Translation of Culture-Specific Items from English into Lithuanian: the Case of O. Henry's Short Stories

INGA JANAVICIENE
Lecturer
Department of Modern Languages and Intercultural Communication
Kaunas University of Technology

Abstract:

Translation of culture-specific items in fiction has always been a problematic issue because it involves transporting and translating culturally marked words from one language/culture into another. However, the translators as well as readerships' cultural backgrounds always play a major role in the overall process. Therefore, cultural and social context of the text to be transposed is as much important as the readership that the translator has in mind. Thus the following article is focused on particularities and techniques of transferring culture-specific items by S. L. Pukienė in her translation of O. Henry's short stories from English into Lithuanian. Moreover, the translation strategies and principles provided by the translation theorist Davies (2003) used for the research are explained. Subsequently, the discussion proceeds to the analysis of the translated culture-specific items with the emphasis on providing and explaining numerous examples. The emphasis is drawn to the strategies of preservation, addition, globalization, and localization. Such a comparative approach is expected to portray some tendencies or pitfalls in the application of the translation strategies by the translator in general.

Key words: literary translation, fiction, culture-specific items, translation strategies, short-stories.

1. INTRODUCTION

Translating fiction has always been problematic because it involves figurative meanings of texts, idioms, similes, culture-specific items and other either linguistics or cultural units that make the task of a translator challenging. Since a translator has to communicate the original message to people (i.e. readers) with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, his/her primary awareness has to be on the readership; ensuring they understand the text as well as preserving the aesthetic and impact factors of the target text as far as possible. Therefore, the translation of culture-specific items might be considered to be one of the most problematic areas in translation studies. With respect to this problematic issue, the following article is intended to identify the peculiarities of culture-specific concepts, as well as to analyse translation strategies for culture specific items in literary translation from English into the Lithuanian language. The works chosen for the analysis are O.Henry's short stories and their translation in Lithuanian done by S.L. Pukienė. In the first part of the article, the author clarifies the used notion of culture specific-items, summarises the studied procedures for rendering cultural units and outlines the problematic nature of their translations. The second part represents a study of particular examples from close comparison of the source text and target text procedures.

As regards the data for the investigation, two sources were considered. The first source, *The Best Short Stories of O. Henry*, which was published in 1945 and the second source, *The Complete Works of O. Henry*, published in 1953. The target language examples were taken from *Išminčių Dovanos: Apsakymai* (2006) translated by Silvija Lomsargytė-Pukienė. Theoretical statements are illustrated with instances selected from 19 short stores and their translations into Lithuanian. The short stories are as follow: *The Gift of the Magi, Hearts and Crosses, An Unfinished Story, The Romance of a Busy*

Broker, The Indian Summer of Dry Valley Johnson, Jeff Peters as a Personal Magnet, The Cop and the Anthen, The Pimienta Pancakes, Shearing the Wolf, The Ethics of Pig, The Third Ingredient, The Pendulum, Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen, The Last Leave, The Trimmed Lamp, Squaring the Circle, The Ransom of Red Chief, The Whirling of Life, and *The Merry Month of May.*

2. CULTURE-SPECIFIC ITEMS: DEFINITION AND TYPES

Despite the fact that the notion of culture-specific items have been elaborated and discussed by a number of different names, the lack of terminological uniformity suggests the need to be delineated once more. Therefore, the varieties of the term of culture-specific items include the following: Newmark (1998) refers to culture-specific items as *cultural words*, Florin (1993), Robinson (1997), Schäffner & Wiesemann (2001) and Mikutytė (2005) labels them as *realia*, while Baker (1992) employs the term *culture-specific concepts*. The notion itself clearly states the link between the source language and culture and the target language and its culture, referring to "words and combinations of words denoting objects and concepts characteristic of the way of life, the culture, the social and historical development of one nation and alien to another" (Florin 1993: 123). Furthermore, Florin (1993: 122) observes that translations of culture-specific items are not limited to language, expanding the idea that culture-specific items do not have exact equivalents in other languages because they have been formed on historical and a local basis, which is unique to every culture (ibid.). A similar idea is supported by Tymoczko, stating that "cultural elements in a literary work are metonymic evocations of the culture as a whole, including its material culture, history, economy, law, customs, values and so on" (Tymoczko, 1999: 45).

The existing classifications of culture bound words are quite numerous. One could distinguish the following ones: names, dialects, geographical names, proper names, systems of measurements, food items, currency, historical events and dates, flora and fauna, customs and festivals, architecture and, political institutions. However, a well-defined and widely acknowledged classification of culture-specific items is presented by Newmark (1988: 95-102). He distinguishes 5 categories of culture-specific items: (1) ecology, (2) material culture, (3) social culture, (4) organizations, customs, activities, procedures, concepts, and (5) gestures and habits; these categories are further subdivided into sub-categories. A different model of culture specific items is proposed by Vlahov, Florin, and Gill. They distinguish realia in 4 different categories: (1) geography, (2) ethnography, (3) politics and (4) religious (Vlachov & Florin, 1980: 6)

Moreover, speech communities tend to focus their attention on a particular topic, which is called culture focus (Newmark, 1988). This topic is presupposed by culture's historical, geographical development and influence. Thus, for instance, the Italians have a number of words to name different kinds of pasta, or in the Eskimos' language there are many names to denote snow (Newmark, 1988: 94).

An extensive number of different culture-specific items make it hard to render into the target language whilst finding the right equivalence to express the same meaning. Danytė (2006) believes that "translators face not only the problem of correctly interpreting such evocations, but also transmitting them in a meaningful way to readers" (2006: 203). Therefore, translation is primarily a cross-cultural transfer (ibid).

The leading norm in translation studies has long emphasized the target text naturalness as a major criterion of a good translation. Therefore, the translator should focus not only on providing equivalent meaning but giving equivalent linguistic and/or cultural value to the text. This leads to the

idea that sometimes culture-specific items are not translatable - the problem in the field is referred to as untranslatability - because there are no equivalents in the target language (Florin, 1933: 125). Local peculiarities, such as religion, morals, habits, rules of conduct, ethical norms, etc. are principal components of any culture. Therefore, the ambiguous nature of culture-specific items requires a special approach or strategy. Moreover, it requires the translator to have a cultural background of the source language to be able to face the difficulties conveying the meaning of cultural patterns in the original text. As Larson (1983) puts it "Language is a part of culture, and, therefore, translation from one language to another cannot be done adequately without knowledge of the two cultures as well as the two language structures." (1983: 431). Therefore, a translator has to be not only bilingual but bicultural as well.

3. TRANSLATION STRATEGIES FOR CULTURE-SPECIFIC ITEMS

Being a peculiar group of references to render culture-specific items to cause a number of problems in translation and requires a translator to have both a linguistic and cultural background, so that all patterns included in the original text would be conveyed meaningfully in the target text and "translation loss would not exceed translation gain" (Petrulionė, 2012: 44). Therefore, in order to achieve a required objective, a number of translation strategies can be applied. The terminology of translation strategies is not unified, albeit the area itself is overwhelmed with a number of different strategies (the subject has been discussed by a number of different scholars: Davies (2003), Newmark (1988), Chesterman (1997), Hervey et al. (1992, 1995), Schäffner & Wiesemann (2001), Danytė (2006), Venuti (2001), and Baker (1992) to name a few.). For example Aixela (1996), divides translation strategies into two main groups: proper names and common expressions.

According to the scholar, proper names include both conventional names i.e. names that do not have any meaning in themselves and names that are loaded with certain historical and cultural associations (Aixela, 1997: 59), e.g., Seattle, Bacardi (Aixela, 1997: 59). Common expressions, on the other hand, cover the world of objects, institutions, habits and opinions restricted to each culture, which cannot be included in the field of proper names, e.g. inches, dollars, corned beef etc. (Aixela, 1997: 59).

A well-defined classification of translation strategies is presented by Davies (2003), who discusses translation strategies under seven headings: preservation, addition, omission, globalization, localization, transformation and creation. Davies classification of culture-specific items is used as a guideline for detailed evaluation and analysis of techniques employed by the translator in the analysis.

The examples collected are classified according to translation strategies employed by the translator. The corpus of data involves a number of different examples of culture-specific items, which include personal names, brand names, geographical names, food items, institutions, clothes, and many other culture-specific items that are of everyday use in the American culture. The corpus dedicated to the transfer of culture-specific units varies as much as 165 cases. The primary intention and objective of the paper is to evaluate and summarize the techniques for transferring culture bound words that would help to foresee the prevailing tendencies in translation of culture-specific items.

The first translation strategy to be defined by Davies is preservation. The strategy of preservation employs the maintenance of the culture-specific items, which are difficult to render into the target language. According to Davies, it is used when there is no close equivalent in the target language, so translators decide "to maintain the source text term in the translation" (Davies, 2003: 73). Exactly the same strategy is

discussed by Newmark, even though he calls it transference (1988: 81), cultural borrowing by Hervey & Higgins (1995: 23), while Mona Baker refers to it as "the use of loan word" (1992: 34). Chesterman (1995: 94) and Schäffner & Wiesemann (2001: 28) distinguish the terms loan and calque too. Data has demonstrated that the frequency of the strategy of preservation amounts up to as many as 2 occurrences per 165 instances of culture-specific items in the short stories by O. Henry. The following examples below illustrate it:

1. **Cerebrum and cerebellum, and medulla oblongata** *(O. Henry, 1945: 347)* - *cerebrum cerebellum* **ir** *medulla oblongata (S. Lomsargyte-Pukiene, 2006: 139)*
2. **The ornithoptera amphrisius** *(O. Henry, 1953: 278)* - ***Ornithoptera amphrisius*** *(S. Lomsargyte-Pukiene, 2006: 97)*

Both of the examples demonstrate Latin words which are hardly understandable to ordinary readers, but the translator's choice for this strategy can be explained by trying to achieve literary effect and strengthen the impact factor of a well educated character in the short story. Although the translator is thorough in adding or explaining unknown items/words (as it will be seen later) in this case no additional information is provided.

Davies's second strategy is addition. The addition of a lexical element is usually used when "certain semantic components of the source language do not have formal equivalence" (Petrulionė, 2012: 45) in the target language, therefore, the translator adds one or two words to make the text reader-friendly. There are two types of addition: "extratextual gloss" and "intratextual gloss" as indicated by Aixela (1996: 62). Extratextual addition stands as footnotes, endnotes, glossaries, commentaries or italics (ibid.). Chesterman (1995: 112) refers to this strategy as "the strategy of visibility change when footnotes, brackets, comments, or glosses are added". Danyte (2006) has observed that in Lithuania "older translations that

have to deal with many foreign words and cultural references do use a large number of footnotes", while "now, footnotes refer only to culture-specific items of particular significance" (2006: 206-207). Intratextual addition happens when additional information is inserted directly into the target text. In total, 18 cases of the strategy of addition were observed, which makes more than 9% of the total number of instances. Either the translator, Silvija Lomsargytė-Pukienė, gives additional information using a footnote at the bottom of the page (12 examples observed) or she adds information before or after the culture-specific item in the target text itself (4 examples observed). The following examples illustrate the strategy of addition used for translation of culture-specific items:

3. **Ponce de Leon** *(O.Henry, 1945: 349)* - **Ponse de Leoną*** *(S. Lomsargyte-Pukiene, 2006: 142)*
*Ponce de Leon – ispanas, atrades Floridą (1460-1521)
4. **Yalu** *(O.Henry, 1953: 270)* - **Jalu upės*** *(S.Lomsargyte-Pukiene, 2006: 88)*
*Upė Kinijos pasienyje, kur vyko mūšiai rusų-japonų karo metu
5. **A dago** *(O.Henry, 1945: 696)* – **dagas*** *(S.Lomsargyte-Pukiene, 2006: 186-7)*
*Taip JAV pravardžiuojami italai, ispanai ir portugalai
6. **A King Cophetua** *(O.Henry, 1953: 262)* - **karalių Kofetua*** *(S.Lomsargyte-Pukiene, 2006: 79)*
*Kofetua – legendinis Afrikos karalius, vedęs neturtingą merginą.
7. **Tiffany's** *(O.Henry, 1953: 259)* – **Tifanio juvelyrikos parduotuvę** *(S.Lomsargyte-Pukiene, 2006: 76)*
8. **Blackwell** *(O.Henry, 1945: 38)* - **Blekvelio kalėjimas** *(S.Lomsargyte-Pukiene, 2006: 13)*

As Examples 3, 4, 5, and 6 indicate, less familiar culture-specific items are explained by footnotes. Looking at all the footnotes, it is clear that explanations are rather long (compared with additional material incorporated within the target text). Thus, it could be claimed that because of their length, the translator finds it difficult to incorporate additional

material in the target text before or after the culture-specific item. Most importantly, too long an explanation would not sound natural and might disrupt the text itself. This, of course, would interrupt their reading process. Nevertheless, the translator has to be careful, as if there are many footnotes - the readers will find it inconvenient and annoying to look down for the meaning of every culture-specific item. Examples 7 and 8 exemplify intratextual addition. Proper names Tiffany's and Blackwell have undergone phonological adaptation and the addition of Lithuanian inflections. However, despite this adaptation the translator adds the words "jewelry shop" and "prison" to make them meaningful to the target text readers due to a difference in the background knowledge.

The next strategy to be discussed is globalization. Davies describes it as

> the process of replacing culture-specific references with ones that are more neutral or general, in the sense that they are accessible to audiences from a wider range of cultural backgrounds (Davies, 2003: 83).

The strategy of globalization implies generalizing a specific culture item and making it less specific. This strategy is often applied by the translators when a culture-specific item in the source culture does not exist in the target culture but, on the other hand, a very similar item can be used instead of that specific item. Newmark (1988: 83) distinguishes functional equivalents referring to the same strategy saying "the use of a culture free word" neutralizes or generalizes the source language word. Baker (1992) calls this strategy generalization, i.e. translation by a more general word or superordinate (1992: 26). The translation strategy of globalization is commonly used by the translator. The total number of the items globalized is 54, which is 20% of the total number of 165 culture-specific items. Examples of culture-specific items which have been translated using the strategy of localization are presented

below:

9. **A setter** *(O.Henry, 1945: 9)* - **medžioklinis šuo** *(S.Lomsargyte-Pukiene, 2006: 9)*
10. **Polly's** *(O.Henry, 1945: 72)* – **papūgų** *(S.Lomsargyte-Pukiene, 2006: 20)*
11. **Wing of a macaw** *(O.Henry, 2006: 86)* - **papūgos plunksna** *(S.Lomsargyte-Pukiene, 2006: 29)*

In the above mentioned examples, the translator uses the general word, thus, *a setter* in Example 9 becomes *a hunting dog*, in Example 10 *polly* becomes *a parrot*, and finally in Example 11 *macaw* becomes *a parrot* as well. The translator applied the strategy of generalization because the above mentioned items might not be familiar to the Lithuanian readers or they would be difficult to render into Lithuanian. Most of them do not have absolute equivalents (except for *setter*), but they do have partial equivalents that represent a part of the meaning of the target words. The examples demonstrate that the translator not only globalizes or tries to generalize the items; she also tries to explain what they mean.

The strategy which is opposed to globalization is called localization. The translation strategy employs replacement of a source culture-specific item or similar into the target culture-specific items that are more familiar to the target text readers (Davies, 2003: 84). Thus the translated text sounds as if it originated in the culture of the target language (ibid.). This strategy is observed by other scholars: Chesterman (1988: 108) calls it cultural filtering, Venuti (2001: 240) applies the term domestication, Newmark (1995: 82) labels this strategy 'cultural equivalent', while Baker (1992: 31) calls this strategy 'cultural substitution'. This translation strategy includes culture-specific items that are not present in the target culture, but if the target culture has a very similar item, the translator can substitute it, in other words, employ cultural equivalents. Using Newmark's division, three strategies fall under the

heading of localization: transference, naturalization and cultural equivalent (Newmark, 1988: 82). The first two strategies can be called transliteration and transcription. It has been presupposed that the strategy of localization is very commonly used by Lithuanian translators (Danytė, 2006: 207). Thus the translated text sounds as if it originated in the culture of the target language (ibid.). This expectation has been proved, because 91 examples of localization out of 165 cases have been noticed. Examples to be observed of culture-specific items that have been translated using the strategy of localization are presented below:

12. **Morpheus** (O.Henry, 1945: 72) – **Morfėjo** (S.Lomsargyte-Pukiene, 2006: 20)

13. **Gabriel** (O.Henry, 1945: 72) – **Gabrielius** (S.Lomsargyte-Pukiene, 2006: 20)

14. **Coney Island** (O.Henry, 1945: 74) - **Koni Ailende** (S.Lomsargyte-Pukiene, 2006: 24)

15. **Henry VIII** (O. Henry, 1945: 76) - **Henriku VIII** (S.Lomsargyte-Pukiene, 2006: 27)

16. **The Choctaw Nation** (O. Henry, 1945: 272) - **čoktų genties** (S.Lomsargyte-Pukiene, 2006: 114)

17. **Peanut candy** (O.Henry, 1945: 350) - **riešutinių ledinukų** (S.Lomsargyte-Pukiene, 2006: 144)

18. **Red Chief** (O. Henry, 1953: 19I) – **Raudonodžių Vadas** (S.Lomsargyte-Pukiene, 2006: 208)

Examples 12 and 13 contain proper names, where the translator adapts them to Lithuanian phonology and adds inflections. Both names are well established in Lithuanian culture and are widely used either in mythological or biblical translations. Example 14 is less well known to Lithuanian readers and depicts a leisure destination in New York City. The translator localizes the item transliterating it and adding Lithuanian inflection. In addition, the translator does not include any explanation of the item which would be relevant to

the reader. Considering Example 15, one can see that it includes a well-known historical personality, *Henry VIII*, which was rendered into Lithuanian as *Henrikas VIII*, this adaptation of the cultural item in the Lithuanian language has a long standing tradition, and despite the fact that it does not correspond with the rules of transliteration or transcription in Lithuanian language it is still widely used. Case 16 indicates phonological adaptation of the item thus *The Choctaw Nation* becomes *čoktų genties*. Generally speaking, phonological adaptation is the prevailing procedure rendering proper names. The Lithuanian translation of Example 17, *riešutinių ledinukų*, could serve as an example of cultural substitution, but not phonological adaptation like in previous examples. The culture-specific item *peanut candy* is adapted to Lithuanian readers and thus becomes *nut candy drops*; a considerably popular sweet in Lithuania.

4. CONCLUSION

On the basis of the collected linguistic evidence, it can be claimed that, first, the translator Silvija Lomsargyte-Pukienė is faithful to the source text; she respects the text and tries to render every culture-specific item. As a result, the translation strategy of omission was not noticed. When comparing the source text and the target text it was observed that the translator has mainly applied four strategies that have been distinguished by Davies (2003): preservation, addition, localization, and globalization. The most often used translation strategy by the translator is localization (occurs in 91 cases), the second most frequent translation strategy is globalization (occurs in 54 cases), the third most frequent strategy is addition (occurs in 18 cases), and finally the least frequent translation strategy applied by the translator is preservation (occurs in 2 cases). The usage of localization and globalization strategies reveals the translator's attempt to provide as accurate and as

clear a translation as possible, presenting all necessary information for Lithuanian readers. Some translation strategies which were described in the article were not found in the texts under analysis. These include omission, creation, and transformation.

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