TRANSLATION SOLUTIONS FOR DEALING WITH AMBIGUITY IN *ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND*

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ABSTRACT. *Translation solutions for dealing with ambiguity in* Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. This paper shows how different types of ambiguity embedded in the matrix of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (the 1993 edition) are dealt with in two prestigious Romanian translations – Frida Papadache's *Peripeţiile Alisei în Ţara Minunilor* (1976) and Antoaneta Ralian's *Alice în Ţara Minunilor* (2007) – as a tribute to the international appeal of *Alice*. My focal aim is to present a comparative analysis of the methods employed in translating Carroll's equivocal lexical items, which make it increasingly difficult to match grammatical categories with function. This paper also aims at describing disambiguation techniques applied primarily in determining if the two translators managed to reinforce the original textual leeway at their disposal in the pure spirit of Carroll. My analysis relies heavily on Dirk Delabastita's translation strategies as precautionary measures to cope with Carroll's specialized type of literary discourse. The findings submitted by this paper are consistent with the idea that translating Carroll's craft unavoidably entails a partial loss of meaning, brought about by the yawning gap between the intended message and interpretation, which can result in either overtranslation

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or undertranslation. The extensive use of double-entendre in the source-text cannot be recoded entirely in the target language, despite the translators' excellent command of English.

REZUMAT. *Soluții de traducere a ambiguității din* **Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.** Acest articol arată că modul în care diferitele tipuri de ambiguitate încadrate în matricea textuală a lui Lewis Carroll în *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (ediția din 1993) sunt tratate în două traduceri românești de vază – *Peripețiile Alisei în Țara Minunilor* (1976), tradusă de Frida Papadache, și *Alice în Țara Minunilor* (2007), tradusă de Antoaneta Ralian – aduce un omagiu notorietății internaționale de care se bucură *Alice*. Scopul acestui articol este să prezinte o analiză comparativă a metodelor alese în traducerea termenilor echivoci care împiedică formarea corespondenței formă-funcție. Un alt obiectiv rezidă în descrierea tehnicilor de dezambiguizare aplicate pentru a determina în ce măsură traducătoarele au împrumutat, în manieră carrolliană, atmosfera lingvistică a textului-sursă, având în vedere strategiile de traducere propuse de Dirk Delabastita ca măsuri de precauție în explorarea discursului specializat al lui Carroll. Constatările acestei lucrări arată că încercarea de a-l traduce pe Carroll inevitabil implică omisiuni lexicale cauzate de distanța mare dintre mesajul scriptic livrat de autor și interpretarea ulterioară. Aceasta duce, în cele din urmă, fie la supratraducere, fie la subtraducere. Folosirea deasă a calamburului în textul-sursă nu poate fi oglindită integral în textul-țintă, în ciuda nivelului excelent de limbă engleză deținut de cele două traducătoare.

Introduction

Fantasy literature – with its well-known elements of wonder, alternate worlds and enchanting characters – has always had so broad an appeal to both children and adults alike that it should come as no surprise that humor, adventure and paradox had been a source of marvel even for Neanderthal Man, centuries before Lewis Carroll, J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, Lucy M. Boston, Alan Garner and Philippa Pearce (to only mention a few) came in the public eye. In between primitive, myth-making fantasying and modern-day retellings of the past and scientific renderings of a technologically-advanced future, one can identify Charles Lutwidge Dogdson (known to the general reading public as

Lewis Carroll[2]), a mathematician and logician who wholeheartedly abandoned himself to a world full to the brim with unconventional linguistic rules applied to familiar syntactic structures. When Tolkien created his stories populated by dwarves and elves, fantasy as a distinctive literary genre was unquestionably past its infancy and already made available to the layman, in the nineteenth-century, via Lewis Carroll and the bulk of his fiction, which reaches outside its merits as an enigmatic realm with specific rules and references to include a brilliant insight into the nature of linguistic meaning.

The paradox of Carroll's linguistic games of ambiguity constitutes one of the many delicately uncanny effects produced on the reader by the fantastic elements of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Alice's world takes on, in addition to its more obvious narrative features and explicit goals, the characteristics of a game of make-believe, whose mere hints and connotative minutiae reveal a complex interrelationship between meaning and form. Ambiguity is, after all, a deep-rooted feature of any natural language standardized through long processes, specifically fostered by English, a synthetic system of communication which has lost most of its inflectional endings. Language, by virtue of its internal potential to give birth to ambiguity, of its (sometimes) irrational conventions of usage, is an exquisite vehicle for creating playful situations through ingenuity, witty grammar and the speech habits of individual native speakers.

The link between form and meaning is almost never straightforward in English. The complexity of the relationship between the two as illustrated by Carroll's literary works has long been the focus of scholars interested in this literary man's constant preoccupation with verbal jokes, puns, and ambiguous statements. Robert D. Sutherland's book, *Language and Lewis Carroll* (1970), admired as pioneering by other experts in the field, makes further distinctions between the author's use of language as a vehicle for play and communication, as well as between his use of names as indexical signs and definitions as precautionary measures for clearing up ambiguity, touching on the fact that sounds (form) might be largely different from sense (import) in a given context and underlining the sovereignty of words in conditioning individuals' behavior and affairs. Central to Sutherland's book is the notion that although "[l]anguage is man's servant", man "cannot take for granted that it will always do his

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2 The author's name is a word-order game involving back translation (Charles Lutwidge > Carolus Ludovicus > Carroll Lewis), as David Crystal notes in *Carrolludicity* (1998). Carroll continuously teaches his readers that keeping the ludic function of language centre stage is important in bringing people into rapport with each other or in simply helping them break the ice. The artistry of his linguistic insights relies on many areas of interest, such as coining "portmanteau" (blend) words, syllogisms, and imparting to lexical gibberish an illusory meaning using familiar structural patterns, as in *Jabberwocky*, a poem famous among linguists for its morphosyntactic value.

bidding" (228). Failures in communication do arise and are the rich source of humor, as Carroll's fiction, meant to amuse and entertain, as well as to educate and inform, demonstrates. Most of these aspects will be taken up and elaborated upon in the next sections.

Carroll's *Wonderland* peels layer upon layer of the commonsensical assumptions about the transparency of language. As a result, another confessed study aim refers to disambiguation techniques that are most likely to be used in the resolution of language ambivalence. My goal is to observe not only the author's brilliant insight into the nature of meaning, with the kaleidoscope of games and effects that it produces, but also his exploitation of certain types of ambiguity possessed by words and phrases and how such equivocal items have been translated from English into Romanian. That Alice's enigmatic world has its specific laws and references, always resulting in humorous and even nonsensical situations, goes without saying. In my approach, I start from the premise that the stimulating value of the Romanian text(s) under (ambiguous) scrutiny calls for contrastive research.

This paper is structured into two main parts: one focusing on ambiguity as a natural part of language challenging the reader's ingenuity by proposing an intratextual puzzle and another one attempting to investigate the specific problems occurring in the translation of ambiguous language in Lewis Carroll's narrative prose. The last section provides examples discussing the position of the translator faced with the challenge of deciding how to tackle the multiplicity of meanings derived from deliberate equivocation. It would be counterintuitive to deny the fact that ambiguity – lexical, categorial, syntactic and referential – can puzzle the translator, especially since language varies greatly across different countries.

To the best of one's knowledge, the translator's emphasis on and alertness to the details of the text do manage to come to grips with the sheer rareness and yet cleverly placement of ambiguities in a text that needs to be rendered in another language. Beginning with Warren Weaver's *Alice in Many Tongues* (1964), work in this area has focused on the extent to which "the translation into language X" manages to "capture and convey those aspects of the original [parodied verse, puns, manufactured or nonsense words, jokes which involve logic and twists of meaning] which seem important to us" (77). Lewis Carroll has been translated into multiple languages, including Thai and Swahili, as thoroughly illustrated by Weaver's 1964 checklist. It has also been tackled by various translators sharing the same native tongue, as Peter Rickard's 1975 study, *Alice in France or Can Lewis Carroll Be Translated?* suggests. The most recent reseacher interested in *Alice* translations, Viatcheslav Vetrov, in *The Linguistic Picture of the World. Alice's Adventures in Many Languages* (2021), works with six target languages – Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, and Russian –

and argues that "no language imposes on its speakers something like a national interpretation of a literary work, that is, a reading of a text or even of some details in it that would be shared by the whole of the respective language community" (12) and celebrates each translation under discussion as "products of [the translators'] individual ability of linguistic seeing" (13).

Types of ambiguity

In this section I will take a preliminary look at four types of ambiguity which are likely to create problems – whether serious or risible – of translatability and give way to supplementary meanings reaching outside the nitty-gritty of ordinary communication systems. Different languages present distinct meaning-form distributions which become notoriously ambiguous on several levels. Whenever bilinguals are faced with the burdensome task of translating ambivalent terms, the resultant potential humour must bounce back and forth between the writer of fiction and the translator. The latter must find a common meeting ground for different languages – either by dropping original meanings or recreating them in an ingenious fashion.

Lexical ambiguity, also known as word sense ambiguity, occurs when a word able to acquire more than one meaning in conventional usage appears in a verbal context that does not disambiguate its intended sense. A word such as *bank*, for instance, has distinct meanings allotted to it, including *financial institution* and *edge of a river*. A sentence such as "I was able to deposit cash at another bank" is not problematic at all, as everyone can speculate on the intended meaning. More difficult and clearly not up-for-the-grabs is "The farmer worked by the bank, while his wife worked closer to home", where contextual evidence is not enough to disentangle the ambiguity. Similarly, *oxygen* has one meaning allocated to it by convention and is not equivocal; but a word like *iron*, having different potential meanings that enable the reader to make a choice, can undoubtedly be called equivocal. Rejected from this generalization are jargon words – all the specialized terms found in various technical fields such as mathematics, biology, physics, and law. In order to reduce an ambiguous utterance to a single, precise meaning, one has to detect disambiguation techniques able to resolve it. Among the most commonly used safeguards against lexical ambiguity, mention should be made of contextual evidence, prosodic features, paralinguistic elements and knowledge of the world. Oftentimes "high-level inference[s]" (Hirst 1987, 79) are required to reduce an ambiguous utterance to a single sene, as in "The lawyer stopped at the *bar* for a drink." (78), where *bar* could mean a place where alcoholic drinks are served or the physical bar of a courtroom. A reader can consider *bar* equivocal only up

to the point where the noun *drink* is mentioned. The appeareance of the NP [a drink] is sufficient to clarify the intended meaning of *bar*. Through the further association between *bar* and its surrounding context, the senses become "mutually disambiguating" (79).

The second type, categorial ambiguity, can be considered, in its turn, as inexact and problematic as the first in any natural language. Some linguists deem it a syntactic type of ambiguity, since it arises when different parts of speech are associated with the same lexeme. Others read it as lexical ambiguity, since it draws on the multiple meanings of a single word. Common cases of categorial ambiguity arise, for example, in drawing the line between a present participle and an adjective. "They were entertaining guests" can be represented as either "They were [entertaining guests]", where the adjective *entertaining* functions as a modifier (a dependent element) of the head-noun *guests*; or as "They [were entertaining] guests, where *entertaining* functions as a present participle and *were* as a helping verb, both being part of the verb phrase [*were entertaining*] (Kess and Nishimitsu 1989, 16). In "The thing that bothered Bill was crouching under the table," (Hurford and Heasley, 122), the *–ing* form of *crouching* can be treated as either a gerund or a present participle, each offering a different reading of the sentence. The ambiguity of the sentence is intensified by the vagueness carried by the noun phrase *the thing*. The sentence is ambiguous between "It was the fact that he had to crouch under the table that bothered Bill" and "The creature that bothered Bill was crouching under the table".

Structural or syntactic ambiguity, the third type, occurs when a sentence can be analyzed as conforming to more than one structural pattern. Struggling to find a proper definition for this linguistic phenomenon, Dallin D. Oaks (2010) states that a sentence is structurally ambiguous when "it can yield more than one syntactic interpretation" or when "it implies more than one syntactic relationship between constituents within a structure" (2010, 15). Structural ambiguities may occur when one lexical item is taken to stand for two parts of speech (for example, it is unclear whether *tie* is a noun or a verb) or when the grammatical role a constituent is assigned in an utterance is two-fold (for example, in *I bought her flowers*, *her* is ambiguous between an indirect object interpretation and a determiner interpretation). Thomas Wasow, in his *Postverbal Behaviour* (2002) argues for the "prosodic cues" which readers pick up on in sentences like: "We send faculty lists." (96). The verb's ability to function either as a monotransitive or as a ditransitive verb determines the sentence's ambiguity. The two interpretations are: [We send][the faculty lists] and [We send][the faculty][lists]. In the former, *faculty lists* is a compound in which the stress falls on the first word, that is, the first syllable of the word *faculty* carries more prosodic prominence than any other syllable in the compound. In the latter, the

stress is on the word *lists*. Kess and Nishimitsu (1989), however, maintain that it would be putting the cart before the horse to rely wholly on prosodic cues for syntactic function identification, as "word stress and the length of pause between segments" (21) are out of step with sentences displaying deep structure ambiguity. Complying with the principles of "Local Attachment" (p. 18) and "Minimal Attachment" (p. 39) is suggested instead. Minimal attachment is, at its heart, a simplicity preference: incoming material is attached to the phrase marker under construction, using the fewest nodes possible in a tree diagram representation. Thus, "The woman saw the man with the telescope" is first parsed as "[The woman][saw][the man][with the telescope]", not as "[The woman][saw][the man with the telescope]". The sentence is then further checked against pragmatic, semantic or thematic biases. According to local attachment, incoming material "should be incorporated into the clause or phrase currently being processed" (Harley 2014, 296). In "Since Jay always jogs a mile this seems a short distance to him", [a mile] is incorporated into the dependent clause starting with *since*. The reading time would be longer for a "Since Jay always jogs, a mile seems a short distance for him" (296), which is not consistent with the inclusiveness preference. The choice between the two types of syntactic preference (simplicity/inclusiveness) is arbitrary in different languages.

Referential ambiguity, the fourth type, arises when it is unclear what is being referred to by a particular lexical item. It is based on what is commonly known in semantics as deixis. John Lyons defines deixis as "the location and identification of persons, objects, events, processes and activities being talked about, or referred to, in relation to the spatiotemporal context" (Lyons 1978, 637). Referential ambiguity is essentially based on person deixis, as it occurs when one lexical item has more than one potential referent. Sentences containing third person pronouns used anaphorically or cataphorically are very likely to display referential ambiguity. It is also particularly difficult to appoint reference correctly to third person pronouns, such as *he*, *she*, *they* or *it*. In "My mother wants to have the dog's tail operated on again, and if it doesn't heal this time, she'll have to be put away" (Rozakis 2003, 90), the antecedent of the pronoun *she* is ambiguous. It could refer to both *my mother* and *the dog*, though referring back anaphorically to a possessive noun that functions as a determiner for another noun is downright ungrammatical. Referential ambiguity, thus, is often the result of inattentive, careless use of language. The comic effects it produces are seldom the result of deliberate intentions. When the ambiguity does occur intentionally, the purpose is the exploitation of humorous resources put forward by language to give people the liberty of making endless assumptions as to which referent is meant by the speaker or writer of fiction and non-fiction.

Translation solutions for dealing with ambiguity

A popular claim in the literature – however tricky its accuracy - is that a great translation should not be dealt with on a word-for-word basis. It should be read, instead, like a target-language (henceforth TL) creation. Anyone who has ever tried to translate English wordplay into Romanian will know that this is no easy task. Far from building a thoretical straw man, my suggestion is that, despite the translators' English-language proficiency, cultural references and ambiguous items may well involve them in incessantly occuring explanatory notes and present obvious difficulties which do not fit neatly into any translation strategy. Ambiguity, without question, travels badly, and TL readers rarely react with a laugh.

To shed light on possible strategies for preserving the translational afterlife of *Alice's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (the 1993 edition published by Wordsworth Classics) and assess the way words are grafted into a new linguistic and cultural context that, in its turn, acquires additional meaning, one has to consider Dirk Delabastita's systematic classification of wordplay translation techniques. In *Translating Puns. Possibilities and Retraints*, he lists eight possible methods of rendering source-language (henceforth SL) puns into the TL: (1) the pun-to-pun method (the source-text[3] pun is virtually replaced by a different or similar target-language pun); (2) the pun-to-non-pun method (the pun is converted into a non-punning phrase to save at least one of the intended senses of the wordplay); (3) the pun-to-related-rhetorical device method (the pun is rendered by some wordplay-related rhetorical device such as repetition, alliteration, rhyme, irony and poetic metaphor); (4) the pun-to-zero-pun method (the pun is omitted altogether); (5) the pun ST = pun TT method (the translator reproduces the ST pun without actually translating it); (6) the non-pun-to-pun method (a pun is placed in a spot where the original text has no ambivalent item to make up for ambiguities and shades of meaning lost elsewhere); (7) the zero-to-pun method (new potentially ambiguous material is added to the TT, again, as a compensatory device); and, finally, (8) editorial techniques (which involve adding explanatory footnotes or endnotes to the main text) (1997, 149) .

The subsequent sections strive to demonstrate that wordplay has been marginalized and sometimes disqualified in language studies, specialists of language too often hovering or oscillating between deeming it purposeless or worthy of serious investigation. It has been stored away in categories such as poetic licence, speech pathology and the like. To shed light on the relative obscurity of a text is, according to Kathleen Davis, to attach "a signature" (1997, 39) to a

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[3] Henceforth, source-text (original version) will be abbreviated as ST, while target-text (translated version) will be abbreviated as TT.

particular language. Dealing with ambiguity in translation makes possible the encounter between two languages that challenge and confirm each other's identity. Wordplay and ambiguity, however, function as signature only when they are read with another language in mind. Only "a counter signature" attests the identity of the "original signature" (1997, 40). Languages cannot replicate one another to reproduce semantic, phonetic, formal and contextual aspects of the source; otherwise, there would be only one signature. Thus, the original text functions as a creditor to the target text (the debtor). The translator's leeway is very much restricted by the fluid, plural and associative character of lexical items. It is technically impossible to pin down and control multiple meanings when grappling with ambiguity as a translator downright hostile to polysemiotic cocktails. Many words that easily jump word class boundaries will fiercely spring to the eye or ear, not leaving a shadow of doubt as to their textual pertinence or intentional nature. Others will prove to be thorny issues for translators, as in the case of Carroll's wordplay, which can easily become a form of punishment (pun intended).

Textual challenges in the translation of Carroll's *Wonderland*

According to David Crystal in his *Carrolludicity*, Carroll's language play is his contribution to "the ludic function of language" (1998, 1). Bending and breaking the rules for humoristic purposes operates at all the levels of language in Carroll's fiction. The narrative framework of Carroll's *Wonderland* is centered upon a very smart and well-mannered child who repeatedly asks questions and is sore about the retorts coming from birds, animals, flowers, fabulous creatures, animate playing-cards and animate chess-pieces undergoing magical transformations of size and shape – the recipe is ready-made for a narrative of comic adventures. Yet the book is far from being merely a novel of comic adventures written exclusively for children. Side by side with the persistent claim of a children's book, a certain adult interest in Carroll has led to an increasing tendency to take the author very seriously, to demand more accurate and refined translations. The paradox, according to Peter Rickard, is that "[the author] is untranslatable", yet "everywhere he has been translated" (1975, 45). Thus, getting lost in the brilliance of imperfect transpositions can prove efficient for translators who become linguistically aware of subtle semantic features in their own language, unfamiliar to them until faced with the intricacies of intercultural communication.

It is obvious that there will be problems at every page when trying to render Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* into Romanian. Many of the problems have little to do with the author's whimsical use of language phenomena, concerning purely routine difficulties which would arise in any translational situation. English, in its striking peculiarity, allows Carroll to employ a rich load

of verbal wit and humorously exploit grammatical categories with their fuzzy edges and contextual shifts via lexical, morphological and semantic processes . This is why the most difficult part of translating Carroll is his wordplay. The translators will be lucky enough if they manage to preserve even a shadow of it, let alone the substance of ambiguity as a linguistic device. I will just mention at this point some commonplace difficulties that are likey to occur in any translation from English into Romanian, because this is not the place to rehearse the essential differences between the two language systems.

One such difficulty lies in the incongruity between English and Romanian insofar as the use of the 2nd person personal pronoun is concerned. In Modern English, the form of address "you" is universal in addressing either a single person or more people. Romanian uses, for this purpose, "tu" and "voi". In addition, Romanian also uses the more polite "dumneata" for the singular and "dumneavoastră" for both singular and plural due to a fragile web of social conventions. The translator has to decide, for example, how Alice, a child, is supposed to address the other characters in the book when she meets them. The use of singular personal pronouns as plural is driven by social purposes that decide the dichotomy between inferior versus superior, acquaintance versus stranger. In English, the Subject position must, in most cases[4], be filled by a formal constituent, be it a phrase or an entire clause, while in Romanian, the Subject is very often ommitted. Verb inflectional endings, however, show the difference between familiar and polite address, therefore the translator is faced with the task of deciding which form of address should be used by the characters.

The difference in assigning gender in the two languages creates a further difficulty. While English has no grammatical gender in the strict sense of the word, the compulsory and inescapable gender of Romanian nouns may generate translation problems when animals are endowed with [+human] semantic features. Likewise, English nouns and adjectives are not inflected for gender. Romanian, in contrast, as a highly analytical language, distinguishes between masculine, feminine and neuter gender. One has to take into account the case of the Caterpillar, who smokes a hookah and talks to Alice like a masculine don. The masculine attributes Carroll assigned to the Caterpillar stand in stark contrast to the Romanian *omidă*, which is a feminine noun. The Romanian translators of *Alice* have to resort to skillful contrivances to preserve the gender qualifications of Carroll's Caterpillar, referring to it as *domnul Omidă*.

Another comparatively minor translation hurdle is brought about by prescriptively bad grammar or non-standard language use. For example, the Griphon specializes in the double negative: "(…) they never executes nobody,

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[4] Nominal clauses patterning with a non-finite verb are much more condensed, for instance, usually occurring without an expressed subject. The reader must, therefore, recover left-out information by attending to other syntactic cues. Imperatives also occur without a subject.

you know" and "he hasn't got no sorrow, you know". Although a single semantic negation may be expressed by two negative grammatical elements in Romanian, Frida Papadache has chosen to ignore the Griphon's second remark: "nu-i mâhnită defel, dacă vrei să știi" (1976, 108), but she managed to maintain the first one: "de executat nu se execută nici o execuție, dacă vrei să știi" (108). By way of contrast, Antoaneta Ralian gives proper credit to both of them, and the translation goes: "[n]imeni nu e executat niciodată, știi?" and "nu are nici o suferință" (2007, 78).

Dreams, nightmares and awakenings are also transposable – there is surely much of it that can be translated into Romanian. Likewise, Romanian fairy-tales contain magical transformations and talking animals. The conflicting dialogues (a series of communication-attempts which more often than not fail to deliver their intended sense) and the characters themselves can also prove difficult to translate, in that they are essentially Carrollian features. The personification of cards and chess-pieces can also be rendered into Romanian. However, in transposing the characters into the Romanian context, unavoidable semantic loss occurs.

Lexical ambiguity

A type of ambiguity which is possible only in a speech context is that produced by homophones, words that sound the same but share a distinct form. Such items tend to deceive one's ear, but not one's eye, for they have different forms when represented in writing. In *Wonderland*, one can observe Carroll's use of homophonic ambiguity particularly well in several examples of admirable resourcefulness. One such example occurs when the Mouse is about to deliver to the public his personal history.

> "'Mine is a long and a sad tale!' said the Mouse, turning to Alice, and sighing.
> 'It *is* a long tail, certainly,' said Alice, looking down with wonder at the Mouse's tail; 'but why do you call it sad?'" (36)

The fragment faces translators with a pun based on the perfect homophony of the nouns *tale* and *tail*. Despite the fact that both English and Romanian are extremely rich in homophones and punning, it is most often improbable for a pun to coincide in two linguistic contexts in terms of morphology, syntax and semantics taken together. This instance of ambiguity is inevitably more difficult to render in the TL. The Mouse's preamble is indicated typographycally and memorably in the source-text in the shape of an ever diminishing tail, which humorously exploits graphology to produce amusing effects. Translators resort to different solutions in order to preserve the lexical ambiguity found in the

original at least partially. Translator A went for a non-punning translation that saved both senses of the wordplay:

> „- Mi-ați făgăduit că îmi spuneți povestea dumneavoastră [...]
> - E lungă și e tristă! Zise Șoarecele, încolăcindu-și coada spre Alisa și oftînd.
> - Lungă e într-adevăr – zise Alisa, măsurînd din ochi, cu mirare, coada Șoarecelui – dar de ce spuneți că e tristă?" (p.40)

The translator failed to preserve the original play on words into Romanian, but she managed, instead, to add explanatory information to the semantic load of the original passage, cleverly bridging the gap between *tale* (*poveste*) and *tail* (*coadă*). A back-translation[5] of the Romanian version reads: "It is long and sad! Said the Mouse, curling his tail towards Alice and sighing." She used Delabastita's second solution, that of rendering a pun by a non-punning translation that saved both senses of the wordplay.

Conversely, Translator B concocted a more daring reworking. Certainly, there was some loss of point, notably over *sad*, but there was much ingenuity for such a difficult passage:

> "- Povestea mea e lungă și tristă ca o corvoadă, a oftat Șoarecele.
> - E lungă ca o coadă, a răspuns Alice, privind cu uimire la coada Șoarecelui, dar de ce spui că e tristă?" (p.28)

The second translator also added some extra-text in the form of a simile, *ca o corvoadă* (*like a burden*), purposefully creating a similar ambiguous effect in the TL. Such a stylistic device provided freshness and emphasized the original intended meaning, reverberating Delabastita's third strategy (replacing the pun with some wordplay-related rhetorical device). Actually, Translator B managed to come up with two parallel structures based on rhyming similes, thus establishing a smooth and whimsical path between *poveste* and *coadă*.

It was difficult enough for Alice to understand the Mouse's words, but Carroll went on to say that it was because Alice was looking at the Mouse's tail and thinking about it that the Mouse's story itself seemed to pursue the bends and curves of his tail. Puzzled by the Mouse's calling his tail *sad*, Alice misunderstands the word *tale*, and it affects her view of his story: as he proceeds, he visualizes his tale as a winding story displayed in a tail-like fashion. Looked under the magnifying glass of humorous wordplay, neither translation is tenable, though both are equally necessary.

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[5] It is a procedure mainly used in the context of machine translation. Back-translation or literal retranslation is analogous to a reversed mathematical operation: a translated text is retranslated back into the ST to test its veracity.

In *The Lobster-Quadrille,* lexical ambiguity is triggered by the homophony between *porpoise* and *purpose.* The target text (TT) pun can replace the contrasting meanings of the ST by substituting new words belonging to distinct semantic fields. Translator B, thus, replaces the pun on *porpoises* to come up with another one on *delfini* (*dolphins*), using Delabastita's pun-to-target-laguage-pun method:

> " 'Of course not,' said the Mock Turtle: 'why, if a fish came to me, and told me he was going on a journey, I should say "With what porpoise?"'
> 'Don't you mean "purpose"?' said Alice." (102)

Translator A, however, chooses to render a solution whereby TT meanings belong to completely different semantic fields:

> "-Păi cum! Zise Falsa Broască Țestoasă. Dacă ar veni la mine un pește și mi-ar spune că pleacă în călătorie, întîi și întîi l-aș întreba: "Cu ce purcel?"
> -Poate vrei să zici: cu ce țel? stărui Alisa." (119)

Translator A turns to rhyme, while Translator B replicates the pun in the source text (ST) via a TT pun, providing *delfin* for *porpoise* (although the latter means *specie de mamifer cetaceu, asemănător cu delfinul*) and inserting, concomitently, its paronym, namely *destin* (*destiny*). The effect created by this pun – similar to the one generated by the ST – is a delight, showing real imagination and invention.

Categorial ambiguity

After the tail-shaped poem episode, the conversation between Alice and the Mouse brings forth another homophonic pun. After a moment, the Mouse snaps off precipitatingly while accusing Alice of being cloth-eared. To mollify him, she says:

> "'I beg your pardon,' said Alice very humbly: 'you had got to the fifth bend, I think?'
> 'I had *not*!' cried the Mouse, sharply and very angrily.
> 'A knot!' said Alice, always ready to make herself useful, and looking anxiously about her.
> 'Oh, do let me help to undo it!'" (37)

Alice's misunderstanding does not become apparent to the Mouse; as far as he can tell, she is on the receiving end of the message. Carroll treats the matter jestingly, even if it dwells on a communication failure running its course without either party ever becoming consciously aware of the misinterpretation.

Tempers flare and, subsequently, communication breaks down completely: from his point of view, Alice is uttering pure nonsense when she says 'let me help to undo it!'. This time, the homophonic pun is based on the categorial ambiguity of the common noun *knot* and the negative particle *not*. Homophony once again takes advantage of Alice's deceiving ear.

Translator A brings forth a very crafty strategy to preserve the pun into Romanian, giving the Romanian Alice her chance:

> "-Iertați-mă, răspunse Alisa foarte smerită. Ați ajuns la al cincilea cot, nu-i așa?
> -Ce cot! țipă Șoarecele mînios. Dacă n-asculți! Iar s-o-nnod?
> -Un nod? zise Alisa, privind îngrijorată spre codița Șoarecelui. Și cum era ea totdeauna gata să sară în ajutor, adăugă: Să vă ajut să-l deznodați; vă rog, arătați-mi unde e!" (42)

By adding some extra-text, the translator does depart a little from the ST, but the outcome reveals that she managed to create the same homophonic pun as the one in the original (the rare pun S.T= pun T.T. strategy), by creatively playing on the homophony of the contracted form of the verb *a înnoda* (*to knot*) and the noun *nod* (*knot*). By way of contrast, translator B's version lends itself to a less fortunate flash of inspiration:

> "-Te rog să mă scuzi, a răspuns Alice, umilă. Coada ți-a ajuns la cea de-a cincea buclă, nu-i așa?
> -Fals! a strigat Șoarecele cu asprime și mânie. Mi se pune un nod în gât.
> -Un nod! A sărit Alice, care era întotdeauna gata să-i ajute pe ceilalți. O, lasă-mă pe mine să ți-l dezleg." (30)

Translator B adopts the same solution – adding extra-text to the Romanian version to create a homophonic pun on the noun *nod* (*knot*) – in using a Romanian idiom (*a apărea / a ți se pune un nod în gât*) that bears little semantic association to the context of the ST (thus, using a pun-to-target-language-pun). Her version, in a literal transposition, would become 'Wrong! shouted the Mouse angrily and harshly. I have a lump in my throat.' As a result, translator A took a shortcut to the Romanian play on words.

The Mock Turtle's Story chapter is certainly the richest in ambiguity and unquestionably among the most challenging the translators. The repetition of the same word with a shift of meaning suddenly changes the semantic flow of the sentence:

> "'Of course it is', said the Duchess, who seemed ready to agree to everything that Alice said; 'there's a large mustard-mine near here. And the moral of that is – "The more there is of mine, the less there is of yours."'" (91)

In English, categorial ambiguity involves a word-class shift from noun to pronoun. The Romanian language system, however, provides translators with a similar homophonic double. The noun *mină* (*mine*) is used in the plural. The Romanian translator no longer resorts to any imaginative artifice, given that, fortunately and purely coincidentally, the same pun can be used to good advantage in the two languages (both translators make use of the fifth translation strategy proposed by Delabastita, the pun S.T. = pun T.T.):

A. "Sînt pe-aici, pe-aproape, niște mine mari de muștar. Și morala acestui lucru este: 'Cît e mai mult la mine, e mai puțin la tine!'" (103)
B. "... pe-aici, prin apropiere, sunt câteva mari mine de muștar. Și morala acestui lucru e: cu cât e mai mult la mine, cu atât e mai puțin la tine." (75)

The next instance of ambiguity is based on mere soundplay:

"'The master was an old Turtle – we used to call him Tortoise – '
'Why did you call him Tortoise, if he wasn't one?' asked Alice.
'We called him Tortoise because he taught us." (95)

Here, the sound association between *Tortoise* and *taught us* is highly unlikely to be grasped by any non-British reader, namely because it is a play on the typically British pronunciation of *tortoise*, where the [r] sound is silent. Such an example could also be deemed as cultural ambiguity, given its peculiar specificity. Both translator A and Translator B prove surprising sophistication and sensitivity to Carroll's linguistic insights in resourcefully rendering the intended import of the ST, simultaneously using language as a vehicle for play. Translator A's version resembles the source-text, where the fertile inventor of wordplay, Carroll, challenged the play on sounds to produce humorous effects:

"-Profesoara era o bătrînă Broască Țestoasă. Îi ziceam Privighetoarea.
-Dar de ce îi ziceați așa? Că doar nu era Privighetoare! întrebă Alisa.
-Îi ziceam Privighetoare, fiindcă ne era Supraveghetoare!" (109)

Romanian lacks a different noun that designates the same family of reptiles, thus the translator changes the name of the old Turtle to make it partially homophonous to a name that designates a person in charge of pupils: *privighetoare* (*nightingale*) and *supraveghetoare* (*superintendent*). Translator A cleverly manages to reformulate the initial soundplay to create amusing effects, using the pun-to-target-language-pun strategy. Here, Carroll illustrates the connotative function of names explicitly. Throughout the book, he involves proper names to denote individuals who are called by them. Translator B manages to be just as creative, if not more:

"-Profesorul nostru era un broscoi vârstnic – noi îi spuneam Carapace...
-De ce-i spuneați Carapace din moment ce nu avea carapace? a întrebat Alice.

> -Îi spuneam Carapace pentru că era o carapacitate şi ne învăţa o mulţime
> de lucruri..." (79)

As seen above, Translator B calls upon the same family of reptiles, choosing the name *Carapace* (translated as *Shell*) to refer to the old Turtle and using both the pun-to-non-pun method and the non-pun-to-pun one). To compensate for the inherent loss of transferential meaning the *Tortoise* and *taught us* pair entails, Translator B creates a portmanteau word, a blend between *carapace* (*shell*) and *capacitate* (*competence*, *capability*).

Syntactic ambiguity

Syntactic ambiguity delivering humorous effects to readers is not found to a great extent in Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, but there are, of course, some challenging examples which generate clever wordplay and surprising incongruities, as shown in the following passage,:

> "'But they were *in* the well,' Alice said to the Dormouse, not choosing to notice this last remark.
> 'Of course they were,' said the Dormouse; '– well in.'" (77)

The word *well* is in the first occurrence a noun and in the second an adverb. The syntactic function of the first is Object of the preposition "in", while the syntactic function of the second is that of an Adverbial. Both have a syntactic function: the first (realized by a preposition) at phrase level , the second (realized by a prepositional adverb) at clause level. The meaning corresponding to the first utterance is *deep into the well*, while that corresponding to the second is *very deep inside*.

Translator A creatively substitutes the wordplay with a paronymic pair, to compensate for the impossibility to create another syntactic ambiguity with the help of the same lexical item. The quintessential feature of the paronymic pair is the sound-play that the two structures produce (the pun-to-target-language-pun method):

> "-Da' n-ai spus că erau înăuntru, în fîntînă?
> […]
> -Am spus că erau în fîntîna de *melasă* – şi, către ceilalţi: Vedeţi, nu mă *lasă*!"
> (87)

Translator B, on the other hand, provides an explanatory translation, offering redundant information (*interior-interiorizate*) that may sound a little forced (the pun-to-non-pun method):

"-Dar ele erau înăuntru, *în* fântână, a observat Alice, fără să țină seama de ultima remarcă a Hârciogului.
-Bineînțeles că erau în interior – interiorizate." (64)

Referential ambiguity

One comes across an interesting instance of referential ambiguity in *Wonderland* when the Mouse is reciting his history (the *driest* thing he knows) to dry out the group of animals after they swim in the pool of tears:

"'I proceed. "Edwin and Morcar, the earls of Mercia and Northumbria, declared for him: and even Stigand, the patriotic archbishop of Canterbury, found it advisable—"'
'Found *what*?' said the Duck.
'Found *it*,' the Mouse replied rather crossly: 'of course you know what "it" means.'
'I know what "it" means well enough, when *I* find a thing,' said the Duck: 'it's generally a frog or a worm. The question is, what did the archbishop find?'" (p.32)

Normally, in such dialogues, the two actors involved comprehend one another. These linguistic mechanisms (lexical, categorial, syntactic and so on), in fact, lead the exchanges to the lack of communication. The dummy pronoun *it* is merely a formal element needed to produce a grammatical sentence in a Subject-Verbal-Direct Object-Object Complement structural pattern. The Duck fails to notice that *found it advisable* is simply the elliptical form of *found* and its object, the relative clause *[that] it [was] advisable*. As a result, he mistakenly considers *it* in its referential sense (as referring to some object left unspecified) and demands that he discover its intended meaning. *It* may be interpreted as referring cataphorically to the non-finite clause *to go with Edgar Atheling*, but it can also be interpreted as an anaphoric pronoun, referring back to the antecedent *declared for him*. The double valence (anaphoric and cataphoric) of the pronoun *it* makes the passage one of the most resourceful examples of equivocal meaning in the entire book. The Mouse knows exactly that *it* is a pronoun referring to the non-finite phrase *to go with Edgar Atheling* functioning as extraposed object. The informational motivation for the pronoun *it* anticipating a full-fledged verb phrase functioning as notional object is end-weight: a quite long and complex string of words (*to go with Edgar Atheling*) is placed in a sentence-final position to make the overall construction easier to process, with sentence elements placed in the order given to new. In fact, it is common practice to move focal constituents (subjects, objects) towards the end of sentences.

One must not forget that the *Alice* books are governed by initiation into idiosyncratic grammatical rules and linguistic processes manipulated by the creatures living in Wonderland which no translator could create from scratch. It is no wonder, then, that the Mouse acts as if the Duck knew what he was about to say, although the phrase had not been uttered yet. The ambiguity of *it* provides Carroll's readers with one of the most enchanting samples of nonsense in *Wonderland*. In fact, in Carroll's *Wonderland*, pronouns acquire a ludic function and become invested with many roles established by grammatical categories such as gender, number and case. Carroll, consciously aware of this property of pronouns to be equivocal, enables one clause variant to be selected over another.

Difficulties arise when translators do their utmost to assert the ambivalent nature of pronouns in Romanian, which is not cut out for exploiting such linguistic features. Nonetheless, both translators resort to creative solutions to render Carroll's point, instead of abandoning the referential ambiguity altogether.

> A. Edwin şi Morcar, conţii provinciilor Mercia şi Normandia, se declarară de partea lui; patriotul arhiepiscop de Cantebury găsi de cuviinţă..."
>
> - *Ce* zici că găsi?" întrerupse Raţa.
> - Găsi de cuviinţă – răspunse Şoarecele cam supărat. Doar ştiţi cu toţii ce înseamnă 'a găsi de cuviinţă'.
> - Eu ştiu ce înseamnă a g*ăsi*. Cînd găsesc *eu* ceva – zise Raţa – înseamnă de obicei o broască sau o rîmă. Da, e vorba, arhiepiscopul ce-a găsit? (36)
>
> B. - [...] Edwin şi Morcar, conţii de Mercia şi Northumberland, s-au declarat de partea lui, până şi Stigand, patriotul Arhiepiscop de Cantebury, a găsit de cuviinţă...
> - *Ce* a găsit? a întrebat raţa.
> - A găsit, a repezit-o Şoarecele enervat, fără îndoială, cunoşti acest cuvânt. Ştiu foarte bine ce înseamnă când găsesc *eu* ceva, a replicat raţa; în general găsesc o broscuţă sau o râmă. Întrebarea este, însă, ce a găsit Arhiepiscopul? (26)

The translation strategy they adopt is based on the substitution of the original pun (derived from the referential ambiguity of the pronoun *it*) by an idiomatic pun-to-target-language-pun constructiom, playing with a two-fold reading of the verb *a găsi* (*to find*): the idiomatic interpretation, as part of the phrase *a găsi de cuviinţă* (*to think it right or fit*), but also the literal interpretation of *find*. The Romanian versions seem to have felicitously duplicated the ludic dimension of the rules governing regular conversational discourse. The passage extracted is a perfect illustration of pragmatic play (one of the levels encompassed by Carroll's language play) which goes beyond the charm of classical word games.

Conclusions

The analysis of the two Romanian versions of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* shows that the translation of ambiguous lexical items is not impossible. Every language has a high degree of idiomacy that is only accessible to recognition. One should not lose sight, however, of the valuable role that ambiguity has in stimulating the ludic function of any language (other than English). Dealing with such a slippery phenomenon makes possible the encounter between English and Romanian, two languages that must constantly confirm each other's identity. The English user embarking on the translation of wordplay from English into Romanian must, therefore, possess an active and wide-ranging mind, as well as extraordinary skill and knowledge of both languages in order to puzzle Romanian readers of *Alice* with intratextual linguistic games exploiting the potential of Romanian phonology, grammar and lexis as a basis for humor.

I have tried to select, from the numerous Carrollian deviations from standard usage, the most relevant examples of linguistic ambiguity which Frida Papadache, in *Peripețiile Alisei în Țara Minunilor* (1976), and Antoaneta Ralian, in *Alice în Țara Minunilor* (2007), either tackled (to hold fast to the humor, unexpected meanings and paradoxical wisdom of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*) or evaded altogether. The global conclusion I could draw after having reviewed the two translated versions is that both can be described metaphorically by the image of the Romanian reader, who settles – albeit not deliberately – for a piece of the "cake" rather than for the whole one. No other full-scale translated version of *Alice*, however, has managed to transpose analogous phonological, grammatical and lexical wordplay games into the target language, since preserving the delicious charm of Carroll's linguistically-derived ambiguity whole is virtually impossible. Some, however, have managed to capture the spirit of the English original.

More concretely, I have confirmed my hypothesis that ambiguity derived from homophony is a translation challenge even for experienced translators. Even skillful ones fail to attain the same effect in the target-language. Most of the examples I have analyzed in my paper can be considered untranslatable (defined as not capable of being put into another form, style or language) but, as I have shown, seasoned translators do find appropriate solutions that at least achieve an effective foreignization of wordplay in the target-text in order to cut across linguistic and cultural differences.

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