"RE-TRANSLATING" THE EXOTIC ROMANIA. FOREIGNIZING STRATEGIES THROUGH LITERAL TRANSLATION IN WALDECK'S "ATHENE PALACE"

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Abstract: Travel books carry imagological messages par excellence. The images of Romania, a more and more fashionable topic both inside and outside the country, have begun to be studied thoroughly in the last years. Due to various reasons, there are few translations into Romanian of such books. The purpose of this brief exercise of translation criticism is to show how literal translation can enhance the image of an ethnic group and generate effects of estrangement upon the Romanian readers, who now regard themselves as being 'the Other'. Such translations address the growing demand of Romanian readers to see themselves through the Westerners' eyes.

Keywords: imagolgy, ethnic groups, cultural translation, foreignization, exoticising

From a strictly linguistic viewpoint, literal translation implies a one-to-one transfer from the SL into the TL. The broader framework of *translating images* expands the word for word/interlinear translation procedure (which, most of the times, is not possible or appropriate anyway) to the transfer of the image into the target language as it appears in the ST. In other words, we might assume that images are literally translated when the translator interferes as little as possible not only in the linguistic structure of the text, but also in its meaning in relation with the images that are presented. In Vinay and Darbelnet's opinion, literal translation is not acceptable when the literally translated message gives another meaning, or has no meaning, (…) or has a corresponding expression, but not within the same register (1995: 34).

The decision of translating images literally, i.e. resorting to the exoticizing strategy, impacts on the readers cognitively, as it enhances the author's intention of presenting their culture as foreign and different. Leerssen (2007: 325) also speaks of *auto-exoticism*, a term used to describe the self-image of countries who have interiorized the exotic terms in which they were habitually represented for (and by) dominant outsiders. We may well consider that Romanians have continuously adopted, starting with the 1990s, an auto-exoticist perspective. Deletant (in Beller&Leersen, 2007:224) explains, for instance, that self-denigration is an essential component of the Romanian self-image and is deeply rooted in the matrix of the national culture. This auto-exoticist perspective is likely to be decisive when choosing a book to be translated, and the approach is likely to be preserved in translation. Dyserinck (cited in Soenen, 1992: 129) argues that, since images influence the selection of literary works to be translated, the conformity to the fixed images of a country is an essential feature of the target text.

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The following analyses seek to show that the literal translation of images is linked to auto-exoticism and to the strategy of 'further- foreignization', a term which refers to a strategy through which culture-bound lexical items which had been explicitated in the foreign text, were once again explicitated for the target readership, thus obtaining effects of strangeness and defamiliarization

Rosa Goldschmidt Waldeck, an American writer of Jewish-German descent, was also a journalist and had a doctoral degree in sociology. She spent seven months in Romania, during the Second World War, as a correspondent of the American weekly *Newsweek*. Her book, first published in 1942, became a best-seller in New York and London. According to Lăcătuşu (2000: 209), it presents a precise (by no means idyllic) radiogram of the Romanian society, highlighting the unfortunate consequences that Nazism had had on Romania in an extremely tumultuous period, full of tragic events. Although I agree with the fact that the descriptions are by no means idyllic, I have to disagree with the framing of the book as a 'radiogram of the Romanian society'. Waldeck spent most of her time in Bucharest, and the capital could not be typical for the whole Romanian society. Moreover, the author did not encounter a wide variety of people, the same as the other authors did.

As Latham jr. mentions in the translated version's afterword, the period of Waldeck's stay in Romania coincides with the most appalling political events in Romanian history: the loss of territories accounting for 100000 km^2 of surface (the regions of Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina and the Hertza province; North-western Transylvania and Southern Dobrudja, all accounting for a population of six million inhabitants). As the American historian states, Romania suffered both from the Soviet aggression and from the violation of German military presence on its territories. Waldeck's coming to Romania related to the fall of France; many British and American journalists settled in Bucharest for, according to Latham jr., Romania was still a safe yet full of relevant information zone. Therefore, as Latham jr. (2012: 218) shows, dozens of the best Anglo-American journalists representing newspapers, radio stations and wire services were sent to the Romanian capital. *Athene Palace* was released two months after USA entered the war, being the last American testimony before the Nazi-dominated Europe closed its doors. Consequently, it was positively (and widely) reviewed by American publications such as *Atlantic*, *Time*, *The Saturday Review of Literature*, *Saturday Evening Post* and others. Kaplan (1993: 81) considers the book as providing a gossipy memoir of sexual intrigue inside the hotel and an exquisitely detailed closeup of Romanian manners.

The translated version of the book (by Ileana Sturdza), *Athenée Palace*, was released in 2000 by the same Humanitas Publishing House, in the *History* collection – the *Performance of History* series (thus, with no apparent connection to the issue of the Romanian version of Sitwell's *Roumanian Journey* eleven years later). Ileana Sturdza has a certain experience in translating history books and memoirs from English and French into Romanian, among which I mention *Confessions d'un vieux diplomate* (Le Conte de Saint-Aulaire).

After fourteen more years (in September 2014), a French translation (by Danièle Mazingarbe, who also wrote the book's preface) was published by Éditions de Fallois, Paris. In

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this case, we might once again refer to the theoretical approaches to journalism, i.e. a situation in which journalists are said to be acting as "frames"[1]. Journalists can choose to present a story from a certain perspective. Some aspects of the situation come into focus while others fade into background. Why would a translation of a book dealing with the Romanian pre-war circumstances appeal to the French public is a fairly raised question. The book's preface points out that the *Athenée Palace* Hotel served as host for French journalists and diplomatic staff, including the writer and ambassador Paul Morand. Moreover, Danièle Mazingarbe reminds that R.G. Waldeck's coming to Bucharest coincided with the fall of Paris, and the Romanian capital, through its intellectual elite, utterly empathized with the French cause:

TT : Pour l'élite roumaine, qui ne jure que par la France depuis la Révolution française, parle français, collectionne les éditions françaises les plus rares et les créations des grands couturiers, la catastrophe est totale (p.9).

This quotation is also relevant, as it speaks about the French social model that the Romanian higher classes had adopted, in terms of both cultural and fashion habits. The situation was also acknowledged by other writers who had dealt with Romania, such as Olivia Manning: "For Bucharest, the fall of France was the fall of civilization. France was an ideal for all of those who struggled against their peasant origin. All culture, art and fashion, liberal opinion and concepts of freedom were believed to come from France. With France lost, there would be no stay of force against savagery"(1960: 272). The arrival of the Germans at the hotel is also relevant for the French public due to familiar historical circumstances. Overall, as it is stated in the afterword, the book is framed as a "firsthand testimony of a crucial period in the French history – *témoignage de première main sur une période cruciale de notre histoire*". The way in which the French version is framed is illustrated in a book review from *L'Express Culture* (11.10.2014):L'élite roumaine Francophile est bouche bée. Que va devenir la Grande Roumanie sans Paris, cet allié généreux qui lui a permis, grâce au traité de Trianon, de doubler sa superficie ? [2]

The French translator expresses her own opinion concerning the Romanians, saying that they enjoy bombastic ceremonies similar to Nazi masses, such as the reburials of the Iron Guard members: "les Roumains aiment ces cérémonies grandiloquentes qui ressemblent aux grandes messes nazies" (p.11). Finally, she admits that the diplomats interested in Romania are the usual readers of the book, a book which she considers a firsthand document dealing with Hitler's expansionist politics, a *human comedy* and a homage to Romania - finally regarded as a martyr. Besides the French involvement in Romania, the book - first published in 1942 - is also framed as a premonition of Hitler's defeat, of which Waldeck came to be sure. Actually, the book is advertised as "*un livre prémonitoire*" – a premonitory book, as is written on its bookmark.

Having been framed as such, the French version obviously had no reason to use any other dominant translation strategy than literal translation. Sentences referring strictly to France were,

[1] For further reference, see Haenggli, *Key Factors in Frame Building: How Strategic Political Actors Shape News Media Coverage* in American Behavioral Scientist, March 2012, pp. 300-317

[2] the Romanian elite is speechless. What will the Greater Romania become without Paris, this generous ally who allowed it, through the Treaty of Trianon, to double its surface?.

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however, ideologically altered through translation. Since the ideological functions of a translation on the representation of France is not of our concern, I will limit our approach to the following example:

ST: The prestige of France was still very high with the Romanians (p.37).

TT: Le prestige de la France demeurait intact auprès des Roumains (p.49).

The idea that the prestige was still high (although it changed) was replaced with that of it having remained intact.

My purpose in this subchapter is to demonstrate how literal translation results into 'further-foreignization' in the Romanian version of Waldeck's novel. I assume that, whatever strategy had the French translator applied, the elements regarding the Romanian culture as presented by a British author would have been exotic enough for the French public. Therefore, the French target text will serve as a means of assessing the degree of 'foreignization' by regarding the alternative solutions that were used in order to address a more neutral public, a public which is less sensitive to the image of Romania.

We could not say that 'further foreignization' is the main translation strategy in the Romanian edition. In many cases, the source text does not even allow for it, as the author used very accurate transcriptions of toponyms and other proper names, and only made few cultural explicitations for her own public. For instance: "Henri knows everything. For 2000 lei he tells a true story and for 1000 lei he tells a very plausible story" (p.31).

Of course, very few people, even among the Romanians, would understand what is implied by these statements, so the literal translation of such sentences provides no more meaning to Romanian readers than the original did for the English speaking public. However, the translator, whenever it was needed, also used footnotes explaining that Romanian toponyms and other culture-bound terms (such as *duduia*, a term meaning *maiden*, used when referring to Elena Lupescu) were originally written in Romanian. In doing so, she managed to prevent the annihilation of the author's strategy of foreignising (through the loan transfer of the Romanian words – a way of introducing the *flavour of the source culture into the target language*, according to Vinay and Darbelnet (1995: 31). Since the author's voice was not left unmarked, this solution involves 'further-foreignization'. The same procedure was used in the French version of the book, but in this case, the explanatory addition was made within the text.

ST : But hardly had he moved on when the Bratianu-beard said, "Voilà le gigolo le plus dangereux de Bucarest" (p. 32)

TT1: Dar de-abia se depărtase, cînd bătrînul cu barbă îmi spuse: *"Voila le gigolo le plus dangereux de Bucarest !*" [in footnote: "Iată gigoloul cel mai periculos din București"]

TT2 : Mais il s'était à peine éloigné que le Bouc-à-la-Bratianu remarquait **en français** : « Voilà le gigolo le plus dangereux de Bucarest » - p.44).

There are, however, many instances in which images of Romania are translated literally creating 'further foreignising' effects in *Athenée Palace*. We will consider a few such examples:

ST: "You ate ciorbă, a sour soup seasoned with lemon, with fowl or game or boiled beef in it" (p.259)

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TT: "Mîncai ciorbă, o supă acrită cu lămîie, cu carne de pasăre sau de vînat sau de vită fiartă în ea" (p.274).

The cultural explicitation / intratextual gloss was kept in the TT, although Romanians are well aware of what *ciorbă* is. In this case, the other option would have been to simply omit the (seemingly redundant) explicitation. Moreover, the same paragraph also mentions "*chopped meats, rolled in vine leaves"*. Although this dish is commonly known by Romanians as *sarmale*, the TT provides a literal translation: *"carne tocată înfăşurată în foi de viţă".* Undoubtedly, the literal translation of this sentence (instead of replacing it with the Romanian culture-specific term) dazzles the readers and dissociates them from something that is, otherwise, familiar to them.

The literal approach with a 'foreignizing' feature is also used in the French version:

TT2 : Vous mangiez *ciorbă* [italics in original], une soupe aigre au citron, avec dedans du gibier à plume ou tout autre gibier ou encore du bœuf bouilli, et un peu de crème aigre (p.277).

The above mentioned effect is achieved through maintaining the Romanian word and the use of italics

We notice the same procedure in the following sequence:

ST: At times, a severe wind coming from Russia, the crivăţ, which the Bucharestians say "has teeth", drew tears from your eyes (p.258).

TT: Cîteodată, un vînt tăios, venind din Rusia, crivăţul, despre care bucureştenii spuneau că "are dinţi", îţi înlăcrima ochii (p.273).

TT2: Par moments, un vent violent venant de Russie vous faisait pleurer; c'était le crivets, dont les Bucarestois disent qu'il a « du mordant » (p.276).

These examples illustrate how explicitations originally used by the author in order to domesticate the information for her public become elements of foreignization for the target readership. We could not say the same thing about the French translation, whose literal approach, this time, is closer to the ST in terms of impact on the readers.

At the micro-level of the linguistic surface structures of *Athene Palace*, troublesome situations such as making a suitable correspondence between two different education systems was dealt with by the translator through the procedure of equivalence, in Vinay and Darbelnet'a acceptation of the term, i.e. a procedure which replicates the same situation as in the original, whilst using completely different wording (1995: 342).

ST: Together with twenty-four others picked from all walks of life, he [King Michael] went through the private equivalent of junior College and had only a few weeks before taken his final examination. (p.147)

TT: Împreună cu alţi douăzeci şi patru de băieţi aleşi din toate straturile sociale, terminase liceul şi trecuse bacalaureatul cu cîteva săptămîni înainte. (p.157)

Indeed, the King's biography clearly shows that the above mentioned situation refers to his secondary education. The translator followed the historical truth and adapted her TT to the Romanian education system, using specific terms such as 'liceu' or 'bacalaureat', although the

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American ‘junior college’ refers to post-secondary education. This solution renders the meaning of the sentence and ensures a similar effect on the target audience to the effect of the original.

The French TT once again sticks to the ST and provides a domesticating (literal) solution:

TT2: Avec vingt-quatre autres jeunes triés sur le volet, il avait fréquenté une école privée qui était l'équivalent d'un établissement d'enseignement supérieur, et avait passé ses derniers examens quelques semaines plus tôt seulement (p.162).

The sequence referring to King Michael’s education shows how the French translator culturally explicitated, based on the original (English) version, the kind of schooling that the king took, despite the historical inaccuracy. We can see here that the American cultural term ‘junior college’ has been replaced with l'équivalent d'un établissement d'enseignement supérieur (the equivalent of a higher education institute), thus no correspondence between the American – French – Romanian education systems being made. It is needless to say that, in order to be precise, some further research could have resulted into a translator’s note explaining that the exam that the king took, the Romanian Bacalaureat, is the equivalent of the French Baccalauréat.

However, even in this case, we might still consider a ‘further-foreignizing’ solution, such as the following possible version of the same paragraph in which literal translation is used in the Romanian TT:

TT3: Împreună cu ceilalți douăzeci și patru aleși din toate straturile societății, urmase echivalentul privat al colegiului și promovase examenul final cu doar câteva săptămâni înainte.

The author’s wrong piece of cultural information could be explained through a footnote, the way the translator did in the case of some other inaccuracies (such as, for instance, the days in which Orthodox Christians celebrate different saints). In a different order of ideas, although there aren’t any attitudes inscribed in the words and phrases from these texts, a positive evaluation is noticeable in the form of an attitudinal token.

Another aspect worth mentioning is that of the clichés and stereotypes by which Romanians are described. As one would expect by now, the negative ones refer to corruption, while the arguably positive ones are related to resilience. Let us consider the following examples:

ST: Things “written on paper”, they said, had a shorter lifein Romania than anywhere else. After a few weeks, the best laws were forgotten or lost their zip because everybody had learned to get around them. This, the Excellencies said, was the Romanian way of life (p.100).

TT1: Lucrurile ”scrise pe hîrtie” au o viață mai scurtă în România decît în orice altă țară, spuneai ei. După cîteva săptămîni, chiar și legile cele mai bune erau uitate sau își pierdeau eficacitatea pentru că toată lumea învățase cum să le ocolească. Așa era felul de a fi al românilor, spuneau Excelențele (p.107)

TT2: Les choses <<écrites sur le papier>>, disaient-ils, avaient une vie plus breve en Roumanie qu'ailleurs. Au bout de quelques semaines, les meilleures lois étaient oubliées, ou vidées de *leur* substance, car les gens avaient appris a les contourner. D'apres Leurs Excellences, tout cela était typiquement roumain (p.115).

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ST: The Romanians possess to the highest degree the capacity of receiving the blows of destiny while relaxed. The secret of the art of falling is, of course, not to be afraid of falling and the Romanians are not afraid, as Western people are (p.288).

TT1: Românii posedă în cel mai înalt grad capacitatea de a primi relaxat loviturile soartei. Secretul artei de a cădea este, desigur, să nu-ți fie frică, și românii nu se tem, așa cum se tem occidentalii (p.303).

TT2 : Les Roumains ont une extraordinaire capacité à encaisser les coups du sort tout en restant détendus. Le secret de l'art de la chute est, bien sûr, de ne pas avoir peur de tomber, et les Roumains n'ont pas peur, à différence des Occidentaux (p.306).

The first paragraph, referring to law abiding, is eloquent in what concerns auto-exoticism, as it is an example of Romanians providing their own clichés about themselves. Negative evaluations in the form of attitudinal inscriptions are obvious both in the ST and in the TTs; the 'auto-exoticist' approach was preserved in the TTs through literal translation. The literal translation used in these two paragraphs (as well as in others) testifies to a constant fidelity in rendering the author's stereotyped opinions. Thus, the translators do not make any compromise so as to attenuate the deprecatory stereotypes or the potential culture shock. According to Dimitriu (2012: 13), this strategy of 'foreignization' / 'auto-exoticising' would, no doubt, highlight the difference in cultural perception between the authors and the Romanian target readers.

The use of the French target text as an alternative perspective showed us that the 'domestication' (achieved, in this case, through literal translation) turns into 'further foreignization' in the Romanian target text (again, through literal translation). Thus, the same strategy provides antithetical effects, and the most striking culture shock is, in this case, suffered by the Romanian readership who finds itself regarded as *the Other*.

There is a significant, 58 year, gap between the publication of *Athene Palace* and its translation into Romanian. The Romanian reader from the contemporary era would probably assume, from a diachronic perspective, that many (if not most) of the realities described in the war-time Romania have changed. Though less reliable than a historical document, *Athene Palace* (and travel books in general) represents a source of (recent) history and will be regarded as such by the Romanian readers, especially given the dreary context of the Second World War. However, the book describes attitudes and beliefs that have been present in the Romanian mentality to this day.

The Romanians' 'auto-exotic' perspective that both the English and Romanian versions of the book provide is discernible in most of the travel books on Romania published after 1990. From this viewpoint too, the decision of translating the book in the year 2000 is by no means surprising.

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