TRANSLATING COLLECTIVE NOUNS FROM ENGLISH INTO ROMANIAN[1]

Abstract: *The present study is based on the semantic and grammatical analysis of collective nouns. This stands for the theoretical approach in conjunction with some practical aspects regarding the appropriate translation of collective entities. The main question is whether the terms or phrases under discussion are rendered as in the source language. Unlike Romanian, English reveals a wide range of collectives. One of the strangest incongruities of English is that there are numerous different collective nouns that all mean a 'group', but are specific to particular things such as: a crowd of protesters, a troop of monkeys, a rope of onions etc. An important aspect related to collectives is their interpretation as a 'collection of objects' or 'individual entities'. Most of them (family, jury, group, herd, crowd etc.) are clearly understood as making up a collection and treated accordingly; others are still subject to heated debate due to difficulties in their classification. Translation of collective entities is a matter of whole meaning. As long as the translator does not put much emphasis on the separate units, but care more about the relevant features of a word in a certain context, he stands every chance of finding the proper equivalent in the target language. Establishing the necessary accuracy in translating collective entities should become the translator's main goal.*

Key words: *collective entities, incongruities, accuracy.*

Collective nouns stand for a fascinating chapter in English grammar, due to its specific morphosyntactic and semantic features. There have been a lot of discussions on this topic, the authors trying to emphasize what makes this grammatical class so special.

The definition of a collective noun ranges from a simple one "a noun that refers to a group of individuals", to a more complex one "nouns with multiple reference are singular in form but…can combine with a plural verb" (Depraetere, 2003: 85).

The main purpose of the present work is to analyze collectives from a contrastive perspective. The two languages under discussion are English and Romanian and our intention is to highlight both their common and different aspects in order to get a thorough interpretation of this grammatical category.

There are no obvious arguments regarding the use of singular or plural member with collectives. However, choosing a form at the expense of another is generally determined by the speaker's intention. As long as grammatical usage is in favour of one form, it soon becomes a rule.

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Romanian differs from English as regards nouns as: *family, team, jury, committee* etc. We usually say *Familia mea este la petrecere* (agreement in the singular), unlike English where both singular and plural are used depending on the unit as a whole or the members of collectivity: *My family is made up of five members* but *My family are gathering tonight to celebrate my sister's anniversary.*

In Romanian, the context of noun class heterogeneity has caused an oscillating position of collectives. The Romanian authors have noticed the hybrid status of the class, placing the comprising elements between individual entities and mass nouns or concrete and abstract nouns.

Specifying the semantic and morphosyntactic characteristics is imperative to clearly structure the class of collectives. The analysis of collective entities in Romanian is more complex than in English due to the presence of two semantic properties: *the property of cumulative reference* (a piece of gold added to another one forms a bigger piece; the entity keeps its ontological status) and *the property of division* (a piece of a chair is no longer a chair).

In some cases, the latter property affects the status of collective nouns, changing it into an individual entity (the last part of a group can be a *man* or the last part of an orchard can be a *tree.*

Defining the morphosynstactic properties of collective nouns implies comparing between mass and individual nouns to get the diagnostic context of the class. A collective in the singular is equivalent to an individual noun in the plural and stands for the argument of a predicate of the type: *a se aduna, a se strânge, a se reuni, a se îmbulzi*. *The crew has gathered on the deck / The sailors have gathered on the deck* equals to *Echipajul s-a adunat pe punte / Marinarii s-au adunat pe punte*. Sentences of the type **The soldier has gathered on the deck, *The woman has crowded to see the actor* are not possible, unless the nouns are in the plural.

G. Link agrees that the addition of adverbs or adverbial phrases lends a collective sense to the verbs which are not 'natural': *together* (to leave together), *at the same time* (to run at the same time), *in concert with* (to rehearse in concert with); *Children eat together* vs. **The child eats together* (Link, 1991: 418-440).

Choosing these predicates helps to establish the distinction between individual nouns and collective individuals. However, there is not a clear separation between purely massive nouns and collectives in a sentence like: *The dust has spread in the air* and *The crowd has spread at night fall.*

Duality of number

The dominant feature of collective nouns is the category of number. If mass entities can be used in the plural when designating species (more teas stand for more varieties of teas or more cups of tea), collective and individual nouns vary in number, without semantic changes.

Individual entities help the pluralization of a certain object (a table – two tables), whereas collective nouns help the pluralization of plurality; *a group* implies an intrinsic multiplicity.

A collective noun generally combines with indefinite determiners (*any team, no team*), but is incompatible with the partitive determiner *some* (**some jury / family*). On the other hand, collectives are usually part of a nominal group *Det N1 of N2* (*a group of politicians, a team of researchers, a crowd of leaders*).

The subject-predicate agreement is a well-known grammatical issue both in English and Romanian. The frequent oscillation between singular and plural as well as the impossibility to impose a single form, is due to co-occurrence between two opposite semantic features: *singularity* and *plurality*.

In recent years, a considerable number of studies have explored the way in which speakers produce agreement. Traditionally, the agreement has been treated as an essentially syntactic process. It has been defined as "the matching of at least one syntactic and / or semantic feature of one linguistic unit, the controller, on another, the target, so that there is a systematic covariance between a syntactic and / or semantic feature of the controller and a syntactic feature of the target. (Levin 2001:21)

In terms of preference for singular or plural agreement, some authors agree that the plural is more popular in speech, whereas the singular is generally preferred in writing. The Romanian speakers tend to use collective nouns in the singular, though reference is made to the members of the group. English, on the other hand, prefers agreement in the plural:

Government

The British Government ***are*** *under pressure due to political conflicts* vs. *Guvernul României a adoptat mai multe proiecte europene.*

Community

Their community do not respond to the economic crisis vs. *Comunitatea noastră este de acord să implementeze noile reguli.*

Team

The favourite team have won the competition vs. *Echipa s-a bucurat de un teribil succes.*

The contrast in number is explained through the use of conceptual information rather than syntactic information. The simple choice of a number form depends on our conceptualization of the noun as a whole or a collection of individuals.

I. Iordan claims that such nouns as: *group, category, majority* etc., should appear in the singular when used alone (*Mulțimea era adunată acolo, Majoritatea a fost de acord cu noi*). As regards *majoritate* "my linguistic sense requires a predicate in the singular, when *majoritate* is followed by a singular genitive (*Majoritatea publicului este favorabilă actorilor*) and a predicate in the plural, when followed by a plural genitive (*Majoritatea oamenilor trăiesc în sărăcie*)." (Iordan, 1978 : 414)

M. Avram sustains the free use of the agreement for *majoritate*. In her opinion, the notional concord is wholly accepted: *Majoritatea a / au venit, Majoritatea elevilor va / vor accepta.*

The presence of the determiner also influences the form of the predicate. When collectives are used with the definite article, the singular form is being preferred (*Mulțimea de spectatori a aclamat zgomotos*), unlike the combination with the indefinite article which requires a plural form (*O mulțime de spectatori au aclamat zgomotos*).

In clauses (except for relative clauses) and prepositional phrases, the agreement is generally in the singular (*That he should have paid such a large sum of money is unbelievable, In front of that shop is where she fainted*). Relative clauses can be either singular or plural (*What she saw was / were squirrels*).

The indefinite pronouns make the agreement in the singular both in English and Romanian: *Everyone / Everybody/ Someone / No one agrees to her attitude*, *Toată lumea este de acord cu ea*.

Coordinated NPs: *NP and NP*, *both NP and NP, neither NP nor NP* are plural in English, while in Romanian, the grammatical concord in the plural is frequently combined with concord by proximity. *Both Alice and Kevin have been in London* vs. *Nici el, nici ea n-au / n-a venit.*

It can be said that English and Romanian speakers do not always agree about the rules of concord. However, grammarians concluded that the number of collectives occurring with both singular and plural concord has decreased, whereas the number of nouns used with either singular or plural verbs has increased.

Translation of collective nouns is another difficult approach for speakers especially when trying to render the Romanian equivalents. Some of them are clear-cut collectives, others are ambiguous or even unintelligible entities.

Collective nouns for birds and animals: *a **brood of hens*** (un puiet de găini*), a colony of vultures* (o colonie de vulturi), *a herd of buffalo* (un cârd de bivoli), *a pack of wolves* (o haită de lupi), *a flock of sheep* (o turmă de oi), *a swarm of bees* (un roi de albine), *a pack of hounds* (o haită de câini de vânătoare) etc. Such nouns are easily understood and translated into Romanian. However, English has a wider range of other collectives in the same category whose equivalent is ambiguous. Romanian speakers find it difficult to translate such structures as: *an ascension of larks, a lamentation of swans, an ostentation of peacocks, a wisdom of owls* etc.

What makes these combinations interesting is the correlation between the group and its specific feature. *Ascension* makes reference to the high flight of the lark, peacocks are metaphorically described as *proud*, while owls are known for their *wisdom*.

The speakers' tendency to use such combinations can only be explained stylistically. Their main purpose is to emphasize various nuances: *humour, irony, exaggeration*, but they cannot be interpreted collectively. They are meant to create

a diverse communicative framework which reveals the evocative communicative interaction between transmitter and receiver.

Collective nouns for people: *a team of athletes* (o echipă de atleți), *a congregation of churchgoers* (un grup de credincioşi), *a band of robbers* (un grup de spărgători), *a choir of singers* (un cor de cântăreți) etc.

Ambiguous translation also occurs with nouns in this category which are only used to create interest or to be humorous: *a thought of barons, an illusion of magicians, a talent of gamblers, an ambush of widows* etc.

The evocative force of collective entities emerges from the following examples:

A gazump of estate agents expresses the feelings we usually have towards estate agents. They are unloved, out-and-out villains, whose only objective is to raise the price of something. Such people are often referred to as: *a ripoff, a voracity, a snare* etc. to render the same attitude.

A foppery of actors

The most popular choice is a *luvvie of actors*, thus aiming at the actors' alleged affectation while performing. *Foppery* is even more expressive and highlights a group of people mainly concerned with and vain about their clothes and manners. Other words include: *an adoration, a vanity, a prompt, a Hamlet* etc.

A gaffery of football managers

Gaffer is informal and generally designates a boss or the owner of a company, factory etc. The football managers' preoccupation with material benefits enables us to use such a combination of words alongside of *a bench, a grump, a sheepskin* etc.

A jabber of journalists

People seem to have several preconceived ideas about journalists: they are intrusive, don't want to listen, only care about their own interests, have a "pack" mentality etc. *A scoop of journalists* is the most popular collective, but there are other more suggestive words to describe how journalists behave in a group: *a distortion, an intrusion, a twist, a gossip, a gutter* etc.

A quibble of lawyers

Lawyers are usually perceived as *tricky, exploitative, taking full advantage of humans' ignorance*. Therefore, this branch has been associated with attributes closely related to their way of thinking and acting. It is not surprising to read about *a greed / a disdain / an extortion / a cunning of lawyers*.

English has a rich repertoire of collective expressions with a strong argumentative force. Romanian also has a large number of collectives to describe a situation more suggestively: *o sleahtă de reporteri / cameramani, o haită de vameşi, o cohortă de directori PDL*, *o liotă de antrenori, un clan de avocați* etc.

On the other hand, Romanian makes frequent use of the suffix *–ime* to form collective entities. The suffix may denote people (*arăbime, avocățime,*

locuitorime, lotrime), animals (*lacustime, broştim*e), plants (*stejărime, tufărime, lăptucime*), objects (*aurărime, scăunime, scândurime*).

In the context of romance languages, only Romanian has kept the latin suffix *–imen* in collective derivatives. As regards their pejorative nuance, it can be noticed in certain derivatives through their full semantism: *calicime* < *calic, golănime* < *golan* or depending on context *popime* < *popă.*

Grammatically, the collective suffix *–ime* can be attached to nouns (*ţărănime – mulţime de ţărani*), adjectives (*greime – mulţimea oştii*), adverbs (*călărime – oameni călări*) or verbs (*însoţime – grup de oameni*).

Collective entities form a complex category with different grammatical and semantic features. The two languages under discussion have revealed both common and distinct aspects.

Translation of collectives from English into Romanian is usually a difficult task mainly due to the ambiguous combinations whose role is to express stylistic nuances rather than their collective nature. Beyond the so-called 'fashionable words' present in language at a certain moment, despite the speakers' proneness to certain words and phrases, there remains the connotative meaning of the structures and dynamism of the communicative act.

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