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## **SEMANTICS OF CULTURE ENVIRONMENT: TRANSLATION OF CULTURAL REFERENCES**

The **aim** of this article is to discuss the procedure of identification of the culture-specific units and to investigate the ways of their transference from source culture into target culture.

The attitudes between cultures demand better understanding of languages as the representative object of cultures through the behaviour of individuals and communities in general. Current literature supports the notion that “..our world is experiencing an increasingly complex interconnectedness both locally and globally in relation to economic, political, technological, linguistic and cultural” (O'Neill 2013). Linguistics helps to “trust the text” (Sinclair 1992) or to interpret the text, rather than “impose interpretations” upon it (Gerbig, Müller-Wood 2006). Robert Lado talked about comparing sound systems, grammatical systems and lexical systems, but mostly about “comparing two cultures” (Lado 1957).

John Grisham (b. 1955) is one of the most favourite modern American novelists who has colourfully described the American society and the American culture environment in his novels. He has written more than 30 novels, not all have been translated into Latvian yet. In order to reach the aim of the given paper, any of his novels that have been translated into Latvian would do. This time the author of the paper has randomly chosen John Grisham's novel “The Pelican Brief” as the source text and its translation into Latvian “Pelikānu lieta”. The choice of the novel “The Pelican Brief” has proved to be both interesting and useful because there were many culture references found in the source text and the contrastive analysis of the translation showed the main stumble stones for the translators of such texts which contain culture references. During the semantic and contrastive analysis of the texts 329 culture-specific lexical units were identified in the source text and 273 culture-specific lexical units were found in the corresponding target text. The difference in the number between the culture-specific lexical units in both compared languages appears due to the great number of omission used by the translator.

To identify the culture-specific lexical units or cultural references, the author of the paper has used the operational definition of cultural reference given by Harald M. Olk in his article “Cultural references in translation: a framework for quantitative translation analysis”:

**Cultural references** are those lexical items in a **source text** which, at a given point in time, refer to objects or concepts **which do not exist** in a specific **target culture** or **which deviate** in their textual function significantly in denotation or connotation **from lexical equivalents** available in the target culture. (Olk 2001, 30)

The very procedure of identifying the cultural references is very individual and therefore very subjective. However, the whole process of identification could be generalized in order to assume what is counted as a cultural reference. In most cases it is relatively easy to recognize cultural references, especially when they are similar in both cultures, i.e., in source text and target text. The cases when certain cultural references do not exist in one of the cultures are more difficult, most often they exist in the source culture only and do not exist in the target culture or exist there in a somewhat similar or completely different way.

Some cultural references which represent certain activities characteristic to any culture are translated differently because they are described in different ways in different cultures at the same time meaning the same item, thing or activity.

The translator’s approach is inevitably significant in this process of transference of cultural references from source language into target language. Besides the subjective factor of identifying the cultural references, the process of translation is subjective itself. The difference of perception of the cultural references makes the basic subjectivity of the translation issue. The main problem is to define what is understood by cultural reference and then find the most proper way of translation. That is “precise investigation of meanings, changes in meaning, and differences in meaning” (Wierzbicka 2013).

The goal of the paper was to identify culture-specific lexical items which could pose problems in a translation of the text into target language, at the same time retaining the source-culture context as precisely as possible.

While analysing the language, namely, the culture-specific lexical units, the research was split in several stages: (1) identification of culture-specific lexical units in the source language, (2) finding similar culture-specific lexical units in the target language (if possible), (3) establishing the system of translation procedures, (4) and finally translate the culture-specific lexical units into target language using the most appropriate translation method.

For the analysis of translation of cultural references, the following system classifying seven translation procedures was established: (1) direct transference of a cultural item; (2) transference of a cultural item with explicitation; (3) transference of a cultural item with explanation; (4) target-language expression referring to the source culture; (5) neutrally common explanation of a cultural item; (6) omission of a cultural item; and (7) substitution of a cultural reference with a cultural equivalent of the target language (Olk, 2012).

**Direct transference of a cultural item** occurs in instances where a culture-specific item from the source text is transferred into the target text. This process is usually categorized as ‘transference’. In the case of transference the distance between source text expression and target text is basically zero and the source culture identity is fully retained. The target reader is treated like the source text reader and no additional information is added.

The source text mentions '*Indians*', '*war paint*', and '*full battle dress*' which are culture-specific lexical units characterising the American cultural environment. These culture-specific lexical units are transferred into target text using the direct transference, namely, these lexical units are translated into Latvian and mean exactly the same as in the source culture text: '*indiāņi*', '*kaujas krāsās*' un '*pilnā kaujas apģērbā*'. The given examples prove that the culture-specific lexical units are perceived equally in both the source culture and the target culture. Certain beneficial role is played by the cultural background knowledge acquired by people historically.

**Transference of a cultural item with explicitation** takes place in the case of explicitation when translators expand the target text, building into it a semantic redundancy absent in the original. By that the translators provide information that would normally be redundant to a source-culture reader but is in most cases very essential for the target culture reader. The translator's solution is not to explain the meaning of the item itself but to provide a minimum amount of information that enables the readers to work out the function of the lexical item even without a clear understanding of its semantic meaning. The source text provides rather long culture-specific lexical unit '*But think (X) of the violence and the radicals...*' whereas the transference of this lexical unit into the target language is done by using different syntactical structure that adds a semantic redundancy in the target text: '*Un padomā par tiem, kas atbalsta vardarbību, – par radikāļiem...*' And this redundancy in this particular case changes the meaning of the whole lexical

unit. What in the source text is meant as enumeration of facts, in the target text is turned into subordinate clause which changes the meaning of the whole lexical unit (in this case the whole sentence).

**Transference of a cultural item with explanation** usually takes place when a cultural item is transferred and has its denotative meaning explained in the target text. The explanation explicitly acknowledges and underlines the conceptual 'foreignness' of the item. The explanations may range from a simple generic term to long and detailed glosses, which are integrated to different degrees into the target language text. As to glosses and explanations, they may be literal translation, generic definition or comparison with a cultural equivalent. As the exemplification is carried out based on literary work and its translation, the glosses did not appear in the sample, but some explanation could be found in the target text. The source text runs as follows: '*He signed off with his patented grandfather's smile of complete trust and wisdom and reassurance.*' To compare there is the target text: '*...un pabeidza pārraidi ar savu patentēto vectētiņa smaidu, kas izstaroja absolūtu uzticību, gudrību un pārlicību.*' The syntactically longer target language variant gives more clear idea about the image, and adds to better understanding of the American lifestyle and the American cultural environment.

When **target-language expression is referring to the source culture**, a cultural reference is not transferred in the translation, but replaced by a word or phrase in the target language which is still based on the source culture. In this case the translator dispenses with the original reference to the source culture and replaces it with a term or phrase which is more familiar to the target reader. The author of the original source text has used the expression '*lightweights*' but the corresponding transference to the target language is '*nekas nopietns*'. The same feature is seen in the next transference example: '*smelled blood*' – '*sajuta asinis*'.

**Neutrally common explanation** is usually regarded to be a cultural reference which is expressed in the target language in a way that is considered culturally neutral. The similarities of source and target culture are emphasized. This ensures easy readability for target language readers, because no culture-specific knowledge is required. Sometimes the transference is very successful as, for example, '*word wizard*' – '*vārda mākslas meistars*', but sometimes by slightly semantically transforming the meaning of the lexical unit the general transference remains undisturbed: '*said slowly in a perfect generic American tongue*' - '*..teica lēnā, nevainojamā angļu valodā*'.

Deliberately omitted reference is counted as ‘**omission**’. It is often associated with a translator admitting that a word or phrase (a lexical unit) has appeared to be untranslatable. Omission can be regarded as another way that neutralizes the cultural identity of the text. It is, however, unforgivable negligence to the source language text authorship and it usually results in a weaker sample of culture-specific items in target language. The translated version of the source text does not reveal the real culture-specific lexical and semantic meaning of it. If only one word is omitted in a neutral part of the text, it usually does not cause any disturbance to perceive the whole transferred message in general. Whereas that happens with some specific or characteristic culture-specific or certain culture-related feature expressed by certain lexical unit, and this characteristic or sometimes very essential part is missing, the whole transference of culture-specific lexical unit is disturbed. Four types of omission have been observed:

(1) an omission of a word:

*'yellow nylon **ski** rope' – '(X) dzeltena neilona aukla';*

*'**draft** beer' – '(X) alus';*

*'bound into the **fetal** position' – 'pašu sasēja (X)';*

(2) an omission of a phrase:

*'..chicken bouillon, boiled potatoes, and stewed onions – **stroke food**.' – 'vakariņas, kas sastāvēja no cāļa buljona, vārītiem kartupeļiem un sautētiem sīpoliem (X).'*

(3) an omission of the sentence:

*'No, it would be a glorious occasion.' – '(X)' There is no sentence in the Latvian text.*

(4) an omission of several sentences:

*'The farmer was not from anywhere, and performed none of the thievery. He was a pro, and someone else did the dirty deeds.' – '(XX)' There are no sentences in the Latvian text.*

As it was already mentioned earlier, the omission was only discussed, provided it was related to culture-specific lexical units. The omission of a word is the most typical way of omission displayed.

Some researchers regard **cultural substitution** as a way out of this rather ambiguous situation referring to translation of the cultural references. Whenever a cultural element is replaced in the source text by a target language word or phrase which is considered specific to the target culture and has similar functions or connotations as the source text element, this rendering is categorized as a ‘cultural substitution’ (Wierzbicka 2013). In many cases

target text readers may be unaware that an item is specific to their own culture and does not exist as such in the text's source culture. The main idea is to transfer the cultural items of the source culture text to the perception of the end reader of the target culture, so that the general cultural context loses as little as possible, if any. This substitution of culture-specific lexical units is often closely connected with the use of stylistic devices of literary works (Gerbig, Müller-Wood 2006). The examples which prove acceptable and appropriate transference from the source language to target language: '*a towering legend*' – '*unikāla leģenda*'; '*No downside.*' – '*Tas nav uz sliktu.*'; '*reelection*' – '*vēlēšanas*'. The last example shows the difference in the cultures, although the semantic meaning of the given lexical unit is the same.

**Two cultural systems** involved in the translation and indicate in what cultural space a culture reference translation or text procedure can be located: source culture – common ground – target culture (Kramersch 1998).

Translation of cultural references is used to identify 'foreignization' or 'domestication' tendencies in the translator's approach to handling the cultural load of a text. The source culture lexical units are basically translated by means of 'direct transference' or 'transference with explicitation'. In the target language these translations will make the impact as 'foreignization' of source culture lexical units over the target language lexical units. The dual nature of some translation modes, such as 'transference + explanation', 'target language expression referring to the source culture', and 'neutral explanation', form the common ground of two culture systems involved in the translation process, making the space for a translator to feel more free due to common semantic or other language values involved in translation of culturally-specific lexical units (Mailhac 1996). Out of the previously mentioned ways of translation, 'transference with explanation' is more likely to belong to the source culture than to the common ground category. However, 'neutral explanation' is more suitable for target-culture. The other tendency of translations from the source language into the target language is called 'domestication' of cultural transplantation. Making the final version of the text to be as close and understandable as possible to the target culture user, the translators very often use 'omission' or 'cultural substitution'.

## **Conclusions**

- One of the main issues in the analysis of cultural reference translations lies in the reliable identification of cultural references which is to some extent an intuitive and therefore a subjective process.

- The translator's approach is inevitably significant in this process of transference of cultural references from source language into target language.
- The stages of workout of culture-specific lexical units: (1) identification of culture-specific lexical units in the source language, (2) finding similar culture-specific lexical units in the target language (if possible), (3) establishing the system of translation procedures, (4) and finally translation of the culture-specific lexical units into target-language.
- The system of seven translation procedures was established: (1) direct transference of a cultural item; (2) transference of a cultural item with explicitation; (3) transference of a cultural item with explanation; (4) target language expression referring to the source culture; (5) neutral explanation of a cultural item; (6) omission of a cultural item; and (7) substitution of a cultural reference with a cultural equivalent of the target language.
- The difference in the number between the culture-specific lexical units in both compared languages appears due to the great number of omission used by the translator.
- When analysing the translations of culture-specific lexical units, four types of omission were distinguished: (1) an omission of a word, (2) an omission of a phrase, (3) an omission of the sentence, and (4) an omission of several sentences.
- Translation of cultural references is used to identify 'foreignization' or 'domestication' tendencies in the translator's approach to handling the cultural load of a text.

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## Kopsavilkums

### KULTŪRVIDES SEMANTIKA: KULTŪRVIDI RAKSTUROJOŠO LEKSISKO VIENĪBU TULKOJUMI

Raksta mērķis ir noskaidrot kultūrspecifisku leksisko vienību identifikācijas procedūru un izpētīt to pārvešanas veidus no avotkultūras mērķkultūrā. Kā avotteksts tika izvēlēts materiāls no Džona Grišama romāna „Pelikānu lieta” angļu valodā un tā tulkojums latviešu valodā kā mērķteksts. Teksta materiālā tika identificētas 329 kultūrvidi raksturojošas leksiskās vienības avottekstā un attiecīgi 273 kultūrvidi raksturojošas leksiskās vienības mērķtekstā. Atšķirība kultūrvidi raksturojošo leksisko vienību skaitā abās valodās rodas tulkojuma daudzo izlaidumu dēļ, tieši tulkojot kultūrvidi raksturojošās leksiskās vienības. Pētījuma norise tika sadalīta vairākos posmos: pirmkārt, kultūrvidi raksturojošo leksisko vienību identifikācija avotvalodas tekstā, otrkārt, attiecīgo kultūrvidi raksturojošo leksisko vienību konstatēšana mērķvalodas tekstā (ja tas iespējams), treškārt, tulkošanas iespējamo procedūru noteikšana, un visbeidzot, kultūrvidi raksturojošās leksiskās vienības tulkošana mērķvalodā, izmantojot vispieņemamāko tulkojuma veidu.

Analizējot kultūrvidi raksturojošo leksisko vienību tulkojumus, tika izstrādāta klasifikācijas sistēma tulkošanas paņēmieniem, proti, (1) tieša kultūrvidi raksturojošas leksiskās vienības pārvešana mērķvalodā, (2) kultūrvidi raksturojošas leksiskās vienības pārvešana ar skaidru piebildi, (3) kultūrvidi raksturojošas leksiskās vienības pārvešana ar (plašāku) paskaidrojumu, (4) mērķvalodas izteiciena, kas attiecas uz avotvalodu, lietošana, (5) kultūrvidi raksturojošas leksiskās vienības neitrāls skaidrojums/ tulkojums, (6) kultūrvidi raksturojošas leksiskās vienības izlaidums, (7) kultūrvidi raksturojošas leksiskās vienības aizstāšana ar mērķvalodas kultūras ekvivalentu.

Raksta autore secina, ka viena no galvenajām problēmām kultūrvidi raksturojošo leksisko vienību analīzē ir ticama kultūrvidi raksturojošo leksisko vienību identifikācija, kas ir zināmā mērā intuitīvs un tādēļ arī subjektīvs process. Tulkotāja radošajai pieejai ir noteicošā loma, pārnesot kultūrvidi raksturojošas leksiskās vienības no avotvalodas mērķvalodā. Tā kā izlaidumi, tulkojot kultūrvidi raksturojošas leksiskās vienības, ir radījuši vislielākās atšķirības tekstos avotvalodā un mērķvalodā, īpaša uzmanība tika pievērsta izlaidumu veidiem tulkojumos. Visbeidzot autore konstatē, ka kultūrvidi raksturojošo leksisko vienību tulkojumus var izmantot, nosakot *ārējās (citas)* vai *vietējās (pašmāju)* kultūras tendences tulkotāja pieejā, apstrādājot teksta kultūras mantojumu.