FUNCTIONAL INTERDISCURSIVITY AND LINGUISTIC CONVENTIONS IN NEURONOVELS: TRANSLATING SIMPLE AND COMPLEX VOCAL TICS IN TOURETTE SYNDROME. A CASE STUDY OF JONATHAN LETHEM’S MOTHERLESS BROOKLYN

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Abstract

This study aims to challenge, both theoretically and practically, the concept of genre in translation studies. First, starting from the conceptual delimitation and theoretical boundaries between text type, genre and register, this article presents the characteristics of these concepts and their applicability in relation to the translation process. Secondly, by exploiting the functionality of interdiscursivity and hybridisation of genres, the present analysis proposes a discussion of how the neuronovel fluidises the boundaries between literary genre and neuroscientific discourse through the “neurologisation” of vocabulary, style and narrative strategies, and of the particularities that the translation of neuronovels or literary neurotranslation reveals. The study concludes with a case study of the translation into Romanian of Jonathan Lethem’s novel Motherless Brooklyn (1999), focusing on the translation strategies of simple and complex vocal tics and on the translation difficulties imposed by the atypicality of narrative discourse told from the perspective of a character diagnosed with Tourette Syndrome.

Keywords: genre, translation studies, genre hybridisation, neuronovel, literary neurotranslation, Motherless Brooklyn, Tourette Syndrome, vocal tics
FROM TEXT TYPE TO (LITERARY) GENRE. A THEORETICAL OVERTURE

Formal conventions, content conventions, stylistic specificity and, of course, at the opposite pole of these characteristics, “hybridisation”: these are just a few of the key concepts that have increasingly polarised theoretical debates and attempts to conceptually delineate the terms “genre” and “text type” in recent years. However, before discussing the interchangeability of these two terms (Biel 151), it would be interesting to point out the constitutive particularities of the transition from conventionalism, as a basic methodological principle in genre delimitation, to hybridisation, as a result of genre interaction and “genre mixing” (Fairclough 34-35). For these particularities are not only constituted in successive steps along a horizontal axis, but also bring to the fore a cross-sectioning characteristic of the whole process of fluidisation of the boundaries between genres.

This transversally-oriented sectioning is concerned, on the one hand, with the delimitation between specific conventions—of a terminological and stylistic nature—specific to a given genre, which may differ in terms of formal rigidity (Biel 151), and, on the other, with sociocultural particularities, which frame genres within a much broader framework. The two different categories of constitutive elements, which also occur in scientific literature as two complementary levels or approaches, can also be easily identified and differentiated in the theoretical delimitation that Biel (154) draws from the relationship between convention and Swales’ syntagm of “communicative purposes”, but also from the three-dimensional functional profile that Borja et al. (62) draw from Hatim and Mason’s delimitation of generic categories (1990). They, as Borja et al. consider, refer to genre as an integrative concept for “formal aspects”, “sociocultural aspects” and “cognitive aspects” (62).

In short, in an attempt to revisit the phrase “communicative purpose” (68), Swales proposes “a text-driven procedure for genre analysis” that contains the following steps: analysing “structure, style, content and purpose”, identifying “genre”, with the following three considering “context”, “repurposing the genre” and “realigning the genre network”. This “text-driven procedure” is opposed to “the situation-driven procedure for genre analysis” which follows the entire process from identifying a “communicative situation” to analysing “textual
features” of genres (72-73). Similarly, Hatim and Mason (69) reveal the generic constraints starting from “conventionalised forms of text” which simply render the characteristics of the social context in detail, as the authors discuss the purpose of “social occasions” and the actors’ intentions in those social occasions. However, it is also from these approaches that focus on macrocontext and widen the boundaries between generic categories, categorising conventions into “obligatory” and “optional” (Cap and Okulska 4), that new perspectives arise, foregrounding the hybridisation of genres. Starting from Fairclough (34) and his already mentioned label of genre mixing that renders the framing of a text into several generic categories as a result of the merging of a genre’s conventions with those of the genres it comes into contact with in the “genre chain” (31), and moving on to the “constellations of genres” that Swales points out recalling the convergence of the social and rhetorical approaches (252), there is a whole series of taxonomic labels that describe this phenomenon of hybridisation. Worth mentioning in this context are the “meta-genres” delineated by Giltrow (190-191), a category that would best befit the genre of “the guidelines”, since they provide information about the conventions and rules of genres and, in short, describe the process of genre formation, and the genre system explained by Teslenko (335). This perspective which views genres in systemic form originates in Kapystianka’s approach to the evolution of genres and the flexibility of generic constraints, an evolution that foresees the connection to the evolution of the sociocultural and political context and the emergence of genres with new constraints when the old ones are violated (335).

**GENRE VS. TEXT TYPE VS. REGISTER IN TRANSLATION STUDIES**

The fluidisation of genre boundaries should therefore be understood on the one hand as a factor that resonates with changes in the social and cultural context, considering the links between genres in a given (macro)framework (Cap and Okulska 5), and on the other hand as a constitutive factor in the consolidation of genres as “macrostructures” (4-5). In fact, this approach is also helpful in terms of the interchangeability of “genre” and “text type”, but especially in terms of the prevalence of the former over the latter in the translation studies field since the last decades of the last century. One of the grounds for this prevalence is formulated by Biel (153-155). Relying on a theoretical-historical approach to the
concepts of *text type* and *genre* in translation studies, Biel notes the popularity of
the discourse analysis methodology in the translation field starting in the late
1980s and, in conclusion, the popularity of the term genre, given its already
known operability in discourse analysis.

It should be noted that this popularisation of the concept of genre took
place at a time when the phrase *text type* had established itself in the early stages
of consolidating translation research and had become used as a phrase directly
referring to translation strategies (153). Moreover, a very interesting aspect is the
way in which—by exploiting the macro dimension and linking it to social and
cultural coordinates—the two seemingly interchangeable concepts have come to
be used to describe different aspects in the analysis of texts and their generic
category. More specifically, taking into account the delimitation between
internal and external criteria (Trosborg, “Text” 3), the two terminological labels
began to describe two operations of the same nature, but with different objects
of analysis. Genre refers to the classification of texts in relation to the social
setting and the whole suite of “communicative functions” and particularities of
the communicative situation (11). The type of text enables texts to be categorised
in relation to a series of inherent features, which can bring together or
differentiate texts belonging to the same genre. This is why these terms cannot
be in a relationship of contradiction, since, in terms of intensification, the term
genre is not the genus term for type. On the contrary, as Trosborg also points
out, a type of text can encompass several genres, since it is possible for texts
belonging to the same genre to be different types of texts, just as it is possible for
texts belonging to different genres to be of the same type (“Text” 12).

The relationship between genre and type is similar to that between genre
and register, as it has been discussed within the same parameters. The
relationship between general and particular is again brought to the fore to
differentiate between the two concepts. While House notes the relationship
between terms by referencing the distinction between microcontext and
macrocontext (247-249), since she considers that the functionality of register
belongs to narrow context and textual particularities, Steiner links register to
applied analysis, encountered at the lexico-grammatical level (292). At the same
time, Trosborg considers the varieties of language use (“Text” 5), and Hatim and
Mason consider the register a “use-related variation” that comprises the “field of
discourse”, the “mode of discourse”, and the “tenor of discourse” (46). From the
perspective of translation studies, the three concepts—genre, text type and register—function individually and propose different weight centres in the practice of translation. In this sense, the two types of translation discussed by House (249-251)—overt and covert translation—put the three concepts to use and turn them into basic factors in the comparative approach between overt and covert translation. Specifically, House defines the two types of translation by relating them both to “the four-tiered analytical model”, i.e., “function”, “genre”, “register”, and “language/text”.

The difference between overt and covert translation is the level of equivalence with the original at all four levels. The former is equivalent to the source text at the level of language/text, genre, and register. In terms of function, the role of translation is all the more important and, at the same time, interesting to trace, because it reveals the mediated contact of the target culture with the source culture and the reception of the original and its function in this culture through translation (250). In other words, at this level, the fidelity of translation equates to the objective rendering of the cultural context of the source text, so that its characteristics can be observed without being altered within the cultural context of the target text. This alteration is also responsible for the main difference in perspective that covert translation proposes, since maintaining the function of the source text and transferring the “cultural impact” to the new context are among the main objectives in shaping the target text. The final product, which retains the genre framing of the source text, will therefore lack equivalence at the level of language/text and, to the same extent, at the level of register. Even if the question that House asks—“Is strict equivalence the translational goal?”—is a mere detail to the particularities that any critical discourse considering this typology must take into account, it is obvious that both types of translation preserve the equivalence in genre of the target text with the source text.

However, this equivalence raises other issues when confronted with the hybridisation of genres and the anchoring of generic categories, to an extent that varies from one genre to another, in social constraints, which are considered even more important than generic categories (Hatim and Mason 13). All three key elements which I have listed above—the generic equivalence of texts, the hybridisation of genres and the anchoring to a socio-cultural context—are equivalent to the parameters of interdiscursivity as a phenomenon that
encompasses both the textual and social dimensions of discourse. And it is all the more interesting to work with this concept, as the equation in relation to critical translation does not change, since interdiscursivity is valid both for the source text and the target text. This is because the discourse level is “intermediary”, bridging the textual and social dimensions (Fairclough 37). In the case of translation, however, it is obvious that interdiscursivity increases the difficulty of the translation process per se when mixing genres and styles. In addition, it also highlights a paradoxical aspect brought to light by this mixing of the source text, associated ex officio with a greater degree of subjectivism and innovation at the textual level, but also with a more pronounced “cultural filter”, and the attempt to adapt the translated text to the new context of the target culture. Of course, from this point of conceptual delimitation, the discussion involves—following the same approach of particularisation—an analysis that takes into account the typology of genres and their relevant characteristics in translation, an analysis whose starting point is the vague delimitation between literary and non-literary genres, placing emphasis on the characteristics of the former.

**LITERARY GENRES AND TRANSLATIONS**

A review of some of the main perspectives on the relationship between literature and translation can only start from the already well-known source text/target text binomial and the textual and cultural transfers that take place through translation from one to another. It is impossible to overlook, in regard to the translation of literary texts, what Bassnett calls the “myth” of the increased difficulty of translating literary texts in relation to technical texts, a myth which, in fact, in Bassnett’s view, reflects the power balance between the source text and the target text and the “authority” of the former (87). Thus, most approaches tend to favour and generalise the distinction between literary and non-literary by emphasising in a somewhat superficial way only the most obvious differences between them. Identifying the increased difficulty in translating jargon and field-specific terminology in the case of translations belonging to the category known as LSP (Language for Special Purposes) (Hvelplund and Dragsted 59) is equivalent to highlighting the normative differences and different purposes (Biel) from the communicative ones (Trosborg, “Introduction” XI) of literary
translation and even to emphasising the stylistic transfer they rely on in the transition from the source text to the target text (Hvelplund and Dragsted 59).

Moreover, the experiment that Hvelplund and Dragsted (60-70) conducted with a group of literary and LSP translators reveals the same parameters that distinguish literary genre translations from LSP translations. In short, the experiment followed, starting from the phrase “genre familiarity”, the approach, some defining aspects of the process itself (from the time spent on revision, to the time spent on online searches, to mention only two of them), the working steps and translation strategies used by eighteen translators (nine literary translators and nine LSP translators) in the translation of four texts, two of them belonging to the literary genre, and the other two—to the LSP category. Apart from verifying the authors’ hypothesis concerning the relationship between genre familiarity and translation practice itself, i.e., the hypothesis that translators specialised in LSP texts and translators of literary texts relate differently to the translation process (71), the experiment also revealed other features of this process, namely certain translation strategies that seem to differ according to genre. Literary translation corresponds to “expansion” strategies, while LSP translations correspond to reduction strategies (71). Without insisting now on mentioning the strategies that belong to the two categories—“expansion” and “reduction”—the correspondence between explanatory strategies and translating literary texts refers once again to the doubling of terminological transfer by the stylistic transfer that Hvelplund and Dragsted speak of and by the particularities of context.

This is because beyond the text and the lexical and grammatical particularities, with an important role in reinforcing the stylistic effects of “ambiguity”—which, after understanding the meaning behind the ambiguity (Clifford 8), must be transferred in the same register in the target text (Hubscher-Davidson 8o)—or “richness” (Parks 14) or “aesthetic effect” (Hatim and Mason 40-41), a literary text is likely to be difficult to translate precisely because of the “ambivalence” that emerges when trying to identify and transfer the macro-contextual elements that relate to the “function” and “intentions” of that text. In other words, as Parks remarks,

for our own practical purposes, we might say more crudely that in the literary text an awful lot of things can be happening at once, perhaps contradicting each other, perhaps qualifying each other; as a result the
translator may find that it is not possible to express all of these
complications simultaneously in his or her language. (14)

Hence the obvious intention, but at the same time the equally obvious
limitations of such an approach, which might resort to a concept like Manzó's
“transgenre” (qtd. in García Izquierdo and Montalt i Resurrecció 137) in the case
of translating literary texts. A transgenre is a genre in which the process and
particularities of translation itself come first and in which the characteristics
that bring the source text closer or further away from the target text are valued
from the same translation-oriented perspective. This concept has been
discussed in relation to specialised translations (García Izquierdo and Montalt
i Resurrecció 137; Borja et al. 70-71), but I consider it somewhat rigid for literary
translations. Since, even if favouring Parks’ remark that was just mentioned, a
literary translation could constitute itself as a transgenre that individualises
itself precisely through the impossibility of “expressing all of these
complications”, in the case of the transfer between the source text (ST) and the
target text (TT), the weight centre still remains in the dynamics between the two,
i.e., which elements from the ST have been transferred and which elements from
the TT have been adapted to the context of the target culture.

This is why the translation of literary genres, even if they are considered
the most incoherent (James 34), must be seen from the perspective of the
processuality it renders by “transforming what it transfers” (Wilson 190) and its
functionality in “intercultural mediation” (Fischer 66). From this mediating role
and from the distinction between being bilingual and being bicultural, the latter
of these terms referring to the ability to capture cultural particularities that
transcend the lexical level and that can influence the translator's choices
(Clifford 77), emerge to some extent all the orientations towards
(re)interpretation encountered in literary translation studies. The focus shifts
very easily, which can be inferred even from those terminological preferences
that lean towards concepts such as “interpretation” (Nelson and Maher 2) and
“reinterpretation”, favouring the translator's reading among a multitude of
other possible readings (Hatim and Mason 11), or even “adaptation” as a process
not inferior to translation in terms of the flexibility required (Clifford 58),
towards the valuing of subjectivity (Bush 39) as an essential process in the
transfer from ST to TT. Lefevere’s remark about understanding translation
beyond lexical transfer and involving “the universe of discourse, poetics and ideology” (94) sums up this tendency. One of the dangers that this interpretation-focused orientation highlights, however, is the very possible narrowing of this direction, which may shift the focus entirely away from “word translation” (94), terminological precision and the sharp dissociation of literary genres from non-literary genres and literary translation from specialised translation.

In other words, I am referring to hypotheses similar to the one Borja et al. make, for example, when they discuss “specialised translations” and their “practical” rather than “aesthetic” usefulness or their target audience and level of training (58). Or, as a more practical example, I am talking about the remarks Pilegaard (162) makes to describe the difficulties faced by translators of medical scientific texts, because of the medical jargon and the continuous change and adaptation that characterise this field of work. It is not by chance that I have chosen these examples. It is important to note, first of all, that I did not choose them to challenge the authors’ perspective on specialised translations or to push the flexibility of genre boundaries as much as possible, but rather to highlight, this time in a practical way, how genetic hybridity can also lead to the hybridisation of the translation process. One relevant question in this context might be: is there a certain threshold of tolerance that leads to the impossibility of mixing specialised and literary translation methods and strategies when discussing the mixing of genres, and thus their compatibility? Or, in other words, and in order to move closer to the aim of my research: which translation strategies prevail in the case of genre mixing, i.e., when—if we also take into account the hierarchy of genres (Biel 152)—a literary genre incorporates a discourse directly linked to medical terminology and the scientific register, relying on the didactic dimension of this combination without neglecting its aesthetic role?

THE NEURONOVEL AND THE LITERARY NEUROUTRANSLATION AS 2-IN-1 FUNCTIONAL CONCEPTS

Nothing can better describe “the neural turn” (Ortega and Vidal 331) and the impact of this phenomenon on the literary field than the connection and transfer between the terms “mind” and “brain” (329), a connection that is equivalent to a
change of focus in the analysis of consciousness starting from the “materialist reductionism” specific to neuroscience (Gaetke 187). Discussed and mapped in recent critical discourse, even in thematic issues that revisit recent literary history from the perspective of this concept (see, for example, “The American Neuronovel (2009-2021)”, the issue dedicated to this literary genre in the *European Journal of American Studies* edited by Pascale Antolin), the neuronovel has known diverse approaches not only in terms of hybrid methods and tools of analysis, but also in terms of terminological labels.

These range from Johnson’s “neuronarrative”, Roth’s “neuronovel”, Tabbi’s “cognitive fiction”, Harris’s “neurological realism”, Lustig and Peacock’s “syndrome novel”, Tougaw’s “brain narratives”, which Antolin inventories (“Introduction” 2), to the label “neurofiction”, which is considered more appropriate because of its neutrality and flexibility (Burn 4). Regarding the emergence of this literary subgenre, there are broadly two directions that view it either as a narrative formula that has benefited from the depopulation and “discrediting” of the “linguistic turn” and “psychoanalysis” (Roth) in the 1980s, or as the literary reaction to the background (Gaetke 184-185; Ortega and Vidal 328) of recent developments in cognitive science, i.e., as a chance for the literary field to take part in this “neuromania” that has also been embraced, under the aegis of the prefix “neuro”, in other diverse fields of activity (Antolin, “Neurological” 2).

Going even further back in time and exploring the morphological depth of this subgenre, critics also discuss the descent (Antolin, “Introduction” 2) of this literary subgenre from “amnesia fiction” (Tougaw, “Amnesia” 1) and a possible subcategorisation according to narrative and thematic criteria (Tougaw, “The Elusive” 6).

In short, returning to the connection between mind and brain or, more precisely, to the “medicalization of the mind” (Roth; Antolin, “Introduction” 3), and to the conceptual delimitation from the perspective of the aspects that can influence the process and strategies of translating novels that belong to this literary subgenre, the mixing of genres, registers and terminology must be analysed from an inclusive perspective. Inclusive, because this “neurologization of literary analysis” and this process of “neurolobiologizing” the vocabulary through the “assimilation of a neuroscientific idiom into literary narrative”, visible at first glance by addressing “neuroscientific issues” and using a “scientific vocabulary”, do not attach to literary discourse merely as a thematic
experiment, as an annex to the subject in a secondary narrative plane, or simply as a body of text inserted as a sample into the body of the literary text, but become “consubstantial” (Ortega and Vidal 328-330, 340). And this relationship of consubstantiality resides in the identification of hybridity at all levels. In other words, the dose of didacticism that Cross (2) also discusses, emphasising the finality that the neuronovelists project in relation to informing and making their readers aware, and continuing Johnson's remarks about the difficulty that resides in the coagulation of scientific jargon with narrative style and the claim of “scientific competence”, is delivered together with the aesthetic finality (Ortega and Vidal 340). This mixing of genres implies, on the one hand, given the use of scientific terminology and the materialisation of language, only an apparent demetaphorisation at the level of the literary text, a process which, however, works in the opposite direction, since one also speaks of the “metaphorisation of symptoms” (Peacock, “Audibodies” 2) when analysed from the opposite perspective. And this stylistic artifice—(de)metaphorisation—is also evident in the way novelists integrate specific terminology into the whole set of discursive and narrative strategies to renew their style (Antolin, “Introduction” 3).

This renewal of style, which is somewhat paradoxical because it is based on terminological constraints, has also been promptly discussed by Roth who, drawing on Churchland’s (1981, 67) “philosophy of mind”, that is, the theory of “eliminative materialism”, points to the cancellation of the “imprecise vocabulary” specific to “folk psychology” (Churchland 68; Roth). However, this eradication of vagueness, which could have been seen as a generator of ambiguity and semantic density, is balanced by the effect of inserting neuroscientific language and revealing the neurocognitive dimension within a narrative structure that uses this dimension to shape a new perspective on the plot. This is why one of the most relevant examples that synthesises the specific genetic mixing in the neuronovel is the narratological artifice of the first-person narrative. This subjective perspective fits the portrayal of “estranged perceptions” on the neuroscientific dimension, since all these details are not presented in an objective or didactically overdone manner, but through the “recovery of the patient’s voice” that filters the whole process of (self)diagnosis (Roth; Ortega and Vidal 332).
The transition from the neuronovel to literary neurotranslation implies discussing the same parameters, since the translation process renders the same mix both at the terminological and stylistic level. Interestingly, the neurotranslation of vocabulary, which brings translation closer to the methods and strategies used for specialised texts, coexists with the specific register and style of novels, an aspect that influences the relation to the text to be translated. In other words, it is obvious that, to build on one of Hvelplund and Dragsted’s remarks about the correspondence between expansion strategies and literary translations, on the one hand, and the link between reduction strategies and LSP translations, on the other, literary neurotranslation must take into account the precision constraints imposed by neuroscientific terminology. Thus, translation must avoid expansion strategies in the context of specialized terms. But it is equally obvious that it is impossible to resort only to reduction strategies that would affect the target text and its stylistic or tonal fidelity to the source text. Moreover, the scientific competence required to write a neuronovel not only transfers to the translation process, but—more than that—scientific correctness imposes terminological restrictions and uniformity, conditions not easily met in the case of neuronovels that rely on the atypical discourses of characters with neurological diseases that directly affect language and, therefore, the objective perception of reality (Ciocîrlan and Drăgulescu 137-142) and that propose the most diverse language registers.

TOURETTE SYNDROME AND THE NEURNOVEL. VOCAL TICS AND LANGUAGE DISORDERS

Whether we are talking about Tougaw’s elaborate classification in which he includes some thirty novels, a classification so elaborate that it seems to lose its legitimacy precisely because of the (only apparent) specificity that each category displays, given that they are constituted around symptomatology as a narrative experiment, the suffering protagonist, the interacting protagonists concerned with neuroscientific issues, and the brain as a theoretical plot device (“The Elusive” 6-7)—or about the lists of the most representative neuronovels designed by Roth or Ortega and Vidal (333), Jonathan Lethem’s 1999 novel Motherless Brooklyn is on all these lists.
To review the thematic and neurological diversity that the neuronovel samples, I mention just a few of the novels and diagnoses that also provide generic framing: *Enduring Love* (1997) and *Saturday* (2005) by Ian McEwan about “de Clérambault’s syndrome”, “Alzheimer’s disease” and “Huntington’s disease”, *The Echo Maker* (2006) by Richard Powers about “Capgras syndrome”, and John Wray’s *Lowboy* (2009) about “paranoid schizophrenia”, and the list goes on. *Motherless Brooklyn* is a novel that renders vividly the narrative artifice of “estranged perceptions” through first-person narration from the perspective of Lionel Essrog, the novel’s protagonist who has Tourette Syndrome. Moreover, Lethem’s novel also fits the pattern of construction of the detective novel, a popular pattern among neuronovels (Antolin, “Impairment” 6; Tougaw, “The Elusive” 132). Related to *Witty Ticcy Ray* (1970) by Oliver Sacks as a nonfictional “source” (Burn 12), *Motherless Brooklyn* is one of a series of neuronovels that offers the most material for the analysis of language disorders and, therefore, for strategies for translating these disorders. Without insisting on details related to the interpretations of the novel’s literary and cultural paradigm, on the unusualness visible in the atypical character of Lionel Essrog as a detective, or on the remarks on the peculiarities of the plot or the association between Tourette Syndrome and Brooklyn (Peacock, “We learned” 72), as these aspects are not part of my list of objectives for this analysis, there are some elements that require the valorisation of the discursive dimension and of register and terminology that are worth pointing out, as they constitute the main points that attest to the generic framing of the novel and its language particularities.

One of the first features that, once noticed and stated, substantially marked the reception of the novel, was “verisimilitude”. In fact, the author himself spoke of (Logan qtd. in Tougaw, “The Elusive” 143) the presumptions on the part of readers who reacted with astonishment when they learned that he did not suffer from Tourette Syndrome, given the fidelity of his protagonist’s speech. Moreover, building on this fidelity, *Motherless Brooklyn* brought to the fore how the neuroscientific discourse and neurological cases displayed become “patterns” of the novel’s narrative unfolding (Tougaw, “The Elusive” 130). In other words, through his intentions to approach “Joycean wordplay” and through his interest in the artifice of language, Lethem indeed succeeds in passing the test of renewing his style by “imbuing” it with neuroscientific content and “Tourettic traits” (143).
But what do these Tourettic traits actually mean that works so well at the discourse level for Lethem? It is mainly about exploiting the symptomatology of Tourette Syndrome, recognisable through the following series of features. Treatises discussing at length this “neurological disorder with behavioural implications” (Zanaboni Dina and Porta 7) reveal the presence of several motor tics and at least one vocal tic, both categories of tics being characterised by “purposelessness” and persisting for at least one year after their onset, an important condition for diagnosis (Zanaboni Dina 7, 32; DSM-5 32, 81). These tics, defined as “sudden, brief, stereotyped actions” (Stern et al. 741), with emphasis on “stereotyped quality” (Martino 4) can be, among other classifications, simple or complex (Martino 6-7; Zanaboni Dina and Porta 34-39), and their onset occurs before the age of 18 (DSM-5 81). As for simple vocal tics, or “sound” tics, since they do not involve vocalisation (Zanaboni Dina and Porta 37)—barks, coughs, yelps, grunts, sniffs (Stern et al. 741, Kushner 3)—, these are “rapid”, “recurrent”, “nonrhythmic” and “meaningless” (Kushner 3; Leckman et al. 6), while complex vocal tics affect language per se—from syllables to words and phrases—but also the paraverbal level, from voice volume to intensity and rhythm (Leckman et al. 6). Complex vocal tics include coprolalia—“repetition of obscene word/s or sentences”, echolalia—“repetition of someone else’s word/s” (Zanaboni Dina and Porta 37), palilalia—“repetition of one’s own utterance/s”, stuttering—“speech with involuntary disruptions such as repetitions of sounds/syllables/words, or prolongation of sounds, or interruptions of speech” (39). It is also worth mentioning that there is a list of comorbidities of Tourette Syndrome which also includes (Zanaboni Dina and Porta 40; Stern 741; Ferrão et al. 50) obsessive-compulsive behaviour and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Moreover, a feature of Tourette Syndrome related to both motor and vocal tics that should be mentioned is the “premonitory urge”, defined by specialists as the “unpleasant somatic phenomena that build up prior to the tic (or upon attempts to resist ticcing)” (Leckman et al. 8) or “the sensation that signals the arrival of a tic” (Zanaboni Dina and Porta 37). Last but not least, motor tics can be equally simple—from blinking, to head, arm and leg jerks—and complex, as “stereotyped movements of longer duration”— copropraxia or “repetition of obscene movements”, echopraxia or “repetition of someone else’s movements” (Leckman et al. 5; Zanaboni Dina and Porta 35-36).
Far from being in any way a complete scientific approach to Tourette Syndrome, but rather a medical intermezzo, in the above description I have also taken into account remarks on obsessive-compulsive disorder, the premonitory urge or even motor tics, all of which at first glance have no effect on language, because in novels, be it *Motherless Brooklyn* and its overflowing accuracy of neuroscientific competence or another work, all these symptoms are transformed into language and are rendered through language. In short, even the description of Lionel Essrog’s obsessive-compulsive behaviour or, more interestingly, even the remarks about the “premonitory urge”, which could not be very much detailed beyond typical sensations in medical treatises written in the third person, are rendered in a fundamentally different way by the first-person narration, being passed through the filter of the character, whose vocabulary also particularises them terminologically each time in the novel. In short, all these symptoms of Tourette Syndrome, regardless of whether they that are related to language or not, become language in the novel and thus also particularise the process of translating such a literary text.

The difficulty of transferring these tics and obsessive behaviours from the source text to the target text, which, although stereotyped, denote spontaneity and a rapid pace of speech, also resides in the strong connection they have with the cultural environment and emotions (Schleifer 564). Beyond the fact that in the case of coprolalia, for example, obscenity does not render a feature of the universal, but rather renders a dimension of the biological and cultural (Morris 187), Tourette Syndrome has been linked to the “juxtaposition” of “biological formations” and “cultural formations” (Schleifer 565). Moreover, Schleifer—who draws attention to the risk of romanticising Tourette Syndrome and insists on the finality of his study, which does not aim to reduce the severity of the disease—associates vocal tics with the “conventions of poetry” and the “poetic function” of language through a predisposition for rhythmicity, repetition and rhyme (564) and proves once again the connection to the patient’s cultural space and personal history. From his perspective, the apparent stereotype of tics, a stereotype given by recurrence (but, paradoxically, a context-sensitive, emotionally-sensitive and patient-sensitive stereotype), takes on a subjective dimension that can also differ from one context to another or from one experience to another, a particularised stereotype, one might say, that can faithfully render the compromise between favouring the form and thus the
cultural dimension or meaning in the source text, and can propose different degrees of (un)translatability.

**MOTHERLESS BROOKLYN BY JONATHAN LETHEM: THE GREAT UNTRANSLATABLE AND THE ROMANIAN TRANSLATION STRATEGIES OF SIMPLE AND COMPLEX VOCAL TICS**

Among the novels mentioned by Touwag (Elusive 6) in the subcategory of neuronovels, less than half use neuroscientific content as a narrative experiment. One such novel, which have also been translated into Romanian, is *Motherless Brooklyn*, authored by Jonathan Lethem in 1999, which was published in Romanian under the title *Orfani în Brooklyn*. Translated into Romanian by Irina Negrea more than ten years ago, the novel was originally published by LEDA Publishing (*Corint Editorial Group*). Then, the Romanian version also had a second edition, published in 2019. The novel announces from the outset, as if going beyond its narrative character and warning its translators in advance of the phonetic, lexical and syntactic marathon they will have to engage in, “the freewheeling language” (Roth), the lexical inventiveness, wordplay and spontaneity of speech under the pressure of vocal tics felt and described extremely vividly:

> Context is everything. Dress me up and see. I’m a carnival barker, an auctioneer, a downtown performance artist, a speaker in tongues, a senator drunk on filibuster. I’ve got Tourette’s. My mouth won’t quit, though mostly I whisper or subvocalize like I’m reading aloud, my Adam’s apple bobbing, jaw muscle beating like a miniature heart under my cheek, the noise suppressed, the words escaping silently, mere ghosts of themselves, husks empty of breath and tone (...). In this diminished form the words rush out of the cornucopia of my brain to course over the surface of the world, tickling reality like fingers on piano keys. (Lethem “Motherless” 1)

In a similar description, Lionel also points to the onset of his vocal tics through a resemblance to “a sea of language” that “was reaching full boil” (“Motherless” 46). The two images remain suggestive not only at the narrative level, but also permeate the text. Cursive writing, as in examples such as “Get, get, get, GOT! said my brain. *Duck, duck, duck GOOSE!*” (8), “My brain went *Follow that car! Hollywood star! When you wish upon a cigar!* My jaw worked, chewing the words back down,
keeping silent” (13) or “I thought mister catch your body mixture bath retardy whistlecop’s birthday and didn’t dare open my mouth” (62), or with hyphenated words, as in “find-a-man-kill-a-phone-fuck-a-plan” (227) and in “Flip-a-thon! Fuck-a-door! Flipweed! Fujisaki! Flitzcraft! (...). Nun-fuck-a-phone!” (230), or even welded words as in “WEDONTSERVESTRING” (32) and in “HellokimmeryIknowIshouldn’tbecallingbutIjust” (260), are highly effective textual strategies not only to mark the change of tempo and the alert rhythm of speech caused by vocal tics, but also to capture, as a consequence of first-person narration, the premonitory urge and attempt to stop the vocal tics delivered massively by the brain but never yet verbalised. Expressions such as “said my brain”, “my brain went” or “didn’t dare open my mouth” support this remark.

In fact, at the level of these verb phrases and the verb used in English for tics, i.e., to tic, a first difficulty of translation also makes its presence felt, whose resolution depends only on the expansion strategies, more precisely on addition. That is, in contexts in which one moves from direct speech to indirect speech, and Lionel Essrog comments on his tics, the English “to tic” is always explained as in the following examples, since there is no one-word-correspondent in English. “I said, ticcing stupidly” (209) in the source text becomes “am spus eu, pradă unui tic tâmpit” (Lethem, “Orfani” 312) in Romanian, whose back-translation would be “I said, being trapped by a stupid tic.” Similarly, in the case of “I ticced loudly” (Lethem, “Motherless” 213), the Romanian counterpart is also constructed by addition, namely: “am emis un tic zgomotos” (Lethem, “Orfani” 319), whose back-translation would look like this: “I made a loud tic”. This situation is relevant and anticipatory for the discussion on the translation of simple and complex vocal tics.

In fact, I have proposed a list of possible categories, based on the layered analysis of speech, tic typology and code-switching phenomena, which explain Irina Negrea’s translation choices, although it is much more difficult to centralise these categories as recurrent and generally valid strategies in terms of choices throughout the entire text, since tics require recourse to solutions that go beyond the grid of strategies and errors in translating literary texts. A relevant example would be that of the frequency error (Clifford 55) that runs counter to obsessive repetition of words, such as, for example, the central vocal tic Eat mel!, an expression of palilalia and coprolalia, which occurs frequently throughout the
novel, even in the same context, as in “Eatmeatmeatme” (Lethem, “Motherless” 2).

As for simple vocal tics, and more specifically onomatopoeic sounds, the source text contains an adaptation in the case of the interjection “I barked twice — ‘yipke, yipke’” (24), translated into Romanian as “ham, ham”—“Am lâtrat de două ori — ‘ham, ham’” (Lethem, “Orfani” 42)—, an onomatopoeic interjection typical for Romanian, but which is a generalisation and loses the specificity of the bark in the original, which is not rendered as “woof, woof”. The same can be said of the onomatopoeia in the phrase “I made a sound, half dog, half cat, something like ‘Chaarfp’.” (Lethem, “Motherless” 218), translated as “Heiarfp” (Lethem, “Orfani” 326), in order to mark the juxtaposition between “ham” and “ciarp”, a juxtaposition visible through the introduction of the consonant “h”. Similarly, the interjections in the utterances “(...) piuind continuu, cum fac păsărelele: ‘Cip-cip-cip’” (61) and „(...) din cauza ticului de a lâtra, din care, cu efort, a rămas doar un ‘...harp’” (398) are linguistic and cultural adaptations, or at least attempted adaptations, of the English interjections “Chirip, chrip, chrip” (Lethem, “Motherless” 39) and “charp” (267), respectively. A special case of inconsistency in translation occurs in the case of the phrase “(...) înăbușind încă un jeg-nemernic într-un fel de behâit ascuțit – bmneeh!” (Lethem, “Orfani” 23) which translates “(...) suppressed another dickweed into a high, chihuahuasque barking sound, something like yipke!” (Lethem, “Motherless” 12), in which not only does the Romanian interjection not remain phonetically faithful to the English one, but it also conflicts with the earlier translation of the interjection “yipke” as “ham”.

As for the complex vocal tics and the use of the phonetic level and phonetic processes—alliteration and assonance—so suggestive of the impulsiveness of the tics, but also to prove once again that these tics are context-sensitive and start from associations of groups of sounds or words that are processed by Lionel’s tourettic mind, the Romanian translation can be considered neither form-oriented nor meaning-oriented, since there is no general strategy regarding these sound effects in the original text. In most cases, one notices the attempt to adapt which, neglecting literal translation, aims to create similar sound effects in the Romanian language, rather emphasising Nelson and Maher’s view of perceiving translation not as an “act of infidelity” or “loss” but as an act of creation (1): enumeration with assonances and alliterations
as in “stakeout snakeout ambush Zendo” (Lethem, “Motherless” 6) “precipice, pleasurepolice, philanthropist” (107), “eatmebailey, repeatembailey, repeatmobile (...) repeatmobile (...)—eatbail! beatmail (...)” (112), “Prays of peach? Plays of peas? Press-e-piece?” (105), “homosapiens, homogenize, genocide, cantdecide, candeyes” (125) favour literal translation when the Romanian language allows this transfer without phonetic loss, i.e., by keeping the same vowels and consonants in alliterations and assonances, as in “precipițiu, placecaraliu, pretfinantrop” or a translation as close as possible to the text, but with interventions on the vowels and consonants forming alliterations and assonances in Romanian. In other words, the sound effect is preserved, but its particular character is lost, as in “Supraveghere, priveghere, pâzea Zendo” (Lethem, “Orfani”15), in which the consonant “s” is replaced by “p”, in “mânâncămăbailey, repetămibailey, repetomobil (...) (...) retragemobil (...) – mânâncămăbaile! batemail!” (171) in which there is a transfer between the “e” and “m” sounds in “a mântca”, “to eat” in Romanian, “Locșorțicnit? Loconvertit? Logcolit?” (161), with transfer between “p” and “l” or as in “homosapiens, homogenizare, genocid, numaidecid, numaidecât”, where not only is there a transfer between the consonants “c” and “n”, but also the rhyme becomes imperfect. In the case of “l/l” alternations, the phonetic principle is favoured at the expense of lexical and semantic fidelity, as word associations such as “least lonely” or “liking Lionel” (Lethem, “Motherless” 51) are translated as “lin liniștitor” and “lângă lionel” (Lethem, “Orfani” 81-82), the meaning being far from that in the source text even though the phonetic play “l/l” is preserved.

Similarly, in the case of rhyming associations such as “textlover, lostbrother” (Lethem, “Motherless” 87) or “handle with scare, scandal with hair” (151), the translator has made substantial changes, especially to “textlove”, in order to keep the rhyme in Romanian “textușor, sansfrâțior” (Lethem, “Orfani” 136) and “manevrează cu spaimă, scandal cu faimă” (228) respectively, the word “faimă” being inserted only for the sound effect of rhyme with “spaimă”. Other interesting cases are those where the amalgamation of letters in English is translated faithfully to Romanian, without keeping the same letters, but with emphasis on the suggestiveness of the sounds. For example, where, falling prey to a complex vocal tic, Lionel distorts, by conjoining, “guywalks, walksinto, guywalksinto” and turns it into “whrywhroffsinko” (Lethem, “Motherless” 31), the rendering in Romanian builds on the amalgamation of the sounds in
“untipintră, pășeșteinăuntru, untipințărăănăuntru’, and the result is “mfrinmfronnttră” (Lethem, “Orfani” 51), which not only preserves the imposed register of the “growling sound”, with the repetition of the consonants “g” and “w” in “guy” and “walks”, translated into Romanian as “mărăit”, with the repetition of the consonants “m” and “t”, but even the order of the sounds in the lexical combination created by Lionel is preserved, since the alternation and order between “w” and “m” are almost identical, “m” occurring before “p”, just as “w” occurs before “p” and “h” in English.

In the same category of intervention and adaptation of the text to the specificity of the target idiom we can also place those situations where the connections between words and lexical play are lost. Specifically, in the enumeration “Barnamum Bailey. Like Osmium, Cardamom, Brainium Barnamum, Where’smymom” (Lethem, “Motherless” 22) the identical pronunciation of “mum” and “mom” becomes “mum” and “mami” in Romanian: “Barnamum Bailey. Like Osmium, Cardamom, Brainium, Barnamum, Undei-mami” (Lethem, “Orfani” 38). Similarly, the combination of “big mouse” and “apocamouse” in English (Lethem, “Motherless” 204) is translated as “big mouse” and “apocâpândău”, the radical “mouse” being replaced in “apocamouse” by “popândău” (“gopher”), another rodent. Very interestingly, the repetitive enumeration “otter utterance” (Lethem, “Motherless” 279) is translated by favouring the sound effect as “vidră, vidră, viermănios” (Lethem, “Orfani” 414), “viermănios” meaning “wormy” and by no means “utterance”. However, the problem arises at the level of inconsistency, since the same term “utterance” is translated in the same context with its usual Romanian equivalent, when used by another character. As for the (un)translatability of Motherless Brooklyn, some extremely interesting cases of code-switching, and more specifically of “intra-sentential switching” and “intra-word switching” (Guldin 23-24) and perhaps a typology of multilingual translation should be brought up: “garden state bricko and stuckaface suckfast” (Lethem, “Motherless” 164), as an expression of echolalia, where only the conjunction is translated into Romanian, “zippity go figure” (Lethem, “Motherless” 201), another case of “intra-sentential switching”, given that the Romanian translation is “zippity go figura” (Lethem, “Orfani” 301), the only word in Romanian being “figura”; “ordinary nunphone” translated as “monaphone obişnuit”, “ghostphone” (Lethem, “Motherless” 230), translated as “nâlucophone” (Lethem, “Orfani” 342), “go-fisticate-a-kill-phone” (Lethem,
“Motherless” 233)—as “so-fistichiu-omophone” (Lethem, “Orfani” 347) are all examples of *intra-word code-switching* where the particle “phone” is not translated.

As for the “great” untranslatable in Lionel Essorg’s “sea of language” (Lethem, “Motherless” 46), as a possible attempt to centralise them, complex vocal tics originating from proper nouns remain untranslated, even if they contain particles from common nouns: “Lionel Deathclam” (93), “Failey! Bakum! Flakely!” (95), “Hospitalbailey”, “Essway! Wrongway” (174) “Yessorg” (30, 50) as a response, even though it could have been translated as “Darog”, as none of the suggestiveness of the response would have been lost. Moreover, examples such as “greenphone, creepycone, phonyman” (156), “Kissmefaster! Killmesooner! Cookiemonster!” (236), “Lasagna ass” and “Laughing Gassrog” (278), and the list could go on, remain untranslated, which affects translation in terms of continuity and uniformity. Finally, the euphemisation of all coprolalic tics is equally impactful, on the one hand, from the point of view of scientific content, since the substitution of obscene words represents a deviation from the definition of coprolalia, a symptom so common in tourettic patients, but, on the other hand, also in terms of the rendering of tonality and, therefore, of cultural particularity and slang value (Clifford 67). Moreover, not translating obscene words or translating them with euphemistic substitutes that do not even preserve the correspondence of lexico-grammatical classes so necessary for the rendering of tonality, rapid rhythm and spontaneity in coprolalic tics affects to a great extent the transfer of style. Examples such as “find-a-man-kill-a-phone-fuck-a-plan” translated as “găsește-omul-omoară-telefon-ce-porcărie-plan” render the same inconsistency that the noun translation of the obscene word brings to the list of verbal entities. Similarly, in terms of speech euphemisation and loss of tonality, examples such as “Rocket-fuck-me” (Lethem, “Motherless” 181), “Fuckalotofus” (300) which remain untranslated or examples such as “fuckmeblackcop” (114) translated as “pupămânfundbăipolițaiulnegru” (Lethem, “Orfani” 175) that means “kissmyassblackcop” or “butt trust” (Lethem, “Motherless” 121) translated as “fund moale” (Lethem, “Orfani” 185) that means “soft ass” are relevant in the context of this strategy which would be worth discussing in a separate study.
ON CONTINUITY: TRANSLATION AS A CREATIVE PROCESS AND MULTIMODAL INTERSECTIONS

As a conclusion, in addition to the points of discussion I have initiated at the level of each paragraph, given the popularity of Edward Norton’s 2019 screen adaptation of the novel Motherless Brooklyn, my study also aims to deepen the translation of Tourette Syndrome tics through a comparative approach. Thus, multimodal practices of text analysis between translating the novel and the audiovisual translation (Taylor 98-104) in Romanian are exploited. Such an approach also nuances potential differences in the rendering of, in particular, simple and complex vocal tics and the meta-dimension of the novel, considering some of Lionel Essrog’s remarks, as “I’ve got meta-Tourette’s” (Lethem, “Motherless” 192). Moreover, a quantitative and systematic analysis of all translations of tics in Johathan Lethem’s novel is all the more necessary at the present stage of my research, as it would accurately reveal the percentage that vocal tics occupy at the text level and to what extent this proportion changes in the target text. The focus of this quantitative analysis is the new approach to translation as creation in translating novels with cases of language pathology.

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