

## TRANSLATING TITLES: ROALD DAHL'S THE BFG IN ROMANIAN

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*Abstract:* This article treats the subject of translating titles and the implications of such an undertaking. Given that titles are of major importance to the rhetoric of a text, their translation requires proper deliberation. Any change, irrespective of how extensive it is, can have an impact on the functions fulfilled by the title and, consequently, on the reception of the text by the reading public. Such changes can be operated either on a part of the title or on the entire title when freely translated. This paper presents three classifications of titles in order to apply them to the three translations of Roald Dahl's *The BFG* into Romanian, since each version has been given a different title from the previous one. The Romanian translators' solutions in this respect are analyzed in the second half of this article in an attempt to highlight the main shifts in meaning they incur and how they are interpreted as a result of these changes.

*Keywords:* children's literature, titles, translation, language functions, roald dahl

### **Introduction**

The title of a text represents the means by which a potential reader evaluates the respective material at first glance. Much like the first impression made by an individual, a text influences the reader by means of its title and its cover. While judging a book by its cover is deemed superficial, marketing rules suggest otherwise, knowing that the more attractive a product is, the more likely it is to sell. The same can be said about titles. When translating titles, they should be attractive and culturally appropriate so as to spark the reader's interest, yet they should also be faithful to the original intention of the author and to the genre of the text. Due to the impact of a title on the entire rhetoric of a text, the translator should be familiar with the functions which a title can fulfill and give some thought to the transfer of the title from the source language into the target language. As María Bobadilla-Pérez points out,

the role of the translator concerning the title is not only to create a semantic transfer, but also to recontextualize it in order to make it appealing to the target language readers. This phenomenon can be defined by Lefevere's concept of cultural "refraction", a semiotic transfer in a broader sense. (Bobadilla-Pérez 2007: 119)

In translating the title of a text, there are a number of methods which the translator can use: the literal approach (word for word translation), explicitation (for example, in the case of a poetry book, the translator may choose to add *An anthology* as a subtitle, or in the case of a biographical book, *A life*), they may partially change the source language title (by replacing or eliminating a word or two) or they may create a completely new title which they deem suitable (based on cultural factors, for example, the translator will know whether or not the original title will have an impact on the target culture reader).

As to the ways in which titles can be categorized and translated, the types of classification to which I will refer in this article use functions as a distinguishing criterion. Three classifications will be briefly presented below that will subsequently be applied to the Romanian titles of Roald Dahl's *The BFG*, suggested by Charles Briffa and Rose Marie Caruana (2009), María Bobadilla-Pérez (2007), and Christiane Nord (1995).

### **Titles: functions and translations**

In their conference paper (Briffa 2009: 3), Charles Briffa and Rose Marie Caruana use a dual model, title functions being grouped into reader-oriented and content-oriented, with the latter further split into internally and externally oriented titles. Reader-oriented titles prepare the reader for the reception of the text by catching their attention and conditioning their concentration. This is achieved by means of an invitation or a request expressed in the title. Content-oriented titles convey the theme, subject, form or symbols of the text. Within this category of content-oriented titles, those which are internally oriented name the character, indicate the theme, create a pun, etc. and those which are externally oriented integrate a metaphor, an idiom or a literary quotation juxtaposed with the theme of the text so as to put it into perspective.

Based on the model they have developed, Briffa and Caruana studied a corpus of texts translated from English into Maltese. They have identified four types of translation: transference (titles keep their original form), naturalization (titles are localized/adapted), literality (literal translations), and shift (alternative titles are used). According to Briffa and Caruana, the main difference between the author and the translator of a text is that while authors may work either cataphorically or anaphorically, translators almost always work anaphorically by virtue of having already read the text prior to translating it.

María Bobadilla-Pérez identifies similar functions to those of Briffa and Caruana, and provides a short presentation of two models for translating titles. In her article (Bobadilla-Pérez 2007: 118), titles are said to introduce themes or symbols, to identify style or genre, or to name characters (what she calls “nominal” role of the title). She refers to Michael S. Doyle’s categories concerning the translation of titles (120): literal (original titles are preserved), near-literal (word-for-word translations; Bobadilla-Pérez considers them to be untrustworthy as they may lose some of the original nuances), and liberal or free translation (resorted to when the translator can’t effectively transfer the original title into the target language). Christiane Nord’s title functions are also mentioned, but this model will be separately discussed.

Using the structuralist functions of language as a starting point, Christiane Nord elaborated a classification of the translation of titles based on Roman Jakobson’s language functions (Nord 1995). In this model, functions are receiver-oriented. She separated these functions into two groups, one of essential functions (distinctive – emphasizes the singularity or uniqueness of a text, metatextual – the title conforms to genre conventions of a specific culture, phatic – establishes contact between the text and the reader) and one of optional functions (referential – refers to objects or phenomena of the world, expressive – communicates to the reader an opinion or an evaluation of a given thing, appellative – stimulating the reader to feel a certain emotion or to act in a certain way; Nord maintains that this function “is generally higher in children’s books” (Nord 1995)).

### ***The BFG* in Romanian: three translations, three titles**

The classifications provided above should serve as starting points for the discussion of the translated titles of *The BFG* into Romanian. While *The Big Friendly Giant* isn’t a proper name per se (as in the case of *Hamlet*, *Pamela*, *Anna Karenina*, etc.), it becomes one due to the way it functions within Roald Dahl’s text. The main character is referred to throughout the book as *BFG* much like the orphan girl is named *Sophie*. Therefore, it can be affirmed that the title of Dahl’s novel is a “nominal” one (according to María Bobadilla-Pérez) or a content-oriented title which is furthermore internally oriented (according to Charles Briffa and Rose Marie Caruana).

In terms of functions, *The BFG* clearly retains the distinctive function. Given that it is a children’s book, giants would be a familiar character to the readers worldwide. The

referential function is, therefore, fulfilled by the title. As for the expressive and appellative functions, these are equally well-represented. It can be assumed that the author named his character “the Big *Friendly* Giant” in order to avoid negative emotional responses from the readers. Giants are usually depicted as negative characters, violent and lacking intelligence, so by stating from the very beginning that this giant is friendly, the author 1) underlines the singularity of the character by separating him from the other giants in terms of personality/conduct, and 2) invites the reader to view him in a positive light. Through this title, Roald Dahl challenges the established preconceptions about giants and informs the readers that they will read an atypical story about giants in order to spark their interest.

It can be further speculated that the adjective *big* is used in order to emphasize the friendliness of the giant, and by extension, his healthy moral principles in general. A giant is scary; a *big* giant – as pleonastic as it is, but with hyperbolic nuances – is terrifying. However, the wording “a big *friendly* giant” makes all the more obvious the unusually good nature of the character through the association of the two determiners *big* and *friendly*.

Roald Dahl’s *The BFG* has been translated into Romanian three times. The first translation dates from 1993 (translated by Leontina Rădoi, published by Patricia Publishing House), the second one is from 2003 (translated by Mădălina Monica Badea, published by RAO Publishing House), and the third one, from 2013 (translated by Alexandra Columban, published by Arthur Publishing House). All three versions have different titles in Romanian. The reason why three different translations have been made in the span of less than 30 years is unknown. It could only be speculated upon. The coming out of the first version in 1993 may be related to the change of political regime in Romania and the large amount of translations published immediately after 1989, which included children’s books as well. In the case of the 2003 translation, either there was a demand for Roald Dahl’s books or RAO Publishing House considered that his books needed to be reedited in Romania and the translations improved, and as such RAO took it upon itself to do so.

The latest 2013 edition, which was reprinted in 2015 by Arthur Publishing House, provides a word-for-word translation of the title: *Marele Uriaş Prietenos – The Big Friendly Giant*. Arthur Publishing House has chosen to retranslate other books as well, their new translations being different from previous ones. It is the case of the *Harry Potter* translated series, initially published by Egmont Publishing House, which no longer exists. An entire generation of readers grew up with the Egmont version of J.K. Rowling’s novels translated by Ioana Iepureanu. The reader’s attachment to the first translation became apparent when Arthur Publishing House decided to retranslate and reprint the series. Many iconic words from the books, which had initially been translated in a certain way by Ioana Iepureanu, were entirely different in the Arthur translation signed by Florin Bican: *muggles* – *încuiaţi* (Egmont) – *mageamiu* (Arthur), *the golden snitch* – *hoţoaica aurie* (Egmont) – *smici* (Arthur), *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* – *Harry Potter şi Prinţul Semipur* (Egmont) – *Harry Potter şi Prinţul Semisânge* (Arthur). For Harry Potter’s fans, who have read Iepureanu’s translation, the new version is unacceptable and they can only bemoan the generation gap created by the new translation. Returning to the Arthur edition of *The BFG* and the translation of its title, given that it keeps so close to the original, the giant is referred to as *MUP* (the Romanian abbreviation of *BFG*).

The second translation, that of 2003, reprinted by RAO Publishing House in 2008, eliminated the adjective *big*: *Uriaşul Cel Prietenos (The Friendly Giant)*. As stated above, *big giant* is a pleonastic structure, yet it is most unlikely that a seasoned writer such as Roald Dahl should have been unaware of what he was writing and what it implied. Far from being a mistake, the association of the two terms, *big* and *giant*, is intentional and helps convey an idea. *Big* and *friendly* provide a concise yet suggestive portrayal of the giant. On the other hand, it could be assumed that the Romanian translator or the publishing house felt that the

pleonasm Big Giant would displease the Romanian readers, the adult ones in particular, as children are less likely to pay attention to such aspects of language and, as a result, eliminated the adjective *big*. By operating this change, certain salient features of the main character are lost and his shortened name – *UCP* – is rather difficult to use as a proper name. On the contrary, in the 2013 translation *MUP* can be easily pronounced and used as a name, and even as a nickname.

The third translation, the oldest of the three, that of 1993, is also the most interesting one. Here, not only did the translator remove the determiner *big* (probably for the same reasons discussed in the case of the previous translation), but she also added another one, namely *bun* (*good* or *kind*), which has an impact on the expressive and appellative functions. The Romanian title of this version, *Uriaşul Bun și Prietenos* (*The Kind Friendly Giant* or *The Good Friendly Giant*), emphasizes even more the good nature of the character. The replacement of *big* by *good/kind* also explains a trait which was only implied in the original wording: the reader could infer that if a giant is friendly, he surely must be good as well. In this translation, the reader's active role – to interpret, to infer, and therefore to bond with the character on a different level, by means of the collaboration between author, text, and reader – is eliminated because the information is readily provided in the title. Throughout the book, the giant is called *UBP*, an abbreviation which is as difficult to pronounce and to use as a nickname as *UCP* in the 2003 translation.

### Conclusion

The changes operated at the level of a text's title can lead to significant changes in the manner in which it is interpreted and the success of the text on the market. A poorly chosen title can misrepresent the contents of the text and, as a result, discourage potential readers from reading it. These changes are either the decision of translators alone, based on their knowledge of the target culture – the readers' expectations, previous experience, and knowledge of the readers' profile – or it can be the result of pressures on the part of publishing houses motivated by marketing concerns. The three translations of *The BFG* into Romanian reflect the passage from one generation to another, with the source text being retranslated every 10 years (1993 - 2003 - 2013). Each title is different from the previous one and carries a slight – yet important – difference in meaning, function, and manner of interpretation.

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