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Translating Similes: a Comparative Perspective on Romanian Versions of the Novel *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, by Lewis Carrol

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Traducerea comparațiilor: o perspectivă comparativă asupra versiunilor românești ale romanului *Alice în Țara Minunilor*, de Lewis Carrol

Rezumat

Articolul își propune să sublinieze rolul comparației în textele literare ca un instrument stilistic puternic, ce sporește imaginea, profunzimea emoțională și semnificația textului. Sunt prezentate diferite funcții ale comparației, inclusiv capacitatea acesteia de a crea impresii vizuale vii pentru o înțelegere mai clară a mesajului și de a evoca o rezonanță emoțională mai pronunțată la cititori. Diferite tipuri de comparații, precum comparațiile explicite/implicite, scurte/extinse, autentice/banale contribuie în mod unic la stilul și tonul narativ al textului. De asemenea, lucrarea examinează provocările întâlnite în redarea comparațiilor în procesul traducerii, axându-se în special pe dificultățile întâmpinate de traducător atunci când sunt transferate din limba engleză în limba română și oferind strategii pentru redarea eficientă a acestora în traducere. Analiza comparativă a două versiuni de traducere a acestei figuri de stil relevă complexitatea redării, importanța păstrării capacității stilistice și emoționale ale acesteia, subliniind, în același timp, relevanța sensibilității culturale și a creativității lingvistice în procesul de traducere.

Cuvinte-cheie: figură de stil, comparație, funcția comparației, tipuri de comparație, traducerea comparației, traducere literală, explicitare, explicitare în note la subsol, omisiunea comparației în traducere.

Abstract

The article aims at emphasizing the role of simile in the literary work as a powerful stylistic device that enhances the image, emotional depth and significance of the text. Various functions of simile are presented, including its ability to create vivid visual impressions, to facilitate comparisons for a clearer understanding and to arouse an emotional resonance while reading literary texts. Different types of similes such as explicit/implicit, brief/extended, genuine/

trite ones contribute uniquely to the narrative style and tone of the text. In addition, the work examines the challenges encountered in rendering similes in translation, focusing particularly on the difficulties encountered when they are transferred from English into Romanian and providing strategies for rendering them efficiently in translation. The comparative analysis of two translations highlights the complexity of translating similes, retaining their stylistic and emotional power and underlining the importance of cultural sensitivity and linguistic creativity in the translation process.

Keywords: figure of speech, simile, simile function, types of simile, simile translation, literal translation, explicitation, gloss translation, simile omission in translation.

Figures of speech enhance an author's work, regardless of genre or the writing style. When used effectively, they bring vitality to what could otherwise be basic words, phrases, and sentences. These literary devices help communicate the author's purpose and lead the readers through their experiences, creativity, or reflections on particular moments. They provide beauty, emphasis, and clarity to what might have been a dull or limited expression. By using figures of speech, authors elevate the trivial, diminish the overstated, and infuse their writing with vibrancy, insight, and understanding. Such tools enable readers to evaluate, interpret, and critically assess not only the writer's efforts but also their underlying purpose.

One of the common figures of speech is the simile. In Merriam-Webster Dictionary simile is a figure of speech comparing two unlike things that is often introduced by *like* or *as (as in cheeks like roses*) and according to Encyclopedia Britannica simile is a figure of speech involving a comparison between two unlike entities. Unlike metaphor, the resemblance is explicitly indicated by the words *like* or *as* in the simile. The common heritage of similes in everyday speech usually reflects simple comparisons based on the natural world or familiar domestic objects, as in: *he eats like a bird, he is as smart as a whip, he is as slow as molasses.*

M. McCall defines simile in terms of its form, as a stated comparison, usually signaled by the tags *like*, *as,* or just *as ... so* but sometimes only implying them or using variations, such as *so have I seen* or *if ... so...* (1969, p. 144). This definition has three key implications: first, a simile cannot convey true identity or opposites, but it can illustrate countless degrees of similarity and difference; second, both elements being compared are explicitly mentioned; and third, the characteristics of these elements are not constrained, either in absolute terms or in relation to one another.

K. Wikberg provides a more accurate definition of simile that can be defined as a figurative expression used to make an explicit comparison of two unlike things by means of the prepositions *like, (as)* or the conjunctions *as, as if, as though* (2008, p. 128). According to P. Pierini simile is used in the discourse just as much as metaphor with a tripartite structure comprised of: the topic or the comparandum

(the entity described by the simile); vehicle or comparatum (the entity to which the topic is compared), accompanied by a comparison marker; similarity features (the properties shared by topic and vehicle) which can be expressed explicitly or left unsaid (2007, p. 21).

The above-mentioned definitions show that a simile is easily identified due to its structure, the entities being compared are clearly stated and the traits of these entities are unrestricted, whether independently or in relation to each other. Simile is a key element of imagery, which involves creating vivid and impactful representations of ideas, individuals, locations, emotions, and various associations. Imagery is employed in diverse forms of communication, including writing and speaking, ranging from advertising to poetry and casual conversation to public speaking. As a primary form of imagery, simile enhances communication, infusing it with a creative and dynamic essence that arises from the fundamental act of comparison.

Every stylistic device is employed with a distinct intention to create a special desired effect upon the reader, to enliven and enrich the literary work, to stir someone's imagination in an artistic form. Similes may have the following functions:

1. to emphasise a certain characteristic of a thing. The comparison made in a simile is often unusual. The listener or reader can form a mental image of the comparison. This increases understanding of what the speaker or writer is trying to communicate. *His explanation was* ***as clear as mud*** (not clear at all since mud is opaque), providing a sarcastic tone to the statement.

2. to make new connections to surprise and interest the reader, engaging the reader's intellect. T. S. Eliot thought that „in the mind of the poet … experiences are always forming new wholes". *Their eyes* ***… as expressive as pandas*** *who have mastered moths* (Kövecses 2010, p. 140);

3. to achieve a comic effect: *When is a* ***door like a bottle****? He looked* ***as if he had been poured into his clothes and someone had forgotten to say 'stop*** (Tchudi 1984, p. 123);

4. to make the objects plainer and impress people: *His memory is* ***like wax to receive impressions and like marble to retain them.*** This brings out the leading idea as to the man's memory in a very forceful manner in contrast with the simple statement: *His memory is good*.

Thus, similes are one of the most widely used literary devices in literature and everyday language due to its pragmatic functions that enhance communication effectively.

There are some main types of similes pointing out the analogy between the various qualities, states or actions of a human being and animals, supposed to be the bearers of the given quality. The following criteria shall be taken into consideration while classifying them:

1. *Simile length:* **a)** brief similes which take up half of line: *You are like an ant*; **b)** extended similes take up many lines and sentences and they are often called Homeric or epic similes, in which the secondary subject or vehicle is elaborated far beyond its specific points of close parallel to the primary subject or tenor, to which it is compared. This figure was imitated from Homer by Virgil, Milton, Dante and other writers of literary epics, who employed it to enhance the ceremonial quality and wide ranging reference of the narrative style. In the epic simile in „Paradise Lost", J. Milton describes his primary subject, the fallen angels thronging toward their new – built palace of Pandemonium, by an elaborate comparison to the swarming of bees: *In spring time, when the sun with Taurus rides, / Pour forth their populous youth about the Hive / In clusters; they among fresh dews and flowers / Fly to and fro, or on the smoothed Plank / The suburb of their straw – built citadel New rubbed with Balm expatiate and confer / Their state affairs. So thick the airy crowd Swarmed and were straitened* (Lynch-Brown, Tomlinson 2005, p. 23).

2. *Simile vehicles or terms of connection:* **a)** explicit similes using *as* to connect them: *as ...as*: *as sly as a fox, as quiet as a mouse, as wise as an owl, as hard as a rock;* **b)** implicit similes use the connector *like.* The common feature is not mentioned; the hearer is supposed to guess, what feature the two objects have in common: *sleep like a baby (sleep soundly), work like a devil (work hard), live like a candle in the wind (live dangerously)* (Wikberg 2008, p. 45).

The semantic nature of the simile-forming elements *seem* and *as if* is such that they only remotely suggest resemblance. Quite different are the connectives *like* and *as*. They are more categorical and establish quite straightforwardly the analogy between the two objects in question (Delabastita 1994, p. 219).

3. *Unexpectedness produced by simile:* ***a)*** *genuine similes* are regarded as belonging to language in action. They are absolutely unexpected, unpredictable, and are mostly found in poetry and emotive prose. Their main function is that of creating images: *The little girl is so delicate as a snowdrop*, *The mother's soul is so cold like the sunshine*; ***b)*** *Trite similes* belong to the language as a system i.e. language proper, and are usually fixed in dictionaries as units of the language. They are mostly found in the newspaper articles, in the oratorical style. Their function is to help the writer, enliven his work and make the meaning more concrete. These hackneyed similes become clichés: in which the second component has become merely an adverbial intensifier. Its logical meaning is only vaguely perceived: *treacherous as a snake*, *busy as a bee*, *industrious as an ant*, *faithful as a dog*, *to fly like a bird* (Newmark 1988, p. 110).

4. *Simile structure:* ***a)*** *simple* ones based on a single image: … *and I could feel chill rise between us like a sheet of glass* (W. Styron); ***b)*** *sustained* – it is based on a grasp of associated images: *All the time I spent with Mason, I felt I never*

knew, never could put my hands on him. He was ***like a gorgeous silver fish in a still pond****: make a grab for him, and he has slithered away, and there you are with a handful of water. But maybe that was just the thing about him, you see? He was* ***like a mercury. Smoke. Wind*** (Lakoff 1980, p. 175).

In this way, through the variety of simile types, the reader of a literary work may become actively involved in the story to identify the common traits between the two things being compared. The impact on the reader often stems from the surprising nature of the simile. It is important to remember that a simile can frequently have an opposite or indirect meaning, and therefore, the reader should be cautious not to fall victim to a sarcastic simile.

The structural-sematic aspect of similes as well as its cultural features should also be taken into account by translators of literary works. The translation of literary texts that abound in stylistic devices is a real challenge for those involved in this process. D. Delabastita states that sometimes similes force us to consider how the two things being compared are dissimilar, but the relationship between two dissimilar things can break down easily, so similes must be rendered delicately and carefully (1994, p. 215).

The aim of our study to identify the difficulties and techniques used in rendering similes from English into Romanian and to analyse whether the translators remained faithful to the original and did their best to reproduce the similes in the target language. We will start with the hypothesis that the simile comprehensibility and the intended response from the target language readers will be achieved if different translation strategies are employed to render similes. Our attention is focused on P. Pierini's classification of strategies used in translating similes as it is mainly based on P. Newmark's approach to metaphor translation that proved to have a methodological value for modern translation theory and practice.

P. Pierini suggested the following strategies: 1. literal translation (retention of the same vehicle); 2. replacement of the vehicle with a different vehicle; 3. reduction of the simile, if idiomatic, to its sense; 4. retention of the same vehicle plus explicitation of similarity feature(s); 5. replacement of the vehicle with a gloss; 6. omission of the simile (2007, p. 27).

In translating simile, it is important to look at the point of similarity between the languages involved in the translation process. The meaning of the sentence *She is as a duck*. In several cultures this sentence has different meanings based on its local cultural context. It can be translated as a person who is a messenger between realms, representing balance and harmony in the Native American folklore. In the Chinese culture, ducks symbolise love, partnership, and fidelity. A duck is also the symbol of motherhood: female ducks are careful mothers, symbolising maternal instincts and family bonds.

Subsequently, we are going to analyse two translations of some similes from the novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* done by B. Popescu in 1971 and F. Papadache in 2014 respectively that belong to different periods of time.

The following simile is repeated several times when Alice refers to telescopes.

Oh, how I wish I could ***shut up like a telescope!*** (1, p. 9). The simile is preserved in both translations. F. Papadache preferred *lunetă* as an equivalent for telescope. *Ah, cât aş vrea să pot* ***să mă strâng ca un telescop****!* (2, p. 5). *Ah, ce bine ar fi* ***să mă pot strânge ca o lunetă****!* (3, p. 17). Alice later explains the situation. When Alice says that she wants to shut up, she refers to the ability to reduce the size of the telescope by collapsing its moving parts. She expresses the desire and ability to shrink or grow as easily as she would extend or contract a telescope. The simile serves as a tool for expressing Alice's desire to remain a child.

She felt a little nervous about this, "*for it* ***might end****, you know,*" *said Alice to herself,* "***in my going out altogether****,* ***like a candle***" (1, p. 11). Alice thought that the candle symbolises her life. Candles are visible reminders of our possible triumph over darkness. In this case, the candle represents Alice's emotions and both translators preserve the original image. The simile is translated literally keeping the same vehicle and preserving its figurative meaning.

*Se simţi un pic nervoasă din cauza asta „Pentru că, ştiţi", îşi spuse Alice „****s-ar putea să mă sfârşesc de tot, ca o lumânare****"* (2, p. 6). *Era cam neliniștită în această privință, „căci, mai știi", își zicea, „****te pomenești că mă sfârșesc de tot, ca o lumânare****"* (3, p. 18).

Transition symbols in dreams such as a cave, hole, tunnel, or a hallway can lead one into the unconscious and a transformed state. When Alice fell down the rabbit hole, she entered a period of confusion and chaos and the next simile is about a place of change and transformation: ***The rabbit-hole*** *went straight on* ***like a tunnel*** *for some way, and then dipped suddenly down, so suddenly that Alice had not a moment to think about stopping herself before she found herself falling down a very deep well* (1, p. 3). A tunnel in a dream suggests a pathway one may have created into the unconscious, an opening to one's innermost feelings and memories. It can also be the way to a birth of something as in the birth canal. B. Popescu kept the same image, while the second translator added the preposition *printr-un* to the original simile.

Gaura de iepure *mergea drept,* ***ca un tunel****, cine ştie unde şi, înainte să se gândească cum să se oprească, se pomeni căzând într-un puţ foarte adânc* (2, p. 4).

O bucată de drum, ***vizuina iepurească*** *o duse înainte* ***ca printr-un tunel****, apoi o luă brusc la vale, dar atât de brusc, încât Alice n-avu vreme nici o clipă să se gândească a se opri. Se trezi lunecând în jos, ca într-o fântână foarte, foarte adâncă* (3, p. 14).

The next example provides the image of the same species of rodents that still differ in some features. *Alice opened the door and found that it led into a small passage,* ***not much larger than a rat-hole****…* (1, p. 8). *Alice deschise uşa şi văzu că dă într-un coridor îngust,* ***nu mult mai mare decât o gaură de şobolan****…* (2, p. 5). *Alice deschise uşiţa şi văzu că dădea într-un gănguleţ,* ***nu mai mult mai mare ca o gaură de şoarece****…* (3, p. 17).

The first translation is more appropriate as it provides the equivalent for the *rat-hole,* while the second translation uses another rodent from the same species and readers can imagine that the hole was smaller like a mouse-hole. Mice and rats have a lot in common, but they actually differ in size, shape, weight, growth rates, tail length and others. The second translation replaces the vehicle with a different vehicle.

There was not a moment to be lost: ***away went Alice like the wind****…* (1, p. 7). The author explains Alice's long free fall through the tunnel. In most cases, a simile keeps the same image (vehicle) as in the source language in the Romanian language.

Nu era nici o clipă de pierdut: ***Alice o porni ca vântul****…* (2, p. 5). *Nu era nici o clipă de pierdut:* ***Alice o luă la fugă, iute ca vântul****…* (3, p. 16).

Both translations preserve the same image of the stylistic device and F. Papadache even intensified its usage by adding the verbal expression *a o lua la fugă* that explicitates similar features.

The next example is taken from the fourth chapter "The Rabbit Sends in a Little Bill": *Well, I hardly know — No more, thank ye; I'm better now — but I'm a deal too flustered to tell you — all I know is, something* ***comes at me like a Jack-in-the-box****, and up* ***I goes like a sky-rocket****!* (1, p. 52). A *Jack-in-the-box* is a toy which is a box with a lid and a little figure inside, in this context it refers to being surprised by something that happens suddenly. *Like a sky-rocket* in this case means *to rise or increase rapidly or suddenly*. The translations of this example are totally different grammatically. *Ei bine, nu prea ştiu. Destul, mulţumesc; mă simt mai bine dar sunt prea tulburat ca să vă pot spune; tot ce ştiu este că ceva m-****a împins ca un arc*** *şi m-****am duce în sus ca o rachetă****!* (2, p. 18).

B. Popescu used a contextual translation preserving two similes in the Romanian text, i.e. the replacement of the vehicle with a different vehicle, even keeping the same grammatical mistake in this example using a footnote to explain it.

De, nici eu nu prea ştiu. Nu, nu-mi mai daţi! Mă simt mai bine acum, da' s prea năucit ca să vă povestesc. Tot ce ştiu e că… s-a repezit nu-ş' ce naiba la mine prin horn şi ***mi-a pocnit un bobârnac*** *de-am* ***zburat ca o cometă*** (3, p. 40). F. Papadache kept only the second simile in the translation, replacing the first simile with an expression *pocnit un bobârnac* to be more meaningful for the readers, because not all people from a different culture know what a *Jack-in-the-box* is. The simile was omitted in the translation.

L. Carroll also uses similes in his work to describe the characters. The following example refers to the moment when Alice first meets the Queen and her impression about the Queen is described. *The queen turned crimson with fury, and, after* ***glaring at her*** *for a moment* ***like a wild beast,*** *began screaming…* (1, p. 117).

B. Popescu preserved the simile but he omitted the word *wild* in the Romanian text. The expression *crimson with fury* which means reddened or as if with blood from emotion or exertion was rendered by a simile in Romanian in both translations. *Regina se făcu* ***roşie ca focul de furie*** *şi, după ce* ***se uită fioroasă ca o fiară*** *la Alice, începu să ţipe…* (2, p. 38). *De mânie, Regina se făcu* ***roșie ca focul*** *și, după ce* ***se holbă*** *o clipă la Alice* ***cu niște ochi de fiară sălbatică****, prinse a răcni* (3, p. 72). F. Papadache added *cu nişte ochi* to the translation of the simile explicitating and intensifying the image.

Later in the ninth chapter, the Queen frowns *like a thunderstorm* as she and Alice play croquet: *Alice looked up, and there stood the Queen in front of them, with her arms folded, frowning* ***like a thunderstorm*** (1, p. 135). B. Popescu replaced the simile with a descriptive word, converting it to sense. F. Papadache's version preserves the simile which has a more negative connotation, showing that the Queen was very furious. *Alice ridică privirea şi o văzu pe Regină în faţa lor, cu braţele încrucişate,* ***încruntată*** (2, p. 38). *Alice ridică ochii, și iat-o pe Regină stând în fața lor, cu brațele încucișate și* ***întunecată la față ca cerul de furtună*** (3, p. 82). This simile describes the queen's personality that is clearly aggressive, unreasonable and moody.

The novel *Alice' Adventures in Wonderland* is the source of one of the most famous similes ever written. During the Mad Tea-Party, the Mad Hatter asks Alice the nonsensical riddle: *The Hatter opened his eyes very wide on hearing this; but all he said was,* ***Why is a raven like a writing-desk****?* (1, p. 97). The Hatter then confesses that he does not have an answer for the riddle. L. Carroll stated in the preface of the 1896 edition of the book that a raven is like a writing desk because they both produce a few notes and are never *put with the wrong end in the front*. B. Popescu kept the same figure of speech in the target language, adapting his translation to the Romanian vocabulary in order to be more understandable for readers. In the second translation, F. Papadache translated the simile by a rhetorical question, changing the translation of *raven* into Romanian with another kind of bird, replacing the original image with a different one or vehicle. *Pălărierul îşi deschise larg ochii la auzul acestora, dar tot ce spuse fu:* ***De ce seamănă un corb cu un birou****?* (2, p. 29). *Auzind acestea, Pălărierul făcu nişte ochi foarte mari, dar de spus nu spuse decât: –* ***Ce asemănare e între o coțofană și o masă de scris****?* (3, p. 62).

Thus, the process of translating similes is a complex one, posing various challenges. The translator needs to take into account broad features, such as genre and the target audience, as well as the narrow ones: the structural-semantic aspect

and function of the simile, cultural peculiarities, target readers's perception in order to overcome these difficulties.

Our contrastive analysis shows that the two translations differ to a certain extent between themselves and not all similes can be translated preserving the same image. The translators resort to different translation strategies such as: changing the image, reducing the simile to sense, keeping the same simile image and adding similarity features or omitting them. It is worth mentioning that there are certain images used in the simile that are unknown to the target readers and if the translators do not apply the suitable strategies, it may lead to misunderstanding among readers.

Different cultures give different interpretations to similes and consequently our corpus of examples proves that omission is a common strategy for rendering this figure of speech. The meaning of the omitted simile is compensated in translation keeping its meaning with the help of the available linguistic means from the target language.

The most difficult thing in translating the simile is to achieve the same effect in the target language because using the same image does not always produce the same impact on the target reader. It is important to use the equivalent expression that would have the same connotations as the original one does. The cultural issue has a great influence on the translation process because in each language a particular concept has its interpretation and effect, so the translators should be aware of concepts from the target language they use.

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