

## On Translating Irrealia in Speculative Fiction

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### Abstract

The genre of speculative fiction has long been gaining popularity among both readers and authors. With the increasing demand and supply of, particularly from the perspective of small languages, published foreign language texts in the genre, the frequency of translation of such texts has been increasing as well. While the genre is broad and includes multiple subgenres, most notably science fiction, fantasy, and supernatural horror, there is connective tissue common to all of them which is also significant for translation – *irrealia*. This article explores irrealia as a defining feature of the speculative fiction genre. It discusses the nature of irrealia and argues they do not represent a homogeneous body, but rather there is a distinction to be made between different types of irrealia, with each presenting translators with unique challenges on top of those common to all irrealia. The article also delves into the implications the presence of irrealia has in regards to the text as a whole, and into the intertextual potential seemingly inherent to irrealia, while illustrating both on examples drawn primarily from the short story *The Private Life of Genghis Khan* by Douglas Adams.

### 1. Introduction

Despite often being presented as an umbrella category, translation of literary texts is hardly a homogeneous type of activity. Just as literary texts themselves vary infinitely, so does, necessarily, the activity of a translator working with such texts. However, while every literary text requires a translatorial approach fitted specifically to it, certain generalizations can be made – selection of translator's strategy is based on the specifics of the text being translated; thus, for a literary translation, some aspects of this strategy are informed by the general category of literariness – these aspects being the few common throughout the entire spectrum of literary translation – while others are more fragmentary, but still shared among texts with same or similar qualities. The focus here will be on those texts that are now most commonly labelled speculative fiction – text type with a prominent and still

growing share among the literary texts worldwide, notably in the Anglophone context, and thus also among literary translation, particularly from the English language. The exact boundaries of speculative fiction are elusive, possibly undefinable; within the scope of this paper, we will base our understanding of these texts on a comparative interpretation of two theories – sociology-based understanding of what comprises speculative fiction of Slovak SF theoretician Ondrej Herec, and the theoretical concept of *irrealia* as building blocks of SF “worlds” by Mika Loponen. Additionally, it should be noted that, while this is of no heightened importance within the context of this paper, “literary text” is understood here much more broadly than usual, including all lingual communication that has a relevant aesthetic function and can be translated, including film, video games and board games, as transmediality is an increasingly important factor for translation of speculative fiction. This polysystem theory-based understanding of a “literary text” as a product – “any performed (or performable) set of signs, i.e., including a given ‘behaviour’” – of a literary system that internalises all factors involved with literature as a socio-cultural activity (Even-Zohar 1997, 43) allows for all of these (and other) text types to be seen as representing works of speculative fiction within the literary system and can thus not only enter genre-bound intertextual relations, but even comprise a single narrative whole spread across multiple texts with different modes of communication. The aim of the presented paper is to identify the relations between the individual notions of this interdisciplinary framework and expound the implications of these relations for the work of translators dealing with speculative fiction while drawing examples primarily from the short story *The Private Life of Genghis Khan* by Douglas Adams (2021), as well as from other texts.

## 2. On speculative fiction

Speculative fiction as an umbrella category provides ample space for thematic, ideational and stylistic diversity. It is commonly understood (among others also by the theoreticians core to this study – cf. Herec 2008, 40; Loponen 2019, 1) to include three general subcategories – science fiction, fantasy and (supernatural) horror. At the same time, each of these is nearly impossible to define in itself, as the thresholds of their individual subgenres are negotiable and many works of speculative fiction include elements of two or even all three of these umbrella genres, regardless of their understanding<sup>1</sup> – this is well summarised by Damon Knight, who stated that science fiction “means what we point to when we say it” (1956, 1). Despite this, readers are able to discern works of speculative fiction (most of the time) from non-SF texts naturally. This might be due to the simple fact that SF “requires a greater

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<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, numerous attempts at defining these genres have been made, e.g., Suvin 1979, Prucher 2007, etc.

degree of [reader] cooperation in creation of new worlds”, as Ondrej Herec (2008, 13) states. Such participation – adding elements from the reader’s cognition – would not be possible on a necessary scale were the fictional world itself governed by the same rules as the reader’s – real – world, or rather, limiting the mechanisms of the fictional world to those of real world would be exceedingly limiting for such participation. Additionally, the author of SF texts essentially always explicitly breaks away from real-world rules, laying the foundations for such participation, inviting the reader to re-create the world by themselves. This quality has been previously observed in some detail within the context of fantasy literature by Martin Djovčoš and Zuzana Kraviarová (2010), who established the “category of fiction” along the lines matching Herec’s ideas regarding the reader’s participation on creation of message and defined it as “consisting of two components: (1) extralingual (ontology, “realia” of the third culture), and (2) lingual (archaicity of language, functional names, stylization of direct speech, unconventional use of capitalization, labels based on sound symbolism)” (ibid., 113). While this category was intended only for one of the genres of SF, its basic notions contained within point (1) are essentially applicable for all SF texts.<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this paper, we are therefore using the foundation laid by Djovčoš and Kraviarová in their treatise: the general quality of diverging from the constitutive rules of the real world within the text’s fictional world common for all SF will herein be labelled *speculativeness* of the text in order to distinguish it from the original narrower category of fiction.

By definition, *speculativeness* of expression as delimited here is easily detectable in the text – cues for readers to suspend their disbelief tend to take form of elements within the syuzhet level of the text. The author expresses the divergence from the real world by informing the reader about the specific divergent element. Djovčoš and Kraviarová (2010) labelled these elements as “‘realia’ of the third culture”, suggesting with quotation marks that these are not realia in the traditional sense, or that these elements are not necessarily limited to the scope of realia. For such elements, the term *irrealia*, introduced by Mika Loponen (2009), has achieved popularity among the younger generation of scholars and students at the CPU in Nitra (the term has been translated into Slovak as “pseudoreálie” – pseudorealia, due to morphological particularities of the Slovak language. An argument for such “rebranding” in English for the purposes of these being the main markers of *speculativeness* can be raised after pointing out the particularities of one category of *irrealia* later on). Loponen understands *irrealia* as “the cultural anchors of the fictional culture, creating implicit and explicit references that can define the fictional

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<sup>2</sup> It could also be argued that the category as defined by the authors is not applicable across the entire spectrum of fantasy literature, as multiple of its subgenres – most notably urban fantasy – do not show the lingual qualities described therein.

culture on multiple simultaneous levels”, thus contrasting them with realia, i.e., “objects and concepts that exist as ‘culture bound’—i.e., whose denotative or connotative significance is tied to their source culture” (Loponen 2009, 166-7). Loponen himself immediately points out that the scope of irrealia is not limited to fictional counterparts of what would be considered realia in real world, but includes also breaking points from the real world or other fictional worlds, which can even be as simple as the existence of two moons for the planet where the story takes place. Thus, he is essentially coining the term irrealis for the primary purpose of being an overt marker of what we are calling here speculativeness of a text.

The issue of what constitutes an irrealis can be approached also from a different angle. Within the scope of Slovak translation studies, even younger students are acquainted with Vilikovský’s *specifics* model of foreign phenomena present in the source text (cf. Vilikovský 1984, 130). Here, realia represent only a part of a single category, other specifics are not realia sensu stricto, yet all of these are culture- or ontology-dependent. Any of Vilikovský’s specifics can thus have an “irreal” counterpart, which can serve as a signal that speculativeness of expression is a stylistic element of the text for the reader.

This understanding of SF as defined by breaking away from the constitutional rules of the actual world not only helps us easily recognise which texts belong to this category, but also implicitly sets a clear-cut boundary between SF and non-SF literary texts: the answer to the question “how much unattested workings of physics/technology/supernatural elements must there be in a text for it to be considered SF?” here has a clear and indisputable answer – as long as there is even a single such element, the text shows presence of speculativeness, invites the reader to participate, and is thus a work of speculative fiction. After all, if one element explicitly sets the fictional world apart from the real world as irreal, then who is to say other such elements are not just waiting to be revealed? This stance seems uncontroversial, as scholars have previously reached the same conclusion regardless of their starting point: Loponen, for example, states that “if a text contains one or more irrealis items, in most cases it belongs to the arts of the fantastic, and if it does not, it belongs to non-fantastic genres” (Loponen 2019, 16-17), allowing for exceptions, though a closer reading of his thesis reveals this space is reserved for highly specific cases of meta-narrative utilization of irrealia within non-SF texts. While this may seem a little extreme a conclusion, it is hard to dispute: a simple example comes from Douglas Adams’ (2021) short story *The Private Life of Genghis Khan*. At first and in fact for most of it, the story appears to be regular piece of fiction following a fictitious day in Genghis Khan’s life with a heavy focus on comedy. While the story departs from reality in its humorous, even absurd depiction of the warlord and his son, Ogdai, it does not otherwise differentiate itself from the regular, or real, world. This changes towards the end of the story, when a spaceship appears and

subsequently an alien called *Wowbagger, the Infinitely Prolonged*, exits the landed craft with the singular purpose of insulting Genghis Khan. All elements pertaining to Wowbagger certainly constitute clear breaking points between the real world and the speculativeness of the short story's world, or irrealia. They thus make it impossible to perceive the text as anything other than speculative fiction. The introduction of Wowbagger into the story pushes it even more into SF once we realise that the character is first introduced along with his motivations for insulting the Khan (and other people) in what some may regard as Douglas Adams' (2002) magnum opus, the *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, an expansive science fiction epic.

Thus, the speculativeness of the text is clearly coupled with another issue, namely that of intertextuality. This is another specific aspect of SF (and, as such, of translating SF) and, at the same time, closely related to the notion of participating in creation of the message. Intertextuality<sup>3</sup> might, in extreme cases, such as in our example, directly connect two or more texts by pointing out that they share the same fictional world – notably, such links are usually formed using particular lexical items that match the understanding of irrealia. However, even if this is not the case, one can observe a kind of “soft” allusional intertextuality if the texts share one or more narrative devices in abstract, due to the unavoidable fact that if reader is to participate in forming the message, they will do so while employing their experiential complex (cf. Miko 1970), formed by previous personal encounters with SF, as well as socially formed understanding of general traits of such devices by being subject to e.g., pop-culture references. Genre intertextuality as such is therefore possibly more prominent within SF, as the irrealia – elements making it such – which stand out from the reminder of the text and invite readers to employ their experiential complexes in their comprehension more readily, are the same that activate the intertextual connections in the text.

If we examine the example of an SF text we have used previously in terms of the outlined understanding of intertextuality, *Wowbagger* serves as a hard link connecting the two discussed texts – *The Private Life of Genghis Khan*, and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* – simply by being present in both and clearly being the same character. One could even argue the second, soft allusional intertextuality is also present in the short story – the prose and the absurd style of humour utilised in the short story are perfectly in line with *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. It is, however, hard to argue that this is an intertextual link between the two texts, as it is, in a broader look at the author's works, simply an expression of Adams' idiolect.

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<sup>3</sup> Understood here not only in the original intentions of Julia Kristeva (1980) as a transposition of semiotic systems, but also as a system of allusions and influences – in this case genre-bound – originally a misinterpretation of the term, but one used so frequently that it attained a certain canonicity (cf. Kaźmierczak 2019)

More troublesome than the implications of the presence of irrealia for the speculativeness of the text, however, is the unavoidable subsequent implication of what speculativeness means for the rest of the text, namely other realia in it. Once the speculativeness of expression has been established (or, in terms of communication process, the readers have suspended their disbelief and started being aware of the fluidity of the fictional world's constitutive rules), the perception of all other narrative elements of the text shifts. Though the reader still bases their expectations of how things are in the fictional world on their experiential complex, they are now aware that a variable, shifting semantic space exists where the meaning of the words used may differ from what they would normally expect. For most vocabulary, this is not an issue – had the author used words with meanings different than their typical denotative meanings in language in general, it would severely hamper comprehension of their work. With those lexical elements that carry culture-specific information, a shift in semantic content is not only unsurprising, but sometimes even expected. Textbook examples of irrealia, such as those taken from the *Lord of the Rings* or other high fantasy (e.g., elves, orcs, dragons, etc.), are transparent in that they belong to a fictional world with fictional cultures. Works of so-called portal fantasy (Mendelsohn 2008, 1), such as the *Harry Potter* series, where two worlds – one modelled after the real world, the other transparently fictional – also do not cause much trouble in their perception: while the sameness of realia from the former of the two fictional worlds and the real world realia is disputable, in these works, authors focus on the latter fictional world and use the former as a narrative device that helps the readers compare it with the real world. Any differences in the semantic content of realia in the text corresponding denotatively with actual realia will thus be either explicitly pointed out to the readers, or irrelevant in the reader comprehension of the text.

Yet, there is a slew of subgenres of all three SF umbrella genres where the situation is not that simple. Even many more or less traditional works of science fiction model their fictional worlds on the real world, but possibly diverge from it significantly, for example in case of time travel stories. Urban fantasy (Ekman 2016) intentionally merges reality and fiction seamlessly and often with no clear boundaries – real places in the USA as well as mythological realia from around the world attain new dimensions within Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*. All the "-punk" subgenres of SF tend to change not only the laws of nature within their scope, but also the social norms and even history of the world that is frequently heavily rooted in reality. For example, the modern *Deus Ex* computer games (subtitled *Human Revolution* and *Mankind Divided*) explore a near future world asking how would modern society change and develop if mechanical augmentations vastly enhancing the physical and mental capabilities of the human body were invented and became commonplace. While due to these inventions the presented world is vastly different from our own, it shares the same history – differences only start to

slowly emerge in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, and even the fictional world's temporal present is a sort of reflection of the real world. For instance, *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* heavily features the city Detroit. In both the game's world and the real world, Detroit's modern history is closely entwined with the automotive industry, and in both worlds the industry's presence in the city wanes over the course of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Similar divergence can be observed even in supernatural horror, even though its presence is perhaps not desirable in this genre due to the focus on emotional effect – as Sandy Petersen (2019) notes when explaining that the familiarity and naturalness of setting is more favourable for achieving emotional response in receivers, paraphrasing the classic author of the genre, M. R. James. To provide another example from an expanded understanding of what constitutes a literary text: within the extended Cthulhu mythos, namely within the board games published by Fantasy Flight, Plato's dialogue *Critias* is among the examples of irrealia modelled after real-world realia, as within the fictional world of the text, Atlantis is a real place and Plato's text is not allegorical (the "reality" of Atlantis within the text-world of the Cthulhu mythos can be attested as early as in Lovecraft's *Strange High House in the Mist* (1926)). Of specific note here are those texts that refuse to be labelled by traditional genre categories, often therefore nestled under "weird fiction" or "new weird" (Miéville 2009), depending on their creation date. In these, often great percentages of ir/realia contained are left for the reader's interpretation (or imagination) – China Miéville's short story *Three Moments of an Explosion* mentions multiple real corporations and organizations in its few dozen lines, but the reader is acutely aware that these fictional counterparts of what they know are not the same: the defence industry company Raytheon incorporates advertising in the explosions of its rockets and Make-a-Wish allows children to carry out large scale demolitions, among others. New weird is an extreme example, a category of texts where reader is often expected to question everything he would normally presuppose in comprehending the message, but this can be observed across SF as a supergenre in general. Here, the argument for the label pseudorealism we have earlier promised to make can be presented: the proposed understanding of the notion is different from the original notion of irrealia, i.e. realia of the third cultures that have no real-world counterparts. For those irrealia used as examples in the previous two paragraphs, the name irrealia does not seem fitting, as these are not entirely unreal. As lexical items, they stand in a particular semantic relation to the homonyms denoting actual realia, which, while particularly hard to define generally due to its high contextual dependence and variability, appears to remind of a pseudo-relation (cf. Cruse 1986). As such, a possible distinction could be made between "pure" irrealia and pseudorealism, even though these behave essentially in the same way in reader perception (while it might seem that the unreal nature of irrealia with real-world counterparts would be harder to perceive for the reader, it appears to not be the case, since readers tend to subconsciously understand

the influence of speculativeness here already on the basis of their choice to read SF).

In *The Private Life of Genghis Khan*, the obvious point of departure is the appearance of a spaceship. With its arrival, we must also arrive at the conclusion that we should not take any information other than directly given in the text as granted. For example, no preexisting knowledge of Genghis Khan should be taken as definitive, as it can be subverted, altered or outright denied at any point. In this short story, the discrepancies between the fictitious Genghis Khan and the real one are rather minor. For example, one can safely assume that unlike the short story's Genghis Khan, the real one did not answer letters on Fridays with his secretary, get asked to do sponsored massacres for charity, nor did he invade Europe out of rage for being insulted by an alien. As absurd as these suggestions are, they generally do not contradict real history other than in certain details (although the depiction of Genghis Khan on display here is widely different from just about any other popular depiction). The changes, however, could have easily been much larger. If Douglas Adams had written e.g., a sequel short story or expanded on his Genghis Khan in other texts, he could have altered the character to the point where it would be in conflict with our reality. Adams' version of the character could have been intolerant of various religious groups, he could have successfully conquered all of Europe, etc. Thus, any assumptions made based on knowledge of real world may ultimately prove misleading or even contradictory once placed in a larger context.

### **3. On translation of realia and irrealia in SF**

Up until this point, the discussion has dealt primarily with the shift in perception of realia and irrealia in SF, and tangentially with the irrealia's capacity for forming intertextual relations. With the general facts established, it is now possible to address the specifics of translator's activity regarding realia and irrealia when dealing with texts marked by speculativeness.

Before we discuss translating of irrealia per se, it might be useful to note that the translator should, first and foremost, make sure they comprehend the fabula of the text. While this might seem obvious, as this is essential in translating any literary text, the speculativeness present in SF texts often complicates the matter and, in some cases, emphasises the need for the translator to have a working knowledge of common tropes present in the genre. Let us draw upon an example from our pedagogical practice. In the previously mentioned short story *Three Moments of an Explosion*, couple of characters take a "tachyon-bugged MDMA" pill, which "takes you out of time" in order to explore a warehouse building suspended in time mid-demolition. An experienced reader of SF texts will know the presented world does not need to adhere to actual workings of the real world, and will also likely be aware that tachyons are often used in science fiction texts in



connection with time travel and general manipulation of time<sup>4</sup>. With this knowledge and further context, such reader will likely understand that the pill quite literally stops time around those who take it. On the other hand, when students with little or no prior experience with SF texts are asked to interpret this passage, they frequently entirely ignore the tachyons, instead focusing on the drug part, i.e., the MDMA. They then attempt to shape their interpretation in accordance with their understanding of the workings of the real world – they tend to interpret parts or the entire passage metaphorically. The resulting interpretations more often than not make little sense and cannot stand up to any level of scrutiny.

Following the established facts about the unreal nature of what would be “regular” realia in non-SF texts, it can be claimed that for readers to be able to participate in creating the meaning of the message along the intentions of Herec’s understanding of SF, a substantial degree of semantic ambiguity is assumed, especially in certain subgenres of SF. Within the intentions of the Nitra school of translation, the speculativeness of SF texts is to be transferred unchanged into the target, since it represents an essential quality of expression and is thus invariant (cf. Popovič 1975). In the decoding phase of the translation process according to Popovič (ibid.), it is vital for the translator to be consciously aware of this fact and be able to distinguish between the information about individual irrealia actually present or presupposed in the text and the information that are only implied or assumed by the readers based on their experiential complexes, but might prove false upon closer scrutiny. This is especially troublesome in translating SF novel cycles before their completion, since the translator has virtually no option to know author’s intentions in time; this is especially prominent in case of foreshadowing via the narrative device of prophecy often used in contemporary high and pseudo-high fantasy. While the reader is expected to “fill in the blanks”, to assume and imagine, the translator-as-reader (i.e., within the first phase of Popovič’s communicative model of translation<sup>5</sup>) should be paying close attention to this level of semantic content and essentially try to deconstruct the text at this level. This is due to the fact that for proper encoding of the semantic ambiguity of irrealia in translation, they have to consciously avoid loading the irrealia with content based on their own experiential complex, since that would lead to a shift in meaning between the original and the translation. This also means that certain translation strategies prove less feasible in translating irrealia, possibly even in translating SF in general (the first that comes to mind is information change, but pragmatic strategies in general here require some forethought before utilization; cf. Chesterman 2016, 104).

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<sup>4</sup> For example, in the *Dune* novels, tachyons are used to explain instantaneous communication across space. In the film *Prince of Darkness*, humanity sends messages backward in time also somehow using tachyons.

<sup>5</sup> E.g., Miko & Popovič 1978, 264.

The other aspect of irrealia that puts specific requirements on the translator is their potential for forming intertextual links. As was pointed out in the theoretical discussion, irrealia often anchor the intertextual, allusive, and referential connections within the text. For the intertextual potential of the second type mentioned earlier, which is activated if the reader is aware of the general denotative and connotative meanings embedded within the relevant lingual content, the translator simply needs to be aware of the proper equivalent within the target system of SF literature. This is in no way an unusual requirement, albeit one that is less common for literary translation and more common for technical and scientific translation – as the necessary knowledge here extends beyond the typical knowledge of stylistic genre specifics and into a field that superficially behaves as terminology (take for instance the previously discussed tachyons), albeit without some of the typical categories, such as systemicity and formal stability, which gives the translator freedom for artistic creativity on one hand, but dilutes the chances of immediate understanding of the content on the other. Of note are those irrealia that possess intertextual potential of the first type mentioned, which form direct hypertextual links between texts, possibly even suggesting that the narratives of the texts sharing this link take place within one fictional world. Again, this places further requirements on the research and preparation phase of the translation process<sup>6</sup>, where the translator needs to get acquainted with available peritexts and metatexts in detail, so as to be able to identify the possible prototexts for these links formed by irrealia. This should be done due to the fact that, just as the reader of the original has the possibility to identify these links in reading or make conscious effort to do so post-hoc, so should the translator provide the reader of the translation with the same options, therefore making sure that they do their best to transfer these links into the translation. Whether they do so by keeping the same lexical units as used in the other texts linked, if these already exist within the target language system, or by ascertaining that the content does not deviate from the original, as in the case of the previous point, but this time taking into account not only the information available from the original text, but also from the linked texts – if these share the same fictional world, then the information provided in one text is canonically true also in the others.

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<sup>6</sup> This can also be perceived as placing further requirements on the translator's experiential complex, assuming they are supposed to be aware of such links from their pre-existing knowledge of the genre. However, as this would require the translator to be actively aware of all the other works influencing the authors of each original they translate, this interpretation does not seem plausible – especially in case of shared worlds such as that of Cthulhu mythos, where these intertextual links are of catenary nature within those texts that do take place in the shared world and may also appear as mere "easter eggs" in texts not actually taking place within the shared world.

To illustrate this second point, let us take a look at how one might approach translating the link between *The Private Life of Genghis Khan* and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. As was already mentioned before, the short story may at first seem to be entirely standalone, but is then revealed to be connected to a larger work, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, through a character that appears in both texts. In the original English language, the character is called *Wowbagger, the Infinitely Prolonged*. If the reader is not familiar with *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* or cannot connect the two characters, they will know very little of Wowbagger beyond his name, alienness, attitude towards death (wishing for it), and his insulting of Genghis Khan. While the action will still be humorous through the sheer absurdity of it and Adams' depiction, the larger connotations and even an entire joke will escape the reader – Wowbagger at one point wishes to check the spelling of Genghis Khan's name, claiming he "would hate to get it wrong at this stage and then have to start all over again" and he offers no explanation or further comments. If, however, the reader is familiar *The Hitchhiker's Guide*, they will know that Wowbagger has earned his epitaph, the *Infinitely Prolonged*, for accidentally, and much to his dismay, becoming immortal. To allay his boredom, he resolves to insult everyone in the universe in alphabetical order. To give the reader the opportunity to realise these connotations, any translation must make it clear that the Wowbagger who appears in the short story is the same one as in the novels. The easiest and most natural way to achieve this is through simply using the same name in both texts. Yet leaving the name in English would be far from ideal, as Adams often charged character names, particularly alien names, with meaning, word- or perhaps sound-play, and thus making it necessary to transform the name. Luckily, when it comes to translating the short story into Slovak, an official translation of *The Hitchhiker's Guide*<sup>7</sup> has been published in which Wowbagger's full name is translated as *Dlhoplánt Nekonečný*. Thus translation of the name in the story would be a simple matter of finding and using the official translation. Of course, as with translating of any intertextual element of this sort, such solution requires one to first be aware of the intertextuality and its significance, and to also be aware of the existence of extant relevant translations.

#### **4. Concluding remarks**

In conclusion, irrealia prove themselves to be a complex and difficult subject for translation. Typically they are portrayed as cultural anchors of fictional third<sup>8</sup> cultures, but a closer look reveals that such a statement, while

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<sup>7</sup> Adams, Douglas. 2005. *Život, vesmír a všetko*. Bratislava: Slovart.

<sup>8</sup> As opposed to the two cultures – source and target – present in every translation, literary or otherwise.

accurate, is also somewhat reductive – there is a distinction to be made between irrealia sensu stricto, i.e., cultural anchors with no real-world counterpart, and perhaps a sub-type of irrealia, which might be called pseudorealia due to them not being entirely unreal, but rather having a real-world counterpart on which they are directly based (e.g., using names of real contemporary companies in SF worlds). The distinction is notable due to the fact that both types call for a different approach in translation. Both share many characteristics – the speculativeness, the potential for intertextual links, a behaviour at times similar to terminology, etc.; pure irrealia may often offer a greater freedom in translation. The translation of irrealia is bound purely by their own (not only semantic) meaning and intertextual links. Pseudorealia, on the other hand, may share the same limitations in translation, but also more closely resemble traditional realia, and thus present similar issues in translation – e.g., should a translation utilise the name of the same company as the original if said company is virtually unknown in the target culture or carries altogether different connotations?

Just as important, however, is not just how to translate irrealia in and of themselves, but also the implications the presence of irrealia has for the remainder of the text. We have established that the presence of even a single irrealis in a text indicates the world presented is not the same as the real world. As we have illustrated on the example of the short story *The Private Life of Genghis Khan*, the difference between the fictional and the real world may turn up to be ultimately insignificant in terms of translation, but one should never assume that to be true. If the story deviates from the workings of the real world in one aspect – in the case of our example sapient aliens are real and have interacted with humans in the past – other aspects of the fictional world may easily differentiate themselves from the real world at any point in a potentially significant manner. The differences in the example story are fairly minor, in a manner of speaking, and largely concern only Genghis Khan's characterization. However, the changes could easily have been much more significant either in the text itself, or other texts entering intertextual relationship with the short story. For example, Genghis Khan could be revealed to be an alien, or aspects of his history could be changed drastically, e.g., the fictional Genghis Khan might live longer and successfully conquer all of Europe, etc. Due to these potential changes, one should never make assumptions about anything in a fictitious world based on the real world, if it can be helped, so as to not mislead the translation's reader with incorrect assumptions, nor to limit the interpretative possibilities afforded to the translation's reader in comparison with those available to the readers of the original text.

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