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## THE PARATEXT OF RELOCATION NARRATIVES ACROSS LANGUAGES

### Abstract

When applying G. Genette's transtextuality theory to the reception of the translation of relocation narratives it becomes readily apparent that the latter can be highly prompted by the treatment of the paratextual elements across the languages concerned by the act of translation. The overarching aim of this paper is to examine how a salient part of the authorial peritext, composed of the title and the subtitle, and an equally important part of the public epitext, namely the blurb(s) on the sites of the publishing houses or on the book-selling sites promoting the books in question, are meant to contribute to the advertising of this travel literature subgenre in both the narrator's mother tongue and culture amidst which he grew up and shaped his identity and in the foreign language of his host culture in which he chose to immerse himself, as well as in other foreign languages.

Keywords: paratext, peritext, epitext, relocation narratives, translation

### Introduction

In 1979, in his *Introduction à l'architexte*, published by Seuil, Gérard Genette approaches the notion of *transtextuality*, defining it as "textual transcendence", that is "everything that brings it [the text] into relation (manifest or hidden) with other texts" (Genette, 1992: 81). He then mentions several branches of transtextuality, namely intertextuality, metatextuality, paratextuality, and architextuality. In 1982, in *Palimpsestes: La littérature au second degré*, the literary theorist investigates transtextuality further, reducing its definition to "all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts." (Genette, 1997: 81). This time he identifies five categories of transtextual relationships, adding hypertextuality to the above-mentioned components. As for the particular relation that interests us here, paratextuality, it ranks second in this enumeration, being defined as "a less explicit and more distant relationship that binds the text properly speaking, taken within the totality of the literary work, to what can be called its paratext: a title, a subtitle, intertitles; prefaces, postfaces, notices, forewords, etc; marginal, infrapaginal, terminal notes; epigraphs; illustrations; blurbs, book covers, dust jackets, and many other kinds of secondary signals, whether allographic or autographic" (Genette, 1997: 3).

In 1987, in his work *Seuils*, which was translated into English in 1997 by Jane E. Lewin as *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Genette focuses his research on the relationship established between the literary text and the elements that could be seen as its threshold, grouped under the name of paratext and categorized as pertaining either to the text's peritext or epitext, arguing once more that the literary work does not exist "in its naked state, without the reinforcement and company of a certain number of productions, themselves verbal or not, like an author's name, a title, a preface,

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illustrations.” (Genette, 1991: 261). The title, the subtitle and the blurb which will interest us here play their role in presenting the text to the public, that is making it present and assuring “its presence in the world, its “reception” and its “consumption” (Genette, 1991: 261); hence the weight borne by these two components of the paratext (viewed as a threshold allowing entrance to a new universe) in the announcement to the world that a new book exists for the readership to peruse. Whilst oriented towards the content of the text, the title, the subtitle and the blurb are also directed outwards, holding the function of persuading the public to become part of its readership. Philippe Lejeune goes as far as to say that the elements composing “the fringe of the printed text” actually control “the whole reading” (Lejeune, 1975: 45). According to the “positioning” of the paratextual elements, either “in the space of the same volume as the text” (as is the case of the title), or “at a more respectful (or more prudent) distance [...] situated, at least originally, outside the book” (as is the case of the blurbs on book sites), we speak about either the peritext or the epitext of a book.

The dual nature of the paratext (oriented both towards the text of the book itself and towards the readership desired to become engrossed in it) is also specific to the particular type of travel writing that makes the object of our analysis, that is the *relocation narrative*. By their nature of “home-abroad books” (George & Sattin, 2002: IX), the stories told “by travellers who [...] decided to stay put in foreign locales” (Mastellotto, 2013: 4), who thus “committed themselves to a place, another place, any place that wasn’t their own but that had become home” (George & Sattin, 2002: VII-VIII) imply the meeting of two cultures and speak about place-attachment in a lifestyle-motivated migration. As a subgenre of the travel memoir, this type of literature is produced by transnational writers. These are writers who have made the choice to move abroad where they settle down, changing country and language in search of a certain lifestyle and who, “for whatever reason”, to paraphrase Silvia Ross (Ross, 2010: 3), feel “compelled to engage textually with the milieu” that had fascinated them in affable accounts of their everyday life written in a humorous tone. The mundane experiences gone through in the newly-found culture will actually be filtered through the reference points the writers have gained in their native culture, constantly offering glimpses of two universes viewed either in opposition or alike. The transnational writer thus assumes a double status, of outsider and insider in relation to the culture he will be reflecting on as “not quite a local but more than a tourist” (Mastellotto, 2013: 21).

### Translating the Peritext of Relocation Narratives

Inherent to the nature of the particular component of the peritext that is called *title* is to enable the entire content of a book to be designated by a mere word or phrase. Traditionally this word or phrase is meant, in its conciseness, to disclose the topic of the book; yet there are times when the title is voluntarily anything but transparent to the content, a cryptic element waiting to be deciphered following the reading of the book. The work of the contemporary British writer Michael Sadler, an academic dividing his life between Paris and the Touraine, enters the former category of titles, where this part of the peritext is highly indicative of the essence of the text. Pertaining to the body of writing which in bookshops, libraries and on book-selling sites is usually grouped under the rubric of travel literature, and which, for accuracy reasons, could be called relocation literature as this “is not the literature of movement but rather the literature of staying put – of setting down roots in foreign soil.” (George & Sattin, 2002: VII-VIII), the names of Sadler’s books are an intimation of constant parallels that will be drawn between a wide array of ways of doing things in two European countries. Drawing on his experience as a foreign academic living either in the French capital or in a traditional French province, Sadler has published a trilogy which could be called “the Englishman series” telling his adventures in his host country (which he first wrote and published in French): *An Englishman in Paris: L’éducation continentale* (2002), *An Englishman à la Campagne: Life in Deepest France* (2004), *An Englishman Amoureux: Love in Deepest France* (2007). It can be easily noticed, at a glance, that all these titles refer the reader both to the English and the French cultures, thus bearing a highly promotional value on the bookshop shelves since from the outset they conjure up ideas of travelling, of being a tourist, of getting acquainted with historical and architectural landmarks and of experiencing new cultural identities. The twofold cultural reference determined by national borders and different mother tongues is achieved in several ways. If in each case the English culture is made

present by means of the ethnonym *Englishman* that identifies the main character and narrator producing the travel memoir in question, the French culture is alluded to by the means of toponyms (Paris or outright the name of the country, France) whose effect will be prolonged by code-switching instances: written in English, these relocation narratives are given either titles or subtitles containing French words and phrases.

The interplay of English and French in the bilingual ensemble formed by the title and subtitle of the book published in 2002, *An Englishman in Paris: L'éducation continentale*, creates an intertextual network. It internationalizes the author's cultural journey of accommodation to the foreign soil by bringing together three locales: the United States of America, the British Isles and France, as the title echoes the Oscar-winning musical romance directed by Vincente Minnelli in 1951, *An American in Paris* and a famous song by British musician Sting, *An Englishman in New York*, whilst the subtitle, recalling Gustave Flaubert's novel written in 1869, *L'éducation sentimentale*, "situates the reader plainly in the French literary scene while evoking the insular position setting England apart from the rest of the European continent it belongs to. The British Isles versus continental France, both pertaining to the same continent, anticipate two views upon the world which will be finally reunited thanks to the intercultural competence professed by the narrator" (Moroşan, 2014: 540).

If in the case of the first cited book, the interlinguistic interaction is achieved at the level of the alternation title-subtitle, in the peritexts of the next two books the code-switching operates within the very titles: *An Englishman à la Campagne*, *An Englishman Amoureux*. In line with their common role, the subtitles have an explanatory nature, providing clarifications on the meaning of the French insertions in the English noun phrases: *Life in Deepest France*, *Love in Deepest France*. The symmetry in the noun phrases making up the subtitles of the two books published three years apart, as well as the alliteration in the overarching couple *life/love* advocate their integration in a series, inviting the public to read all of them and to consider their messages at a larger scale. Once more, the peritextual choices bear promotional value. The subtitles rely on an initial translation by means of a calque of a French phrase, namely *La France profonde* [the Deep France] that stands as a cultural reference to the profoundly French aspects of life specific to provincial towns and rural agricultural culture seen as authentic, far away from the Parisian life and its élite. If the phrase "Deep France" now exists in English, having the corollary "Deep England", Sadler pushes the limits of its meaning, choosing to reinforce it by abandoning the calque and resorting to a semi-transposition, since he does not change the word class in translation, but uses a particular form of inflection for comparison within the word class in question. He thus renders the adjective *profond* at a positive degree in French by the English superlative *deepest* which is meant to highlight the preservation of authenticity of the the French life in certain areas.

As for the French and Romanian versions of the peritextual elements of the Englishman trilogy, they are characterised by a lack of information, in the case of the French original, which is the source text for the English translation (the latter proceeding thus to explicitation), and by entropy, in the case of the Romanian translation, which relied on the English book as its source text. The French peritext does not have the richness of information implied by the code-switching in the English version of the book, while the Romanian one fails to preserve it. In the case of *An Englishman in Paris: L'éducation continentale*, the French version was published by l'Archipel two years prior to the text in the author's mother tongue, in 2000. The title and subtitle read simply *Un Anglais à Paris: L'éducation continentale*, the allusion to the English culture made by means of the ethnonym *Anglais* being deprived of linguistic reinforcement through code-switching, as will be the case two years later in the English peritext. As for the Romanian translation done by Ruxandra Ana, it was published by Humanitas in 2010 under the title *Un englez la Paris. Educația continentală*. With regard to the choice of language(s) considered by the translator as suitable to express the title for a Romanian-speaking readership, this translation bears resemblance to the French book which favoured monolingualism, and not to its source text which had chosen to count on the informational and stylistic benefits of bilingualism. If in the English version, the presence of the French language in verbalising the subtitle *L'éducation continentale* called the reader's attention to the possibility of interpreting the intertextual hint at Flaubert's novel *L'éducation sentimentale*, hence alluding to the author's knowledge and playing upon elements specific to the foreign environment he calls „home”, and also, if in France Flaubert's novel is so well-known that the French noun phrase is highly likely to be recognized as an allusion to the Flaubertian title, the Romanian translation relies solely on the Romanian readers'

knowledge of French literature, missing the expatriate author's play upon words and cultural elements in his host country.

The same loss of divulging clues can be noticed in the monolingualism of the titles in French and Romanian of the next two books of the trilogy: *Un anglais à la campagne*, published by *l'Archipel* in 2003, *Un englez la țară. Viața în Franța profundă*, a translation done by Radu Paraschivescu and published by Humanitas in 2011, and *Un Anglais amoureux* published at *l'Archipel* in 2006, and *Un englez amorezat. Dragostea în Franța profundă*, translated by Irina Negrea and published by Humanitas in 2012 respectively.

As it can be noticed from the above-mentioned enumeration, the titles in the French versions *Un anglais à la campagne* et *Un Anglais amoureux* are not accompanied by subtitles, an aspect which, were it not for the prospective reader's acquaintance with the first book in the trilogy, could result in his missing the parallel between the French and English environments, the backbone of both relocation narratives. If the Romanian translations of both books, having the English version as their source text, do preserve the subtitles (*Un englez la țară. Viața în Franța profundă*, *Un englez amorezat. Dragostea în Franța profundă*), their rendition is based on the calque *Franța profundă*, a calque which is not popular in Romanian and whose meaning – unless the readership is familiar with the French expression –, will be again lost for the prospective reader.

### The Epitext of Relocation Narratives across Languages

Another element belonging to the paratext of relocation narratives is the blurb published on the back cover of the book or on the promotional materials issued by the publishing house, inviting the public to read the content and promising them a valuable experience. Offering a few glimpses of the book, just enough to kindle their interest, the succinct presentations are subjective, relying on the illocutionary force of directive speech acts: they urge their readers not to be satisfied with their simple statute of epitext readers and to actually take the step and become readers of the full text which constitutes the “right of existence” (G. Genette) of the paratext.

In what follows we shall focus on the blurbs meant to promote the first book of the Englishman trilogy on three sites: the e-commerce site *Amazon* (for the English book), the site of the large French retail chain selling cultural products *la Fnac* (for the French original), and the site of the *Humanitas* Publishing House (for the Romanian translation).

The blurb promoting *An Englishman in Paris: L'éducation continentale* on *Amazon* (<https://www.amazon.com>) reads:

*An Englishman in Paris* is Michael Sadler's delightful account of his first year in the French capital, describing with alternate affection and bemusement such continental confusions as the etiquette of flower-buying, the role of cricket in French foreplay, and the dangers “black butter” presents not just to one's cholesterol levels but also to dry-cleaning bills. Beautifully observed and very funny, *An Englishman in Paris* will delight armchair travellers and Francophiles alike.

The subjective description made in such a way as to maximize the book's chances to become a best-seller contains from the outset a laudatory verdict (“delightful account”) which has the illocutionary force of a commissive act, implicitly promising the prospective customer that the book he is considering buying will prove to be a source of pure delight. The construction of the blurb then progresses by featuring objective elements from the text of the book, meant to be anchors helping the buyer make the decision to pursue the reading: the person in which this relocation narrative is written, the source of inspiration lying at its core and the setting. The account is written in first-person narrative, it is based on the English author's personal experience, and it is set in Paris. These pieces of information let the reader infer that constant comparisons will be drawn between life in England and life in France, showcasing points of resemblance and points of difference between them; hence the disclosure of the tones in the stories told: “describing with alternate affection and bemusement such continental confusions”. The blurb is humorous as the scenes extracted from the novel give a foretaste of what the experience of reading it will be like are presented in an amusing and slightly exaggerated way: the etiquette of flower-buying, the role of cricket in French foreplay, and the dangers “black

butter” presents not just to one’s cholesterol levels but also to “dry-cleaning bills”. The ending of the blurb comments on the insightfulness and overall tonality of Sadler’s account (“Beautifully observed and very funny”), accomplishing one more commissive speech act, promising that all the people, irrespective of their cultural background, will revel in their reading act: “will delight armchair travellers and Francophiles alike”.

The advertising strategy on the French e-commerce site differs from the previously examined English blurb on *Amazon*. The French presentation on the *La Fnac* site (<https://livre.fnac.com>) reads:

Mr Sadler n’en manque pas une. Mais il a une excuse: il est anglais. Exilé à Paris en service commandé. Objectif : décrypter les secrets de l’âme hexagonale. Dans sa panoplie, deux armes de choix: l’humour British et la langue de Molière. Major Thompson des années 2000, il pose sur nos mœurs un regard ironique, tendre et amusé. Et reprend, à sa façon, l’interrogation de Montesquieu: comment peut-on être français ?

Unlike the Amazon blurb which focuses on Michael Sadler’s written production, that is the book the site means to advertise in order to sell to its customers, the discourse construction of the French description focuses from the outset on the contemporary English writer living in France. The writer is called by the English title “Mr Sadler”, then a cryptic judgement is passed on him: “Mr Sadler n’en manque pas une”, but immediately after he is humorously absolved from guilt thanks to his particular foreign nationality: “Mais il a une excuse: il est anglais.”, and then a detail of his biography is revealed that finally leads the way to the book the blurb is supposed to promote: “Exilé à Paris en service commandé. Objectif: décrypter les secrets de l’âme hexagonale.” The blurb progresses by a metaphor (“Dans sa panoplie, deux armes de choix”) referring to the tone of the book by means of an English borrowing (“l’humour British”) and to the author’s fluency in French (“la langue de Molière”). The ending of the blurb resorts to intertextuality, containing two literary references well-known to the French readership: Pierre Daninos’ best-seller translated into twenty-eight languages, *Les carnets du Major W. Marmaduke Thompson. Découverte de la France et des Français*, 1954 (*The Notebooks of Major Thompso. An Englishman Discovers France and the French*), a humorous book relying on the comparison between all things English and all things French and the irony of Montesquieu’s *Lettres persanes*. The question asked at the very end of the blurb “Comment peut-on être français?” echoes Montesquieu’s famous question “Comment peut-on être Persan?”, advocating the need, when speaking about cultural differences, to put the difference that at first sight seems offensive into perspective by looking at the big picture and realizing that in many cases there are more ways of doing a specific thing than the particular one we have grown accustomed to and have come to consider as the “natural” one.

The Romanian blurb of the book *Un englez la Paris. Educația continentală* featuring on the site of its publishing house (Humanitas) starts with a question:

Ce speră un englez evadat din ceață să găsească în Franța? *Joie de vivre, savoir faire și plaisir d’amour. Educația sentimentală* a lui Flaubert se transformă într-o educație continentală, căreia omul nostru i se supune cuminte, așteptând înflorirea. Cum însă orice transplant poate produce efecte secundare, iată-l pe erou jucând într-o spumoasă comedie a inadecvării. Scorțos când lumea e destinsă, ponderat când totul în jur invită la frivolitate, meditat la „catehismul preludiului” de doctorande în flirt, el are totuși norocul să oprească de fiecare dată oiștea la doi centimetri de gard. Dacă Sting a cântat melancolic despre un englez la New York, Michael Sadler scrie despre o lume agitată, pestriță și în fond încântătoare. E lumea băcanilor complici, a dentiștilor fascinați de meserie, a neorevoluționarilor febrili și cârcotași, a doamnelor șic. Concluzia e la mintea cocoșului, nu neapărat galic: cu o asemenea poftă de viață, îngropați în mâncăruri rafinate și vinuri de poveste, prietenii de dincolo de Canal n-au cum s-o bage pe Mânecă.

If the initial questions at the beginning of a text are very often rhetorical, used as an introductory technique with a phatic function to engage the reader, this is not the case in this epitext, as the blurb pursues by providing a precise answer relative to the Englishman’s French findings: “Ce speră un englez evadat din ceață să găsească în Franța? *Joie de vivre, savoir faire și plaisir d’amour.*” If, as we have seen above, the title of the Romanian translation neutralized the code-switching present

in the source text, which resulted in entropy, the blurb compensates for this loss by reinstating the code-switching and putting it to good use. That which is pinpointed by the author as the essence of French life (the feeling of great happiness and enjoyment of life, the know-how and the joys of love) is expressed in the Romanian epitext in the language spoken by the inhabitants of the country characterized by the particular lifestyle depicted in the book: *Joie de vivre, savoir faire și plaisir d'amour*. The picture of the elements making up the specificity of the French world will be finished off towards the end of the blurb which brings forth grocers, dentists, grouchy feverish neo-revolutionaries, chic ladies, a zest for life, refined cooking and fine wines.

This component of the public epitext also mentions and decodes the intertextual reference to Flaubert's work manifest in the English peritext thanks to code-switching but which in the Romanian translation of the title was made obscure due to monolingualism: "*Educația sentimentală* a lui Flaubert se transformă într-o educație continentală, căreia omul nostru i se supune cuminte, așteptând înflorirea." It also contains other cultural references such as: the friends across the Channel, the Gallic rooster, an Englishman in New York, the neo-revolutionaries.

Just like in the cases of the English and the French blurbs, the tone of the Romanian one is humorous, a major tool in attaining the humour being the informal register present through discourse markers meant to grab the reader's attention or through common idioms altered in such a way as to suit an ironical purpose: "omul nostru", "are totuși norocul să oprească de fiecare dată oiștea la doi centimetri de gard", "Concluzia e la mintea cocoșului, prietenii de dincolo de Canal n-au cum s-o bage pe Mânecă."

## Conclusion

Issued from a "deep immersion" (Hulme & Youngs, 2002) in a foreign culture, relocation narratives account for the expatriate writers' journey of everyday life in the country of their choice. The body of writing resulting from the gradual (re)consideration of what their lifestyle used to be in their former environment and of what it is like now, in their host country, will be characterised, among others, by parallels drawn between cultures, in terms of content, and by code-switching, in terms of the languages that are being used as the narrative unfolds. By way of consequence, the translation of the paratextual elements (peritextual and epitextual alike) of this type of culturally significant literature needs to pay particular attention to these specific traits.

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