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# RE-ENACTING THE PAST: THE TRANSLATION OF PERFORMATIVITY IN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS / RECREANDO EL PASADO: LA TRADUCCIÓN DE LA PERFORMATIVIDAD EN ENTREVISTAS DE HISTORIA ORAL

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**Abstract:** This article explores the connection between Translation Studies and Oral History on Romanian communism. Inspired by Portelli's theoretical framework, it aims to address the problems posed by the translation of performativity from Romanian into English. To this end, transcribed historical interviews are extracted from two main books on the era: *Memorial of pain: darkness and light* (Hossu Longin, 2013) and *The Survivors: testimonies from Romania's communist prisons* (Ștef, 2014).

**Keywords:** Translation Studies, Oral History, communism, performativity.

**Resumen:** Este artículo explora la conexión entre los estudios de traducción y la historia oral sobre el comunismo rumano. Inspirado en el marco teórico de Portelli, tiene como objetivo abordar los problemas que plantea la traducción de la performatividad del rumano al inglés. Con este fin, las entrevistas históricas transcritas se extraen de dos libros principales sobre la época: *Memorial of pain: darkness and light* (Hossu Longin, 2013) y *The Survivors: testimonies from Romania's communist prisons* (Ștef, 2014).

**Palabras clave:** estudios de traducción, Historia Oral, comunismo, performatividad.

This article lies at the intersection between Translation Studies and Oral History on Romanian communism offering a unique interdisciplinary approach. My translation from Romanian into English of transcribed oral history interviews on communism provides an original corpus that helps delineate the performative dimension of Oral History. The transcribed interviews chosen as data reflect a wide breadth of views and stances, aiming to provide the complex and multifarious facets of communism.

## 1. Defining Oral History

In her seminal book *Oral History Theory* (2016), Lynn Abrams offers many illuminating insights on oral history theory and practice. She contends that oral history is a “research practice, a method of research” (2016, p. 1) that defies fixed interpretations and stretches theoretical paradigms. What is more, Yow insists on the peculiarity of oral history regarded as a “recording of personal testimony delivered in oral form” (2005, p. 21). As a result, she argues that, in the aggregate, the term includes a recorded memoir, a transcribed interview and an interview-based research method.

It is worth noting that there is broad consensus among scholars on the significance of oral history as an interpretative event. Among others, Shopes (2002) and Grele (1991) are particularly sensitive to this aspect, with the latter stating conclusively that interviews:

tell us of what happened but they also tell us what people thought happened and how they have internalized and interpreted what happened. They tell us how individual personalities and social forces reconstruct memory to advance or hinder the development of particular ways of viewing the past (Grelle, 1991, p. 245).

On a different note, it should be mentioned that oral history interviews are gaining currency in the countries of the former communist bloc. Giving a voice to ordinary people, once deprived of a chance to express themselves, these interviews can complement or correct understanding about the communist period but also help a nation come to terms with a traumatic past. Furthermore, at a time when contradictory meanings and interpretations of communism still need to cohere, the translation of unique oral history interviews can provide cogent evidence about the period, shifting thus the focus on individuals as actors in the events of the past.

The translation of the important data that have been collected via oral history interviews with first-hand witnesses is indeed necessary in the transmission of knowledge about communist history. However, scholarly works establishing a connection between Translation Studies as a discipline and Oral History on the subject of communism are scarce (Reeves-Ellington 1999; Temple 2013; McDonough Dolmaya 2015). I am interested in a concurrent examination of these fields, as oral history projects assume an ever-increasing importance in the countries of the former communist bloc (Khanenko-Friesen and Grinchenko, 2015).

## 2. Performativity

Alessandro Portelli (2003, pp. 63-75) identifies nine oral history characteristics: orality, narrative, subjectivity, credibility, objectivity and authorship, performativity, mutability and collaboration. However, due to space constraints, I have selected only the concept of ‘performativity’ in an attempt to assess its problems and challenges in translation. With this purpose in mind, I have translated from Romanian into English a set of transcribed interviews on communism structured around two main categories:

- (a) those given by the members of the anti-communist resistance groups in the Carpathian Mountains (the partisans): *Memorialul durerii: întuneric și lumină*, (Memorial of pain: darkness and light), 2013, by Lucia Hossu-Longin.
- (b) interviews given by political prisoners: *Supraviețuitorii. Mărturii din temnițele comuniste ale României* (The Survivors: Testimonies from Romania’s communist prisons), 2014, Humanitas, by Raul Ștef and Anca Ștef.

In order to map out the problematics of performativity in translation some theoretical remarks ought to be made. According to this Italian researcher what gains valence in oral history is the act of remembering and telling as opposed to memory and tale. Drawing on this assumption, I can make fair inferences about the quality of interviews as performances whereby history is about doing and enacting the past.

Pollock (2005, pp. 1-19) moves discussion to a higher level by charting the performative criteria of oral history. First, oral history is “rehearsed” (Dhaliwal, 2013, p. 1) for it works as a temporal and spatial accumulation and fine-tuning of dialogue. Second, the nature of testimony is reflexive, as the interviewee reveals his/her subjective self to an interviewer, representative of a wider audience.

Third, the meanings of oral history emerge in the performative act being therefore conditioned by the specificity of time and place. This idea invites the next one, which points at the consequentiality of oral history. More explicitly, performative statements conjoin ‘saying’ with ‘doing’ as telling a story is imbricated in the making of history. Finally, oral history spills over into performance, inasmuch as it borrows its triad: mimesis, poesis, and kinesis (Dhaliwal, 2013, p. 2). It is thus a recreation of historical events by an embodied self that brings forth a singular way of being, reasoning and perceiving the world.

What is more, it should be remembered that, according to the *Living Handbook of Narratology*, performance refers to the “embodied live presentation of events in the co-presence of an audience at a specific place and time” either in the real world or fictionally, in a theatrical setting (Berns, 2012, p. 2). On the other hand, performativity implies the “imitation or illusion of a performance” (ibid.) which is thus reconstructed in the readers’ minds. This coordination of performance/performativity with narratology is of import insofar as it heightens awareness about the narrativised and performative principles underpinning an oral history interview.

One intrinsic dimension of performance calls attention to human voice and its modulations, from hesitations and silences to emphatic repetitions and interactions. Inarguably, oral tradition has proclivity for performance, as Tedlock (1971) and Tonkin (1982) demonstrate. Tedlock trains his analytical lenses on the Zuni Indians of New Mexico and he locates the genuine meaning of spoken narratives in “the placement of silences”, “tones of voice”, and “whispers and shouts” (Grele, 1991, p. 112). With this in mind, he views transcription as a poor imitator of oral performance, as punctuation and spacing provide but a pallid artistic expression of the performative act.

Nevertheless, Tedlock’s solution to this problem lies in the language of oral history itself which he defines as poetic. Obviously, oral discourse is traditionally embedded in poetry in the forms of songs and chants. On the other hand, as the American scholar suggests, listening closely to conversational narratives one is bound to discover their poetry, for “poetry is oral history and oral history is poetry” (Grele, 1991, p. 107).

In line with this directive, it is vital to listen to the musicality of stories as if you would listen to any type of musical genre. Interviewed by the American oral historian Ronald Grele, Terkel makes reference to the relation between music and conversation, observing that a jazz performer “when it comes time for a solo, creates as well as performs and so there’s an improvisational air to it” (Grele, 1991, p. 12). Certainly, the similarities with the oral history interview, which thrives on its unplanned nature, are easily called to mind. If one thing spawns another the cadence might change and the “feeling tone” (Grele, 1991, p. 24) is the one yearned for.

Performance makes up the innermost core of oral history. “Insistent on doing through saying” (2005, p. 2), as Pollock concisely remarks, its performative features foreground the

history-making dialogue, the subjectivities of informants and historians and the narrative form of telling.

In conclusion, the performative world of stories reveals a profound connection with orality, enveloped as it is in gestures, voice inflection, silence and a bewildering array of theatrical elements. Manifestly, “it’s not the song, it’s the singing” (Grele, 1991, p. 97) that matters, as the epistemological substance lies in the dialectics of performing. Surprisingly or not, the narrator’s performance reminds Friedman of “Brecht’s concept of primitive epic theatre, in which the content of the performance is about performing” (Charlton, Myers and Sharpless, 2006, p. 476).

### 2.1 *The Translation of performativity*

Given the dearth of material on this particular topic, it is necessary to tap into proximal areas of study for theoretical guidance. As a result, the following section develops around a two-tiered structure. The first one lies at the intersection between the translation of oral narrative performance and anthropology. The second structure, on the other hand, owes its inspiration to the translation of drama performance and suggests points of convergence with oral history.

To begin with, anthropologists such as Tedlock (1988) and Hymes (1964/ O’Neill 2013) have long wrestled with the translation of oral narratives performed by indigenous communities. Unlike translators, who had direct access to a written text, anthropologists’ double concern was caused by the transcription of oral narratives and the preservation of their cultural parameters in translation.

The first part of Tedlock’s path-breaking work *The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation* (1983) is devoted to transcription and translation. The consequential argument that emerges here is that form is an extension of content. It follows then that transcriptions must dismiss the rigid conventions of writing and propose instead conventions of their own more apt to record the oral narrative performance.

Regarding translation, Tedlock evaluates historically the work of Cushing, Benedict and Bunzel. Possibly a result of dictation, their translated works are marked by distortions of narratives, explanatory additions, excessive literalism or text truncation. The anthropologists are therefore at pains to maintain the long sentences, parallelism and interjections and onomatopoeia extant in Zuni performances (Tedlock, 1983, pp. 38-43). What they ultimately achieve is a flat and contorted text that points sharply not only at the dictation process, which, by its very nature, mitigates the dynamics of oral performances. Rather, it betrays a complete ignorance of the poetic and oral understructure of narratives.

More recent anthropological research has shifted the focus on the translation of performance in Ainu oral narratives.<sup>1</sup> A case in point is provided by Sato-Rossberg’s (2008) examination of Chiri Mashiho’s (1909-1961) performative translations into Japanese against those of the Polish ethnologist Bronislaw Pilsudski (1866-1918). If both scholars had direct contact with the Ainu people, language and culture, their translations reflect different interpretations and objectives.

For example, Pilsudski worked not only in Japanese, but also in Russian and English. His translations into King James’ English are mainly literal, indicative of his endeavour to conserve the Ainu culture. Conversely, Chiri followed a different agenda as he strove to safeguard the performative aspect of the narratives. As a consequence, he rejected literal translation for a freer one that could take stock of the performative and theatrical Ainu storytelling.

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<sup>1</sup> The Ainu are an indigenous people living on the island of Sakhalin which was once disputed between Japan and Russia. It now belongs to the latter.

Finally, colloquial language is used to add a phonetic polish to the free translation. Creative improvisation, which fosters the immediacy of the narrative, can be also registered in the treatment of idiophones. A telling example that recalls Jakobson's sound symbolism is offered by the translation of Ainu 'pas-pas' (ash) into the phonetically similar Japanese 'pachi-pachi' (the sound of burning wood) (Sato-Rossberg, 2008, p. 144).

A cursory look at translation history records changing interests in analytical approaches. From emphasis on texts, cultures and languages practitioners are currently lured by the "translation of action" (Fleishman and Bala 2019, p. 1). Given the multimodality of performances, translators must take account of non-verbal elements effected by face expressions, gestures, body movements, sounds, images or lighting (Malena, 2017, p. 1; Fleishman and Bala, 2019, p. 2). Clearly, translation can no longer be dismissed as a simply lexical or grammatical undertaking, as assiduous attention must be directed to performers.

Lastly, I would like to draw attention to one of Peghinelli's comments regarding her revision and adaptation for the Italian stage of the Belarus Free Theatre plays (2019, p. 280). Interestingly, her refusal to domesticate their works was triggered by her acute awareness of the cruel political context in which they were shaped. With this in mind, the message about life under the Belarusian dictatorship had to reach the Italian audience in a consistent and undoctored way.

Peghinelli is right in claiming that a successful drama translator must not only be university educated. Rather, he/she should engage in a productive dialogue with theatres or dramatic arts academies (Peghinelli 2012, p. 277). The reasons for the necessity of collaboration are spelled out by Fleishman and Bala. Drawing on the words of Michel De Certeau, they reflect on the intricacies of translating performance, an artistic act fully defined by the primacy of gestures:

when performance "speaks" it does so beyond language; through the body in "wild, disordered, undisciplined" ways. It threatens the capacity of translation, "that makes it possible to...transform...non-sensical 'noises' uttered by voices into (scriptural, produced, and 'comprehended') messages" (2019, p. 3).

### **3. The translation of performativity in Romanian Oral History interviews on communism**

Oral history is, quintessentially, a performative enterprise. Any attempt to grasp its real and deep meaning ought to be acquainted with this aspect. It might not be then far-fetched to contend that the translation of historical interviews is synonymous with that of performativity.

In what follows, I pore over my translation from Romanian into English of transcribed oral history interviews on communism extracted from the books *Memorialul durerii: întuneric și lumină* (Memorial of pain: darkness and light; 2013) and *Supraviețuitorii. Mărturii din temnițele comuniste ale României* (The Survivors: Testimonies from Romania's communist prisons; 2014).

#### *3.1 Study case: Memorialul durerii: întuneric și lumină* (Memorial of pain: darkness and light; 2013)

The book *Memorialul durerii: întuneric și lumină* (2013) consists of interviews included in the televised series *Memorialul Durerii*, first broadcast in 1991 on the Romanian National Television (TVR). The interviews revolve around the Romanian anti-communist

armed resistance in the Carpathian Mountains being given by the surviving partisans, the persons who helped them or the families of those who perished.

First and foremost, performance is reified as a verbal construct as speakers address their public directly. An illustrative example is given by Paler who announces the beginning of his story by the following line: “*And now, let me tell you a short story.*” (“Și acum, dați-mi voie să vă spun o mică poveste”; 2013, p. 232). Evidently, translation steers clear of problems, for equivalence is easily established by the use of the verb ‘let’ and the common collocation ‘tell a story’. In this way, the narrator grabs the public’s attention as he signals clearly the inception of the story. Once the audience is prepared to listen and pay attention to what will happen next the performance can begin.

In addition to Paler, Ion Metea, a former partisan and mountain fighter, communicates directly with his audience, making an appeal for the use of their imaginative power. Describing at length his successive arrests and his cunning in outwitting the Securitate<sup>2</sup>, he glosses over episodes of beatings:

*You can imagine what went on when Stoica, known as the One-armed, because he was one-armed, he had only one arm, you can imagine what beatings and what went on! He would electrocute us, use planks, and all the things in the world, a sandbag and all sorts of other torments - to tease something out.*

Vă dați seama ce se-ntâmpla când era Stoica, zis Ciungu, că era ciung, n-avea o mână, ce bățai și ce se-ntâmpla acolo! Te pune la curent, și cu blana, și cu toate minunile lumii, și cu sacul de nisip, și fel de fel de chinuri – ca să scoată ceva. (2013, p. 252).

The interviewee helps the audience share his involvement in the story by asking them to picture the savage acts of violence perpetrated by the Securitate. He thus uses the structure ‘Vă dați seama ce se-ntâmpla când era Stoica’ which is translated as ‘You can imagine what went on when Stoica was around’. Addition is applied in the case of ‘around’ so as to round out the meaning expressed in the original. More than that, the verb ‘a-și da seama’ (‘to realise’) finds a better correspondent in the English term ‘imagine’. Similarly, the direct equivalent of the verb ‘a se întâmpla’ – ‘to happen’, is dismissed as the phrasal verb ‘go on’ is favoured. I argue that the latter has a higher evocative power inasmuch as it assists the audience in perceiving the unfolding action.

Moreover, the explanation of Stoica’s nickname disrupts the flow of the sentence and raises problems in translation. First, let me train the analytical lenses on the Romanian word ‘ciung’. Its translation into ‘one-armed’ fulfils communicative expectations and needs, though imperfect. The term is more expressive than the Romanian one which, being less frequently used, might lead to comprehension problems especially for younger readers. Next, modulation is employed in the rendering of the construction ‘n-avea o mână’ as ‘he had only one arm’.

Further, due to the elliptical final part, meaning has to be completed by the addition of a structure that runs parallel with that at the beginning. Consequently, the clause ‘ce bățai și ce se-ntâmpla acolo!’ is padded out and the lengthier version reads as ‘you can imagine what beatings and what went on!’ A decision to preserve the ellipsis would have been detrimental to the meaning of the target text which would have appeared mangled and, to a certain extent, incomprehensible.

The slightly informal and popular register (that has already been referenced by the word ‘ciung’) shapes the expression of the last sentence. The interviewee strives to account for the multitude of practices concocted by the Securitate to strike their opponents repeatedly and violently. With a tinge of humour and irony, Metea lets one in on the morbid imagination of

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<sup>2</sup> The Romanian Secret Police.

the communists: electric power, sandbags, and planks, were but a few of the elements that propped up the beating stage.

When it comes to translation, the word ‘blană’, suggestive of the popular language, is equated with the more pallid word ‘plank’. The register of the source language is partly lost in the target text, in want of a better equivalent. Last but not least, the expression ‘cu toate minunile lumii’ is transferred as ‘all the things in the world’. Here, the less formal language is more adequately signposted and the idea of the ‘world’ (‘lume’) is successfully retained. Despite the difficulty of translation, the construction ought to account for the unimaginable scale of objects and contraptions used to inflict pain.

Further, Gavrilă Ogoranu, the leader of the armed resistance in the Făgăraş Mountains, morphs into a performing storyteller. For example, he quotes directly a partisan’s words (‘Dead. I will surrender only dead’; 2013, p. 240) and those of his crying mother (‘My dear boy, my dear boy’; 2013, p. 241) or uses repetition (‘It was his last bullet kept for his last act’; 2013, p. 241). He is a storyteller who performs not only for an audience in order to educate them and to disseminate knowledge on the armed resistance. Rather, Gavrilă Ogoranu is aware of his weighty responsibility towards the victims, as he was the one who survived to tell the story. Let it be said, genuine interpretation of the historical interview shares close affinity with this dual hermeneutic of the performative act.

Inarguably, the interviewees’ stories are akin to film scripts as their organisational structure is inherently performative. For instance, Eugeniu Mărgineanu provides an elaborate description of the decoy used by the Securitate to apprehend partisans Gelu Novac and Gheorghe Şovăială. More specifically, the Secret Police put on women’s clothes to identify the fugitives’ hiding place. Their deceitful actions continued with a gypsy who was made to take food to the partisans in order to make them come out in the open (Hossu-Longin, 2013, p. 270).

To continue, Alexandrina Murariu-Cârstea is committed to re-enacting the moment the two partisans, Nicolae Mazilu and Ioan Mogoş, were captured by the Securitate in her parents’ house. As can be imagined, the episode is not short of drama and action: “He opened the door, the head of the district office entered and told them: ‘In the name of the law, surrender!’. Nicu Mazilu raised his hands in order to show his surrender”. (‘Le-a deschis, a intrat și le-a spus: ‘În numele legii, să vă predați!’ Nicu Mazilu a ridicat mâinile în sus să se predea.’; 2013, p. 256).

This short excerpt from the interviewee’s story derives its performativity from a double interpretation. On the one hand, the use of direct speech at a crucial moment of the action (‘In the name of the law, surrender! - În numele legii, să vă predați!’) captures the undivided attention of the public. On the other hand, the supply of a visual detail (‘Nicu Mazilu raised his hands - Nicu Mazilu a ridicat mâinile în sus’) underlines the significance of gesture in performance. This doubly visual and kinaesthetic image reminds one of the correlation between language, movement and thought. A story is thus recreated not only linguistically and cognitively, but also somatically. The audience visualises both the speaker’s body movement and that of the narrative’s protagonist as well.

Let me return to my translation, for a few comments must be made about the techniques applied. First, the elliptical subject in the first three clauses must be construed from the wider context. As such, the interviewee’s father ‘opened the door’, the head of the district office ‘entered’ and ‘told them’ to surrender. Contrary to the Romanian source text, the translation spells out who the protagonists are so that confusion about the characters’ identities could be avoided.

The Securitate’s colourful language is not ignored by interviewees who cast it in the form of direct speech. Victoria Haşu-Trâmbiţaş reports on commander Cârnu’s words following the confrontation with partisan Andrei Haşu:

*[...] all we know is that commander Cârnu, he was back then the Securitate commander, went to the officers and said: "The hell with you, why did you shoot? Why didn't you shoot him in the leg?". They would have liked to take him alive, but that they couldn't do.*

[...] atâta știm că comandantul Cârnu, el era atunci comandantul de securitate, s-a dus la securiști și a zis: „Dumnezeii voștri, de ce-ați tras? De ce n-ați tras la picioare?” Ar fi vrut să-l ia viu, dar viu nu l-au mai putut lua. (2013, p. 266).

The commander's expression of anger at his subordinates' gaffe reflects the use of colloquial language verging on swear words. Inevitably, the direct quote might send ripples of shock throughout the audience, as the performative power of the direct quote is unrivalled. Translation calls attention to the first question 'Dumnezeii voștri, de ce-ați tras?'. Even though a phrase like 'God damn you!' would have proved its worth retaining the word 'God' uttered in the original, I have opted for a more impactful construction. As a result, 'The hell with you' conveys the commander's outrage and indignation more effectively. What is more, the feeling of disturbed surprise experienced upon reading the original is produced in the target language as well.

Additionally, the repetition of the adjective 'alive' is abandoned in English. However, the insertion of the deictic pronoun 'that' in the target text increases the performativity of the narration a few notches generating communicative equivalence. In the main, all references to the hostile factions are organically performative. Why is this the case?,—one might rightfully ask. I postulate that historical interviews model themselves on theatrical performances where narrative action is centred, time and again, on the conflictual relations between men.

Incontestably, narratives cannot be abstracted from their performative configuration. The level of performance builds up around the dynamic use of direct speech and also around the voices directly quoted, as the next example demonstrates. Victoria Hașu-Trâmbițaș invites the audience to the far-removed past in order to discover her brother, partisan Gheorghe Hașu, as a child. Consequently, her story is set in a time frame that predates that of the interview topic, i.e. the anti-communist armed resistance. The following passage zooms in on the conversation between Gheorghe and his mother:

*[...] and my mother used to say: "Hey, stop going with her again for wood in the forest. Go instead with my sister from Beclean", who is with him in that photo, there. She was a stout, fat girl. "Hey, take Reta with you instead". "Mother, I'm not going with Reta, I'm going with Tori,\* because Tori takes the wood until we load the cart. I'm not taking Reta, I'm going with Tori, with Tori".*

[...] și zicea mama: 'Las-o, măi, n-o mai tot lua să te duci cu ea la pădure după lemne, măi. Mai ia-o și pe soră-mea aia din Beclean' – care e cu el în poză, acolo. Aia era o fată voinică, grasă. 'Ia-o, măi, și pe Reta să meargă cu tine.' 'Mamă, eu n-o iau pe Reta, eu mă duc cu Tori,\* că Tori duce lemnul până noi încercăm carul. Eu n-o iau pe Reta, eu cu Tori, cu Tori mă duc.' (2013, pp. 264-265).

The more colloquial language adopted by the interviewee grants to the story an improvisational character that accents its performativity. This unexpected flashback to childhood years and the vivid dialogue between the little boy and his mother mark the singularity of the narrator's account. The child's insistence on going for wood in the forest with his sister Victoria (Tori) is flagged by repetitions in the original which are kept in the translation as well ('I'm not taking Reta, I'm going with Tori, with Tori' - Eu n-o iau pe Reta, eu cu Tori, cu Tori mă duc').

As previously stated, colloquial language originates in the use of the interjection 'măi' – 'hey', dispersed throughout the paragraph. Briefly, no other major problems are inventoried.

Yet, the only caveat that should be made concerns the dynamics of performativity. The interviewee's use of a photo ('who is with him in that photo, there') and her unique insights into the partisan's voice as a child account for a successful staging of the action. The public is definitely mellowed by the story and curious to listen on so that they could discover what happened to the little boy who went for wood in the forest. Indeed, with its fair share of action, characters, dialogue and plots, oral history confirms its denomination as a narrative performance.

In conclusion, the translation of performativity reflects the translation of action. As formerly implied, language, thoughts and movements/gestures meld together to re-enact the past in a lively and realistic manner. Needless to say, it takes two to tango, so the presence of the audience is instrumental in shaping up the oral history interview. Translation is observant of all these aspects so that the target language audience could gain a similar experience of the narrative performance delivered by the original.

### 3.2 Study case: *Supraviețuitorii. Mărturii din temnițele comuniste ale României* (The Survivors: Testimonies from Romania's communist prisons; 2014)

In this second section I will examine a host of highly-performative accounts excerpted from the book *Supraviețuitorii. Mărturii din temnițele comuniste ale României* (2014) and given primarily by former political detainees. The interviews train the spotlight on the infernal world of communist prisons like Aiud, Pitești, Gherla or Periprava. It should be noted that the former political detainees chose to speak on the year that marked half a century since the decree that freed political prisoners en masse (1964).

By reading these transcribed oral history interviews I get the persistent feeling that, beyond their linguistic and historical dimensions, they are inscribed in a distinctive performative paradigm. There is a sense of a narrator speaking, telling a story to an audience – a story that happens to be about past events and individual actions in the maelstrom of history.

Thus, as a corollary to historical facts, one can easily detect the performativity-oriented constructions. Matei Boilă, a fierce opponent of communism, describes how hundreds of prisoners were gathered and forced to extol the virtues of the regime in exchange for their release. He ends his descriptive scene with a soliloquy: "*What they wouldn't give to make me say all those things too*". ('Tare ar fi vrut să mă facă și pe mine să spun chestiile astea'; 2014, p. 199). The line is uttered as an aside, as if signalling the narrator's complicity with his audience.

The target text battles for the performative spirit of the original which is somewhat difficult to capture. The semantically powerful adverb 'tare' denotes intensity ('extremely, very much') and plays up the performativity inherent in spoken language. To achieve semantic and communicative correspondence, I have opted for a more expressive paraphrase of the implicit meaning encased in the construction. With the audience in mind, my adverb 'what' in initial position reinforces the theatricality of the scene and the connection narrator - audience, as if a secret is being shared between them.

Statements shaped as soliloquies are not the only ones steeped in performativity. Colloquial and idiomatic language can also foster the performative nature of oral history interviews. The more colourful discourse of prison guards and captains is lodged in direct speech which enhances the theatrical elements of narratives. Boilă gives an example germane to this argument:

*When the captain saw me the following day, he told me: "You bastards! Only you and your brother dig your heels in, but I'll hold you in prison until you've made old bones and I can wipe*

*the floor with you.” I answered: “Captain, did I ask you to release me? You can keep me here, for all I care.” His whole body was shaking in anger.*

Când m-a văzut căpitanul a doua zi, mi-a spus: “Măi, ticăloșilor! Numai tu și cu fratele tău vă încăpățânați să nu cedați, dar să știți că vă țin în pușcărie până la adânci bătrâneți și vă fac material de pavaj.” I-am răspuns: “Domnule căpitan, v-am rugat eu să mă eliberați? Nu aveți decât să mă țineți.” Tremura de ciudă. (2014, p. 199).

The interviewee’s calmness and touch of irony combine with the captain’s outburst of anger producing a highly theatrical scene. The language used conveys adequately the cognitive and connotative meanings of the excerpt. First, the vocative form of the noun ‘ticăloșilor’ employed in addressing the prisoner calls to mind a specific intonation as reinforced by the presence of the exclamatory mark. The target text captures both the style and semantic meaning of the original by adding the pronoun ‘you’, in what eventually becomes ‘you bastards!’. More than that, the more colloquial phrase ‘vă încăpățânați să nu cedați’ is rendered as ‘dig your heels in’ which evokes the starting point of his crescendoing anger. The idiom proves its suitability in the context as it ushers in the intensely dramatic sequence predicated on an idiomatic use of language.

Therefore, the adjacent clauses ‘vă țin în pușcărie până la adânci bătrâneți și vă fac material de pavaj’ associate denotative with connotative meanings in what becomes a rather comical scene. My translation notes this juxtaposition of cognitive and stylistic elements reading as ‘I’ll hold you in prison until you’ve made old bones and I can wipe the floor with you’. The powerful imagery of the original accents the fact that the detainee would be kept in prison until his old age. As such, it delineates the entertaining and performative feature of the source language, which is being translated by two idiomatic expressions that produce a similar effect on the target audience.

Finally, the narrator’s answer, as heavily ironic as it is extremely bold, connotes composure and self-possession standing in stark contrast with the captain’s irritability. A literal strategy (‘Captain, did I ask you to release me? - Domnule căpitan, v-am rugat eu să mă eliberați?’) is followed by an idiomatic use of language. Indeed, the negative sentence ‘Nu aveți decât să mă țineți’ expresses the prisoner’s indifference which is rendered in English as ‘you can keep me here, for all I care’. The informal phrase ‘for all I care’ renders the communicative element conveyed by the Romanian adverb ‘decât’ (‘only’) used in negative constructions. The form of the original is distorted in the target text, yet the connotative meaning is adroitly restored.

The performativity inscribed in this passage stems from an adept combination of direct speech, colloquial/idiomatic language and the emotive meanings of words. There is a sense of verbal and psychological confrontation between the protagonists which further promotes the performative dimension of the described scene.

To continue, direct speech is undoubtedly a marker of performativity. The examples provided here not only endorse this tenet but they help stage elaborately the conflict between antagonists and protagonists. The following excerpt is centred on hunger strikes in prison. Evidently, direct speech is employed in order to draw the public’s attention to a rather delicate topic:

*When I went on hunger strike, the head of investigations, a major, Samoilă, asked me:*

- *Why do you go on hunger strike, because you are released tomorrow?*
- *I’m not asking for any release! Let me sleep!*
- *Alright then, sleep! But are you going to eat?*
- *I’ll eat!*

*It was in the afternoon, and I told them:*

- *I can’t eat this food – pearl barley, that’s hardly anything. I can’t eat! The same food for seven years! I can’t stand it anymore.*

- *Very well, but what can you eat then?*  
[...]
- *Two slices of beef of around one hundred fifty grams, mashed potatoes with oil, cabbage or tomato salad and a piece of bread of around two hundred grams.*
- *Very well then, you'll get it!*

Când am declarat greva foamei, șeful anchetelor, un maior, Samoilă, m-a întrebat:

- De ce declari greva foamei, că mâine te eliberăm?
- Eu nu ce eliberare! Lăsați-mă să dorm!
- Bine, dormi! Dar mănânci?
- Mănânc!
- Și era la amiază, și le-am spus:
- Nu pot mânca mâncarea asta – arpacaș, nimica toată. Nu pot mânca! Aceeași mâncare de șapte ani de zile! Nu îl mai suport.  
[...]
- Bine, dar ce poți mânca?
- Două felii de carne de vită, de vreo sută cincizeci de grame, cartofi piure, cu ulei, salată de varză sau roșii și o bucățică de pâine, vreo două sute de grame.
- Bine, vei primi asta! (2014, p. 85).

The melodrama of the passage lies in the quick change of voices, as the prisoner's short exclamatory sentences alternate with the major's concise questions. The interviewee's sense of revolt is captured linguistically by the double repetitions of the negative clauses 'I can't eat' ('Nu pot mânca'). His repugnance at prison food is reminiscent of oral colloquial language ('I can't stand it anymore – Nu îl mai suport'; 'that's hardly anything – o nimica toată') being so explicitly stated that the gastronomic desires listed at the end strike a humorous note. The farcical undertones of the passage articulate its performative parameters. Translation faces no stumbling blocks, as the conversational nature of the paragraph alludes to a familiar language free of lexical or grammatical inaccuracies.

What is more, language put at the service of performativity is evidenced by the use of interjections. Actability and musicality are in full force in the following sentence related to the Securitate interrogations: "*He would ask you: 'What's your name?' and then smack!, a slap across your face*". ('Te întreba: „Cum te cheamă?” și jap! o palmă.” (2014, p. 179). Language brevity converges with the interjection 'jap!' and a more elliptical structure ('a slap across your face') to drive the performative pace of the scene. Obviously, the sonority of the interjection makes a positive contribution to the staging of the narrative, while recalling its oral context. Translation is faithful to the original, as both content and form are effectively equated in the target language.

Furthermore, the drama hovering over prison episodes is tangible in action-packed descriptions. While at Aiud Prison, Ioan Roșca witnessed a prisoner's shooting by a guard, following the latter's presence in a forbidden area. The story, in its broader outlines, is evoked as follows:

*Popa climbed up the barbed wire fence and said: "Open fire and shoot me!" The militiaman on duty and all the people were shouting: "Don't shoot, he's sick!" [...] When he made sure that if he shot him he would fall between the two fences, he opened fire and shot. People started screaming, the whole prison was screaming. The alarm went off.*

Popa s-a suit pe gardul de sârmă și a zis: „Trage și împușcă-mă!” Milițianul din post și lumea strigau: „Nu trage, că-i bolnav!” [...] Și când a fost sigur că dacă-l împușcă o să cadă între cele două garduri, a tras și l-a împușcat. Lumea a început să urle, tot penitenciarul urla. S-a dat alarma. (2014, p. 183).

The tragic element foregrounded in the story derives from the prisoner's words, quoted directly. Sounding as an invitation for the militiaman to shoot him, they lend themselves easily to the performativity of the oral interview. More than that, the brevity and intelligibility of the sentence 'Trage și împușcă-mă!' do not mark only the detainee's lack of meaningful reaction to the extreme situation he found himself in. Rather, they play up the entertaining nature of the narrative while engaging the audience's attention.

Translation is literal, as attempts are made to retain both the cognitive and pragmatic frames of the original. What is more, the lexical synonymy defined by the simultaneous use of the verbs 'a striga' ('to shout') and 'a urla' ('to scream') is also transferred in English. All in all, the highly performative nature of the passage originates in the triadic relationship between prisoner-militiaman-the other prisoners. As the spotlight gradually moves along this triangle, visual images conflate with auditory ones in what turns out to be a sensational and overdramatic episodic.

As a concluding remark, these examples further uphold the validity of oral history interviews as performative acts in their own right. If direct speech has already been acknowledged as a marker of performativity, this new set of interviews championed the use of colloquial language and humour/irony in the production of entertaining narratives.

#### 4. Conclusion

Oral accounts give the impression that everything unfolds right before one's eyes, which strengthens the importance of the narrator as a performer. The great intensity of historical scenes can only be sensed in their relation to performance.

The translation of performativity reflects the translation of action. As formerly implied, language, thoughts, and movements/gestures blend to re-enact the past in an animated and realistic manner. Everything is done with someone in mind, as the presence of the audience is instrumental in shaping up the oral history interview. Translation is sensitive to all these aspects so that the English public could gain a similar experience of the performance delivered by the original.

Conclusively, the dramatic performance of historical interviews on communism is sustained by a whole set of 'stage props': implied gestures, tone of voice, colloquial/popular/informal language, introspective soliloquies, direct speech, and, last but not least, a direct form of addressing the audience. Their translation into English alternates literal rendering with more liberal strategies being reactive to two elements. Firstly, the factual and historical load of the testimonies cannot be negated and ought to be thoroughly transferred. Secondly, the emotional layers of meaning that offer insights into human subjectivity and the performative use of language should also transpire in the target text.

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