

Translation and Culture

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Abstract: This paper focuses on some theoretical and practical approaches on translation of cultural references and elements. Even though it is argued that literary texts such as novels, short stories or plays are full of cultural specifics, practice shows that even other text types are culture-bound. Being in the position of a university lecturer for fifteen years and teaching both Translation and Culture as separate courses to graduate and post graduate students, I have frequently noticed that when I try to explain institutions and culture of the United Kingdom, I also have to provide their equivalent translation in our mother tongue, Albanian language. Many translation scholars argue that sometimes it is rather difficult to translate cultural units into a target language due to differences in traditions, social behaviour, customs, food and dressing habits, flora and fauna, forms of governing, institutions, etc. Thus, in this paper one will find some examples randomly taken from my daily practice with students. Examples are in English and their translations are in the Albanian language. One will also notice that there is always a solution to translating culture from SL into TL having in mind different suggestions provided by the scholars.

Keywords: Translation, culture, culture-specifics, culture-bound words and phrases, formal and dynamic equivalence, transference, componential analysis, translation context, translation procedures, etc.

INTRODUCTION

Living in a period of globalization it seems rather easy to communicate between cultures. People more and more are embracing new patterns of behavior, new trends in fashion, new celebrations and wedding ceremonies. Yet this era of globalization is somehow reinforcing national identities especially with a middle-aged generation finding hard to understand the reasons why youngsters are moving away from old traditions. It is their stance and persevering efforts to make young people aware of their native country's history, national heritage, customs, rituals and cultural belonging. Cultural differences are present in every nation, but when there is a necessity to translate culture into another culture then the job poses many problems.

Performing the translator's task is not as easy as one can think of. The translator often finds elements in a text which seem untranslatable. However, there are options and ways to consider the translatability of a text. Dealing with translation problems and providing solutions to a difficult text is a challenge to everyone who considers translation of a SL text into a TL text. As every language has its own linguistic systems, it is sometimes difficult to render the implications of SL into TL. Even though there are losses in translation due to many reasons, there are still certain approaches, which are offered by scholars in translation discipline. These

theoretical approaches are defined according to difficulties encountered by translators in different areas. Cultural units are present in different texts and it is up to the translator to adapt them in the target language. Challenges and practice coexist in translation. Acculturation is a process widely known in sociology and psychology. It is associated with differences in culture, customs and social institutions. It is also related to the process of translation especially when translating literary texts. André Lefevere and Susan Bassnett [6] are among the scholars who have provided essential tips on how to overcome problems in translation especially with the "classics". They see the process of translation as rewriting. Translators are considered as co-authors. These may sound strange ideas, but translation theories are changing and translator is at times a traitor because he shifts from the original words or phrases by using other words or phrases by changing the form and keeping the content.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The paper contains examples and illustrations in both languages English and Albanian. One can find illustrations from daily practice with students and also suggestions and arguments by different scholars in the field of translation. The focus will be on difficulties posed by cultural elements and possible solutions. Examples are of different areas such as everyday

language, flora, fauna, food and drinks, institutions, etc. The paper in this section is further divided into subheadings, which clarify the necessity of carrying out translations in different areas due to differences in culture.

Short stories, novels and plays are full of culture-specifics. Translators have to choose whether to adapt or preserve these culture references and as Paul Schmidt suggests a 'translation must never incorporate strangeness, even accidentally, unless it exists in the original' [1]. In theatrical translation which is strongly related to performance, directors and translators often do not take under consideration this principle. Excesses in setting, costumes, and acting arise in performance. As Phyllis Zatlin puts it 'A translator who is not involved in the production cannot prevent them but perhaps can forestall them by avoiding imposed strangeness in the written text' [2]. She continues by arguing that 'For plays that do not emphasize location, the translator can decide to under-translate (generalize) passing references to the setting.' (idem). Based on her ideas translators can do modest changes and make different plays universal even though in the original they take place in New Orleans (A Street Car Named Desire), early 19th century Madrid (The Sleep of Reason), etc?

There will always be a certain degree of loss in meaning when a text is translated. As Peter Newmark puts it "... if the text describes a situation which has elements peculiar to the natural environment, institutions and culture of its language, there is an inevitable loss of meaning, since the transference to ...the translator's language can only be approximate" [3]. To illustrate Newmark's statement let us consider some examples which are randomly chosen from translation practice textbooks with some comments on the translated version into Albanian language:

(SL) I thought that job would take me ages, but I had finished it by tea-time.

(TL) Mendova se ajo punë do të më merrte shumë kohë por e mbarova para pushimit të kafes).

In this situation tea-time as a cultural unit typical for British culture can be adapted into translation with another cultural unit pushimi i kafes, since Albanian culture normally has a coffee-break at work rather than tea-time.

(SL) He spent the evening in the pub, drinking himself into a stupor.

(TL) Ai e kaloi mbrëmjen në pab duke pirë deri sa u bë xurxull).

If in Albanian language we are going to preserve the noun pub-pab, there will certainly be some loss in translation, because the British culture makes

use of the pub as a place where people go and drink as much beer as they can since it is cheaper in comparison with bars and restaurants. In Albanian culture pub has obtained a different meaning. It is a place where people drink but they also have fun and the beer is more expensive and they normally do not go alone to spend the evening. Instead of pub the word pijetore can be closer in meaning, however, it is not the same thing.

(SL) There is an excellent bus service-the bus stop is just a stone's throw away.

(TL) Gjendet një shërbim shumë i mirë urban dhe qëndrimi i autobusit është vetëm dy hapa larg.

In this situation the idiomatic expression with 's "a stone's throw away" can only be adapted into translation with another idiomatic expression "dy hapa larg" which is an equivalent of the British idiom.

(SL) He was a fresh-faced youth who looked as though butter wouldn't melt in his mouth.

(TL) Ai ishte një djalosh i ri që dukej se nuk i lëvizte as qerpiku.

The expression "butter wouldn't melt into his mouth" refers to somebody cold, sometimes cruel and without any facial expression. In Albanian the phrase "s'i lëvizte as qerpiku" is closer in meaning, inferring that he was distant and cold and not impressed by anybody or anything.

In the Play "Pygmalion" by Shaw [7], from the very first act and throughout the play the main character Eliza Doolittle uses the expression "I am a good girl, I am". The translator of the play having into consideration the wider context and also the intention of the playwright and the time the play was written, has translated the play with the expression "unë jam vajzë e ndershme". This translation technique, which provides explanation and contextualization, refers to the time when prostitution was a phenomenon widely spread and was one of the occurring themes in the play.¹

Differences between cultures can be traced in various areas such as educational system, legal system, weddings ceremonies, national days, food habits, governmental institutions, mourning clothes, etc. Even though we are talking more and more about globalization, thinking that disparities between nations do not exist, it is a step towards deepening changes in cultures and strengthening nationalistic feelings and a sense of belonging to one significant cultural heritage. If one English speaking translator is about to translate Albanian wedding traditions into English how can he overcome the problem of these cultural differences in the source culture? Albanian traditional weddings may

¹ My translation into Albanian and also my comments.

look strange to the foreigner's eye, especially to Western culture. British and Americans find it hard to decode the content of all elements intertwined together to the big event. It is inconceivable for them the word 'qokë' or 'adet' where people go to the groom's house before the reception to wish his parents and relatives present at their house a happy life to the couple and leave money on the tray or 'tabaka' after being treated with 'llokum' and 'liker' (liquor). Another strange thing is 'djegia e shamisë së beqarit' (burning the stag's handkerchief) which makes the translator read more about this typical tradition as well as give a try at understanding 'throwing rice, candies and coins over the couple's head when the bride is leaving her parent's house and entering the car accompanied by the groom'. The same cultural problems are also encountered on the side of Albanian translators trying to find the right equivalent for 'garter' worn by the bride over the knee and thrown to the single men as a symbol of fertility and as a sign that the one who catches it will be married next. Similar examples are in American education system and the Albanian cultural equivalents:

Primary school-shkollë fillore
Junior high school-shkollë nëntëvjeçare
Senior high school –gjimnaz
Freshmen (9th grade) –viti i parë (vitparist)
Sophomores (10th grade) – viti i dytë
Juniors (11th grade) – viti i tretë
Seniors (12th grade) – viti i katërt (maturantë)

Legal system in UK poses many difficulties to the translators starting with the sources of English Law such as Magna Carta and Habeas Corpus and the Common Law and proceeding with court divisions in the criminal and civil area. In England and Wales we have Magistrates Courts which is a very old court system with magistrates or Justices of the Peace who sit and hear petty cases and give their judgment even though they don't have any legal training. In Albanian in the lower courts or first instance courts we have 'gjyqtarë' in this position. In Scotland a typical situation is with 'sheriff courts' equal to high courts and for Northern Ireland there are 'Diplock' courts which deal with alleged terrorists.

Difficult in translation are also 'Queen's Bench Division'- gjykatë e lartë që trajton çështjet civile mbi kontratat, çështjet e neglizhencës dhe pretendimet për kthimin e tokës apo pronës.

Chancery Court Division- gjykatë e lartë që trajton çështjet civile mbi problemet tregtare, financiare apo trashëgimore.

Lord Chancellor is a senior and important functionary in the government of the UK and administers all higher crown courts in England and Wales. In Albania the court system is different and the

senior and most important functionary is 'prokurori i përgjithshëm' or in certain cases 'Këshilli i Lartë i Drejtësisë'.

Solicitors and barristers are two distinct cultural elements for the British legal professions.

Albanian traditional food and drinks are difficult to be rendered into other cultures that is why foreigners like very much Albanian 'raki' as they also prefer Greek 'uzo' or British 'ale'. 'Paçe' is a favourite early morning meal for Albanian men especially for those who transport goods and have to travel a lot. How can foreigners find an equivalent for it since it is not part of their food habit? This is equal to finding an equivalent for 'Irish Curry' or 'Yorkshire pudding', 'bagel', etc.

Many significant dates in the American history have entered other cultures in the form of calques without being culturally transposed into target languages such as Great Depression – Depresioni i Madh, Pearl Harbour War- Lufta e Përl Harbërit, Baby Boom transposed as Lindshmëria e Lartë e Fëmijëve, Watergate –translated with addition of the word 'skandali', thus 'Skandali i Uotergejtit' edhe pse 'gate' në vetvete do të thotë 'skandal' in Albanian we cannot translate it as 'Skandali' i 'Uoterit'.

Bank Holiday – cannot be literally translated as 'banka e ka pushim' but as 'ditë zyrtare pushimi' as it is officially a 'public holiday' where all banks close and this is typical for Britain.

If anybody is more and more familiar with Wallstreet and transliterate it as 'Uollstrit' without making any references to New York's Stock Exchange, translators cannot proceed like this with 'The City' – London's Financial Centre (Bursa e Londrës) or with Fleet Street which in media is a reference to 'British national newspapers' (Shtypi britanik) although no national paper is now produced in this street in London. 'Tabloids' and 'Broadsheets' are culturally transposed as 'gazeta me format të ngushtë' dhe 'gazeta me format të gjerë'. Thatcherism, Clintonism, Machiavelism, etc. have been easily translated as loan words: Theçërizmi, Klintonizmi, Makiavelizmi, but what about 'Britishness', 'Englishness', 'Albanianness', 'Scottishness', 'Irishness'?

RESULTS

After the consideration of different examples mentioned above, the paper considers the results section which contains the assessment of the translator's job and provides suggestions and interpretations for future translations in different areas when it comes to the translation of culture elements in a text. Both Professors Peter Newmark and Mona Baker classify culture-

specific words according to their close findings and research.

Peter Newmark [3] considers culture as “the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression”. Here we also bring into mind the cultural turn, thus the necessity to switch from one culture into another, becoming aware of cultural specific features of one language and trying to translate them into another language. Every text-type has its own difficulties and culture-specifics are present in every area. For this reason Newmark tried to categorize the cultural words as follows:

- 1) Ecology: flora, fauna, hills, winds, plains (pine marten –belongs to weasel family but it is a different species - tip nuse lale)
- 2) Material Culture: food (fish and chips or crab-sandwiches), clothes (kilts), houses (bed and breakfast, cottages) and towns, transport (double deckers)
- 3) Social Culture: work and leisure (rounders, cricket, rugby)
- 4) Organizations (FBI), Customs (Highland Games, Eisteddfod Festival), Activities (staff party, greyhound racing), Procedures (criminal and civil proceedings, Magistrate courts, Old Bailey), Concepts: • Political (House of Commons, House of Lords, the Senate, the Congress) and administrative (The Oval Office, Ten Downing Street) • Religious (Presbyterian Church, Established Church of England, Methodist church, Zoroastrians, Hinduism, Buddhism)• artistic (Promenade Concerts at Albert’s Hall)
- 5) Gestures and Habits (V sign which stands for victory if used with the palm inward is an offensive gesture in UK. Queuing is a habit Brits love, but other people hate.)

Professor Mona Baker in her book *In Other Words* [4], classified cultural words into abstract and concrete. In the SL one can find words that may express concepts completely unfamiliar in the TL. This cultural words or phrases may generate from various areas such as religion, customs, food and drinks. It is rather difficult when the translator tries to put these cultural-bound words into the target culture, since both SL and TL have their distinct culture references, units and elements. According to Baker we have the following classification:

- a) Culture specific concepts (‘ministers’ in European governments are equal to ‘Secretary of State for...’ in British and American government system)
- b) The SL concept which is not lexicalized in TL (Watergate- Uotergejti)
- c) The SL word which is semantically complex (Chancery Division)

- d) The source and target languages make different distinction in meaning (Memorial Day-Dita e Dëshmorëve –typically American)
- e) The TL lacks a super ordinate (Ten Downing Street-Selia e Kryeministrit Britanik)
- f) The TL lacks a specific term (hyponym) – (Daffodil-një lloj luleje e verdhë)
- g) Differences in physical or interpersonal perspective (White clothes in Asia –Black clothes in Western cultures to cry for the dead)
- h) Differences in expressive meaning (Baby Boom-Lindshmëria e Lartë e Fëmijëve)
- i) Differences in form (Fleet Street –Shtypi Britanik)
- j) Differences in frequency and purpose of using specific forms (zebra crossing –vijat e bardha)
- k) The use of loan words in the source text. (Watergate –Uotergejti, Wallstreet –Uollstriti)

DISCUSSION

Based on the results dealing with the classification of culture-bound words the paper discusses the procedures and strategies which should frequently prevail over other techniques in the process of translation. Peter Newmark and Eugene Nida see the process of translating culture specifics as one which requires dynamic equivalence and componential analysis of the text.

Translation is a hard process. Even though one can claim that translation is simply the process of switching from one language into another, the venture is more complex and difficult. Many people think that literary texts are full of culture-bound words and phrases, but experience shows that in almost every text-type there may be culture-specifics. The most important thing for translators is hack their way through verbiage and clear all the stumbling blocks that stand in front of them.

In the process of translation one should never forget the implications of language and culture, which must be considered as intricate aspects for translation. Different scholars have different opinions about the translation of cultural words and notions. Peter Newmark suggests two different methods: transference and componential analysis [3]. According to him, transference gives “local colour” maintaining cultural names and concepts. He argues that this method may cause problems for the general readership even though the emphasis is on culture.

Newmark is more inclined to propose on componential analysis since he thinks it is “the most accurate translation procedure, which excludes the culture and highlights the message” [3]. Eugene Nida’s arguments are similar in this respect to definitions of Newmark, because he (Nida) suggests the translators should focus more on dynamic equivalence of a text [5].

Formal and dynamic equivalence correspond with transference and componential analysis. While formal equivalence or transference produce a faithful translation of the ST and the reader can to a certain extent “understand as much as he can of the customs, manner of thought, and means of expression” [5], the componential analysis or dynamic equivalence “tries to relate the receptor to modes of behavior relevant within the context of his own culture” (idem).

CONCLUSIONS

It seems as if translating culture-bound words is easy and the problems are solved. Yet the cultural implications for translation remain and translators strive hard to find the right way how to put them in the TT. Different methods and procedures are suggested ranging from footnote references in the TL, paraphrasing, adding the SL term to avoid ambiguity, preserving the SL term intact, compensating, making up a new word, naturalizing, etc. Theorists and practitioners in the translation field are more and more relying on communicative translation, aiming at ensuring that both content and language in the SL are rendered with the same pace, rhythm, logic, register, style and cultural references in the TL.

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