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PHILOLOGY

LANGUAGE IN SERVE OF ECO-ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

This article examines the role of stylistic elements in enhancing the narrative depth and emotional resonance within the works of renowned author Gerald Durrell. Through a close analysis of selected passages featuring the animal characters depicted by G. Durrell, this study elucidates how the author employs personification, simile, metaphor, exaggeration, etc. to imbue these creatures with human-like qualities, creating a deeper connection between the readers and his characters on an emotional level and effectively blurring the boundaries between the natural and human worlds. The use of different stylistic devices emerges as a powerful tool in Durrell's descriptive arsenal, enabling him to evoke vivid imagery and complex emotions through seemingly simple descriptions.

By comparing the English originals with their Italian translations, this article also explores the challenges and nuances of literary translation, highlighting the importance of fidelity to the author's stylistic choices while adapting the text to a different linguistic and cultural context. Ultimately, this study contributes to our understanding of the intricacies of narrative technique and translation practice, underscoring the universal themes and emotions that resonate across diverse linguistic and cultural landscapes.

Keywords: eco-linguistics 1, eco-environment 2, personification 3, simile 4, literary translation 5.

Introduction

Investigations in the field of eco-linguistics initiated back in the 1970s have established a connection between ecology and language, that, in the broad sense of the word, lies in the way human behavior towards both the natural world and each other is shaped by our thoughts, concepts, ideas, ideologies, and worldviews (Haugen 1972; Naess 1995; Fill and Mühlhäusler 2001; Gare 2002; Milstein, 2009; Stibbe 2015, etc.). According to Arran Stibbe's observations, language is the medium through which economic systems are constructed, and when these systems are perceived to result in widespread suffering and environmental harm, it is through language that they are challenged, and new economic models are introduced (Stibbe 2015: 2). Ecology, in the sense that the term is used in the book by Arran Stibbe, consists of the life-sustaining relationships of humans with other humans, other organisms and the physical environment. To his firm belief, to move towards more sustainable ways of living, none of these elements can be overlooked – neither humans, particularly those vulnerable to ecological destruction, nor other organisms or the physical environment and the relationships among them. Eco-linguistics is there to help identify linguistic strategies for building up the salience of those areas of life that for one reason or another have been neglected by humans (Stibbe 2015: 181). Particularly when related to environmental themes, the field of eco-linguistics tends to focus on how our perception of the

environment is shaped through language, hence it is not surprising that in different works of fiction the linguistic representation of plants and animals is extremely vivid and bright. This, in fact, is a way to draw due attention to the natural world, and eco-linguistics emphasizes the importance of representing plants and animals vividly in language to encourage respect for the natural world.

The field of eco-linguistics, while related to environmental themes, tends to focus more on the linguistic aspects of how language shapes our perception of the environment rather than specifically on individual works of literature. Academic disciplines often have specific areas of emphasis, and eco-linguistics may prioritize linguistic analysis, discourse studies, and the examination of language patterns related to environmental issues.

Gerald Durrell's contribution to promoting the eco-environment

Investigations have shown that Gerald Durrell belongs to the category of writers who write in excellent language, have an indisputable literary talent, but who, apparently, would not pretend to be called a novelist or artist of the word. This can evidently be accounted for by the fact that he is first and foremost a natural scientist and then a writer. His works are unique, talented and interesting variations of the popular scientific

genre¹. His style is characterized by liveliness and brightness, which, however, do not go beyond his observations as a naturalist.

By giving preference in his works, and particularly in the enormous diversity of the figurative language he uses, to a variety of fauna and flora (which he not only knows as a professional naturalist, but also fondly loves), Darrell expresses his kind, loving, and caring attitude towards the animal and plant world, thus trying to arouse the same feelings in his readers. For Darrell, the world of fauna and flora (which can be perceived through the senses, i.e., through seeing, hearing, smelling, and then cognizing), is a living reality, and his figurative devices are intended to help clarify the nuances of that world, enabling the reader to learn about, study, love, and feel responsible for nature and the natural worlds that surround them.

Although eco-linguists do not explicitly mention Gerald Durrell in their academic works, however we are inclined to believe that Durrell's works could be considered influential in the broader context of promoting ecological understanding and appreciation through language, for his works, particularly his books *My Family and Other Animals*, and *The Whispering Land* under investigation in our case, can rightfully promote positive feelings and caring attitudes towards the natural world of which a human being is an indispensable part. Hence, his works can be considered invaluable sources of eco-linguistic inspirations. The study of G. Durrell's works testifies the writer's contribution to fostering a positive relationship between language and ecology through his engaging narratives and descriptions, thus, in a broader sense of the word, advocating ecological understanding and appreciation through language. It is essential to recognize that the lack of explicit mentions in academic literature does not necessarily diminish the impact Durrell's works have had on making environmental awareness more broadly. We believe that individual researchers within eco-linguistics or related disciplines might indeed find inspiration in literary works like those of Gerald Durrell.

Arran Stibbe's (2015: 175) idea of the importance of language use in building the salience of the natural world in the minds of readers is, indeed, justified by Gerald Durrell's works, for the choice of the author of the techniques implemented in his autobiographical novels indubitably helps to present animals and plants as important creatures, worthy of attention in their own rights.

Another important observation in G. Durrell's novels is the abundant use of the pronouns. For instance the use of *we* and *our* is meant to include animal participants, i.e. non-humans in the same group with humans, while the personal pronouns *he* or *she* with reference to different representatives of fauna help personalize them². Giving names (most frequently human names)

to individual animals gives the latter salience and allows the author to personalize them. Thus, for example, in the passage adduced below, the use of the personal pronoun *he* with reference to the tortoise, not only demonstrates the attitude of the author towards the reptile as a person, but also associates the tortoise with the successful and invulnerable Greek soldier of the Trojan war through the name Achilles given to it.

He learned his name in a very short time, and when we had only to call out once or twice and then wait patiently for a while and he would appear, lumbering along the narrow cobbled paths on tip-toe, his head and neck stretched out eagerly. He loved being fed... He loved grapes as much as Roger did, so there was always great rivalry. (Gerald Durrell, M.F. p.38)

The personification of the tortoise, attributing human characteristics to a non-human entity, obviously, endows the tortoise with qualities (in this case, the ability to learn its name and respond to it) traditionally associated with human beings, and adds a sense of individuality and intelligence to the tortoise, implying a level of cognitive ability that goes beyond typical animal behavior. Durrell utilizes personification to bring Achilles, the tortoise, to life in the reader's imagination. By using pronouns and other elements of language that imply intelligence, emotions, and individual characteristics, the author invites his readers to empathize with and appreciate the unique personality of the tortoise. This technique contributes to a richer and more engaging portrayal of the animal characters in the narrative.

When we turn to the Italian translation of the passage, it becomes evident that in the Italian version as well vivid imagery is employed to portray the tortoise's movements and behavior.

Imparò prestissimo il suo nome, e bastava che lo chiamassimo una o due volte e poi avessimo la pazienza di aspettare un poco ed eccolo che arrivava, avanzando in punta di piedi lungo gli stretti sentieri di ciottoli, con la testa e il collo avidamente protesi. Gli piaceva farsi imboccare, e se ne stava regalmente acquatto al sole mentre noi gli porgevamo pezzetti di lattuga, bocche di leone o chicchi d'uva. L'uva gli piaceva quanto piaceva a Roger, quindi tra loro c'era sempre una grande rivalità. Achille stava lì acquattato biascicando l'uva, col succo che gli colava giù per il collo, e Roger gli si sdraiava accanto, fissandolo con occhi straziati e la bocca sbavante.

In both versions descriptive language is used, and the vivid picture of the tortoise is painted. Words like *lumbering*, *eagerly*, *regally* in the English text, and *acquatto*, and *avidamente* in the Italian one, do contribute to the richness of the descriptions. The Italian version effectively captures the image of the tortoise advancing

¹ However, it should be added that the status of the scientific popular genre has not been fully clarified. Hence, in connection with this, a natural question is bound to arise: "Do Durrell's books present natural history in the form of an entertaining story, or are they just travel books? Whatever the case,

one thing is obviously clear: the scientific subjects that he introduces in his works are meant to interest many people and bring them as close as possible to the understanding of fundamental scientific issues.

² See about the personalization of fauna in Arran Stibbe 2015, p. 115.

on tiptoe (*avanzando in punta di piedi*), and Roger lying down next to him with a longing gaze (*Roger gli si sdraiava accanto, fissandolo con occhi straziati*). The use of parallel constructions in phrases like *pezzetti di lattuga, bocche di leone o chicchi d'uva* maintains the balanced flow found in the English original text: *bits of lettuce, dandelions, or grapes*. The humorous tone of the original passage has also been preserved in the Italian version, particularly in the description of the rivalry over grapes between Achilles and Roger. Thus, the Italian version is stylistically rich, employing devices similar to the original text. We can say that the Italian version is a faithful and equivalent translation of the English text which maintains not only the meaning and style of the passage but also the general atmosphere of a careful attitude towards the eco-environment.

The following passage depicts a dog who has her baby-puppy hanging from her mouth by its head.

She (a dog) had spent a whole morning doing this before we discovered what she was up to; the unfortunate baby hung from her mouth by its head, its body swinging to and fro as Dodo waddled along at Mother's heels'. 'It this goes on much longer that puppy'll grow into a giraffe', observed Leslie'. (Gerald Durrell, M.F. p.221)

The described situation is ironic and humorous, and Leslie's exaggerated observation about the puppy growing into a giraffe if it continues hanging from the mouth of the dog, unquestionably intensifies the humour. This hyperbole adds a comedic element to the situation. Overall, the author employs a combination of humor, imagery, personification, and dialogue to create an engaging and entertaining scene, which is unexpected and contrary to typical canine behavior.

The stylistic equivalence of the Italian translation to the English original is obvious:

Quando scoprimmo che cosa stava combinando era già tutta la mattina che faceva quell'operazione; il povero cucciolo le pendeva dalla bocca tenuto coi denti per la testa dimenandosi da tutte le parti mentre Dodo zampettava alle calcagna di mamma. ... "Se questa storia continua ancora per molto quel cucciolo diventerà una giraffa" osservò Leslie.

The humor in the situation is retained in the translation. The absurdity of Dodo carrying the puppy in a seemingly unconventional way adds a humorous element to the narrative. Leslie's metaphorical comment about the puppy growing into a giraffe adds a playful and exaggerated flavour to the observation, contributing to the overall humor. The metaphor lies in the comparison between the puppy's continued behavior (unspecified in detail but associated with Dodo's actions of carrying) and the idea of growing into a giraffe. No doubt, this is not meant to be taken literally. It is a figurative way of expressing the potential consequences of the ongoing situation. The metaphor involves exaggeration for a comedic effect. Giraffes are known for their long necks, and the idea that a small

puppy could grow into such a tall and specifically different animal through its current actions, is intentionally exaggerated. The metaphor exists in a similar way in both the English and Italian versions. In both cases, Leslie uses the idea of the puppy growing into a giraffe as a metaphorical expression to reproduce the ongoing situation with Dodo and the puppy. In both cases, the metaphor involves the exaggerated notion that the continued behavior of the puppy will lead to "transformations". The metaphor is retained in the Italian translation, and while there may be slight linguistic variations, the core idea and the humorous intent of the metaphor remain consistent across both versions.

In the next context, the writer's persistent intention to humanize the world of fauna and flora results in the use of another case of personification, which is evident in the description of the flowers being *half-asleep*.

The flowers were half-asleep, roses dew-crumpled, marigolds still tightly shut. (G. Durrell, M.F. p. 30)

The state of sleep (*asleep*) is typically associated with living beings, and in this case the writer definitely wants to give the flowers human-like qualities. The phrase *roses dew-crumpled* creates a visual image of the roses which being covered with tiny droplets of dew, make the impression of being crumpled. The use of *marigolds still tightly shut* employs metaphorical language to convey the closed state of marigold flowers. The metaphor suggests a sense of containment or protection, as if the flowers are securely closed.

The Italian translation appears to faithfully convey the imagery, tone, and atmosphere present in the original text.

I fiori erano insonnoliti, le rose gualcite dalla rugiada, le calendule ancora del tutto chiuse''.

Both versions use language that evokes a sense of natural beauty and a setting characteristic of a peaceful morning. The translation can be considered an effective one, as the intended meaning and mood of the original passage have been preserved. The Italian translation maintains the poetic and descriptive quality, effectively employed in the essence of the original text. The use of "half-asleep" and "dew-crumpled" paints a vivid picture of the flowers in a state between wakefulness and slumber, with the roses affected by dew. The choice by the translator of the lexical units "Insonnoliti" (half-asleep), "gualcite dalla rugiada" (crumpled by the dew), and "ancora del tutto chiuse" (still tightly shut) help to preserve the descriptive details of the tranquil atmosphere of an early morning, when nature is slowly waking up. In the meantime, the Italian translation maintains the poetic and imaginative quality of the original text.

In the next passage, where the use of an anthropomorphism creates a more engaging and relatable image for the reader, the third person singular personal pronoun *she* helps the author to refer to the female scorpion attributing human qualities to it.

She (the female scorpion) hoisted herself out of the box with great rapidity, her babies clinging on desperately, and scuttled on to the back of Larry's hand. (G. Durrell, M.F. p. 111)

The phrase *with great rapidity* employs hyperbole, emphasizing the exceptional speed with which the female scorpion hoisted herself out of the box. This exaggeration adds intensity and vividness to the description. The stylistic devices of personification and hyperbole contribute to the effectiveness of the passage in conveying a dynamic and visually evocative scene. They enhance the reader's engagement with the narrative and contribute to the overall tone and atmosphere of the writing.

When we turn to the Italian translation of the passage we can see how carefully has the translator treated the passage trying to convey the sense of urgency and movement in the scene. As far as the stylistic value of the translation is concerned, one can immediately notice that the action of the scorpion in both the original and the translation texts is conveyed through the employment of similar devices which on the other hand effectively reproduce the tone and vividness of the original text in the translation.

Scavalcò rapidamente il bordo della scatola, coi suoi piccoli aggrappati forte su di lei, e sgambettò sul dorso della mano di Larry''.

Thus we can see that the translation is successful in retaining the essential stylistic elements and meaning of the original text.

Our observations in the contexts presented below reveal that the Italian translation maintains stylistic equivalence with the English original.

She (the penguin) would retreat, disgruntled, and with anguished eye watch the two disgustedly fat Jones (penguin) babies wolfing down their food. (Gerald Durrell, W. L. p.32)

Allora se ne tornava a casa con le pive nel sacco e con occhio angosciato guardava quei ciccioni dei piccoli Jones che si strozzavano di cibo.

We can see that the translation captures the emotional tone, descriptive elements, and colloquial expressions effectively. The English phrase *disgustedly fat* and the Italian term *ciccioni* both employ descriptive language to emphasize the babies' weight and perhaps their voracious eating habits. The use of *ciccioni* introduces a colloquial and slightly playful tone in Italian. The phrases *wolfing down their food* in English and *si strozzavano di cibo* in Italian both convey the idea of the babies eating eagerly or voraciously. The Italian phrase adds a literal touch by suggesting they are choking on their food, perhaps indicating the speed or enthusiasm of their eating. The English phrase contains an idiom (*wolfing down*), and the Italian phrase involves a metaphorical element (*si strozzavano di cibo*). Both convey the idea of rapid and enthusiastic eating, but the linguistic devices used are different, while *si*

strozzavano di cibo translates to *choking on their food* in English, the metaphorical aspect lies in the idea that the babies are eating so eagerly and quickly, as if they are figuratively choking on the food. It is a vivid way of expressing their voracious eating habits, adding a layer of intensity to the description.

In the English version, the pronoun *she* is used to refer to Henrietta, the penguin. Here the animal is anthropomorphized, and the personal pronoun is used to denote a sense of individuality. In the Italian translation the pronoun *lei* (*she*) is not used when describing Henrietta. Instead, the description focuses on the action and emotions of Henrietta without assigning a specific gender through pronouns. The choice of pronouns and linguistic nuances in referring to animals can be influenced by both grammatical considerations and stylistic preferences in each language. The grammatical aspect, specifically the conjugation of verbs in Italian, can play a role in influencing the choice of using pronouns or not. As in Italian, the conjugation of verbs is based on the subject's person and number, more often there is no need of adding pronouns.

The repetition of *she's beauty* in English and *è una vera bellezza* in Italian in the contexts below serves as a stylistic device to emphasize the beauty of the puma.

Ah, you want my puma'', he grinned. 'But I warn you I want a lot of money for her she's beauty. (Gerald Durrell, W. L. p. 144)

Ah, volete il mio puma'' disse sorridendo. 'Ma vi avverto, voglio un mucchio di soldi, perché è una vera bellezza.

The use of the mentioned phrases adds a touch of admiration and underscores the character's pride in the animal. Here is also noticed a rhetorical element in the way the speaker presents the demand for a significant sum of money, potentially aiming to underscore the perceived value and beauty of the puma.

It is beyond suspicion that the act of naming is a powerful way to personify the representative of fauna and create a close contact between the reader and, in this particular case, the pig, for it implies a level of individuality and personalization that goes beyond a generic reference to a pig. Here is an example in which by giving the pig the specific and human-like name *Juanita*, both the author and the translator try to personify the pig.

This is Juanita (pig)'', said the Indian, smiling as he placed the diminutive creature on the awn, where it uttered a shrill squeak of delight and started to snuffle about hopefully. (G. Durrell, W.L. p. 122)

Questa è Juanita'' disse l'indio con un sorriso mentre passava la minuscola creatura sul prato, dove questa squitti per l'entusiasmo e cominciò ad annusare rumorosamente tutt'attorno, piena di speranza.

The passages that follow continue developing the theme of the pig, and here the use of a simile helps describe the pig's behavior:

She (pig) would lie there, her eyes closed, gnashing her baby teeth together, like miniature castanets, in an ecstasy of delight. I still had all the very tame and less destructive creatures running loose in the garage, and as Juanita (pig) behaved in such a lady-like fashion I allowed her the run of place as well, only shutting her in a cage at night. (G. Durrell, W.L. p. 123)

Allora se ne stava lì a occhi chiusi, digrignando i denti di cucciolo come nacchere in miniatura, in un'estasi di felicità. Le creature molto domestiche e meno distruttive erano ancora libere di scorrazzare per il garage, e dato che Juanita si comportava in maniera così compita lasciai anche lei padrona del posto, limitandomi a rinchiuderla in gabbia di notte.

The English text mentions: *gnashing her baby teeth together, like miniature castanets*, and the Italian version translates this as *digrignando i denti di cucciolo come nacchere in miniatura*. The simile creates a vivid image and adds a playful and rhythmic quality to the description. The term *lady-like fashion* in the context of describing the behavior of Juanita, the pig, carries a sense of irony. The phrase *lady-like* typically refers to behavior that is refined, elegant, and well-mannered, often associated with a cultured or sophisticated woman's conduct. In the given context, however, the author is using the term humorously and ironically to describe the behavior of the pig. Pigs are not typically associated with traits considered *lady-like*, so there is a deliberate play on expectations. This use of irony adds a comedic element to the description, highlighting the contrast between the expected behavior of a lady and the actual behavior of the pig. The irony contributes to the overall humorous and lighthearted tone of the passage, as the author presents Juanita's behavior in a whimsical manner. It is an example of how the author uses language playfully to engage the reader and create a memorable and entertaining depiction of the pig's behavior. In the Italian translation, the phrase *in maniera così compita* is used, which can be interpreted as *in such a ladylike manner* or *in such a refined manner*. This phrase maintains the irony found in the English version, as it still describes the behavior of the pig in a way that contrasts with the typical expectations associated with the word *ladylike*.

So, while the exact wording may differ between the English and Italian versions, the essence of the irony, humor, and contrast between the expected and actual behavior of the pig is expressed in both versions.

In the following passage the description of Luna, the puma is presented, and in this case again the author chooses to personify it by attributing human-like expressions and behaviors to the character.

Luna (puma) gave me a withering look. ... Luna shook his head, like a person faced with one of the great enigmas of life. (Gerald Durrell, W.L. p.221-122)

Luna mi incenerì con lo sguardo. ... Luna scosse la testa come chi si trovi di fronte a uno dei grandi enigmi dell'esistenza.

In both English and Italian, the puma is described as giving a *withering look* and shaking his head *like a person faced with one of the great enigmas of life*. This personification adds a touch of humor and vividness to the description of Luna's reactions.

The use of *like* in English (*Luna shook his head, like a person faced with one of the great enigmas of life*) and *come chi* in Italian (*Luna scosse la testa come chi si trovi di fronte a uno dei grandi enigmi dell'esistenza*) creates a clear image of Luna's perplexed expression through a simile. It is obvious that the Italian translation does maintain the stylistic elements present in the English original, including personification and simile. However, as is often the case with translations, there are slight differences in the choice of the words and phrasing to convey the same meaning in the target language.

Our comparative observations in both English and Italian passages depicting the tortoise, reveal the author's and the translator's choice of employing anthropomorphism. While not a direct personification, it, however, does contribute to portraying the tortoise in a more relatable and familiar light by ascribing human-like traits to it.

The new arrival was duly christened Achilles (tortoise), and turned out to be a most intelligent and lovable beast, possessed of a peculiar sense of humour. (Gerald Durrell, M.F. p. 38)

Il nuovo arrivato fu formalmente battezzato Achille, e si rivelò una bestiola intelligentissima, simpatica, e dotata di un particolare senso umoristico.

The Italian version is equivalent in terms of meaning and intent to the original English text. It accurately conveys the information about the christening of the tortoise named Achilles and describes its qualities as intelligent, lovable, and possessing a peculiar sense of humour. The translation maintains the overall tone and style of the original while adapting it to the Italian language.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is obvious that eco-linguistics is a vital interdisciplinary field that examines the interplay between language and ecology, emphasizing the influence of linguistic structures and practices on our understanding and treatment of the natural world. The discipline has grown to incorporate diverse perspectives on how language creates human attitude towards the environment and each other. Through imaginative illustration of plants and animals in fiction, eco-linguistics stimulates a greater appreciation for the natural world, ultimately striving to form a more ecologically aware society. While eco-linguistics combines with environmental concepts, its primary central point lies in the examination of linguistic dimensions, including discourse analysis and language patterns, rather than the critique of specific literary texts. This field underscores the importance of language in shaping environmental consciousness, advocating for a comprehensive ecological understanding that integrates human, non-human, and environmental elements.

Gerald Durrell's works serve as exemplary models of how literature can bridge the gap between scientific observation and ecological advocacy. Durrell's profound knowledge and affectionate portrayal of flora and fauna coupled with his use of figurative language enrich his writings with a unique charm that both educates and inspires readers to value and protect the environment. Promoting ecological awareness with the help of language, he fosters a strong correlation between humans and the environment. His works encourage readers to perceive the natural world as a living reality that deserves understanding, love, and protection, thereby encouraging readers to see the animals as unique individuals.

It is obvious that the Italian translation of Durrell's works preserves the expressive imagery, the richness, the humorous tone, stylistic nuances used by Durrell, maintaining the spirit, intent and beauty of the original language, ensuring that the Italian reader experiences a similar sense of wonder and devotion for nature's intricacies.

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