An Eye on Eye Dialect

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Abstract

This article aims to identify the strategies used to render the Eye Dialect and how it is translated. More specifically, the purpose is to analyze the translation of Eye Dialect found in Harry Potter dialogues.

Throughout this article we will define "Eye dialect" and specify its role. Thus, it is worth investigating the purpose of the writer by using the "Eye Dialect" in order to be able to select the appropriate strategy of translation.

Key Words: Eye Dialect, Translation, Harry Potter

What's Eye Dialect?

 "Eye Dialect" also known as "Eye Spelling" is a literary technique that uses nonstandard spelling of a standard word with the aim of drawing the reader's attention to pronunciation, such as: 'fer' for 'for', 'yer' for 'your', 'shore' for 'sure' …etc.

However this difference in spelling does not indicate a difference in the pronunciation of the word. That is, it is dialect to the eye rather than to the ear. It suggests that a character "would use a vulgar pronunciation if there were one" and "is at the level of ignorance where one misspells in this fashion, hence mispronounces as well."

It is to note that being a literary technique utilized by many authors; some eye dialect forms have become institutionalized, finding their way into dictionaries as new, distinct lexical entries: helluva, whodunit or whodunit.

The term was first coined by George P. Krapp and used it for the first time in his chapter "Literary Dialects" in The English Language in America (published originally in 1925).

The term appears in the following passage:

"Of the dialect material employed in American literature, several clear kinds may be distinguished. First and most extensive in use is the class dialect which distinguishes between popular and cultivated or standard speech. This calls for no detailed discussion.

The impression of popular speech is easily produced by a sprinkling of such as aint for isn't, done for did, them for those, and similar grammatical improprieties. This impression is often assisted by what may be termed "Eye Dialect," in which the convention violated is one of the eye, not of the ear. Thus a dialect writer often spells a word like front as frunt , or face as fase, or picture as pictsher , not because he intends to indicate here a genuine difference of pronunciation, but the spelling is merely a friendly nudge to the reader, a knowing look which establishes a sympathetic sense of superiority between the author and reader as contrasted with the humble speaker of dialect."(1)

More recently, Brett David in his book gives the 'Eye Dialect a new dimension: it's any variation of spelling used to indicate particular pronunciations or accents.

This means that it also refers to pronunciation spellings, that is, spellings of words that indicate that they are pronounced in a nonstandard way. For example:"oo" for "who", "Uzzer" for "other"…etc

Using Eye Dialect to portray the character, the writer's intention is to add a specific description to the character and give him a more exact representation.

These details of pronunciation serve as a cue to the reader about all of a character's speech; they get the reader closer to the character by providing him a hint that the speech is different from normal. It indicates either it's dialectal, foreign or uneducated. It indicates also the character's background and his social class.

J.K Rowling played on this literary technique of which she was aware. She confirms that in an interview with Stephen Fry on BBC Radio 4:"… SFry: there are characters like Tonks which for some reason I just instinctively felt she had that slightly sort of Burnley, you know sort of Jane Horrocks sort of accent. And it just seemed to fit her exactly and I think… J.K Rowling: It does. […] SFry: And 'About tat' kind of northern writing in it, it's just something that's there and I'm sure it's just as I'm conscious with you sometimes, that you, you're writing a smallish character that, use a turn of phrase that makes me think 'Now that sounds like a Cockney,' or 'that's… that's an older character or that's a younger character.' […] What I really enjoy about your reading is, the accents aren't intrusive ..."

J.K Rowling has used eye dialect in Harry Potter, combining it with pronunciation spelling and nonstandard grammar in the speech of her uneducated characters. An example in Harry Potter is dialogue spoken by Rubeus Hagrid:

"What's this? Feelin' sorry for me? Reckon I'm lonely or summat?" "They won' grow inter nuthin'," said Hagrid. "I got 'em ter feed ter Aragog"

"It's … Aragog. … I think he's dyin'. . , He got ill over the summer an' he's not getting' better.... I don' know what I'll do if he ... if he ... We've bin tergether so long"(2)

It's obvious that eye dialect poses many problems for the translator. Simply because not all languages can display this relationship between the pronunciation and the spelling or the sound and the orthographic representation.

Thus, it's not always possible to transfer the eye dialect in the target language and this can get much more complicated when the writer's intention is to give more details about the character's regional accent or social class.

Morini suggests the following strategies:

"Whenever two or more variants of the same language inhabit the same textual space, the translator can:

 1) write his target text in the standard version of the target language;

 2) employ two or more variants of the target language;

 3) translate one of the variants by a non-standard (incorrect, popular) variant of the target language."(3)

The translator of Harry Potter into Arabic does not make any changes to differentiate the character's speech. The orthography and the non-standard features have been standardized. Therefore, the translator has opted for the first strategy.

Was that on purpose or was it due to a lack of equivalence in the Arabic language?

In order to respond, a sociolinguistic study is highly recommended.

Endnotes:

(1) George Philip Krapp, The English Language in America (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1960),I, 228.

(2) Rowling, J.K., 2005, Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, London; p 216-217).

(3) Morini, M., 2006, "Norms, Difference, and the Translator: Or, How to Reproduce Double Difference", Review of Literatures of the European Union: Traduzione Tradizione? Paths in the European Literary Polysystem 4: 123-140;