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THE CHALLENGES OF TRANSLATING RUSSIAN ONOMATOPOEIAS INTO SPANISH (BASED ON A CORPUS STUDY OF THE LINGUISTIC UNIT *БУЛТЫХ*)

This article addresses the translation challenges posed by the Russian lexeme *бултых*, a syncretic linguistic unit functioning simultaneously as an onomatopoeia and ultra-instantaneous verb. Drawing from a contextualized corpus extracted from the Russian National Corpus, the study analyzes 102 real-world examples in which this lexical unit appears to evaluate the particular translations provided by the neural machine translation systems Google Translate and DeepL. The main objectives of this study are: (1) to examine the semantic and morphosyntactic structure of *бултых*; (2) to assess the quality of the automatic translations available; (3) to classify the most frequent errors made by the neural machine translation systems; (4) to identify the key factors to consider when translating it either as an onomatopoeia or as an ultra-instantaneous verb; and (5) to propose suitable Spanish equivalents that preserve both its meaning and function within a text. The conducted analysis reveals that automatic translation systems have severe limitations when it comes to dealing with culturally marked lexical phenomena, underscoring the need for a detailed semantic-actantial analysis to act as a foundation for more accurate translation decisions to be built on. Specific recommendations are also offered for improving the translation of this complex linguistic unit.

Keywords: onomatopoeia, machine translation, ultra-instantaneous verbs, lexical syncretism, actants, Russian language

1. INTRODUCTION

Onomatopoeias are one of the most difficult linguistic phenomena to classify: present in every human language, they are phonetically motivated lexical units integrated into linguistic systems as conventional ones. Although these units share similar structural features, the phonological, cultural and perceptual factors specific to each linguistic community stand behind significant differences between them in

the particular languages.¹ Despite their role in the genesis of language as a whole, they have usually been considered peripheral elements of lexical systems.

This study proposes an innovative approach that focuses on the linguistic features of the Russian lexeme *бултых* and the challenges related to its translation into Spanish within the context of the neural machine translation systems DeepL and Google Translate. The word *бултых* presents a linguistic syncretism because it can function both as an onomatopoeia and as an ultra-instantaneous verb, a linguistic phenomenon which does not exist in Spanish. This dual nature makes it prone to misunderstanding and difficult to translate correctly.

The main objective of this article is therefore to analyze the translations of the lexeme *бултых* from Russian into Spanish and to propose solutions based on semantic and actantial analyses. First, the semantic and morphosyntactic structure of the word *бултых* is examined, considering its dual nature as both an onomatopoeia and as an ultra-instantaneous verb. Then, the quality of automatic translations carried out by the neural systems Google Translate and DeepL is evaluated by analysing a contextualised corpus extracted from the Russian National Corpus. Finally, a procedure for the translation of the word *бултых* is established so that its meaning is not lost or altered when translated into Spanish. As a result, the present study aims to contribute to improvements in the translation of lexical units that are difficult for neural machine translation systems to classify by incorporating more detailed linguistic analyses.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Onomatopoeia is one of the most ancient phenomena of human language, characterised by a direct relationship between a signifier and a sound referent. As Stanislav Voronin mentions, onomatopoeic words are those whose origins and bases are onomatopoeic.² According to Dietmar Rosenthal and Margarita Telenkova, an onomatopoeic word is “a reproduction of the reflective exclamations of human beings, sounds and cries produced by animals and birds, sounds of

¹ А. Реформатский, *Введение в языкознание*, Аспект Пресс, Москва 2004; М. Флакسمан, *Звукоизобразительная лексика английского языка в синхронии и диахронии*, Издательство СПбГЕТУ “ЛЕТИ”, Санкт-Петербург 2015.

² С. Воронин, *Основы фоносемантики*, ЛЕНАНД, Москва 2006.

natural phenomena, sounds produced by objects, etc.”³ The notion of an “iconic word” supports this perspective as, seen from this angle, these are

words whose phonic forms are as close as possible to the designated sounds [...] they are words, on the one hand, which contain phonemes whose acoustic characteristics are the most similar to the acoustic characteristics of the designated sounds and, on the other hand, have only one meaning.⁴

Therefore, the terms onomatopoeia and iconic word are synonymous, as both are motivated units, and they both convey a direct relationship between a sound object/subject and the phonemes of a word that designate this sound object/subject.

In accordance with Spanish linguistic tradition, Fernando Lázaro Carreter defines onomatopoeia as a “phenomenon that occurs when the phonemes of a word describe or acoustically suggest the object or action they denote.”⁵ For Enrique Alcaraz Varó and María Antonia Martínez Linares, onomatopoeias “are lexical units whose meanings are related to the acoustic properties of the signifiers.”⁶ However, it is also noted that onomatopoeia “always constitutes an approximate and therefore relatively arbitrary imitation,”⁷ since it represents the different interpretations of the same noise in different cultures. Dubois et al. distinguish between “non-linguistic imitation and onomatopoeia” which “is integrated into the linguistic system” and which may also produce derivative forms.⁸

There is a large group of Russian onomatopoeias (especially those related to water) full of different meanings. This can be explained by the fact that water occupies a central position in Slavic geography and culture. According to Russian monolingual dictionaries, the word *бултых* designates both the short, loud noise produced by an object falling into water and the sudden action of throwing oneself or falling

³ Д. Розенталь, М. Теленкова, *Словарь-справочник лингвистических терминов*, Просвещение, Москва 1985, p. 81.

⁴ М. Флакман, *Звукоизобразительная лексика английского...*, pp. 100–101.

⁵ F. Lázaro Carreter, *Diccionario de términos filológicos*, Gredos, Madrid 1981, p. 301.

⁶ E. Alcaraz Varó, M.A. Martínez Linares, *Diccionario de lingüística moderna*, Ariel, Barcelona 2004, p. 459.

⁷ G. Mounin (ed.), *Diccionario de lingüística*, transl. R. Pochtar, Labor, Barcelona 1982, p. 132.

⁸ J. Dubois et al., *Diccionario de lingüística*, transl. I. Ortega, A. Domínguez, Alianza, Madrid 1994, p. 454.

into water.⁹ As such, it belongs to the onomatopoeic group of water, and its functional ambiguity is a key factor: it can be both an onomatopoeia and an ultra-instantaneous verb.

Ultra-instantaneous aspect verbs (*глаголы ультрамгновенного вида*) are verbal infinitives which designate an action (*бах–бахать*) and express the imitation of sound, as well as indicating the extended duration of the sound by reiterating the base (*бах–бах!*).¹⁰ These types of verbs are widely used in colloquial language and correlate with the past tense forms of single-action verbs with the suffix *-ну-* (*брякнул, бултыхнул*). More expressive than full verbs and designating sudden, instantaneous fast actions, they express the perfective aspect, the past tense and the indicative mood, but lack the forms that refer to person, gender and number.¹¹

According to linguists, words that combine the qualities of ultra-instantaneous aspect verbs and onomatopoeia have a syncretic nature.¹² These lexemes “are perceived by native speakers as expressive variants of the ‘full’ verbs to which they correspond, and therefore they can be used in the same conditions as full verbs emphasising sudden and ultra-fast actions.”¹³ In the most well-known monolingual Russian dictionaries the entries for this type of words are structured as follows: the first meaning is an onomatopoeia or interjection and the second meaning is a predicate that indicates a perfective action in the past (referring to verbal infinitives and expressing a sound imi-

⁹ Д. Ушаков, *Толковый словарь русского языка*. Т. 1, Советская энциклопедия, Москва 1935; С. Ожегов, Н. Шведова, *Толковый словарь русского языка: 80 000 слов и фразеологических выражений*, Азбуковник, Москва 1997; Т. Ефремова, *Современный толковый словарь русского языка (в 3 томах)*, Астрель, Москва 2006.

¹⁰ И. Климас, *Междометия, звукоподражания и их дериваты в словнике прозы Аркадия Гайдара*, “Ученые записки. Электронный научный журнал Курского государственного университета” 2009, no. 3 (11), pp. 34–41; И. Нагорный, Ван Синсинь, *Звукоподражания в русском и китайском языках: к вопросу о сравнительно-типологических характеристиках*, “Научные ведомости Белгородского государственного университета. Гуманитарные науки” 2014, no. 6 (21), pp. 13–17.

¹¹ Н. Шанский, А. Тихонов, *Современный русский язык*. Ч. 2: Словообразование. Морфология, Просвещение, Москва 1987.

¹² Е. Диброва (ed.), *Современный русский язык. Теория. Анализ языковых единиц*. Ч. 2: Морфология. Синтаксис, Издательский центр “Академия”, Москва 2008.

¹³ Л. Моисеева, Т. Борисова, *Функционирование “усеченных” форм глагола в произведениях русской художественной литературы XIX–XXI вв.*, “Социально-экономические явления и процессы” 2013, no. 6 (52), p. 198.

tation).¹⁴ Thus, a clear example of syncretism can be observed, since two meanings and functions merge within the same word. In this case, syncretism performs the action and the imitation of the sound associated with the action.

The above linguistic units pose significant translation problems, particularly in the Russian-Spanish language pair, since in Spanish an equivalent linguistic category does not exist. Maria Flaksman establishes the level of adequacy of the translation of an onomatopoeia by saying that “adequate translation of an onomatopoeia occurs when the semantics of the sound and its form are maintained with respect to its typological class.”¹⁵ In the translation of Russian onomatopoeias, the following techniques are used: functional equivalent, conventional equivalent, onomatopoeic equivalent of the same phonotype or a different one, generalization, substitution (with a non-onomatopoeic word), addition, omission (of an onomatopoeia in a translation), lexical change, description, transcription and borrowing onomatopoeia from the original language.¹⁶

In the case of machine translation of *бултых*, the situation is even worse due to the fact that neural networks powering Google Translate or DeepL are unable to distinguish whether they deal with an onomatopoeia or a verb, and, consequently, cannot determine an appropriate translation equivalent. Therefore, rigorous semantic and actantial analysis is necessary to improve these translation engines and to of-

¹⁴ Д. Ушаков, *Толковый словарь русского...*; С. Ожегов, Н. Шведова, *Толковый словарь русского...*; Т. Ефремова, *Современный толковый словарь...*

¹⁵ М. Флакман, *Проблемы перевода звукоизобразительной лексики на исландский язык*, “Вестник Московского государственного лингвистического университета. Гуманитарные науки” 2020, no. 5 (834), p. 228.

¹⁶ Н. Ермакова, *Ономатопея: англо-русские параллели в переводе: автореферат диссертации кандидата филологических наук*, Санкт-Петербургский университет, Санкт-Петербург 1993; Е. Корнева, *Ономатопея в переводческом аспекте*, “Казанский вестник молодых ученых” 2018, no. 4 (7) vol. 2, pp. 94–97; В. Лукьянова, О. Колоскова, *Специфика перевода английских звукоподражаний на русский язык в детском анимационном фильме*, “Филологические науки. Вопросы теории и практики” 2018, no. 2 (80 part 2), pp. 334–337; Е. Николаева, С. Агабабян, *Специфика перевода звукоподражаний в жанре литературной сказки (на материале сказок К. С. Льюиса “Хроники Нарнии”)*, “Политематический сетевой электронный научный журнал Кубанского государственного аграрного университета” 2017, no. 132(08), pp. 1366–1373; А. Соколова, *Ономатопея как элемент графической стилистики*, “Вестник Московского государственного лингвистического университета. Гуманитарные науки” 2015, no. 11 (722), pp. 171–188.

fer reference models for human translators to help them find equivalents for culturally marked lexical phenomena.

It was the analysis of actants which allowed for the determination of translation strategies for onomatopoeic verbs depending on their types of valences (see Yuriy Apresian¹⁷).

According to Igor Melchuk,¹⁸ the actants of a situation are determined by the semantic analysis of the situation itself or by the lexicographical interpretation of the word. Although Lucien Tesnière claims that actants “are living beings or objects that participate in process in some capacity [...] and in some way [...]”¹⁹ Arto Mustajoki argues that it is impossible to determine the states of things without them.²⁰ Also for Elena Starodumova actants are participants in every situation, and their meanings lie in the semantics of each predicate²¹ while in the Linguistic Encyclopedic Dictionary we find that they are any member of a sentence that names a living being or an object that participates in the process designated by the verb.²² Therefore, the fulfilling the semantics of a word occurs when it has enough of the semantic components required to convey its full meaning.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study has been conducted within the field of machine translation research and aims to analyse the translation process of the Russian onomatopoeic verb *бултых* into Spanish, as well as to evaluate the quality of the solutions proposed by two widely used translation engines based on neural networks (Google Translate and DeepL).

The following methodology has been employed to achieve this aim:

¹⁷ Ю. Апресян, *Избранные труды* (т. 1). *Лексическая семантика*, Школа “Языки русской культуры”, Москва 1995.

¹⁸ И. Мельчук, *Опыт теории лингвистических моделей “СМЫСЛ–ТЕКСТ”*, Школа “Языки русской культуры”, Москва 1999.

¹⁹ Л. Теньер, *Основы структурного синтаксиса*, transl. И. Богуславский et al., Прогресс, Москва 1988, p. 117.

²⁰ А. Мустайоки, *Теория функционального синтаксиса: от семантических структур к языковым средствам*, Языки славянской культуры, Москва 2010.

²¹ Е. Стародумова, *Синтаксис современного русского языка*, Издательство Дальневосточного университета, Владивосток 2005.

²² В. Ярцева (ed.), *Лингвистический энциклопедический словарь*, Советская энциклопедия, Москва 1990.

1. Analysis of the definitions of the word *бултых* included in monolingual Russian dictionaries²³ and bilingual Russian / Spanish dictionaries.²⁴

2. Compilation of a parallel Russian-Spanish corpus: 102 contextualised examples using the verb *бултых* have been extracted from the Russian National Corpus.²⁵ The selected examples were drawn from literary texts and translated into Spanish by using two machine translation engines based on neural networks (DeepL Translator and Google Translate). This parallel translation has enabled a comparative analysis of the translation strategies employed by both tools.

3. Linguistic analysis: it concerned the Russian examples from the created corpus where the lexeme *бултых* was used as onomatopoeia, and ultra-instantaneous verb with the meaning of an agent or object falling into water; the examples in which it has developed a metaphorical meaning and is not applied in a water-related context (e.g. *бултых на диван*) were excluded.

4. Analysis and classification of errors: the most frequent errors in the outputs of both machine translation systems have been systematised.

5. Translation proposal: finally, a contextualised translation proposal has been created for each of the examples analysed that considers both the function and meaning of *бултых*. The proposal is based on functional and stylistic equivalence criteria, and both the contexts and the meanings of the original texts have been considered.

This methodology allowed for the identification of the current limitations of translation engines based on neural networks when dealing with the studied linguistic phenomena, for proposing alternatives that can serve as reference for human translators, as well as for improving the accuracy of the above-mentioned engines.

4. ANALYSIS OF THE MEANING OF THE LEXEME *БУЛТЫХ*

In the monolingual dictionary compiled by Dmitriy Ushakov *бултых* is defined as an onomatopoeia used as a predicate with two

²³ Д. Ушаков, *Толковый словарь русского...*; С. Ожегов, Н. Шведова, *Толковый словарь русского...*; Т. Ефремова, *Современный толковый словарь...*; К. Горбачевич (ed.), *Большой академический словарь русского языка*. Т. 2, Наука, Санкт-Петербург 2005.

²⁴ L. Martínez Calvo, *Diccionario ruso-español*, Sopena, Barcelona 2000; G. Turover, J. Nogueira, *Gran diccionario ruso-español*, Rubiños, Madrid 2002.

²⁵ *Национальный корпус русского языка*, <https://ruscorpora.ru/> (18.09.2025).

meanings: 1. Something that fell, mainly into water; 2. a) Someone that shook or splashed liquid; b) Someone that threw something noisily into a liquid.²⁶ The dictionary compiled by Sergey Ozhegov and Nataliia Shvedova defines the first (onomatopoeic) meaning as “the short, loud sound produced by dropping something into water.” The second meaning, related to an ultra-instantaneous verb, defined as “someone / something that fell or jumped into the water” is attributed to the predicate.²⁷ According to the dictionary compiled by Tatiana Efremova, this word is used to convey the sound produced when a hard, heavy object falls into water, and it is also used as a predicate.²⁸ The Academic Dictionary of Russian Language underlines that in the predicate function, the lexeme is used for the denomination of a quick action and has the meaning of “to fall or throw oneself into water, or any other liquid, or into something soft, making a noise; to hit water and make a noise.”²⁹ Thus, it can be concluded that the word *бултых* appears in dictionaries as an onomatopoeia and as an ultra-instantaneous verb with the semes: fast action, action directed towards water or liquid, and the sound produced when something hits the water with considerable force.

The action conveyed by the verb is a sudden displacement of the agent, or an object propelled by the agent, into a body of water. Russian-Spanish bilingual dictionaries do not specify that the word *бултых* can be an ultra-instantaneous verb and with a predicate function; it is therefore translated using the following onomatopoeias: *paf, chas*³⁰ and *paf, zas*³¹. According to the dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy, *paf* is used “to express the sound that someone or something makes when falling or bumping into an object,” *zas* is used “to imitate the sound made by a blow, or a blow itself,” and there is no entry on *chas*.³² None of the onomatopoeias proposed as equivalents in Spanish convey the seme of water, and their predicate function is not considered in the mentioned dictionaries.

²⁶ Д. Ушаков, *Толковый словарь русского...*

²⁷ С. Ожегов, Н. Шведова, *Толковый словарь русского...*

²⁸ Т. Ефремова, *Современный толковый словарь...*

²⁹ К. Горбачевич (ed.), *Большой академический словарь...*

³⁰ G. Turover, J. Nogueira, *Gran diccionario ruso-español...*

³¹ L. Martínez Calvo, *Diccionario ruso-español...*

³² Real Academia Española. (23.8), *Diccionario de la lengua española* (23.^a ed.), <https://dle.rae.es> (18.09.2025).

The following sections analyse the machine translations in order to see whether they are suitable and whether they consider the dual nature of the word *бултых*.

5. CLASSIFICATION OF ERRORS MADE BY AUTOMATIC TRANSLATION SYSTEMS

First, the corpus entries were submitted to machine translators to evaluate translation adequacy. In most cases, the translation did not achieve the required accuracy and the equivalents offered for the word *бултых* did not convey the semantics of the original phrases. The observed errors were classified into two groups according to the function the word performed in the sentence: errors related to the translation of onomatopoeia and errors related to the translation of ultra-instantaneous verbs. Below, different types of errors made by Google Translate and DeepL are described; one example of each type of detected error is provided.

5.1. Classification of errors related to onomatopoeia:

5.1.1. Confusion concerning other words that have a similar form in the target language:

Example	Machine translation	Human translation
<i>Бултых, бултых — плюхаются они один за другим в стеклянный аквариум (Krijukova 1989).</i>	<i>Bueyes, bueyes: uno a uno se sumergen en el acuario de cristal (DeepL).</i>	<i>Se podía oír cómo salpicaba el agua cuando saltaban uno detrás de otro a una pequeña piscina de cristal.</i>

We can see that the onomatopoeia *бултых* has similar acoustic form as the Spanish word *bueyes*, however, there is no relation between them in terms of semantic content and grammatical category. The word *бултых* is a water onomatopoeia, while the word *bueyes* is a plural noun meaning “oxen.”

5.1.2. Use of another water onomatopoeia in the target language:

Example	Machine translation	Human translation
<i>[...] человек двести негров таскают кофе и сахар со склада на берег и прямо мешками в воду — бултых, бултых! (Nekrasov 1997).</i>	<i>... y directamente al agua en sacos: ¡chapoteo, chapoteo! (Google Translate).</i>	<i>Unos doscientos negros transportan café y azúcar desde un almacén hasta la orilla y directamente lanzan (arrojan / tiran) sacos al agua.</i>

The Spanish onomatopoeia **chapoteo** has another meaning “to make a noise by moving one’s hands or feet in water or mud, or by stepping on them”³³ which differs from the onomatopoeia **бултых**. The only relation to the latter is that they are both water onomatopoeias.

5.1.3. Transliteration of the onomatopoeia:

Example	Machine translation	Human translation
<i>“Бултых,” — прыгнул за мамой в воду папа. “Бултых-бултых-бултых,” — прыгнули за папой еще несколько человек (Abgarjan 2015).</i>	<i>“Bultikh”, papá saltó al agua tras mamá. Bultah-bultah-bultah-bultah-bultah-bultah-bultah, unos cuantos más saltaron tras papá (DeepL).</i>	<i>Se escuchó cómo salpicaba el agua tras tirarse el padre cuando iba detrás de la madre. Y volvió a escucharse en varias ocasiones cómo salpicaba el agua cuando otros tantos se tiraron detrás del padre.</i>

5.1.4. Use of a sequence that generates an onomatopoeic effect that does not exist in Spanish:

Example	Machine translation	Human translation
<i>Полз он долго-долго, и вдруг почувствовал, что земли под ним нет и он куда-то летит. Бул-тых!.. Я в реке! (Kozlov 1987).</i>	<i>Se arrastró durante mucho, mucho tiempo, y de repente sintió que no había suelo bajo él y que estaba volando hacia alguna parte. „¡Boool, boo-hoo! Estoy en el río! (DeepL).</i>	<i>Se arrastró durante mucho tiempo, y de repente sintió que no había suelo bajo él y que se estaba cayendo. Se escuchó el ruido que provocaban las salpicaduras de agua. ¡Estoy en el río!</i>

Here, a new onomatopoeia in Spanish was created. The limitation is that it is unknown to native speakers which may lead to misunderstanding.

5.1.5. Confusion concerning the meaning by using a word different from the meaning of the original word:

Example	Machine translation	Human translation
<i>Что-то тяжелое повисло на хвосте, и рыболов — бултых! — полетел с бревна (Veltistov 1997).</i>	<i>Algo pesado se colgó de su cola, y el pescador — ¡mentira! — salió volando del tronco (DeepL).</i>	<i>Algo pesado colgaba de la cola. Se podía escuchar el ruido que provocaban las salpicaduras del agua: el pescador se cayó del tronco.</i>

³³ Real Academia Española (23.8), *Diccionario de la...*

This is similar case discussed in section 5.1.1; the difference is that the word **бултых** does not have any relation to the offered equivalent **mentira** not even in acoustic form. The Spanish word **mentira** is a noun which means “lie”.

5.2. Classification of errors while dealing with the ultra-instantaneous verb:

5.2.1. Confusion concerning the part of speech (for example, considering the verb as a noun):

Example	Machine translation	Human translation
И Джальма, быстро оглянувшись, вдруг — бултых в воду и, наслаждаясь прохладой, медленно плывет к затону, к камышам (Bunin 1983).	Y Jalma, mirando rápidamente a su alrededor, y, saboreando la frescura, de repente — buey en el agua (DeepL).	Y Djalma, tras mirar rápidamente a su alrededor, de repente, se tiró al agua y disfrutando de la frescura, nada lentamente hacia la ensenada, hacia los juncos.

In the original text, **бултых** is a verb, while **buey** is a noun in the translated phrase. Although the translation maintains the same original syntactic structure, it lacks a predicate and, consequently, does not make sense.

5.2.2. Confusion concerning the use of tense, person and number (caused by its invariant form):

Example	Machine translation	Human translation
Подойдешь — моментально налево кругом и бултых на дно! (Nemirovich-Danchenko 1996).	Si te acercas, ¡instantáneamente darás la vuelta a la izquierda y te sumergirás hasta el fondo! (DeepL).	Si te acercas, instantáneamente darán la vuelta a la izquierda y se sumergirán hasta el fondo.

As it was mentioned above, the ultra-instantaneous verb lacks forms that refer to person, gender and number. While translating into Spanish, however, it is necessary to restore the markers of grammatical person, number and tense. In some contexts, as we observe here, it is difficult for the neural network to recover the real subject of the verb. As a result, it deduces the subject from a previously mentioned one without considering the context. Here, the word **бултых** refers to the subject “frogs” (third-person plural), but the machine translation used **te sumergirás** (second-person singular), because this particular subject was used in the preceding clause.

5.2.3. Confusion concerning voluntary and involuntary actions:

Example	Machine translation	Human translation
<i>Иду, вдруг какая-то баба бултых в Неву (Reshetnikov 1982).</i>	<i>Caminaba y de repente, una mujer se precipitó al Neva (Google Translate).</i>	<i>Caminaba, y de repente una se tiró al Neva.</i>

See the subchapter 6.2.1.

5.2.4. Confusion concerning two similar words in the source language and in the target language (*бултых* → *bouquet*), which may cause the wrong equivalent to be translated (*bouquet* — *ramo*):

Example	Machine translation	Human translation
<i>Вслед за ней оба китайца прыгнули на край плота, перекувыркнулись и оба бултых тоже в воду головой; [...] (Vagner 1991).</i>	<i>Después de ella, ambos chinos saltaron al borde de la balsa, saltaron y ambos bouquet también en el agua con la cabeza... (Google Translate).</i>	<i>Los dos chinos que iban detrás de ella saltaron al borde de la balsa, dieron una voltereta y se tiraron de cabeza...</i>
<i>Ну, починил-пустил, поехал назад на плотике, шестик с руки сорвался, он и бултых в воду (Shmelev 2004).</i>	<i>Bueno, lo arreglé, lo dejé ir, volvió a la carne, los seis de su mano se rompieron, él y el ramo en el agua (Google Translate).</i>	<i>Bueno, arregló la balsa e inició el camino de vuelta en la misma balsa, el palo se le escapó de las manos, y se cayó al agua.</i>

The case similar to the one discussed in section 5.1.1. occurs here. The translation contains a word whose acoustic form reminds the Russian word (*бултых* → *bouquet*); nevertheless, it cannot be the correct equivalent as its semantics and grammatical category are different. Yet the translation process sometimes goes further: here, it offers a synonym of this incorrect translation (*bouquet* — *ramo*), as it can be seen in the second example.

6. THE PROPER TRANSLATION OF БУЛТЫХ INTO SPANISH

Both of the uses of *бултых* — as an onomatopoeia and as an ultra-instantaneous verb — must therefore be thoroughly analysed.

Whenever the lexeme *бултых* is preceded or followed by a verb in the personal form with the meaning “to throw oneself, to jump, to fall or to throw” (depending on the agent actant and the object actant), it should be considered an onomatopoeia because it only represents a direct acoustic representation of an action. For example, in the

sentence: *Бултых, бултых — плюхаются они один за другим в стеклянный аквариум*, the word *бултых* is accompanied by the verb *плюхаются* (“to throw oneself into making a sound, to flop down”). In this type of construction, *бултых* can be seen to act as an onomatopoeia, since the sound and dynamics of the action described copies the lexeme in an iconic and immediate way.

However, if *бултых* is not accompanied by a verb, it acts as an ultra-instantaneous verb: *Потом бултых в воду и, разбрызгивая пену и ломая веселые солнечные круги, пошел обратно, туда, где свалена одежонка* (Goldberg 1924) // *Acto seguido, se dio un chapuzón en el agua; entre espuma y salpicaduras, rompiendo los círculos juguetones que el sol dibujaba sobre la superficie, regresó al lugar donde había dejado la ropa.*

6.1. THE TRANSLATION OF БУЛТЫХ AS AN ONOMATOPOEIA

In order to convey the onomatopoeic sema “a short or intense sound made when falling into water,”³⁴ the translation strategy of amplification by incorporating lexical items linked to auditory perception has been used. These units include verbs such as *escuchar* (to listen) or *oír* (to hear), as well as detailed descriptions of the action accompanying the sound reproduced by the onomatopoeia *бултых* (*cómo salpicaba el agua* “how the water splashed”; *el ruido que provocaban las salpicaduras del agua* “the noise caused by the splashing water”).

Thus, the expressiveness of the original text is compensated for by preserving both the acoustic effects and immediacy in the target language. Examples of both cases are presented here: in the first case, onomatopoeia is followed by a verb with the meaning “to throw oneself into the water with sound,” “to flop,” “to fall,” “to jump” (*плюхаться, прыгнуть, полететь*):

Example	Proposed translation
<i>Бултых, бултых — плюхаются они один за другим в стеклянный аквариум</i> (Krjukova 1989).	<i>Se podía oír cómo salpicaba el agua cuando saltaban uno detrás de otro a una pequeña piscina de cristal.</i>
<i>“Бултых”, — прыгнул за мамой в воду папа. “Бултых-бултых-бултых”, — прыгнули за папой еще несколько человек</i> (Abgarjan 2015).	<i>Se escuchó cómo salpicaba el agua tras tirarse el padre cuando iba detrás de la madre. Y volvió a escucharse en varias ocasiones cómo salpicaba el agua cuando otros tantos se tiraron detrás del padre.</i>

³⁴ С. Ожегов, Н. Шведова, *Толковый словарь русского...*

<i>Что-то тяжелое повисло на хвосте, и рыболов — бултых! — полетел с бревна (Veltistov 1997).</i>	<i>Algo pesado colgaba de la cola. Se podía escuchar el ruido que provocaban las salpicaduras del agua: el pescador se cayó del tronco.</i>
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The second case presents an inversion of the syntactic order observed in the previous group: a verb with the meaning “to throw oneself, to jump, to fall or to throw” is followed by the onomatopoeia *бултых*. This pattern represents a structure where the main action precedes the accompanying sound effect, thus reinforcing the acoustic dimension of the event after it occurs:

Example	Proposed translation
<i>Полз он долго-долго, и вдруг почувствовал, что земли под ним нет и он куда-то летит. Бул-тых!.. Я в реке! (Kozlov 1987).</i>	<i>Se arrastró durante mucho tiempo y, de repente, sintió que no había suelo bajo él y que se estaba cayendo. Se escuchó el ruido que provocaban las salpicaduras de agua. ¡Estoy en el río!</i>
<i>Все это очень похоже на брошенный в реку камень — бултых, и нету... (Mihalskij 2005).</i>	<i>Todo esto es muy parecido a una piedra arrojada al río; se escucha el ruido que provocan las salpicaduras de agua, y, finalmente, no hay nada...</i>

As shown here, the inversion of the order of the onomatopoeia and the verb accompanying it does not influence the translation.

6.2. THE TRANSLATION OF *БУЛТЫХ* AS AN ULTRA-INSTANTANEOUS VERB

In order to proceed with the translation of the ultra-instantaneous verb *бултых* into Spanish, it is necessary to follow a series of methodological steps that enable both the meaning of the verb and its syntactic and semantic realization to be identified. The stages of translational analysis are:

Identification of the type of actant: Firstly, it should be established whether the main actant of the action is animate (person, animal, mythological creature) or inanimate (object, thing). This distinction is required to understand the type of action expressed.

Classification of the action according to its voluntary nature: if the agent actant is animate, one must check whether the action performed is voluntarily or involuntarily Interpretation of meaning according to the context: once the type of action has been established, the specific meaning of *бултых* within the communicative situation should be determined, considering both the actant participating in

the action and the environment in which the action takes place (water, bog, ice, container, etc.).

Selection of an appropriate Spanish equivalent: Finally, based on the above parameters, the Spanish verb that best reflects the action described in Russian should be chosen.

It is possible to distinguish several groups of agent actants that participate in the action described by the ultra-instantaneous verb. The translation of different groups is analysed in the following section:

6.2.1. Group of agent actants, in which the agent is a person
Group of agent actants, in which the agent is a person is divided into two subcategories according to the nature of the actions performed: voluntary actions and involuntary actions.

6.2.1.1. Within the group of agent actants carrying out *voluntary actions*, two meanings are identified: pleasure/enjoyment and necessity, and the syntactic structure is:

agent actant performing a voluntary action, which can be explicit or implicit + ultra-instantaneous verb + final destination actant of the action, which can be explicit or implicit, + mode actant, which can be explicit or implicit.

The previously described subcategories need to be examined here:

a) Pleasure or enjoyment. First of all, one must check whether the action expressed by the word *бултых* is perceived as a lasting action (an action that lasts after the initial contact with the water) or instantaneous action (limited only to the moment of the impact). Lasting action does not finish on impact with the water, meaning that there is a temporary continuity and, in many cases, the agent actant experiences pleasure or enjoyment. In order to convey this nuance in Spanish, the expression *darse un chapuzón* is proposed, as it represents both the idea of contact with water and the playful or relaxing nature of the action:

Example	Proposed translation
<i>А чудесно будет после всех пересадок, вокзалов и прочего бултых в воду!</i> (Arbuzov 1983).	<i>Después de tortuoso periplo de transbordos y estaciones de tren distintas, sería maravilloso darse un chapuzón.</i>

In this example, when translating the sentence, the final destination actant ‘water’ is omitted, as the Spanish equivalent includes this actant in its semantics.

In the following example, the seme “pleasure” is reflected by the presence of verbs that indicate continuation of the action, such as the verb *купаться* ‘to bathe.’ In these cases, the verb *tirarse* (‘to throw oneself’) is used, since it is not necessary to make the duration of the action and the enjoyment associated with it explicit:

Example	Proposed translation
<i>Ты знаешь, у него несчастье: пошел он на Днепр купаться — бултых в воду! А часы-секундомер с руки не снял (Gajdar 1986).</i>	<i>Sabes lo qué le pasó, una desgracia: se fue a bañarse al Dnepr, se tiró al río y se le olvidó quitarse el reloj.</i>

If the action is momentary, the following factors need to be considered: if the mode actant appears in the sentence, it is translated by using the pronominal verb *tirarse*, specifying the mode of the action (вниз башкой “headfirst,” плашмя “belly-flop”):

Example	Proposed translation
<i>Поравнялись с ними, Головачев уже стоял нагишом, бойко направил четверку борт о борт с бабьей лодкой, вскочил в нее, сделав страшный переполох, и бултых в воду вниз башкой! (Bogoljubov 1996).</i>	<i>Cuando alcanzaron la barca de las mujeres, Golovachev — de pie y completamente desnudo — hizo una certera maniobra con su embarcación hasta colocarla junto a la otra. De un salto, pasó de una barca a la otra, provocando un gran revuelo, y acto seguido se tiró al agua de cabeza.</i>
<i>Галопом до полыньи, плашмя в нее бултых, и галопом обратно, [...] (Skazki zimnego Bajkala 2003).</i>	<i>Corrieron a toda velocidad hacia el agujero en el hielo, se tiraron en plancha y, regresaron corriendo inmediatamente.</i>

b) Necessity. Unlike the previous group, in this case, the actions are still voluntary, but they are motivated by the needs of the speaker. To translate the ultra-instantaneous verb *бултых* in this type of context, the verbs *tirarse* and *lanzarse* are used, which both express a voluntary action motivated by a specific need:

Example	Proposed translation
<i>Мы со стариком бултых в воду и вытаскиваем ее на берег (Iskander 1989).</i>	<i>El viejo y yo nos tiramos (nos lanzamos) al agua y lo arrastramos hasta la orilla.</i>

In this group, the final destination actant is always “water” or an element that contains it: a river, sea, or a blowhole in a frozen river. However, this actant does not influence the selection of the verb in the target language, since it can also be translated as *tirarse* or *lanzarse*.

Example	Proposed translation
<i>Тут не плавать надо, а нырять! И Катя — бултых в реку</i> (Sobakin 1991).	<i>Lo que hay que hacer ahora es bucear, y no nadar. Y Katia se tiró (se lanzó) al río.</i>

In this group, there are two examples where appear the goal actant (*следом за дятлом*), which provides the reason for the action of the ultra-instantaneous verb, and the mode actant (*головой*), which explains how the action is carried out.

Example	Proposed translation
<i>Коля замахал руками, замычал, валидолину выплюнул и бултых следом за дятлом</i> (Astafev 1982).	<i>Kolia se puso a mover las manos, empezó a quejarse, escupió el calmante y se lanzó al río a por el pájaro.</i>
<i>Вслед за ней оба китайца прыгнули на край плота, перекувыркнулись и оба бултых тоже головой; [...]</i> (Vagner 1991).	<i>Los dos chinos que iban detrás de ella saltaron hacia borde de la balsa, dieron una voltereta y se tiraron de cabeza también...</i>

6.2.1.2. Group in which the agent actant carries out an involuntary action. Its syntactic structure is as follows: agent actant who performs an involuntary action, which can be explicit or implicit, + ultra-instantaneous verb + final destination actant, which can be explicit or implicit.

In this group, the appropriate equivalent for conveying the involuntary action in the target language is the verb *caerse* “to fall”:

Example	Proposed translation
<i>Один раз загляделся с мостка на чебачка, потянулся за ним — и в воду бултых</i> (Veshhunov 1987).	<i>Una vez me quedé mirando desde el puente a un pez con la boca abierta, intenté cogerlo y me caí al agua.</i>

In the cases in which the final destination actant is not explicit in Russian, it must be made so in Spanish (*en el agua* “in the water”):

Example	Proposed translation
<i>Сорвался в овраг, да колесом вертелся, вертелся... бултых!..</i> (Gorbunov 1902).	<i>Se despeñó por el precipicio y dando vueltas como un trompo... se cayó en el agua.</i>

6.2.2. Group in which the agent actant is an animal or mythological creature

To find the appropriate equivalent in this group, attention must be paid to the type of movement related to each type of actant, as well as the final destination of the action.

6.2.2.1. Agent actant (fish): in the cases in which the agent actant is a fish in the water, *бултых* is translated using *moverse* “to move”:

Example	Proposed translation
<i>А тут бултых во-о-от такая зараза в кувшинках, [...] (Ivanov 2006).</i>	<i>En ese instante, ek bicho se movió entre los nenúfares...</i>

In this example, the location actant *в кувшинках* “among the water lilies” is used, which describes the location of the agent in the water.

Nevertheless, in the cases in which a fish is found out of the water against its will, and it wants to return to its natural habitat as soon as possible, a native speaker will perceive a voluntary action, explaining why it should be translated using the word *tirarse*:

Example	Proposed translation
<i>Окунь сорвался с крючка, запрыгал по травке к родной стихии и... бултых в воду! (Chehov 2001).</i>	<i>La perca se soltó del anzuelo, se puso a dar costalazos sobre la hierba en la búsqueda de su hábitat natural y... ¡se tiró al agua!</i>

If a fish is out of the water voluntarily and is eager to return to its habitat, a native speaker will probably consider some kind of personification and thus it is translated as *sumergirse* “to submerge oneself / to dive”:

Example	Proposed translation
<i>Скользнула рыбка над водой и опять бултых в нее (Nemirovich-Danchenko 1996).</i>	<i>El pez se deslizó sobre el agua y se volvió a sumergir.</i>

6.2.2.2. Agent actant (frog): the characteristic movement of a frog is that it leaps; however, in this specific context, the final destination actant is not just the surface of a body of water, but the bottom of the aquatic space. This semantic circumstance influences the selection of a verb in the target language. It could encourage the use of the verb *sumergirse*, which more accurately reflects both the direction of the action and its outcome. Furthermore, this verb implicitly incorporates the aspectual feature of repetition, present in the original context:

Example	Proposed translation
<i>Подойдешь — моментально налево кругом и бултых на дно!</i> (Nemirovich-Danchenko 1996).	<i>Si te acercas, instantáneamente girarán a la izquierda y se sumergirán hasta el fondo.</i>

Here, the selection of the verb *sumergirse* enables both the downward direction and the sudden, repeated action described by the ultra-instantaneous verb *бултых* to be conveyed.

6.2.2.3. Agent actant (dog): since dogs share physical spaces with humans and are treated as if they were family members (considered to almost be a friends or even children), human actions, both voluntary and involuntary ones, can also be attributed to them. Such humanization of these animals enables the application of syntactic and semantic structures to the agent actants that are similar to those typical of human actants.

Therefore, the Spanish verb *tirarse* is the most appropriate equivalent for the ultra-instantaneous verb *бултых*, as in the following example:

Example	Proposed translation
<i>Бойе приосел в осоке, пополз к урезу берега, вдруг пружинисто взметнулся, бултых в воду!</i> (Astafev 2015).	<i>Boye se agazapó entre los juncos, se arrastró hasta el borde de la orilla, se impulsó con gran agilidad y se tiró al agua.</i>

6.2.2.4. Agent actant (mythological creature): this group includes two figures belonging to folklore: the devil and mermaids. A common feature of these fantastic creatures is their ability to perform sudden actions, which can be unexpected or disconcerting, followed by their immediate disappearance. This narrative pattern must be taken into account in the translation process, as it not only defines the type of action described, but it also assists the selection of the most appropriate verb in the target language, as well as helping representation of the final effect that is their disappearance. In the first example, the agent actant is the devil:

Example	Proposed translation
<i>В колесья бултых, и пропал</i> (Korovin 2010).	<i>Saltó entre las ruedas del molino y desapareció.</i>

Here, the ultra-instantaneous verb *бултых* conveys not only the sudden movement towards a physical destination, that of the mill wheels, but also the immediate disappearance of the agent, which

highlights his supernatural nature. For this reason, the verb *saltar* “to jump” is used as a proper equivalent in this context. In the second example, the agent actant is a mermaid:

Example	Proposed translation
<i>Заготовили обе да и бултых в тину...</i> (Kondratev 2016).	<i>Ambas rompieron a reír a carcajadas y se tiraron al lodo para, posteriormente, desaparecer.</i>

In this case the verb *tirarse* in Spanish is appropriate for the action described by *бултых* as the subject performs voluntary action.

6.2.3. Group that contains an object actant

The syntactic structure in this group is as follows: agent actant that represents a person, which can be explicit or implicit, + verb + object actant, which can be explicit or implicit, + final destination actant, which can be explicit or implicit. This group is subdivided according to who or what the object actant is.

6.2.3.1. Group of object actants represented by humans.

The presence of the object actant makes use of transitive verbs in the translation process. In this case, the voluntary/involuntary nature of the actions is not an issue when it is translated into Spanish.

Example	Proposed translation
<i>Померещилось ему что-то, ухватил он его за кафтанишку, встряхнул, да и бултых в колодец...</i> (Salias 1991).	<i>Se figuró algo, lo agarró por el kaftán, lo sacudió y lo tiró (lanzó, arrojó) al pozo...</i>

In cases in which the object actant is implied in the original text, it has to be expressed in the translation (we use “lo” in this example referring to “person who was thrown”). In this context, the ultra-instantaneous verb *бултых* can be translated by using the following verbs: *tirar*, *lanzar*, *arrojar* (to throw). In the second example, the selection of the verb in the target language is conditioned by the destination final actant, which is a bathtub (*ванная*) in this case. The fact that the receptacle for water is small and artificial (if compared with natural spaces such as a river or a sea), means that it can be translated it into Spanish as *meter* “to put into”:

Example	Proposed translation
<i>Невзначай бултых его в ванну!</i> (Rudyh 2002).	<i>Accidentalmente lo metes en la bañera.</i>

6.2.3.2. Group containing object actants represented by things. Two subtypes can be identified in this group, and these can be defined by considering the weight of the objects involved: light objects and heavy objects (the criteria for weight is defined by whether a human can lift the object unaided).

Regarding light object actants, the action expressed by the ultra-instantaneous verb *бултых* is usually translated by using the verbs *tirar*, *lanzar* or *arrojar*. The use of these verbs depends on the context:

Example	Proposed translation
[...] человек двести негров таскают кофе и сахар со склада на берег и прямо мешками в воду — <i>бултых</i> , <i>бултых</i> ! (Nekrasov 1997).	... unos doscientos negros transportan café y azúcar desde un almacén hasta la orilla y directamente <i>lanzan</i> (<i>arrojan</i> / <i>tiran</i>) sacos al agua.

When the object actant is heavy (as in the case of a raft) the most appropriate verb in Spanish is *bajar* “to lower,” in the semantic of “carrying something from a high place to a lower one”:

Example	Proposed translation
И поток <i>бултых</i> в воду, [...] (Chapuygin 1967).	<i>Bajé la balsa al agua.</i>

However, it is also essential to consider the final destination actant. When this destination is an enclosed or limited space (as in the case of a container or receptacle), it is preferable to translate the action expressed by *бултых* with the verb *meter*:

Example	Proposed translation
Я кипятку в кастрюле поставила на плиту, а он, мой сердечный, часы-то <i>бултых</i> в кастрюльку, а на яичко-то смотрим! (Karatygin 1970).	Puse un poco de agua hirviendo en una cacerola al fuego, y él, pobrecito mío, <i>metió</i> el reloj en la cacerola mientras-cuando estaba mirando el huevo.

7. CONCLUSIONS

In this article, a detailed analysis of the Russian onomatopoeia *бултых* and its translation into Spanish has been carried out. The translation of this lexical unit is particularly difficult, as it can be either an onomatopoeia or an ultra-instantaneous verb, meaning that different translation strategies need to be used. Analysis of trans-

lations carried out by DeepL and Google Translate has shown that translation engines based on neural networks often provide inadequate or even incomprehensible results facing such lexems. The present research proposes a detailed analysis of the word *бултых* and its function in a text as an onomatopoeia and as an ultra-instantaneous verb. In the case of onomatopoeia, the priority is to convey the acoustic component accompanying an action; therefore, lexical units linked to auditory perception and description of the sound created by the action are used. However, when *бултых* functions as an ultra-instantaneous verb, an action acquires a dominant semantic weight, which leads to a translation of the action expressed, omitting the sound component. The selection of an appropriate verb in the target language depends on many factors, both semantic and syntactic. This is why not only the semantics of the verb in the source language, but also the actants involved in each situation must be analyzed. The research shows that in such analysis it is important to consider: whether the action is voluntary or involuntary; what is the type of agent actant (person, animal, mythological creature); how it moves within a space; if an object actant is present or not; what are the characteristics of the final destination actant (for example, size); and what are other parameters such as the nature of the action as well as the type of object involved (light, heavy). Therefore, the above analysis may be an important contribution to the future research in the field of onomatopoeia translation, and in the development of semantic and syntactic analyses aimed at obtaining more precise and effective translations of linguistic phenomena that are commonly used in Russian, yet less frequently used in Spanish.

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