# *"FIE, FOH, AND FUM, I SMELL THE BLOOD OF A BRITISH MAN": COMMON CREATIVITY CONVEYED THROUGH INTERJECTIONS AND MEANS OF TRANSLATING THEM"*

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*Abstract: Common spoken language has not been sufficiently studied until recently, although it is the clear evidence of demotic linguistic creativity, as spontaneous linguistic forms of common talk or of folk memory increase the density of potential meaning. The conscious play with these linguistic forms, means and potential meanings intensifies the intimacy and solidarity between participants in a conversation.*
*Through the linguistic analysis of interjections (creative instances specific to common language), this study reveals that their communicative purpose outweighs their referential content. My research will be carried out on a corpus of children's spontaneous verbal interactions in normal life situations. The transcript analyses show that exclamations and interjections are extremely common in children's language, and have often an equivocal lexical status. The last part of the study highlights translation strategies that can be used to transcode the meaning and functions of interjections.*

*Keywords: common talk, creativity, interjection, corpus, translation strategies.*

## 1. Introduction

Based on a theoretical framework that explores the resourcefulness of everyday spoken English, this article investigates the peculiarities of spoken creativity in terms of definition, communicative functions and language forms, emphasizing children's language features and highlighting their use of interjections, of the so-called *exclamations* and *communicators* (MacWhinney, 2014:50), highly specific to this type of verbal discourse. The premise of this approach complies, thus, with Carter's statement that "patterns and forms of language (...) classified as poetic or literary can be seen to be regularly occurring in everyday conversational exchanges", linguistic creativity proving to be not simply a property of exceptional people but an exceptional property of all people" (2004:13).

The second part of our research explores the relational functions of interjections, structures of spoken performances, in children's language - a spoken language variety prone to the use of interjections. Consequently, this part is based on CHILDES, a virtual corpus of children's spontaneous verbal interactions in normal life situations and on one example of folk memory illustrative for our argumentation. The use of interjections in these cases seems to enhance the speakers' linguistic harmony and mutual creation of interpersonal meaning.

Finally, in the light of these theoretical aspects, and based on the above mentioned practical analysis we identify several challenges that translators might face while recreating the



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meaning of these demotic and childlike interjections. Also, based on Chesterman's taxonomy, some appropriate translation strategies are concisely suggested in the last part of the study.

## 2. On the creativity of common talk

"(…) slips of tongue, false starts, hesitations, pauses, interruptions (…) are not to be found when tidied up and anaesthetized examples are the basis for analysis, and when referential and ideational uses of language are privileged over affective, interpersonal and emotive uses" (Carter, 2004:11)

### 2.1. Definitions:

Ronald Carter's basic idea in his book *Language and Creativity, The art of common talk* is that linguistic creativity is a property virtually belonging to all human beings and that it involves a clear transgression of language norms, as well as a conscious play with its forms in order to enhance the density of potential meaning. Consequently, creativity usually implies innovative correlations between "conceptual elements which have been previously unassociated" (Carter, 2004:47). As a "matter of co-creation" (ib.:69), creativity appears mostly in dialogic and interpersonal acts of communication, being defined as "endemic to everyday discourses" (ib.:49), "instantial and emergent" (ib.: 148).

Common spoken language represents "language *at full stretch*" (ib.:57) and it comprises several speech genres. Hence, Carter maps creativity in relation to social contexts (transactional, professional, socializing, intimate) and according to the *interaction type*, either collaborative or not. The more intimate and collaborative[1] the context, the more such "contexts are likely to be prone to creative language use", namely to include creative features and forms.

### 2.2. Functions of creativity

According to the purposes for creative language in common everyday speech suggested by Ronald Carter, we may easily notice that creativity may affect the message itself and its content, the identity of the speaker/s, the relationship between speakers, as well as the (communication) environment.

Regarding the functions performed on the message and its content, creativity serves to emphasize the content; to express a particular attitude, either positive or adversarial, humorous or ironic; to offer some new way of seeing the content of the message; "to end one bit of talk and start another" (ib.:148).

Therefore, identities can be created through creative speech acts. For instance, one may talk in different ways. It is the case of 'baby-talk', when adults speak differently in order to impress the toddler or the parents. Carter also mentions the "process of multivoicing" (ib.:68), that appears when a speaker uses different "voices" as the communication context changes. "This addresivity can also sometimes lead to the projection of different people and to an improvised, creative interplay between the voices" (ib.:68).Thus, in such cases, spoken language creativity makes the speaker's identity more noticeable.

[1] Non-collaborative discourses, belonging, according to Carter, to the "information provision type" (2004:149) of communication are those in which only one speaker dominates the talk, and, eventually, the others offer support by backchanneling.



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Creative speech features are also used to maintain and establish interpersonal relations, to preserve cohesion in a group of speakers by "playing with language forms to entertain the others; or simply oiling the wheels of the conversation" (ib.:148). This social function is a way of adapting and integrating within the social world. Also, the creative language play is important for the "metalinguistic development of children" (ib.:73).

Creating fictional, alternative worlds, and distorting the world as it is (from mere white lies or deliberate misinformation, to the use of hyperbole) proves to be, in Carter's opinion, a fundamental characteristic of the human mind.

**Features of spoken performance**

Of course, all these functions are characteristic and applicable to all linguistic forms and patterns that are creatively used. These features "further support and creatively adapt to the informality, intimacy and solidarity established between the speakers" (ib.:9).

In Carter's opinion, the most significant of these features seems to be repetition. It "is the central linguistic meaning-making strategy, a limitless resource for individual creativity and interpersonal involvement" (Tannen in Carter, 2004: 8). Repeating what the former speaker said is not a mere echo, but a strengthening of consensus between speakers, "an affective convergence or commonality of viewpoint. (ib.:8). Other features include "morphological creativity" (Carter and McCarthy in Carter, 2004:97), which refers to the invention of new words, interpersonal grammatical forms such as tails (e.g. *They were superb, they were"*), vague, hedged language forms (e.g. *something has fallen apart a bit*), backchannelling (e.g. Oh lovely, oh lovely; yeah, yeah), and affective exclamatives (e.g. *Oh wow!*).

Amongst these last two features included within the range of evaluative and attitudinal expressions, we will focus only on what has traditionally been referred to as interjection. All feelings can burst in an interjection. It is the part of speech through which one externalizes spontaneous sensations, feelings or expressions of the will or which reproduces sounds or noises of nature. Most interjections are polysemic and context-dependent, meaning that they cannot be fully understood without the accompanying context. Since most interjections do not have a notional content, in certain situations they may have a richer meaning than that of a common word, replacing a whole sentence. In the same line of thought, MacWhinney (2014) evidences that exclamations and interjections are extremely common in children's language, often with an equivocal lexical status.

## 3. Children's language: a practical analysis

"Hardly has the child comprehended with certainty which objects go together and which do not, when he begins to listen happily to verses of absurdity. For some mysterious reason the child is attracted to the topsy-turvy world where legless men run, water burns, horses gallop astride their riders and cows rubble on peas on top of birch trees" (Chukovsky, [1982] 1963, in Carter: 76)

As mentioned above, spoken language creativity is manifested mainly in contexts of intimate and collaborative communication, such as the language used by or addressed to small children, that Elliot (1981:151) names *motherese* or *baby talk*. While trying to communicate with toddlers adults usually adopt a simplified language, but neither less creative, nor less



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spontaneous. Elliot (1981) sates that the structure of children's language discourse is characterized by specific phonological, syntactic, paralinguistic and discursive features.

Specifically, the phonological features refer to syllable repetition or to the falling of the initial consonant group. For instance, the repetitive exclamation *yumyum*, which intensifies the degree of tastiness.

Syntactic features include the average duration of expression (shorter statements), a small number of subordinates and utterances without verbs. The discourse is thus simplified and generalised, for the children to be able to grasp the meaning. CHILDES corpus offers illustrative interjections, such as **pst*[2], which replaces the whole exclamation *listen here*, or *emem* which is the simplified version of *I don't know.*

Common paralinguistic features are high pitch and exaggerated intonation. Grownups consider that the use of flashy intonation better transmits a positive or negative opinion and makes the message more **explicit**. For example, negation in CHILDES is found to be expressed in baby-talk by **hunmmm, *uhuh* or **hunhunh* (all of these meaning a plain *no*)

Finally, discursive features imply an addition of imperatives and interrogatives, as well as a fluent speech, with a larger number of repetitions. In this case, interjections are used to express an entire sentence and are used to indicate communicative or interactional functions such as agreement, disagreement or pauses. Examples from CHILDES corpus include the following markers, with their corresponding function: *ahem*, meaning *ready to speak*, the questioning *hmm?*, the contradicting **yeahhuh* or the pause expressed by **uh.* (MacWhinney, 2014:52)

This largely spontaneous, unplanned and improvised type of discourse helps children create language while learning it, every bit of it proving to be fresh and playful.

Another type of discourse that uses children's language is represented by the folk memory which comprises wordplay, puns, formulaic jokes and nursery rhymes. According to Carter, this is the case in which the multiple rehearsals affect the spoken performance. For instance, in the case of the rhyme "Fee-fi-fo-fum, / I smell the blood of an Englishman, / Be he alive, or be he dead, / I'll have his bones to grind my bread."[3] which expressively changed over time. We will consider the particular case of the interjections forming the first line *Fee-fi-fo-fum* in six versions of the English fairy tale *Jack and the Beanstalk.* Accordingly, this verses changes into:

- "*Fe, fa, fi-fo-fum*, / I smell the breath of an Englishman. / Let him be alive or let him be dead, / I'll grind his bones to make my bread."
- "*Wife! Wife!* I smell fresh meat!"
- "*Fe, fi, fo, fum*, / I smell the blood of an Englishmune. / Be he alive or be he dead, / *Fe, fi, fo, fum!*"

[2] The authors of the corpus mention that the words that are marked with an asterisk cannot be found in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary.*

[3] The six versions of the fairy tale have been found online, at http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0328jack.html#lang offered and edited by Ashliman D. L, University of Pittsburgh. In order:
Jack and the Beanstalk, as recorded by Joseph Jacobs (1860/1890).
Jack and the Beanstalk, as recorded by Andrew Lang (1890).
Jack and the Beanstalk, as recorded by Edwin Sidney Hartland (1890).
Jack and the Bean-Pole, as recorded by Elsie Clews Parsons (1917).
Jack and the Bean-Stalk. Source: The Child's Own Book, 9th edition (London: William Tegg, 1861), pp. 214-29).
Jack and the Bean Tree. Source: Richard Chase, The Jack Tales: Folk Tales from the Southern Appalachians (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2003), pp. 29-37. First published 1943.



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- "*Wife*, I smell fresh meat!
- "*Fee, faw, fumm!* / I smell the blood of a English-mum. / Bein' he alive or bein' he dead, / I must have some!"

Charles Richardson refers to the interjections *Fie, Fiend, Foe, Foh, Faugh* offering two etymological perspectives that somehow converge. The first one, belonging to Horne Tooke states that *Fie* is the imperative of the Gothic and Anglo-Saxon verb verb *to hate*. *Fo*, also of Anglo-Saxon origin, is the past participle of the same verb, and means *hating. Foe* is the past tense of the same verb, "by the regular change of the characteristic letter of the verb" (Richardson 1815: 104), meaning *hated*, while *Foh* and *Faugh* are "the nauseating interjections" deriving from the same past participle. The second etymological clarification, belonging to Samuel Johnson, states that the interjection *Fy* derives from the Latin *vah*, and connotes blame and disapprobation. In addition, according to the same sources, *Fiend* means the great enemy of mankind, the devil, while its derivative noun *foe* refers to an enemy, an ill-wisher. As for the Saxon interjection of abhorrence *Foh*, it illustrates the shout one should utter at the sight of 'a foe'. In Skeat's etymology (1993:148) it is stated that *Fie* derives from the Sanskrit *phut*, and Latin *phui*, *phy*, all expressions of disgust. Easy to see, all etymological perspectives imply the same meaning of both fury, disgust, rage as well as envy and desire of blood at the same time.

But, here "the content of the message matters less than its communicability. It is performed rather than read. The sounds and movement of the rhyme, especially its repetitions, powerfully override the referential meaning." (Carter, 2004:3). The main function of this rhyme is to represent (to frighten), and, by representing, to create a bond, a relationship, between the storyteller and the child who listens to the story.

## 4. Translation challenges and strategies

It is without doubt that trying to recreate in another language the meaning of a creative discourse belonging to common talk is a challenge to any translator. Roland Carter states that "cultural knowledge is needed for the impact of wordplay and humour to be at its most effective" (2004:21) and we should add that a translator should be aware of and master a whole range of linguistic, etymological, target language target, cultural, phonetic (play), discursive, (etc) features in order to maintain and reconstruct the 'density of meaning' in the target language.

In our opinion, in order to translate children's language and / or language for children (as in fairy tales), a translator should take into consideration the characteristic features of children's language, i.e. that it is diminutively simple, generalized, repetitive and explicit. Also, it is important in this case for the translator to be aware of how much cultural and linguistic knowledge and understanding a child already has at a certain age.

Andrew Chesterman distinguishes between three major classes of problem-centred translation strategies that could be of use in this case: syntactic, semantic and pragmatic (1997: 87-113). These types may overlap to some extent, and in what follows our focus will be only on syntactic strategies:

1. Literal translation - is defined as meaning "maximally close to the SL form, but nevertheless grammatical" (1997:94) and is given a default value. From a purely linguistic point of view, it is a one-to-one transfer of the SL structures; in other words, it is a perfect linguistic equivalence. In Chesterman's opinion, literal translation maximally respects the SL form and the TL grammatical correctness;



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2. Loan, calque - is a strategy linked to the borrowing of both individual items and phrases. Thus, direct transfers of foreign terms evoke the atmosphere of the source language into the target language which does not have a correspondent;
3. Transposition - means any change of word class (e.g. from interjection to noun);
4. Unit shift - occurs when a ST unit (e.g. morpheme, word, phrase, clause, sentence, paragraph) is translated as a different unit in the TT;
5. Phrase structure change – indicates a number of changes at the level of the phrase, including number, modification in the noun phrase, and person, tense and mood in the verb phrase)
6. Clause structure change - affects the structure of the clause;
7. Sentence structure change – affects the structure of the sentence (main, sub-clauses);
8. Cohesion change – affects intra-textual reference, ellipsis, substitution, pronominalization and repetition, or the use of connectors of any kinds;
9. Level shift - affects the mode of expression, shifting it from one level to another (phonology, morphology, syntax and lexis);

Scheme change – refers to changes that translators incorporate in the translation in terms of rhetorical schemes, such as parallelism, repetition, alliteration, metrical rhythm.

The translations into Romanian of the above rhyme include different strategies, depending mainly on the target audience. In the case of the movie *Jack and the Giants* (2013, director Bryan Singer) the translator opted for a not very effective loan (calque), rendering into Romanian exactly the same English interjections, which do no transmit the *fiends'* thirst for revenge and human blood. It happens that in the movie some giants indeed call themselves Fie, Fo and Fum, but that still does not transfer into Romanian the expressions of disgust of the English interjections.

A more successful translation is that of the fairy tale itself, where the translator opted for a sort of literal translation "- *Miam,miam, miam!* Pe-aici miroase a carne proaspătă! strigă el, lingându-şi cu poftă buzele." (*Yummy, yummy, yummy!* I smell fresh meat! he said, smacking his lips). "A sort", because *"miam,miam, miam!"* is indeed baby-talk in Romanian and has no negative implications at all. But the translation is appropriate for the target audience – small children.

In fact, these lines are also used in Shakespeare's play *The Tragedy of King Lear*, by the character Edgar, who exclaims at the end of Act III, Scene 4: "Child Roland to the dark tower came, / Fie, foh, and fum, / I smell the blood of a British man." The Romanian translation, in this case incorporates several strategies, namely transposition, unit shift, phrase structure, cohesion change and level shift: "Edgar: Roland la Turnul Negru / A început a plânge, / Strigând: miroase-a sânge!..." maintaining and transferring the same functions of the original text.

**Conclusions**:

Interjection is a form of spoken language, inheriting thus all creative features of common talk. As most creative features of common talk, it is to be found mostly in intimate and collaborative types of conversation. In terms of translation strategies, when translating children's language and language for children a translator should consider simplicity, generalization, explicitness, which are exactly the features of children's lively and resourceful discourse. Therefore, and in the light of the above mentioned examples, we found that combining



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translation strategies and focusing on the target audience are the most suitable approaches in such translations. Given the limited experience of children's understanding, literal and foreignizing translations might cause confusion and even total dilution of meaning. Therefore, I consider that the most appropriate method to produce the "intended effect", the finest "echo of the original", (Dimitriu, 2006:226) is a freer interpretation, focusing on rendering the significance of the source text.

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