

what it means, not what it says

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In addition to the English-language versions of **THE PRISONER**, the series has been released around the world in several different languages, including German, French and Italian. Apart from certain differences to the title and credit sequences, the picture content has been exactly the same but the entire voice track has been replaced with local equivalent and thus we have Patrick McGoohan and his fellow actors apparently able to speak several languages. Well, that's not quite what happens of course.

Each country employs a translator and voice director. The scripts are translated into the local language and the voice director hires a team of actors who overdub the English voice track. This is a very common practise in the television and film industry and I'm sure that most of us have at some time turned on the TV in our hotel on the Costa Brava (or whichever foreign clime get the vote that year) and been treated to an incomprehensible half hour of what we were certain was "Coronation Street".

The German version of **THE PRISONER** was called **NUMMER SECHS** (credits: **NUMMER 6**), literally "Number Six", and for those of you giggling at the back who didn't do your German homework, "sechs" is pronounced "zeks". The translation of the scripts was by Joachim Brinkmann, who was also voice director. Patrick McGoohan is dubbed by German actor Horst Naumann and does a remarkable job in reproducing the McGoohan intonation and cadence.

idiomatic phrases

However, what's interesting about the German version of **THE PRISONER** is that there are some significant differences in the script and it's apparent that Joachim Brinkmann took a certain amount of liberty in his translation and

worked some variations of his own into the original concepts. This is over and above the difficulty which all translators would have with phrases that just don't translate word for word from one language to another. This is because such phrases are idiomatic - they only mean something in the original language and just translating the words into another language doesn't mean that it would mean the same thing or even understood in the same way.

The pivotal phrase "Six of one, half a dozen of the other" is a good example as there is no direct German equivalent. So, when Number 6 says "I'm not a number, I'm a person", instead of replying "Six of one, half a dozen of the other", Number 2 says (in German) "The one doesn't necessarily preclude the other". Just think what that does to the title of The Prisoner Appreciation Society!

"By hook or by crook" is another phrase that just doesn't cross over, and this necessitated a rewrite of the opening titles:

"We want information, information, information.

You won't get it.

By hook or by crook, we will."

The problem with the last line is that it's based on a concept, and the words themselves don't mean anything in isolation. Therefore, translating the last line into German results in gibberish and there's no alternative but to look for a phrase that, although the words would be different, means much the same thing. In this instance, we have our script alteration, which becomes:

"Wir wollen informationen, informationen, informationen.

Ich sage nichts. - I'm saying nothing.

Sie werden sprechen, so oder so. - You will talk, one way or the other."

Interestingly, when you translate "so oder so" back into English, that doesn't mean anything either. The trick obviously is to know what it means, not necessarily what it says.

"village" references removed

Of greater interest are the instances where Brinkmann injected his own ideas or took the opportunity to add new twists to concepts within the established framework. When Number 6 asks, "Whose side are you on", for example, the answer is not "That would be telling", but "We are on the right side". Perhaps the most significant of these script departures was to totally remove references to The Village and make Number 6's incarceration even more mysterious by simply referring to it as "Here" or "this Place". I'm capitalising the "P" to denote the strength of the word in the context that it's used.

Translating "Village" to the German equivalent "Dorf" would have been easy enough, so it would seem a deliberate decision to substitute "Place". It certainly alters things because while "Village" conveys the impression of a

small community, "this Place" imposes no boundary and arguably adds an extra ingredient of mystery. Just how big is "this Place"? How small? Can it expand or contract and adapt to changing requirements? Not allowing Number 6 the luxury of at least identifiable prison walls increases his confusion and adds to his disorientation. Mind you, it does mean that some treasured dialogue gets trashed. Take the question and answer sequence in the standard opening titles:

"Where am I? - In the Village." This becomes:

- "Wo bin ich? - Where am I?"
- "Sie sind da. - You are there."

(This can also be taken to mean "You are here" which sounds better to English ears.)

Skirting around any mention of the Village occurs many times during the course of the series. Using "Die Glocken von Big Ben" ("The Chimes Of Big Ben") for the following example, we have the conversation between Nadia and Number 6 when Nadia says she doesn't know where she is. Number 6 echoes the line in the episode opening sequence - not "In the Village", but "Sie sind da." - "You are there/here."

And again, when they talk about transportation: Number 6: "Taxis - local service only." becomes "Es gibt taxis. - Sie fahren aber nur hier im Ort." - "There are taxis, they only drive here in the Place."

Replacing Village with Place sometimes sounds odd to English ears. Again, it's something which sounds fine in German because the language is very precise and formal but it doesn't translate back into English in quite the same way.

Take these further examples, again from "Chimes":

Number 2: "Can I give you a lift back to the Village?" becomes "Wollen Sie mit mir zurück in den Ort fahren?" (into the Place).

Number 6 (replying to Colonel J's question about Number 2): "Chairman of the Village." becomes "Der boss da, von diesem Ort." (the chief there, of this Place).

orange and white

In addition to losing the Village, we also lose various grades of Alert. When the supervisor orders "Yellow Alert", it indicates that there's a potential threat or a possible escape attempt in progress. "Orange Alert" means that the situation has escalated and requires the service of Rover.

The reason for the various colours is rooted in the military alert system accorded to the degree of threat existing at any given time. A Code Red security alert represents the highest threat, usually reserved for imminent military action, and there are "cooler" colours allocated to less threatening situations down to Code Black when it's safe to break out the tea and crumpets. "Red Alert" was also used in the STAR TREK series to indicate that it

was time to arm the proton torpedos.

Brinkmann decided not to use any of the colours and whenever Rover shows up we hear "Weißer Alarm" which means "White Alert". It sort-of makes sense but comes over more as a reaction to Rover rather than a dramatic escalation of events. Therefore, as Nadia swims out to sea in her early escape attempt, Number 2 watches her progress and then pushes the button to call up Rover with the words "Weißer Alarm".

drastic geographic reshuffle

Staying with "Chimes", Nadia reveals her origin as Bulgarian rather than Estonian as she is in the English version of the story and there is a drastic reshuffle of the geography surrounding the Village. Normally she tells Number 6 that they are in Lithuania and she muses on the probable escape route they must take. "Lithuania, on the Baltic. That means making for... West Germany, Denmark..."

However, Joachim Brinkmann chose to resite the Village some way across the world to Bulgaria. Number 6's musing now becomes: "In Bulgaria. On the Balkans. That means making for Greece, into Turkey..." The sea escape to the Polish border therefore has to be altered and our dynamic duo make instead for the Turkish border towards the village of Wradjye (not Branyevo). Interestingly, Wradjye is referred to as "ein kleines dorf" (a small village) which indicates that only the Village needs to have the anonymity of being a "Place".

Continuing the story, they meet up with Nadia's contact man who usually confirms their route to London as "By sea, Gdansk - Danzig - you know. By air, to Copenhagen. By air, again, to London." Except that they're now elsewhere, so the route becomes "Boat Turkey - Istanbul - understood. Then plane Athens. Plane again Paris, then London."

Hand me that world atlas, I'm starting to lose my sense of direction!

Why Joachim Brinkmann chose to make these changes to the established script is unknown. * Vincent Tilsley who wrote the original script for "Chimes" confirms that he wasn't consulted on any such changes and it would seem that Brinkmann simply decided to put his own spin on the basic concept, over and above a simple translation job. There are certainly some interesting ideas.

NOT STRAIGHT FORWARD TRANSLATIONS

Effectively, what we have in the German episodes of THE PRISONER are alternate versions not straight forwards translations although some episodes have significant changes, some only quite minor ones. It doesn't ultimately make any difference, Number 6 still doesn't get away, but it all adds a number of interesting twists to the original tale.

**) Mr. Brinkmann was contacted in May 2006. In a brief telephone conversation he regretted that, after 40 years, he wasn't able to contribute anything substantial. Thus, no details on his work were discussed.*