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# Attitudinal markers of identity in the translation of fictional texts: a diachronic view

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*This paper focuses on how attitudinal markers of identity are rendered in two diachronic translations of a work of literature. It offers a comparative view of the translations in terms of their preservation or adaptation of attitudinal discourse markers and the extent to which they render the literary hero's identity in the target language. Relevant examples are subject to analysis by applying both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The findings validate both our initial hypotheses, indicating that the hero's personal and social identity is affected in both target language versions and that the more recent translation is more authentic and believable for the current-day target readership.*

Keywords: *attitudinal markers, identity, idiolect, sociolect, diachronic translation*

## 1. Introduction

Translation studies is a domain acknowledged to feature an interdisciplinary dimension at different levels as it inherently intertwines with other disciplines. This study deals in translation studies borrowing resources from sociolinguistics and discourse analysis, while it aims at shedding a comparative diachronic glance at two translations into Romanian of Salinger's well-known novel *The Catcher in the Rye* (1991). One of the translations was made by Catinca Ralea and Lucian Bratu and published in 1964. The other version was translated by Cristian Ionescu and published in 2005/2011. The paper investigates the commonalities and differences between these translations, focusing on some speech discourse markers that substantially contribute to the construction of the hero's identity and to the authenticity of his language. Apart from being a precious work of literature, Salinger's novel, first published in 1951, is also significant historical and linguistic evidence of teenage vernacular of the 1940s-1950s.

Subsequent to preliminary observations, the objective set in this study is to test two hypotheses: (i) both translations affect the hero's personal and social identity; (ii) the second translation (2005/2011) is an updated version of the original

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and therefore a more authentic one for the current-day reader.

The research methodology applied to test these hypotheses is of both quantitative and qualitative nature and entails the analysis of relevant examples of attitudinal markers occurring in the source language text. The choice of such markers is grounded on the fact that they (i) provide information about the personal and social identity of the literary character who uses them abundantly, and (ii) that they integrate in the stylistic register of colloquial speech and slang which is the fastest changing register and therefore the most endangered to lose authenticity. This may justify the need for a new translation decade after the publication of the previous one.

## 2. Diachronic translation

There is scholarly consensus on the fact that translation is subject to constraints determined by its socio-cultural dimension. However, with certain text types, the temporal factor might affect the reception of the translation as well. This is a good reason for a valuable source language text to be provided with a new translation after years' time. The different time when a translation occurs integrates into what Toury calls translating under different conditions, when "translators […] often adopt different strategies, and ultimately come up with markedly different products" (Toury 1978/1995, 199). Diachronic differences in the translations of the same source texts are mostly determined by the natural changes in the evolution of a target language.

Hence, the need arises for updating the target language version for the sake of authenticity, especially when the topic is deemed as eternally and universally valid. It is the case of Salinger's novel, tackling the issue of the typical teenager's angst and frustration faced with his emerging life, therefore lacking self-confidence and being in search for his own identity. All this is, to an important extent, revealed by means of his speech, which integrates him in the teenagers' social group. In order to make his character credible to today's audience, undertaking a second translation of a source text is not only a matter of adapting the target text to the language changes and thereby taking account of the current-day target language readership, but also paying homage to an important literary work.

## 3. Personal and social identity of literary heroes

It is common knowledge that sociolinguistics is the study of language in its social context. Sundry sociolinguists, among whom we can name Bell 1976, Hudson 1996, Trudgill 2000, Gardiner 2008, Spolsky 2010, Wardhaugh 2010, etc., have investigated the relationship between language and society both at the personal or

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individual level and at the group or community level. Moreover, socioliguistics also investigates language variation in its social context. "[t]he language variation attributed to each individual by social status, the sociolect, separates social groups by social factors like age, gender, class, ethnicity, education, religion, etc." (Hudson 1996, 58).

We next relate the study of language in its social context to its role in the construction of personal and social identity. In this discussion, which will later focus on the linguistic identity of fictional text heroes, the words of Llamas and Watt, (2010, 1) in point of personal identity seem to be a relevant way of introducing the topic: "[l]anguage not only reflects who we are but in some sense it *is* who we are". Therefore, in our attempt to understand how the language the novelist uses is an important feature of the main character's identity, this section focuses on the issues of personal and social identity reflected in language use.

Joseph, discussing personal identity – or what he calls 'self-identity' –, states that it "has long been given a privileged role in identity research" (2010, 11). To relate personal or individual identity to group or social identity, the author adds that the identities which people construct for themselves and the ones they interact with seem to be different only to the extent to which they take into account the status "[they] accord to them" (id.). Thus the 'gap' between personal identity and that of a group, i.e. social identity, is for Joseph "most like a true difference of kind" (id.) because the latter seems to be more abstract than the former. However, no one can deny that personal identities are combinations of abstract features pertaining to social identity. In this respect, "[t]he group identities we partake in nurture our individual sense of who we are, but can also smother it" (Joseph 2010, 12). This is even better put by Llamas and Watt whose central argument is that "in addition to personal identity, we are also social beings with social identities" (Llamas and Watt 2010, 1).

Additionally, Llamas and Watt state that language users, who have a natural ability to adapt their linguistic behaviour to the context of various everyday encounters and their interlocutors, are also able to make the most of a wide range linguistic resources meant to help them highlight "different aspects of their identities in particular contexts at particular times" (2010, 1).

In the same line of thought and in relation to how linguists should examine the tight link between language and identity, Johnstone (2010, 30) points to the idea that "linguists need a way of thinking about how social and personal identities and linguistic forms are related". In her examination of the complex relationship between language and personal and/or social identity, she introduces the concept of '*indexicality'* and states that language '*indexes'* identity and is therefore an "*indexical* (or an *index*) when it serves this purpose" (2010, 31). The author traces the concept of indexicality in the work of linguistic anthropologists Ochs (1992) and Silverstein (2003) who were the first to introduce it in the area of sociolinguistics and who showed that the indexical connection between "linguistic form and social meaning can emerge at various levels of abstraction" (Johnstone 2010, 31).

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Starting from Johnstone's assertion that "[w]ritten texts and pictures can also help link linguistic form and social identity" (2010, 34), we claim that the written fictional text and its translation can also be a 'terrain' for the examination of how language is an identity indexical in this type of text and whether or not it maintains this feature in translation.

As far as the role of the social context in the translation of fictional texts is concerned, "it is the duty of the translators to make sure that they both understand and properly render in the target language all the socially dependent language instances" and use the most appropriate translation strategies (Arhire 2014, 792). In this way the final product can give the reader as true a version of the social context in the original work as possible. In addition, the most serious challenges the translator faces when working with the literary text are those related to the rendering of the linguistic and cultural features of the source text. In order for the translators to meet these challenges, they need to both identify the original author's purpose for the choice he/she makes in terms of language and to resort to strategies which can later lead to what has become the well-known "writer meaning and reader meaning" (Hatim and Mason 1994, 92). In other words, the translator will be an intermediary between the original writer and the reader and will help with both the preservation and the adaptation of the original meaning.

## 4. Discourse markers

As early as the 1980s, the concept of discourse markers has been a constant concern for linguists. An example is Schiffrin's landmark book in which the author uses an interactional sociolinguistic approach to define this concept as "sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk" that signal "the speaker's potential communicative intentions" (1987, 31). In a similar line of thought, Fuller (2003) states that discourse markers are a type of particle, and claims that there are two criteria which can be used as analytical tools to determine whether a given particle is in fact a discourse marker. The author first discusses the semantic relationship between the elements connected by the marker and suggests that they must be the same even if the marker is removed. Second, he points out that without the discourse marker, the grammaticality of the utterance must still be intact.

Research on discourse markers focuses mainly on their examination in spontaneous speech. Fox Tree shows that this investigation deals with such words as *well*, *oh*, and *you know* or on related words *um* and *uh*. The author also maintains that "the functions of discourse markers in spontaneous writing are similar to their functions in spontaneous speaking". She then classifies discourse markers as "(1) *attitudinal*, (2) *tailored*, (3) *temporally sensitive*, or (4) *cohesive"* (2014, 64). In the same study, Fox Tree points out that these four dimensions "predict the frequency with which discourse markers occur in spoken versus written formats" (id.).

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Fictional texts as representatives of written language do not seem to have been too often investigated from the perspective of their 'content' of discourse markers. Moreover, the translation of discourse markers present in fictional texts is clearly an area of language research where not very much work has been done. In this article we approach discourse markers in a fictional text and two of its translations into Romanian. This is a piece of fiction in which the author, and the translators in our case, attempt to reproduce 'real life' For the analysis of such data, we identified a number of words in the source text and their translations as discourse markers of the type that Fox Tree calls 'attitudinal'. For this linguist, *attitudinal discourse markers* are "speakers' expressions of emotions or attitudes", which are necessarily present in written communication more than in speaking (Fox Tree 2014, 65).

This then means that the lack of suprasegmental features of speech and nonverbal clues in written texts can be substituted by the creator of fictional text, in our case, by the use of attitudinal discourse markers purposefully placed in the language that appears to construct the identity of the character. How these discourse markers are translated and whether their attitudinal value is preserved, omitted or compensated in translation are points taken into consideration in the following sections.

## 5. Analysis and findings

The presence of several types of language markers is a defining feature of Holden's, speech, playing also an important part in shaping his identity. Most of these markers are part of the slang or the colloquial language spoken by Holden. The attitudinal markers we are herein investigating belong to such language categories as well. The criterion for the selection of the attitudinal markers subject to analysis has been the frequency of their occurrence, which determines the relevance of the character's idiosyncrasy. Taking a step further, the translation should ideally take account of these relevant markers for the sake of preserving the hero's full identity. The attitudinal markers: *sort of, damn, goddamn* and *as hell* have been compared in the two translations of Salinger's novel with a view to determining to what degree they are close to the source text in terms of frequency, authenticity and suitability for rendering the specificity of the character's speech and implicitly personal identity and social belonging. Their importance for the translated texts and hence the accurate reception of Holden's identity by the target text readers derives from the author's obvious purposeful insertion of such markers in the hero's speech. Holden's image conferred thereby comprises features of emotional involvement, weakness, superficiality, sometimes laziness, integrating him simultaneously into the social group of teenagers.

Additionally, the high frequency of some of the indicated markers justifies their turning into Holden's verbal tics, especially as they appear in both the first

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person narrator's voice and in the dialogue he engages in with people from different social layers. *Goddam* occurs in the novel 245 times, *damn* 125 times, *sort of* 175 times and *as hell* 81 times, all of them in the total amount of 115 pages. Our analysis is based on a sample from the novel considered significant, namely the first two chapters. The examined attitudinal markers are exemplified below:

(1) I'm not going to tell you my whole goddam autobiography. (Salinger 1991, 3)
(2) It cost him damn near four thousand bucks. (Salinger 1991, 3)
(3) I sat next to her once in the bus from Agerstown and we sort of struck up a conversation. (Salinger 1991, 4)
(4) I felt sorry as hell for him, all of a sudden. (Salinger 1991, 10)

They all reveal Holden's attitude towards aspects of his own life story, providing the discourse with a coherent and powerful atmosphere operating at reception level. Their omission would not affect the discourse semantically, but it would heavily neutralize its emotional and stylistic content.

To start with, the most frequent attitudinal marker featuring Holden's speech is *goddam*, the translation of which will be presented together with the translation of *damn*, which is but another version of *goddam*. Together, their occurrence in the entire novel amounts to 370 entries, outnumbering by far all the other attitudinal markers. They are translated in various contexts by different words or phrases denoting a negative attitude and worthiness to compensate for the absence of a lexical equivalent in the target language having the value of an attitudinal marker that could be consistently used throughout the novel:

(5) He put my goddam paper down… (Salinger 1991, 9)
  a. … *a pus jos lucrarea mea nenorocită*… (Salinger 1964, 34)
  b. … *a lăsat jos teza …* (Salinger 2005/2011, 19), (omitted marker)

(6) I damn near fell down. (Salinger 1991, 5)
  *a. A fost cît p-aci să cad.* (Salinger 1964, 26), (omitted marker, compensated)
  *b. … numai că n-am căzut în nas.* (Salinger 2005/2011, 10), (omitted marker, compensated)

As can be inferred from the examples above, both translations display lack of consistency in the selection of translation solutions. Albeit not affecting the sound of colloquialism in Holden's speech or its semantics, the lexical variety in the translation of the same word used in the original prevents the target text readers from acquiring implicit knowledge of Holden's speech idiosyncrasy, his verbal tics. Furthermore, the lexical inconsistency and the increased softness (5a, 6a, 6b), as well as the full omission (5b) in the translations affect the overall image of the

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recurrent features of teenage speech at that time, which was one of Salinger's acknowledged purposes.

Similar situations can be observed in the translation of the attitudinal marker *sort of*, which is omitted, on an average, in 50% of both the translations and translated by diverse lexical versions in the other 50%. Below are two examples exhibiting this lexical variety:

(7) His door was open, but I sort of knocked on it anyway (Salinger 1991, 6).
*a. Dar eu tot am bătut așa, în treacăt* (Salinger 1964, 28).
(omitted marker, compensated)
*b. Dar tot am ciocănit încet* (Salinger 2005/2011, 13).
(omitted marker, compensated)

(8) He didn't say it just sarcastic, but sort of nasty, too (Salinger 1991, 9).
*a. Tonul lui nu mai era ironic, era de-a dreptul veninos* (Salinger 1964, 36).
*b. N-a zis-o doar cu sarcasm, ci și cu oarecare răutate* (Salinger 2005/2011, 21).

One of the rare situations in which both translations are equivalent to the original in register is exemplified below in the translation of the attitudinal marker *as hell*:

(9) It made me feel sad as hell (Salinger 1991, 11).
*a. Mă întristau al naibii* (Salinger 1964, 39).
*b. Totuși, m-a întristat ca dracu'* (Salinger 2005/2011, 23).

The most accurate Romanian equivalents for *as hell*, namely *dracu'* or *naiba*, preceded by prepositions, do occur in some of the translations, but they could have been used for the sake of consistency in several other contexts (which remains a topic for investigation in another study). Instead, the translators' creativity in finding Romanian colloquial ways of expression is fairly remarkable as the following examples provide evidence of:

(10) He'd be charming as hell and all (Salinger 1991, 10).
*a. Și era de o afabilitate că ți se făcea greață* (Salinger 1964, 36).
*b. Făcea pe șarmantul de nu mă-ntreba* (Salinger 2005/2011, 21).

Quantitatively speaking, the analysis reveals that the examined attitudinal markers have been omitted in 41.66% of the 1964 translation and in 47.22% of the 2005/2011 translation. Some of these attitudinal markers which have been omitted in the translation have been compensated for by colloquial language expressed in lexical items, phrases, syntactic language devices or even punctuation.

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## 6. Comparative view of the two translations

One of the commonalities that the two translations exhibit is that, overall, they both preserve the atmosphere of the original and the colloquial language. More precise common features stem from the findings that the source language attitudinal markers which have been analyzed have lost their quality of attitudinal markers in the target language, that they have either been omitted or translated by a variety of language means or have been compensated for with a view to endowing the translated text with a similar atmosphere. Even though the character's idiolectal features are affected, neither translation could be deemed improper, but their possible 'faults' lie in the impossibility of using a similar Romanian language register in a consistent manner and apply one-to-one lexical equivalence, i.e. the same word throughout the target language text for the investigated attitudinal markers in the source language. Therefore, it becomes obvious that losses are inherent and inevitable in the translation of the language items discussed in this study.

Both translations are, in different measures, creative in the attempt to compensate for the lack of consistent attitudinal markers suitable in the variety of contexts offered by the source language text. The question then arises if the 2011 translation was needed. In order to provide a pertinent answer to this question, we need to address the novel's macro-contextual level, to identify the author's overall intentions and his envisaged effect on the readership. All of these aspects ultimately boil down to the creation of a text that should enable the readers to depict an authentic even if at times abrupt image of the teenage language and behaviour at a particular time and in a particular space and social environment. Being subject to temporal and social change, the language definitely becomes obsolete to effectively impact the readers and have them perceive teenage language as such. For the sake of offering an authentic text that addresses universal issues related to teenage, a fresh and updated translation is justified. Slang and the manifestation of colloquialisms changes fast and rapidly loses authenticity. Therefore, a new translation, after thirty-one years, can be a solution for reconstructing the teenage feel for some target language audience. This is what, we are confident, the 2005/2011 translation succeeds in doing, thereby validating our initial hypothesis.

It is worth mentioning also that the 1964 translation, being a softer, more general and neutral version of the original writing, is less prone to become ephemeral as compared to the 2005/2011 translation which will become soon outdated from the vantage point of the register it uses.

## 7. Conclusions and further research

As mentioned in the previous section, the hypothesis relative to the higher level of authenticity in the more recent translation (2005/2011) has been validated. The other hypothesis, which entailed testing whether the personal and the social identity of the

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hero have been preserved in translation, is also validated, in that the character's identity is not fully rendered in the translations.

The American teenage vernacular of the 1940s-1950s is inherently lost at the intercultural and inter-linguistic transfer. Under the circumstances, the translator's mission remains to try and (i) preserve the authenticity of teenage speech in the target language (social identity) and (ii) maintain the register level of the source language speaker (personal identity). We do admit that these two undertakings might prove conflicting if the target language authentic teenage language does not comply with the register level of the authentic source language teenage speech. Therefore, the translators, facing such a situation, will make compromises.

Overall, the atmosphere of the original writing as generated by the colloquial language is preserved in both translations. However, even though based on a rather small-scale analysis, the data speak for some losses in the hero's identity in the target language texts. There is a considerable number of omissions of attitudinal markers and their translations display either high lexical variety or softer lexical and semantic equivalence, thereby neutralizing especially some of Holden's idiolectal speech features and implicitly part of his personal identity. Also, the lack of consistency in the translations prevents the target text from presenting a coherent image of the teenage sociolect, thus affecting Holden's social identity.

Indeed, most of the times, these losses stem from the impossibility of finding a perfect lexical equivalent in Romanian to translate the attitudinal markers contributing to constructing the hero's identity.

Further research would be necessary based on a larger variety of attitudinal markers so as to strengthen the findings obtained by this study. Additionally, other discourse markers could be investigated, such as tailored markers and cohesive markers, with a view to drawing conclusions on Holden's full identity construction as observable in the translations.

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