ON STRATEGIES FOR TRANSLATION
OF CULTURE-SPECIFIC ITEMS

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Rezumat: *Fiecare purtător de limbă este putrător de cultură, de aceea expresia linguală în cadrul comunicării este o expresie a culturii naționale. Limba deservește cultura, dar nu o determină. Pentru traductologi, reprezentarea stereotipului unei națiuni pentru o altă cultură este o sarcină extrem de dificilă. Autorul se concentrează pe problemele care apar în timpul traducerii elementelor specific culturale (CSI) din engleză în română sau rusă. Scopul prezentului studiu este de a descrie diferitele domenii ale cunoștințelor culturale care contribuie la competența traducătorului.*

Cuvinte cheie: *cultura, elemente culturale, competența sociolingvistică, competența culturală, comunicarea interculturală.*

In the modern world the exchange of information depends heavily on translation, i.e. the activity consisting of the transference of words through the dividing borders of languages on the one hand, and the transplanting of emotional and cultural situations on the other hand. In recent years, the theory of translation has made a noticeable cultural turn. Many researchers (Bell, Jakobson, Klaudy, Neubert etc.) consider the process of translation as "*the crossroads of cultures*" or "*the mechanism for representing other cultures*", thereby emphasizing its major role in the process of intercultural

communication. The present study is focused on particularities and techniques of translating cultural-specific items (CSIs) taking examples from well-known stories by O'Henry and George Orwell.

According to Bell "the translator must, as a communicator, possess the knowledge and skills that are common to all communicators but, in two languages" (Bell 1991: 35-36). Analyzing Bell's point of view, we can say that translators have to possess communicative competence, based on source and target language knowledge, text-type knowledge, area- and contrastive knowledge, which contribute to the following four areas of knowledge and skills: *grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence* in two languages. But it is not enough. We should mention the fact that translators/ interpreters are bilinguals who are decoding and coding the source text; and should posses the ability of "transcoding" the text. Even if this term of "transcoding" is technical one and means "to re-code" smth into the target format, we can apply it to the translator when the target readers should not get misinformation or lack information incorporated in the source text. As the translator works not only with languages but with cultures as well, the knowledge of the source and that of the target culture is also of vital importance.

Translation is a complex phenomenon that includes linguistic, psychological, cultural, literary and other factors. The role of translation nowadays is more important than ever due to global integration, expansion of international contacts, world trade and media. Various types of translations are the sources of knowledge about cultural values, beliefs and viewpoints of other peoples. Translation makes it possible to exchange information between speakers of different languages, transferring into the target language (TL) a text that has the same communicative meaning as the original text. Every text has a certain cultural content belonging to another culture that requires a certain interpretation. The translator must go out beyond the original text and reflect the actual situation described in it. This is the first step in the translation process. The second stage is to describe the situation in language translation.

While translating any text the translator meets different cultures, mindsets and traditions. Schweitzer's ideas are close to the topic of our research. He states that "translation can be defined as: a one-way and two-

phase process of interlanguage and intercultural communication, in which the secondary text (metatext) is created on the basis of the targeted ("translation") analysis of the primary text, replacing the primary one in another linguistic and cultural environment". The process is characterized by an attitude towards the transmission of the communicative effect of the primary text, partially modified by differences between two languages, two cultures and two communication situations. Thus, according to Schweitzer, translation is not only the interaction of languages, but also the interaction of cultures.

It is worth mentioning that translating fiction has always been problematic because it involves figurative meanings of texts, idioms, culture specific items and other either linguistics or cultural units that make the task of a translator challenging. The translators need not only proficiency in two languages, but they must be at home in two cultures. In other words, they must be bicultural as well as bilingual.

The translation of cultural items has been recognized as a troublesome area, attempts to define a culture and its affiliation with language were made, and translation procedures for culture-specific items were suggested. Particular attention should be given to the analysis of the "cultural turn" in the field of translation. In the eighties, Susan Bassnett in her book "Translation Studies" (1980) brought the attention to the cultural and historical background of texts and offered some insights into cultural factors that affect translation and translation strategies in use (Bassnett, 2011). It greatly influenced other scholars to pay attention to cultural, as well as political and historical context of translated texts. Lefevere (1992) acknowledged that "translators function in a given culture at a given time" (Lefevere, 1992, p.15) and the way they perceive themselves and their culture greatly contributes to the way they translate (Lefevere, 1992). This cultural turn challenged previous theories and norms, offering new insights about cultural impacts on language, however Susan Bassnett (1998) states that the collaboration between translation studies and culture studies was not a surprising outcome, considering their similar agendas (Bassnett, 1998).

In translation studies the problem of "cultural aspect" has received a lot of denominations. As Navarez states that different scholars suggest different terms: Nida speaks about "***cultural foreign words***"; Oksaar

introduces "***cultureme***"; Newmark prefers "***cultural terms***"; Vlakhov and Florín coin the term "***realia***"; Nida and Reyburn introduce "***presuppositions***"; Baker prefers "***culture-specific concepts***"; Foreman uses the term "***cultural references***" which does not limit itself to the lexicon marked culturally, but it allows the inclusion of symbols, icons, gestures, etc. Navarez highlights the idea that scholars keep on extending the diversity of denominations introducing "***cultural bumps***" (Leppihalme 1995), "*culturally marked segments*" (Mayoral and Muñoz 1997), "***culture-bound references***", "***culture-specific items***" (Franco Aixelà 1996), (Nedergaard-Larsen 2003), Ceramella (2008) and Valdéon García (2009).

In 1996, the Spanish translator Javier Franco Aixelá proposed "***culture-specific items***" (**CSIs**) and their translating strategies which were given the definition as "*those textually actualized items whose function and connotations in a source text involve a translation problem in their transference to a target text, whenever this problem is a product of the nonexistence of the referred item or of its different intertextual status in the cultural system of the readers of the target text*" (Aixelá, 2007:58) for the first time. Due to the plethora of culture – specific items (CSIs), specific values, aesthetic and expressive features, literary texts are more difficult to translate than other kinds of texts.

Scholars have provided various repertoires of translation procedures to compensate for the lack of equivalence. Vlakhov and Florín (1970) suggest six procedures for translating realia: *transcription, calque, formation of a new word, assimilation, approximative translation and descriptive translation*. Their theory states that realities are not only individual lexical units, but also expressions (phraseological units, idioms, etc.). According to their definition "realities" are lexical units that name objects, phenomena, objects characteristic of the life, everyday life, culture, social and historical development of one people and unfamiliar or alien to another people, expressing national and / or temporal flavor; by structure, realities are separate words or phrases. From their point of view, there are: realities - measures; realities - money; phraseological units; proper names; treatment; deviations from the literary norm (including children's language, dialects, etc.).

At the course "Competent approach to language problems" with MA students we have been working with the following texts: "A Cosmopolite in

a Café" by O'Henry, "The Ransom of Red Chief" by O'Henry, "A Nice Cup of Tea" by George Orwell. We analyzed the translations made by Romanian translators Al. Halunga, C. Popescu and I. Peltz; and Russian translators A. Eleonscaia, K. Balmont. Analyzing different variants of translation, we should mention that the translators give different translation to the "realities" from the short story "The Ransom of Red Chief" by O'Henry. For example, *kidnapping* – детокрадство (A. Eleonscaia), похищение (K. Balmont), *madhouse-* желтый дом (A. Eleonscaia), сумасшедший дом (K. Balmont), *scythes* - коса (A. Eleonscaia), серп (K. Balmont). Another example with the word "trapper" - A. Eleonscaia translated it as "охотник" but K. Balmont translated it as "зверобой".

Some phraseological units also differ in translation. For example, "A human can only stand so much" was translated as "Есть предел человеческому терпению" (A. Eleonscaia) and as "Человек только человек" (K. Balmont); "Give a weak sort of smile" was translated as "Через силу улыбнуться" (A. Eleonscaia) and as "Выдавить на лице жалкое подобие улыбки" (K. Balmont); "Red-hot boiled potato" was translated as "С пыла горящая картошка" (A. Eleonscaia) and as "Горячая картофелина" (K. Balmont).

It is worth mentioning that even local American realities, reflecting the culture of the linguistic community were translated differently. For instance, "Couriers" was translated as "всадники" (A. Eleonscaia) and as "курьеры" (K. Balmont); "Yeomany" was translated as "

фермеры" (A. Eleonscaia) and as "поселяне" (K. Balmont).

Newmark (1988/1992:145) suggests such ***procedures*** for translating cultural terms *as loan translation or calque, transference, cultural equivalent, neutralisation, literal translation, accepted standard (or recognised) translation, naturalisation, addition, deletion, etc*.

Moreover, Newmark (1988) first proposes five domains for classifying foreign cultural words. These domains are: 1) ***Ecology*** (flora, fauna, winds, plains, hills); 2) ***Material culture*** (food, clothes, houses and towns, transport); 3) ***Social culture*** (work and leisure); 4) ***Organizations, customs, activities, procedures, concepts*** (political and administrative, religious, artistic); 5) ***Gesture and habits***.

We classified the words and word-combinations from the original texts having Newmark's domains for the CSIs as the theoretical framework. In

the 1st Table we present only some of the words and word-combinations from "A Cosmopolite in a Café" by O'Henry and "The Ransom of Red Chief" by O'Henry and their domains.

Table 1. Examples of CSIs domains

Original texts and domains	"A Cosmopolite in a Café"	"The Ransom of Red Chief"
Ecology (flora, fauna, winds, plains, hills)	*Geographical names* - Mauch Chunk, Coney Island, Kealaikahiki, Kanaka, Bombay, Cincinnati	*Flora* – Cedar, brake, Oats, Glade; *Fauna* - Lackadaisical bloodhounds, Cinnamon, Calliope; *Others* – Earthquakes, fire, flood, Cyclones
Material culture (food, clothes, houses and towns, transport)	*Beverage* - Würzburger, *Others* - table-d'hôte, bazaar, Banquet, Sixth Avenue, Broadway	*Houses, streets and towns* – Alabama Summit, Poplar Cove, Town-lot scheme, Western Illinois, Owl Creek, The Central, Southern and Middle Western States, Countryside, Canadian border, *Transport* – Buggy; Food - Bacon and bread and gravy, A red-hot boiled potato
Social culture (work and leisure)	*Musical terms* - Medley, Dixie, *Mythology* - Titans	A class of peasantry, A sylvan attitude, A prominent citizen, Freckles, Indian Camping, Pesky redskin Pirate, Poker games, Burned at the stake, Red hair, Great pirates of Penzance
Organizations, customs, activities, procedures,	*Ideology* - Cosmopolite, *Historical word* - Yankee,	Post-office, Madhouse, Bedlam, Constables, The sturdy yeomanry, The postmaster, The mail-carrier, A mortgage fancier, The

concepts (political and administrative, religious, artistic)	*Local institution* - Murray Hill Lyceum	messenger, Forecloser, Detectives, Red Chief Ransom, Kidnappers, Dynamite outrages, Police raids, Train, robberies *Historical terms* – Braves, Settlers, Warpath
Gesture and habits; Specific cultural interjection; Service sector	*Service sector* - Garçon, manicure, *Specific cultural interjections* - Whiff, Zip, too-ralloo-rallo	Geronimo! Batting an eye, With a broad grin on his face, The most appealing look in his eyes, We knocked at Ebenezer's front door

There is no single recommended strategy for translating CSIs. Newmark introduces different **strategies** for translating CSIs in his work "About translation". Al Timen and Issa suggest another classification. Thus, the common taxonomy includes:

• **Transference**: It is the process of transferring an SL word to a TL text as a translation procedure. It includes transliteration, which relates to the conversion of different alphabets.

• **Cultural Equivalent**: It intends replacing a cultural word in the SL with an, although not accurate, TL word.

• **Componential Analysis**: It means comparing an SL word with a TL word which has a similar meaning, although not being its one-to-one equivalent, by presenting, first, their common, and then, their differing sense components.

• **Synonymy**: It is a near TL equivalent.

• **Modulation**: It occurs when the translator reproduces the message of the original text in the TL text in accordance with the current norms of the TL, because, the SL and the TL may be different in perspective.

• **Functional Equivalent**: In this procedure, a culture-free word is used, sometimes a new specific term is used; therefore, it generalizes the SL word.

• *Naturalization*: It conforms the SL word first to the normal pronunciation, then, to the normal morphology of the TL.

• *Componential Analysis*: It means comparing an SL word with a TL word which has a similar meaning, although not being its one-to-one equivalent, by presenting, first, their common, and then, their differing sense components.

Table 2. Examples of strategies of translation and the English-Romanian/ Russian translations

	CSIs	Strategy of translation	English - Russian/Romanian translations
"A Cosmopolite in a Café"	Mélange of talk	Cultural equivalent	смесь беседы/ mix de conversație
	Maraschino	Transliteration	мараскиновая вишни (засахаренная вишня в ликёре)/ cireșe maraschino (cireșe confiate în lichior)
	table-d'hôte	Transliteration	Табльдот (общий стол)/ o masă la restaurant oferită la un preț fix și cu puține alegeri, dacă există.
	Lapland	Translation\ Modulation\ Recognized transaltion	Лапландия (область на севере Швеции)/ Laponia (regiune din nordul Suediei)
	Alkali	Synonymy\ Equivalent	Солончаковый (щёлочь)/ Salină (alcalină)
	Periwinkle	Cultural equivalent	Барвинок/ Brebenoc
"A Nice Cup of Tea"			
	Tea council	Transliteration\ Modulation	Чайный совет/ Consiliul
	Lukewarm	Translation\ adaptation	Теплый / Cald
	Binnie Hale	Transliteration	Бинни Хейл/ Binnie Hale (proper name)
	Elevenses	Untranslatability	Одиннадцатые/ Cei dea unsprezecelea

	Smart clothes	Adaptation by meaning	Элегантная одежда/ Haine elegante
"The Ransom of Red Chief"	Feet	Calque	Фут / шаг/ pas/ picior
	Philoprogen etiveness	Individual equivalent	Чадолюбие / Любовь к своим детенышам/ Dragoste pentru copii / Dragoste pentru puii săi
	Until his freckles rattled	Phraseological analogue	Пока веснушки не застучали друг о друга/ Пока у него все веснушки не загремели, как горох на блюде/ Până când pistruii lui zăngăneau ca mazărea pe un platou
	Buzzard tail-feathers	Translation	Ястребиные перья/ Два пера, выдранные из хвоста сарыча/ Pene de șoim
	All systems fail	Phraseological analogue	Все идет прахом/ Все идет к чёрту/ Toate sistemele eșuează

Summing up, we should say that translation is a new interpretation of the original texts and gives a new dimension to the original text, introduces it to another cultural system; so the text can be considered as one of the forms of culture existence. On the one hand the text is a part of culture, but on the other hand it is the necessary component of revealing features of the national character, associated with universal system of cultural values. For instance, some local American realities, reflecting the culture of the linguistic community from "The Ransom of Red Chief" by O'Henry are: *Black scout, constable, Cursed paleface, Red Chief, scalp, Yeomany* and others. Several geographical and proper names or historical words taken from "A Cosmopolite in a Café" by O'Henry are: *Mauch Chunk, E. Rushmore Coglan, Coney Island, Kanaka, Arkansas, Chicago Lake, Mr. Kipling, North Carolina, Pocahontas, Yankee, Secaucus, Battle Creek and others*. Working with the original text and analysing the translation of "A Nice Cup of Tea" by George Orwell, we should mention that MA students not only improved their skills in working with CSIs but even enjoyed the traditions of English tea drinking. A real Englishman, writer and publicist gives 12 strict rules on the topic of tea and tea drinking from a position of

an Englishman from the middle of the last century. Even in Orwell's novel there are "Hamlet" questions - what should be poured first - tea or milk? Whether to put tea in the cup first and add the milk after, or the other way around, has split public opinion, with Orwell stating, "indeed in every family in Britain there are probably two schools of thought on the subject". Here are some CSIs from "A Nice Cup of Tea" with domains and strategies of translation: *Tea council*, Bar council, a professional body that regulates the profession of barristers together with the Inns of Court, Transliteration\Modulation; *counter*, Mechanical, technical domain, General translation; *Yukk*!, Sound expressions, Adaptation of the sound; *Binnie Hale*, Proper name, Transliteration; heaven, Phenomenon of nature, General translation.

Modern translation theory emphasizes the necessity of maintaining the national identity of the original text. Translators are bilingual mediators who mediate not only between languages but also between cultures. Since the process of translation involves cross-cultural transfer, cultural knowledge is an essential part of the translator's competence. When comparing the source text and the target text it was observed that the translator has mainly applied strategies that have been distinguished by different scholars.

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