CUTURAL LOAD OF THE ONOMASTIC SISTEM IN THE ROMANIAN VERSION OF „DREAMS FROM BUNKER HILLS" BY JOHN FANTE.

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Abstract: In recent decades there is a tendency to keep proper names unchanged in the translated versions both in literary and non-literary texts. At an insight look, nonetheless, their translation actually should depend on multiple factors such as having a correspondent in the target language, having the same degree of frequency in the source language and target language at a given historical time etc. In the Romanian version of "Dreams from Bunker Hills" by John Fante, the translator kept quite all the proper names unchanged, anthroponyms and toponyms, preserving the foreign element through the transliteration. Still, it is worth pointing out some observations on the onomastic system as a particular type of CSIs, and on the effects of the related translation strategy on the target text.

Keywords: realia/CSIs, proper names, translation strategy, cultural, John Fante, Romanian

1. Introduction

In recent decades there is the tendency to keep proper names unchanged in the translated versions both in literary and non-literary texts. At an insight look, nonetheless, their translation actually should depend on multiple factors such as having a correspondent in the target language, having the same degree of frequency in the source language and target language at a given historical time etc. In the Romanian version of *Dreams from Bunker Hills* by John Fante, the translator kept quite all the proper names unchanged, anthroponyms and toponyms, preserving the foreign element through the transliteration. Still, it is worth pointing out some observations on the onomastic system as a particular type of CSI's and on the related translation strategies. This paper analyses then in a deeper manner the way the proper names have been translated in the Romanian version (translation strategies) with a focus on how and to what extent their cultural load has been preserved (effects).

2. Review of Literature

From a translational point of view, proper names can be included in the category of the so-called realia, or CSI's (culture-specific items). In TS, realia are words that mean objects of material culture without precise correspondences in other languages. They pose the problem of translatability since they often call non-existent referents in the TL, so they require specific translation strategies. Important contributions to the definition of realia have come from Eastern European schools. In particular, two Bulgarian researchers, Sergej Vlahov and Sider Florin, have defined in a detailed study the main categories of realia: geographical, ethnographic, social and political. They have also illustrated the related translation strategies: transliteration, transcription, creation of a

specific analogue, explicitation, substitution with a local variant, substitution with an "international" variant, addition of an identifier. (Vlahov and Florin 2018)

But how exactly does this work in the case of proper names, since there are many scholars considering the translation of the proper names a non-trivial matter, as it could seem at a superficial glance? And more specifically, haw does this work in the Romanian version of *Dreams from Bunker Hills*? It is necessary at this point to have a deeper look at the definition of proper names which determines the various translations strategies adopted.

The main function of a proper name is to identify an individual referent, since unlike the generic nouns the proper names are mono-referential, which doesn't mean they are mono-functional. It has been often affirmed that proper names lack in descriptive meaning:

> An ordinary personal name is, roughly, a word, used referring, of which the use is not dictated by any descriptive meaning the word may have. (Strawson 1971, 23)

If the proper names may be non-descriptive, they surely are not non-informative, given that within the same language community they always transmit some pieces of information, e.g., gender (male/female), geographical origin (there are "typical" regional names and surnames), human or pet names (there are "typical" names for dogs, cats, horses, etc.), places. In fiction, this can be assumed to be intentional. Considering the proper names as mere labels used to identify a person or a thing has frequently implied that their translation was seen as a simple automatic process of transference from one language into another. This is for example Vendler's view: "proper names have no meaning (in the sense of 'sense' and not of 'reference'), which is borne out by the fact that they do not require translation into another language" (Vendler 1975, 117). Proper names are labels attached to persons or objects, and the translator must simply transfer them to the target language. A similar vision is expressed also by Sciarone, who argues that the general practice of transliterate or transcript the proper names in translation enforce the idea proper names have no meaning when considered within the language system. (Sciarone 1967, 86).

Nevertheless, long before the affirmation of the multicultural approach in translation, other scholars illustrated a different stance, underlying that proper name may also carry 'senses' beyond its primary identifying function, or, to better say, that not all the proper names are merely identifying labels. Consequently, their translation is not such a trivial issue and can involve decision-making process which require careful consideration of the meanings and of the symbolic and cultural charge before transferring them into the target language. (Searle 1975; Strawson 1975).

Nouns are classified as common (referring to a class of entities) or proper (having a unique referent). Grammatically, there are some co-occurrence restrictions distinguishing them, of which the most important are: a) proper nouns (PNs) do not accept demonstrative pronouns as determiners (*this man* > **this Charles*); b) PNs do not

accept restrictive adjectives or restrictive relative clauses (use of the PN as a common noun in the grammatical sense, *she is the same woman she used to be* > **she is the same Mary she used to be*); c) opposition between definite and indefinite is neutralized in PNs (a given PN either invariably takes no articles or invariably takes the definite article, *Charles, Paris* > *the Price Charles, the Highlands*). However, especially in literary texts, in a given speech situation PN status can grammatically manifest as a common noun and can perform a metaphorical/ symbolic/ culturally charged function.

Moreover, the meaning of a concept is made up of a lexical entry containing linguistic information (phonological, morphological, semantic and categorial) about the natural language items related to it (Sperber and Wilson 1986, 83-93). The concept may also be defined within a logical entry which may be empty, partially filled or fully definitional, and an encyclopaedic entry containing various propositional and non-propositional representational information about the denotation and the potential connotations of the concept (culturally determined). Therefore, taken from granted that an assumption is a structured set of concepts, its content is the function of the logical entries of the concepts while the context of the processing is outlined on the basis of the encyclopaedic entries of those concepts. (Sperber and Wilson 1986, 89).

In this perspective, prototypical PNs (without a descriptive content) are associated with empty logical entries. But this does not happen in all the speech situations, since as any other linguistic manifestation, PNs may also have a logical content derived from their encyclopaedic entries. The basic rule concerning PNs translation is to keep them unchanged, to transfer them into the target language (transliteration or transcription, depending on the language) but it always depends on a series of situational factors as well (cultural, structural, functional, e.g., names of international organizations usually have translation equivalents in the member countries). In literary works there are no PNs with no informative function at all, more or less subtle. When the information is explicit (a descriptive name), during the translation the cultural load could be affected. If the information is implicit, or if the cultural marking function has priority over the informative function, there will probably be a loss in the translation or a compensation through additional information (explicitation).

3. Methodology

This paper investigates the rendering of the cultural load of the onomastic system in the Romanian translation of *Dreams from Bunker Hills* by John Fante. For this purpose, the onomastic entries have been identified in the digitalized version of the target text and compared with the corresponding translated entries to analyse the translation strategies and their effects.

4. Data analysis

Dreams from Bunker Hill is the last novel of Arturo Bandini's tetralogy, and John Fante's last literary work. Written in 1979, or better said dictated to his wife Joyce because of his blindness and amputated leg due to diabetes (Cooper 1999), *Dreams* is an

autobiographical memory novel structured around the core Fantian themes: the literature as a destiny and the success as a writer, the women and the desire, the Italian-American family and the Catholicism, the identity building and assimilation process, and last but not least the city of Los Angeles and Hollywood, with Fante's unsolved node of the abdicated literary vocation and the screenwriter work for the studios. In a nostalgic but light tone intermingled with vivid irony, witty humour, and farcical accents, the seventy-years-old Fante retraces his literary young alter ego Arturo Bandini's itinerary along twenty-six chapters (2 to 6 pages each) set between Los Angeles, Hollywood, Boulder (Colorado) during the depression era. Accordingly, the rhythm is fast, adequate to the memory fragmented retrievals, interspersed with flashbacks and flash-forwards.

The main story line develops around Arturo's oscillation between the urgency of recognition as a literary writer and the need of immediate economic success reached by accepting a job as a screenplay writer in Hollywood film industry. In fact, the novel was initially titled *How to write a screenplay* (Pleasants 2010, tape three).[1] A fade, illusory, misleading world, Hollywood, described through literary devices of hyperbole, of adjectival and anthroponym accumulation. Dreams versus reality. Putting aside the literary vocation in exchange of economic stability causes Arturo's dramatic frustrations, displacements and inner conflicts and this is the thematic nucleus of the novel. A similar perennial emotional contradiction seems to characterize also the pages related to the Italian American identity; religious issues comprised. Another open question, an everlasting open question for Bandini/Fante, the identity question. However, the dramatism is always tempered by irony, humour, and comicality while the narrative structure is strongly supported by the language at all levels.

Given the setting in an urban environment with characters belonging to, the analysed novel has words that can be framed as real, especially socio-cultural and ethnographic. I will report emblematic cases, but also some corresponding in TL, to illustrate the multiplicity of situations that arise in the translation process and the range of strategies regarding the translation of PNs as cultural-specific items adopted in Romanian version: preservation (transliteration), loan/calque, explication.

Toponyms and Anthroponyms

As specified before, in the Romanian version of *Dreams* the translator kept quite all the proper names unchanged, anthroponyms and toponyms, preserving the foreign element through the transliteration. Let us have a more detailed look at this process.

The ***toponymy*** is strongly linked to the autobiographical character of the novel, as resulting from the author's direct personal experience. In *Dreams*, as in the other three novels of Fante's tetralogy this constitutes one of its definitory traits (Los Angeles

[1] In a recorded interview to Ben Pleasants on May 22, 1979, John Fante talks about *Dreams from Bunker Hill*: "BP: What is the book that you're working on now?
JF: It's called *How to Write a Screenplay*. It's my early period in Hollywood, my first experiences as a writer in pictures. […] It's the story of a writer who comes out here from Colorado and has no thought of becoming a screenwriter. He comes out because he wants to be a writer and get away from home, and he more or less falls into screenwriting." (Pleasants 2010, https://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/undertow-thejohn-fante-tapes-three/tape three, retrieved on July 20, 2021).

and Bunker Hill are even included in two titles of the tetralogy).[2] Therefore, the toponymy is not fictional, but real and very precise, repetitive, detailed, often using micro-toponyms with quite irrelevant referential findings for a foreign reader but with significant role in the narrative construction and in the protagonist's characterization process. Since the spatial elements are pretty substantial for Fante/Bandini, within the perimeter of symbolic connotations of his reiterated oscillations in search of his place in the world, enforced at linguistic level by the frequency of toponyms. Some quantitative examples below.

There are cities and regions names: Los Angeles -12 occurrences; Boulder - 11 occurrences; New York – 3 occurrences; North Platte – 2 occurrences, Palos Verdes – 2 occurrences, Denver – 4 occurrences; Colorado - 12 occurrences; Kansas -4 occurrences; Nevada-2 occurrences; Nebraska, Utah and Wyoming -1 occurrence.

There are neighbourhoods, streets, buildings, and squares names: Hollywood - 17 occurrences, Bunker Hill – 15 occurrences (plus one in the title), Benedict Canyon – 3 occurrences, Terminal Island – 3 occurrences, Woodland Hills – 2 occurrences, Santa Monica, Beverly Hills, North Denver – 1 occurrence; Third Street – 7 occurrences, Temple Street, Fifth Street, Hill Street, Seven Street, Olive Street, Hope Street, Figueroa Street, Georgia Street, Los Angeles Street, Gower Avenue/Gower Street, Wilshire Boulevard, Beverly Boulevard, Beverly Drive, Beechwood Drive, Avalon Boulevard, Hollywood Boulevard, Sunset Boulevard, Ocean Boulevard, Pershing Square, Civic Center, St. Mary's Curch of the Angels; Pearl Street and Arapahoe Street (in Boulder); El Centro, McCadden Place, Wilcox, Las Palmas, Coconut Grove, Doheny, Musso Frank's (saloons and restaurants), Olympic Auditorium, Stanley Rose's (bookshop), Follies Theatre, Sacred Heart School and Public Library (in Boulder).

Instead, the references to geomorphological elements of the landscape are represented with common concrete nouns, such as basin, foothills, mountains, ocean, and desert. The only exception is for Rocky Mountains, translated *ad verbum* "Munţii Stâncoşi" in Romanian version – domestication (152). Notable is the case in which Los Angeles is used in alternation with *city* (12 occurrences) and with *town* (6 occurrences). For Arturo Bandini Los Angeles become "the great city", "wonderful city", "my city", "friendless city", never using *town* related to Los Angeles. Instead, his Hollywood friend Frank Edgington, "an Eastern writer" from New York, does it with an intentional diminishing scope subtly marking the contraposition between East and West Coast and the "superiority" of New York compared to Los Angeles, not recognized by Bandini/Fante. This functions as a cultural marker. ("I hate this town […] Let's go to New York." says Frank. "I don't want to go to New York, Frank. Take me home.", answers Arturo 47).[3] With the same subtle pejorative intention, Hollywood is called "tinsel town"

[2] *The Road to Los Angeles* and *Dreams from Bunker Hill*.

[3] For a long time, critics have "classified" Fante as an ethnic regional writer of the West Coast, even a local, Californian one. *Ask the Dust* is commonly seen as "a sort of *Great Gasby* of the West Coast." Indeed, Fante "holds a special place in the history of ethnic literature in the West" (Collins 268). Nevertheless, Fante didn't agree with the idea of a classification based on an author's background or work setting, and "resented being kept out of the mainstream by reviewers who categorized him ethnically or located his work regionally". He partly felt this as an effect of the New York publishing establishment, of the "East Coast parochialism." (Collins 270).

by Agnes, a rich girl who had refused Arturo while he was in love with her before leaving Boulder, during his return home ("How are things in tinsel town?" 141)[4]. She does this with precise intention to hurt him, underlying once again that there is a social distance between Arturo and the "others" and that still no one there takes him seriously nor believes in him ("Me in Hollywood? That's funny." 141) In the Romanian version the toponymic value and its nuances are lost but the equivalence and the effect are compensated and rendered through an inspired semantic translation with "fabrica de vise", lit. "dreams factory" and with "ce glumă", lit. "what a joke". ("Cum merge treaba la fabrica de vise" / "Eu la Hollywood? Ce glumă.", 155). Finally, Arturo uses *town* only referring to Boulder, with an emotional charge ("my hometown", "the best damned town in the USA"). To sum up, in BE and AE there is a quite clear distinction between the two meanings, while in the Romanian translation "oraş" the distinction between *city* and *town* is lost and the rendering is more neutral (loss).

The toponymical characterization marks all the main protagonists in the novel, not only Arturo Bandini. I give two examples.

Arturo has a love affair with Hellen Brownell, his landlady in Bunker Hill and five years older than his mother. "[W]ith her old Kansas ways" (62) / cu obiceiurile ei bătrâneşti din Kansas" (67), she represents a conservative traditional yet homely and comfortable world. Kansas, Topeka and Witchita enforce this at lexical level, as well as "Thanksgiving dinner" reference (Romanian translation *ad verbum*):

> I heard Mrs. Brownell talking of Kansas and Thanksgiving dinner on a farm outside of Topeka, an account of her brothers and sisters and how her father ran away with a woman from Wichita. (33)
> Am auzit-o pe doamna Brownell vorbind despre Kansas şi despre masa de Ziua Recunoştinţei la o fermă de lângă Topeka, o poveste despre fraţii şi surorile ei şi despre cum fugise taică-său cu o femeie din Wichita. (42)

Before leaving Boulder, Arturo had felt in love with Agnes Lawson, a girl belonging to a wealthy family, who had refused him and had made him feel excluded because of his social condition (poor and Italian-American). The distance between them is underlined in one of Arturo's evocative flash backs to those times:

> During my second year at the university, I fell in love with a girl who worked in a clothing store. Her name was Agnes, and I wanted to marry her. She moved to North Platte, Nebraska, for a better job, and I quit the university to be near her. (55)

Arturo operates a displacement in an attempt to diminish the social distance, declassing her as a salesgirl in a clothing store living in a rooming house (the "real"

[4] AE dictionaries register "tinsel town" or "tinseltown" as Hollywood (first known use in 1978 - Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Tinseltown. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved July 20, 2021, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Tinseltown). English-Italian dictionaries resister "tinseltown" as pejorative "il mondo molto dorato (ma superficiale) di Hollywood", lit. "the very golden (but superficial) Hollywood world" (https://dizionari.corriere.it/dizionario_inglese/Inglese/T/tinseltown.shtml)

Agnes character's father is the owner of the most famous clothes store in Boulder, and she lives in a magnificent house). But also, in the invented story within the story Agnes refuses him: "I don't want to marry you." "I don't want to see you any more. That's why I'm here, so we don't see each other." "Go home, Arturo. Please go home. Don't think about me any more." (56) Nebraska and North Platte toponymics are culturally marked and contribute to the meaning-making process by evoking remoteness, isolation, emotional distance, exclusion, and closure. No approaching is possible, Arturo's trauma is still to be elaborated.

Some interesting observations can be done on the system of ***anthroponyms*** as well. It does not contain any hypocoristic, neither endearments nor offensive. As the names and surnames of the main characters are concerned, there are the Italian names linked to the family and friends' sphere: Arturo Bandini,[5] Tom (his brother's name), Mario (his brother's name and Duke of Sardinia's name), Stella (his sister),[6] Joe Santucci (family friend), Jenny Palladino (Duke of Sardinia's girlfriend). The American names are mostly linked to the film industry characters and, apart from Arturo's mentor Heinrich Muller and Arturo's friend Frank Edgington, the others' names are somehow exotic, strange, pretentious, used by Fante with mocking and ridicule intentions: the literary agent Gustave Du Mont, the Hollywood agent Cyril Korn (metonymic occupational surname), the screenwriter Velda van der Zee, the movie director Harry Schindler and his wife Thelma Faber. All of them just second-rate people in film industry, floating in an atmosphere like Quentin Tarantino's *Once upon a time in Hollywood*. Then there are dozens and dozens of Hollywood actors', actresses', directors', screenwriters' names, lavished continuously by Velda van der Zee or by Arturo imitating her absurd dreaming with strong ironical effects, to detect the vacuity and artificiality of that cinema world. An impressive repetitive gallery of anthroponyms in a *crescendo* accumulation, in paragraphs like the ones below:

> "William Powell's old house. You'll love it." She began to speak of Irene Dunne and Myrna Loy, but I was used to it by now and scarcely heard her as she moved on to Lew Ayres, Frederic March, Jean Harlow and Mary Astor. (83)
>
> That started her off. Vilma Banky, Rod La Roque, Clara Bow, Lillian Gish, Marian Davies, John Gilbert, Colleen Moore, Clive Brooke, Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, Wesley Barry, Billie Dove, Corinne Griffith, Claire Windsor. (84)
>
> [...] Velda talking of Jean Arthur, Gary Cooper, Tyrone Power, Errol Flynn, Lily Damita, Lupe Velez, Dolores del Rio, Merle Oberon, Claude Rains, Leslie Howard, Basil Rathbone, Nigel Bruce, Cesar Romero, George Arliss, Henry Armetta, Gregory La Cava, Paulette Goddard, Walter Wanger,

[5] The middle names "Gabriel" and "Dominic" appear in *The Road to Los Angeles* (Arturo Gabriel Bandini) and in *Ask the Dust* (Arturo Dominic Bandini).
[6] Mona in *The Road to Los Angeles*.

> Norma Talmadge, Constance Talmadge, Janet Gaynor, Frederic March, Nils Asther, Norman Foster, Ann Harding, and Kay Francis. (86)

These names are then culturally marked, with a certain degree of transculturality since a part of them are supposed to be known to the target reader.

Finally, it is worth mentioning some significant cases where Fante makes a charged, metaphorical, or allusive use of names, that is for Helen Brownell, Jennifer Lovelace, Ginger Britton, Mr. Lawson (Agnes' father) and Biff Newhouse (Agnes' boyfriend).

Semantically, Brownell undoubtedly suggests the brown colour, warmth like the feeding land but also boring, old, and monotone. Etymologically, it is a habitational name from Old English *brun* + *hyll* / "brown" + "hill" (DFN), and in fact Mrs. Brownell is the landlady of Bunker *Hill* hotel.

Jennifer Lovelace is a beautiful woman whose Arturo madly and with no hope falls in love with. Her composed surname (*love* + *lace*) anticipates Arturo's dazzling attraction. Etymologically, from Old English *laghles*/ "lawless", "outlaw"; later, as a surname from the nickname of an uncontrolled, unrestrained person (DFN).

Ginger Britton is the striptease Arturo is infatuated with. The name Ginger definitely suggests some stereotyped physical and temperamental features: the red hair and the spicy, high-sexual character (in AE slang "to ginger up" means "to feague" = "to increase the liveliness of a horse by inserting an irritant, such as a piece of peeled raw ginger or a live eel, in its fundament";[7] indeed Bandini uses vulgar and sexually loaded words describing her, among which "with the ass of a young colt"). Britton alludes to a locational surname, from Breton – France (actually, the theatre where Ginger performs is Follies Theatre). (DFN)

Mr. Lawson is Agnes' father. He is one of the wealthiest Boulder citizens and does not like Arturo. Semantically, the composed *law* + *son* suggests integrity and respectability (within the novel he is indicated only by surname). But the surname appears as "Sheriff Lawson" also in the screenplay *Sin City* that Velda has completely transformed compared to Arturo's version. The ironical and irreverent intention is evident through Fante's metaliterary intervention. Still, Biff Newhouse is Agnes' boyfriend and a "star fullback on the Colorado University football team" (140). Etymologically, the name *Biff* was initially a slang verb meaning "punch"/ "hit", then it became a nickname for bully, tough guys (very popular in the USA in the early to mid-twentieth century in sport, literature, and films). And in fact, there will be a fight between Biff and Arturo, who will leave Boulder soon after, back again to Los Angeles. The nickname has progressively crossed over into actual given name. (DFN)

Nicknames

(1) The Duke (of Sardinia)

There are two nicknames in the novel, both interesting by a translation point of

[7] https://www.etymonline.com/word/gin?ref=etymonline_crossreference#etymonline_v_25689. Retrieved on July 20, 2021.

view. The first is *The Duke* with *68 occurrences (4 occurrences "the Duke of Sardinia", 64 occurrences "the Duke")*. It is a title used as a nickname (BE and AE dictionaries register the word as indicating both the title and the holder person), culturally charged in relation to Fante's Italian roots and with strong symbolic role in *Dreams* narration (Pascu 2020). As European male title it is linked to the society classes organization and still used. For the Italian readers it is inevitably associated with Mussolini, who intitled himself "Duke"/ "Duce" using the meaning derived from Latin "Dux" / "commandant" (one famous fascist motto was "Dux Mea Lux"/ "Duce Mia Luce" / lit. "Duke my Light"). In fact, in the Italian translation "duca" is used (nobiliary title, < byzantine Gr.) instead of "duce" (< Latin), while in the Romanian language this differentiation is not present. Therefore, the translation turns out less nuanced, letting the Romanian reader to interpret and eventually to assign a symbolic meaning to the nickname, according to what in pragmatic linguistic is called the "common encyclopaedia". The Duke's name is mentioned only one time in the novel, as Mario.

(2) Richard Lionheart - 5 occurrences, Rom. "Richard Inimă-de-Leu" (translation calque, domestication; the nickname corresponds to a historical figure already assimilated in target language). Richard Lionheart is the Duke's opponent in the story and is mentioned only by his nickname. It represents the opposition between the WOP and WASP, underlying metaphorical and symbolic meanings of the nicknames as a feature of Italian-American Fante/ Bandini's double consciousness and multifaceted identity.

5. Conclusions

As observed during our investigation, the predominant translation strategy of PNs in the Romanian version is transliteration, which as an effect produces a high degree of foreignization. This helps the reader to fix the novel in a precise context and to gain awareness of discovering a new real and fictional world, John Fante's and Arturo Bandini's in fact. There are still few proper names translated *ad verbum* (translation calque), with domestication effect, in the case of PNs already assimilated or with correspondents in the target language (Rocky Mountains, Richard Lionheart, Thanksgiving, Olympic Auditorium, The Guild, etc.). This helps the reader to collocate the translated text in the historical continuum of the translated works already assimilated in the target literary system.

From a strict technical point of view, the predominance of transliteration is a correct and effective choice, but it is evident that it cannot render the richness of all implicit cultural references of the source text onomastic system, particularly of the character's names. By the other hand, however, the Romanian reader is supposed to be already quite familiar with a large number of American culture-specific issues[8]. Therefore, the reader is likely to be able to decodify and to interpret, at least partially, the cultural allusive and metaphoric load of PNs and to play an active part to the

[8] For example, in Romania films/ documentaries/ cartoons have always been delivered in original language with subtitles.

meaning-making process of the translated text.

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