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Linguistic Re-reading of the Literary Text. An Alternative Understanding of Local Bilingualism in the Context of Globalization

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Abstract. In this paper, I present a possible interdisciplinary, predominantly linguistic reading of the literary text, taking as a starting point the work of Andrei Dósa entitled *Multă forță şi un dram de gingăşie* [Lots of Power and a Touch of Gentleness], published in 2021 by Polirom Publishing House. This way of re-reading allows us to go beyond the basic narrative structure of the text and focus on the underlying meanings constituted by the language used in the shaping of local colour. In the contextualization of the narrative thread, in the case of this novel, translanguaging strategies appear, which are analysed in relation to the evolution of the main character and the constitution of his own identity in relation to the Other. The specificity of the artistic processing of the spoken language, the way in which the complementary activation of languages becomes a tool for characterization, and the creation of local colour can provide stable reading references even for texts written in other languages. In this case, the activation of lexemes, phraseological units, culturemes, quotations from Hungarian (predominantly) and English in the literary text written in Romanian support the presentation of the steps of the individual's self-definition in finding the local specificity under the imprint of globalization. The present study explores the significance of the secondary semantics of bilingual situations in the architecture of literary texts in general and, at the same time, provides a possible way of re-reading the text by following the processes of individualization of the literary transfiguration of bi- or multilingual existence in the case of a contemporary novel.

Keywords: reading from a linguistic perspective, bilingualism, biculturalism, translanguaging

Introduction

Reorganizing, reinterpreting, and redefining are constant marks of the Present, and these elements are to be found in the redefinition of local specificity in the context of globalization. Re-dimensioning is also echoed in literary discourse. Thus, in the age of the digital, the sphere of referentiality in literature is widening, and we are witnessing the resizing of literary discourse in general, the flexibilization of its framework through intertextuality and multimodalization. Relevant in this regard is the diversity of new species that have appeared recently only at the level of poetic discourse such as slam poetry, Instagram poetry, videopoems, slides, etc. Along with these openings to other forms, we are also witnessing the rethinking of national paradigms in literary interpretation (Balázs 2017). The aim of the present analysis is to provide interpretative benchmarks for the selective re-reading of contemporary literary texts produced by a new generation characterized by ambilingualism, i.e. parallel socialization in two languages, literatures, and cultures. The specific framework of the re-reading is given by the linguistic perspective, more precisely sociolinguistics, which we adopt by defining and applying a terminological system borrowed from this field. This interdisciplinary dialogue can provide us with a more nuanced understanding of the portraits, relationships, and cultures that emerge in and between different languages.

Text and context

In the present analysis, I address the significance of secondary semantics of bilingual situations in the architecture of literary texts in general, while in the second part of the paper, I track the individualization processes of the literary transfiguration of bi- or multilingual existence in the case of a novel published in 2021. The referential framework of this analysis is the generation of contemporary ambi- or multilingual authors, which – based on Demény's (2023) self-definition – can be considered the "Hunga-Romanian" generation of writers.

The present study is part of a larger project that aims to investigate how the literary representation of biculturalism, also bi- and multilingualism, acquires specific individual notes through the linguistic strategies of constituting the linguistically and culturally determined semiological system in the case of the aforementioned generation of writers.

What do we mean by the new generation of ambilingual writers?

The generation upon which I aimed a more in-depth reading is represented by the works of authors such as Péter Demény, Andor Horváth, Tamás Mihók, Nóra Ugron, Robert Gabriel Elekes, Kocsis Francisko, Andrei Dósa, etc. The common note of the authors mentioned above is that they write both in Hungarian and Romanian (some also in English) and are at the same time socialized in the literature of both cultures. They are also translators, an endeavour that ensures a permanent to-and-fro between languages and cultures, even between universal and local literature. In outlining the portrait of this new generation, the predominant common note concerns the nuances of the inner perspective of creating in two languages. Illustrative in this regard is Nóra Ugron's statement about the act of creation: "By the way, writing literature in Romanian as a Hungarian person sometimes feels sad, as well as being an anti-normative experiment and exploration. With every line I write, I seem to gain something I had never thought I would, and I lose something at the same time, with every missed opportunity to write in my mother tongue..." (Ugron 2023).[1] As the same author remarks, creating in two languages is "a tragedy and a celebration" at the same time; it is a state of being "caught between two languages and nowhere at home" (Ugron 2023).

Generally speaking, from the various interviews[2] and confessions, we also notice that, although these authors define the state of creation as an ambivalent state, we feel in their voices, with different intensity, the co-presence of the regret of abandoning the mother tongue but also the curiosity of finding themselves through the language of the other. They do not determine their own cultural identity based on the paradigms of national literatures, nor based on spatio-temporal paradigms, but in terms of meaning and significance in which they search for the right linguistic styles, codes and registers, the right words. Péter Demény illustratively captures this in the following lines, published in *Matca Literară*: "I do not, alas, look for pretexts for hatred. I'm looking for myself in this hustle and bustle. In all this life. In all the 'Hunga-Romanianness' that defines me" (Demény 2023). The compound word used by the author essentially but suggestively captures the idea of Presence (Dasein in the Heideggerian sense) in both cultures.

These authors' works represent artistic expressions of bicultural socialization, socialization assumed through the activation of inter- and intra-linguistic and cultural experiences. Taking this context as a starting point, I believe that we are witnessing the emergence of a new dimension of artistic language, in which the differentiation, the hierarchy of minor and major cultures or the idea of "minoritized"

1 All translations from Hungarian and Romanian are mine, E. M. Tódor, throughout the article.

2 https://transtelex.ro/kultura/2022/04/11/andrei-dosa-magyar-kolteszet-napja (Last accessed: 31 May 2023).

cultures disappears, as they are perceived as value systems in themselves, bearers of specific, indigenous values. In the universes thus created, the boundaries (even those of languages) disappear, and the universal character of human feeling is conveyed through this bi- or trilingual, complementary perspective, while the central organizing element becomes mediation, the transmission of feelings, values, thoughts and ideas, and not so much the origin of the word.

Writing in or about the language of another is not a foreign phenomenon in world literature. The literature of exile, for example, provides us with numerous illustrative examples of authors whose primary linguistic socialization differs from the language in which they expressed their artistic talents. We only need to think of the works of authors such as Joseph Conrad (1857–1924), Vladimir Nabokov (1899–1977), Eugen Ionescu (1909–1994), Cinghiz Aitmatov (1928–2008), Tristan Tzara (1896–1963), Arthur Koestler (1905–1983), Paul Celan (1920–1970), Aleksandar Hemon (1964–), Eugen O. Chirovici (1964–), and others.

In Romanian literature, taking on the voice in the other's language has manifested itself in different ways. We find the direct artistic processing of these ideas as early as 19th-century literature. Costache Negruzzi, in his essay entitled *Cum am învățat româneşte* [How I Learned Romanian], describes, for example, his "painful" experiences of reading in his mother tongue. An interesting description of the immersion in a language that is not one's mother tongue can be found in Lucian Blaga's *Hronicul şi cântecul vârstelor* [The Chronicle and the Song of Ages], in which the narrator recounts his experiences when entering a German-language school, how at first he perceives and listens to the language of communication in his environment, which then becomes the language of study, and the language of his intellectual fulfilment. Indirect literary references to the coexistence of cultures can be found in many artistic universes of Romanian literature, such as in the writings of Liviu Rebreanu, Ioan Slavici, Mihail Sadoveanu or the very existence and writings of Tudor Arghezi (Ferenczes 2015), etc. It should be noted that we have exemplified in this case the representations of each other's culture, but we do not propose to analyse the relations and tendencies of mutual knowledge of cultures, on which Tomonicska (2017b: 245), following a diachronic incursion, concludes that there is "an asymmetry and a partial parallelism" in the Romanian–Hungarian cultural relations. Generally speaking, in the era before the Revolution of 1989, Hungarian literature "under a dictatorial regime" was poorly represented, "camouflaged and/or repressed" (Tomonicska 2017a: 174). In the texts of contemporary Romanian literature on the whole and in texts by the authors of the generation writing in both languages, the manner of writing about bi- or multilingual life and manifestations appears much more "relaxed", although it is a relatively recent phenomenon. By introducing this aspect into the sphere of literary discourse, the specific aspects of cultural and linguistic interdependencies become much more nuanced, as their transposition to the level of artistic discourse

synthesises the vision of both the lived and contemplated experiences, provokes the dialogue of intrinsic and extrinsic images, thus providing a framework for metalinguistic and metacultural reflection on the phenomenon. Obviously, these tools continue to fulfil their natural purpose of restoring local and regional colour, individualizing the universe created by the author. We are also witnessing the processing of spoken language, the capturing of speech acts in their natural manifestation, but – implicitly – also their artistic processing.

In contemporary writings, the way of talking about bi- or multilingual life and manifestations has taken on nuanced representations, being a constituent of local and regional colour creation techniques. An illustrative example in this sense is Caius Dobrescu's novel *Moarte în ținutul secuilor* [Death in Szeklerland], a novel published in 2017, where a specific form of resemantization of spoken language can be observed (Tódor 2019). In this case, the language of the characters becomes a means of "naturalizing" portraits and places, while their verbal conduct offers the possibility of contextualizing the narrative thread. The translinguistic manifestations of the characters, identifiable at different levels of language, from the phonetic-phonological to the lexico-semantic, become strategies of rendering local colour. "From this mingling and rupture of words and non-words, the author reaches a *metasemantic* level, a 'game of language' obtained by a *hyper-sign* created on a level beyond sentences, cultures and languages" (Tódor 2019: 4; emphasis in the original).

Conceptual framework of re-reading

The theoretical framework of the linguistic re-reading of literary texts is provided by the conceptual system of defining the coordinates of bilingual verbal conduct. The starting point for linguistic rereading is a more nuanced understanding of verbal conduct through the dimensions provided by the literary text. The reading will thus acquire a specific character through the way in which the reader's perspective focuses on the verbalization of biculturalism. In this paper, I investigate how this idiolect appears in the artistic universe outlined by Andrei Dósa in the novel *Multă forță și un dram de gingășie* [Lots of Power and a Touch of Gentleness] (2021), published at Polirom Publishing House. The re-reading announced in the title of the present study involves the transphrastic analysis of the text (focusing on the linguistics of the text); the metasemantic study of the text obtained through a transphrastically constituted, transcultural hyper-sign. I begin the re-reading process by delimiting a thematic and a linguistic level, a surface and a deep structure in the architecture of the text.

The conceptual framework that provides the benchmarks for the re-reading is focused on the terms that describe the profile of the bilingual speaker, studied

and described on the basis of empirical data collected among the Hungarian-speaking community in Romania (Tódor 2019). The arsenal of notions referred to will be briefly presented in what follows. They cover behavioural aspects on the one hand and language structure and cross-linguistic contacts on the other.

Thus, in the praxis of communication, phenomena such as communicative anxiety (fear of speaking in order not to make a mistake), lexical hiatus (the feeling of not finding the right word), linguistic impasse (the quicker activation of a word from another language although the word is also known in the base language of communication), verbal routines (i.e. the habit of naming something in a specific way), failure or success of intercomprehension are elements that are more prominent with bilingual speakers than with monolingual speakers. In these situations, the "familiar" or "foreign" character of a word is also determined by the frequency at which it is used, as well as by its socio-affective valences, as it may happen that a foreign word in the linguistic system of a language may seem familiar to the speaker – perhaps more familiar than the one in the language of communication – due to the specificity of the contact with that language. Based on such situations, the concept of translanguaging situations (Wei 2011, 2017, Cenoz and Gorter 2017) emerges, which aims at the complementary activation of languages in the speaker's linguistic repertoire, the specificity of the choice of a word in L1 or L2 being socio-culturally and relationally marked (Wei 2011: 2). Thus, the phenomenon of language code switching noticeable at the level of language structure is contextualized, taking on pragmatic and socio-affective functions. In the artistic transfiguration of reality, this conceptual puzzle is re-semanticized, becoming a tool for characterization, for creating local colour, constituting pillar elements of the global and local coherence of narrative structures (Zafiu 2000).

General overview of the novel

Poet, prose writer, and translator, Andrei Dósa, in his novel *Multă putere şi un dram de gingăşie* [Lots of Power and a Touch of Gentleness], published in 2021 at Polirom Publishing House, Iaşi, offers the reader a framework for reflection on how to define oneself in a bilingual and bicultural context. A Romanian-writing Hungarian writer, he writes in both Hungarian and Romanian. In an interview[3] published in 2022, he claimed about his own bicultural existence that he "has two ways of thinking": "When I write, the constraints of choosing language registers are real challenges. How to express something well and precisely as it resonates with me. Not to mention the traditions of the two literatures…"

3 https://transtelex.ro/kultura/2022/04/11/andrei-dosa-magyar-kolteszet-napja (Last accessed: 31 May 2023).

Right from the title, his book announces a contrast between the symbolically chosen words "power" and "gentleness", to which he refers through quantitative determinants that are also in antithesis. It is a thematically complex novel which proposes at the same time a socio-political monograph on the redefinition of post-communist existence and an ironic social critique of the times; all of this is outlined through a personal narrative thread that gives the novel an autobiographical touch. In the critical remarks contained in the back of the book, Adrian Lăcătuş remarks that "unique in this novel is the voice of its narrator, a mixture of Holden Caulfield and Karl Ove, Hungarian and Romanian, idealistic and cynical, hybrid in many senses, trying to find clarity, without knowing why..." Accepting the hybrid character of the novel, a combination of Bildungsroman and anthropological novel, I interpret this writing primarily from a psychological perspective, being an artistic universe that presents the steps of an individual's self-definition, his intrinsic struggles, the moments of gradual recognition of the self in relation with others. It is a novel of psychology beyond masks, with a fine illustration of repressed feelings and the discomforts of assuming the self at different moments of existential evolution. It is a piece of writing concerned with the analysis of the gentleness of personality in the context of the power-shaping socio-political factors.

The psychological character of the novel is also emphasized by the dimension of setting up the linguistic and even national identity of the main character, distancing himself from the restricted circle of friends socialized in one culture and stepping into another framework of linguistic and cultural socialization. These uncomfortable exits and returns become sequences of the permanent struggle between affirmation and silence, between acceptance and rejection.

Through the confessions of the narrative self, we are presented with the portrait of a young man socialized in his immediate environment, with distinctive regional characteristics, eager to go beyond the limiting framework of locality and to redefine himself translocally by discovering the dazzling challenge of globalizing trends. These three dimensions can be traced in the text by describing how the narrator self relates to his environment.

Interlingual dimension and text architecture

Beyond the global narrative structure, the peripheral narrative (van Dijk 1972, in Zafiu 2000) appears in the architecture of the text, which in the case of the present discourse renders the local, translocal, and global dimension of the main character's journey.

The local cohesion of the text (Zafiu 2000) is delineated by the regional clues of the discourse, materialized in (a) spatial references: "the registration number of the van is only partially visible, the first two letters: HR. *Hegyi Rabló* (Mountain

robber)" (Dósa 2021: 87); and in (b) onomastic and toponymic references. In the text written in Romanian, the characters have Hungarian names, rendered literally in Hungarian spelling such as Atti (nickname for Attila, representative for the Hungarian culture because of Attila the Hun, also called "Scourge of God"), Timi, Robi, Péter, Gergely, Edit, and so on. Local celebrities also appear in the novel, such as Uncle Sós, "the old man who had fought a bear and had apparently chased it away with his fierce battle cries" (Dósa 2021: 16).

The scenes of the novel are set in geographically identifiable locations, such as Braşov, Mereşti, Târgu-Mureş, or Miercurea Ciuc; the toponyms used in the text sometimes appear in Hungarian, sometimes only in Romanian. "Atti was delighted about his trips to Szeklerland, he was energized by any contact with this geographical region which he called his true homeland" (Dósa 2021: 18).

The translocal cohesion of the text is outlined through strategies of capturing cultural specificity, through the alternation and complementary blending of languages at the level of sentences and phrases, completed with the author's footnotes with the Romanian translations of the Hungarian in-text sentences. Here are some illustrative examples:

"I'll give him a bit more time to get used to the idea, I told myself. *Kész kabaré, pajtás!*[4] *as Greg used to say.*" (*Dósa 2021: 117; italics in the original*);

"Atti used to call me csirkemellű"[5] (Dósa 2021: 42; italics in the original).

The intercultural dimension of the narrative discourse is outlined through the interlinguistic playfulness, an individualizing element of Andrei Dósa's texts. This playful character is achieved through interlinguistic lexical similarity or interlinguistic paronymy or homonymy (also called "false friends" after "faux amis"), explained through translation. Interlingual homonymy refers to situations in which lexemes from different languages show formal similarity (full or partial) but carry different meanings. In the following case, the author refers to the association of the words *irodalom*/*birodalom* 'literature/empire' in order to then make semantic connections: "in Hungarian it is enough to omit the first letter of the word *birodalom* to get *irodalom*" (Dósa 2021: 8). Another illustrative example is *Goodfriends*/*Bukfenc* 'Somersault': "We used to get snotty in the Hungarians' bar, Goodfriends, which we nicknamed Bukfenc" (Dósa 2021: 51).

The lexical dimension of intercultural confluences takes on various forms. Cross-linguistic strategies appear at the level of sentences and phrases, with explanations in the footnotes via the author's translations:

"Except that my father thought otherwise. You have to eat what you're given. *Elég a figurázásból*"[6] (Dósa 2021: 21; italics in the original).

4 "Ce cabaret, amice! (magh.)" (Like a cabaret, pal! (Hun.)).
5 "Că am piept de pui (magh.)" (having chicken breast (Hun.)).
6 "Lasă figurile (magh.)" (Forget about tricks (Hun.)).

"'*Na, nyomás*!'[7] encouragement which he accompanied with a distinctive whistle…" (Dósa 2021: 34; italics in the original).

"I never stopped to talk to him, I just greeted him briefly, *szevasz*!"[8] (Dósa 2021: 40; italics in the original).

"*Tiszta szégyen!*[9] Greg's father looked surprised and stroked his bushy moustache: Does he really not know Hungarian?..." (Dósa 2021: 121–122; italics in the original).

The activation of texts in other languages is often driven by the desire to accurately reproduce the cited text. This is the case of the lyrics of songs heard or hummed in different contexts, of which a few illustrative examples are provided below.

"From the battered speakers we could now hear: *Olyan csávó vagyok / hogy kilenc romnyit kapok/, ha akarok*"[10] (Dósa 2021: 55; italics in the original).

Often the insertion of the word from the other language is a result of the untranslatable nature of some phraseological unit or cultureme. Here is an illustrative example: "János's culture was *egyveleg kultúra* (un vălmăşag, un potpuriu),[11] in which Hungarian folk songs co-existed, a kind of tavern music which back in those days was labelled Hungarian manele" (Dósa 2021: 170; italics in the original).

Prejudices and labels widely used among subcultures of the Hungarian population, such as the way Hungarians in Hungary are perceived by Hungarians in Szeklerland, also appear in the text. In this context, the word *táposok* appears, meaning weaker people, lacking vitality, which basically includes an indirect characterization, a compensatory or cynical way of relating to the other, used especially in colloquial contexts.

'These people are driving me crazy with their geeky ideas.'

'*Táposok*,'[12] Atti said contemptuously.

'We are going to get bored…'

'*Nyugi, ember.*[13] *He won't do anything we don't like.*' (Dósa 2021: 110; italics in the original)

Through translinguistic narrative and conversational situations, beyond the portraits, the imagology of the micro-community is also outlined. This micro-

7 "Hai, bagă viteză! (magh.)" (Come on, step on it! (Hun.)).
8 "Sal! (magh.)" (Hi! (Hun.)).
9 "Curată ruşine! (magh.)" (What a shame! (Hun.)).
10 "Sunt aşa un gagiu, că-mi iau nouă femei dacă vreau (magh.)" (I'm such a guy that I'll take nine women if I want to (Hun.)).
11 A hodgepodge, a potpourri.
12 "Hrăniți cu paiul, lipsiți de forță (magh.)" (straw-fed, lacking strength (Hun.)).
13 "Relax, omule (magh.)" (Relax, man (Hun.)).

community often refuses otherness, from which it acquires its own vitality through the permanent strengthening of its own image in relation with the other.

The dimension of the narrator's relation towards the globalizing tendencies of the time is also outlined through interlinguistic connections. These are achieved through the activation of English lexemes in the narrative continuum in Romanian. Here are some illustrative examples: "The child... made the *switch* with extraordinary speed" (Dósa 2021: 38; italics in the original); "That almost sickeningly erotic gleam in his eyes was not nearly enough to arouse me. *And I had my porn*. Why complicate myself?" (Dósa 2021: 33; italics in the original).

At other times, mutations of registers and linguistic codes are due to quotations or intertextuality resulting from the accurate reproduction of the lyrics of English songs. Here are some illustrative examples:

"I was moved to tears by the love songs of the eighties. *What a wicked thing to do, to let me dream of you*" (Dósa 2021: 118; italics in the original). English lexical elements, marks of globalization, are perceived as comprehensible presences; they are not translated by the author.

A representative topos of the main character's existence is digital space itself. At one point in the novel – through the universalizing language of the digital –, we are introduced to the configuration of the computer, by presenting the D-partition of the computer and its existing subfolders. From this point of view, the space in which the reader is transposed is unprecedented, the way in which a space of human existence, of the constitution of the digital self, is outlined to us, with powerful imprints on concrete manifestations and spoken language. In the text, there is a permanent transition from the register of digital communication to that of the oral or written narrative. Here is an illustrative example: "I gave the girl an *add* on Messenger and within a second Atti pulled out his phone and called her, eyes focused on the screen to say *I'm atta_boy, please accept my friendship*" (Dósa 2021: 58; italics in the original).

Reflections upon re-reading the text

In this study, I have illustrated a new possibility of reading the literary text, namely its reading from a linguistic point of view, offering a novel perspective on the text in which, beyond the overall narrative structure, I have experimented with selective reading of the peripheral narrative from the perspective of activated verbal conduct, capturing the way language is processed in the universe of the novel in its natural, spontaneous manifestation. In this way, the surface and underlying meanings of the text have been outlined. I believe that such an interdisciplinary (re)reading can provide a qualitative deepening in the understanding of the text and, at the same time, can provide a framework for reflection on the language

activation schemes and strategies available in the linguistic repertoire of the bi- or multilingual speaker. This repertoire must be approached holistically, while the communicative contexts of the novel pragmatically illustrate such a linguistic reality. It can therefore be concluded that this interpretative reading approach can be applied, based on the concepts offered by linguistics, to the context of other texts, including those written in other languages.

The present reading also becomes exciting in terms of the techniques used by the author in the linguistic rendering of local colour. In this case, we can see that unlike the universe created by Caius Dobrescu – analysed in Tódor (2019) – through the translinguistic elements that provide the artistic discourse with a closed coherence, since the world articulated and transfigured through translinguistic techniques must be intuited, meanings and significance are to be discovered by deciphering the local accent and the specific lexico-semantic structures. Thus, in the linguistically outlined universe of this work, there are continuous openings and exits. By these "exits", I mean the specific strategy of Andrei Dósa's universe, realized through the metatextual dimension, constituted by the translations offered by the author. In this case, the reader is left to contemplate the intrinsic universe of the work, precisely through the different linguistic worlds constituted in parallel (i.e. through translation). Here the specific element of the languages used complementarily is the effort to sustain or challenge "total" understanding.

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