

A SYSTEMIC INTERPRETATION OF J. K. ROWLING'S "HARRY POTTER" AND STEPHENIE MEYER'S "TWILIGHT"

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When rendering a particular text from the source language into the target language, the translator should take into consideration the multi-layered structure of the language. Barbara M. H. Strang discusses modern English structure referring to "language as an articulated system of signs" (1968: 6). On the other hand, Ferdinand de Saussure defines *semiology* as "a science that studies the life of signs within society" (Matthews 2003: 135) considering that linguistics is only a part of the general science of semiology.

A system is understood in terms of its units and their combinatory relationships. According to the stratification principle (Hjelmslev 1967), the linguistic levels are hierarchically organized, that is a unit of a certain level is made up of one or more units of the inferior level. Consequently, there are many more units at a superior level than at an inferior one. Stratification creates the following linguistic levels: a) the level of the distinctive features; b) the level of the phoneme and of the semanteme; c) the morpheme, the word and the enunciation levels (Bidu-Vrăncianu et. all 1997: 476).

Since distinctive features represent the irreducible components of a linguistic unit, they could be easily identified by means of componential analysis (Coșeriu 1973; Hjelmslev 1967; Lyons 1995). The term is usually used in phonology with reference to particular articulatory or acoustic characteristics of sounds. Distinctive features coexist in combinations called *phonemes* from the point of view of expression or form and *semantemes* from the perspective of content. What the definitions of the phoneme have in common is that it is a minimal invariable linguistic unit of the phonetic system of a language: "a generalized conception of a speech-sound belonging to a particular language" (Darbyshire 1971: 66); "the idealization that represents each area of distinctive sound" (Bolinger 1975: 36); "sound that is used to distinguish the meanings of words" (Katamba 1994: 14). The branch of linguistics which studies the sound system of a language is called phonetics. A more recent branch of linguistics is phonology, also referred to as *phonemics*, *phonematics* or *functional phonetics*. According to Tatiana Makarenko, its object of study is "the social function of different sound phenomena by which is understood a meaning-differentiating function of sounds, stress, intonation and juncture (a transition from one speech sound to the next)" (1998: 10). The other units, the semantemes, comprise both lexical and grammatical features.

At the next level, the word *morpheme* is generally acknowledged as the minimal linguistic unit endowed with meaning. Thus, the term designates: "those segments into which utterances can be divided in order to display the structure of the utterances and through that the grammatical structure of the language" (Darbyshire 1971: 53); "minimal carriers of meaning" (Bolinger 1975: 84); "the smallest unit that has meaning or serves a grammatical function in a language" (Katamba 1994: 14). Morphology studies the form of

morphemes, whereas semantics focuses upon their content. More morphemes make up a superior unit, the *word*, which is traditionally dealt with by lexicology.

Lexis is a level of linguistic organization that immediately attracts attention mainly due to diverse and rapidly changing material and it needs thorough investigation. The *utterance*, *enunciation* or *statement* is positioned above the word, being defined as “any stretch of talk, by one person, before and after which there is silence on the part of that person” (Harris 1951: 24). An utterance is the result of the meaning and the internal organization of its components, as well as of the linguistic and extralinguistic context. Barbara M. H. Strang differentiates between *utterance* and *sentence*, describing the latter as “a linguistic unit that has internal but no external grammatical relations” (1968: 71).

A professional translator should have a wide perspective upon the organization of the language as a system and be constantly aware of all the levels mentioned above. The present study highlights the importance of systemic interpretation in the translation process of two famous novels dedicated to adolescents, J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (1997) and Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* (2005). They are both the first volumes of some longer series (*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* – 1998, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* – 1999, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* – 2000, *Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix* – 2003, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* – 2005, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* – 2007 versus *New Moon* – 2006, *Eclipse* – 2007 and *Breaking Dawn* – 2008) which brought world-wide recognition to their authors. At a time when children were thought to be abandoning books for computers and television, these two novels proved that teenagers could still be attracted to reading, even become incredible fans knowing lines and characters by heart. Having acquired such a fame, they were sold in millions of copies all over the world and the translators’ job was to promptly and professionally find those equivalents that were as close as possible to the original text.

J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (1997) as well as Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* (2005) have out-of-the-ordinary themes which require a highly symbolic language which, nevertheless, preserves its simplicity and beauty. Symbolism, light humour, irony and sarcasm form an interesting blending in a novel about the magical world of a little sorcerer as well as in a novel about love at first sight between a young girl and a vampire. Out of all the levels which make up the system of a language, the two novels mentioned above will be analyzed with respect to the phonetic, phonological, lexical and stylistic levels since I consider them relevant for the creation of unique fictional worlds.

At the phonetic and phonological level, an interesting issue to be discussed in both J. K. Rowling’s novel and Stephenie Meyer’s novel is that of the importance of intonation. Leon Levițchi refers to intonation as representing the variations of pitch according to the way the vocal cords vibrate (2000: 53). In his opinion, intonation can be: equal (when pitch is preserved on the same musical note), rising (when it raises to a higher note) and falling (when it decreases to a lower note). In general, intonation may perform the following functions: accentual (expressed by the accent component of intonation), attitudinal (expressing the emotion or attitude of the speaker), grammatical (distinguishing between various types of sentences, such as questions, statements, exclamations) and discursive (focusing the listener’s attention on aspects of the message that are most important). As a matter of fact, the functions of intonation are clearly differentiated only for didactic purposes since in real speech or writing intonation may acquire multiple functions at the same time.

In written texts, intonation has to be deduced by means of the linguistic context. For example, when Ron Weasley is first introduced to Harry Potter, he uses intonation to express his uncertainty and bewilderment that he might actually get to know the one he has heard so much about: “‘Are you really Harry Potter?’ Ron blurted out.” (Rowling 1997: 64) – “Chiar ești Harry Potter? întrebă Ron, parcă nevenindu-i să creadă.” (Rowling 2006: 76). The accent

falls on the most prominent word in the utterance, the adverb *really* which occurs in front position in Romanian due to emphatic reasons. Ron's intonation combines both accentual and attitudinal functions. In *Twilight*, Jessica, Isabella's bugging friend, wants to know everything about her relationship with Edward. The tirade of questions she addresses Isabella contains words that are accentuated through italicization: "Is that *possible*?" "I mean, do you *really* like him? she urged."; "How *much* do you like him?" (Meyer 2005: 105) – "E *posibil* așa ceva?" "Vreau să spun, îți place *pe bune* de el? mă îndemnă ea."; "Cât de *mult* îți place de el?" (Meyer 2008: 165) The italicized words carry the accent and express Jessica's interest, incredulity or surprise.

At the lexical level, a major type of relationship which should be properly understood and interpreted by any professional translator is that of synonymy. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* displays a wide range of ideographic synonymic couplets, as in the case of *strange – mysterious, fear – horror, shout – scream*: "They were the last people you'd expect to be involved in anything *strange* or *mysterious*, because they just didn't hold with such nonsense" (Rowling 1997: 1) – "Erau ultimii oameni de la care te-ai fi așteptat să fie amestecați în ceva *straniu* sau *misterios*, fiindcă, pur și simplu, nu credeau în astfel de aiureli!" (Rowling 2006: 5); "Mr. Dursley stopped dead. *Fear* flooded him" (1997: 3) – "Domnul Dursley încremeni locului. Îl năpădi *groaza*" (2006: 7), "And to Harry's *horror*, a voice answered, and the voice seemed to come from Quirrell himself" (1997: 189) – "Și, spre *groaza* lui Harry, o voce care părea să vină din trupul lui Quirrel, îi răspunse" (2006: 223); "'LIAR!' Harry *shouted* suddenly" (1997: 190) – "Mincinosule! *izbucni* Harry" (2006: 225), "Harry sprang toward the flame door, but Voldemort *screamed* 'SEIZE HIM!' and the next second, Harry felt Quirrell's hand close on his wrist" (1997: 191) – "Harry o zbughi spre ușa în flăcări, dar vocea *țipă* înfiorător: Pune mâna pe el! În clipa următoare, mâna lui Quirrel îi strângea încheietura." (2006: 225)

In *Twilight*, Stephenie Meyer uses synonymic series, such as *to look – to peek – to gawk – to watch – to see – to glare – to gaze – to stare – to glance*. In this synonymic series, the verb *to look* is the dominant term, whereas all the other synonyms preserve its main meaning, but differ conceptually acquiring slightly different meanings. For example, the verb *to peek* is used with the meaning of "to look quickly at something, especially something that you are not supposed to see" (Longman 2001: 1043): "Charley *peeked* sideways at me with a hopeful expression." (Meyer 2005: 6). In the Romanian version of the novel, Laura Frunză translated this verb by means of the Romanian phrase "a se uita cu colțul ochiului": "Charlie *se uită* către mine *cu colțul ochiului* având o expresie plină de speranță pe față." (Meyer 2008: 16) I consider that a much more appropriate translation of the verb *to peek* would be the one registered in *Dicționar englez-român*: "a privi iscoditor." (2004: 690)

Another interesting synonym of *to look* is the verb *to gawk* used by Isabella Swan to talk about the way her literature teacher, Mr. Mason, looked at her: "He *gawked* at me when he saw my name – not an encouraging response – and of course I flushed tomato red" (2005: 9) – "A *căscat gura* la mine când mi-a văzut numele – o reacție nu prea încurajatoare – bineînțeles, mi-au luat obrazii foc." (2008: 22) The translator manages to preserve the meaning of the English verb: "to look at something for a long time, in a way that looks stupid." (Longman 2001: 586) Out of more translation variants "a se holba, a se zgâi; a căsca gura", she chose a Romanian phrase with expressive connotations. When Isabella Swan sees Edward Cullen and his family for the first time, she is so fascinated by the way they look, that she says: "I *stared* because their faces, so similar, were all devastatingly, inhumanly beautiful" (2005: 11) – "Mă *holbam* pentru că fețele lor, atât de diferite de ale noastre, atât de asemănătoare între ele, erau devastator și inuman de frumoase." (2008: 25) The meaning of the verb *to stare*, "to look at something or someone for a long time without moving your eyes" (2001: 1405) is best rendered into Romanian by means of the following verbs and

phrases: “a se uita fix, a se zgâi, a se holba (la).” (2004: 894) *Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary* establishes the common meaning as well as the differences among the verbs *to look*, *to watch* and *to see*. They all imply being aware of things around one by perceiving them through the eyes: “*To watch* is to be a spectator, to look on or observe or to fix the attention upon during passage of time; *to look* is to direct the gaze with intention of seeing, to use the eye-sight with intention; *to see* is to perceive with the eyes, to obtain a visual impression, with or without fixing the attention” (1989: 1611). In Stephenie Meyer’s novel, both the verb *to look* and the verb *to watch* appear in the same paragraph illustrating the lexical differences between them and at the same time suggesting the Cullens’ indifferent attitude towards everybody else in the cafeteria and Isabella’s growing interest: “They were all *looking* away – away from each other, away from the other students, away from anything in particular as far as I could tell. As I *watched*, the small girl rose with her tray – unopened soda, unbitten apple – and walked away with a quick, graceful lope that belonged on a runway. I *watched*, amazed at her lithe dancer’s step [...]” (2005: 11)

The Romanian translator rightfully resorts to the verb *a privi* for the English verb *to watch* and to the verb *a se uita* as an equivalent for the English verb *to look*, repeating it three times in order to emphasize the unusual lack of interest of the Cullen boys and girls: “Toți *se uitau* în altă parte – *nu se priveau*, *nu se uitau* la ceilalți elevi, *nu se uitau* la nimic în special din câte mi-am putut da seama. În timp ce îi *priveam*, fata cea scundă s-a ridicat cu tava cu mâncare – cu sucule nedeșăcut și mărul neînceput – și s-a îndepărtat cu un mers rapid și grațios ca al unui manechin pe podium. *Am privit-o*, uimită de pasul ei de dansatoare [...]” (2008: 25) As for the verb *to see*, it is used by Isabella to describe what she saw when she was saved from death by Edward’s providential intervention: “I *saw* several things simultaneously” (2005: 28) – “*Am văzut* mai multe lucruri în același timp.” (2008: 51)

As Isabella gets more and more interested in Edward Cullen, she cannot restrain herself to look at him, hoping that nobody else will observe her furtive looks: “I *glanced* sideways at the beautiful boy, who was looking at his tray now, picking a bagel to pieces with long, pale fingers” (2005: 12) – “*M-am uitat cu coada ochiului* la frumosul băiat, care își *privea* acum tava, fărâmițând un covrig cu degete lungi și palide.” (2008: 26) In English, the verb *to glance* means “to quickly look at someone or something once” (Longman 2001: 600), whereas perhaps the best Romanian equivalent would be “a arunca o privire la.” (DER 2004: 413)

When Edward realizes that he cannot escape the fascination Isabella exerts upon him, he desperately wants to do something to change things: “But Edward Cullen’s back stiffened, and he turned slowly to *glare* at me – his face was absurdly beautiful – with piercing, hate-filled eyes” (2005: 15) – “Dar spatele lui Edward Cullen s-a înțepenit și el s-a întors încet *să se uite urât* la mine – cu fața lui absurd de frumoasă – cu ochii pătrunzători, plini de ură.” (2008: 31) In order to grasp the meaning of the verb *to glare*, “to look angrily at someone for a long time” (Longman 2001: 600), we have to pay attention to context since DER provides the following Romanian equivalents: “a se uita sever și fix la; a exprima (ură, sfidare) cu privirea.” (2004: 413) As time passes by, Isabella and Edward fall in love, the latter not understanding what happens to him: “But instead he continued *to gaze* with probing intensity into my eyes.” (2005: 37) – “Dar în loc să facă asta, continuă *să se uite* cu o intensitate cercetătoare în ochii mei.” (2008: 66) Isabella does not use the verb *to gaze* (“to look at someone or something for a long time, giving it all your attention often without realizing you are doing so” (Longman 2001: 586) accidentally; she chooses to use it in order to highlight the impact Edward’s scrutinizing look has upon her. Perhaps, the translator would have had to accentuate meaning replacing the too neutral verb *a se uita* with one of the Romanian phrases “a privi fix; a privi uimit; a se uita țință.” (DER 2004: 400)

The conclusion is that the Romanian translator would rather use a phrase to translate an English verb. This may happen simply because she considers that the Romanian phrases she makes use of have the same lexical and expressive connotations as the English verbs. We agree with the fact that "English is particularly rich in synonyms because it is a hybrid language. It has acquired its elements, phonological, grammatical and lexical, not from a single source but from several" (Darbyshire 1967: 158), but this does not mean that Romanian is not rich in synonyms too.

In point of style, we have identified a number of features which distinguish J.K. Rowling's style from that of Stephenie Meyer and of other authors whose works are dedicated to children and adolescents. The use of figures of speech and the creation of a world of symbols is what make the two novels unique, each of them in its own way. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines a figure of speech as "an expression that departs from the accepted literal sense or from the normal order of words, or in which an emphasis is produced by patterns of sound." (Baldick 1991: 83)

The third person narrator in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* sees the world of magic and the characters that populate it through the eyes of the inexperienced Harry Potter who is easily fascinated by everything around him. For example, when he meets Hagrid for the first time, he is impressed by his overwhelming appearance, therefore he uses different epithets to describe him: "A giant of a man was standing in the doorway. His face was almost completely *hidden* by a *long, shaggy* mane of hair and a *wild, tangled* beard, but you could make out his eyes, glinting like *black* beetles under all the hair" (Rowling 1997: 30) – "În prag stătea un munte de om. Fața îi era aproape complet *acoperită* de pletele *zbârlite* și *țepoase* și de barba *încâlcită*. Doar ochii i se vedeau din toată clăia aceea de păr, strălucind în întuneric" (Rowling 2006: 39).

Stephenie Meyer's novel abounds in epithets, metaphors and similes used by the protagonist, Isabella Swan, when she describes a character, a place or a feeling she has. For example, she uses metaphoric epithets to describe Phoenix, the city in Arizona she is forced to leave to go live with her father: "I loved the *vigorous, sprawling* city" (Meyer 2005: 4) – "Iubeam acel oraș *mare și plin de viață*." (Meyer 2008: 13) She resorts to epithets again when she describes her mother or the Cullens: "How could I leave my *loving, erratic, harebrained* mother to fend for herself?" (2005: 4) – "Cum puteam s-o las pe mama mea *iubitoare, amețită* și cam *prostuță* să se descurce singură?" (2008: 13) or "They didn't look anything alike. Of the three boys, one was *big – muscled* like a *serious* weight lifter, with *dark, curly* hair. Another was taller, *leaner*, but still *muscular*, and *honey blond*. The last was *lanky*, less *bulky*, with *untidy, bronze-colored* hair" (2005: 11) – "Nu semănau deloc între ei. Dintre cei trei băieți, unul era *solid, musculos* ca un halterofil de categorie grea, cu păr *negru și creț*. Altul era mai *înalt, mai slab*, dar tot *musculos*, cu părul *de culoarea mierii de albine*. Ultimul dintre ei era *înalt și subțire, nu prea voinic*, cu păr *castaniu, dezordonat*." (2008: 24)

Moreover, Isabella makes use of metaphors and similes to symbolically portray the strange atmosphere in Forks: "You could never see the sky here; it was *like a cage*" (2005: 8) – "Aici nu puteai vedea nicodată cerul; erai *ca într-o cușcă*" (2008: 19); "Forks was literally *my personal hell on earth*" (2005: 15) – "Forks era *iadul meu pe pământ, la propriu*" (2008: 30); "It seemed like a heaven, already the closest thing to home I had in this *damp green hole*" (2005: 15) – "Mi se părea ca un refugiu, deja cel mai familiar lucru în *gaura asta de lume umedă și verde*." (2008: 31)

To conclude, all linguistic levels are in a close relationship and interpenetrate contributing to the creation of a fictional world. A systemic interpretation of texts could certainly be considered a proper way of studying the inner mechanisms of the respective texts, allowing us to decipher the multitude of minute details and structures that make up the whole and ensure the beauty and success of the author and his work.

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