Metaphorical Euphemisms in the Original Text and Italian Translations of F.M. Dostoevskij’s novel “Crime and Punishment

The present paper deals with euphemisms in the original text and some Italian translations of F.M. Dostoevskij’s novel “Crime and Punishment”, with particular attention to those formed via application of metaphor, as it appears to be one of the most effective veiling instruments. First of all, the main spheres of metaphorical euphemistic is indicated and subsequently a lexicographic-cultural analysis is presented 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 in Italian. Apart from masking meaning, metaphorical euphemisms contain that cultural and symbolic, expressed via 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, metaphor, translation of euphemisms, indirect nomination, metaphorical euphemisms.

Introduction

Humans combine biological and social characteristics. Those second make of us a society, such a huge community, so complicated to be organised. Language is the essential mean for social interactions and the inner organisation of our community. In the society there are laws, written and unwritten, both having the form of linguistic signs though, that regulate life inside it. The laws presume particular patterns of behavior in a given situation. A crucial role in these patterns is assumed by linguistic behavior. So, the reflections on how to act go always together with those on what to say.

The social co-existence makes us think a lot about our interlocutors and the effect of what we say. So, sometimes we are sure we can say things the way they are, following the line of direct nomination. But, obviously, 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”\(^1\). 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\(^2\). Such words are called euphemisms.

Most scientists claim that euphemisms trace their origin the 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

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\(^1\) Wardhaugh, 2006 : 5
\(^2\) Katsev, 1987 : 64
gods, in some cultures names of ordinary persons or dead, wild animal which were objects of hunt. During the Medieval period a lot of words from religious field were often interdicted and those relating to epidemies, as well. So, the euphemisms of those periods were principally conditioned by superstitious fears.

As for the Modern Age, the euphemisms generating factors have completely changed: many etiiquetted euphemisms appeared and continue to appear, as for us, nowadays, the period of active globalization, it’s essential not to sound offensive, especially when it comes to international contacts, which require, as well, an 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 with 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.

So, the main purpose of the present 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 concentrate, 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 creating euphemistic meaning basis in both languages. And finally, the main functions and fields of metaphorical euphemisms functioning in the novel will be indicated.

The article contains the following parts: introduction, literature review, methodology, findings and results, conclusions, references.

Literature Review

Scientific interest to euphemisms has manifested only in the XX century was 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, 19271, "O Eufemismo e o disfemismo no português moderno” by Heinz Kröll2, 1984 for Portuguese, "Le brutte parole, Semantica dell’eufemismo” ["Bad words, Semantics of euphemism"] di Nora Galli de’ Paratesi3, 1964 for Italian.

As for the English language, it became to a great extent object of lexicographic description, the most representative results of which are ”A Dictionary of Euphemisms&Other Doubletalk” by Hugh Rawson4, 1981, ”How Not To Say What You Mean” A Dictionary of Euphemisms by R. W. Holder5, 2002.

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1 da Silva Correia, 1927  
2 Kröll, 1984  
3 de’ Paratesi, 1964  
4 Rawson, 1981  
5 Holder, 2002
In the Russian scholar one of the fundamental works devoted to
euphemisms was created by A.M. Katsev1 entitled “Jazykovoje tabu i
evemija” [language taboo and euphemia], 1988. The monograph provides the
reader with a panoramic view on the process of euphemism’s 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 those 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
euphemism2. 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”3
[Euphemisms in the lexical system of the Russian language] which 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, that we partly
applied in the present paper.

“Slovar’ evfemismov russkogo jazyka” [Dictionary of euphemisms of the
Russian language] by E.P. Senichkina4, 2008 is the first experience of
lexicographic direction in the studies of euphemisms.

Methodology

The research started with choosing a Russian text. The author and the
novel weren’t selected by chance. We needed a classical text which addresses
themes 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 style5. And, finally, Dostoevskij is an extremely popular
popular writer in Italy, and it provoked and continues to provoke creating
translations of his texts. Very few Russian writers were translated so many
times. And it gives a good possibility for comparative research.

The next step was to work with the Russian text individualizing
euphemistic uses and creating a corpora.

Subsequently, it was time to find Italian translations. For the present paper
we worked with seven translations.

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1 Katsev, 1988
2 Katsev, 1988: 5
3 Moskvin, 2017
4 Senichkina, 2008
5 Moskvin, 2016:64
We carried out two types of analysis: lexicographic-cultural and translational. The first one presumes semantic inquiry, with particular attention to the concept used to create an euphemistic meaning in both languages, consulting various dictionaries and, besides, it includes the lexical characteristic of an euphemism which let it have, increase or decrease a veiling capacity.

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

Results

The conducted research allowed us to individualize three mostly frequent themes 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 filed and of their interpretations into Italian will be offered and analyzed below.

Death

Death is a traditional frightening phenomenon in various cultures, and so, a reach source for creation of euphemisms. Even the less superstitious persons often use euphemisms talking about death and other frightening things. So, Moskvin considers them to be one of the groups in his thematic-functional classification of euphemisms and calls them euphemisms used for nomination of frightening objects and phenomena

Pokojnyj [peaceful]

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

The metaphoric concept of peace 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, the word “pokojnyj” has five meanings, and that regarded to death was the last 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. 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

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1 Moskvin, 2017:102
2 Evgenjeva, 1999
context, the word was formed in. Life of a Christian never was easy to live, and
the meeting with the God in paradise was often desired as the only way of
liberation from all the sacrifices of the world.

As for Italian, the most frequently used equivalent is “defunto” [past
participial from “defungere” – “to die”; etymology: from the Latin verb
“defungi” – comp. of “de” – “out of” and “fungi” – “to accomplish”]. So, a
completely different interpretation of death can be noticed, as if it was seen as
a mission to accomplish, so 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. And this
vision may refer to the after death processes our body goes through and to the
funeral traditions of corpse treatment that literally don’t let us see the person
again.

“Buon’anima”, the next interpretation of “pokojnyj” is an expression
literally meaning “good soul”. It is frequently used in common speech in order
to pay respect and express affection to the dead. The existence and use of such
a word combination represent the general attitude of veneration of dead, typical
for numerous cultures and which often includes saying only good things about
who is dead.

It can be considered a euphemism, as words relating directly to death are
omitted, and, with the metaphor the dead person is “transformed” into “good
soul”, the result of ameliorating the denotatum.

The following example of interpretation is the use of the word “povero”
[poor] in metaphoric meaning. First of all, a person who doesn’t possess
material benefits can be called “povero” [poor], and a dead doesn’t possess
life which is the most precious thing, so mercy is deserved. And this
metaphoric transfer created euphemistic base of the meaning.

There is another method of translation occurring often enough. It doesn’t
have metaphoric nature though. It’s 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’re nearly perceived like living people by the readers.

A completely different tendency of translation is demonstrated by such
interpretation as “mortal” [dead]. It is an example of direct nomination deprive
of any euphemistic or metaphoric capacity 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

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1 De Mauro, 2016
2 De Mauro, 2016
3 De Mauro, 2016
during the period of Dostoevskij’s writing activity\(^1\). The employed metaphor reflects, again, the state quiescence of a dead which in appearance is similar to that of a sleeping person. And so, amelioration of denotatum formed via application of metaphor can be observed which contributes to euphemistic meaning creation. Besides, the concept is strictly related to that of peace typical for the Russian language already introduced above by the word “pokojnyj”.

As for the translations into Italian, in some of the versions “defunto” and “morte”, analysed 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\(^2\). So, the metaphor contains the reference to identifying life with fire, so something active, colourful, and intense. A fire may destroy or save: it’s as different as people are. But for any kind of fire, as well as person there is an end, so the day comes, and the fire or the fire of life are put out. We can note two contrasting concepts for death: sleeping in Russian and putting fire out in Italian representing cultural differences in the vision of life and death.

Othodit’ [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’s 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 (dictionary of the Russian language): “klubnika otoshla” [strawberry walked away] means that strawberry is out of season. So, the metaphoric 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 neutralise well 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.

Another similar semantic camp is suicide.

Nalozhit’ 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. And the same in Italian: alzare le mani su qc has the identical meaning. But in Italian there are no idioms or collocations with the same concept meaning suicide, and that resulted in problems for translators to interpret nalozhit' na seba ruki. As for the euphemistic component, it’s conducted via a metaphorical shift, relating to the fact that in most cases violent death or suicide are brought with employing of hands. In the text the idiom is not referred to a real suicide, but to that 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. So, the euphemism is used with the function of veiling frightening objects and phenomena, moral death in this case.

The first examples of translations we analyse are portare la mano su s'steesso, 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] that is not used in the context of suicide, making it closer to the original. But, the Russian word combination, the model for 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, and so it can’t 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. The last interpretation to analyse is suicidarsi [commit suicide]. Here we deal with a case of direct nomination deprive 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 the terms by readers.

Alcohol consumption and its consequences

1 Evgenjeva, 1999
2 Evgenjeva, 1999
3 De Mauro, 2016
Another theme resulting in frequent employing of euphemistic means is alcohol, particularly its effect on its consumers which is condemned by Christian and moral principles. But, unlike the previous semantic camp where the generating reason for euphemistic nomination was fear, in this thematic group this reason is masking the consequences of alcohol consumption. And so, here we will observe the application of masking euphemisms, taking part of Moskvin’s classification\(^1\).

**Hmel’nøj [hopped]**

The most frequent euphemism for *drunk* is *hmel’nøj* [hopped]. The concept of hop is, first of all, associated with beer, being its main component. But in Russian 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 “the shining” or, if we consider a 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**

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 (dictionary of the Russian language). In the text of the novel Dostoevskij employs the term combined with the verb *sidet’* [to be seated]: *hmel’ sidit* [hop is seated (seats)]. The verb contributes to the metaphoric, and, as a result, 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 N+V(to be seated) with V(to be)+N. One of the applied nouns is *sbornia* [drunkenness] that has uncertain etymology and is another example of direct nomination which can’t represent metaphoric, 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.

\(^1\) Moskvin, 2017
“Ubriacatura” [drunkenness] is one more direct term formed of the 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]. So, we have an expression *udarit’ v golovu* [to strike on 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, 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 sentence 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 wasn’t 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 an euphemism. But, on the other hand, the word combination is not close enough to the original and doesn’t 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. But, as well, there are terms having similar both metaphorical and euphemistic elements in the meaning. And, finally, the problem of direct nomination for interpretation of euphemistic word and expressions occur.

*People, their qualities, sins and conditions of life*

In the present section we will consider Russian metaphorical euphemisms referring to the field of personal abilities referred to intellect and their interpretations into Italian. There will be observed a frequent use of etiquettical euphemisms employed in order not to offend the mentioned person¹.

¹ Moskvin, 2017:118
Mental abilities

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 created an additional shadow of veiling to the euphemistic meaning contained in the concept used for its formation. The concept of simplicity 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, 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, quiet similar to the previous one, is semplicione [simple (with augmentative suffix one)]. 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. 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.

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 term 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 present semantic camp, as they sound offensive.

Another pair of examples similar to being direct terms are 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 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, revelating and offensive terms that can’t be considered euohemistic.

Conclusions

1 Battaglia, vol. XVIII, 609
2 De Mauro, 2017
3 Evgenjeva, 1999
4 Battaglia, vol.XX, 735
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 used are those used for nomination of frightening objects and phenomena, masking and etiquette. 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. 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 direct terms that are not able to transfer euphemistic metaphorical elements of the meaning.

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