TRANSLATING PROPER NAMES CHALLENGES

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Rezumat: *În timpul procesului de traducere a numelor proprii, traducătorii se confruntă cu multiple obstacole culturale şi lingvistice, care pot avea influenţă asupra semnificaţiei textului. Articolul dat reprezintă o antologie de idei, strategii ale lingviştilor referitor la traducerea numelor proprii, clasificarea semnificaţiilor, precum şi soluţii de traducere. Articolul ţine să răspundă la următoarele întrebări: Ce este numele propriu? Ce cauzează dificultăţi în procesul de traducere? Cum să traducem numele proprii?*

Cuvinte-cheie: *nume propriu, realie, semnificaţie, literatură artistică, toponime, literatură ştiinţifică.*

Translating proper names is rather thought-provoking as there are some controversial opinions concerning this matter. Some stick to the idea that proper names should not be translated, and in fact, this is one of the methods translators mostly use. However, the statement is disputable when facing different types of text. Generally, names play a significant part in all written pieces whether it is a scientific or a literary written work. Regardless, their translation becomes more challenging when names obtain a deeper meaning than the literal one. The complexity of this issue is generated by the hidden meaning of names, lack of equivalents in the target language and absence of an explicit method for translation. Moreover, names are deeply connected to the culture and historical events that can be obscure for the foreign reader. Thus, the translation of proper names is necessary and it requires a good grasp of history, traditions and language norms of both source language and target language. In order to analyze this problem it is essential to understand what the term '*proper name'* stands for and what functions it has.

The term '*proper name'* is "*a noun that designates a particular being or thing, does not take a limiting modifier, and is usually capitalized in English"* [10]. As a rule it expresses people's names, sex, nationality, age, animals, objects, buildings, and cultural peculiarities. In his book, 'On Defining the Proper Name', John Algeo underlines the following distinct features of proper names: (1) *Orthography*, i.e. proper names are capitalized. (2) They are *morpho-syntactic,* i.e. proper names are used without article (apart from some names of rivers, seas, oceans, buildings, regions that take the definite article). They do not take limiting modifiers and they have no plural form. Proper names are referential, i.e. they refer

to one individual. (3) *Semantic*, i.e. proper names are meaningless [1, p. 12-13]. However, some scholars argue the last statement regarding the meaning of names. All names are informative for they divulge the general characteristics of a person. Moreover, *"theories of proper name meaning often do not capture the full variety of types of meaning that they can have…"* [14]. The meaning can be either related or unrelated to the referent. Therefore, based on the statements, we can divide names into: *meaningless* and *meaningful* proper names. Meaningless names have only identifying functions, they designate individuals. Meaningful names are usually found in literature and they possess additional information that the author intends to deliver to the readers. Every clue the author leaves within the text has to be rendered for better absorption of the message. Considering this, we can say that *symbolic* names that are left in the original form, only increases the distance between the audience and the work, causing incomprehensibility. Therefore, their translation should be accurate so that the message behind them is unveiled, clarified and adapted to the realia of the foreign reader.

Translation of toponyms in factual texts

It is not an easy task for a translator to translate geographical names or toponyms as they are usually considered to be meaningless, yet they are non-ambiguous. For instance, *Cambridge* means a bridge over the river Cam; the *Pacific Ocean* stands for peaceful water. In fact, three types of the toponymical ambiguity can be underlined: (1) Morpho-syntactic ambiguity: one noun defines a geographical place and a common noun in the language: *Coward* – a town in Florence County, South Carolina, the United States and *coward* – common noun;

(2) Referential ambiguity: one noun defines two or more geographical places of the same type: *Moscow*, Russia – *Moscow*, Kansas (both geographical places are cities);

(3) Feature type ambiguity: one noun defines two or more geographical places of different types: state of *Alabama,* US and the *Alabama* River (the geographical name firstly indicates a state, secondly a river) [7, p. 72];

(4) Additionally, some names denote persons and are sexually ambiguous, for example Beverly (Beverly Hills), Houston (Houston state of Texas), George Washington (Washington, D.C.) [1]

The main methods of toponyms translation are either their transcription or transliteration. In the detective novel "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes" written by A.C. Doyle, the famous *Baker Street* (EN) was rendered into Russian by Nadejda Voitinskaya as *Бéйкер-стрит* (RU), using the method of transliteration [5]. In Romanian, Doina Puicea applied the transcription method – *Baker Street* (RO) [4]. It is crucial for a translator to check in new tendencies of translation as they might change throughout the time. Thus, *Stratford-upon-Avon* will be rendered as *Стрáтфорд-апон-Э́йвон* **not:** *Стратфорд-он-Эйвон* [11].

As a rule, most known geographical names already have an exonym [6] in any language. When converting the text into TL, translators must use the exonym if it exists, otherwise the translation will be considered an unacceptable mistake. For instance, let's consider the following toponyms:

English	Romanian	Russian	German
Countries			
Republic of Moldova	Republica Moldova	Республика Молдова	Republik Moldau
(the) United States	Statele Unite	США	Vereinigte Staaten
(the) United Kingdom	Regatul Unit	Великобритания	Vereinigtes Königreich
Vatican City	Vatican	Ватикан	Vatikanstadt
Spain	Spania	Испания	Spanien
Argentina/ the Argentine	Argentina	Аргентина	Argentinien
Antarctica	Antarctica	Антарктика	Antarktis
Egypt	Egipt	Египет	Ägypten
France	Franța	Франция	Frankreich
Cities			
London	Londra	Лондон	London
Liverpool	Liverpool	Ливерпуль	Liverpool
Las Vegas	Las Vegas	Лас-Вегас	Las Vegas
Milan	Milano	Милан	Mailand
New York	New York	Нью-Йорк	New York
New Orleans	Noul Orlean	Новый Орлеан	New Orleans
Miami	Miami	Майами	Miami
Cologne	Köln	Кёльн	Köln
Rivers			
The Thames	Tamisa	Темза	Die Themse
The Nile	Nil	Нил	Der Nil
The Danube	Dunăre	Дунай	Die Donau
The Yangtze	Yangtze/ Ianțzi	Янцзы	Der Jangtsekiang
The Rhine	Rin	Рейн	Der Rhein
The Loire	Loara	Луара	Die Loire

The examples listed above, prove the fact that most toponyms have an officially accepted equivalent that must be considered before being translated. In instances, when the translation seems doubtful, the translator is to consult an expert in the domain, atlases and maps or preserve the name in the original form.

It is important to mention that some place names have more than one possible variant of translation: e.g. *Beijing* (EN) or *Peking* (EN), *Пекин* (RU). Due to historical events the city initially was spelled as *Peking* until the adoption of the variant Beijing on February 11, 1958. However, the first variant is still used in terms such as *Peking duck* and *Peking University*, not *Beijing duck* and *Beijing University*. Another notable example is the country *Myanmar* or officially the *Republic of the Union of Myanmar*, which was initially called *Burma*. Despite the fact that the name of the country was changed, the name of the language remains the Burmese language. Moreover the locals are called *Burmans* or *Bamar people*, not *Myanmars*.

The translation of non-adopted geographical names requires thorough research in dictionaries or recent atlases done beforehand: The Netherlands (EN) –

Olanda or Țările de Jos (RO) – Нидерланды (RU) – die Niederlande (DE), city: Munich (EN) – München (RO) – Мюнхен (RU) – München (DE), Bayern (DE) – Bavaria (RO) – Бавария (RU) – Bavaria (EN).

Unique and understandable toponyms are translated applying the calquing method. We can provide the following examples: Death Valley (EN) - Долина Смерти (RU) - Valea Morții (RO) – das Tal des Todes (DE), the White House (EN) – Бе́лый дом (RU) – Casa Albă (RO) – das Weiße Haus (DE).

Partial calques are used when names contain classifiers: Millennium Bridge (EN) - Мост Миллениум (RU) – Podul Millennium (RO), The Snake River (EN) – Râul Snake (RO) - Река Снейк (RU).

For less known places descriptive translation is used, e.g. Bălți is a city in Moldova.

If toponyms already have a cultural adaptation in the TL then they are substituted, for example: The English Channel (EN) - Canalul Mânecii (RO) – Ла-Манш (RU) – der Ärmelkanal (DE).

Translation of personal names in literary texts

The translation of personal names appears to be the most laborious job, as they fall both into meaningful and meaningless categories. They might designate the character's outer appearance as well as inner qualities, assets and his or her purpose in the text. It is the translator's duty to prevent distortion of the culture of SL and to keep the significance of the name while conveying the text. Thus, scholar L. Venuti suggests applying two strategies of translation developed by Friedrich Schleiermacher [15]. The first one is *domestication,* which is the way of translation that involves changes in the text to make it closer to the culture of the TL. For example, the name of the protagonist in the children's novel "Alice in Wonderland", written by Lewis Carroll, was rendered with the Russian variant of the name «Алиса» not «Элис» - the transliterated version. This way the translator removed the ethnic distance, making the character an ordinary, relatable girl from the same culture as the audience. The second strategy is *foreignization,* which is the way of translation that maintains cultural peculiarities of the source language. To put it differently, *domestication* allows readers to discover the text through their own reality, while *foreignization*, on the contrary, engages the audience in an unknown and enigmatic atmosphere.

In the article "Proper Names in Translation", J. Nurmetov indicates three methods of name translation, initially suggested by Hervey and Higgins: (1) Exotism, when the name is left unchanged, (2) Transliteration, when the name is changed according to graphic and phonic rules of the TL, and (3) Cultural transplantation, when the name is changed in the TL with another name with a similar connotative meaning [8].

As a rule, proper names are only transliterated or transcribed if they indicate a person without other connotative meanings: e.g. *А́нна Каре́нина* (RU) – *Anna Karenina* (EN) - *Anna Karenina* (RO), *Emma Bovary* (EN) – *Emma Bovary* (RO) – *Эмма Бовари* (RU), *Romeo Montague* (EN) – *Romeo Montague* (RO) – *Роме́о Монте́кки* (RU). However, if the name is used with a purpose, literal translation is impossible. In the series of the *Harry Potter* fantasy novels written by J. K. Rowling, the name of one of the characters *Neville Longbottom* was comically translated by

Igor Oranski as *Невилл Долгопупс* (RU) and it was translated into Romanian by Ioana Iepureanu as *Neville Poponeață* (RO). His surname consisting of the words *long* and *bottom* underlines clumsiness and bad luck. Yet, the word *bottom* also means endurance and strength. Eventually it was revealed, that the author intended to emphasize his braveness not awkwardness, how the translators assumed [14]. In both mentioned examples the translation method is totally different which leads to the idea that the name rendering depends on the book, the meaning of words and on the author's goal. It might be of interest to regard how proper names are used in the short story "Désirée's Baby" by Kate Chopin. Having analyzed the English and the Russian variants, it is noticeable that none of the names were used with connotative meaning. The translator used the method of transliteration to keep the foreign elements of late 18th century United States [2].

Toponyms:

Original	Translation		Method
L'Abri	Л'Абри (RU)	L'Abri (RO)	Transliteration
Louisiana	Штат Луизиана (RU)	Statul Louisiana (RO)	Descriptive translation
Paris	Париж (RU)	Paris (RO)	Translation through exonym
France	Франция (RU)	Franța (RO)	

Personal names:
1. Madame Valmonde (EN) – Madame Valmonde (RO) – Мадам Валмонд (RU); 2. Désirée (EN) – Désirée (RO) – Дезири (RU); 3. Coton Mais (EN) – Coton Mais (RO) – Котон Маис (RU); 4. Armand Aubigny (EN) - Armand Aubigny (RO) – Арман Обини (RU); 5. Monsieur Aubigny (EN) – Monsieur Aubigny (RO) – Господин Обини (RU); 6. Zandrine (EN) – Zandrine (RO) – Зандрина (RU); 7. La Blanche (nickname) (EN) – La Blanche (RO) – Ла Бланш (RU); 8. Negrillon (nickname) (EN) – Negrillon (RO) – Негриллон (RU).

Analyzing the translation according to the methods of exotism, transliteration and cultural transplantation, all mentioned personal names fall into the category of transliteration. As for the last two nicknames, they are suggestive, as in the text they are used to underline characters of different colour: white and black. Yet it can be observed that the translator preserved the original form of names. Thus, we can conclude that translators are unrestrained to decide possible ways of rendering the meaning if they consider it necessary.

Another captivating story with suggestive names is "Utzel and His Daughter Poverty" written by Isaac Bashevis Singer [12]. The main characters of this text are: Utzel, Poverty and Sandler the shoemaker. If the names Utzel and Sandler denote human names, Poverty has two meanings. It is used as a girl name, but it also refers to the state of being poor (Oxford Learning's Dictionary online[6]). The author describes Utzel as an indolent man who lived in misery with his beloved daughter. As Utzel's laziness grew so did Poverty. In these circumstances it is clear that the girl's name is used with a symbolic meaning. If the allegory of the story is clear for a local reader, it would definitely be obscure for the foreign one. Both in Romanian

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[6] https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/poverty?q=poverty

and Russian the word *poverty* has no connotations if it is left as an exotism. Instead of a moral story, the text will be perceived as a fantasy story or worse as nonsense. Therefore, the message of this text will be incomprehensible for the public. In our opinion, an optimal solution for this issue is either to translate the name literally: *Poverty* – Sărăcie (RO), Бедность (RU) or preserve it with additional explanations.

We are certain that the translation of proper names is as significant as the translation of the text itself. Besides identifying functions, they are loaded with meaning. This makes the translator's work more challenging, even creative. Translation is a form of art, so there are no rules defining right ways to convey names. As it has been previously shown, translators choose their own methods and strategies to render the required meaning. In this process, proper names undergo multiple modifications in order to be understood by the targeted audience. Thus, translators are the connectors between a factual or literary text and the reader. Only a translator's knowledge, abilities and invisibility can overcome incomprehensibility caused by language, history and cultural differences.

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