ON LANGUAGE PECULIARITIES:
when language evolves that much that speakers find it strange

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Abstract

The article deals with the idea that language is an interesting instance of cultural evolution and that the users of a certain language are bound to influence and be influenced by it. We have focused our short debate upon the case of the English language, since it is the language that affects the largest majority of speakers using it as non-native tongue.

Keywords: language, English, cultural evolution, national mark.

Since the language of a people is one of its national mark, it is only natural for it to be filled with cultural specific expressions, which are only to be found in that particular linguistic instance. These special collocations bear the cultural, historical, geographical, social and temporal mark, deeply imbedded in their form and fond. No wonder then, that there is a great deal of difficulty and challenge in the process of rendering form and fond to a different language, belonging to a different cultural and linguistic frame. Needless to say, it seems to be a matter of 'transdaptation' that occurs between languages, as cores of the cultures they belong to.

The cultural specificity of any language becomes its legacy to the generations to come, therefore, to be preserved and protected by the vicissitudes of time. Yet, the realities we live in impose upon us the need to communicate in order to survive time. Thus, the necessity of a language meant to ensure this prerogative has been proven, once at a certain moment in history Latin, and after and since then English, have become lingua franca.

According to Luke Mastin's web page[2] "There is no official definition of 'global' or 'world' language, but it essentially refers to a language that is learned and spoken internationally and is characterised not only by the number of its native and second language speakers, but also by its geographical distribution and its use in international organizations and in diplomatic relations. A global language acts as a lingua franca, a common language that enables people from diverse backgrounds and ethnicities to communicate on a more or less equitable basis. (...) The influence of any language is a combination of three main things: the number of countries using it as their first language or mother-tongue, the number of countries adopting it as their official language and the number of countries teaching it as their foreign language of choice in schools. The intrinsic structural qualities of a language, the size of its vocabulary, the quality of its

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[2] http://www.thehistoryofenglish.com/issues_global.html#Is

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literature throughout history, and its association with great cultures or religions, are all important factors in the popularity of any language. But, at base, history shows us that a language becomes a global language mainly due to the political power of its native speakers, and the economic power with which it is able to maintain and expand its position."……

Nowadays, when information of any kind travels as quickly as light, it is virtually and realistically impossible for a language as overly-used and exposed, such as English, to be delivered in an error-free mode. Therefore, for a while now, we have been constantly made aware of the fact that English is paying the price of being used in such an extensive manner.

Since English was proclaimed as an international language, its users have continuously been imprinting it with linguistic and cultural traits of their own languages. It has been proven that this process happens at any level of the language: at phonological level, since certain English words appear to be pronounced and also spelled in more than one way, due to the phonetic and phonologic laws governing the language of the non-native user of English and also due to the fact that English is a etymological language, thus having a rather sophisticated spelling. Therefore, the term sonorous might be bearing the accent either on the first or on the second syllable, and common words like night are likely (hopefully not, though) to be spelled as *nite* in certain circumstances and by certain linguistic users, in their attempt to simplify it.

English might also bring about difficulties at lexical level, if not for anything else, than for the numerous oxymoronic collocations, which are frequent and confusing enough, for that matter. Yet, the number of people using them appears to be quite big, regardless their contradictory nature; thus, we are likely to hear and use expressions which might appear strange, but are used often such as: *clearly misunderstood, exact estimate, small crowd, old news, random order, awfully good, plastic glasses, true lies, deafening silence, impossible solutions, friendly takeover, only choice, found missing, even odds, unbiased opinions, sad smile, loud whispers, pretty ugly*, a.s.o.

Kathy Cross[3] put together a list of interesting facts about the English language. According to her, "English is such a wonderful language, born from so many other tongues and so rich in texture and depth. The Oxford English Dictionary gives us over 600,000 entries and thanks to evolution, corruptions, misinterpretations and altercations, the language throws up some interesting quirks." Thus, it appears that language is a living organism that evolves in time and has the ability to adapt to current times, therefore many words have been derived from combinations, puns or sometimes even paradoxical instances.

An interesting instance would be the one regarding the frequency of the letter *e*, which is supposedly the most used letter in the English language. Yet, author Ernest

[3] http://readingaddicts.co.uk/21-interesting-facts-english-language/

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Vincent Wright wrote an entire novel - just over 50,000 words - without using the letter e at all.[4]

For those passionate about statistics, we came across other worth-mentioning linguistic instances: "The word *uncopyrightable* is the longest word in the dictionary where no letter is repeated twice; the words *facetious* and *abstemious* are the only two words that contain all of the vowels in the correct order. (…) The longest word in the dictionary without any vowels is *rhythm*."[5]

Probably one of the most impossible to cope with nuisance of the English language phonology is the combination of letters *-ough,* which can be pronounced in nine different ways. The sentence that follows contains all of them: "*The rough-coated, dough-faced, thoughtful ploughman strode through the streets of Scarborough; after falling into a plough, he coughed and hiccoughed".*[6]

Following the idea according to which language is affected by the age of speed and change we live in, it appears that this is also visible in linguistics. Thus, a word formed by joining together two parts of existing words is called a *portmanteau* word and many new words are added to the dictionary this way. *Brunch* is a portmanteau of *breakfast* and *lunch*, while *motel* is a portmanteau of *motorcar* and *hotel*. It is said that Oscar Wilde pushed duds (clothes) and attitude together to create dude.[7]

And, to top it all, we believe it relevant for our intervention to briefly debate upon certain bizarreness in the English language: Christina Sterbenz[8] draws our attention towards some sentences that, in spite of seeming absolutely weird, they are rather accurate; thus, one of them contains lexical ambiguity, where the same words possess different meanings.

A ship-shipping ship ships shipping-ships.

In order to clarify the obsolete instance, we are made aware of its interpretation: "The above example contains three similar versions of the same word: a noun, adjective and verb. The adjective, in this case, is actually a participle, *shipping* or a verb functioning as a modifier. Thus, our sentence becomes: A ship-shipping (compound participial adjective) ship (noun) ships (verb) shipping-ships (compound participial noun).

Will, will Will will Will Will's will?

Will (a person), will (future tense helping verb) Will (a second person) will (bequeath) [to] Will (a third person) Will's (the second person) will (a document)? (Someone asked Will 1 directly if Will 2 plans to bequeath his own will, the document, to Will 3.)

Rose rose to put rose roes on her rows of roses.

[4] http://www.buzzfeed.com/adamdavis/surprising-and-odd-things-you-never-knew-about-the-englis#.nwqwbvkxN
[5] Acc to. Kathy Cross, op cit.
[6] idem
[7] idem
[8] http://www.businessinsider.com/weird-sentences-2014-1?utm_content=buffer864ef&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer

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This sentence deals with homophones, words that sound the same with different meaning. Thus, we have: *Rose*, a woman; *rose*, the verb meaning to get up; *rose*, the flower, *rose*, the colour; *roes*, the fish eggs (in this case, used as fertilizer) and *rows*, the lines. (A woman named Rose got up to put rose-coloured fish eggs on her rows of roses.)

Just as words were proved to have changed their meaning over time, they are also prone to change every time they are used new, due to the flexibility power they may be endowed with. This change in meaning is obviously influenced by the exhaustive use of the words, by the fact that language is a living entity, in a continuous change, thus flexible, never the same.

As we have already stated previously, the process of translation activates national and international cultural identities. Each and every language possesses specific linguistic and cultural particularity, unique, impossible or very difficult to render in a different language, resulting in endless difficulties in translation. We agree, therefore, that any language contains particular terms, terms that carry information of national cultural identity, terms that cannot be entirely equated by means of translation.

It seems legitimate enough to consider that it is normal for a certain language, especially one so over-used (and sometimes abused) as English to try to survive by continuous changing and adapting. It is just as legitimate, for that matter, to meet the common user's resistance to the change, since change has always been considered dangerous, even though admittedly necessary.

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