meanings but also two styles, so that language is being made ‘palpable’ with regard to its sociolinguistic stratification as well as its structural properties of form and conceptual meaning” (1993: 101–102).

versions either tend towards a more exact rendering or towards omission (see below, Tab. 4).

One example of her malapropisms will suffice to illustrate the general tendency:

- (4) Quickly. Marry, sir, I come to your worship from Mistress Ford.
 Falstaff. Mistress Ford? I have had ford enough. I was thrown into the ford, I have my belly full of ford.
 Quickly. Alas the day, good heart, that was not her fault! She does so take on with her men; they mistook their erection.
 Falstaff. So did I mine, to build upon a foolish woman's promise.
 (3.5.32–40)

Her malapropism in this instance is typical of her linguistic behaviour throughout the play: She incorrectly uses “erection” instead of “direction.”³² Her slip of the tongue, which is quite in character, instigates Falstaff's introduction of bawdy wordplay into the scene in a witty exchange. The difficulty in translation is twofold: for one, the sexual innuendo contributes to the characterization of Mistress Quickly; for another, there is a sound relation between *erection* and *direction* that somewhat motivates their confusion.

Günther (2012) translates these lines as follows:

- (5) “Ach Gottchen aber auch, das gute Herz, das war nicht ihre Schuld. Sie tut ja sooo mit ihren Leuten schimpfen; die haben ihre Direktionen und Erektiven nicht verstanden.” (139)

He has Falstaff take up this phrase in his response, “Und ich nicht meine Direktiven und Erektionen, die ich bezüglich der Versprechungen einer dummen Frau hatte” – rather than the more simple “So did I mine [...]” (39–40) in the original. His rendering exemplifies the extent to which some translations diverge from the original text as much as from earlier ways of rendering particular character idioms. Günther in (5) foregrounds Mistress Quickly's linguistic weakness by adding a spoonerism to his rendering – and by giving the correct form in Falstaff's answer: *Direktionen und Erektiven* should actually be *Direktiven und*

³² For an analysis of this passage in the overall context of the play, see Parker (1996: 120). – One might go even further and argue that her unwitting wordplay extends to taking up Falstaff's pun on “ford” in her “that was not her fault”, depending on her pronunciation as [fo:lt] may easily be pronounced in a manner that is similar to [fo:d].

Erektionen; he thus adds a stylistic device in order to focus on Mistress Quickly's linguistic inaptness. Günther's substitution is, at least in this place, still more original than most renderings.

Tab. 4: Translations of 3.5.34–40

Eschenburg (1778)	Dippold (1810)	Meyer (1831)	Tieck (1832)	Gundolf (1911)	Rothe (1957)	Bader (2000)
Q. Ach! daß Gott erbarm! das arme Ding dafür kann sie nicht. Sie hat ihre Leute recht hart angelassen; sie haben ihre Sache schlecht ge- macht. F. Und ich auch, daß ich mich auf das Verspre- chen eines nährischen Weibes ver- ließ! (285)	Q. O Herze- leid! daran war sie nicht schuld, mein Herzchen: sie that ja nur so mit ihren Leu- ten, und die verstanden ihre Erektion falsch. F. Und ich die meinige, da ich auf das Versprechen eines thörig- ten Weibes baute. (124)	Q. Daß Gott erbarm! die gute Seele; das hat sie nicht ver- schuldet. Sie hat ihre Leute schön ange- lassen: sie haben ihre Erektion falsch ver- standen. F. Und ich die meinige auch, indem ich auf eines nährli- schen Weibes Versprechen baute. (71)	Q. Ach, lieber Gott, das ar- me Herz kann ja nichts da- für. Sie hat ihre Leute recht herun- tergemacht; die haben ihre Konstruktion falsch erstan- den. F. Und ich die meine, daß ich auf das Versprechen eines alber- nen Weibes baute. (136)	Q. Ach, lieber Gott, das arme Herz kann ja nichts dafür. Sie hat ihre Leute recht herun- tergemacht. Die haben ihre Irrigie- rung falsch verstanden. F. Und ich die meine, dass ich auf das Versprechen eines alber- nen Weibes baute. (70)	[F. Die Flut stand mir bis an den Hals.] Q. Nein, sie hängt sich an ihren Hals und ist untröstlich über die Ver- kommenheit ihrer Knechte. Sie nimmt sich das Le- ben wenn Sie Ihr kein freundliches Wort zukom- men lassen. F. Ist Ihr an Worten ge- legen? Mir nicht. (308)	Q. Ach Gott, gu- tes Herz, das war nicht Ihr Fehler. Sie ist so wütend auf Ihre Diener – sie haben Ihre Erektion miß- verstanden. F. Und ich die meine, indem ich mich so auf das Verspre- chen einer tö- richten Frau verlassen konnte. (172)

The word “erection” has mostly been rendered as “Erektion” (Dippold, Meyer, and Bader) or as “Irrigierung” (Gundolf). Tieck, in the 1832 version, has “Konstruktion”, thus completely ignoring any bawdiness, in which Rothe follows suit. Both Eschenburg and Rothe change the meaning of the dialogue through substitution: in Eschenburg's case, Mistress Ford's people “just got everything wrong”, and in Rothe's the sense is yet different. He substitutes the wordplay on “erection” with one that takes its cue from Falstaff's “Die Flut stand mir bis zum Hals”: Mistress Ford will cling to his breast (idiomatic “an jemandes Hals hängen”) because she is so distraught. In these two renderings in particular, the character of Mistress Quickly is changed from bawdy to much more understanding and virtuous – but this means that she is no longer Mistress Quickly: The tech-

nique chosen for this translation thus affects the play in that it changes its overall meaning.

4 “[O]ne that makes fritters of English”:³³ Sir Hugh Evans

A similar change in meaning and character portrayal can be observed in Sir Hugh Evans, who poses a double problem to the translator: for one, Shakespeare marks his dialect as Welsh; moreover, Evans speaks an idiolect that is different from that of Nim and Mistress Quickly with regard to word formation, grammar, overly complex syntax and wrongly interpreted idiomatic expressions (cf. Günther 2012a: 232). Translators have approached his character in various ways, for instance, by having him speak in a German dialect or by inventing a “new” dialect (as Günther 2012), which, however, may lead to confusion and even incomprehensibility.

Evans first appears in the opening scene of the play, where the idiolect of several characters is introduced, and they enter into communicative play:

- (6) Slender. All his successors – gone before him – hath done’t; and all his ancestors – that come after him – may. They may give the dozen white luces in their coat.
Shallow. It is an old coat.
Evans. The dozen white louses do become an old coat well. It agrees well passant. It is a familiar beast to man, and signifies love. (1.1.12–18)

“Luces”, as Melchiori notes, are a “heraldic designation, from the French, of the pike, a freshwater fish” (Shakespeare 2000a: 125n14). Evans’s reinterpretation of “luces” as “louses” is probably intended as a pun,³⁴ as is his play on “pass-

³³ The quotation is taken from an utterance by Sir John Falstaff about Evans’s “Seese is not good to give putter” (5.5.139), meaning “It is bad (unhealthy) to add cheese to butter”, which alludes to Sir Falstaff’s being fat: “‘Seese’ and ‘putter’? Have I lived to stand at the taunt of one of that makes fritters of English?” (5.5.141–142).

³⁴ Crane seems to contradict himself when he first writes: “It seems clear [...] that Evans himself is not punning, but takes Slender’s ‘luces’ as the kind of plural formation for ‘lice’ that would be familiar to him in his own Welsh dialect of English [...] the joke is on him because he has misunderstood pike as lice in the first place” (Shakespeare 2010a: 44n15) to then go on about “It agrees well passant” by explaining that “passant” refers to heraldry, “and he [Evans]

ing” and “old coat”: “Evans’ use of a heraldic term in his next sentence must mean that he understands Shallow’s heraldic use of the term ‘coat’. Evans makes the witty remark that an old heraldic coat like an old garment goes appropriately with lice” (Shakespeare 2010a: 44n15).³⁵ He continues to speak on this level of punning with his “well passant”, which refers to animals in a coat of arms that are represented as walking (cf. Shakespeare 2000a: 125n17) and by interpreting the coat: “signifies love.”

Günther’s approach to translating this passage is innovative but also fairly problematic:

- (7) **Schmächtig.** All seine Junioren, die einst vor ihm kamen, haben das so gehalten, und all seine Senioren, die dereinst mal nach ihm kommen, dürfen’s genauso halten: die dürfen elf schwarze Lanzen im Wappen führen.
Seichtl. Uraltes Wappen.
Evans. Elf chwaarze Wanzen, die mach sich gutt in een uraalte Kappen; des ziert’s Kappen, wann die uffmar’chiert kumm; sin sehr anhängelich Tierchers bei’s Men’chens, un sin chprichwerterlich fier ,unzertrennlich Liebe’. (9)

Günther translates “dozen white luses” – i.e. twelve white pikes (as in ‘fish’) – as “elf schwarze Lanzen”, i.e. eleven black pikes (as in ‘weapon’). One might therefore assume that he takes “pike” for the synonym of “luse” and substitutes it with its homonym (i.e. the ‘weapon’ for the ‘fish’) in order to create paronomasia (*Lanzen / Wanzen*, in analogy to *Wappen / Kappen*). His note, however, suggests something else, namely that he reads Evans as inventing a wrong plural of “lice³⁶”; Günther does not comment on the linguistic specificities that he (perhaps unwittingly) comes up with in his translation (see Zirker 2016).

The passage also foregrounds another feature of Evans’s idiolect that, in the English original, only appears slightly later: Evans’s rather peculiar pronunciation. Günther marks this on the basis of an invented dialect that is, however,

_____ suggests that lice in an old coat of arms are appropriately shown walking, just as they walk about in an old garment” (44n16).

³⁵ Melchiori (Shakespeare 2000a: 126n16–7) and Oliver (Shakespeare 1971: 5–6n21) suggest that “coat” may contain a further pun on Evans’s false pronunciation as “coad”, referring to “cod”, a saltwater fish.

³⁶ “*luses / louses* = ‚Hechte‘ und ‚Läuse‘ haben im Engl. einen sehr ähnlichen Klang. Seichtl spricht von ‚Hechten‘ in seinem Familienwappen; Evans mißversteht es als ‚Läuse‘ und nimmt an, jener hätte ein Wappen mit Läusen. (Der Plural von *louse* ist eigentlich *lice* – Evans’ wall-sisch verdrehtes Englisch erfindet hier einen falschen Plural.)” (Günther 2012c: 251–252).

very hard to follow and understand (and, for the actor, to speak).³⁷ Evans's pronunciation is also marked as being Welsh in most of the other translations.

Tab. 5: Translations of 1.1.12–18³⁸

Meyer (1831)	Tieck (1832)	Bader (2000)
Spärlich. Seine ihm vorangegangenen Successoren haben's alle gethan; und alle ihm nachfolgende Antecessoren dürfen's thun. Sie können ein Dutzend weißer Laechse in ihren Waffenrock setzen. Dummrian. Es ist ein alter Rock. Hugo. Das Dutz weißer Läuse gehört in einen alten Rock, es paßt gut, passappel; 's Ist ein mit dem Menschen pfertrautes Peest und peteudet – Liebe. (7–8)	Schmächtig. Alle seine Deszendenten, die ihm vorangegangen, haben's so gehalten, und alle seine Aszendenten, die nach ihm kommen, können's auch so halten, sie führen alle den silbernen Hecht und Leu, separiert vom schwarzen Gatter, im Wappen. Schaal. Das Gatter ist uralt. – Evans. Tie silberne Läuse passe sich kut für ten alten schwarzen Kater; schreitend nehme sie sich wohl aus; es ist sein vertrauliche Creature mit dem Menschen und peteuten Liebe. (8)	Slender. All seine Nachfolger, die ihm vorangingen, haben es getan, und all seine Vorgänger, die ihm folgen, mögen es tun: sie dürfen ein Dutzend weiße Hechte in ihrem Wappen führen. Shallow. Es ist ein altes Wappen. Evans. Ein Dutzend weißer Läuse passen gut in ein altes Wappen; das paßt gut, vortrefflich / schreitend; es ist ein Tier dem Menschen wohlbekannt und bedeutet Liebe. (40)

Bader is the exception here in that he does not mark Evans's dialect in any way nor does he try to motivate the misunderstanding of *Hechte* (pike / luce) and *Läuse* but rather opts for a straightforward (equivalent) translation. Meyer and Tieck both indicate Evans's dialect through pronunciation spelling and motivate Evans's misinterpretation. The dialect is based on hypercorrection (cf. Bußmann 1990: 316), i.e. the unvoicing of voiced plosives and fricatives as in "passappel" and "peteuten"³⁹ (see also "ferry" (1.1.45)) and by a rather unusual syn-

³⁷ Günther explains his approach in his appendix to the translation (2012a) and in a letter to the actor playing Evans (2012b). He explicitly wishes to avoid any local identification of the dialect (cf. 2012a: 235) and hence invented one on the basis of mixing dialectal elements and "Sprachverhunzungen" (2012a: 235), i.e. by intentionally creating wrong linguistic structures.

³⁸ Eschenburg does not translate Evans's speech here and comments on its untranslatability (174n). Dippold equally leaves Evans's lines untranslated and has him first appear with lines 25–30. Gundolf in this instance is identical with Tieck.

³⁹ In his appendix, Günther describes Evans's hypercorrection as "Sprachfehler" (language flaw) and thinks that it does not signify anything in German (see Günther 2012a: 233). Hyper-

tax. These markers can also be found in the original version, for instance, when Evans says:⁴⁰

- (8) It is petter that friends is the sword, and end it; and there is also another device in my prain, which peradventure prings goot discretions with it. (1.1.38–40)

These features as well as Evans’s “Welsh plural” (see Shakespeare 2000a: 127n27; i.e. the use plural instead of singular, as in “discretions”), lexical blending (e.g. “compremises” in 1.1.30 as a blend of “compromise” and “premise”; see Shakespeare 2000a: 127n30) and terminal devoicing (“goot”) can be found in Evans’s utterances throughout the play.

In the German renderings, these specifics of his idiolect are in parts equivalently translated.

Tab. 6: Translations of 1.1.38–40

Eschenburg (1778)	Dippold (1810)	Meyer (1831)	Tieck (1832)	Bader (2000)	Günther (2012)
Es ist besser, wenn gute Freund der Degen sind, und es ausmachen. Und zudem geht noch ein anderer Anschlag in meinem Kopf herum, der vielleicht ganz ersprießlich seyn kann. (175)	Beßer ischt's, die Freund seynd das Schwert, so entschaidet; und da kommt mir noch so ain anderer Anschlag in das Kehirn, der könnte ungefährlich wohl zu etwas Gutem führen. (8)	'S ist pesser, dass Pfreunde das Schwert sind und 's ausmachen; auch hab Ich noch einen andern Anschlag im Koppe, der vielleicht was Kutes zu Weke brinkt. (8)	Viel pesser, wann Freunde tas Schwert seyn, und es enden; und ta kommt mir noch ein andrer Einfall in die Ketanke, ter, wanns klückt ketelhliche Convenienzen mit sich pringt. (6)	Es ist besser, daß Freunde die Degen sind und ihn beenden, – und mir schwebt noch ein anderer Plan vor, der möglicherweise guten Gewinn mit sich bringt. (42)	Wär viel besser, wenn ihrich gutte Freende es Chwert wärn, un dätten es ende. Un do hätt lek nu noch een Olnfallsblitz ins meen Hirn'chtliebchens, wu meechlicherweis sich resulatlich rendietlich rendiern mecht. (11–13)

correction in German, however, characterizes someone as a dialect speaker who tries to speak High German (cf. Bußmann 1990: 316).

⁴⁰ On Welsh characters and their language in early modern drama, see, e.g., Bartley (1954: 48–77) and Outland (2011). Outland identifies Evans “as the earliest sustained depiction of a linguistically-marked Welsh character richly interpellated into an English setting” (2011: 312).

Both Eschenburg and Bader render a rather unmarked German; as their character presentation of Evans in the translations is not conspicuous in any sense, he appears as one among others. Dippold is more innovative in his rendering with a slightly complicated syntax and unvoiced /k/ instead of the voiced initial plosive in "Kehirn." Meyer and Tieck both make a lot more of his tendency towards hypercorrection and have him substitute all initial voiced plosives with unvoiced ones, Tieck even introducing them into words (e.g. "keteihliche"); Tieck moreover has him use a word of French origin, "Convenienzen", to underline his striving for a more eloquent expression. Günther works on the basis of mixing various dialects ("iek" which is typical of Berlin and "Oinfall" from Swabia) and adds tautology and paronymy,⁴¹ "resuldatlich rendietlich rendiern", to set his overall idiolect apart from other characters as well.

Both in (most of) the German translations as well as in the original English, Evans's idiolect is hence marked as recognizably different. Contemporary audiences of Shakespeare's English text would note the Welsh dialect in this play; the similarities between Evans and other speakers of Welsh in the Shakespeare canon as well as on the early modern stage in general would actually facilitate this: as Melchiori notes, "Evans's way of emphasizing polysyllables by making them plural is a Welsh habit shared with Fluellen in *H5*" (Shakespeare 2000a: 127n27). In 1.1.50, Evans says "It were a goot motion, if we leave our pribbles and prabbles"; Melchiori has linked this to Fluellen's speech in 4.1 of *Henry V* (see Shakespeare 2000a: 128n50):

- (9) 'So! In the name of Jesu Christ, speak fewer. It is the greatest admiration in the universal world when the true and anchient prerogatifs and laws of the wars is not kept. If you would take the pains but to examine the wars of Pompey the Great you shall find, I warrant you, that there is no *tiddle-taddle nor pibble-pabble* in Pompey's camp. I warrant you, you shall find the ceremonies of the wars, and the cares of it, and the forms of it, and the sobriety of it, and the modesty of it, to be otherwise. (Shakespeare 1995: 4.1.66–75; emphasis mine).

Fluellen's dialect is similar to Evans's in many respects:⁴² the Welsh plural, unvoiced instead of voiced plosives (most famously in "Alexander the Pig", Shakespeare 1995: 4.7.13), tautology and reduplication.

⁴¹ On paronymy as a typical form of Shakespearean wordplay see Müller (1996: 213–216).

⁴² See Vickers (1968: 160): "Fluellen is clearly a martial version of Sir Hugh Evans, both in his pronunciation [referring to 4.1.70–71], and in his odd habit of equating nouns and adjectives."

Günther translates these lines as follows:

- (10) Jessesmariechen bi'n Herrn Jesses obber jetz, chsprechen S' duch nech su ville. Issich duch chtändich immer widder de greeßte Erchstuanlichkeit inne Universumswelt, wie de grundlechende un antieche Griechs-recheln und Brärogativen nech beobochdet werdde dunn. Wenn S' sich nur mo' gebben dätten un dätten de Grieche von de Bumbeius de Großen chtudiern dunn, ich sech Sie, do dätten S' sehn, sech i mo', do issich kein Quatche-Gequassel un kein Quassel-Gequatche nech innen Bumbeius' sinn Feldlocher nech. (Shakespeare 2005: 149)

For a native speaker of German, the dialect of Fluellen here is unquestionably Saxon and therefore different from Günther's rendering of Evans's idiom, as a mixture of several dialects. The example shows how translators, when they transform idiolects and dialects that appear in different plays and thus link characters to one another (in this instance those that are Welsh) something is indeed lost, namely the idiom that makes a character recognizable and situates him or her in a specific context, be it regional, social or even theatrical.

5 Conclusion

The translation of character-specific language play, i.e. the “verbal tics” of individual characters whose portrayal is based on their idiom, seems to be an impossibility: Either the character is no longer recognizable as linguistically distinct or the wordplay is lost, incomprehensible or no longer comic – or both character and wordplay are lost in translation. This is particularly problematic in cases similar to those considered here, namely characters who are reduced in their complexity (in the Jonsonian sense as described above) and discrete through their idiom.

In the case of Nim, the rendering of *humour* as “Humor” results in the preservation of his tic but also in a loss of the various meanings the word has in an early modern English context. With Mistress Quickly, the tendency is either towards a change of her character, e.g. in making her more modest and virtuous in her expression, or in a loss of the wit in her malapropism: if we substitute the pun on *erection-direction* with *Erektionen* and *Direktiven*, the paronymic relation of the words is missing in German. And for Evans, the difficulty lies in preserving his dialect, which is complicated by Shakespeare's similar use and representation of Welsh that goes beyond a single play.

While the translatability of wordplay in general is certainly not an impossibility (cf. Delabastita 1993: 182), it does become one when character idiom is involved and the adequate rendering of the character in connection with his or her discrete use of language play is not realized. This impossibility has an effect on the whole play: when language play is lost in translation, the drama as such changes as an instigator of witty dialogue between characters is dropped that contributes to their representation. Eventually, wordplay and its translation thus affect communication in drama; but this is for another essay.

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