

# MANAGING THE EXTERNAL INFLUENCES THAT CAN SHAPE AND HAVE AN IMPACT ON A TRANSLATION

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## Abstract

*The external influences that can shape and have an impact on a translation mainly refer to the social and cultural contexts of the target text translator's country in a certain historical period of time. Thus, such factors can prove helpful if we are looking for a holistic image on the creation, production, reception and translation of a certain text or novel in two or more cultures and its status in contemporary society.*

*The presentation of these contexts requires an interdisciplinary approach, focusing on the historical, political, economic, social and cultural aspects of both the source language and target language texts. A good example in point would be the analysis and comparison of a text that was translated in very different historical periods of time and cultural contexts. This is one of the reasons for using J. D. Salinger's novel, "The Catcher in the Rye", for this type of approach the main focus is to present the huge impact that the Second World War had, mainly on the USA –the democratic context – and Romania – the communist context – and on how it affected life, developments and social evolutions in these two different countries. These external influences refer to the main events in the history of these two countries (or any other countries considered for comparison and analysis), as well as the political regimes and their impacts on each nation and on the developments from various fields of activity, as well as their impact on people's lives and ways of thinking. Closely connected to these factors and recent perspectives on Translation Studies is the aim of this article: to draw attention to certain problems that may occur in a translation, especially when different cultures are involved and when these cultures have the power to shape a translation, and not only.*

## Keywords:

*Managing external, influences translation studies, cultural context, social context.*

## 1. Introduction

The aim of this article, that of discussing the possible external influences that can affect a translation and the possibilities of managing them, started from an analysis and comparison between a famous American novel published in 1951, J. D. Salinger's "The Catcher in the Rye" and its two translations into Romanian and several other translations into other languages. The reason for choosing it is closely related to the universal value of Salinger's novel due to its universality of style, of language, and especially of the message contained. Altogether, even though the American and the British reviews were either in favor or contrary to the novel, it reached a high popularity in a very short period of time. Nevertheless, in spite of all the banning, censorship, removal from reading lists and controversy, the novel sold more than 60 million copies. Sarah Graham mentioned in the *Introduction* of her book that Salinger's novel was indeed one of the most popular novels of the twentieth century and that "[i]t has never been out of print, has sold millions of copies worldwide and has been translated into more than thirty languages" (xi). Nowadays it still sells a quarter of a million copies worldwide and it is present in polls all around the world, in top positions. We find the same situation in Romania, especially since the publication of C. Ionescu's retranslation of Salinger's novel. Ana-Maria Onisei, focusing on this Romanian retranslation, said that "The text is actuated and adapted for our times, without losing from the charm and freshness of the same teenage dilemmas. Practically, the rebellion, the negation and the ignorance are nothing but the essence of the age (and of the book), its language being the only one which deserves to be renewed" [my translation and adaptation]. These ideas clearly show that the novel chosen for discussion is highly popular and appreciated, standing the test of time, and that it raises some serious problems in terms of language use and translation choices, especially given the political and cultural contexts at the time of publishing the translation.

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## **2. Methods**

The main methods I have used in this article are the content analysis method of the reference sources and of the texts chosen to emphasize the examples in point, the comparative approach through qualitative research, and the observation method starting from empirical research in the field.

The aim of this article was to offer some insight on the social and cultural contexts from the USA and Romania from the period of the novel's publication and respectively of the first Romanian translation in order to get a bigger picture of all the elements that contributed to the creation and perception of Salinger's novel as it is today. Thus, it has focused on a brief account of the reception, different translations and solutions offered to manage the problems raised by Salinger's use of taboo language in Romania and in other countries, especially in order to emphasize the idea that other researchers have previously taken interest in Salinger's choice and use of language and the problems raised by its translation in different cultures.

The main strategy I have used was the practical act of comparing the Source Language (SL) text with its translation into the Target Language (TL) and discussing mainly the cases of misunderstandings and mistranslations, of problems of equivalence, of influences from the political, social and cultural contexts on the end-result – the novel's translations.

## **3. Background**

Catinca Ralea and Lucian Bratu were the first ones who translated Salinger's novel into Romanian, with the title "De Veghe în Lanul de Secară" in 1964. Cristian Ionescu retranslated the novel into Romanian, with the same title, and published it in 2005.

Oana Boca, Promotion and PR Manager at Polirom Publishing House, contacted by me through email, stated that the second Romanian translation by Cristian Ionescu, sold more than 40,000 copies since its publication. The book has also appeared on Polirom's website positioned either first or second in their weekly sales tops, and it has stayed there for 127 weeks so far. The number of 40,000 sold copies situates this cult type of novel on a very high position since in Romania, as Oana Boca stated, the average number of copies sold being between 2,500 - 3,000, more exactly of approximately 2,800 sold copies. This piece of information is important because it shows the great interest that Romanian readers take in J. D. Salinger's work, and this, of course leads to the main idea that the translation of such a popular book deserves special attention and it has great impact on its readership.

The novel is seen as a best-seller in Romania, even after its second translation, which actually maintains the novel on the list of the best sold books of Polirom Publishing House. Mirecea Mihăieș mentions the first translation of the novel, in the '60s, which became rather old-fashioned when compared to the modern, slangy language used by its second translator, Cristian Ionescu. Then he makes reference to the status of the novel in the American literature (being part of the mandatory reading lists in high-schools and universities, the controversy around the book, its censorship). Mircea Mihăieș also asks himself what the generation of teenagers of sixty years ago has in common with the current generation, born with the TV remote in their hand, a modern generation, an Internet-and-computer-game generation, which creates its own violent stories on the computer, using "primitive language and intensely irrigated by hormones in pure state." He emphasizes the fact that we should take interest in the issue of "the perishability of cultural myths." Mircea Mihăieș believes that the outdated slangy language of Salinger's novel no longer impresses the modern generation and that the novel is read more and more by adults who are "willing to sacrifice the pleasure of the participative reading for one of analysis of the psychological structures and of the language" (4). But the main issue here is the shortage of such readers from the American reading rooms, libraries and bookshops. He believes that Salinger is living the drama of the rock singers who

entered irreversible obscurity after decades of glory and who will, of course, be remembered in the cultural history, but nobody will be amazed by their come-backs (4).

J. D. Salinger's literary masterpiece cannot be profoundly understood without taking into consideration the social and cultural context and the influences of the period in which Salinger lived and created his fiction. This involves an interdisciplinary approach of the topic, dealing mainly with historical, political, economic, social and cultural aspects of the 1950s. Although Salinger started working on his novel much earlier, in the 1940s, the '50s is the period in which the novel was published and rapidly gained national and international reputation. But without the specific events that took place in post-war America, the huge popularity of Salinger's novel may not even have been possible. In order to emphasize the main events I shall make reference to some very recent studies, mainly belonging to Sarah Graham and Martin Halliwell.

The period right before, during and after the Second World War had a huge impact, at all levels, on all the nations involved, but the focus in this article is on the USA and Romania, and on how the war affected life and its evolution in these two different countries. This part represents the core of understanding how all the new changes and developments, both in positive and negative directions, in the post-war era were actually shaped and how they influenced life, in all its spheres, with an emphasis on literature in this unique context in the above-mentioned nations. Before embarking on discussing and presenting the most important events from the decade of the 1950s, I believe it is important to briefly point out what the atmosphere was like in the mid-1940s, when Salinger had actually started working on his novel. The respective period "had seen an almost complete reversal of the alliances of World War II: the Germans and Japanese were no longer the sworn enemy, even though West Coast Japanese Americans has been interned and relocated *en masse* in the late 1940s, causing widespread resentment" (Halliwell 28). The real dangers or threats were now Red China and the Soviet Union.

But in order to better understand the post-war period we have to look even further back in the history of the USA, to the period of the Great Depression. Sarah Graham mentions that the post-war American atmosphere cannot be really understood without going back to the Wall Street Crash in 1929, when the US stock market suffered an immense collapse which lasted until the beginning of World War II in 1939 and which was known as the Great Depression, "an economic crisis that threw millions of people into poverty" (9). The USA had hoped to avoid getting involved in the war. "Anxious about the rise of communism, keen to limit immigration, and resistant to a European influence on American identity, the USA was happy to stay isolated from the rest of the world" (Graham 9). But Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 17 December 1941 killed more than 2,400 American service people and civilians and this fact made the USA decide by 11 December to go to war with Japan, Germany and Italy. America's participation in the war pulled her out of the Depression by creating many jobs, especially new ones. This situation further led to the economic boom of post-war America.

The two major dangers that America was facing after the end of the war were: "the possible spread of Communism from the USSR and the fear that the Soviets would develop and use atomic weapons" (Graham 10). These dangers influenced America in all its major fields of life for many years. Capitalism and Soviet Communism are deeply opposing concepts. For Americans capitalism means that "individuals or companies own the means of production and employ a workforce" (Graham 10). Soviet Communism is at the opposite pole, it is "a state-run, rather than privately owned economic system in which, ideally, the workforce owns the means of production" (Graham 10). These are the reasons which led to the 'Cold War' between America and the USSR. "The boom of America's economy was a very important aspect and an influential one in everybody's life" (Graham 10). Martin Halliwell believes that the "Cold War ideology is central to understanding 1950s culture but it

was also a period in which the economic prosperity that began during World War II started to have tangible effects on middle class life” (2).

All these aspects of real American life clearly had an impact on Salinger’s writing style and description of the rebellious teenager’s conditions, as well as use and choice of language. That is why it is highly important to manage the translation-related issues by referring exactly to the context in which the novel was created and published and in the process of (re)translation to try to recreate more the same effects rather than just render the same linguistic meanings.

#### **4. Romania in the 1960s**

The period in which the first Romanian translation of Salinger’s novel appeared in our country, namely in 1964, done was that of Communism, the much feared threat of the USA. This means that Romania which met Holden Caulfield for the first time had the exact political and social context that the Americans, Holden’s compatriots, were fighting against. This brief outlook on Romania’s communist period will greatly help explain the decisions and choices made by the Romanian translators; they will also help to profoundly analyze the text in relation to the socio-cultural context and better understand why the first Romanian translation was not a very successful one. In this context it is also very important to understand Romania’s position in the period before, during and after the Second World War in order to better understand the changes that took place in our country and that shaped its history for almost five decades before the revolution against Communism, in 1989, which represented a spiritual, cultural, economic, political and historical rebirth for our nation. The main source for the information presented in this sub-chapter is an article entitled “Cultura română în perioada regimului comunist. Reconstrucția culturii române în perioada postcomunistă. Poziții actuale privind identitatea națională și procesul integrării europene” (“The Romanian culture during the communist regime. The reconstruction of the Romanian culture in the post-communist period. Present positions regarding the national identity and the European integration process”). All the quotations and paraphrasing from this article (as well as from other sources in this sub-chapter) are my translation and adaptation into English unless otherwise stated.

The communist regime was installed in Romania under direct pressure of the Soviet occupation forces, against the will of the Romanian people, in the geopolitical conjunction appeared after the end of World War II. After this harsh period there was a period of repression and institutionalization of ideological control, which was known as censorship. These regimes, when they fully took over the power, they destroyed the intellectual elite, using violence in the repression and physical extermination, in prisons and camps, of a large number of members of the old political class. In Romania, the year 1948 represented a turning point, because there was a change towards “a systematic policy of communization of society,” under the apparent legitimacy of the new legislation and of the essentially communist laws. Since then, the communist regime started the action of nationalization of economic enterprises and the collectivization of agriculture, and on the political and cultural level there was a wild repression towards the representatives of old political and intellectual classes, in parallel with a program of “Sovietization of the culture.”

In 1948 the ideological censorship was institutionalized, affecting all areas of creative or cultural activity. Lists of publications were established; and the same happened to works or authors who may see the light of print, and lists of publications and works that had to be prohibited, with authors to be removed from the public domain. The public libraries were purged of banned works, but they were invaded by translations from Russian literature, the Russian films flooded the screens, the publishers and newspapers were put under a strict ideological control. The works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin were translated and disseminated to saturation. This situation can be slightly linked to the attempts to ban

Salinger's novel after its publication in 1951 or to censor certain parts, actually words (such as the case of the "F" word) from the book. This harsh political context from Romania affected all strata of life, especially the cultural one and this had a great impact on the first Romanian translation of "The Catcher in the Rye."

In broad terms, from a cultural point of view, the article mentioned above distinguishes three relatively distinct periods of the communist regime: the Stalinist dogmatism of the '50s, the era of relative liberalization between 1964-1971, and the age of re-Stalinization until 1989.

Thus, there was a period of relative political liberalization and cultural openness, which had beneficial effects on the cultural environment, between the years 1964-1974. It was the period in which the important values of the national culture were rediscovered and used, in which the intellectual contacts with the Western world were resumed; art and cultural activities claimed and got a relative autonomy over the official policy directives, directives that knew, in their turn, a relaxation phase, and the ideological censorship became more lax. The fine arts, the theater, the cinema, literature and cultural media were experiencing a renewal of substance, a stylistic diversification and performance achievements. At the same time, there was openness to the Western culture, yet limited and selective, but the academic environment began to have access to specialized journals and books from the West, intellectuals returning thus to the scientific and information circuit. There were massive translations from contemporary writers, important authors from philosophical thinking were translated. Thus, "the specificity of the Romanian press after 1989 [was] characterized by a free circulation of information, [by] the diversity of information channels, [and] openness of the Romanian press towards English and American sources of information [...]" (Chirilă 45).

This was, broadly speaking the socio-cultural and political context in Romania at the time when "De Veghe în Lanul de Secară" was translated for the first time, in 1964. This brief presentation can thus help us better understand the censorship present in the choices made by the two Romanian translators. One of the important advantages of this first translation is that it appeared in the so-called period of political liberalization and cultural openness, in 1964 and this allowed our country to come into contact with a highly controversial book, banned especially because of its "inappropriate" language.

Regardless how good or bad the translation may be ranked or how modern or old-fashioned the language of the novel may look like to different generations of readers, the work of the first two Romanian translators is of great value since it united the Romanian and American cultures, shedding light on the latter in the eyes of Romanian readers and awakening their interest in wanting to find out more about Holden Caulfield and his teenage dilemmas. From this point of view the translation can be considered a bridge between cultures and a good starting point for further analysis of different cultural and historical aspects and events that highly influence the writing, translating and decoding process of a literary work. These are some of the main reasons why I have focused on the socio-cultural and historical contexts related to the birth, and respectively to the translation of Salinger's novel.

## **5. Case study**

In culture-related aspects of translation the concept of norms is a frequent subject of discussion. Many critics believe, and I share this point of view, that the cultural specificity of norms makes translating such a highly challenging activity. Norms are, in the majority of cases, not universal but particular, and that is the main reason why a translator has to maintaining a position of mediator between two cultures. This means that a translator is also frequently faced with a situation in which (s)he has to choose whether to conform to the norms prevailing in the source culture (SC) or to those prevailing in the target culture (TC) in order to avoid a clash between the two. The first Romanian translation of Salinger's novel



seems to fit the first pattern described by Laura Routti and the explanation may be represented by the culture-related and historical background of the period of the translation.

Laura Routti in her paper entitled “Norms and Storms: Pentti Saarikoski’s Translation of J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye*” discusses the relationship between translation and norms through a case study focusing on Pentti Saarikoski’s Finnish translation of J. D. Salinger’s novel. The most important point made by her study is that, in an attempt to render the stylistic qualities of Salinger’s novel in his translation, Saarikoski was compelled to violate the norms regulating the use of language in the target literature of the time. Following the initial “shock” in the target culture, “Sieppari Ruispellossa” is, however, seen to have gained an influential, norm-initiating role in the evolution of the Finnish literary system as a translation through which the use of slang was introduced to it as a new, alternative means of expression.

The relationship between norms and translation is a twofold one since norms influence translators, but translators in their turn can influence norms. As mediators between cultures, translators are in a position to change norms of the TC through their translations and, in this way, to contribute to the development of the literary system of the target language. There are, as Laura Routti stated, cases in which a translation conforming to the SC norms is altogether rejected as norm-violating by recipients in the TC, but in other cases such translations may, in fact, gain a position as exemplary literary models which authors in the target literature are willing to follow. Regarding translation as an activity characterized, at least in theory, by a double obligation, namely faithfulness to the ST on the one hand, and loyalty to the norms prevailing in the TC on the other hand, the aim in her paper was to shed light on the context, and on the specific constraints in that context.

The concept of norms is generally considered to have been introduced to translation studies through the work of Gideon Toury in the late 1970s. Toury himself, however, has refused to claim credit for having associated norms with translation, regarding Jiri Levý and James S. Holmes as the originators of a norm-based approach to translation studies (Toury, “A Handful of Paragraphs” 10). The view of translating as a norm-governed activity presupposes that translators at work are subject to expectations prevailing in a certain community at a certain time. Norms influence not only the production, but also the selection and reception of translations (Schäffner, “The Concept of Norms” 6). However, as mediators between cultures in which different norms prevail, translators are also in a position to introduce and change norms. As Laura Routti notes, reader responses are highly time-dependent, and textual qualities introduced by a norm-violating translation may eventually be domesticated and come to be regarded as natural elements of the target literary system. In that process of change, a translator whose work may first have been disapproved of as norm-breaking may, in the course of time, come to be highly appreciated as a norm-initiator.

The overall tone of the novel is highly colloquial and the vocal quality of the narrator’s sentence structure has led some critics to conclude that Salinger thought of the novel more in terms of spoken than of written speech (Costello 329). The main problem was related to Salinger’s use of highly informal language in “*The Catcher in the Rye*,” as in Finnish literature the use of slang was practically unknown at the time. In an attempt to remain faithful to the original novel and to make the Finnish Holden sound like his American counterpart, Saarikoski created a vernacular to correspond with the tone of the ST. This required not only linguistic and cultural competence from the translator, but also the courage to juggle with the norms that regulated the use of language in the Finnish literature of the time. Thus, this is a clear case of managing the external influences and adapting the methods of translation to the specific TL.

The same parallel could be easily drawn between the original version of the novel and the first Romanian translation, especially while thinking about the historical background around the year 1964 when the communist regime was in power and when the use of slang in

print was not a matter of option, it was simply unconceivable. There is nevertheless a major difference between the Finnish literature and the use of slang and the Romanian one. In Romanian, both in the common use of language and even in literature, slang words and expressions existed, but they were not used in the same proportion. The censure of the communist regime was too high to allow such words to be seen in print at that time. And Romanian was not a singular case, as we have just seen and we shall see further on.

I believe that one of the reasons why the original text is so difficult to translate is that the language itself raises such difficulties. The translator himself or herself must have the same intelligence as the writer himself in order to be able to render the same ideas with the same or at least similar means, to adapt the source text and culture to the target language and culture. Perhaps this is also one of the reasons why the first Romanian translation was not a complete success and why the Romanian literature, as many others as well, felt the need to revive, to improve, to give a second translation to the audience, as an alternative not only to a new perspective, but also to a new culture and society. The second Romanian translation of Salinger's novel seems to offer, at least, a new perspective after the fall of the communist regime, a freer one, and one in which all the language norms and barriers reflecting the political norms and barriers are no longer visible and no longer exist.

Saarikoski simply decided to reject the use of "literary Finnish" altogether, and to create an artificial vernacular based on urban colloquial language. The vernacular came to reflect features from different language varieties. For the most part it was based on the teenage slang spoken in Helsinki at the time, but it also included dialectal features of the Finnish spoken in Vironlahti, a country district where Saarikoski had spent his childhood, as well as a number of anglicisms, as Laura Routti added. The task of creating this vernacular involved a lot of "field-work": Saarikoski visited cafés frequented by young people and attended their parties to listen to their language, as the writer of the article continued her idea. This also seems to be the case of the translator of the second Romanian version of "The Catcher" though apparently not rising at the same level as the Finnish one. "Sieppari" thus came to symbolize the first step towards the modernization of literary Finnish. The articles written by Saarikoski and the strategy he then adopted in his translation of "The Catcher" show that, in an attempt to render the slangy tone that Salinger had employed in "The Catcher," Saarikoski made a conscious decision to violate the norms governing the use of literary language in Finnish literature at the time.

Some critics applauded the Finnish translator's vision and agreed that no other person could have produced the Finnish version of Salinger's novel as skillfully as Saarikoski. Some other critics had been quite harsh on Saarikoski, even claiming that he has written his own version of Salinger's novel, considering the Finnish translation even a fraud, as Laura Routti explained in her article.

Laura Routti stated that Pentti Saarikoski has probably been the best translator one could think of for this novel. His translation conveys the tone and the rhythm of the language spoken by today's school children. "Sieppari" has captured the spirit of the Finnish city, although the story itself takes place in a city across the world. I consider that this seems to be the main task of any translator while transposing one text from a SL into a TL. Perhaps this idea is related to the fact that the first Romanian version of Salinger's novel was not a very successful one and that the second one was considered "too bold" and at times the exact opposite of the first one—a fact which did not allow Romanian critics to have the same opinions about the Romanian renditions of "The Catcher" as the Finnish ones in terms of translation and norm breaking, at least not yet. Nevertheless, the future may always bring new attempts to translate a text and break old linguistic rules and norms, although it is less likely in the case of the Romanian linguistic system.

John Robert Schmitz, in his article "Suppression of References to Sex and Body Functions in the Brazilian and Portuguese Translations of J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*," compared two

translations into Portuguese, one Brazilian and the other European, of Salinger's "The Catcher in the Rye." The author pointed out translational deviations and freedoms in the translated renditions of this work and stressed the need for translators to be faithful to the original text and not censure the language by "erasing" what they find objectionable. I believe that this outstanding and extremely important idea must also be applied to the first Romanian version of Salinger's novel since there are many examples of such deviations, censures, euphemisms and suppressions of certain words (and sometimes ideas) in the TL version, all done with the purpose first to remain faithful to the norms of the TL (as already discussed in the example of the Finnish translation) and second not to "bother" or trouble the politic authorities during the communist regime period. This seems a well-grounded reason to make reference to the above-mentioned author and his article and launch a multi-lingual comparison and analysis of the losses occurring in different translations of Salinger's novel.

## **6. Conclusions**

In this article I have tried to focus mainly on the social and cultural contexts from the USA and Romania, as well as on some linguistic problems raised by Salinger's use of highly colloquial and taboo language in "The Catcher." I have chosen the two countries due to obvious reasons: America is the "home country" of Holden Caulfield and Romania is the country which produced the two translations that were compared and analyzed. This twofold approach, social and cultural, can help in better understanding the whole context in which Salinger produced his literary masterpiece, which in its turn can greatly help in understanding the reception of the novel in the two cultures, its status in contemporary society and the different ways used to manage the external influences that occur in the process of translation.

The presentation of the social and cultural contexts of the USA in the 1950s and of Romania in the 1960s was done in order to have a holistic image on the creation, production, reception and translation of Salinger's novel in the two mentioned cultures. The presentation of these contexts, based on important critics' studies and opinions, involved an interdisciplinary approach, focusing on the historical, political, economic, social and cultural aspects of the USA and Romania. The main events in the history of these two countries have been presented, as well as the political regimes and their impacts on each nation and on the developments from various fields of activity, as well as their impact on people's lives and ways of thinking. Closely connected to this presentation was also that of the most significant recent perspectives and approaches to Salinger's novel, but in connection to the context in which the novel was written, the period of the 1950s.

Another conclusion, based on the critics' studies and research, is that the Finnish translation discussed as an example of a way of managing the issues that occur in the translation process played an innovative role and an influential one in the literary system of Finland by breaking the norms of the TL, in order to render the stylistic qualities of the ST, and by introducing the use of slang language in Finnish, as a new and alternative means of expression. This also leads to the idea that translators have to be faithful to the original text and never attempt to censure the ST. The fact that the two translations in question changed the language of the ST because they considered it offensive or taboo demonstrates that such cases should never be part of a translator's task.

The conclusion is that although such cases of suppression or censure of the ST are not desirable or should never happen, in reality they do exist, but the fact that more and more people take interest in such situations may indicate that more and more researchers are concerned with finding ways of preventing or avoiding such mistranslations from occurring in the future.

In conclusion I can say that it is obvious that the way we read a novel is highly influenced by the context in which we live, especially by the political and social aspects. The way we understand the messages of a novel can change along with the way we evolve as human beings and the way the society in which we live develops as well.



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