



ALTERED FAMILIAR EXPRESSIONS IN ROMANIAN RETRANSLATIONS OF ROALD DAHL'S *THE BFG*

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Abstract

This article aims at investigating how a special type of formulaic language, namely altered familiar expressions, is dealt with in translation. These units are set phrases that have been artistically altered in literary works for pragma-stylistic reasons. Since altered familiar expressions are marks of an author's style, they should shine through in translation. The textual analysis of four Romanian target texts of Roald Dahl's *The BFG* reveals that Romanian translators mainly opt for replacement (equivalence) and retention (literal translation), contrary to expectations grounded on previous studies of translated children's literature.

Keywords: *retranslation; formulaic language; altered familiar expressions; replacement; retention.*

INTRODUCTION

The present paper aims at providing a textual analysis of formulaic language, i.e. familiar expressions, in three Romanian versions of Roald Dahl's book, *The BFG*. I define familiar expressions as multiword constructions that are recurrent and recognizable and have a unitary meaning or function in discourse. The paper investigates strategies in the translation of familiar expressions that have undergone artistic deformation, by analysing examples culled from the

discourse of giants in *The BFG*. I am interested in looking at how artistic altering of familiar expression works so as to establish speech patterns in the discourse of these characters and how Romanian translators preserve these recurrent patterns in their target texts. Since strategic alteration in formulaic language seems to reinforce speech patterns and contribute to the characterization of the speakers, the phenomenon should not be overlooked in translation. However, it has been proved in the literature (Zorgati 19; Epstein 227; Vişan 147) that lexical creativity poses problems in translation and, consequently, it stands to reason that pattern re-forming creativity, that is, creativity dependent on formulaic language, is even harder to translate. This situation makes the current investigation all the more worth pursuing.

While formulaic language has been a topic of interest in linguistics for a while now, there are few to no studies that tackle these formations from the perspective of retranslation studies. Moreover, to my knowledge, there are no studies on altered familiar expressions in Romanian retranslations. Making use of Sidtis' taxonomy of formulaic language (38) and of Kuiper's Law regarding accessibility and recoverability in intentionally deformed familiar expressions (193), I intend to check to what extent the pragma-stylistic function of altered familiar expressions employed in the source text shines through in the many versions available in Romanian and which of Epstein's strategies are regularly selected in the available Romanian target texts. In her book on translated children's literature, Epstein (175) identifies six recurrent strategies that translators resort to when dealing with expressive language: *retention* (the translator copies the respective phrase and transfers it in the target language), *deletion* (the translator omits the phrase), *addition* (the translator adds more text or an extra pun, wordplay, coinage in the target text), *replacement* (the translator replaces the phrase with an equivalent from the target language), *compensation* (the translator uses the wordplay or coinage in a different place in the target texts or in different amounts), *explanation* (paratextual or intratextual explanation, a footnote that explains the meaning of the wordplay or coinage). Epstein's study on the translation of what she calls "neologisms" in Dahl's *The BFG* in Swedish, Danish and Norwegian concludes that none of the translators of the book has managed to render more than a third of the original instances of creative language, opting for either deletion or for explanation of the respective coinages or puns (227).

THE CORPUS

I have chosen Dahl's novel *The BFG* (1982) as the basis for my corpus because the language that the main character of the novel speaks is a variety especially created by the writer for the inhabitants of the realm of giants and, as such, is a stumbling block for any translator (Ionescu 74). The BFG refers to the variety he speaks as a type of "langwitch" that is "wigglish", a misshapen type of English, peppered with a lot of odd-sounding phrases and coined words. In fact, in one of his televised interviews, Dahl explained that the key to writing this novel was exactly making his character speak in this peculiar manner, meant to intrigue and entertain his young readers. In discussing Dahl's linguistic ingenuity, Rudd explains that Dahl empowers children over adults by inverting social, cultural and linguistic conventions (66). It is therefore crucial for the linguistic innovation present in the source text to be captured in translation.

A history of the translations of Dahl's books should take as point of reference a periodization such as the one proposed in Vișan (285), which divides Romanian translations into the "pre-communist" period (up to 1947), the "communist" period (1947-1989) and the "post-communist" period (1989 – up to now). As confirmed in Borza et al. (1993), Roald Dahl's books were translated only after 1989, which means that they belong exclusively to the third period, i.e. the "post-communist" period. Three of Dahl's most popular books (*Matilda*, *The Witches* and *The BFG*) were translated during the early 90's by 'Patricia' Publishing House, by the same translator, Leontina Rădoi, and then retranslated a decade later by 'Rao' and yet another decade later by 'Arthur'. Both 'Rao' and 'Arthur' employed different translators for each of the books, which probably makes Leontina Rădoi the only published translator "specialized" in Roald Dahl, since she is the only translator who was commissioned to translate as many as four of this author's books (in 1994 she also translated *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar*, which is the only Romanian version of this particular book). That is, possibly, the reason why TT1 is the only target text mentioned in the most recent and definitive history of Romanian translations (Ursu 89, Ștefănescu 1035). Consider the table below, which provides information about the Romanian translational series of *The BFG*:

| Source Text (ST) | Target Text 1 (TT1) | Target Text 2 (TT2) | Target Text 3 (TT3) | Target Text 4 (TT4) |
|--|---|--|---|--|
| <i>The BFG</i> , published in 1982 by 'Jonathan Cape', with illustrations by Quentin Blake | <i>Uriaşul bun și prietenos</i> , 1993, 'Patricia', translated by Leontina Rădoi, with illustrations by Quentin Blake | <i>Uriaşul cel prietenos</i> , 2003 (republished in 2008), 'Rao', translated by Mădălina Monica Badea, with illustrations by Quentin Blake | <i>Marele uriaş prietenos</i> , 2013 (republished in 2015, 2016, 2020, 2022, 2023, 2025), 'Arthur', translated by Alexandra Columban, with illustrations by Quentin Blake | 2025, unpublished translation by Nadina Vişan, excerpts, "contrived" translation |

The translational series under discussion is a five-element series, made up of a source text, a first translation (TT1) and three retranslations: ST_TT1_TT2_TT3_TT4. I have placed the last element in the series between brackets because this particular target text has not been published and has only been produced for the purposes of this article, to provide a set of alternative solutions, in agreement with Bittner (quoted in Harmon 34), who reinforces the idea that any kind of comment on or evaluation of a target text should first side with the translator and secondly provide alternative solutions accompanied by solid arguments. In discussing strategies of dealing with expressive language in translating children's literature, Epstein, in her turn, seems to be in favour of retranslators consulting the work of their predecessors (174). Thus, TT4 may be viewed as a set of retranslated excerpts produced by an "informed" retranslator that is aware of and draws upon previous elements in the translational series.

What do all of the published target texts have in common, apart from author Roald Dahl and illustrator Quentin Blake? All of them shun the initialism originally selected by Dahl ("The BFG") in favour of a four- or three-word title, probably for readability and commercial reasons. The title is no longer a puzzle to be solved, although this is probably what the author must have had in mind when opting for this particular title. Also, none of the three published target texts

mentions the name of the translator on the front cover, thus rendering the translators semi-invisible.

ALTERED FAMILIAR EXPRESSIONS IN TRANSLATION

The examples I have selected contain instances of familiar expressions that have been artistically altered or “artistically deformed”, to use Kuiper’s phrasing (192). Consider the most recent definition of familiar expressions that I have found in the literature:

A familiar expression is generally defined here as a word or multiword sequence that is known to the speaker-hearers of a language as having a special status in the language community [...]. The expression is known to be recognizable not only to oneself but also to other speakers of the language [...]. These expressions have unique characteristics and specialized functions in verbal and written discourse. (Sidtis 3)

Thus, it appears that familiar expressions are chunks of formulaic language, and are to be placed in opposition with “novel” language (Wray 2012), that is, freshly generated language. Sidtis (38) proposes the following taxonomy: familiar expressions can be either (a) formulaic expressions (non-literal set phrases such as idioms, for example phrases like “on the house”, “last straw”, “I’ll be damned”, etc.), or (b) lexical bundles (discourse and pragmatic markers such as “I think”, “well”, “to tell you the truth”, “and so on”, etc.), or (c) collocations (literally used set phrases such as “part and parcel”, “bride and groom”, “as good as gold”, “works like a charm”, etc.).

On the other hand, altered familiar expressions are instances of language where a speaker/writer selects a fixed pattern which he “deforms” intentionally to elicit various effects, ranging from laughter to shock. Consider, for instance, the funny phrase “once in a blue baboon” (an alteration of the formulaic expression “once in a blue moon”), to quote but one of the BFG’s preferred expressions (Dahl 80). While familiar expressions are mainly employed by speakers who want to promote their own “survival interests” by creating solidarity (Wray 231), altered familiar expressions are intentional deviations from a familiar path, thus creating a different type of solidarity in interlocutors. Although they are much costlier and require the hearer (reader) to process their meaning longer, they might offer “long-term rewards” (Bell 193): in

a children's book, such instances of language might function as puzzles to be solved by children (and, possibly, establish a parent-child rapport during collaborative reading), contributing to entertaining, empowering and educating young readers.

One of the features familiar expressions have in common with altered formulaic expressions is that they are both difficult to identify (Sidtis 15). In translation, they are often translated literally or omitted exactly because of this feature.

In a previous study I analysed how familiar expressions fared in retranslation and I discovered a tendency on the part of (re)translators to select an equivalent from a limited set of target language set phrases when translating such familiar expressions. The result was a lot of coincidental, non-strategic overlapping (in the sense of Van Poucke 15); conversely, in the case of novel language, there was a lot of variation. If altered familiar expressions are familiar language intentionally converted into novel language, meant to challenge readers into filling "unorthodox slots" (Bell 194), I expect a lot of variation from one target text to another. I start from the premise that the basis for alteration will be selected mainly from two of the three subcategories proposed by Sidtis (38): formulaic expressions and collocations. This is because lexical bundles are pragmaticalized and desemanticized and they seem more difficult to "alter".

In translating altered familiar expressions, the translator will have to observe Kuiper's Laws (193), namely "accessibility" on the one hand, and "recoverability" on the other. In other words, for an altered familiar expression to be valid, it will have to be easily recognized by a hearer/reader: firstly, its base form should be accessible to the reader and there should be enough "perceptual cues" (Kuiper 193) after deformation that would enable the reader to recover the base form. As a first reader of the source text, the translator will, in turn, have to be able to identify the instance of artistic deformation and then produce a target text where the resulting altered expression should observe these conditions. The resulting target text should, at least in theory, be characterized by readability.

Let us analyse what happens in the available target texts. I have organized the examples in the corpus according to the taxonomy discussed above, into altered collocations and altered formulaic expressions.

Altered Collocations

I start the discussion with collocations, because, of the three subcategories mentioned above, they are the most frequently used, irrespective of register or other criteria. They are familiar expressions used with a literal meaning. Let us, for instance, consider Dahl's deliberate distortions of the base form *skin and bones*. Consider the examples in the table below, in which the BFG explains to his friend that he has to eat a foul-tasting vegetable (snozzcumpers), if he does not want to perish or to resort to cannibalism, like the other giants:

| ST | TT1 | TT2 | TT3 | TT4 |
|---|-------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| If I don't [eat snozzcumpers] | Dacă nu, aş fi numai <i>oale şi</i> | Dacă n-aş face asta, n-ar mai rămâne din mine decât <i>pielea şi colosul</i> . | Altfel eu ar fi numai <i>piele şi maţ</i> . (51) | Dacă nu fac aşa, o să fiu doar <i>piele şi sos</i> . |
| I will be nothing but <i>skin and groans</i> . (42) | <i>piese</i> . (42) | | | |

The base form of the collocation, “skin and bones”, corresponds to the Romanian collocation “*piele şi os*” (‘skin and bone’). The second term of the collocation has been deformed by substitution: it has been replaced by another noun that rhymes with the original one, but that switches the semantics of the collocation to a resultative tinge of meaning (skin and bones leads, after all, to skin and groans, in the final analysis). While all target texts opt for replacement, Kuiper's Laws are not observed meticulously. TT1, for instance, replaces the ST altered collocation with a spoonerism: “*oale şi piese*” (‘pots and pieces’) for “*piele şi oase*” (‘skin and bones’), which, due to the fact that the singular noun “*os*” (‘bone’) has been turned into a plural and then phonologically deformed, seems to be quite opaque and difficult to process for an adult, let alone a young reader. Both TT2 and TT4 copy the strategy of the ST in selecting a second term in the collocation that rhymes with the original “*os*” (“*colos*” ‘colossus’ and “*sos*” ‘sauce’). While the resultative addition of meaning implied in the ST altered collocation is lost, I would argue that TT4 recreates a humorous effect in associating “skin” with “sauce”. The semantic association in TT2 sounds weird, though. As for TT3, the base form is much less retrievable in “*piele şi maţ*” (‘skin and bowel’), which reduces the readability of the text.

Consider how translators treat another altered collocation in the table below:

| ST | TT1 | TT2 | TT3 | TT4 |
|---|--|--|--|---|
| 'You do unless you is wanting to become so thin you will be disappearing into a thick ear.' | - Trebuie, dacă nu vrea să ajungă așa de subțire că n-o să se mai vadă prin <i>caerul</i> <i>transperant</i> . | - Da, trebuie, dacă nu vrei să ajungi <i>slabă ca un mâr</i> . | - Trebuie, dacă tu nu vrea să <i>dispară din cer senin</i> . | - Trebuie dacă nu cumva vrei să slăbești așa de rău încât să ajunge <i>străverzie</i> . |
| 'Into thin air,' Sophie said. | - Prin <i>aerul transparent</i> , | - Slabă ca un țâr, zise Sophie. Mâr e cu totul altceva. (62) | - Din senin, îl corectă Sophie. Cerul senin e altceva. (55) | să ajunge <i>străverzie</i> , spuse Sophie. Străverzie e cu totul altceva. |
| 'A thick ear is something quite different.' | (44) | (45) | | |

The base form is provided in the source text by Sophie, the BFG's interlocutor: "to disappear into thin air". Romanian does not have an equivalent, but can supply a series of possible alternatives. Since there is no set list of equivalent phrases, the translators have to become even more resourceful than they did in the first case. TT1 opts again for a spoonerism ("caerul transperant", instead of "aerul transparent"). The resulting phrase operates metathesis on "aer transparent" ('transparent air') which results in perfect nonsense: "caer transperant" ('skein' and 'blind', where 'blind' is a noun, like in "draw the blinds/shades"). Again, the result is quite opaque, the more so as neither "caer" ('skein'), nor "transperant" ('blind, shade') are core vocabulary and young readers are very unlikely to recognize them or know their meaning. It can be argued that the resulting "gibberish" in Romanian might sound funny to young readers anyway. However, more readable solutions are possible, as proved by the second target text. TT2 provides a much more successful solution in using replacement and a similar strategy in substituting the word "țâr" from the collocation "slab ca un țâr" ('as thin as a rake') with "mâr" (which is an onomatopoeia for the "growling" sounds made by dogs). The result is quite funny, and the resulting

deformed expression is characterized by recoverability. The third target text conflates two collocations: “a dispărea din senin” (‘to disappear out of the blue’) and “cer senin” (‘blue sky’), which is ingenious, yet not as humorous as the solution provided by the second target text. TT4 opts for blending and reduces the collocation to one word (“străveziu”) made up of the adjective “străveziu” (‘transparent’) and the colour adjective “verde/verzi” (‘green’), derived with a approximating suffix (-iu) that is used in Romanian to derive colour adjectives (e.g., “albastru – albăstriu”, ‘blue-bluish’). To my mind, TT2 is the most successful of the four alternative solutions offered here.

A very well represented class of collocations are similes, which the author delights in altering. Out of the many examples present in the book, I have only selected two:

| ST | TT1 | TT2 | TT3 | TT4 |
|---|--|--|---|-------------------------|
| We is helpless as horsefeathers’ (106) | Este neputincioşi ca o coadă de cal. (97) | N-avem mai multă putere decât un fulg de cal. (115) | Noi este neajutoraţi ca penele cailor. (120) | Nu puţim face nimic! |

The base simile is “as helpless as a kitten”, altered by Dahl so as to obtain alliteration (by copying the alliterative pattern in other similes, of the type “as good as gold”). All target texts, with the exception of TT4, opt for retention (in this case literal translation): TT1 – ‘is as helpless as a horse tail’, TT2 – ‘we don’t have more strength than a horse feather’, TT3 – ‘we are as helpless as feathers of horses’. Since Romanian does not have as many similes available as English does, translating altered similes seems to be a challenge, because the result does not echo any set phrase in Romanian. TT4, however, refashions a set phrase that, while being no simile, manages to capture the echoing effect of altered familiar expressions present in the source text and observes Kuiper’s Law: “Nu putem face nimic” (‘we can’t do a thing’) is altered to “nu puţim face nimic” (‘we stink do a thing’).

| ST | TT1 | TT2 | TT3 | TT4 |
|--|---|--|---|-------------------------------|
| “You is deaf as a dumpling compared to | Tu este surdă ca o găluşcă în comparaţie cu | Tu? Eşti surdă ca o găluşcă pe lângă mine! | Tu este surdă ca o găluşcă în comparaţie cu | Tu?! Păi faţă de mine eşti |

| | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|
| me!” cried the BFG. (36) | mine! strigă UBP. (36) | strigă UCP. (52) | mine! strigă MUP. (45) | <i>surdă turtă!</i> strigă MUP. |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|

A similar pattern is employed in the translation of “as deaf as a dumpling”, another familiar expression altered from “deaf as a lamp post” so as to contain a humorous alliteration in the source text. All published target texts resort to retention (literal translation) again, and the result, while comic, owes its comic effect to the ridiculousness of literal translation rather than wit. The fourth version opts for altering the collocation “surdă toacă” (‘as deaf as a lamp post’) to “surdă turtă” (‘dead deaf’), transferring the resultative from the expression “beată turtă” (‘dead drunk’). The echo effect is preserved and the base form remains recoverable, even if, arguably, young readers might not be as familiar with resultatives as adult readers might be.

Altered Formulaic Expressions

Artistic deformation is very well represented in formulaic expressions, namely non-literally used set phrases. Dahl creates patterns where he substitutes one slot in the fixed expression with a humorous alteration (“horsefeathers” for “horses”), which he subsequently replaces with another humorous horse-related compound noun (“horseflies” for “horses”), creating linguistic whimsy. The first base form is “hold your horses”, altered to “hold your horsefeathers/horseflies”, whereas the second base form is “keep your shirt on”, altered to “keep your skirt on”. Consider the examples in the table below:

| ST | TT1 | TT2 | TT3 | TT4 |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| Wait!’ he cried. ‘Hold your horsefeathers! Keep your skirt on! Just you wait to see what I is going to bring about!’ (80) | - Stai! strigă el. <i>Nu mâna aşa! Ține-ți fusta! Așteaptă să vadă ce o să facă!</i> (80) | - Stai așa! Strigă el. <i>Stai aşa un stropuleț! Ai răbdăcoare! Să vezi tu ce fac!</i> (107) | - Stai ! zise MUP. <i>Nu-ți ieși din bostani! Nu te- mpacheta! Stai să vezi ce pregătește eu !</i> (94) | - <i>Stai așa vițel!</i> <i>Ai vițică răbdare! Să vezi ce-am să fac io!</i> |

| | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| 'Wait!' cried the BFG. 'Hold your horseflies! Keep your skirts on! I think I has the answer to the maiden's hair! (148) | - Aşteptați! strigă U.B.P. Nu mai mânați așa! Țineți-vă fusta! Cred că are răspunsul la problemă! (148) | - Stai puțin! strigă UCP. Stați așa un stropcean! Aveți răbdăcoare! Cred că știu răspunsul la dilemoțul vostru! (212) | - Aşteptați! interveni MUP. Nu vă ieșiți din dovleci! Nu vă- mpachetați! Eu crede că are răspunsul la încâlcitură! (189) | - Stai așa vițeluș! Aveți vițică răbdare! Io crede că are răspunsul la trilemă! |
|---|--|---|---|--|

The first base form (“hold your horses”) is repeated in the same chapter of the novel, having undergone different alterations (“hold your horsefeathers”, “hold your horseflies”). Repeated patterns are important not just for ludic reading, but also as a way of helping young readers remember already learned set phrases or acquire new vocabulary. In translation, strategies differ: TT1 opts for retention and translates the altered familiar expressions literally (“Slow down! Hold your skirt!”). There is no variation for “horsefeathers/horseflies”, and no wordplay present in the target text. TT2 opts for blending (“stropcean” might be read as a blend between “strop” ‘drop’ and “ocean” ‘ocean’, “răbdăcoare” probably blends “răbdare” ‘patience’ and “răcoare” ‘coolness’, “dilemoț” is a blend between “dilemă” ‘dilemma’ and “moț” ‘tuft/ tassel’). The results are funny and readable and the base forms can be retrieved. Consider the back translation of TT2: “Wait a minnut! Be patiente! I think I know the answer to your dimentia!” TT3 is even more creative, making use of the Romanian base form “a-ți ieși din pepeni” (literally translated as ‘to go out of your watermelons’, which means “to fly off the handle”) by filling the slot occupied by the noun “pepeni” (‘watermelons’) with “dovleci” (‘pumpkins’). The second altered expression (“keep your shirt on”) is translated as “nu vă-mpachetați”, a deformation of the base form “nu vă impacientați” (‘don’t lose your patience’). The phrase “maiden’s hair”, whose base form I have not been able to identify but whose meaning can be inferred from the co-text, is translated as “încâlcitură” (‘tangled knot’, a ‘bird nest’ in one’s hair). The result sounds probably like in the following back translation of TT3: “Don’t fly off the ladle! Don’t lose your passionce! I thinks I has the answer to your dilemon!” As an alternative to these solutions, TT4 proposes alteration of dialectal/colloquial adverb “nițel” (‘a little, a bit’) by phonological deformation:

“vițel” (‘calf’) and its feminine diminutive “vițică” (‘heifer’), which are inserted in recognizable set phrases. For “maiden’s hair”, the solution is a pun in which the noun “dilema” (‘dilemma’) is tampered with: the first part of the word is recalculated as a prefix (di-, meaning ‘two’) and phonologically altered to another prefix (tri-, meaning ‘three’). All target texts, with the exception of TT1, resort to a combination of replacement and compensation, while TT2 opts for retention (literal translation).

Special attention should be paid to euphemistic dysphemisms (Allan and Burridge 32), instances of masked profanity such as “by golly” (used by Sophie to tone down the taboo phrase “by God”). It is interesting to notice that English (like Romanian) employs a regular mechanism of pragmaticalized alteration, identified as “tabooistic distortion” (Campbell 156). This mechanism differs from artistic alteration because it is regularized and constantly used in conversation, whereas artistic alteration is strictly employed in a literary text and very rarely gets picked up by a speech community. From this point of view, artistic alteration is on a par with “occasionalisms” (Poix 3), which are literary neologisms, nonce-words coined by authors to enrich the discourse of their literary works. Dahl resorts to a similar strategy of distorting taboo language and uses the base form “by God!” which he repeatedly alters. Considers the examples below:

| ST | TT1 | TT2 | TT3 | TT4 |
|--|--|---|---|---|
| ‘By gumbo, that is a squackling good idea!’ the BFG said. (123) | - Pe frobscotul meu! Asta este o idee geniabilă! (111) | - Pe gumbo! Ce idee splendionară! zise UCP. (156) | - Pe gumbo, asta-i o idee răstitor de bună! zise MUP. (139) | - Măi să fie cu pălărie! Am o idee fărămidabilă! |
| ‘By gumfrog!’ he cried. (80) | - Pe urechile mele! (74) | - Pe toate broscălițele din baltă! strigă el. (107) | - Să fiu al macului! exclamă el. (93) | - Să-mi sară urechile din cap! strigă el. |

Retention seems to be the preferred strategy for the translation of the instance of artistically altered tabooistic distortion “by gumbo!” (which originally alters base form “by God”). The resulting text flouts Kuiper’s Laws and the readability

of the target texts is reduced. TT4 opts for artistic deformation of base form “ei drăcie cu pălărie!” (a rough back translation for this would be ‘oh, damnation botheration!’), which is an instance of register-marked idiom (belonging to Romanian kids’ variety) that has been tampered with. I would argue that this solution produces a more readable text. In the case of “by gumfrog”, whose base form is also “by God”, TT1 attempts replacement (‘by my ears!’), whereas TT2 prefers retention by literal translation and addition (‘by all the froggies in the pond!’). TT3 provides a very inspired alteration of base form “să fiu al dracului!” (‘I’ll be damned!’), by substituting the noun “dracul” with another noun, “macul” (‘poppy’), which results in a funny phrase (‘I’ll be poppified!’). The solution is in line with Kuiper’s recommendations and the text is readable and funny. TT4 draws upon TT1’s proposal, but selects a set phrase (“să-mi sară ochii din cap!”, which literally translates as ‘may my eyes pop out of my head!’) which is altered to “să-mi sară urechile din cap!” (‘may my ears pop out of my head!’) and which fulfills the pragmatic function of the source text phrase. The text is all the funnier because in the story, the BFG has rather big ears that can hear almost everything, which semantically justifies this kind of compensation.

Last but not least, let us analyse an instance of double alteration, presented in the table below:

| ST | TT1 | TT2 | TT3 | TT4 |
|---|---|--|--|--|
| But mostly us giants is simply going on and on like whiffsy <i>time-twiddlers</i> .’ (43) | Dar cel mai mulți trăiește, și trăiește, ca niște <i>întinde-timpi</i> . (43) | Însă, în general, noi, uriașii, trăim la nesfârșit, <i>fără să știm de timp, care ne curge printre degete</i> . (61) | Dar de cele mai multe ori noi, uriașii, își vede de ale noastre ca niște <i>pierde-vară flătăreți</i> . (53) | Dar în mare parte noi, uriașii, o duc așa, la nesfârșeală, așa suntem noi, niște <i>încurcă-vreme!</i> |

The noun “time-twiddlers” is a compound form of the altered familiar expression “to twiddle time”, whose base form is “to twiddle one’s thumbs”. As you can see, the base form has been doubly tampered with, first by substitution, then by compounding. Interestingly enough, three of the four target texts opt for

replacement by using the same derivational procedure (compounds of the Verb-Noun type, a derivational pattern that has ceased to be productive both in Romanian and in English, Vișan 125). While TT1 goes for a complete lexical invention, since the compound “întinde-timpi” (‘stretch-time’) is an instance of pure occasionalism and does not possess a base form to alter, TT4 derives the compound “încurcă-vreme” (‘bother-time’) from the base form “încurcă-lume” (‘bother-world’). TT3, on the other hand, just picks an already existing Verb-Noun compound, namely “pierde-vară” (‘waste-summer’). TT2 stands out, by altering the base form “a-ți curge banii printre degete” (‘money slips through one’s fingers’), by substituting the noun “banii” (‘money’) with “timp” (‘time’). The result is not as expressive or funny as in the other three target texts, but it is readable enough, being back-translated as: “But, in general, us, giants, live on, without minding the passing of time, which slips through our fingers.”

CONCLUSIONS

The present article has focused on altered familiar expressions in translated children’s literature, analysing four Romanian variants of excerpts from Roald Dahl’s novel, *The BFG*. The first aim of the article was to identify what strategies of Epstein’s set of translational strategies have been resorted to in the Romanian target texts. Epstein’s findings regarding a corpus of Swedish, Danish and Norwegian target texts suggested that translators are not as creative as the author of the source text and that the main strategies employed are deletion and explanation. My analysis has shown that, in the case of Romanian, the strategies translators opt for are replacement and retention and that neither deletion nor explanation are well-represented in this corpus. This is an interesting result, which is worth further investigation. Epstein’s suggestion, in the case of Scandinavian translated children’s literature, was that reduction of expressive language in translation might have something to do with the editorial norms applied by publishers. It would be interesting to see if the same applies in the case of Romanian.

Another aim of my article was to trace discourse patterns involving alteration in familiar expressions and investigate to what extent these patterns are retained in translation. While substitution and phonological deformation were employed both in the source and in the target texts, some of the patterns

were less productive in Romanian, as was the case of simile formation or of tabooistic distortion, probably because they are not as frequent in Romanian. This is why these were the patterns that elicited the most numerous instances of retention (literal translation combined with direct transfer, as was the case of “by gumbo” rendered as “pe gumbo”), which impaired readability in some of the target texts.

My expectations regarding overlapping and variation in the translation of altered familiar expressions were met. Unlike familiar expressions, which tend to be translated by coincidental overlapping in alternative target texts (Vișan 293), altered familiar expressions undergo a lot of variation in translation. This is a result that I expected, since artistic deformation of familiar language results in novel language and novel language tends to be translated in very diverse ways in alternative target texts.

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BIONOTE

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