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CHALLENGES IN ROMANIAN-ENGLISH AND ENGLISH-ROMANIAN TECHNICAL AND LITERARY TRANSLATIONS. GRAMMATICAL AND LEXICAL DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN ENGLISH AND ROMANIAN

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ABSTRACT:
The present paper provides a series of examples of common translation mistakes that are the result of source language interference. The issue of crosslinguistic interference, and its impact upon translation is a useful aspect to consider if one wishes to significantly improve translation results and create texts which stay true to the target language structure. Comparing the grammatical structure of the source and target languages of a text becomes a tool for predicting possible mistakes rooted in source language transfer to the target language of a text. Initially, comparative-contrastive analyses were performed primarily in the field of language teaching and acquisition, but recently the method has started being applied also in the field of Translation Studies. The comparative analysis of specific language structures can thus come in handy for both the study of translation and for translator training.

KEYWORDS:
Translation, challenges, English, Romanian, grammatical distinction, transfer, source language, target language

1. Introduction

In order to be able to assess the difficulties potential translators of English or Romanian texts face, one needs to resort to a set of linguistic considerations. In her paper "Comparative-Contrastive Analysis of Romanian to English Translation. Language Structures", Laura Sasu argues that no matter what language pairs we are talking about, a methodical comparative-contrastive approach to translation should be the applied norm, as such an approach will offer a much clearer image of which structures in both languages are most prone

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to produce unnatural sounding or downright mistaken structures in the target language, by means of interlingual transfer (2017: 113).

Initially, comparative-contrastive analyses were performed primarily in the field of language teaching and acquisition, but recently the method has started being applied also in the field of Translation Studies. The comparative analysis of specific language structures can thus come in handy for both the study of translation and for translator training. In Sasu's opinion, "bidirectional analyses are able to provide translators with the necessary disambiguation criteria for attaining best message equivalence as well as the natural/correct use of the target language" (2017: 113).

According to Sasu (2017), whenever one uses a foreign language, one actually uses translation from and into that certain language. To decode and encode messages in a foreign language means to "switch back and forth between the two languages involved, therefore creating a permanent translation process from and into one of the languages" (Sasu, 2017: 113). Production in the target language is consequently heavily influenced by one's source language, as pointed out also by Johansson (2008: 112). In what the field of translation is concerned, no matter which the source language is (English or Romanian), it will have a decisive impact on the final translated product.

Cozma argues that the root of most erroneous translations is the fact that teaching translation goes aboutin the same manner as teaching foreign languages, namely by focusing on grammatical structures as isolated entities. The downside of this approach is that it ignores the communicative function of both language and translation, the fact that words and phrases do not have to be translated in a vacuum, but as part of a text and context: *"The view which is offered by the foreign language teaching methodology – a view which, unfortunately, is sometimes applied in the case of translator training, too – is generally focused on the word or phrase as an isolated unit and mainly takes into account the student's competence as a foreign language learner. The problem is that this type of evaluation heavily penalizes the cases in which the grammatical rules are ignored or the basic vocabulary is not known, but does not take very much into account the communicative function that words and phrases are meant to fulfill in the particular passage, text, situation and culture in which they are used"* (Cozma, 2019:85).

In the case of Romanian to English and English to Romanian translations, the grammatical, structural, lexical and cultural differences between the two languages have a profound impact on the translation process. In what follows we will attempt to determine which grammatical and cultural differences determine most of the mistakes or inadequate translations from one of these languages into another. We will therefore look firstly at grammatical differences between English and Romanian, and secondly at the cultural differences between the two.

2. Nouns

2.1. Number of nouns

When translating from Romanian into English or vice versa, unexperienced translators or non-native speakers may be tempted to apply the plural construction schemes of their mother tongue to the target text, assuming that there is a plural form in the target language, while in fact there is none, or believing that there is no plural form. This is illustrated by the following examples:

●EN: The local administration provided me with more **informations** [correct: information] regarding the urban development project.

RO: Administrația locală mi-a oferit mai multe **informații** referitoare la proiectul de dezvoltare urbană.

●EN: She searched the library for more recent **researches** [correct: research].

RO: A căutat la bibliotecă **cercetări** mai recente.

Similarly, irregular plurals in English lead native speakers of Romanian to create regular, non-existent plural forms:

●EN: Extreme weather **phaenomenons** [correct: phaenomena] are common in this area.

RO: Asemenea **fenomene** meteo sunt normale în această zonă.

The source language inevitably influences the target language production in these examples, resulting in the employment of interlingual transfer, materialized in the use of wrong plural forms.

2.2. Case of nouns

In English, the genitive case, signalling possession, can be expressed in two ways, while in Romanian this cannot be done. Thus, in case of a Romanian to English translation, it will be up to the translator to decide which way of expressing the genitive he/she will use. Let us consider the following examples:

●EN: Our new **house's** windows [The windows **of our new house**] are wide.

RO: Ferestrele **noii** noastre case sunt mari.

●EN: The findings of the doctors [doctors' findings] were surprising.

RO: Concluziile medicilor au fost surprinzătoare.

2.3. Gender of nouns

In Romanian, gender is strictly specified by specific nouns (masculine, feminine and neuter), whereas in English gender can be determined only from the semantic context. Sasu argues that "common or dual gender nouns in English are insufficient when translating Romanian nouns, referring to animates that are gender marked in the source language. Transfer to either masculine or feminine (by including gender contrast markers) is necessary in order to provide accurate translations in such cases" (2017: 114). The following examples might shed light on this:

●EN: There are 90 **male students** and 70 **female students** in our school. [gender must be specified with the help of markers]

RO: În şcoala noastră sunt 90 de **elevi** şi 70 de **eleve**. [gender is expressed by specific forms of the noun]

3. Articles

While in English there are three categories of articles (definite, indefinite and zero article), Romanian only features two types (definite and indefinite). In English the zero article is a carrier of generic meaning, which in Romanian should be replicated by using the definite article. Errors thus may occur in translation by using the definite article in English, where a zero article should be employed, as shown in the following examples:

●EN: We live in the age of **the information** [correct: We live in the age of information.]

RO: Trăim în era **informației**.

●EN: I love **the animals**. [correct: I love animals.]

RO: Iubesc **animalele**.

When a specific reference is made, however, the definite article should be employed in English:

●EN: I love **the animals** on your farm.

RO: Iubesc **animalele** de la ferma ta.

4. Numerals

4.1. Cardinal numerals

Native speakers of Romanian translating into English will often engage in interlingual transfer also in what the use of numerals is concerned – thus, the particle "and" is often included when translating the corresponding numeral in English, as exemplified below:

●EN: 223 - two hundred and twenty-three.

RO: Două sute douăzeci şi trei.

Similarly, Romanian speakers have the tendency to translate numerals which have a plural form in Romanian with the

plural form in English, although in English plural forms for numerals such as hundred, thousand, million, billion are only used with a noun function or in constructions followed by the particle "of", as we can see in the example below:

●EN: Three millions [correct: million] people have fled the country so far.

RO: Trei milioane de oameni au fugit deja din țară.

●EN: Millions joined the protest yesterday.

RO: Milioane s-au alăturat protestului de ieri.

●EN: He makes millions of dollars each year.

RO: El câștigă milioane de dolari anual.

4.2. Ordinal numerals

Translators of Romanian and English texts are sometimes faced with situations where English cardinal numerals should be used for Romanian ordinal ones, or vice versa. Keeping the original type of numeral in the target text may result in an unnaturally sounding target text. Consider the following examples:

●EN: The jewelry section is on [correct: the second] floor **two**.

RO: Raionul cu bijuterii este la etajul **doi**.

●EN: The sixth house [six] on this street is the most beautiful.

RO: A şasea casă de pe această stradă este cea mai frumoasă.

4.3. Decimal numerals

A high-risk situation in translations from Romanian to English or vice versa is represented by the different ways in which the two languages use the decimal separator. In Romanian a comma is used, whereas English makes use of a point. On the other hand, in Romanian a point is used in order to separate numerals in the case of billions, millions, thousands and hundreds, while English uses a comma in this case. In this case the result of an inappropriate translation is the complete alteration of the initial numeral, as shown in the examples below, resulting in severe distortion of meaning:

●EN: 24,345 twenty-four thousand three hundred and forty-five [correct: 24.345/ twenty-four point three four five] meters of fabric are enough.

RO: 24,345 metri de material sunt suficienţi.

●EN: 2.934 two point nine three four [correct: 2,931/two thousand nine hundred and thirty four] people were affected by the earthquake.

RO: 2.934 oameni au fost afectați de cutremur.

5. Adjectives

5.1. Degrees of comparison

Due to the existence of a single pattern for comparatives and superlatives in the Romanian language, it is difficult for a potential translator to make a choice between synthetic, analytical and irregular comparative structures in English. Let us consider the following examples:

●EN: The more pretty [correct: prettier] girls will be invited.

RO: Fetele mai frumoase vor fi invitate.

Another interesting aspect to mention is the rendering of the comparative construction in English *the +comparative*, usually used when comparing only two things, by means of literal translations of the Romanian superlative:

●EN: This cake is the best [correct: better] of the two we baked today.

RO: Această prăjitură este cea mai bună dintre cele pe care le-am făcut azi.

5.2. Position of adjectives

The most common position of adjectives in Romanian is after the nouns they determine. In those cases when the adjective precedes the noun this is done in order to add emphasis on it or create a specific reference, whereas in English adjectives usually are placed before the

nouns they accompany. Consequently, the special implications of placing an adjective before the noun it accompanies in the Romanian source text will be completely lost in the English translation:

●EN: They haven't read the new book yet.

RO: Încă un citit noua carte.

●EN: They haven't read the new book yet.

RO: Încă nu au citit cartea nouă.

6. Pronouns

Often in translation demonstrative pronouns in the singular and plural which make reference to proximity are rendered inadequately by using the singular instead of the plural. The same happens in case of the plural forms of second person reflexive pronouns, as shown in the examples below:

●EN: Please give me this [correct: these]!

RO: Dați-mi-le vă rog pe acestea!

●EN: Help yourself [correct: yourselves] to some tea, dearests!

RO: Poftiţi la un ceai, dragii mei!

7. Adverbs

Another possible problem may be posed by irregular comparative forms of adverbs in English, which have different meanings for the comparative and the superlative. This may cause confusion for Romanian speakers or translators, for whom there is no difference between the two in their native language. Consider the following examples:

●EN: The detective will farther [correct: further] investigate.

RO: Detectivul va cerceta mai departe. (27)

●EN: They should drive further [correct: farther].

RO: Ar trebui să conducă mai departe.

8. Prepositions

The proper use of prepositions is one of the most challenging aspects for non-native translators of both English and Romanian, as their incorrect use can result in grammatical mistakes or even change of meaning, as illustrated below:

●EN: The dough was obtained through [correct: by] mixing the ingredients.

RO: Aluatul s-a obținut prin amestecarea ingredientelor.

9. Conjunctions

Romanian's use of double negation can prove challenging for translators when dealing with conjunctions with implicit negation, as shown below:

●EN: Don't contact me unless you haven't changed [correct: have] your behaviour.

RO: Să nu mă cauți, dacă nu ți-ai schimbat comportamentul.

Specialized terminology is most often based on common words used with different meanings in certain specific contexts (Pungă & Pârlog 2017: 257). These common words' meanings may hint at the meaning of the specialized term – however, in most cases specialized terminology has a fixed meaning and does not allow freedom of translation. The extension of meaning that sometimes occurs in certain languages from the everyday to the specialized sense is not mirrored by a similar extension in the source language, posing problems for the translator. Pungă & Pârlog offer the following example in this respect: For example, ceiling and floor no longer refer to parts of a room, but, by analogy, to the highest and, respectively, the lowest price limits when used in business as collocates of price: price ceiling, price floor ("limita inferioară a prețului", "limita superioară a prețului"). Similarly, blanket loses its every day meaning "piece of soft fabric used as bed cover" in favour of the specialized, descriptive one – "that covers all risks", in blanket insurance. Such extension of meaning is, however, characteristic of the three English words only; the senses of their Romanian

equivalents tavan, podea and pătură have not evolved in the same way (which makes word-for-word translation impossible) (2017: 257).

10. Literary translation

Translations from Romanian into English in our country can roughly be subdivided into three major periods: the pre-communist, communist, and post-communist one (Ursu 2017: 3-4). What led to the translation of Romanian literary works into other languages during this time were the cultural policies applied, and as Ursu states, also the state's translation policies (2017: 4). Quoting Lefevere, Ursu argues that Romanian publishing houses based their decisions of having certain literary works translated on political documents during the communist period, or on various cultural projects initiated by institutions such as the Romanian Cultural Institute during the post-communist period (2017: 5).

During pre-communist times, translations from Romanian into English happened as a result of the personal initiative of certain public figures such as Queen Mary of Romania, who were attempting to make Romanian culture known to the British readers. During this time translations of Romanian literary works were published only by foreign publishing houses, with a preference for short stories highlighting the distinct character of the Romanian people and Romanian culture. Most of these translations were performed by native speakers of English and evinced an obvious tendency towards "adapting" the literary works to the British target culture. One such example is the 1930 translation of Ion Creangă's *Amintiri din copilărie* (translated as *Recollections*), where footnotes explaining Romanian culture-specific terms are completely absent or culture-specific terms are replaced with more general ones: „buhai" – "drums", "satul Humuleşti" – "the town of Humuleshti", "pluguşorul" – "Christmas Carols", "horă" – "tune", "şezătoare" – "reunion", "uliţă" – "street", "ştioalnă" – "pool", or adapted to British cultural realities: "vornic" – "sheriff", "oca" – "ounce", "para" – "centime", „Smărăndiţa" – "Esmeralda" (Ursu 2017: 4-5). Thus, we can claim that adaptation rather than translation was the technique applied on Romanian literary works during that time, in an effort to bring a foreign and rather unknown culture closer to the dominant, politically relevant, British one.

During the communist period translation policies regarding Romanian literary works became the exclusive property of the communist authorities in Romania, who spared no financial efforts to make Romanian culture known (and respected) abroad, at a time when Romania's political relevance was also on the rise. The nationalist political orientation was mirrored by the selection of works to be translated: classical works belonging to the Romanian literary canon. The translations were published mostly by the Minerva publishing house and then sent to other countries. Translations were performed by teams consisting of one native speaker of Romanian and one native speaker of the target language. One such example is the 1978 translation of Ion Creangă's *Amintiri din copilărie* as *Memories of My Boyhood*, by Ana Cartianu and R.C. Johnston. As compared to the 1930 translation discussed above, the 1978 one evinces an orientation not towards the target, but towards the source culture, Romania. Instead of replacing Romanian culture-specific terms with English ones, the translators chose to use explanations or footnotes (35 footnotes in the 1978 translation). We hold this to be a far better approach, as Ursu also notes: "Without any explanations and footnotes, Creangă's text, laden with cultural references, would probably be fully accessible to an even more limited category of readers" (2017: 6). Another similar translation of *Amintiri din copilărie* from the same period is A.L. Lloyd's (*Recollections from Childhood*), where footnotes and explanations are

employed for cultural or religious terms, names, or proverbs: “colivă” – a sweetmeat given as an offering for the souls of the dead. Made of boiled wheat, honey and ground nuts; “opinci” – home-made peasant shoes, in the style of mocassins; “hora” – The collective round-dance which is an important feature of south-east European village life on Sunday afternoons and holidays, “Moşi” – A popular rite, falling on the Saturday before Whitsun, when offerings are made for the souls of the dead, etc. The 1978 translation used additional footnotes for terms such as: “glasurile” – church chants (The eight fundamental melodies at the basis of church singing in the Greek Orthodox service); “mânzii popei” – the priest’s foals (It is usual in Romanian for young boys to be called foals or colts), “lei” (leu, plural lei: the monetary unit of Romania); “ouăle roşii” (Greek Orthodox custom, accompanied by the words: Christ is risen! to which the reply is: “He is risen indeed!”), “prăjină” (unit of measurement), etc (Ursu 2017: 6-7). By means of translations published during this time, translators tried to accustom foreign readers to the particularities of Romanian culture.

11. Conclusions

The present paper has set out to explore the fundamental grammatical differences between English and Romanian, which might have an impact on the translation process or even constitute challenges for non-native speakers of either Romanian or English. Morphological categories such as the noun, the adjective, the numeral, the preposition, etc., have been analysed here from a comparative point of view, accompanied by concrete examples for illustration. We have also looked at the difficulties of translating certain Romanian literary texts into English, especially those texts that rely heavily on the use of regionalisms. The conclusion we were able to reach is that the translation process from English into Romanian and from Romanian into English poses significant problems from a grammatical and from a literary point of view. The utmost care needs to be exercised on part of the translator in order to avoid involuntary transfer of grammatical categories and structures from one’s mother tongue into the English translation.

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