

**FROM FIDELITY TO CREATIVITY:
TRANSLATING BOOK TITLES**

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***Abstract:** The present paper reflects our interest and research in the field of marketing translation and addresses the pragmatic nature of title translation for literary works, continuing the analysis of two translation pillars we work with, as previously employed in a study we published on film title translation. As such, “fidelity” and “creativity” would frame the dynamic exchange that authenticates the linguistic particularization of titles as reader-oriented or content-oriented while making use of translation methods and procedures.*

***Keywords:** book title, equivalence, fidelity, literary creativity, marketing translation*

1. Introduction

The present paper continues our line of research that approaches titles as a form of persuasive/advertising discourse which needs to meet specific requirements and whose translation would be expected to follow the principle of fidelity (among others) in translation (see here Lungu Badea’s approach to types of fidelity, 2005: 14), and yet it comes to pose specific translation issues and mirror the loss-and-gain principle, ultimately influencing the target audience’s choice (i.e. potential readership) and constructing/deconstructing the identity of the book. This approach started with a paper we published on film titles, “From Fidelity to Creativity: Film Titles and Marketing Translation”, where we regarded their translation as partially determined by a marketing choice to increase impact on viewership, the titles themselves being understood as a powerful marketing tool.

We add here an individualized approach to the interaction teacher – student in introducing literary translation to BA and/or MA students, also making use of the PETRA-E framework and analysing the official (on-the-market) translation of the titles of a literary work selection from the perspective of translation fidelity, loss-and-gain principle, methods and procedures employed.

2. General

“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet” (Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act 2, Scene 2) What’s in a name indeed when meaning is to be found beyond word carcasses?

What’s in a book title for that matter when it comes to inviting the reader into the textual worlds lying dormant or pulsating in the awaiting pages of a book? It is the beginning of the story, setting out on a soothing, yet adventurous journey. It is a door left ajar to incite curiosity, the first glimpse at an imagined world that echoes longings, hopes, dreams, regrets, memories and the kind, promised realities that appeal to the reader’s reality within. Yet, titles can fail and so can book title translation for we have so often seen translation going wrong, almighty titles getting lost in translation and becoming uninviting metaphorical doors we, as readers, feel no desire to open despite our being aware of the fact that those titles do encapsulate an entire world in their textually

limited boundaries, aspiring to recreate the beautiful in the target language (which Georgiana Lungu Badea sees as the purpose of literary translation [2005:13]).

In the aforementioned paper (Nicolae 2020:185), we list a number of features that apply to film titles, but apply to literary titles as well (hence, to their TL equivalent): conciseness of expression (semiotic density, condensed and compact form), cultural insight, thematic relevance (allusive, suggestive), aesthetic/artistic element (appeal), commercial/market element (persuasive, sellable/marketable). We also include an enumeration of approaches that branch out into methods and procedures that help the process of translation/rendering equivalence, rooted in Jean-Paul Vinay & Jean Darbelnet's (in Venuti, 2004: 84-93; in Molina and Hurtado Albir, 2002: 500-501), Newmark's (1988:45-47, 81, 82-91) and Nida's (in Venuti 2004:129-130, 134) taxonomies, which we use in the analysis of the TL equivalent for the selected SL titles (simple random sampling of English titles) in the activity dedicated to BA/MA students, meant to demonstrate the creative potential, the dynamics, the complexity, and the difficulty of literary title translation.

- Newmark's translation methods: word-for-word translation, literal translation, faithful translation, semantic translation, adaptation, free translation, idiomatic translation, communicative translation;
- Newmark's translation procedures for CBTs: transference / reproduction, naturalization / graphic adaptation, cultural equivalent, functional equivalent, descriptive equivalent, componential analysis, synonymy, through-translation / literal translation, shifts or transpositions, modulation, compensation, recognized translation, paraphrase, couplets;
- Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet's translation methods (direct and oblique) and procedures: borrowing, calque, literal translation, transposition, equivalence, modulation, adaptation, compensation, concentration vs. dissolution, amplification vs. economy, reinforcement vs. condensation, explicitation vs. implicitation, generalization vs. particularization, inversion;
- Nida's classification of equivalence: formal ("gloss translation") and dynamic.

It is no wonder that, because of the very essence of the translation process, the transition from the SL text to the TL text (the title, in our case) implies adapting the translation to the culture it addresses, therefore localising it and sometimes moving away from the TL in the effort to be both relevant and impactful, mirroring an artistic exchange / creative transposition (see R. Jakobson in Venuti 2004). The title of a literary work (any title, for that matter) completes the SL work and advertises it, being the first component that reaches the (potential) reader, a more or less successful invitation embedding just enough information to incite curiosity (informative, aesthetic, vocative functions referred to), to make the reader resonate (intellectually, emotionally). Even if in most of the cases the final version of the title is not the translator's prerogative, but rests with the editorial staff of the publishing house, this does not lessen the complexity of the process of title translation, its implications and impact on the readership, paralleling the author's conceptualisation of the SL title.

In their paper, "Stylistic Creativity when Translating Titles", Briffa and Caruana (2009:3) make use of Lodge's assertion, identifying the title of a text as a "constituent element of the textual world", while it "derives its identity from the context and translation must take this into account". We add here Bobadilla-Perez's perspective (117, 119), according to which the translator's role in what concerns titles is to both mediate a semantic transfer and to recontextualize it so as to make it appealing to TL readership; she also asserts that the title is again part of the rhetoric of the literary text and "it may be, in fact, as close as we come within that text to an *authorial voice*", having as its primary function "to lure unsuspecting readers [...] into the story presented by the story. Therefore, titles are the most imprecise, capricious and subjective component of the whole narrative."

Briffa and Caruana further refer to the functions of literary titles, distinguishing between reader-oriented titles and content-oriented ones; the former are seen as preparing the reader for what is to follow, stimulate curiosity, condition concentration by stipulating a condition, making a request,

suggesting emotion, etc. whereas the latter (subdivided into internally-oriented and externally-oriented titles) provide information on theme, subject, form, character, symbols. Thus, the layered significance/potential of the titles is made again obvious, the scholars stating (using as reference Myers and Simms) that they may “accommodate several latent meanings which can be discovered after experiencing the text” (2009:4), which would influence the translator’s decision-making process, his/her choice between literal translation or translation shift, denotative equivalence (Nida’s “formal equivalence”) or connotative equivalence (Nida’s “dynamic equivalence”), etc.

In their analysis, Briffa and Caruana (2009:5) identified four strategy types of translated titles, with acknowledged instances when a combination of strategies is used: transference (loan titles with original orthography), naturalisation (naturalised/localised loan titles), literality (literal titles), and shift (alternative titles; elements of translation shift).

A somewhat different classification (i.e., M.S. Doyle’s) is mentioned by Bobadilla-Perez (119-120), where we would speak of three categories: literal translations, near-literal translations, liberal/free translations. Literal translations include three sub-categories (nominal titles, titles incorporating foreign phrases and words, titles which are retained in English); near-literal translations would refer to *mot à mot* translations or those including slight changes deemed necessary by the translator; liberal/free translation might be quite challenging as it implies the translator’s effort to achieve fidelity elsewhere, not in the verbatim perspective.

Bobadilla-Perez also discusses Cristiane Nord’s classification of title translation, a classification that is rooted in Jakobson’s structuralist functions of language; as such, the TL title would mirror some of the six functions that Bobadilla-Perez lists on pages 121-123 (a suggestion for handling literary title translation):

- the distinctive function (the title needs to unmistakably identify the target text);
- the phatic function (appealing to the culture-specific audience);
- the metatextual function (the title conforms to “the genre conventions of the culture it belongs to”);
- the descriptive/referential function (comprehensible, relevant title to the TL audience and their cultural background);
- the expressive function;
- the appellative/operative function (taking into account “the culture-specific susceptibility and expectations of the prospective readers”; the commercially successful element).

A highly interesting (and entertaining) analysis of title translation is provided by Clifford Landers in his study “The all-important title” where the examples given speak for themselves, highlighting the fact that besides the well-translated titles, there are so many uninspired choices that affect the rightness of the title, falsify the readers’ perception of the meaning, move away from the author’s intention or insistence that their title should be rendered a certain way into TL (Landers [2001:141] gives here the example of J.D. Salinger and his request that *The Catcher in the Rye* be translated literally; yet, we have the German version that would translate into English as *Young Holden*, or the Spanish one, *The Hidden Hunter*), or those titles that, as Landers nicely puts it, “do not travel well” (143) (local place names not known abroad, snatches of proverbs, plays on words, etc.). Landers (140) opts for the approach that does not favour change in target language title; he states that “a title change may occur because of cultural, linguistic, historical, or even geographical disparities between SL and TL. In all cases, the purpose should be to afford the TL reader easier access into the work by diminishing the potentially offputting ‘otherness’ of such writings – without, needless to say, adulterating or ‘improving’ the original.”

As to the practical application of this theoretical foundation/framework in the teaching-learning process, we use the case of translating titles in our didactic approach to translation studies – film titles when handling audiovisual translation (see our paper on the translation of film titles) and book titles to introduce the practical part of literary translation to students (stories do begin with

a title, don't they?) –, making use of the above-mentioned methods, procedures, perspectives, to gradually paint the multi-faceted, protean portrait of the (literary) translator as a mediator between cultures and languages, carrying the assumed burden and responsibility of accurately, appropriately and beautifully (see Lungu Badea's assertion as quoted above) facilitating the access to the translated text (form and meaning). A comparative analysis is employed, students acknowledging, discussing, and being demonstrated the various challenges of the different types of translation, followed by the discussion on the PETRA-E framework that they need to understand as a tool developed for both teaching and learning purposes, helping in building/acquiring (and assessing) a set of competences (with given descriptors LT1 → LT5) that inevitably characterise the literary translation process: transfer competence, language competence, textual competence, heuristic competence, literary-cultural competence, professional competence, evaluative competence, research competence.

The worksheet we use for book titles includes a SL corpus of English titles of literary works (simple random sampling bound to change in difficulty depending on the students' level). Students are asked to render them into TL (Romanian, in our case) without getting familiar with the book content and discuss/identify the difficulties in translating the titles (decontextualized as they are at this stage); the next stage, implies providing background information to students, who are now asked to rethink their translation from the point of view of the information on the plot they have been given and apply (if deemed necessary) and explain subsequent changes; the next step is to give the students the official translation (renowned quality publishing houses on the Romanian market) and ask them to compare their translation with the official/published one, identify and discuss the differences; the last step implies analyzing the official title translation from the point of view of fidelity, the loss-and-gain principle, impact/appeal (the commercial element), function, methods and procedures.

We would insist on the syntagm we used above, "renowned quality publishing houses on the Romanian market", as this can make a huge difference in the quality of the translation as well, with a more professionally thought workflow and higher standards. To illustrate our point, we would like to mention here some of the examples given by Radu Paraschivescu, writer and translator, in his "Pastila de răs" for Digi24 TV on December 12, 2015 (<https://www.digi24.ro/magazin/timp-liber/cultura/pastila-de-limba-greselile-de-traducere-din-carti-si-din-filme-469355>). In discussing mistranslations (books, films), Paraschivescu refers to a volume published by a certain publishing house and enumerates some examples of translators having massacred the SL titles while rendering them into Romanian and ignoring the correct TL titles present in bookstores and libraries for quite a while: Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*, translated as *Portocala mecanică*, becomes *Mecanismul ceasului oranj* (with the noun "orange" having abruptly become an adjective), Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*, translated as *Ultimul suspin al maurului* suddenly becomes *Ultimul suspin al zidului* (with the noun "sigh" having been mistaken for a "wall"), defying all logic, or Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra*, accurately rendered as *Doliul îi șade bine Electrei*, becomes *Din jale se întrupează Electra* (with the verb "to become" used as "to grow/come to be" instead of "be appropriate/suitable"), etc. The point is that, unfortunately, there are publishing houses that do not value and/or promote (also to be read "ensure") quality translations, thus sabotaging the very essence of translation probably for financial considerations, which should be a sort of warning for the literate reader that translated books on shelves do not necessarily bear a TL quality badge.

Going back to the didactic approach, we include below the table for the BA/MA worksheet, adding the official/published version in the corresponding column, with the publishing house mentioned, and more importantly with the translator's name indicated (as a humble way of drawing attention on the importance of the translator's right to have their identity acknowledged), providing analysis for several of the enumerated titles to demonstrate the teaching-learning process in the use of such activities, with no claim on our part to exhaust the analysis.

ROMANIAN JOURNAL OF ENGLISH STUDIES
RJES 18 /2021

BOOK TITLE (SL)	students' translation	official translation (TL) publishing house, translator	translation procedure(s)	loss-and-gain principle
Delia Owens, <i>Where the Crawdads Sing</i>		<i>Acolo unde cântă racii</i> (Pandora M; Bogdan Perdivara)		
Richard Powers, <i>The Echo Maker</i>		<i>Cel care cheamă ecoul</i> (Polirom; Iulia Gorzo)		
Horace McCoy, <i>They Shoot Horses, Don't They?</i>		<i>Și ciii se împușcă, nu-i așa?</i> (Humanitas; Dan Croitoru)		
William Golding, <i>Darkness Visible</i>		<i>Beznă clară</i> (Humanitas; Iulia Gorzo)		
E. Hemingway, <i>For Whom the Bell Tolls</i>		<i>Pentru cine bat clopotele</i> (Polirom; Ionuț Chiva)		
Cristopher Moore, <i>Lamb: The Gospel According to Biff, Christ's Childhood Pal</i>		<i>Mielul: Evanghelia după Biff, tovarășul de joacă al lui Isus</i> (Polirom; Iulia Gorzo)		
J.D. Salinger, <i>Catcher in the Rye</i>		<i>De veghe în lanul de seară</i> (Polirom; Cristian Ionescu)		
A. Huxley, <i>Brave New World</i>		<i>Minunata lume nouă</i> (Polirom; Andrei Bantaș)		
Samuel Beckett, <i>Dream of Fair to Middling Women</i>		<i>Vis cu femei frumoase și nu prea</i> (Polirom; Veronica Niculescu)		
William Faulkner, <i>As I Lay Dying</i>		<i>Pe patul de moarte</i> (RAO; Horia Florian Popescu, Paul Goma)		
George Saunders, <i>Lincoln in the Bardo</i>		<i>Lincoln între vieți</i> (Humanitas; Radu Paraschivescu)		
Cormac McCarthy, <i>All the Pretty Horses</i>		<i>Căluții mei, căluți frumoși</i> (Polirom; Iulia Gorzo)		
Zelda Fitzgerald, <i>Save Me the Waltz</i>		<i>Acordă-mi acest vals</i> (Humanitas; Rodica Ștefan)		
Arundhati Roy, <i>The Ministry of Utmost Happiness</i>		<i>Ministerul fericirii supreme</i> (Humanitas; Alexandra Coliban)		
Arundhati Roy, <i>The God of Small Things</i>		<i>Dumnezeul lucrurilor mărunte</i> (Humanitas; Luana Stoica)		
Jonathan Safran Foer, <i>Everything Is Illuminated</i>		<i>Totul este iluminat</i> (Humanitas; Fraga Cusin)		
Jonathan Safran Foer, <i>Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close</i>		<i>Extrem de tare și incredibil de aproape</i> (Humanitas; Andra Matzal)		
Jonathan Safran Foer, <i>Here I Am</i>		<i>Iată-mă</i> (Humanitas; Andra Matzal, Cosmin Postolache)		
Anthony Doerr, <i>All the Light We Cannot See</i>		<i>Toata lumina pe care nu o putem vedea</i> (Humanitas; Iulia Gorzo)		
Max Porter, <i>Grief Is the Thing With Feathers</i>		<i>Durerea e o făptură înaripată</i> (Pandora M; Mihaela Buruiană)		
M. Vargas Llosa, <i>The Storyteller (El Hablador)</i>		<i>Povestășul</i> (Humanitas, Coman Lupu)		
Sylvia Plath, <i>The Bell Jar</i>		<i>Clopotul de sticlă</i> (Polirom, Alexandra Coliban)		
Kurt Vonnegut, <i>Welcome to the Monkey House</i>		<i>Bun venit printre maimuțe</i> (Humanitas; Alexandra Coliban)		
Anuradha Roy, <i>All the Lives We Never Lived</i>		<i>Toate viețile pe care nu le-am trăit</i> (Humanitas; Cristina Nicolae)		

The activity is meant not only to gradually build on students' competences as prospective (literary) translators, but by its entertaining and dynamic nature to incite students' curiosity, to make

them want to set out on this fascinating adventurous journey of the profession. If book titles (whether translated or not) are meant to invite potential readers into the worlds they promise, this activity is meant to invite students into the world of the literary translator. The comparable sample is an engaging, challenging means to illustrate the use of methods, procedures, equivalence typology in translation.

In the case of Max Porter's *Grief Is the Thing with Feathers*, we have an example of oblique translation: the TL equivalent substitutes the SL zero article noun "grief" with the definite article TL noun "durerea", and the definite article SL noun "the thing" becomes the indefinite article TL noun "o făptură"; at the same time "the thing with feathers" becomes "o făptură înaripată" ["a winged being"], a brilliant semantic and lexical choice that incorporates the meaning and is highly poetic, hence impactful, having added aesthetic value/stylistic effects. The semantic association between "feathers" and "winged" seems to change focus, and yet stays within the same symbolism. If the TL rendition had been a faithful, word-for-word one, the impact on readership might have been lost and would certainly have lost the stylistic effect provided by the syntagm "o făptură înaripată".

All the Lives We Never Lived, Anuradha Roy's novel, was rendered into TL as *Toate viețile pe care nu le-am trăit*. The choice of title was a sinuous path to follow, moving from version to version, either shortening the title ("viețile noastre netrăite" / "vieți netrăite") or encapsulating more of the content to finally arrive at the unanimously agreed on title. This is another example that mirrors the predominance of formal equivalence as a translation choice, with a slight change – the omission of the subject in the TL title: if the SL title reflects the English grammar requirement that the subject be specified, the Romanian rendition also reflects TL flexibility in that the Romanian verb form indicates the subject (1st, 2nd, 3rd person, number), the subject being inferred without necessarily being specified. However, in the case of this Romanian verb tense ("perfect compus"), we have identical form for first person singular and plural, therefore the TL title becomes less clear as to whom (I/we) the action/plot mirrored in the title refers but without negatively impacting readership. We need to add here that by having inserted "noi" [we] in the title, the fluidity of the TL title would have been affected, which was a good reason for skipping the pronoun in the title; besides, a note of mystery is triggered by this omission, leaving it to the reader to provide the missing clues on reading the book, which may be regarded as a suitable marketing choice.

A further example would be that of Cormac McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses*. The TL title, *Căluții mei, căluți frumoși* is an example of (beautiful) oblique translation where the translator opted for the repetition of the diminutive "căluți(i)" (a sort of structural parallelism), the first TL occurrence in its definite article form to which the possessive adjective "mei" [my] was added, while the second one in its zero article form that would function as an explication, also adding musicality and stylistic effect. Shifting from general to particular "all" is omitted, felt as redundant in the TL syntagm, replaced by "mei" whereas "pretty" is 'upgraded' to "frumoși" [beautiful], which is not at all felt as a loss in the process of translation, but rather as a gain that would seek to establish an affective bond with potential readers.

William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* becomes *Pe patul de moarte*, another example of oblique translation, with a shift from particular (the use of "I") to the general (the omission of the subject) – modulation, from verb ("lay dying") to noun ("patul" [the bed]) – transposition. The TL equivalent ["on one's deathbed"] preserves the semantic load of the SL title, expressive of the last hours of somebody's life; yet, in our opinion, the SL title sounds more dramatic precisely because of the use of verbs, but we are aware of the fact that a word-for-word Romanian translation would not have been an inspired marketing choice.

The last example we analyse here is M. Vargas Llosa's *El Hablador* translated into English as *The Storyteller* and rendered into Romanian as *Povestașul*. The Romanian equivalent is a perfect example of a lexical choice (out of a synonymic chain) that reconfigures the impact on the readers, as well as the reader's attitude towards the book, and, why not, the character. The translator opted for "povestaș" and not for other dictionary equivalents such as "narator", "cel ce spune povești",

“povestar”. Although not posing any semantic, lexical, grammatical difficulty, the straightforward title is beautifully handled in Romanian, the translator favouring the equivalent that has a lower frequency of use, but is typical of literary texts, suggesting by this very choice a travel in both space and time. Just like the book itself.

3. Conclusion

Book titles need to be seen as incorporating a textual microcosm whose mysterious boundaries are meant to appeal to the reader and, as a marketing tool, sell the book. Although it might seem an easy task to do, book title translation might prove a highly challenging conundrum where the shift from, say, a definite article form to an indefinite article form, from the general to the particular, or from a verb to a noun, etc. may turn out to be either a loss or, on the contrary, a strike of inspiration that compensates for the inevitable losses that the transition from SL to TL might trigger, still doing justice to both the author and the book, and ultimately making the reader resonate. It is a story in a nutshell, the very beginning of a narrative journey which literary translation seeks to faithfully represent while recreating/echoing the beautiful given by literature as art.

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ROMANIAN JOURNAL OF ENGLISH STUDIES
RJES 18 /2021

of the European Parliament (having supervised several terminological projects), organizer of a translation contest for university students and over 50 academic workshops.