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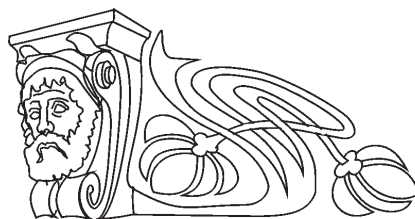
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Article

## Special features speech portrait of an autistic child in Mark Haddon's novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* translated into Russian



A. S. Bakanova

Moscow City University, 4, corp. 1 2nd Sel'skokhozyaistvennyi proezd, Moscow 129226, Russia

Anastasia S. Bakanova, [kanunnikovaas@mgpu.ru](mailto:kanunnikovaas@mgpu.ru), <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3425-6146>

**Abstract:** The article deals with the issue of studying the speech characteristics of a literary character, which is no doubt of significant interest. The speech portrait of a literary character is one of the key components in forming an image in a literary text. However, the speech of child characters, especially those with developmental disorders, has not received much attention. The source material for the study is the modern novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2003) by Mark Haddon and its translation into Russian made by A. Kukley (2003). The paper's main purpose is to enumerate, classify, and analyze the complex speech portrait of a child with an autism spectrum disorder and to examine the methods used for translating these characteristics. The study draws upon the classification that focuses on the impairments in socialization, communication, and imagination, which are central to autism research. The author's methodology, based on the use of the continuous sampling method, classification method, comparative analysis method, and quantitative method, allowed to reach some conclusions and observations. The author claims that the majority of the speech characteristics typical of a teenager with autism are preserved in the translated text. According to the author, the translator carefully conveys these characteristics into another language, sometimes making changes considering the context, nuances of a language structure, and cultural differences, which requires certain adaptations in order to render meaning and emotions more precisely.

**Keywords:** translation, speech characteristic, child character, autistic child, novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*

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Научная статья

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**Особенности отображения речевого портрета ребенка-аутиста  
в переводе на русский язык романа Марка Хэддона «Загадочное ночное убийство собаки»**

A. С. Баканова

Московский городской педагогический университет, Россия, 129226, г. Москва, 2-й Сельскохозяйственный пр-д, д. 4, корп. 1

Баканова Анастасия Сергеевна, старший преподаватель кафедры англистики и межкультурной коммуникации Института иностранных языков, [kanunnikovaas@mgpu.ru](mailto:kanunnikovaas@mgpu.ru), <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3425-6146>

**Аннотация.** Представленная статья затрагивает проблему изучения речевой характеристики в целом, в особенности характеристики персонажа литературного произведения, что вызывает в последнее время большой интерес. Речевой портрет литературного героя является одним из ключевых компонентов формирования образа в художественном тексте. Однако изучению речи персонажа-ребенка, тем более с особенностями развития, уделялось не так много внимания. Источником материала исследования послужил современный англоязычный роман Марка Хэддона (Mark Haddon) «The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time» (2003) и его перевод на русский язык, выполненный А. Куклей («Загадочное ночное убийство собаки», 2003). Основная цель работы связана с перечислением, классификацией и анализом особенностей сложного речевого портрета ребенка, у которого наблюдается расстройство аутистического спектра, а также анализом способов перевода этих особенностей. Исследование опирается на классификацию, согласно которой основу для исследований в области аутизма составляют нарушения социализации, коммуникации и воображения. Избранная автором методология, которая базируется на применении метода сплошной выборки, метода классификации, метода сопоставительного анализа, количественного метода, позволила прийти к ряду выводов и наблюдений. Так, автор считает, что большинство речевых особенностей, присущих подростку с аутизмом, сохраняются в тексте перевода. Переводчик, по мнению автора, внимательно передает эти особенности на другой язык, иногда внося изменения с учетом контекста, нюансов языковой структуры и культурных особенностей, что требует определенных адаптаций для более точной передачи смысла и эмоций.

**Ключевые слова:** перевод, речевая характеристика, персонаж-ребенок, ребенок-аутист, роман, «Загадочное ночное убийство собаки»



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The central concept of translation theory is undoubtedly the notion of “translation” itself which is regarded as a complex and intricate form of human activity and involves more than merely converting a text from one language to another. It is defined as “a process aimed at transmitting the communicative effect of the primary text, partially modified by differences between two languages, two cultures, and two communicative situations” [1, p. 75].

Translating a literary text is considered a specific form of translation. Landers defines literary translation in terms of uniqueness and creativity, describing it as “the most demanding type of translation” [2, p. 7]. This process involves a creative transformation of the original text using all necessary expressive means of the target language. Literary texts are characterized by high emotional and aesthetic value. Therefore, when translating them, it is crucial to take into account distinctive elements such as structure, purpose, and the national, cultural, and historical context [3]. As a result, the difficulties which emerge during the translation of literary texts are predominantly determined by the unique nature of a literary text itself.

Moreover, the challenges of translating a literary text are also connected to the fact that “its linguistic components cannot be directly substituted with equivalent components from the target language due to the inherent structural and functional nature of language signs” [4, p. 13]. The translator, in turn, is supposed not only to comprehend the meaning of an original text, but to effectively recreate it in a different language.

A genuine literary work of art is symbolic, representing a real world within its imaginative realm. This is precisely why the concept of “image” is central when studying literature in general and an individual masterpiece in particular. A character's image is a combination of all the elements comprising their appearance, actions, speech, which are depicted through a specific set of composition techniques, as well as linguistic means.

The speech portrait of a literary character is one of the key parameters of their image indicating their personality, origin, social status, and their attitude towards the events described. Some features of characters' speech can be conveyed through

linguistic means that violate the accepted language norms. Such systematic deviations are related to the author's aim to reflect the peculiarities of characters' speech, including pronunciation, accents, errors, age-related traits, and so on [5, p. 181]. That is why it can be challenging to present the speech characteristics thoroughly in translation [6, p. 331].

The text of the novel “The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time” written by Mark Haddon (2003) [7] and its translation (2003) [8] were taken as a material for the study. We employ the continuous sampling method to find the examples of speech characteristics in the original text; the method of comparative analysis was applied to detect similarities and differences between the original text and its translated version; the method employed to distribute our examples according to the previously described factors is classification. For some cases, at lexical level specifically, we managed to use the quantitative method.

The main character of the novel is a fifteen-year-old teenager Christopher Boone. Despite the fact that autism is never named as such in the narrative and that Haddon did no specific research into the condition, many believe that there are grounds to suggest that Christopher suffers from this disorder, as it is manifested through specific behavioral traits of the boy's character, including speech. Thus, the author managed to convey reality through the perspective of a person with limited health capabilities. Therefore, the speech portrait of this character plays a crucial role in unveiling his personality and defines many essential text characteristics.

Christopher demonstrates genuine talent in science and possesses an academic mindset. He likes books about space and math because they are compelled by logic which he appreciates. Christopher also likes routine; he has individual aversions or adherence to food, colors, and computer games. Being literal-minded, the boy cannot tell lies, which often gives him grief, and also has problems with metaphors. Thus, like many autistic individuals, Christopher finds social connection with others difficult. He feels repeatedly distressed by his inability to read social and physical signs. Moreover, he is unable to reconcile the inconsistency between people's words and actions.



There is much that has been documented in medical, social science, and educational texts about autism. The condition is described as “a neurodevelopmental disorder marked by challenges in social interaction and communication skills, along with repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behaviors, activities, and interests” [9, p. 24]. One of the significant obstacles in research is that the presentation of communication impairments is variable in range and severity. Some children with autism experience echolalia. They may repeat entire phrases or sentences without connecting them to any meaningful context. In other cases, an autistic child may be silent, aloof (not seeking comfort from parents even when distressed), and engaged in repetitive activities like arranging toys or spinning coins for extended periods. Another one can talk continuously about their own special interest, be indiscriminately over-friendly, and unable to tell the difference between a joke and a lie. In general, according to research, “the pragmatic aspect, which involves using speech effectively in communication, is particularly challenging for children with autism” [10, p. 58].

We rely on the classification by F. Happe, who identifies “five impairments of reciprocal social interaction, six impairments of verbal and nonverbal communication and imagination, as well as five factors indicating a limited range of activities and interests” [10, p. 35]. The classification is based on the Lorna Wing triad of impairments in autism, which focuses on three areas: “social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication and imagination, a highly limited repertoire of activities and interests” [10, p. 35].

Amongst these factors we can see: lack of understanding of the necessity of personal space, lack of participating in simple social play or games, lack of interest in establishing friendships, avoidance of eye contact or touch, absence of facial expression, limited range of interests, and so on.

Thus, **the purpose of the paper** is to enumerate, classify, and decompose the peculiarities of a speech portrait of an autistic child and analyze the ways and methods of their translation.

The above-mentioned list is ranked in order of age and manifestation of impairments (early age characteristics or those with the most pronounced impairments are listed first) [10, p. 35–37]. As we are dealing with a 15-year-old teenager, some disorders are not being observed. These include: an evident unawareness of the existence of other people and their feelings (for example, treating a person as an

object); absence of some forms of communication such as babbling, gesturing; severe speech disorders affecting speech volume, pitch, stress patterns, rate, rhythm, and intonation.

Based on the classification mentioned above, we could enumerate the problematic areas for the character. Here it may just be noted that some of them remain undetected by the child himself, as we can see with **the impairments of social interaction (1)**. As these features are not reflected in the character's speech, we do not observe them in detail. This group includes:

A. Clear lack of awareness of personal space, or intolerance of intrusions into their own space.

B. Absence or disruption of engagement with partners, preferring solitary play.

C. Evident difficulty in making and maintaining peer friendships.

At the level of **verbal and nonverbal communication and imaginative activity (2)** we witness:

**A. Difficulty establishing and maintaining eye contact.**

The feature is clearly seen in the story. What is more important, the boy is aware of it and articulates it (being a narrator) himself:

*I did not look at his face. I do not like looking at people's faces, especially if they are strangers* [7, p. 47] – *Я не смотрел ему в лицо. Я не люблю смотреть людям в лицо, особенно если я их не знаю* [8, p. 48].

In the text of translation, the sentence with a subordinate clause draws our attention. The translator employs repetition of a personal pronoun “I”, as well as repetition of simple parallel constructions («я не смотрел», «я не люблю смотреть», «я их не знаю») to preserve the speech characteristics of a teenager.

**B. The absence of imagination** can be manifested in quite diverse ways, for instance, as lack of interest in stories about fictional events. Christopher himself claims the following:

*This is another reason why I don't like proper novels, because they are lies about things which didn't happen <...>* [7, p. 25] – *И это еще одна причина, почему я не люблю вымышленных романов. Они рассказывают о вещах, которых никогда не происходило, <...>* [8, p. 27].

In this example the word “proper” is not intended to suggest appropriateness or respectability. Instead, it is used to illustrate a contrast that Christopher perceives between a “false” novel (a mystery novel) and a “true” novel (a work of literature). Thus, in the translated text a more suitable for the Russian language word («вымышленный») is used.



Moreover, there is an example of generalization ("lies" – «рассказывать») to demonstrate that the boy lacks imagination, which is clearly depicted in the original text.

Christopher tends to take things literally and fails to understand figures of speech or metaphors. However, there are some examples of simile and hyperbole in his speech, which are represented in translation:

*I think prime numbers are like life* [7, p. 15] – Я думаю, что простые числа похожи на жизнь [8, p. 18].

<...> *there will be no darkness, just the blazing light of billions and billions of stars, <...>* [7, p. 13] – <...>, там уже не будет темноты, а только пламенеющий свет миллиардов и миллиардов звезд, <...> [8, p. 16].

In addition, the autistic child might not grasp hints and understatement. This feature is observed in both texts:

*And she said, "Now I need you to be quiet for a while." And I said, "How long do you want me to be quiet for?"* [7, p. 253] – Она ответила: – Помолчи немного. Я спросил: – Сколько времени я должен молчать? [8, p. 266].

The translator uses a shift in modality and roles ("do you want me" – «я должен») to demonstrate that the boy asks his mother to specify her request. The translator does this to align with the norms of spoken language in Russian. However, this does not interfere with the main communicative intent.

Christopher has difficulties understanding jokes as well:

*I cannot tell jokes because I do not understand them* [7, p. 10] – Я не могу рассказывать шутки, потому что я их не понимаю [8, p. 13].

In this context the translator's choice («не могу» instead of «не умею») reflects the idea that Christopher perceives his inability to tell jokes as a fundamental aspect of his nature rather than a skill that he has not yet developed.

**C. Ritualized patterns of verbal behavior**, for instance, repetitive questioning about a particular topic, are expressed at both lexical and syntactical levels, which can be attributed to a disruption in the form and content of speech.

*And I asked Mother if I could do my maths A level the next day. And she said, "I'm sorry, Christopher." And I said, "Can I do my maths A level?"* [7, p. 254] – И спросил мать, можно ли мне завтра сдать экзамен на уровень А. А она сказала: – Прости, Кристофер. Я спросил: – Мне можно будет сдать экзамен на уровень А? [8, p. 268].

The decision of the translator to use the verb «можно» instead of «я могу» can be explained by the fact that Christopher is asking permission from his mother. Additionally, the translator uses repetition of a construction with «можно мне» as the repetition is also present in the original text.

In the following example the translator, understanding the significance of repetition in the child's speech, does not resort to other means of conveying semantics or does not use synonyms, words with hyper-hyponymic relations, etc.:

<...> *and there was a man standing in front of the window and there was a man behind the window, <...>* [7, p. 188] – И еще там был мужчина, который стоял перед окошком, и мужчина, который сидел за окошком, <...> [8, p. 195].

Stylistic devices like **anaphora**, **polysyndeton**, and **parallelism** can be considered forms of repetition. As seen in the example below, they are not only retained in the translation, but also appear as compensatory mechanisms in the translated text:

*Then he lifted me up and made me sit on the side of the bed. He took my jumper and my shirt off and put them on the bed. Then he made me stand up and walk through to the bathroom. And I didn't scream. And I didn't fight. And I didn't hit him* [7, p. 144] – И он усадил меня на край кровати, снял с меня свитер и рубашку, поднял на ноги и повел в ванную. И я не кричал. Я не сопротивлялся. Я его не ударил [8, p. 147].

**D. The inability to initiate or sustain a conversation with others** is also evident in the boy's speech:

*For example, when there is a new member of staff at school I do not talk to them for weeks and weeks. I just watch them until I know that they are safe* [7, p. 46] – Например, когда в нашей школе появляется новый ученик, я не разговариваю с ним несколько недель. Я просто смотрю на него, пока не убеждаюсь, что он безопасен [8, p. 46].

The repetition ("weeks and weeks") in the original text might be a deliberate choice to emphasize the extended period it takes the boy to get used to new people. However, the translator decides not to apply repetition and uses «несколько недель» to represent the way Christopher expresses himself and emphasize the duration. In addition, the verb "watch" in the boy's speech might be intentional to maintain the childlike and less formal tone of the original. In this context the word «смотрю» in the translated text might be considered a stylistic choice rather than an error.





**Highly restricted, fixated interests and activities (3)** are also manifested in the character's speech.

**A. Stereotyped or repetitive movements** are expressed using polysyndeton, anaphora, and different types of repetition and mostly preserved in translation:

*And my chest began hurting again and I folded my arms and I rocked backward and forward and groaned* [7, p. 255] – *И тогда у меня снова начала болеть грудь, я сплел руки и стал раскачиваться взад-вперед и стенать* [8, p. 269].

The translator's choice to use the verb «стенать» in this example is explicable due to its strong emotional connotation. Christopher produces the sound and does the repetitive movements described when an overwhelming amount of external information enters his mind.

**B. Strong attachment to specific aspects of objects**, in our case, is evident in the form of some detailed descriptions. The teenager is highly attentive to details. This peculiar feature is represented by multiple repetition of the verb “notice” (20 examples in the original text). In the text of translation we see the essential seme expressed by contextual substitutions: «заметил», «увидел», «обратил внимание»:

*And this is like me, too, because if I get really interested in something, <...> I don't notice anything else* [7, p. 92] – *И это тоже как у меня, потому что если я действительно чем-то заинтересован, <...> то больше я ничего не замечаю* [8, p. 97].

The multitude of details in the child's speech demands specific syntactic constructions:

*Mrs. Alexander was wearing jeans and training shoes, <...> And there was mud on the jeans. And the trainers were New Balance trainers. And the laces were red* [7, p. 50] – *На миссис Александер были джинсы и кроссовки, <...> Джинсы – с пятном, а кроссовки – фирмы New Balance, с красными шнурками* [8, p. 52].

In the original text the author uses polysyndeton, while in the translated text we observe elliptical (incomplete) sentences with missing predicate within parallel structures, which is typical of spoken language.

**C. Extreme distress at small changes in the surrounding world.** This implies that being in a new place is quite exhausting for Christopher since he observes all the alterations.

*That is why I don't like new places. If I am in a place I know, <...> I have seen almost everything in it beforehand and all I have to do is to look at the things that have changed or moved* [7, p. 174] – *Вот*

*почему я не люблю новые места. Если я нахожусь в каком-то месте, где я бывал раньше, <...> я знаю, что там я все видел. И тогда я просто замечаю, если что-то изменилось или передвинулось* [8, p. 178].

Children with autism may struggle to develop skills that enable them to actively engage with the surrounding world due to the forced pathological development of defense mechanisms. That is why they concentrate on ensuring stability and predictability in their environment [11]. In the translated text, «я знаю, что там я все видел» suggests that Christopher's knowledge of familiar places serves as a defense mechanism. Being aware of his surroundings, he gains a sense of control and can identify and react to any changes, thereby reducing the anxiety associated with unpredictability.

**D. Excessively inflexible in behavior.** Christopher provides a list of rules which he is very strict about. He calls them “behavioural problems”, for example:

*Not eating food if different sorts of food are touching each other* [7, p. 59] – *Я отказываюсь есть, когда разные виды еды соприкасаются друг с другом* [8, p. 62].

It appears that the verb «отказываться» in the translated text emphasizes that Christopher is a child in a subordinate position, making it clear that he is resisting or rejecting his parents' idea of eating certain foods. This introduces modality into the child's speech.

**E. Limited interests and preoccupation with one specific object** can also be observed in the child's own narration. Christopher is scrupulous and meticulous. He tends to record all the details in his notebook:

*And there were 31 more things in this list of things I noticed <...>* [7, p. 176] – *В этом списке есть еще 30 вещей, которые я заметил. <...>* [8, p. 181].

As he is interested in mathematics and calculations, this is reflected in his speech, which, in turn, requires some adaptation to the system established in the translation culture (terminology, spelling norms, etc.):

*I doubled 2's in my head because it made me feel calmer. I got to 33554432, which is 2<sup>25</sup>, which was not very much because I've got to 2<sup>45</sup> before, <...>* [7, p. 192] – *Я мысленно возводил в квадрат число 2, потому что это меня успокаивает. Я дошел до 33 554 423, то есть до 2 в 35-й степени, но это не очень большое число, потому что перед этим я уже один раз возвел 2 в 45-ю степень, <...>* [8, p. 152].



Additionally, the numbers are retained as numbers in the translated text, which the translator carefully noted and preserved.

Thus, the analysis of the novel reveals the fact that Christopher himself points out certain speech characteristics of a teenager with autism in the narrator's speech, speaking from his own perspective. Other features become evident in dialogues and cases of his interaction with people. The translator made a careful effort to convey these speech characteristics with the help of the Russian language means, making changes considering the context, nuances of linguistic structure, and cultural peculiarities, which could require adaptations for the best representation of meaning and emotions. It is worth emphasizing that the linguistic devices such as polysyndeton, anaphora, and repetitions are employed by the translator even in those places where they are absent in the original text. While many transformations could have been applied to make the child's speech sound more lively, the translator recognized that these stylistic devices are characteristic of the boy's speech and preserved this slight unnaturalness.

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