

The Romanian Translation of G. Swift's *Last Orders*: Trying to Keep Faithful to the Original

La traduction roumaine de *Last Orders* par G. Swift: En essayant de rester fidèle à l'original

Traducerea în limba română a romanului *Last Orders* de G. Swift: încercarea traducătorului de a rămâne fidel originalului

Irina-Ana DROBOT

Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest
Department of Foreign Languages and Communication
124 Lacul Tei Blvd, sector 2, Bucuresti
anadrobot@yahoo.com

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the way in which Graham Swift's novel Last Orders was translated into Romanian. How much can they keep faithful to the original? To what extent is a faithful translation possible, without it sounding odd? Is the result of their work convincing, in terms of decoding and communicating the author's message? Keeping 'a foreign flavour to it' is inevitable, as we deal with two different cultures, and is, in fact, according to Wilhelm von Humboldt, a sign of a good translation, as long as the reader does not feel the 'foreignness' but feels the 'foreign'.

Résumé

Le but de cet article est d'examiner la manière dont le roman Last Orders par Graham Swift a été traduit en roumain. Comment les traducteurs peuvent-ils rester fidèles à l'original? Dans quelle mesure est possible une traduction fidèle, sans qu'elle sonne bizarre? Le résultat de leur travail est-il convaincant, en termes de décodage et de communication du message de l'auteur? Garder une «saveur étrangère» est inévitable, car nous avons affaire à deux cultures différentes, et cela est, en fait, d'après Wilhelm von Humboldt, le signe d'une bonne traduction, aussi longtemps que le lecteur ne sent pas «l'étrangeté» mais l'«étranger».

Rezumat

Scopul acestei lucrări este de a examina modul în care romanul Last Orders de Graham Swift a fost tradus în limba română. Cât de mult pot traducătorii să păstreze fidelitatea față de original? În ce măsură este o traducere fidelă posibilă, fără a suna ciudat? Este rezultatul muncii lor convingător, în termeni de decodare și comunicarea mesajului autorului? Păstrarea unei atmosfere străine este inevitabilă, așa cum avem de a face cu două culturi diferite, și este, de fapt, în conformitate cu teoriile lui Wilhelm von Humboldt un semn de o traducere bună, atâta timp cât cititorul nu simte ceva straniu dar simte atmosfera unei culturi străine.

Keywords: *foreignness, creative translation, dialect.*

Mots-clés: *étrangeté, traduction créative, dialecte.*

Cuvinte cheie: *străin, traducere creativă, dialect.*

1. Translation: Fidelity or Adaptation?

What is the role played by the translator? What should a translator go for: a faithful translation, an adaptation, or a mixture of both? What kind of fidelity: to the spirit or to the letter?

The subject of fidelity of translation or impossibility of translation has been debated by many scholars, philosophers and translators.

To what extent is fidelity in translation possible, or to what extent should it be carried out?

Wilhelm von Humboldt seems to offer a good solution:

‘Translation should indeed have a foreign flavour to it, but only to a certain degree; the line beyond which this clearly becomes an error can easily be drawn. As long as one does not feel the foreignness (Fremdheit) yet does feel the foreign (Fremde), a translation has reached its highest goal; but where foreignness appears as such, and more than likely even obscures the foreign, the translator betrays his inadequacy.’ [3]

His theory also seems to explain what the translators of Swift’s novel *Last Orders* have done.

Or, is their work better explained, at least regarding some aspects, by Lawrence Venuti’s claims that follow below?

‘Translators’ intention when translating literally is either to be ‘invisible’ and thus prove their devotedness to the original, or to shock the readers by making their voice heard in a text that constantly reminds them that what they are reading belongs to a language and culture which are different from theirs’ [6].

What are the effects of choosing a familiar equivalent of the East vernacular London speech used by the characters? Is this fidelity or rewriting the text according to the translators’ creativity? Is the original message preserved?

2. The original and the Romanian translation of Swift’s novel *Last Orders*

The purpose of this paper is to examine the original and the Romanian versions of Graham Swift’s novel *Last Orders*.

I think that the Romanian translation of this novel by Petru Creția and Cristina Poenaru (*Ultima comandă*, published by Univers, Bucharest, 1999) tries to keep faithful, as much as possible, to the original.

By examining this translation in this paper, I try to show that the boundaries between faithful translation and adaptation are rather blurred. This is because two languages are never identical at the level of grammar or vocabulary. However, even if apparently the translation deviates from the original in this respect, the meaning is preserved. What is more, we may also speak about different cultures when we refer to a translation. Something should be done in order to preserve certain aspects of the culture in the original version, but also to find equivalents for the dialects or the terms which describe various situations which are culture specific.

2.1. Translation of the title: keeping its various meanings

Since a translation does not involve only aspects related to grammatical structure, I think that we should look at the meanings of the title of Swift’s novel. This should help us notice if the Romanian translation is a faithful one. If so, what strategies does the translator resort to in order to be true to the English version?

The novel’s title is preserved as much as possible in the Romanian translation. The only difference is the plural form of ‘orders’ being expressed in the singular in Romanian.

The English title refers to a pub's call for last orders, at the end of the evening. These words may also remind of last rights, the Catholic ritual where a priest blesses you and prepares you for the afterlife. The novel does not focus on Jack's preparation for death, as much as on its effects on his friends. There is more than one last order (aside from Jack's request to his friends to scatter his ashes into the sea at Margate) - a last request made to Ray, who helps his friend with preparing a future for his widowed wife.

The Romanian translation has changed *orders* from plural to singular ('comandă'). This does not change much, though. The Romanian translation may be regarded as faithful, in the sense that 'comandă' may refer to both singular and plural. The Romanian term may refer to all the orders at the same time, as well as to each order taken separately.

The singular was most likely preferred so as to function as an understandable equivalent for the last orders in a pub, which are expressed in Romanian in the singular. Although the Romanian 'comandă' may sound a bit too strong for expressing a last wish, or last wishes (but this might be regarded as being the case in the original), the word may once again be interpreted as ambiguous, as acquiring a different, separate meaning from what it might stand for at first sight. The Romanian 'comandă' may be interpreted figuratively, as an equivalent for the orders in life (the pubs being connected to the joys and vitality Jack has experienced while alive) with the orders as last wishes. Even after his death, Jack is remembered as he was during his lifetime. His last wishes are also a privilege for his friends to have a little fun in pubs, to chat and even have the remains of their friend by their side. The story is not entirely sad; there are moments of joy, of optimism in it.

By preserving the title and not being creative with it, the translators ensure the keeping of the keyword 'orders' ('comandă') as it appears throughout the text, on various occasions. The first instance of translation shown below in (1) supports the variations in meaning of 'order', 'orders' even in the original text. The second example in (1) shows a play upon words on 'order', referring to other orders than those symbolized in the title.

(1)

Se uită la mine, mă uit la el. Mă ține de mîna. Zice: „Nu mă întreba nimic, Vince, nu mă întreba. E o rugăminte, nu-i o comandă.”	He looks at me, I look at him. He's holding my hand. He says, 'Don't ask me, Vince, don't ask me. It's a request, it aint an order.'
---	--

[...] totul pare ca și cînd Vince ar fi dat o comandă: atîta a fost de stat, înapoi la mașină. [5]	[...] it's as though Vince has given an order anyway: time's up, back on the couch. [4]
--	---

In the first example, *order* and *comandă* are equivalent terms from all points of view, as far as language and culture are concerned. In the second example, we notice a similar situation. If the translators had used *ordin* instead of *comandă*, though, the cultural aspect would have been lost. *Comandă* is preferred since it resonates with the significance of the English title, *Last Orders*. Both *comandă* and *orders* may be given in everyday life situations among characters but also in a pub.

On some occasions, the translators use the Romanian 'comandă' where 'order' or 'orders' was not there in the English version, as shown in (2):

(2)

A zis: „Cînd are loc înmormîntarea?”	He said, 'When's the funeral?'
Am zis: „Joi. Motorul e ca și nou. Vopseaua și tot interiorul, ca la comandă”.	I said, 'Thursday. Engine's good as new. Paintwork and trim's all custom.'

„Toate scaunele se pot regla automat”,	'All seats power-adjustable,' Vince says.
--	---

zice Vince. „Capitonarea este de comandă.” [5]

‘Upholstery’s custom.’ [4]

These instances of translators’ creativity do not modify the message. In fact, such instances enrich the text, by keeping it playful, interesting and giving to it a natural flow. I think that these instances try to compensate for other situations where this strategy employed by Swift may be lost in the Romanian version. Another purpose for these instances may be to make use of all possibilities of language so that the Romanian version is also rich in allusions to the title and playful with language. On the other hand, *custom* also refers to trade or duty, just like *orders*.

2.2. Finding an equivalent for East London vernacular speech: being creative in an attempt to obtain fidelity to the spirit

For the East London vernacular shared by the characters -who belong to the working class London culture- a spoken, colourful, everyday Romanian language is chosen, as can be noticed in some such instances shown in (3):

(3)

*o nimereală mai bună
Ce mai nume
afurisita de diligență
crede că-i spunem prăpăstii
Păgubos pentru afaceri
mușterii
s-o șterpelească
o seamă de fleacuri
umblu după cai verzi pe pereți
merge ca lumea
stai colea pe piele crem
se simt la strâmtoare
Halal plăcere
M-ar fi trăsnit la mir
era hotărâtă nevoie mare
Comandă-ți și ție o halbă, tot dichisul
m-am cărat
bătrânul păcătos i-a dat de furcă
flecăreală
să-i spânzure în toată legea
nu face nici cât o ceapă degerată
haleală
Marina bat-o vina
Nici eu nu mă simt clasa-ntâi [5]*

*a better bet
daft name
the bleeding coach
it might sound like a load of hooley
Not much good for business
punters
to pinch it
a few other odds and ends
fool’s errand
goes along sweet
you’re perched on cream leather
they’re feeling the pinch
Sad pleasure
I’d’ve got the shock of my life
was dead set
Buy one for yourself an’ all
I’m shoving off
the old bastard’s given him a hard time
guff
to string ‘em up regular
don’t mean a tuppenny toss
grub
Wavy navy
I don’t feel so A-I myself [4]*

On some occasions, as shown in (4), Romanian colorful terms are chosen as equivalents for rather general terms:

(4)

*Dibuie înlăuntrul cutiei
noi ăștialalți
mutra
un stop de oarece*

*He feels inside the box
we all
face
a drop of something*

<i>ședea</i>	<i>he was sitting</i>
<i>isprăvește</i>	<i>finishes</i>
<i>avea năravul să</i>	<i>he used to</i>
<i>Uite-l colea</i>	<i>He sits there</i>
<i>Și nu e legat cobză, ca mine</i>	<i>And he ain't attached, like me</i>
<i>Asta e, vasăzică?</i>	<i>Is that it then?</i>
<i>nu încape vorbă</i>	<i>course</i>
<i>să fiți pe cale de</i>	<i>be just about to</i>
<i>E musai să vii</i>	<i>You want to come</i>
<i>se bucură de o gardă de onoare ca la carte</i>	<i>he's got a good guard of honour</i>
<i>să lași mașina să lânzezească</i>	<i>to let a car sit</i>
<i>să ne dăm un răgaz</i>	<i>give ourselves a break</i>
<i>Merită puțină osteneală [5]</i>	<i>It'd take a bit more doing [4]</i>

The introduction of some colourful Romanian terms is performed on other occasions where there is no similar term at all in the original:

- (5)
- | | |
|--|---|
| <i>Noi ar fi trebuit chipurile să ieșim din noi înșine</i> | <i>We should get ourselves out of ourselves</i> |
| <i>Și, la urma urmelor, ce mare ispravă a făcut?</i> | <i>And what did he ever do anyway?</i> |
| <i>să ne mutăm de-a binelea [5]</i> | <i>to pack it all in [4]</i> |

Sometimes, Romanian dialectal forms are used:

- (6)
- | | |
|---|---|
| <i>Dar stai oleacă, asta nu i se aplică lui Ray</i> | <i>But that don't apply to Ray here, now</i> |
| <i>Aici îs numai carne și guri, durere și fripturi.</i> | <i>All meat and mouth, all beef and grief.</i> |
| <i>Eu îs ăla care-o să-l duc pe Jack la Catedrala Canterbury.</i> | <i>I'm the one who's going to carry Jack into Canterbury Cathedral.</i> |
| <i>flăcăule</i> | <i>Big Boy</i> |
| <i>bătrâni flăcăi</i> | <i>old codgers</i> |
| <i>Petreceți, măi flăcăi</i> | <i>You carry on, lads</i> |
| <i>junelui Vince [5]</i> | <i>young Vince [4]</i> |

The choice of an equivalent colourful everyday Romanian language going from colloquial language and reaching slang or dialectal forms was inevitable in order to make the readers understand the social class such characters belong to. Moreover, a creative use of language as far as colourful words, phrases and wordplay are concerned, was part of the charm of the original novel, so the translation was supposed to keep that impression. Otherwise, most of the charm would have been lost in the translation.

Adding a more colourful word in the translation shows that the target language is resourceful and creative too, and it may compensate for some aspects which may be lost in the process of translation on certain occasions.

Moreover, if we look carefully at the Romanian terms, some of them belong to the Moldavian dialect. In this case, we deal with the translation of a dialect (East London Vernacular) into another dialect (Moldavian). Why was this dialect chosen for the Romanian version? Perhaps it is because the Romanian readers associate the Moldavian accent most often with non-standard Romanian speech. Perhaps they associate the Moldavian speech with that of their relatives who are

not from Bucharest (where standard Romanian is spoken). Bucharest as the capital of Romania is strongly associated with standard Romanian.

An article in Wikipedia supports the claim that a faithful translation by replacing a dialect with another is possible: “The difference between the language spoken in Chişinău and Iaşi and the language spoken for example in Bucharest could be roughly compared to that between Standard British and Scottish or American English. Others have argued that these differences might be found within any linguistic territory.” [8] Why is this possible? I think it is because a translated version addresses the readers’ perception of certain dialects and refers to their cultural background.

If we look at the examples in (7), we notice in the original an affective meaning to ‘your Kath’ which is not available in the Romanian translation. This is because the language should be spoken everyday language, thus a natural language, not a forced one. The following three instances are in English examples of non-standard use of language, which cannot be rendered as such into Romanian. The last sentence contains a colourful use of a word for ‘married’ which finds no correspondent into Romanian.

(7)

„Şi lui Kath cum îi mai merge?”	‘So how’s your Kath?’
Vince nu răspunde.	Vince don’t answer.
„Atunci de ce mai întrebi?”	‘So why you asking then?’
<i>Nu poţi avea tot, Ray băiatule!</i>	<i>Can’t all have it all, can we, Ray boy?</i>
<i>Văd că Daisy Dixon se mărită.</i> [5]	<i>I see Daisy Dixon’s getting spliced.</i> [4]

The construction “your Kath” is specific to the English language as far as the sentence construction is concerned. It is a construction found in everyday speech. This is not, however, the case with the Romanian language.

I think that the effect of the Romanian version on the reader is not only of a familiar language (which ends up creating a familiar environment, making the reader feel closer to or at home among the characters), but also of reading about a world belonging to a different, foreign culture.

2.3. The situation of proper names – names of places, characters’ names, nicknames, diminutive names

The English proper names of places and characters are kept. Some exceptions are Ray’s nickname, *Lucky*, which is translated in Romanian as *Norocosul* -on some occasions, the diminutive *Norocel* is used-, and Mr Snow’s nickname *Snorter- Fornăilă*. The name *June* is not translated, as it would have sounded odd in Romanian. It is left in English, the significance of the name being self-explanatory in the original. Diminutive names such as *Raysy*, *Vincey*, *Ame*, and *Bern* are preserved.

The readers’ knowledge of English seems to play an important part in their understanding of the proper names. The name *June* also refers to the month of the year; this meaning is lost in the Romanian version if the readers do not know any English. The affectionate meaning of diminutive names in English is lost in the Romanian version if the readers are not aware of their significance in the English culture (*Raysy*, *Vincey*, *Ame*, *Bern*).

2.4. Culture-specific character names with no equivalent in Romanian

Punch and Judy [4] are preserved, as there is no equivalent for these characters in Romanian culture. There’s no such equivalent for *Jack-in-a-box* [4], either, which, translated into Romanian, leads to a loss of an obvious play upon words in the original (*Jack într-o cutie*) [5].

It is, however, up to the reader’s cultural background whether he/she may guess the original wordplay.

2.5. Other aspects

Currency units are, on some occasions, preserved, such as *shilling* [4]/ *șiling* [5], *penny* [4], [5]. They are found, where it is the case, alongside translated ones: *miar* [5]/ *grand* [4], *bănet* [5]/ *dosh* [4].

For the slang-like name *Merc* (instead of Mercedes) [4], the Romanian *Merțan* or *Merț* [5] are used.

This translation makes the novel accessible to the Romanian readers, in terms of decoding the original message, while also keeping a certain ‘foreign flavour to it’ (as Wilhelm von Humboldt claims that a good translation should). It succeeds in not sounding awkward. It flows naturally and enjoyably due to the playful and creative rendering of the original which shows the same qualities. The few adaptations and instances of creativity are used in an attempt to keep faithful to the original. The message is still there in the translated version. The East London vernacular finds an enjoyable, colourful decoding, together with the title and the variations on its meanings. Judging by Venuti’s claims, the translators are indeed devoted to the original; whether the reader may be shocked or not by being introduced into an environment which may sound both familiar and foreign to him/her, depends on his/her experience or views. The language can be at times very familiar, but then foreign names are introduced. Cultural differences may be seen right away, considering the names of places and their descriptions. The fidelity of this translation lies in the fact that, while speaking a familiar Romanian language, the characters clearly do not belong to the Romanian culture.

References

- [1] BASSNETT, S. 2002. *Translation Studies*, New York, Routledge.
- [2] DUMITRIU, R. 2002. *Theories and Practice of Translation*, Institutul European.
- [3] SCHULTE, R. AND BIGUENET, J. ed. 1992. *Theories of translation: An anthology of essays from Dryden to Derrida*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1992: p.58.
- [4] SWIFT, G. 1997. *Last Orders*, New York, Vintage Books.
- [5] SWIFT, G. 1999. *Ultima comandă*, București, Editura Univers.
- [6] VENUTI, L. 1995. *The Translator’s Invisibility*, New York, Routledge.
- [7] VENUTI, L. 2002. *The Translation Studies Reader*, New York, Routledge.
- [8] Wikipedia article. 2012. *Moldovan Language*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moldovan_language

