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## LIVING UP TO THE ORIGINAL: (NON) CREATIVE SOLUTIONS IN TRANSLATING METAPHORS, SIMILES AND PUNS

### Introduction

The word "creative" entails uses which are marked out as striking and innovative, involving "a marked breaking or bending of rules and norms of language, including a deliberate play with its forms and its potential for meaning." (Carter, 2004: 9).

The topic of linguistic creativity is fascinating for anyone who loves newness and English is a language endowed with features that allows writers to convey their thoughts and ideas in simple, original and expressive ways. This is why we decided to focus on a number of metaphors, similes and wordplays in two of Salman Rushdie's novels: *Midnight's Children* (published in 1982) and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (published in 2000). Salman Rushdie himself remarked that "[n]ovel" itself is a word that means new, and the purpose of art has always been thought to make things new, so you don't see things through the same old, tired eyes' (Rushdie, in Rance 2001: 106). Relative to the English language that we believe was rather enriched than subverted by postcolonial writers, Rushdie declares:

"... the great gift of English as a language is its malleability – its huge size and its huge versatility as a language – you can do this with English. You can stretch it and pull it and chop it up and tie it into knots and it still makes sense. And it's capacious enough. It's a great good fortune to me to have English as a language, but certainly I wanted to make a new noise with it. (Rushdie, in Isaacs 2001: 162)

Therefore, it seems interesting and productive to analyse how the author performs this and how this extends in the Romanian versions of the two novels mentioned above: *Copiii din miez de noapte* [*Midnight's Children*], translated by Radu Paraschivescu in 2007 and *Pământul de sub tălpile ei* [*The Ground Beneath Her Feet*] translated by Antoaneta Ralian in 2012. Our analysis of translation strategies and procedures is informed by Newmark (1988) and Fawcett (1997).

### 1. Novel metaphors and similes with Salmon Rushdie

In Rushdie's work, figurative language offers new insights into approaching literature that is written cross-culturally. At the same time, it can be said that the density of linguistic and cultural factors in figurative language may be challenging in the passage from one language to another.

Critics like Sanga (2001) argue that one of the main tasks of postcolonial writing has been the interrogation of Western colonial discourse. Postcolonial

discourse uses metaphorical formulations of its own, thus demythologizing colonialist metaphors such as 'bringing light and civilization to the dark places in the world'.

In this section we will show how Rushdie challenged established (colonial) ways of understanding the world, [notions such as nation, identity, etc.] by creating a coherent and evocative system of images.

Rushdie's definition of metaphor reminds of the cognitive linguists' view according to which metaphor represents a mapping between two different conceptual domains and it is realized through metaphoric expression: "the very word 'metaphor', with its roots in Greek words for 'bearing across', describes a sort of migration, the migration of ideas into images..." (Rushdie, 1991: 279). Metaphor helps people to see more, and more clearly: "... the love of images also contains great potential. When the world is seen through ideas, through metaphors, it becomes a richer place." (idem, 181)

In the novel "*The Ground Beneath Her Feet*", MUSIC is present not only through explicit references to music such as the book title but also as one of the favourite source domains for metaphors and similes. Thus, in the examples below, Rai, one of the three protagonists and the narrator in the novel, speaks about his own SELF or IDENTITY as dissonance (1):

(1) At my worst, I have been *a cacophony, a mass of human noises* that did not add up to the symphony of an integrated self (TG, 75)

And, remaining within the same conceptual field of music, he goes on, with a simile (2):

(2) At my best, the world sang out to me, and through me, *like ringing crystal* (TG, 75)

Another cognitive source domain used for the representation of the SELF is FOOD. Images related to food serve to characterize the protagonists and their relationships, as, for example, in "*The Ground Beneath Her Feet*", where Rai describes his relations with Vina and Ormus in the following terms:

(3) ... in those days before the tour she at last admitted that I'd waited my whole life to hear, namely I had become a factor, a problem. I was no longer *an occasional dish, a side snack*. (TG, 450)

In *Midnight's Children*, the usage of food images characterizes Saleem's grandmother (Reverend Mother) as strong, determined, and prideful:

(4) "Reverend Mother doled out **the curries and meatballs of intransigence**, dishes imbued **with the personality of their creator**; Amina ate the fish salans of stubbornness and **the birianis of determination**," influencing the eaters in various ways. (MC, 158)

Another character from the same novel, Alia, Saleem's aunt, was a vengeful spirit that influenced everyone around her through the foods she prepared. Later in the novel, after 220 pages, Saleem narrates:

(5) What she had, during the lonely madness of the years, raised to the level of an art-form: the impregnation of food with emotions. . . .she fed us *the birianis of dissent* and *the nargisi koftas of discord*; and little by little, even the harmonies of my parents' autumnal love went out of tune. (MC, 378)

According to Kortenaar (2004), the inspiration for endowing the main protagonist, Saleem with the ability to detect other people's emotions with his senses, especially by smell, derives from "the fact that Rushdie left India when he was fourteen and the child registers smells and tastes more strongly than does the adult. For Rushdie, India is the land of smells and tastes because it is forever the land of childhood". (Kortenaar, 2004: 51)

The association of Indian spice names with various emotions and attitudes that characterize the protagonists is unexpected, unusual and can be viewed as a way to echo the place he writes about.

Stylistically, the extract in example 5 reminds the reader of a previous extract (given in example 4) and cements the text together.

Rushdie's metaphors based on sensory experience to evoke emotions and attitudes seem to follow a particular pattern, that is NOUN 1 (concrete) + OF + NOUN 2 (abstract), a pattern that can also be identified in (6) and (7).

In "*The Ground Beneath Her Feet*", the narrator, Rai, recalls his childhood days, by looking at childhood as being a CONTAINER for treasured memories:

(6) From deep within *the dusty trunk of childhood* I can still dig out the memory of my mother Ameer when young ... (TG, 56)

A peripheral instance of the CONTAINER metaphor, but, this time, conveying a negative meaning, is the representation of people's lives in Bombay:

(7) In the Muslim muhallas or neighbourhoods which clustered around Chandni Chowk, people were content to look inwards into *the screened-off courtyards of their lives*; to roll chick-blinds down (MC, 69)

Rushdie's metaphoric pattern involving the attribution of physical attributes to abstract or inner entities and having the structure Noun 1 (concrete) + OF + Noun 2 (abstract) is very close to simile, his favourite figure of speech. In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, the theme of cultural blending, of hybridity, appears in a simile depicting Bombay:

(8) The west was in Bombay from the beginning, impure old Bombay where West and East, North and South *had always been scrambled like codes, like eggs*. (TG, 95)

## 2. Metaphor and simile translation strategies

The predominant strategy of rendering Rushdie's metaphors and similes in the Romanian versions is *literal translation*. This confirms Newmark's (1988: 113) view that original metaphors should be translated literally, whether they are universal, cultural or obscurely subjective, mainly because of two reasons:

- a) they contain the core of an important writer's message, his personality, his comment on life, and these have to be transferred neat
- b) such metaphors are a source of enrichment for the TL.

Besides, Rushdie himself believes that "the device of literal translations of metaphors is certainly exotic, but it does also lend a kind of authenticity ..." (1991: 77)

As it is known, Rushdie wanted to open a window for readers into the cultural identity of India through occasional sparkling of Hindi terms and phrases and to this purpose he often resorted to cultural words denoting social status terms, kinship terms, forms of address, etc. Food-related words, such as *curries*, *birianis*, *nargisi koftas*, included in the structure of metaphoric expressions as those in examples (4) and (5) have been '*naturalized*' in the target text by transferring and adapting them to the normal pronunciation and normal morphology of the target language: *curry-uri*, *birian-uri*, *nargisi koftale*.

Relative to the translation of the simile *West and East, North and South scrambled like codes, like eggs* in example (8) it is worth noting that the Romanian translator grasped the idea of homogenization of cultures and conveyed it by using the combined strategy of "*omission*" (of *like codes*) and compensation.

## 3. Wordplay and rhyme with Salman Rushdie

Rushdie's declared love of words is well known and his voice stating it is heard at the beginning of chapter three in "*The Ground Beneath Her Feet*" when Rai, the narrator recalls:

(9) "That was how we spoke, my mother and I: in puns and games and rhymes, in, you might say, lyrics. This was our tragedy. **We were language's magpies** by nature, stealing whatever sounded bright and shiny." (TG, 57)

Indeed, within the same fragment mentioned above, the reader observes this gift in the juxtaposition of words of nearly the same sound with different meanings used to produce a humorous effect:

(10) „Ma, keep mum”. „Silent ice is wholly nice”. „Ice cream not youce cream”. And, parodying the Kwalitiy brand's famous slogan, „A dream without scream”. (TG, 57)

Equally noteworthy in the same novel is the pun-based name of the character *Yul Singh*, the director of an American record company who "has arranged everything - documents, permissions, limousine - and has placed one of his country residences" at the disposal of the future music stars Vina Apsara and Ormus Cama.

The author's irony is amplified when he refers to Yul's "bodyguards and chauffeurs, bouncers and valets, accountants and lawyers, strategists and enforcers, publicists and A&R" as

(11) "Yul Sikh's jokes: *Will Singh, Kant Sing, Gota Sing, Beta Sigh, Day Singh, Wee Singh, Singh Singh* and so on. (TG, p. 355, italics mine)

Other instances when the development of the dramatic events in "*The Ground Beneath Her Feet*" is counterbalanced through a humorous tone are the wordplays on Orpheus, initiated by Vina and then extended by Rai:

(12) "... she starts cracking **Orpheus jokes**. This is an old riff of hers, one she first laid down when she heard I was moving into an **Orpheum**; me, Rai, scion of the clan with the worst voices in Indian musical history. You should change the name, she said, out of respect you should name it after a different fucking god. Maybe **Morpheus**, the god of sleep. I played along: How about **Metamorpheus**, god of change. It went downhill from there. We came up with **Endomorpheus** and **Ectomorpheus**, the twinned gods of body type." (TG, 456)

An emblematic pun for Rushdie's work that is interesting to approach from a cultural, a semantic and a translation perspective can be found at the end of the excerpt below:

(13) "... the leavened white loaves of Ormus's childhood ... were nothing like the lavish loaves sitting plump and enticing, and for sale, in the windows of the capital's many bakeries. ... Ormus Cama plunges into this new world, betraying, without a backward glance, the fabled breads of home. ... The daily purchase and consumption of quantities of bread is, in a way, his first wholeheartedly erotic encounter with London life. In the warehouses of the bakeries Ormus pays without a murmur for his encounters with the amorality of the loaf. ... . **East is East, thinks Ormus Cama; ah, but yeast is West.** (TG, 290).

The pun "*East is East but yeast is West*", like all the creative linguistic devices we have discussed so far, condenses in a short form various associative links and encodes a great amount of information regarding the protagonist's (changed) view of life, his re-evaluation of the East he has left and of the West he just started to know directly.

#### 4. Pun and rhyme in translation

When translating puns from the Source Language to the Target Language, a translator has three main options available: (1) pun (2) some other rhetorical device or (3) no pun. If we consider the Romanian version of the wordplays discussed in the previous section we observe all these three options.

It is a remarkable merit of the Romanian translator Antoaneta Ralian to find equivalent puns in the Target Language. Thus, *Silent ice is wholly nice* is rendered by the Romanian *Inghețata în tăcere te umple de plăcere* [lit. Icecream in

silence fills you with pleasure] which preserves both the semantic content and the rhyme of the original.

The wordplay *Ice cream not youce cream*, illustrates what is called “pun across word boundaries” which usually raises a high degree of difficulty to the translator. The Romanian version *Crema la gheață nu înseamnă cremă cu gheață* compensates the original non-sensical homophony-based pun by rhyme.

Further, the translation of the wordplay *A dream without scream* as *Un vis mut e un vis plăcut* [lit. A silent dream is a pleasant dream] shows it is possible to transfer puns in the target language, preserving their formal and functional equivalence and even adding clarity to their original meaning.

In the case of pun-based names such as *Will Singh, Kant Sing, Gota Sing, Beta Sigh, Day Singh, Wee Singh, Singh Singh* the translation procedure used in Romanian was borrowing. The same translator, Antoaneta Ralian, uses “naturalization” for the Orpheus jokes. Thus, *Morpheus, Metamorpheus, Endomorpheus* and *Ectomorpheus* are naturalized as *Morfeu, Metamorfeu, Endomorfeu* and *Ectomorfeu*.

For the last wordplay presented in section 3, “*East is East but yeast is West*” which apparently represents a challenge to any translator, Antoaneta Ralian found a solution which uses adaptation without losing the author’s message and style: *Drojdia din pâine nu-i drojdia societății* [lit. Bread yeast is not society dregs].

## Conclusions

Creative rhetorical devices such as those discussed add semantic density to the text in the sense that they bring about numerous links of associations and encode, usually in a short, expressive form, a great amount of information. In addition, creative metaphors, similes and wordplays in the analysed novels contribute to the cohesion of the text.

Comparing the figurative, creative language in two novels by Salman Rushdie with their Romanian versions we have noticed that the author’s style is preserved, quite interestingly, through literal translation in the case of metaphors and similes and through a careful (and inspired) combination of function and form, of meaning and rhyme in the case of puns.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CMN - *Copiii din miez de noapte*

MC - *Midnight’s Children*

PST - *Pământul de sub tălpile ei*

TG - *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*

## END NOTES

[1]. The title is taken from a song from the novel, composed by Ormus Cama after Vina’s death. The lyrics to the song, with minor changes, were adapted and recorded by the U2 band.

[2]. All italics in the examples from the novels are mine.

## CORPUS

### Source Texts

Rushdie, S. 1982. *Midnight’s Children*. London: Pan Books.

Rushdie, S. 2000. *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. London: Vintage.

## Romanian translations

- Rushdie, S., (2007). *Copiii din miez de noapte*. [Midnight's Children]. 2nd edition. Iași: Polirom. (transl. Radu Paraschivescu)
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## LIVING UP TO THE ORIGINAL: (NON)CREATIVE SOLUTIONS IN TRANSLATING METAPHORS, SIMILES AND PUNS

**Abstract:** *The paper looks at creativity as newness of the source text by dealing with novel metaphors, similes and puns and also analyses creativity as an inevitable aspect of the translation process, as a way of negotiating form and meaning. While metaphors and similes are translated literally, thus lending a kind of authenticity to the Target Text and also enriching the Target Language, wordplay and rhyme are real challenges for the translator who has to use all his/her expertise and creative potential to find solutions.*

**Key words:** *linguistic creativity, metaphor, simile, wordplay.*