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CHALLENGES UPON TRANSLATING CULTURE-CARRIER LITERARY WORKS. CASE STUDY – TRANSLATING BUBICO, BY I.L. CARAGIALE

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Abstract: No wonder that the most difficult to translate literary works are the ones considered to embrace the cultural essence of a people. Together with the Master students in Anglo-American Studies of the Masters Programme within the "Petru Maior" University of Tg. Mureș, we will try to render a fair transdaptation of a very difficult to translate literary work, i.e. "Bubico", by I.L. Caragiale (excerpts), in order to underline the challenges found upon translation.

Keywords: culture specific items, humour, language, difficulty in translation

The idea to translate excerpts from *Bubico* by I.L. Caragiale was triggered, on the one hand, by the idea that Caragiale is already acknowledged to be difficult (if not impossible) to render in translation and, on the other hand, by two facts: first, the fact that more than a decade ago, Maria Bucur[1] declared in the online issue of the *Observator cultural* that "There is no good English translation of the most important modern Romanian playwright I.L. Caragiale!", and second, the fact that a certain professor Eric D. Tappe, had already tried almost four decades ago and, to some extent considered to have succeeded such an endeavour, with the slight exception of *Bubico* and *Două Loturi*, according to an article written by Rodica Pioariu[2]. "The general impression spawned from reading these translations is that of a notable accomplishment. The British translator (E.D. Tappe) offers a good selection of texts and correct transposition in the target language, in spite of the inevitable 'losses' arising from filtering through his own soul of the conception of the Romanian author. However, the prerequisite was fulfilled: the original spirit and form can certainly be found within the translations - Eric D. Tappe managed to merge equally, both the atmosphere and spirit of the Romanian stories, adapting them to the specificity of the receiving culture and spirit. Sometimes, the language overflown with diminutives, exaggeration, or even swearing or inappropriate nicknames - specific to a particular social and ethnic segment - has not always found the happiest expression in English. In our opinion, the language register selected by translator was not always the best for the characters outlined in *Bubico* or *Două Loturi*, for example. Slang rudimentary shade does not seem to have been pinned well enough consequently; its English equivalent appears to be poor. In some cases, much of the comic of the language, its rich semantics, its equivoque, ambiguity of expression that gives

[1] http://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/scriitura-romaneasca-in-traducere-un-vis-de-20-de-ani-2/
[2] R. Pioariu, *Despre o traducere a lui Caragiale în limba engleză*, http://www.diacronia.ro/ro/indexing/details/A4850

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unparalleled flavour to the language of Caragiale - so appreciated by the Romanian reader - is hardly found in its English rendering, or moreover, it loses its value."

Considering this line of events, together with the Masters students in Anglo-American Studies of the Masters Programme within the "Petru Maior" University of Tg. Mures, we embarked in the challenging journey of rendering a fair 'transdaptation' of two short excerpts of the difficult to translate literary work, *Bubico*, by I.L. Caragiale, in an attempt to underline the challenges found upon translation. The exercise of translation benefited from the input translation variants of nine master students and it was developed within the seminars of the *Translation and Interculturality* master degree course. The original Romanian texts, excerpts from *Bubico*, by I.L. Caragiale[3], that required translation were the following 2 fragments, from the volume "Momente și schițe" (rendered by the students as "On-the-spot Stories, Sketches and Memories").

> *"Nouă ceasuri şi nouă minute... Peste şase minute pleacă trenul. Un minut încă şi se-nchide casa. Repede-mi iau biletul, ies pe peron, alerg la tren, sunt în vagon... Trec de colo până colo prin coridor, să văz în care compartiment aş găsi un loc mai comod... Aci. O damă singură, şi-fumează, atât mai bine! Intru şi salut, când auz o mârâitură şi văz apărând dintr-un paneraş de lângă cocoană capul unui căţel lăţos, plin de funde de panglici roşii şi albastre, care-ncepe să mă latre ca pe un făcător de rele intrat noaptea în iatacul stăpânii-şi.*
> *- Bubico! zice cocoana... şezi mumos, mamă!*
> *"Norocul meu, gândesc eu, să trăiesc bine!... Lua-te-ar dracul de javră!"*
> ***
> *"- Să te mănânce Bismarck... craiule!*
> *- Ham! ham!*
> *Şi sare de pe bancă jos în vagon şi apucă spre mine.*
> *- Cocoană! strig eu, ridicându-mi picioarele; eu sunt nevricos, să nu se dea la mine, că...*
> *- Nu, frate! zice cocoana, nu vezi că vrea să se-mprietinească? Aşa e el: numaidecât simte pe cine-l iubeşte...*
> *- A! zic eu, având o inspiraţie infernală; a! simte pe cine-l iubeşte... vrea să ne-mprietenim!... Bravo!*
> *Şi pe când căţelul se apropie să mă miroasă, iau un pacheţel de bonboane, pe cari le duc în provincie, la un prietin; îl deschid, scot un bonbon şi, întinzându-l în jos, cu multă blândeţe:*
> *- Cuţu, cuţu! Bubico băiatul! Bubi!*
> *Bubico, dând din coadă, se apropie mai întâi cu oarecare sfială şi îndoinţă, apoi, încurajat de blândeţea mea, apucă frumos bombonul şi-ncepe să-l cleftăie.*
> *- Vezi că v-aţi împrietinit! zice cocoana cu multă satisfacţie de această apropiere."*

From the very beginning of our analysis, we acknowledge the types of humour exploited with such talent by Caragiale. The author of *Bubico* is famous for his multi-folded sources and resources of humour: situational humour, humour of vices, of characters, of names or language humour. We daresay that even these short excerpts we chose for our analysis envelop, to a bigger or lesser extent, shades of each type of humour: the situation,

[3] Ion Luca Caragiale, *Momente și schițe* (1908)

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even if it might appear quite a common one, becomes a hilarious, thus zestful one; the characters are undoubtedly entertaining and the name of the poor spoiled mutt, Bubico, (even if not captured by the variants suggested by the students) may be derived from the Romanian *bubă*, which is a sore spot, a blotch, something annoying, one desperately wishes to get rid of, just like the mutt eventually becomes.

The analysis we performed brought into the light the idea that the degree of difficulty was increased by the linguistic items which support the orality and language humour which is so specific and characteristic to Caragiale's works. The instances that triggered the most diverse variants were the ones rendering the following linguistic items:

Original text	**Instances from the students' variants of translation**
cocoana	lady/ dame/ madam/ misses
şezi mumos, mamă!	sit nicely, dear!/sit tight, darling!/sit quietly, you mommy's boy!/ be nice, darling!/ sit nicely, love!/ sit down nicely, honey!/ sit gently, dear!
"Norocul meu, gândesc eu, să trăiesc bine!... Lua-te-ar dracul de javră!"	Lucky me, I say to myself, hope to live well! Damn you, you stupid mutt!/ What a luck (I have)` I think. `Damn you, mutt!/ A hack of luck, I think! Comfortable living…! Damn you cur!/ Just my luck, I thought, cheers!... Go to hell you mutt!/ Lucky me, thinking I, living well!.. The hell with you mutt!/ "My luck, I say to myself, is to live well! To hell with you, you mangy mutt!/ Just my luck, I say to myself, I hope to live well!… To hell with you, stupid mutt!/My great luck, thought I, hope to live well! To hell with you, stupid mutt!/ Just my luck- I thought to myself-Should the devil have its way with you mutt!
craiule!	womaniser/ prince/ beau/ your highness/ wolf/ waif
eu sunt nevricos, să nu se dea la mine, că…	I'm jittery, he'd better not hit on me, or else…/ I'm neurotic if this comes closer…/ I am a feeble person, don't let him get me, or I…/ I'm nervy, so don't let it get me, or else…/ I'm nervous, so stay away from me, or else.../ I'm "scarious", don't let it get near me, or.../ I'm sorehead, don't let him get me, 'cause…/ I'm craven, don't let it reach me/ I suffer from hysteria should it not approach me or else…
Nu, frate!	No, dear!/ Don't worry, bro'!/ No, my brother/ No, brother!/ No, lad!/ No, chap!/ Oh, no brother dear!
Bravo!	Good dog!/ Great…!/ Well done!/ Good!/ Whoop!/ Good doggy!/ Good for you!
Cuţu, cuţu! Bubico băiatul! Bubi!	Here, doggie, doggie! Good boy! Bubi! Doggy-doggy! Boy Bubico, Bubi!/ "Hey doggy dog, Bubico…good boy…! Bubi!/ Here doggy, doggy! Here Bubico boy! Bubi!/ Here puppydog! Bubico boy! Bubi!/

As the terms taken into discussion stand to prove, the master degree students who took part in the translation exercise managed, more often than not, to render the difficult

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instances they came across in the source text. Most of them were able, to a certain extent, to capture the humour and savour that hides within the words and behind the images so artfully designed by Caragiale, and thus, render the meaning quite appropriately. Moreover, the orality effect was also seriously considered by the translators, being aware of the fact that half of the fun lies in the oral communication of the humour-endowed expressions.

There were other instances that couldn't be rendered as appropriately as desired, due to the difficulty they imposed: they stand for the Romanian intended misspellings: *bonboane* instead of *bomboane (*meaning *candies)*, *pe cari* instead of *pe care (*meaning *which)*, *să văz* instead of *să văd (*meaning *to see)*, *să se-mprietinească* instead of *să se-mprietenească (*meaning *to become friends)*, *prietin* instead of *prieten (*meaning *friend)*, instances which could hardly be rendered in any way, without spoiling the intended meaning.

The original contains a multitude of linguistic instances that can, under no circumstance, be rendered in any language, since they carry the cultural heritage of the Romanian people of that particular historical period from the beginning of the XXth century and of that particular social stratum, which was the new aristocracy. On the other hand, one ought to observe that even if it had not been for the historical and social contextual framing, still the work of Caragiale could be enjoyed and savoured, since it has that special something-else-ness that lures the reader. It is just that this particular quality is the one that triggers the difficulty in translation.

The translator is not only the one who needs to 'solve' a mystery found in a certain language, the one who decodes the message, but the one who knows and who is able to re-code the message for the receiver to understand. This is possible, but very difficult to be achieved most of the times, without 'tampering with' the content of the message, sometimes, unfortunately, not in the favour of the message. Therefore, we find translation to be like 'food already chewed, to be served to the one who cannot chew by himself. Still, such a food does not taste the same as the original one.'[4] Keeping this in mind, we can only imagine how difficult, yet, rewarding, *transdaptation* from Caragiale might have been for anyone endeavouring to de-code and re-code the message. The message is to be considered, from the very beginning, one filled with a multitude and pluri-faceted intralingual meanings, which only adds to the difficulty of the de-coding and re-coding process.

It goes without saying that, the work of a translator requires knowledge and continuous effort, and the high degree of difficulty within the act of translation stems primarily from the imperious necessity that the translator not only seeks appropriate equivalent of a certain situational or cultural context, but also achieves transfer in the target language of the whole universe of ideas and feelings illustrated by the original. This can only be achieved as a result of a careful analysis and interpretation of the original work, aiming to facilitate the discovery of particular attributes specific to the source culture, preconditions which are absolutely indispensable to support a fair transposition in the cultural context of the Other. In other words, the translator ought to find ways and methods best suited to express the same reality to the target culture, thus becoming a true mediator not only between two different languages, but also between two different cultures.[5]

[4] Kumarajiva, translator of Budist texts in Chinese, quoted by Andrei Bantaş, Elena Croitoru, *Didactica Traducerii,* Teora Publishing House, Bucharest 1999, pg. 7
[5] acc. to . Pioariu, in *idem* (our translation)

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