Teacher Notes
Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński, "Piosenka"

Summary

1. Subject(s): Translation, English literature, Polish literature, linguistics
2. Suggested age group: 11+
3. Time Allotment: 1h+ - can be extended into a project – see extra discussion activities in student pack, and further reading / listening below

Implementation

Background context

Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński[1] was one of Poland's foremost "Columbus Generation" [2] poets, known mainly for wartime poetry and death during the Warsaw Uprising. "Piosenka" ("Song") is his early poem – written before WW2 broke out, when the poet was 17 years old. Links to history / WW2 can be made if class is able to work it out – but poem (and activities) can work independently of historical context.

Procedure for activities

1. Students work independently / in pairs to match words with their English counterparts. If there are Polish speakers in the class, monolingual and bi-lingual students could be paired for the exercise. Polish speakers can act as checkers / controllers for this one.

Extra question: see if your students' ideas about where languages come from can be explored. Possible answers can include: "neighboring" languages (Spanish and Portuguese), common "ancestor" languages (Polish and Russian), words "borrowed" from one language to another (from English into many others).

ANSWERS:

wędrujemy - we wander

malachitową - of malachite (see picture)
pomarańczy - oranges (given)
arkad - arcades (see picture)
sól - salt
noc - night
morze - sea (extra points for this one)
fontannami - fountains
perłowymi - of pearl
winogrona - wine grapes

2. Students work independently to figure out the age of the poet and write in the line (**ANSWER:** 17) and in pairs to brainstorm possible interests (**ANSWERS WILL VARY**). Extra question: for students with knowledge of 20th-century history, this will be a reasonable extension question to ask – otherwise, ignore and proceed.

3. Pre-teach or revise "genre" if needed. Ask students to think about songs they are familiar with, and songs their family / parents / friends know and listen to. Students can work alone at first to tick the rules they agree with, then discuss / complete / alter their rules in groups. **ANSWERS WILL VARY**, discuss and further explore "some parts repeat" (teach / revise "chorus" if needed), some words sound similar ("rhyme") etc.

4. If reading only, encourage students to find the words and explore the rules in the original before jumping to decipher the translation ideas. **This poem has been set to music and recorded** – see **"Resources" below for link to the song.**

5. Encourage students to use this time and space to find their own ideas / meanings about the poem. Don't insist on full sentences – these associations and key words will also become useful and relevant later. Emphasise that there are no right or wrong answers here.

6. Pre-teach or revise "syllable" if needed. This activity explores the rhyme and metre structure of the song. **ANSWER:** The lines are all 9 syllables long, and the rhymes are a-b-a-b throughout the poem.

7. With the whole class, go through the example. There may be different interpretations here, that's OK – the thing to stress is the colour reference ("malachite" – vibrant green) which you can primarily see. In pairs, students go through the translation ideas and complete the table.

8. Pre-teach / revise "symbol", "metaphor", "simile" if needed or appropriate. The activity can work well without this jargon. Emphasise that you are working with translation ideas here, not the original. Explore the more interesting symbols / metaphors, and ask students why they think something is literal / not literal.

9. This brainstorm is a revision of the work above, and a discussion of intentions / reasons for translation. You can start by asking whether students agree that **C** is "quite difficult" and "quite important" (elicit reasons). Maybe it needs to be moved somewhere else? Afterwards, ask students to complete the graph by themselves or working in pairs – by writing in the letter where they think it belongs. Encourage a few students / groups to present what they think and why. Ask: with different things being important / easy / difficult for different people, do you think there should be different translations of one poem? Why? What for?

9b. If a class is not ready for / enthusiastic about translating the poem at this point, these writing prompts will still work with the activities and choices above. You can ask the students to evaluate / explain the reason for writing in a certain way, e.g. "I wanted my writing to be like a song, and that's why my description of summer rhymes and has a chorus."

10. This can become as structured or free-flowing as the class is ready for. Activity 9 above should prepare students / groups for focusing on certain things when they translate. It's a good idea to have students write out the letters that are important for them on the top of the page they're working on, so you can see what angle they take on the translation (e.g. a group with C, G, and L will be aiming for a modern, meaning-driven translation that still tries to preserve the sensory imagery of the original). Emphasise that it's not necessary to start with line 1 and progress in a linear manner – students with a "song" focus may want to start with rhyme-finding first, for example!

Resources

Recording

"Piosenka" has been set to music by Grzegorz Turnau and recorded as "Znów wędrujemy".[3]

Additional poems

Here are some suggestions of other Polish poems that can be used for similar translation activities:

Ewa Lipska, "* (dotąd doszliśmy)"** / ["*** (this is where we got to)"] (1967)

dotąd doszliśmy. Tu się rozwiązały koniec z początkiem. Przekłady Homera na brzegu siedząc przeglądamy teraz. Nikt nie przypływa po nas. Puste oceany. Spokój gwałtowny. Może to juz sierpień. Może strach. Rozegrany przez nas umiejętnie. Jest mi tak jakby już było za późno. Może to sierpień. Ale drzew tu nie ma a sierpień zawsze dojrzewa na drzewach. Nikt nie przypływa. Homerycki żart i wiatr z kamieni nam wróży jak z kart. Nikt nie przypływa	[this is where we got to] [Here is where they untied themselves] [end and beginning] [Translations of Homer] [on the shore] [sitting] [we browse now] [Nobody is sailing for us] [Empty oceans] [Peace violent / sudden] [Maybe it's already August] [Maybe fear] [Played out by us skillfully] [It feels to me] [as if already] [it was too late] [Maybe it's August] [But there are no trees here] [and August always ripens on the trees] [Nobody is sailing in] [A Homeric joke] [and the wind] [from the stones] [tells us fortunes] [like from cards] [Nobody is sailing in]

Connections: travel, sea, summer, landscapes, descriptions of journeys
Ewa Lipska's poem has also been set to music by Grzegorz Turnau.[4]

Krystyna Krahelska, "Miłość" / ["Love"] (1930s/40s)

Słuchaj, słuchaj... Czy w wietrze nie słyszysz jak śpiewa Mój głos, w którym jest moja miłość i tęsknota Tak prosta i mocna jak wiosenne drzewa Jak sprężone gałęzie młodych wierzb w opłotkach Poprzez pola wiatr gęsty wiosną w serce chlusta Oddech w piersi tamuje i krwią tętni w skroniach Aż do bólu, radosne serce niosąc w dłoniach Chodzę z wiatrem z nieznanym imieniem na ustach	[Listen, listen] [If] [in the wind] [you don't hear] [how it sings] [My voice] [in which there is] [my love and longing] [So simple and strong] [like spring trees] [Like compressed / wound-up branches] [of young willows] [in hedges] [Through the fields] [wind] [thick] [with the spring] [in the heart] [gushes] [Breath in chest] [it stops] [and with the blood] [it pulsates in the temples] [Until it hurts] [a joyful heart] [carrying in my hands] [I walk with the wind] [with an unknown / unfamiliar name] [on my lips]

Connections: Columbus Generation, seasons, sensory imagery
Krystyna Krahelska's poem has been set to music by Aga Zaryan.[5]

Polish poems and recordings available online

http://polska-poezja.pl/krzysztof-kamil-baczynski – More of Baczynski's poetry in Polish and in recordings, freely available

http://polska-poezja.pl – Other Polish poems with actor-quality recordings (instantly translatable into English with Google Translate!)

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Resource pack prepared for the Stephen Spender Trust by Vic Kostrzewski © 2018

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Krzysztof_Kamil_Baczy%C5%84ski
[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Generation_of_Columbuses
[3] https://open.spotify.com/track/1H8jrEDm4heRUeMqIhHSIP?si=MbcpxObFQzCaW27X3ttAtQ
[4] https://open.spotify.com/track/50qdpy47gJTpspEaTVG4Bh?si=aGePmjKZTf-YM9WzNy6hDQ
[5] https://open.spotify.com/track/5mq5R7GKOSeaCgDYwdDShd?si=PAYxba3kQ-e4RaJJxBoy1w