Problematic Issues in Translation of Culture Specific Items

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Abstract

While translation is always a linguistic act, it is often associated with culture. In translation, universal words do not cause any particular problems in translation because it is usually easy to find their equivalents in the target language. Culture specific items, on the other hand, are difficult to translate and therefore they belong to the group of non-equivalent lexis (Pažūsis, 2014, pp. 42-43). Translation of culture- specific items (CSI) is a challenging task for the translator, who has to choose from a variety of translation strategies. The translator is also constantly under the pressure to produce a result that would enhance cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: Translation, culture specific items, culture, intercultural communication, translation strategies.

Introduction

Despite the fact that culture is often referred to as a considerably relevant component of translation, it is also seen as "the greatest obstacle" (Newmark, 2010, p. 172). The translation of culture-specific items presents a particular problem in the realm of translation and culture. The phenomenon became an object of interest in the fields of linguistics and translation studies just about 50 years ago; the term, definition and classification of realia have not been determined so far. Neither have translation theoreticians been able to reach a consensus on the list of strategies that could be universally applied for translation of CSIs.

The object of the present paper is CSIs and translation thereof into the Lithuanian language in travel guide books about London. The aim is to analyse and compare translation strategies of rendered CSIs. Current trends in the world, such as globalization, ever-increasing mobility of people, highly developed tourism and broad network of advanced mass media, markedly contribute to the spreading of cultures. It is then natural that CSIs leave their original localities and in material and/or verbal form come to the environments, where they are perceived to be 'foreign'. In terms of translation, CSIs are seen as a challenge and are very likely to receive more and more attention due to the increasing growth of intercultural societies.

TRANSLATION AND CULTURE

As an expert in mediation between cultures, the translator plays a significant role on culture, and, in a broader sense, on cross-cultural communication. Newmark (1988) describes 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" (p. 94). Moreover, Davaninezhad (2009) expands the notion of "life and its manifestations" into "beliefs, ideas, attitude, customs, behaviour, festivals, cuisine and clothes style". Petrulionė (2013) concludes that culture is a system that consists of various components used by the society to deal with a surrounding world (p. 127). It is worth noticing that more explicit definitions of a culture are often interrelated with broader categorizations of CSIs. Thus, culture can be defined in numerous ways and most descriptions refer to a society or a community because culture is a reflection of cooperation between people. Culture does not exist on its own, and a single individual cannot develop it, therefore, being part of a community always implies being part of a culture. As a direct consequence of belonging to a community, a person learns both its culture and the language.

Newmark (1988) explains that language cannot be an inherent part of culture because it would make translation impossible. Aspects of one culture can be explained to the members of a different culture with respect to the norms of the target culture, as, according to Aixelà (1996), "translation is generally in favour of importing language and culture" (p. 52). Furthermore, in translation the primary aim is to render the source language text into the target language text, and the first thing the translator encounters is the language. Having read the text, the translator can relate it to a certain culture and contemplate why something has been said in that particular way. To avoid perplexity, it would be relevant to consider the language and culture as separate features characteristic of a certain community, which are closely related and significantly important in the representation of that community. Language is what enables communication among people and for this reason it is seen as a means to express culture. In addition, language performs an important role in "the way the speakers perceive the world" (Akbari, 2013, p. 13).

Translation is seen as "an act of communication" (Blum-Kulka in Katan, 2009, p. 74) or, more specifically, "one of the forms of intercultural communication" (Petrulionė, 2012, p. 48), and it is referred to by Ramière (2006) as "intercultural transfer" (p. 153). Cross-cultural communication is more effective and, respectively, translation may be more successful when two cultures involved are similar. As stated by Richards and Schmidt (2013), when "cultural conventions of the speakers are widely different, misinterpretations and misunderstandings can easily arise, even resulting in a total breakdown of communication" (p. 148). Therefore, a translator, who is a mediator between sending and receiving cultures, takes on responsibility to enable intercultural communication, and to ensure high quality thereof. The translator's competence is among the major factors that determine the results of translation and cross-cultural communication.

The translator's expertise cannot be limited to linguistic knowledge only; he has to be well-acquainted with the source and target cultures and know both similarities and differences between the languages and cultures. A good practice of a translator is to "know the purpose of the communication" (Davaninezhad, 2009), evaluate the importance of cultural aspects and how extensively they should be translated, consider how cultural aspects are going to be perceived by the target language readers, what they could infer (James, 2002), and to provide required presuppositions, which would ensure that the message will be understood.

Armstrong (2005) distinguishes between culture infused in language from culture detachable from language. He describes that the first notion involves the textual level because the whole text is seen as culturally determined, and attributes CSIs to the second one which are words and belong to the vocabulary, (pp. 30-36). In accordance with Davies (2003, p. 68), cultural implications at the textual level, such as discourse structure, genre norms or stylistic devices, concern other linguistic areas, but CSI is genuinely a lexical (or semantic) phenomenon.

Realia started to receive more attention in translation studies relatively recently, therefore, there are still on-going discussions about the term and it seems that some scholars feel the necessity to employ a new term. As claimed by Pažūsis et al. (2014, p. 42), the term *realia* was first used in 1960 by Bulgarian scholars Vlahov and Florin, who are considered to be pioneers on the topic (at least in Eastern Europe), and who later wrote publications, where they discussed *realia*. Other scholars use other terms, such as *cultural words* (Newmark, 1988), *culture-specific concepts* (Baker, 1992), *culture-specific items* (Aixelà, 1996), *culture-specific references* (Davies, 2003), *culture-specific material* (Ramière, 2006) or *culturally-oriented elements/terms* (Armellino, 2008).

Fernández Guerra (2012, p. 4) classifies CSIs into: geographic and ethnographic terms; words or expressions referring to folklore, traditions and mythology; names of everyday objects, actions and events (such as food and drinks, clothes, housing, tools, public transport, dances and games, units of measurement, money, etc.; social and historical terms denoting territorial administrative units or divisions; departments, professions, titles, ranks, greetings and treatments; institutions, patriotic and religious organisations; etc.)

The biggest concern for a translator dealing with CSIs is the choice of the proper translation strategy. Marinetti (2011) noted that in the translation theory one of the key elements of transfer from the linguistic to the cultural approach involved equivalence (p. 26). While linguistic approach seeks to find equivalents between the source language and the target language, supporters of the cultural approach state that because of cultural and linguistic differences cultural equivalents exist but rarely, and usually translation thereof is only an approximation. As Armellino (2008) explains, it is almost impossible to find equivalents for CSIs because they are "always strongly linked to the specific cultural context where the text originates or with the cultural context it aims to re-create" (Introduction, para.1). This also explains why CSIs belong to the group of non-equivalent lexis.

In view of the fact that the number of existing translation strategies is immense, in this paper classification of strategies presented by Davies (2003) is used as a framework. Davies briefly discusses foreignization and domestication concepts employed by Venuti (2003) and stresses that her strategies not necessarily can be classified as foreignizing or domesticating (p. 71). According to Davies, there are seven translation strategies which can be applied by professional translators to render words which carry cultural meaning.

The first strategy, which Davies calls **preservation**, is used when realia do not have a close "equivalent" in the target language (TL), and the translator simply transfers the foreign word to the target text (TT). Davies distinguishes between two types of preservation: that of form and that of meaning. Typically, the disadvantage of the first one is that it can cause a loss of meaning and, on the contrary, when a translator aims to preserve meaning, it can possibly "lead to a loss of communicative effect" (Davies, 2003, p. 76). Aixelà (1996) also notices that if a translator uses this strategy, he risks to make his translation too unrecognizable to the target readership (p. 61).

Davies points out **addition** as the second translation strategy. Talking about the role of the translator as a mediator between languages and cultures, she states that a translator has to:

<...> provide the target audience with whatever it is they need to know in order to be able to process the translation in a way similar to the way members of the source culture process the source text (ST) (Davies, 2003, p. 68).

According to Petrulionė (2013), when it comes to more "specific cultural situations", the target readership could lack knowledge needed in order to fully comprehend them (p. 129). Komissarov (1991) sees it as a direct consequence of linguistic and cultural differences between two communities (p. 47).

According to Davies (2003), addition is needed when the usage of one translation strategy – preservation - would cause some confusion to the TL reader. Therefore, the original term is explicitated (p. 77). The translator has to be sensitive to the needs of the target readership because he has to decide whether explicitation is necessary (Katan, 2009, p. 80). Kwieciński (in Katan, 2009) defines this strategy as the one belonging to "rich explicatory procedures", which present one or two additional terms that provide the reader with some contextual information (p. 80).

As maintained not only by Davies, but also by Newmark (1988) and Aixelà (1996), additional information can be included either in the main text or outside its formal borders. Newmark (1988) calls the strategy of addition notes, additions, glosses, and Aixelà (1996) distinguishes between two separate techniques for both internal and external additions, which he calls respectively intratextual and extratextual gloss. Extratextual gloss can take a form of notes at the bottom of a page, chapter or book (here a glossary can appear too) (Newmark, 1988, p. 92). On the other hand, when addition is in the text, the reader's attention is less interrupted (Newmark, 1988, p. 91), compared to the situation in which he has to look up the term somewhere else outside the formal text borders. When addition appears in the text, it has to be concise in order not to "hold up the narrative or burden the reader with irritating detail" (Davies, 2003, p. 77). Both Newmark (1988) and Kwieciński (in Katan, 2009) agree that additional information can be presented in the brackets or "explanatory brackets", as Kwieciński calls them. However, Newmark is in favour of a direct intratextual gloss, and Aixelà (1996) wonders whether additional information in the brackets is intratextual or extratextual gloss (p. 61).

Referring to the research carried out by Danytė, Brasienė (2013) states that in Lithuania translators still tend to use many extratextual glosses, though this tendency has been lately changing (pp. 20-21). Extensive use of footnotes and similar extratextual glosses is sometimes impossible due to purely practical reasons. For instance, in travel guide books, which usually come in the sizes that easily fit in a pocket (some of them are indeed pocket travel guides, like the one analysed in this paper – *Londonas: Kelionių*

vadovas). Komissarov (1991) notes that addition, as a strategy, is not widely used in translation of proper and geographical names. He believes that such names are already well-known, therefore additional "common names of the subjects they denote" are usually unnecessary. Yet, if a translator thinks that the reader does not have an understanding of the term it is suggested to explain it (Komissarov, 1991, p. 42).

As Davies notices, "sometimes the explanatory insertion makes the original item redundant, and it may accordingly be omitted" (2003, p. 78). Therefore, the next strategy she discusses is **omission**.

Omission appears when CSI is removed from a TT because the translator either cannot find an adequate translation of the word used in the ST or it would require too much of the translator's energy or time and would be disadvantageous in this aspect (Davies, 2003, p. 81). This strategy can also be employed when there is no reasonable motivation to keep CSI in the text because it does not create any particular impression in the reader's mind and thus would "create a confusing or inconsistent effect" (Davies, 2003, pp. 80-81). In other words, omission can be applied to CSI when the latter is irrelevant. Petrulionė (2012) noted that omission should not be regarded as the translator's failure, because in each case when something is omitted, it can have a logical reasoning behind it (p. 46). When discussing strategies introduced by Pederson, who also mentions omission, Hosseini Maasoum and Davtalab (2011) say that it "should be the last choice of the translator" if the translator seeks to preserve original text as much as possible (p. 1770).

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Davies (2003)defines **globalization** as "a process of replacing culture-specific references with ones which are more neutral or general, in the sense that they are accessible to audiences from a wider range of cultural backgrounds" (p. 83). To name this strategy, Aixelà (1996) used the term *universalization* and noted that it can be limited (some cultural meaning remains) or absolute (the cultural meaning is completely neutralized) Newmark's strategy, similar to Davies's globalization, is *functional equivalent*. Pederson uses the term *generalization* (in Hosseini Maasoum & Davtalab, 2011, p. 1770) and Baker (1992) calls it *translation by a more general word*.

This strategy allows the text to be understood by a much wider audience; on the other hand, some loss of association can occur (Davies, 2003, p. 83). Usually this strategy is applied when the translator seeks to remove the cultural aspect from the TT. Newmark (1988) even describes it as "a cultural componential analysis" (p. 83).

The strategy, which stands in opposition to globalization, is **localization**. Aixelà (1996) calls it *naturalization* and Newmark (1988) refers to it as *cultural equivalent*. In general, when using this strategy, the translator replaces CSI with an approximate equivalent existing in the target

language, making the text more comprehensible to the target audience (Davies, 2003, p. 84). Two most important issues related to this strategy is that for the translator it is often difficult to evaluate "a very fine line between passable and implausible localization" (Davies, 2003, p. 84).

According to Davies (2003), **transformation**, as a strategy, is used when "the modification of a CSI seems to go beyond globalization or localization, and could be seen as an alteration or distortion of the original" (p. 86). Daugėlaitė (2008) explains that this strategy can be useful when the "the real meaning of an item" is opaque but the term cannot be omitted (p. 22). Still, Davies herself admits that it is not easy to determine clear differences among transformation, localization and globalization (2003, p. 86).

Davies also introduces **creation** as a translation strategy. Aixelà (1996), however, calls it *autonomous creation*. Basically, creation is production of a CSI which is not originally present in the ST (Davies, 2003, p. 88). The translator may employ this strategy to render the meaning of CSI in a manner that would be clearer to the target readership (Davies, 2003, p. 87). Aixelà (1966) sees this strategy as one of the least popular and claims that it is usually applied in order to make the text more imaginative (p. 64).

Thus, the analysis of CSI is a relatively new topic in the field of translation, which interests many translation theorists and scholars who have discussed this phenomenon and provided various terms, definitions and categorization systems to the field; the same applies to translation strategies used to render SCIs. The translator's choice of a specific strategy for a particular CSI always depends on the relation between the source and the target cultures since the translation of CSI concerns both two languages and two cultures.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research has been carried out to analyze material of 2 London travel guide books and their translated Lithuanian versions. The travel guides include descriptions of the most significant highlights in London and provide wide-ranging information for people visiting the city. There are passages on historical and modern artefacts and geographic areas in London and the famous sights they contain. In these books suggestions are given where to go to eat and general information is provided for visiting a new place for the first time. The travel guides aim to provide the readers with basic knowledge of the UK's capital city, which they would find useful planning their trip or already visiting the city.

Realia in English have been categorized according to the taxonomy presented by Fernández Guerra (2012). The translation strategies that have been used by the translators of both books to render CSIs into Lithuanian

have been identified. The strategies used to translate CSIs were based on Davies's classifications.

In total, 330 cases of CSIs have been found in the travel guide books *Top 10 London* and *Berlitz: London pocket guide*. Overall, 424 translation examples have been found in the travel guide books *Top 10 Londonas* and *Londonas: Kelionių vadovas* due to the fact that some of CSIs in English have two or three different translation variants in Lithuanian. The analysis of CSIs translation is based on Davies's (2003) taxonomy of translation strategies.

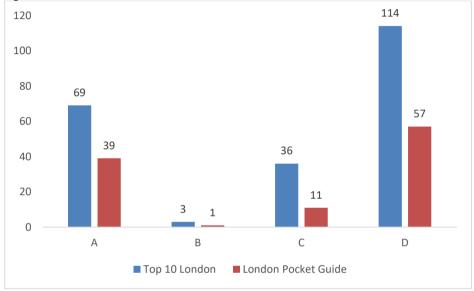


Figure 1. Distribution of CSIs into four main categories according to Fernández Guerra's taxonomy.

Figure 1 shows that the majority of CSIs are attributed to category D (Social and historical terms denoting territorial administrative units or divisions; departments, professions, titles, ranks, greetings and treatments; institutions, patriotic and religious organisations; etc.). A considerable amount of CSIs is assigned to category A (Geographic and ethnographic terms) which mostly includes toponyms referring to London and its areas, names of parks and other geographic and ethnographic CSI. Category C (Names of everyday objects, actions and events (such as food and drinks, clothes, housing, tools, public transport, dances and games, units of measurement, money, etc.;) cover 36 and 11 CSIs from the books respectively and refer mainly to food, constituting the third biggest category. A small amount of CSIs from the travel guide books are attributed to category B (Words or expressions referring to folklore, traditions and mythology); and all of the instances refer to traditional events.

Translation strategies according to Davies's (2003) taxonomy, which have been applied to each category of CSI in the travel guide books, is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Translation strategies (number of instances) based on Davies's (2003) taxonomy applied to four categories of realia according to Fernández Guerra (2012) in travel guides

Top 10 Londonas and Londonas: Kelionių vadovas.

Category→	A		В		С		D	
	T1	T2	T1	T2	T1	T2	T1	T2
Translation strategy								
Preservation	88	36	3	-	26	10	119	35
Addition	2	9	-	-	3	-	15	22
Omission	-	-	-	-	-	1	6	3
Globalization	-	-	-	-	4	2	2	-
Localization	-	1	-	-	3	-	1	2
Transformation	-	-	-	-	2	-	1	1
Creation	-	3	-	1	2	-	6	8

Note: A, B, C and D refer to the categories by Fernández Guerra; T1 refers to *Top 10 Londonas* and T2 refers to *Londonas: Kelionių vadovas*.

Table 1 shows that the translation strategy of preservation is used most often to translate CSIs of all categories as identified by Fernández Guerra (2012). The second most popular translation strategy is addition. Other translation strategies are used rarely or not used at all. Only omission and creation, both used for rendering CSIs of category D are used more than just on a few occasions.

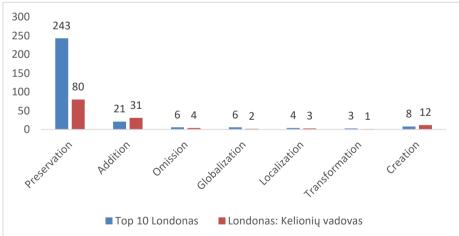


Figure 2. Distribution of CSI translation in travel guide books *Top 10 Londonas* and *Londonas: Kelionių vadovas* according to Davies' taxonomy of translation strategies.

Preservation as a translation strategy includes translation instances of CSIs where preservation of form or preservation of content is observed, e.g.

Fenton House remains Fenton House and fino remains as fino, which means a special kind of an alcoholic drink sherry, as the latter word might not be transparent to a reader of limited knowledge (the typically implied readership). The translator could have possibly added fino vynas or translated the term as cheresas. Guy Fawkes Night is transferred into the Lithuanian text preserving the CSI's form, while the name of this annual celebration in the UK could have been translated as Gajaus Fokso naktis. Trooping the Colour, which is another example of CSI belonging to the group of traditional events, again retains its form, though it was possible to translate it into Lithuanian as Karinis paradas (karalienės Elizabeth II gimtadienio proga). The retained original form is too difficult to understand and can be misleading to readers.

The translation strategy of *addition* could be illustrated by the translation of the following CSIs: *Seven Dials* is a road junction and the translator has added this information (*sankryža*) in order to explain the meaning of the CSI: *Seven Dials sankryža*. The translation of CSI *Gabriel's Wharf* is an interesting example as the translator did not simply translate *Wharf* into *prieplauka*, but has decided to preserve its form and add its Lithuanian equivalent. As a resulte, *Gabriel's Wharf* prieplauka looks as an excessive translation variant.

Omission as a translation strategy could be illustrated by the translation of CSI Queen Elizabeth II Bridge where the lexical unit Queen is omitted: Elžbietos II tiltas.

Globalization is a strategy which neutralizes the cultural meaning of an original CSI in its translation into the target language. Thus, cultural item translated in such manner becomes easier to comprehend. The translation of CSI ravenmaster and refers to a person who takes care of ravens in the Tower of London presents an instance of globalisation strategy. Tarnautojas is a general term, too general in this case, because it does not disclose the specificity of this person's responsibilities but, as a term, is commonly understood by the target culture readers.

Localization means that a CSI is replaced by another CSI, specific to the target culture, or a cultural item is adopted to be closer to the target culture, e.g. food CSI croissant is rendered into prancūziški rageliai, which is a recognized term. Similarly, the Tower of London has been localized to render its meaning in the text as referring to the museum, and therefore, in Lithuanian is presented ascame Tauerio muziejus.

Transformation, as a translation strategy, includes the following translation instances: the name of the dish scallop shu mai has been rendered into geldelės šu mai and The Queen's Chapel is translated into karališkoji koplyčia. The transformations that have been carried out in these examples

are: changes in the word categories and adaptation to Lithuanian phonology rules.

Creation is a translation strategy which involves invention of a new CSI, consider: Imperial War Museum is not named Didžiųjų karų muziejus in Lithuanian, it is named Imperijos karo muziejus and National Portrait Gallery does not contain only one portrait as it is presupposed in the Lithuanian translation Nacionalinė portreto galerija, but it is Nacionalinė portretų galerija.

To sum up, the results indicate that the dominant CSI translation strategy in travel guide books is preservation (either of form, content or both) while edition is the second most frequent translation strategy. Creation, omission, globalization, localization and transformation are strategies used only occasionally.

Conclusion

Culture plays a major role in translation especially when the text is highly related to the culture in which it has been produced. Such texts often contain CSIs, the translation of which is a difficult task because of their cultural nature. The results of the research have shown that preservation is the most commonly used translation strategy in the two analysed travel guides, addition is the second most popular one, whereas the other translation strategies – omission, globalization, localization, transformation and creation – have been used only on a few occasions.

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