

Old and New Challenges in the Translation of Young Adult Novels

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Abstract

Technological war transposed in real-life situations is at the core of Andy Briggs's contemporary series for teenagers HERO.COM and VILLAIN.NET originally published between 2008 and 2010 and already translated into Romanian. This paper revolves around the idea that in a century dominated by mass-media and globalization, translators should be able to promptly respond to the publishers' requirements and make sure that they have chosen the best option for their future target readers.

In Andy Briggs's novels, the never-ending clash between good and evil acquires almost graphic representations embedded in a rather detailed vocabulary related to war and modern technology. Translating such novels becomes a challenge for those who have to bear in mind that nowadays teenagers all over the world have the possibility to communicate on the internet and are thus accustomed to the kind of language the characters in these novels use.

Keywords: globalization, confrontation, linguistic deviation, computer terminology, war related vocabulary

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The everlasting clash between good and evil has been a constant topic in literature for children in general and in young adult literature in particular. Even if some of the major characteristics of war stories are still preserved in contemporary novels for teenagers, there are undoubtedly some new problems which are tackled in order to envisage current trends and attitudes of modern society.

Organized on two main parts, this paper aims at establishing both writing and translation variables in young adult novels focusing on the case study of Andy Briggs's contemporary series and anti-series for

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teenagers *HERO.COM* and *VILLAIN.NET*. Following the tradition of young adult literature which stipulates that an adolescent is usually the protagonist of the story, Andy Briggs's novels show a group of teenagers engaged in a confrontation for supremacy. Their inner struggle and perpetual need to decide whether to be heroes or villains acquires a hyperbolic significance since the choices they make could mean the end of the world as they know it.

Watching the *HERO.COM* and *VILLAIN.NET* video diaries, one can follow Andy Briggs's journey from an unpublished author with a genius idea to a published author translated worldwide.

Inspired by comic books, Andy Briggs has written novels whose protagonists are either superheroes or supervillains, but, as he himself admits in his video blog, have to be "credible and tridimensional". Published by Oxford University Press in 2008-2010, Andy Briggs's novels have been written and launched in tandem. Film companies and studios have been interested in turning the book series into film series, thus ensuring their worldwide distribution. Fortunately, Andy Briggs has had the opportunity of marketing his novels in a variety of ways from a video blog with the author's confessions and fantastic trails to the promotion campaign initiated by Oxford Publishing House which included these novels in the Oxford brochures dedicated to children's books.

As far as the Romanian editions of Andy Briggs's novels are concerned, only the first two books of the series have been translated into Romanian by Georgiana Harghel and published at the initiative of RAO International Publishing House. A thorough analysis of the characteristics of the original as well as of the implications and changes generated by the translation process should start with the interpretation of the titles of Briggs's novels.

First of all, the titles of Briggs's series and anti-series are relevant for the idea of conflict at the core of these novels. *HERO.COM* and *VILLAIN.NET* are the names of two sites from where the young protagonists can download their superpowers. At the end of the first book of the *VILLAIN.NET* anti-series, the evil Basilisk explains the origin of the two sites to young Jack Hunter. *HERO.COM* is the acronym for the Higher Energy Research Organization, a Foundation created to research the superpowers bestowed upon some people called Primes ever since their birth.

Acquiring symbolic meaning, the *HERO.COM* site demanded for a negative counterpart: *Villain.Net*. The real antagonism of the two sites

is questioned from the beginning since Basilisk admits that the Council of Evil has founded *VILLAIN.NET* by stealing the format and content of *HERO.COM*:

Why go through the pain and hardships of creating something new when it's much easier to steal and put your name on it? The problem lies in the fact that we do not know the limitations of our own website since we didn't create it. We really just put a new interface on the front, stole a research lab that stored their powers and added our own (Briggs 2008b: 185).

As far as the translation of the English titles into Romanian is concerned, the English names of the two sites have been preserved whereas subtitles have been translated into Romanian. The translation of the two subtitles could become a matter of debate. While the subtitle *Council of Evil* has been closely translated as *Consiliul răului*, the subtitle of the first novel of the *HERO.COM* series, *Rise of the Heroes*, has been freely translated by means of the Romanian subtitle, *În slujba binelui*. Understandable as it may seem, the translator's intention to focus upon the battle between good and evil has led to a deviation from the author's original intention to gradually present the evolution of a new generation of superheroes (*Rise of the Heroes*, *Virus Attack*, *Crisis Point* and *Chaos Effect*). On the other hand, the translator must have thought of stressing the opposition between good and evil which would not have been otherwise noticed since the names of the two sites have not been translated into Romanian.

The English editions of *HERO.COM - Rise of the Heroes* and *VILLAIN.NET - Council of Evil* contain the author's message to his readers under the form of an e-mail. By means of this message, Andy Briggs initiates a dialogue with his target readers warning them against the dangers of accessing the wrong internet sites as it happened in the case of the heroes and villains of his books who stumbled across different websites accidentally. Moreover, he tries to arouse his readers' interest by mentioning some of the characters in the books and pretending that he is about to divulge details of an important scene and stops at the last minute:

But *HERO.COM* and *VILLAIN.NET* don't really exist. : - (I thought them up when I was dreaming about how cool it would be if I could fly. The idea for *HERO.COM* suddenly came to me - especially the scene

where Toby and Pete... Oh wait! You haven't read it yet so I'd better shut up! :-) Anyway, I began writing and before I knew it, the idea had spiralled into VILLAIN.NET as well (Briggs 2008a).

Inviting his child-readers to visit his own website (www.whichsideareyouon.co.uk), Briggs feels the need to explain that the two sites appearing in his books belong to the world of fiction and do not exist in the real world. Unfortunately, in the Romanian translations of *HERO.COM - Rise of the Heroes* and *VILLAIN.NET - Council of Evil*, Briggs's message to his readers is entirely deleted. From my point of view, it would have been useful to translate this message because it has been a part of the original editions functioning as a link between the two novels and it would also have been a good marketing device.

An interesting strategy Briggs uses refers to the fact that he has chosen to publish two novels at a time, one belonging to the *HERO.COM* series and one pertaining to the *VILLAIN.NET* anti-series. Although they could be read as independent books, *HERO.COM - Rise of the Heroes* and *VILLAIN.NET - Council of Evil* share some of the characters and observe chronology in the sense that the story lines are different but they happen at the same time.

In *HERO.COM - Rise of the Heroes*, a group of teenagers, Toby, Pete, Lorna and Emily stumble on a website that allows them to download powers off the Internet in order to become superheroes. When Toby and Lorna's mum is kidnapped by the evil supervillain Doc Tempest, they must band together to save her and ultimately save the planet which he intends to destroy by changing the climate. By contrast, *VILLAIN.NET - Council of Evil* is based on the adventures of the fourteen-year-old Jake Hunter who goes from average bully to villain after finding a website that lets him download superpowers. When he joins forces with the supervillain Basilisk, he becomes a global fugitive wanted for theft, kidnapping, blackmail and the pending destruction of the planet.

Technological war transposed in real-life situations is a recurrent topic of both novels mirroring the teenagers' eternal fascination with war and the possibility of acquiring fame and glory and thus become a hero:

Beyond fulfilling a sense of responsibility to one's country or one's loved ones, though, young people, especially young men, seem prone to believe that war promises excitement. Swept up in war fervor, young people fear that the war will be over before they come of age, and their

dreams of glory will go unfulfilled. It is also a dramatic crucible, in which boys generally pass to manhood, no matter how realistic or unrealistic their expectations upon enlistment—or they die trying (Trupe 206: 231).

The line between being a hero and becoming a villain is so thin and so easy to cross that the readers of Briggs's novels often wonder whether the evil characters are so bad after all or if the heroes' actions are always justifiable. There are many instances in *VILLAIN.NET – Council of Evil* when Jack Hunter, the main character has many doubts regarding his own evil deeds and finds it difficult to follow into the footsteps of his fiendish adviser Basilisk. Consequently, the child readers are more likely to identify with such a character and even take his side as he feels very lonely and constantly misunderstood and betrayed by all those surrounding him. Hunter becomes a representative of the postmodern anti-hero of contemporary literature for teenagers:

Young adult literature of the past thirty years departs from the classic hero, who is unfailingly admired, a member of the dominant culture, male, and a brave battler against whatever forces threaten his domination - corrupt humans, devils, or the natural world. Readers encounter him in classics such as *Treasure Island* and *The Call of the Wild*, movies, and accounts of the founding fathers of the United States. However, contemporary readers are much less likely to identify with this hero in an increasingly multicultural and global society, and a postmodern hero with weaknesses, an antihero, or an unlikely hero may well be more satisfying than the classic hero (Tasillo qtd. in Trupe 2006: 108).

In spite of the characters' hesitations, confrontation is still at the core of Briggs's novels which oscillate between witty verbal retorts and physical conflict acquiring almost graphic representations due to an exceptional ability of using war related vocabulary. On the same wavelength, linguistic deviation and cases of non-equivalence generate translation difficulties.

In terms of linguistic deviation [1] at the text level, one can notice different types of deviation which could become problematic in translation:

- a) phonological deviation;
- b) graphological deviation;
- c) lexical deviation;

- d) grammatical deviation;
- e) semantic deviation.

a) Phonological deviation occurs due to a situation of great intensity when the young characters of the novels are in shock:

- (1) **'You feelin' all right mate?'** - **Ești bine, prietene?** întrebă Scuffer asked, his eyes constantly twitching as though he couldn't focus on one thing (Briggs 2008b: 71). Scuffer, ochii rostogolindu-i-se constant, de parcă nu ar fi putut să se concentreze pe ceva (Briggs 2010b: 73).
- (2) **'Give it a min'** - But Toby was cut off as a brilliant flash of light burst like a firework from Lorna's eyes - followed by an energy blast that stuck the side of the tree (Briggs 2008a: 48). - **Ai răbdare un min...** Dar Tobi fu întrerupt în momentul în care un fulger luminos izbucni ca un foc de artificii din ochii Lornei, urmat de o undă de energie care lovi o parte a copacului (Briggs 2010a: 55).

Unfortunately, in Romanian this type of deviation is not constantly rendered occasionally leading to lack of expressiveness as it becomes obvious from the contrastive analysis of examples (1) and (2) with a Romanian linguistic structure following the norm in (1) and transposing the English phonological deviation in (2).

b) Graphological deviation breaks up common conventions of writing and the reasons for such a deviation highlight an indirect confrontation between what the source-text and afterwards the target-text readers expect to visually see on the page and what the narrator and subsequently the translator choose in order to keep them tuned to the storyline and sometimes take them by surprise. In example (3) parentheses are simply used for explicitation [2] and the Romanian translator has preserved this technique of making information explicit by means of graphological representation:

- (3) Villain.net is not responsible for injury, damage or death to either the End User (**yourself**) or others (**victims**) due to utilizing online powers (Briggs 2008b: 70). Villain.net nu este responsabil pentru rănirea, daunele sau moartea provocată Utilizatorului Final (**dumneavoastră**) sau altora (**victime**) din cauza utilizării puterilor online (Briggs 2010b: 72).

The translation of the reflexive pronoun “yourself” reflects a possible controversy with reference to the use of the Romanian personal pronoun of politeness “dumneavoastră” as an indicator of a degree of formality not necessarily aimed at by the original author.

On the other hand, capital letters can acquire a multitude of functions which have been clearly identified by the Romanian translator who decided that she should resort to the same strategy in order to have the same results. As a consequence, capital letters have been used to: express concern in (4); attract attention in (5); focus the characters’ and readers’ attention upon the online messages in (6); display newspaper headlines in (7) and increase suspense and create auditory effects in (8), (9), (10) and (11). The following examples show all the afore-mentioned functions of capital letters:

(4) **‘MUM!’** shouted Toby (Briggs 2008a: 100). - **MAMĂ!!!** strigă Toby (Briggs 2010a: 102).

(5) ‘Pete’ he whispered. ‘Are you awake?’ Nothing. He tried again, louder this time: **‘PETE!’** You awake?’ (Briggs 2008a: 107). -Pete! șopti el. Ești treaz? Niciun semn. Încercă din nou, de data asta mai tare:
- **PETE!** Ești treaz? (Briggs 2010a: 109).

(6) **WELCOME BACK, YOUNG HEROES!** (Briggs 2008a: 125). **BINE AȚI REVENIT, TINERI EROI!** (Briggs 2010a: 126).

(7) **LOCAL HERO KILLED BY BREAK ACCIDENT** (Briggs 2008b: 118). **EROU LOCAL OMORÂT ÎNTR-UN ACCIDENT ÎNGROZITOR** (Briggs 2010b: 116)

(8) **BAM!** A concentrated beam of blue energy leapt from his eyes and blew the cargo door into twisted metal fragments (Briggs 2008a: 4). **BUM!** O rază concentrată de energie albastră fășni din ochii lui și ușa avionului explodează în fragmente distorsionate de metal (Briggs 2010a: 11).

(9) **WHUMP!** Snarling orange flames covered his body as though somebody had covered him in petrol and lit a match (Briggs 2008a: 25). **VRUM!** Flăcări portocalii sfârâitoare îi acopereau corpul, de parcă l-ar fi stropit cineva cu benzină și ar fi aprins un chibrit (Briggs 2010a: 32).

- (10) **WHAM!** Emily swooped in low. Having gained momentum by looping from the end of the street, she smashed into him like a cannonball (Briggs 2008a: 66). **BUM!** Emily plană la joasă înălțime. Câștigând un avantaj prin faptul că venise în picaj din capătul străzii, se lovi de el cu forța unei ghiulele (Briggs 2010a: 71).
- (11) **KEER-AMASH!** The tornado struck the front of the house like a sledgehammer (Briggs 2008a: 90). **BA-BUM!** Tornada lovi fațada casei precum un baros (Briggs 2010a: 101).

Teenagers are usually drawn to conflicting situations, but in Briggs's novels these situations exhibit apothotic dimensions expressively rendered in the descriptions of the physical confrontations between the young heroes and villains who possess superpowers allowing them to engage in explosive battles.

Linguistically speaking, interjections in examples (8), (9), (10) and (11) are meant to concentrate the energy and impact of the war-like situations. Positioned at the beginning of the paragraph, written in capital letters and isolated from the following sentence by an exclamation mark, interjections rely on visual representations to portray the intensity with which the protagonists serve the cause of either good or evil. The author's ingenuity in using a variety of interjections is paralleled only by the translator's ingenuity in finding and sometimes inventing the corresponding interjections in the target language.

As in the case of parentheses, dashes are used for explicitation providing more details and ensuring visual representation:

- (12) Racing on all fours, he reached the alarm and stabbed the button - **silencing it** - just as a key was inserted in the front door (Briggs 2008a: 29). Alergând în patru labe, ajunse la alarmă și apăsă pe buton **amuțindu-l**, exact când cheia intra în yala de la intrare (Briggs 2010a: 35).
- (13) But this time it snaked at an angle - **as Lorna was not directly in front of the screen** - and poked her temple (Briggs 2008a: 44). Dar de data aceasta, formă un unghi - **din moment ce Lorna nu era exact în dreptul ecranului** - și o lovi în tâmplă (Briggs 2010a: 51).

- (14) Pete cast one last glance at the mayhem they had left behind – **at the cases of money** – before he followed his friends (Briggs 2008a: 80).
 Pete aruncă o privire spre debandada pe care o lăsară în urmă – **și la valizele de bani** – înainte de a-i însoți pe prietenii săi (Briggs 2010a: 83).

Literal translation was preferred in examples (12), (13) and (14) with a slight difference in example (12) where the translator has deleted the dashes probably for reasons of text coherence and cohesion whereas in examples (13) and (14) the dashes have been preserved and we notice what Dimitriu calls “a one-to-one transfer of the source language structure” (33).

c) Lexical deviation includes novelty in the use of words, malapropism and last but not least, colloquialism and vulgarism. Creative use of nicknames is relevant in example (15), malapropism occurs in example (16) and instances of colloquialism and vulgarism are present in examples (17), (18) and (19):

- (15) ‘And what do they call you? **Zoom Girl?**’ (Briggs 2008a: 66).
 - Și ție cum ți se spune? **Domnișoara Viteză?** (Briggs 2010a: 71).
- (16) ‘My name is Doc Tempest, and already you have seen the awesome power of my **wever** machine. And I -’ (Briggs 2008a: 220).
 - Numele meu este Doc Tempest și ați văzut deja puterea teribilă a mașinii **clisme**. Și eu..
 - Stop! Stop! țipă bărbatul, oprind camera (Briggs 2010a: 215).
- (17) ‘**What the heck?**’ exclaimed Lorna, astonished at the sight of her brother held fast against the wall (Briggs 2008a: 22).
 - **Ce dracu?!** exclamă Lorna, uimită să-și vadă fratele lipit de perete (Briggs 2010a: 29).
- (18) ‘**Oh, damn!**’ he cried (Briggs 2008a: 183).
 - **O, fir-ar să fie!** strigă el (Briggs 2010a: 181).
- (19) ‘Well, I know this sounds a bit ... weird ... you know, but you’re **lookin’** white like a ghost. Not **turnin’** into a Goth are you?’ [...]
 “- Ei, știi că pare un pic ... ciudat ... Știi, dar **arăți** ca o fantomă. Nu cumva ai început să adopți un stil mai gotic? [...]

'An' you don't seem to be 'avin' - **Și** se pare că **nu te mai distrezi**.
 fun no more' (Briggs 2008b: 71-72). (Briggs 2010b: 73-74).

If mockery and derision lie beneath the appeal to nicknames or malapropism, colloquial language expresses the characters' feelings of panic, surprise or wonder. In Romanian, translation does not always allow for the use of colloquial language as in example (19).

d) Grammatical deviation may involve a multitude of morphological and syntactic cases of deviation but my intention here is not to provide an exhaustive list. What I wish to emphasize is the fact that I see grammatical deviation as a means of enabling a controlled and deliberate distortion for the sake of a certain stylistic effect and not as reflecting ignorance and unconscious misuse of words or of morphological and syntactic structures. Confronted with grammatical deviation in the source text, the Romanian translator may choose to ignore it in the target text as it happens in examples (20) and (21) where ellipses disappear in the target language because of non-equivalence between the source text and the target text:

(20) 'Lorn, **you OK?**' asked Toby. - Lorna, **ești bine?** întrebă Toby.
 [...] [...]
 'You hurt your eyes?' asked Emily - **Te dor ochii?** întrebă Emily
 Emily' (Briggs 2008a: 48). (Briggs 2010a: 55).

(21) 'You OK? asked Chameleon with some concern' (Briggs 2008a: 148). - **Ești bine?** întrebă Cameleonul puțin îngrijorat (Briggs 2010a: 148).

e) Semantic deviation encompasses transference of meaning and honest deception. In Briggs's novels, metaphors of death as in example (22), warfare metaphors and similes as in examples (23) and (24) as well as hyperbole as in example (25) are relatively simple and straightforward although this strategy must have been purposefully selected by the author who must have thought of her young readers who enjoy clear-cut distinctions in the real or imaginary world which surrounds them:

(22) To the men on the ground it looked as if a **huge black vulture** was descending on them (Briggs 2008b: 3). Pentru cei de la sol, părea că **un vultur negru** cobora asupra lor (Briggs 2010b: 13).

- (23) He passed between the jeeps **like a rocket** (Briggs 2008b: 48). Trecu printre jeepuri **ca o rachetă**. (Briggs 2010b: 52).
- (24) He screamed in horror as he soared metres above **the aircraft**, which looked **like a small toy** below him (Briggs 2008b: 82). Țipă cuprins de oroare în timp ce plutea la câțiva metri deasupra **navei**, care părea **o mică jucărie**, dedesubt (Briggs 2010b: 83).
- (25) Jake felt his teeth jangle as he emitted an **unearthly howl** (Briggs 2008b: 83). Jake își simți dinții scârșnind în timp ce scoase **un urlet nepământesc** (Briggs 2010b: 83).

In addition, a final remark concerns the abundant use of vocabulary from the field of computers and the internet which would deserve a separate analysis since the English terminology is so familiar to the Romanian teenagers that the translator preserves the English words and adapts them to the Romanian linguistic structure. Many anglicisms in the Romanian translation are proof of the strategy: “Windows-ul”, “mouse-ul”, “clicuri”, “conexiunea broadband”, “online”, “linkul” (Briggs 2010a: 21-22).

To conclude, Andy Briggs’s contemporary series and anti-series HERO.COM and VILLAIN.NET are a relevant example for the literary and linguistic journey of a young adult text in today’s society. Apart from the actual confrontations in the novels, the translation process involves a linguistic confrontation which means dealing with instances of linguistic deviation or cases of non-equivalence. Translation strategies should be reconsidered in order to face the challenges of the present market requirements.

Notes

[1] The concept of linguistic deviation has been tackled by Leech (1969: 42-52) who has applied it mainly to poetry. Nevertheless, I consider that prose displays instances of linguistic deviation too as long as it is perceived as “a discrepancy between what is allowed by the language system, and what occurs in the text” (Leech 2008: 55). To put it differently, deviation is defined as “the occurrence of unexpected irregularity in language and results in foregrounding on the basis that the irregularity is surprising to the reader” (Jeffries and McIntyre 2010: 31).

[2] In children’s literature (translation) explicitation is frequently used to indicate adjustment to “the child’s level of comprehension and his reading abilities” (Shavit 1981: 172).

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