

Metaphorical Euphemisms in the Original Text and Italian Translations of F.M. Dostoevskij's Novel *Crime and Punishment*

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The following paper deals with the euphemisms occurring in the original text and some Italian translations of F.M. Dostoevskij's novel "Crime and Punishment." Particular attention is given to the euphemisms formed via application of metaphor, as it appears to be one of the most effective veiling instruments. First of all, the main thematic areas of metaphorical euphemisms use are indicated and, subsequently, a lexicographic-cultural analysis is conducted paying attention, as well, to the essential functions and processes of formation of such a type of words and expressions in Russian and Italian. An important part of the article is devoted to the contrastive analysis of Russian metaphorical euphemisms found in the text of the novel and their translations into Italian. Apart from the masking meaning, metaphorical euphemisms contain those cultural and symbolic, expressed by means of semiotic content of denotatum, and this characteristic makes of them often a complicated translation problem to resolve. Some examples will be delivered in order to demonstrate the major tendencies translators follow dealing with the issue.

Keywords: *Euphemism, Indirect nomination, Metaphor, Metaphorical euphemisms, Translation of euphemisms*

Introduction

Humans combine biological and social characteristics. The second ones make of us a society, such a huge community, so difficult to be organized. Language is an essential mean for social interactions and the inner organization of our community. In the society there are written and unwritten laws that regulate life inside it. Both of them have the form of language signs. The laws presume following particular patterns of behavior in a given situation. A crucial role in these patterns is assumed by linguistic behavior. Then, the reflections on how to act go always together with those on what to say.

The social co-existence makes us think a lot of our interlocutors and the effect of what we say. Therefore, sometimes we are sure we can say things the way they are, following the line of direct nomination. Although it is obvious we have restrictions, as well, and they are not a few. As Wardhaugh puts it: "*No one speaks the same way all the time and people constantly exploit the nuances of the languages they speak for a wide variety of purposes*" (Wardhaugh 2006: 5). There are a lot of social and cultural factors and conditions limiting our linguistic behavior and making us employ indirect nomination, or substituting offensive or harsh words by those more neutral and pleasantly sounding (Katsev 1987: 64). Such words are called euphemisms.

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Most scientists claim that euphemisms have their origin in the phenomenon of *taboo*, its linguistic aspect, which presumes some words to be interdicted. During the earlier periods of our history, such words were names of gods, in some cultures, names of ordinary persons or dead, wild animals which were objects of hunt. During the Medieval period a lot of words from religious field were often interdicted and those relating to pestilences, as well. So, the euphemisms of those periods were principally conditioned by superstitious fears.

As for the Modern Age, euphemisms generating factors have completely changed: numerous etiquettical euphemisms have appeared and continue to appear, as for us, nowadays, in the period of active globalization process, it is essential not to sound offensive, especially when it comes to international contacts, which require, as well, adequate interpretation from language to language.

Euphemisms often represent a difficult translation problem to resolve, as they can have the form of both words and expressions, they always have a cultural element in the meaning and can be formed by means of different tropes. One of the most effective veiling instruments and, as a result, one of the most effective euphemistic meaning basis is metaphor, thanks to its figurativeness which distracts our attention from an interdicted object or phenomenon.

The main purpose of the research is to analyze the way translators deal with Russian metaphorical euphemisms interpreting them into Italian. For such an aim a comparative analysis of the euphemisms taken from the original text and seven Italian translations of F.M. Dostoevskij's novel *Crime and punishment* will be carried out. We will focus, as well, on conducting a lexicographic-cultural analysis of the found lexical units paying particular attention to the principles of formation of metaphorical euphemisms in Russian and Italian and to the metaphorical concepts which are used to create euphemistic meaning basis in both languages. Finally, the main functions and fields of metaphorical euphemisms use in the novel will be indicated.

Literature Review

Scientific interest to euphemisms has manifested not before the XX century, and has been marked by a series of papers devoted to euphemisms, their semantic characteristics in different languages. For instance, *O Eufemismo e o Disfemismo na Língua e na Literatura Portuguesa* by João da Silva Correia (1927), *O Eufemismo e o disfemismo no português moderno* by Heinz Kröll (1984) for Portuguese, *Le brutte parole, Semantica dell'eufemismo* di Nora Galli de' Paratesi (1969) for Italian. As for the English language, it became to a great extent object of lexicographic description, the most well-known results of which are *A Dictionary of Euphemisms & Other Doubletalk* by Hugh Rawson (1981), *How Not to Say What You Mean - A Dictionary of Euphemisms* by R. W. Holder (2002).

In the Russian scholar one of the fundamental works devoted to euphemisms was created by A.M. Katsev and entitled *Jazykovoje tabu i evfemija* (1988). The monograph provides the reader with a panoramic view on the process of the phenomenon of euphemism development: from the ancient taboo to the

contemporary euphemistic use. The description is enriched with examples from different languages. Another essential emphasis is done to the description of euphemism's nature. One of the most important characteristics is that it consists of three elements: social, psychological and linguistic. The first one considers social, religious, moral and other reasons that condemn direct nomination, the second relates to the negative emotion we experience when pronounce or hear an interdicted word or expression, and the third one is divided into two elements: negative *denotatum* of the interdicted word and the ameliorative effect of an employed euphemism (Katsev 1988: 5). This scheme demonstrates complicity and interdisciplinarity of the phenomenon.

Another important Russian researcher is V.P. Moskvin who published a monograph *Evfemizmy v leksicheskoj sisteme russkogo jazyka* (2017) which is another work referred to the general theory of euphemia with particular attention to the methods of their formation and the fields of use, as well as, to some similar phenomena euphemia should be distinguished from. Apart from this, Moskvin elaborated a thematic-functional classification of euphemisms, which we partly applied in the paper.

Slovar' evfemismov russkogo jazyka by E.P. Seničkina (2008) is the first experience of lexicographic line in the studies on euphemisms.

Methodology

The research was started with choosing a Russian text. The author and the novel were not selected by chance. We needed a reliable classical text which addresses issues requiring euphemisms. Besides, it had to be culturally representative, difficult to be translated. Another important point is that Dostoevskij is considered one of the Russian writers who more frequently than others employed euphemistic style (Moskvin 2017: 64). And, finally, Dostoevskij is an extremely popular writer in Italy, and it provoked and continues to provoke creating numerous translations of his texts. Very few Russian writers were translated so many times, so it gives a good possibility for comparative research.

The next step was to work with the Russian text individualizing euphemistic uses and to create a corpus. Subsequently, it was time to find some Italian translations. For the present paper we worked with seven translations.

We carried out two types of analysis: lexicographic-cultural and translational. The first presumes semantic inquiry, with particular attention to the concepts used to create euphemistic meanings in both languages, consulting a number of dictionaries. Besides, it includes the lexical characteristics of euphemisms permitting them to have, to increase or to decrease veiling effect.

The second type of analysis, which consists in a comparative inquiry of the translations, allowed us to observe the tendencies followed by translators interpreting Russian metaphorical euphemisms into Italian.

Results

The conducted research allowed us to individualize three mostly frequent thematic areas requiring metaphorical euphemisms in the novel, and they are death, alcohol consumption and its consequences and mental abilities. Some examples of Russian metaphorical euphemisms from each field and of their interpretations into Italian will be delivered and analyzed below.

Death

Death is a traditional frightening phenomenon in various cultures, and as a consequence, a reach source for creation of euphemisms. Even the less superstitious persons often use euphemisms talking about death and other frightening things. Moskvin considers such euphemisms to be one of the groups in his thematic-functional classification: *Frightening phenomena as object of euphemization* [Pugàjušjije javlènija kak objekt evfemizàtsii] (Moskvin 2017: 102).

Pokojnyj [Peaceful]

In the original text of the novel the most frequently observed euphemism for *dead* is *pokojnyj* [adjective from *pokoj* – *peace*] or *pokojnik* [noun from *pokoj* – *peace*]. The adjective often becomes a noun for the process of conversion. It is principally used in juridical and other formal contexts.

The metaphoric concept of peace, substituting that of death, results in extenuation and reducing the negative effect produced by the argument, and in this way the *denotatum* is ameliorated and the euphemistic base is created.

A completely positive vision of death is observed, thanks to the metaphor, so the euphemism is curious to be analyzed from the cultural point of view as well. As the dictionary of the Russian language reports (Evgenjeva 1999), the word *pokojnyj* has five meanings, and that regarded to death was the latest to form. The metaphor, the meaning was created with, may be referred, first of all, to the physical state of a dead person, as he or she is not able to move anymore, because the first characteristic of peace is absence of movements (Evgenjeva 1999). But, it is connected, as well, and maybe even more closely, to the interior state: no more worries. This second aspect may represent the Orthodox Christian cultural context, the word was formed in. Life of a Christian was never easy to live, and meeting the God in paradise was often desired as the only way of liberation from all the sacrifices and difficulties.

As for Italian, the most frequently used equivalent is *defunto* [past participial from *defungere* – *to die*; etymology: from the Latin verb *defūngi* – comp. of *de* – *out of* and *fungi* – *to accomplish*] (De Mauro 2016). A completely different interpretation of death can be noticed, as if it was seen as a mission to accomplish, and life in itself is probably more important than what is expected after it, unlike the content of the Russian term. It seems to be a Latin pagan culture reflection.

In Italian *defunto* is used, first of all, in formal contexts that presume use of neutral words, a condition perfectly satisfied by euphemisms.

Another translation of the Russian euphemism is *scomparso* [disappeared] which is another example of euphemistic metaphorical figurative meaning containing a cultural element relating to the vision of death. This vision refers to the after death processes our body goes through and to the funeral traditions of corpse treatment that literally do not let us see the person again. As a result, death is easily associated with a long absence permitting to create the metaphor.

Buon'anima, the next interpretation of *pokojnyj* is an expression literally meaning *good soul*. It is used in order to pay respect and express affection to a dead (De Mauro 2016). The existence and use of such a word combination represent the general attitude of veneration of dead, typical for numerous cultures that often includes saying only good things about decedents. It can be considered a euphemism, as words relating directly to death are omitted, and, with the metaphor a dead person is "transformed" into a *good soul* that is the result of ameliorating the *denotatum*.

The following example of interpretation is the word *povero* [poor] in metaphorical meaning: first of all, a person who does not possess material benefits can be called *povero* [poor] (De Mauro 2016). A dead does not possess life which is the most precious thing, so the person deserves mercy that is the metaphorical transfer which created euphemistic base of the meaning.

There is another method of translation occurring often enough. It does not have metaphorical nature though. It is the case of omission of the word referring to death. That is another effective technique for euphemisms creation. Instead of the word meaning *dead* some translators just used names of the persons. In this way they are nearly perceived like living people by the readers.

A completely different tendency of translation is demonstrated by such interpretation as *morto* [dead]. It is an example of direct nomination deprived of any euphemistic or metaphoric capacities which are characteristic to the Russian term.

Usopshij [Sleeping]

Another Russian euphemism relating to death is *usopshij* – *sleeping* which is now considered an obsolete word, but was of highly common use during the period of Dostoevskij's writing activity.¹ (Natsional'nyj korpus russkogo jazyka). The employed metaphor reflects, again, the state of quiescence of a dead which in appearance is similar to that of a sleeping person. Therefore, amelioration of *denotatum* achieved via application of metaphor can be observed which contributes to euphemistic meaning creation. Besides, the concept is strictly related to peace that is typical for the Russian language and already introduced above by the word *pokojnyj*.

As for the translations into Italian, in some of the versions *defunto* and *morto*, analyzed above, were employed.

Another translator preferred to use the word *estinto* [extinct] which has a Latin root meaning *to put something out*, relating, first of all, to fire (De Mauro 2016). So, the metaphor contains the reference to identifying life with fire, so

¹Natsional'nyj korpus russkogo jazyka [National corpus of the Russian language]. Retrieved from <https://ruscorpora.ru>

something active, colourful, and intense. In this term a vision of death similar to that of *defunto* is reflected: life is more important and after there is nothing but a distinguished fire. We can note two contrasting concepts for death: peace, sleeping in Russian, which are more positive, and putting fire out in Italian that represent cultural differences in the vision of life and death.

Othodit' [To Walk Away]

As for the Russian euphemistic verbs employed to talk about death, one of them is *othodit'* [to walk away], and its concept makes a reference to the vision of death in the form of a road or a trip. The same verb can be combined with the word *train*, for example, when it is about to depart. The previously formed meaning of the verb under attention is *to finish, to come to an end*, first of all, for the contexts of agriculture (Evgenjeva 1999): *klubnika otoshla* [strawberry walked away] means that strawberry is out of season. Then the metaphorical transfer of meaning towards death can already be traced at that stage.

In the Italian translations the Russian term has a number of interpretations. One of them is *rantolare* [to wheeze], and here the *denotatum* of death is substituted with that of the sounds produced by a person who is about to die.

A different metaphoric concept is contained in the option *spirare* [to exhale] which refers to the last moment of life – the last exhale.

The next interpretation, conceptually, is the closest to the original. The verb *andarsene* [to go away] lets us imagine walking away, a road and an unknown destination that neutralize the negative emotion generated by the topic. *Essere alla fine* [to be at the end] is another translation representing a traditional perception of death as the end which is, clearly, not a positive point that reduce the level of amelioration and, as a consequence, of euphemistic veiling. A similar semantic camp is suicide.

Naložit' Na Sebja Ruki [To Put Hands On Oneself]

The Russian idiom has a figurative meaning of committing suicide. The concept of hand is of use in both Russian and Italian when it comes to expressing physical damage idea. In Russian there is, as well, for example, such expression as *podnimat' ruku na kogo-libo* [lift a hand on sb] with the meanings *to try to beat sb, to beat sb or to try to kill sb, to kill sb* (Evgenjeva 1999). The same can be observed Italian: *alzare le mani su qc* has the identical meaning. In Italian, though, there are no idioms or collocations with the same concept meaning suicide that resulted in problems for translators to interpret *naložit' na sebja ruki*. As for the euphemistic component, it is conducted via a metaphorical shift, relating to the fact that in most cases violent death or suicide are brought employing hands. In the text the idiom is not referred to a real suicide, but to a moral one of Sonja who became a prostitute to maintain the family of her father. The idiom is used by Raskol'nikov who condemns her choice. The euphemism is used with the function of veiling frightening phenomena that is moral death in this case.

The first examples of translations we analyze are *portare la mano su sé stesso, portare la mano su di sé* [to put hand on oneself], *portare le mani su di sé* [to put hands on oneself]. They seem to be cases of loan translation, because the

expressions are not registered in the dictionaries of the Italian language, nor clear to native speakers.

The second example is *alzare la mano contro di sé* [lift the hand against oneself], which is probably an attempt to adapt the Italian fixed expression *alzare le mani su qc* [to lift the hands on sb] which is not used in the context of suicide, making it closer to the original. The Russian word combination, though, the model of translation was apparently taken from, seems to be a different one - *podnjat ruku na kogo-libo* [lift hand on sb]. And it has a different meaning: *to try to beat someone or to beat sb, to try to kill sb or to kill sb* (Evgenjeva 1999) and so it cannot be associated with suicide. A similar weak point was found in the idiom *mettersi le mani addosso* [to put hands on oneself], as neither it can be used when it comes to suicide. In Italian it means *to beat sb* or *to touch*, especially in a lustful way (De Mauro 2016). The last interpretation to analyze is *suicidarsi* [to commit suicide]. Here we deal with a case of direct nomination deprived of any masking, conceptual or cultural elements contained in the original expression.

Taking into consideration the above mentioned characteristics of both Russian and Italian terms used to interpret death, we can conclude that the major part of the interpretations respect the euphemistic and metaphoric nature of the original terms. Besides, some of the Italian translators used words and expressions conceptually similar to those of the Russian text, so some similarities in the perception of death in the cultures can be noticed. As for the differences, the Russian terms tend to endue death with more positive qualities. Apart from the above mentioned conclusions, we can add disregard of some translators for the euphemistic and metaphoric characteristics of the Russian words and expressions that resulted in employing direct terms. And, finally, the problem of loan translation of Russian idioms was observed which results in incomprehensiveness of some terms by readers.

Alcohol Consumption and its Consequences

Another thematic field resulting in frequent employing of euphemistic means is alcohol, particularly its effect on its consumers which is condemned by Christian and moral principles. Although unlike the previous semantic camp where the generating reason for euphemistic nomination was fear, in this thematic group the reason is masking the consequences of alcohol consumption. So, here we will observe the application of masking euphemisms, taking part of Moskvin's classification (2017: 125).

Hmel'noj [Hopped]

The most frequent euphemism for *drunk* is *hmel'noj* [hopped]. The concept of hop is, first of all, associated with beer, being its main component. In Russian, though, it is used for the consequences of any alcoholic drinks consumption. The veiling results effective, as the concept of the plant created in our mind "protects" our perception from the negative shades contained in the direct terms and the issue itself.

Some Italian translators preferred to employ the term *brillo* [an adjective from the verb *brillare* – to shine] which, as well as the original word, is able to produce a veiling effect, thanks to invoking of the metaphor. The concept used in Italian may be associated with such external signs, as reddish face colour causing "shining" otherwise, if we consider the figurative meaning of "shining," it may be related to provocative or aggressive behavior of a person under effects of alcohol consumption.

Another part of translators, on the contrary, concentrated on the descriptive method of interpretation and decided to apply direct nomination having employed the term *ubriaco* [drunk] that, obviously, is not able to transfer the euphemistic and metaphorical content of the Russian term.

Hmel' Sidit [Hop Seats]

One more euphemism containing the concept of hop is hop itself, or *hmel'* in Russian. This word in its third meaning designates the state of being under the effect of alcoholic substances (Evgenjeva 1999). In the text of the novel Dostoevskij employs the term combined with the verb *sidet'* [to seat]: *hmel' sidit* [hop seats]. The verb contributes to the metaphorical, and, as a result, to euphemistic meaning formation that creates an effective masking effect.

In some of the Italian interpretations translators used a different grammatical construction, having substituted the Russian *Noun+Verb* (to seat) with *Verb* (to be)+*Noun*. One of the applied nouns is *sbornia* [drunkenness] that has uncertain etymology (De Mauro 2016) and is another example of direct nomination which cannot represent metaphorical, euphemistic or cultural elements of the meaning of the Russian term.

Similar lexical units are *sbronza* [drunkenness] and an adjective *sbronzo* [drunk]. They have the same meaning and, as well, an uncertain etymology (De Mauro 2016).

Ubriacatura [drunkenness] is one more direct term formed of the reflexive verb *ubriacarsi* [to become drunk].

As for the verbs employed in creating euphemistic meanings of the semantic camp under consideration, in the original text of the novel we observed using of the verb *udarit'* [to strike] combined with the word *golova* [head]. As a result, we have an expression *udarit' v golovu* [to strike in head] with the meaning *to start feeling drunk*. Such a concept must come from the perception of alcohol effects like a strike on head that is brusque and coming unexpectedly. In Russian the expression can have both personal and impersonal form. In the text of the novel an impersonal construction is used: *udarilo* [it stroke], but in Russian there is no any subject, the verb is used in the form of neutral gender which is impersonal, and this characteristic contributes to effectiveness of the euphemistic meaning.

In Italian translations we observe existence of a similar concept to form the euphemistic meaning: some translators used the expression *dare alla testa* [to give on head] formed thanks to the meaning *to strike* of the verb. But the verb usually presumes a subject, so, interpreting the Russian text, some translators employed such sentences like *il vino gli aveva dato alla testa* [the wine had given him on the head], *l'alcol gli aveva dato alla testa* [the alcohol had given him on the head],

while in the Russian sentences there is no a subject, and the verb has the form of the neutral genre responsible for impersonal constructions: *v golovu udarilo* [in head stroke].

A different concept was applied by another translator: *salire alla testa* [to lift on the head] representing vertical "movement" of the alcohol and its effects inside the body and their arrival to the head. The translator used an impersonal construction, so there was not a direct reference to alcoholic substances that is a favourable condition for the euphemistic element of the meaning.

The last interpretation is *fare l'effetto* [to do/ to make effect] which is the most neutral thanks to large meaning of the verb *fare* [to do/to make]. This largeness of the meaning is another good point for creating a euphemism. On the other hand, the word combination is not close enough to the original and does not possess any metaphorical elements in the meaning.

Having analyzed Russian metaphorical euphemisms relating to the semantic camp *alcohol and the consequences of its consumption*, we can notice that in the Italian translations of the novel there are some differences in the word forming concepts of the terms used by translators. There are, as well, terms having similar both metaphorical and euphemistic elements in the meaning. Finally, the problem of direct nomination for interpretation of euphemistic word and expressions occur.

Mental Abilities

In the following section we will consider Russian metaphorical euphemisms referring to the field of intellectual abilities and their interpretations into Italian. A frequent use of etiquettical euphemisms will be observed, as they are employed in order not to offend mentioned persons (Moskvin 2017: 118).

A frequent definition for not quite clever characters in the novel is *prostovatyj* [simple]. It has a very productive suffix in Russian – *ova* which reduces the grade of a quality expressed by adjective. Such a characteristic creates an additional shadow of veiling to the euphemistic meaning contained in the concept used for the word formation. The concept of simplicity in similar contexts is applied in many languages, including Russian, Italian and English. It refers to the simplicity of thoughts, things discussed by person. *Simple* instead of *stupid* makes a great difference, considerably ameliorating the *denotatum* thanks to the metaphor.

In Italian, as mentioned above, there exists the same concept for stupidity: *semplice* [simple]. But unlike English, in Italian and in Russian there are diminutive suffixes able to improve the veiling effect. So, in Italian some translators applied *sempliciotto* [simple (with diminutive suffix *otto*)] which is a perfectly convenient term to interpret the Russian euphemism.

Another Italian term, quite similar to the previous one, is *semplicione* [simple (with augmentative suffix *one*)]. The most important dictionaries of the Italian language, though, that are *Grande Dizionario della lingua italiana* by Battaglia (1997) and *Il Nuovo Vocabolario di base della lingua italiana* di De Mauro (2016) do not contain references to being stupid in the meaning of the word *semplicione*. It is related more to ingenuous character of a person, while in the dictionary of the

Russian language the word *prostovatyj* has the second meaning which is *stupid* (Evgenjeva 1999).

As for the translations based on the method of direct nomination, there are such examples as *stupido* [stupid] and *assai stupido* [very stupid]. If the first term just reveals the real meaning of the euphemized word, the second one even intensifies the direct meaning with the word *assai* which is quite expressive in Italian. So, these interpretations are not able to accomplish the etiquettical function, typical for the euphemisms of the referred semantic camp, as they sound offensive.

Another pair of examples, similar to being direct terms, is *tardo di mente* [late of mind] and *limitato di mente* [limited of mind]. In the first collocation the semantic nuclear is the word *tardo* [late]. As the dictionary of Battaglia (1997) reports, this word has the fifth meaning which is referred to low mental and intellectual faculties, and it can be used injuriously. Such a stylistic note proves the euphemistic incapacity of the collocation.

The second word combination contains, as well, revealing and offensive terms that cannot be considered euphemistic.

Conclusion

The conducted research demonstrates, first of all, that in the original text of F. M. Dostoevskij's novel *Crime and punishment*, as well as, in its Italian translations, the main semantic camps for metaphorical euphemisms are death, alcohol consumption and its consequences and mental abilities. As for the functional types of metaphorical euphemisms in the novel, the most frequently applied are those used for nomination of frightening phenomena, masking and etiquettical. Besides, we can conclude that metaphor is one of the most effective veiling instruments thanks to its figurativeness which is able to distract well our attention from the real object of communication. Among other effective means for euphemistic veiling, use of diminutive suffixes and omission can be indicated. As for the metaphorical euphemistic concepts in both languages, there are similarities and differences conditioned by those cultural. When it comes to interpretation of such lexical units, they definitely create difficulties for translators, and, as we observed, there are translators who try to resolve the problem, finding appropriate words and expressions to conserve the euphemistic content in Italian, but, there are, as well, those who prefer to employ terms with reduced or absent veiling capacity that are not able to transfer euphemistic and metaphorical elements of the meanings. When metaphorical euphemisms have the form of fixed expressions, the problem of loan translation may occur, leading sometimes to incomprehensiveness of some interpretations formed following this technique.

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