

**TRANSLATING IRONY FROM ENGLISH INTO ROMANIAN.  
A CASE STUDY – THE FORSYTE SAGA / TRADUIRE L'IRONIE DE  
L'ANGLAIS VERS LE ROUMAIN. FORSYTE SAGA – UNE ÉTUDE  
DE CAS / TRADUCEREA IRONIEI DIN LIMBA ENGLEZĂ ÎN LIMBA  
ROMÂNĂ. UN STUDIU DE CAZ – FORSYTE SAGA<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** *The present article starts from the already well-known relationship between translation studies and pragmatics and aims to offer an analysis of the way in which several instances of irony in John Galsworthy's novels are translated into Romanian. The paper approaches the phenomenon of irony comprising pragmatic theories such as: irony as substitute of literal meaning, as echoic mention, as pretence or simulation of illocutionary force of speech acts.*

**Keywords:** *irony, translation studies, pragmatics, literary text, English, Romanian*

### **Introduction**

In the process of translation, several competences must be activated in order to deliver a good final product. When the translator encounters irony, the *linguistic competence* is not enough, as it must be backed up by pragmatic awareness and *pragmatic competence*, understood as “the knowledge of the linguistic resources available in a given language for realizing particular illocutions, knowledge of the sequential aspects of speech acts, and finally, knowledge of the appropriate contextual use of the particular language’s linguistic resources” (Anne Barron 2003: 10).

In pragmatics, the most important developments regarding irony (to enumerate only the best-known) belong to H. P. Grice (1975, 1978), D. Sperber, D. Wilson (1978), H. Kottoff (2003) and G. Currie (2006).

Drawing a parallel with the study of tropes in classical rhetoric, H. P. Grice (1978) understands irony as the opposition between *literal meaning* and *figurative meaning* and between *sentence-meaning* and *speaker-meaning*. In his work *Logic and Conversation* (1975), irony is seen as a violation of the *Maxim of Quality* (“be sincere/ truthful”, “do not give information that you believe to be false or which is not supported by evidence”).

On the contrary, D. Sperber and D. Wilson (1981) consider that irony is not in itself an opposition between the literal and the figurative meaning and see irony as *echoic mention*, an utterance which refers to itself or to other fragments of discourse with the purpose of conveying critical attitudes.

However, the theory of *irony as pretence* (cf. Clark and Gerrig, 1984; Currie, 2002, 2004, 2006; Recanati, 2000, 2004) states that when producing ironic statements, the speaker is not performing a speech act (such as asking a question), but he/ she “makes as if”, in fact “pretends” to perform it while expecting the addressees and the audience to recognise the ironic attitude: “[...] what is essential is the expression, not the communication” (Currie, 2006:115).

Starting from the above-mentioned, Elena Negrea (2010:149) points out that irony can also be defined as *simulation of the illocutionary force of a speech act*: “[...] Verbal irony determines the realisation of a simulated illocutionary act [...] the ironic meaning of an utterance modifies the illocutionary force of that utterance [...] the interpretation of an ironic utterance implies the recognition of the ironist’s intent and of the simulation of the illocutionary force of the performed speech act”.

In the process of reading and translating literary texts, the translator must pay attention to the enunciative mechanisms and to the linguistic means for taking enunciative

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responsibility, as well as to the distinction between the *voice* of the narrator and the voices of the characters. Thus, irony can be found both in the narrator's discourse (to express mocking attitudes towards the world depicted in the text), and in the conversations between characters, the literary dialogue representing, perhaps, the most efficient characterizing method.

The literary texts we focused on here are the series of novels *The Forsyte Saga*, *A Modern Comedy* and *End of the Chapter* by John Galsworthy. For the analysis of the translation we have selected the Romanian editions mentioned in the bibliography.

### Methodology

When attempting to identify instances of irony, we must start from the fact that *dictum*, *modus* and *implicatum* are categories present in all languages. In literary texts, as far as the enunciative-pragmatic approach is concerned, the concept of *point of view*, strongly connected with that of *voice*, as well as with the persuasive dimension of communication, is synonymous with expressing and identifying opinions, attitudes, or evaluations (often ironical) and placed in opposition with other opinions, attitudes or evaluations, real or possible.

Thus, on the one hand, in the narrator's discourse (the abstract projection of the author) we shall encounter modalisers (epistemic, deontic, evaluative), markers of evidentiality, statements with evaluative predication, different speech acts, strategies of irony which separate the narrator's *point of view* from the *point of view* of other Enunciators (most often the characters) and reveal attitudes of acceptance or, on the contrary, rejection with regard to the lifestyles, the beliefs and the mentalities projected in the text. On the other hand, the dialogues between the characters are obviously a result of the author's intentionality, of the attitude he wants to transmit and impose through the communication process and they comply with the contract of fiction established by any literary discourse. But the conversations in the literary texts are, at the same time, a concentration of the idiolects and sociolects, of the discourse strategies and rituals which are dominant in the epoch and the space to which the text belongs, a collective construction carrying values, beliefs, attitudes and mentalities.

In order to fully understand the information provided by a literary text (as well as the author's intentionality) and to render it into the target language, the translator must make use of his/her *pragmatic competence*. That implies being able to separate the different *voices* and *points of view* in the text, in other words, to identify the *enunciative polyphony*, as well as the strategies associated with indirection and the phenomenon of implicit (allusion, irony, euphemism, taboo, preconstructed implicature, etc.).

Given the number and the length of the novels in question, the analysis below is, obviously, not exhaustive. Instead, keeping in mind the theoretical specifications presented above, the present article attempts only to identify how several instances of irony (both in the narrator's discourse and in the characters' interventions) were translated into Romanian and how the translation complies with the strategies of irony in the source text and the author's virtual reading prescriptions.

### Irony in the narrator's discourse:

In *The Forsyte Saga* series of novels, irony is to be found in the discourse of the narrator who denounces the flaws of the English upper middle class at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In Galsworthy's last two trilogies, the narrator displays critical attitudes towards

the snobbism, superficiality and immorality of some characters or categories of characters and taunts the worldly-minded preoccupations dominant in the English society, during the interwar period.

A. The narrator's mocking attitude is to be found in ironic interventions often built on the junction *dictum – implicatum*, that is, the strategy of irony as the opposition *literal meaning vs. figurative meaning* which is expressed both in the original text and the Romanian translation as:

a. Antiphrasis

- (1) “[...] much kindness lay at the bottom of(1’) „La temelul clevetirilor zăcea multă the gossip”  
(Galsworthy [1906-1921] 2001: 103);  
bunăvoință”  
(Galsworthy 1972. *Forsythe Saga. Proprietarul*: 149; În românește de Henriette Yvonne Stahl);

b. Periphrasis functioning as euphemism

- (2) “[...] his mind, where very little took place from morning till night, was the junction of two curiously opposite emotions [...]”  
(Galsworthy [1906-1921] 2001: 29);
- (2’) „[...] în mintea lui – în care se petreceau destul de puține lucruri de dimineața și până seara – se ciocneau două emoții contradictorii [...]”  
(Galsworthy 1972. *Forsythe Saga. Proprietarul*: 52; translated by Henriette Yvonne Stahl);

c. Metaphoric comparison

- (3) “This great and good woman [...] was one of the principal priestesses in the temple of Forsytheism, keeping alive day and night a sacred flame to the God of Property”  
(Galsworthy [1906-1921] 2001: 169);
- (3’) „Această mare și strașnică femeie [...] era una din principalele preotese ale templului forsyte-ismului. Ea ținea aprinsă zi și noapte flacăra sfântă a Zeului Proprietății”  
(Galsworthy 1972. *Forsythe Saga. Proprietarul*: 237; translated by Henriette Yvonne Stahl);

B. Irony as simulation of the illocutionary force of speech acts

a. Simulation of the illocutionary force of representative speech acts

- (1) “Better, far better, to make large loose(1’) „Mai bine, infinit mai bine, să faci attention, abuse the other side, and call the electors the sanest and soundest body of people in the world”  
afirmații vagi și vaste, să-i insulti pe adversari și să-i numești pe alegători cei mai teferi la minte și cei mai de încredere oameni din lume”  
(Galsworthy 1983. *Dicolo de râu*: 29);

(Galsworthy [1933] 2007: 22);

translated by Antoaneta Ralian);

- (2) “Goya, with his satiric and surpassing precision [...] alone perhaps of painters would have done justice [...] to Jack Cardigan, with his shining stare and tanned sanguinity betraying the moving principle: ‘I’m English, and I live to be fit’”
- (Galsworthy [1906-1921] 2001: 578);
- (2’) „Goya, cu neîntrecuta lui precizie și ironie [...] dintre toți pictorii lumii numai el ar fi putut reda [...] pe Jack Cardigan, cu privirea luminoasă și obrazul brun-roșietec, întruchiparea principiului: Sunt englez și scopul vieții mele este să mă mențin în formă”
- (Galsworthy 1972. *Forsythe Saga. Deșeptarea. De închiriat*: 112; translated by Henriette Yvonne Stahl);

b. Rhetorical questions foreshadowing ironic answers

- (3) “[...] Why mention the particular when the general would serve? Why draw attention, even, to the fact that the general is made up of the particular; or to the political certainty that promise is never performance?”
- (Galsworthy [1933] 2007: 22);
- (3’) „De ce să intri în amănunte particulare, când te poți sluji de generalități? De ce să atragi atenția asupra faptului că generalul e alcătuit din amănunte particulare; sau asupra certitudinii politice că promisiunea nu devine niciodată fapt concret?”
- (Galsworthy 1983. *Dicolo de râu*: 29. translated by Antoaneta Ralian);

C. Irony as *echoic mention*

- (1) “[...] for in spite of the disapproval of that great body of Forsytes [...] – to whom Love had long been considered, next to the Sewage Question, the gravest danger to the community [...]”
- (Galsworthy [1906-1921] 2001: 194);
- (1’) „[...] căci în ciuda dezaprobării [...] această puternică instituție formată din ginta Forsythe – care de multă vreme socotea că, după Problema Canalizării, cea mai gravă primejdie pentru comunitate este Iubirea [...]”
- (Galsworthy 1972. *Forsythe Saga. Proprietarul*: 271; translated by Henriette Yvonne Stahl);
- (2’) „Este absolut O.K., zise George; el era inventatorul multor expresii originale care fuseseră atribuite altor surse”
- (Galsworthy 1972. *Forsythe Saga. Vara târzie a unui Forsythe. Încătușați de lege*: 88; translated by Henriette Yvonne Stahl).
- (2) “‘It’s quite OK’, said George – it was he who invented so many of those quaint sayings which have been assigned to other sources [...]”

(Galsworthy [1906-1921] 2001: 311).

### Irony in the dialogues between the characters

When translating dialogues, the translator should pay attention to the way in which the critical or mocking attitudes of the characters towards their interlocutors are associated with indirection and the possibility of taking refuge in the area of literal meaning, in the attempt to protect the *faces* of the others (cf. P. Brown, St. Levinson, the theory of linguistic politeness).

In a conversation with Annette, Prosper Profond asks:

- (1) “Don’t you think human nature’s always (1’) „Nu credeți că firea omenească este the same?” întotdeauna aceeași?”  
(Galsworthy [1906-1921] 2001: 660) (Galsworthy 1972. *Forsythe Saga. Deșteptarea. De închiriat*: 228; translated by Henriette Yvonne Stahl)

Annette ironically replies that, in her opinion,

- (2) “Human nature is not the same in (2’) „În Anglia firea omenească nu e precum England as anywhere else” cea din alte părți ale lumii”  
(Galsworthy [1906-1921] 2001: 660) (Galsworthy 1972. *Forsythe Saga. Deșteptarea. De închiriat* : 228; translated by Henriette Yvonne Stahl).

In *A Modern Comedy*, Fleur ironically mentions the relationships between Francis Wilmot and Marjorie, by saying that:

- (3) “Marjory Ferrar is just about the limit [...] (3’) „Marjory Ferrar întrece orice măsură the limit of perfection”, Francis being “a [...] orice măsură a desăvârșirii” living proof”  
(Galsworthy [1924-1928] 2001: 347, 351). (Galsworthy 1985. *Comedia modernă. Lingura de argint*: 72, 78; translated by Henriette Yvonne Stahl).

The above-mentioned examples are accurately translated into Romanian and we recognize them as being ironic through the *simulation of the illocutionary force of speech acts* and the discrepancy between the logical inferences (human nature, by definition, excludes the existence of differences induced by nationality; perfection has no limitation and the adjectives corresponding to these terms are non-comparable) and what the characters desire to imply.

Ever since his first discourse in Parliament, Michael uses the common technique among politicians, that of using irony when referring to their opponents:

- (4) “Speakers on all sides of the House, (4’) „Vorbitorii din toate aripile Camerei au dwelling on the grave nature of the stăruit asupra naturii grave a problemei Unemployment problem, had pinned șomajului, dar și-au pus toate speranțele their faith to the full recapture of în recucerirea piețelor europene, unii într-

European trade, some in one way, some in another. Augustus as they were, he wished very humble to remark that they could not eat cake and have it [...] Some honourable Members, he was afraid not many, would be familiar with the treatise of Sir James Foggart [...]"

(Galsworthy [1924-1928] 2001: 382, 383).

un fel, alții într-altul. Fiind vorba despre personalități auguste, el, cu toată smerenia, dorește să le spună doar că omul nu poate mânca cozonacul și în același timp să-l păstreze. [...] Unii onorabili membri ai Camerei – Michael se teme că sunt cam puțini – cunosc poate tratatul lui Sir James Foggart [...]"

(Galsworthy 1985. *Comedia modernă. Lingura de argint*: 115, 116; translated by Henriette Yvonne Stahl).

The Romanian translation clearly mirrors the ironical attitude of the speaker which is reflected, on the one hand, in the *preconstructed implicature* (a proverb with negative connotations resulting in irony as *echoic mention*) and, on the other hand, in the *simulation of the illocutionary force* of an appreciation, associated with minimizing his own importance. The irony is also perceived in the contrast between a positive evaluation and what he pretends to feel (irony as *pretence*) – he fears the honourable members of the House are too few, as well as in what he actually infers (his main concern is not the number of members of the House, but their honourability).

Soames reads in a newspaper some ironic allusions to his daughter:

- (5) “Enterprising little lady is losing no (5’) „Mica și întreprinzătoarea doamnă nu chance of building up her salon. [...] pierde nici un prilej de a-și desăvârși Lion-hunter would not have been salonul [...]. Nici dacă i-ar fi zis mica arivistă n-ar fi fost mai deslușit”. „Din plainer”. “Unfortunately – comments the narrator – in a primary sense ‘lion-hunter’ was a compliment, and Soames doubted whether its secondary sense had ever been ‘laid down’ as libellous”

(Galsworthy [1924-1928] 2001: 324).

(Galsworthy 1985. *Comedia modernă.*

*Lingura de argint*: 46; translated by Henriette Yvonne Stahl).

In the example above, irony is conveyed through the *substitution of the literal meaning with speaker meaning* (cf. Grice [1975 1978] 2001). The speaker infers that Fleur is a snob and a climber, inferences which, of course, could ruin her reputation. The opposition *sentence meaning – speaker meaning* in ironic utterances reflects the possibility of the speaker to *save face*, to avoid a direct conflict and to take refuge in the literal meaning. This is exactly what the editor in chief of the newspaper does when confronted by Soames. He explains that “an enterprising little lady [...] is quite a pleasant word” (Galsworthy [1924-1928] 2001: 325).

### Conclusions

Given the complexity of the topic, of the theoretical and conceptual framework and of the selected literary corpora, the conclusions of this paper can only be partial. However, I hope that the results can point out several aspects of the *pragmatic competence* needed when a translator is confronted with the task of translating irony and, especially, when translating irony in literary discourse.

The irony in literary texts is to be found both in the narrator's discourse and in the dialogues between the characters which allows them to display, in an indirect manner, critical or mocking attitudes towards the world projected in the text. Thus, on the one hand, a translator's pragmatic competence involves the ability to rigorously separate the enunciative instances (author, narrator, characters, other voices) and to determine the linguistic means for distancing and taking enunciative responsibility. On the other hand, the translator must identify and properly render the strategies associated with indirection, such as allusion, euphemism, irony etc.

The examples above are, obviously, only a very small part of the ironic discourse in Galsworthy's literary texts. However, they are illustrative of the most important pragmatic theories regarding irony. Thus, the irony in the narrator's discourse occurs as the opposition literal meaning vs. figurative meaning (antiphrasis, periphrasis functioning as euphemism, metaphoric comparison), as simulation of the illocutionary force of speech acts (simulation of the illocutionary force of representative speech acts, rhetorical questions foreshadowing ironic answers) and as echoic mention. In the dialogues between the characters, irony appears as simulation of the illocutionary force of speech acts, as echoic mention, as pretence and as the substitution of the literal meaning with speaker meaning.

The contrastive analysis between the source text and the Romanian translation indicates that the translator identified the irony in the text as well as the author's intentionality and managed to produce an accurate translation conveying the original meaning by using exactly the same pragmatic strategies.

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