Culturemes in Cross-Cultural Adaptation (on the Material of the Spanish Translation of the Novel “Peter and Wendy”)

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Abstract. This article deals with the translation of the literary text from English into Spanish, emphasizing the features of the translation of cultural terms. The theoretical part of the paper considers the definitions of cultural terms that exist in modern scientific discourse, as well as how this concept can be nominated in different languages. According to this, some features of Russian-speaking and English-speaking scientific discourse are highlighted. Variants of taxonomies of the culturemes (or realias) based on the thematic principle are presented. This article presents the part of the comparative study of the English novel and its Spanish translation dedicated to the cross-cultural adaptation of the cultural terms.

1. Introduction

The translation is a unique phenomenon, which for a long time was understood as the result of the action, i.e. as a specific text etc. In Russia, for example, the translation has acquired the status of a special field of philological science only in the early 20th years of the XX century [1]. As a kind of creative activity, the translation goes back to deep antiquity. Hence it is fair to admit that the theory of translation had been late for twenty centuries from the practice [2]. According to Fedorov, translation played a significant role in the history of culture—both individual nationalities’ culture and world culture in general [3]. The scientist's observation of the increasing intensity of international contacts as the main reason of the growth of the “translation activity” can be considered right and even “prophetic”: it reflects the actuality though it was made in the early 80-s. For us, it is significant to note that many concepts of translation are reflected today in linguistic discourse. This fact explains also the variety of definitions of the translation we have as well as the ambiguity of the term.

Basically, the meaning of the word “translation” can be expressed by two concepts:

1. a process performed in the form of a mental act, which consists in the fact that a speech unit (textual or oral statement) that has appeared in the source (or original) language is recreated in the target (or translation) language;
2. the result of this process, i.e. a new speech unit (textual or oral statement) expressed in the target language. [3].

This branched definition of Fedorov is taken as the basis for our paper because his investigations reflect a functional-stylistic approach to translation. This approach characterizes by understanding language not as a shape that embodies content, but as a function. Within the framework of this approach, translation is treated as a functional similarity of the original text (or message etc.). That is why the next definition we give is the adequacy of translation: it means an exhaustive transfer of the meaning of the original content which is fully corresponding to the original on the functional-stylistic level [3]. Such a concept is properly suitable for the comparative studies dedicated to the translation of the fiction text (i.e. literature).

We are specifically interested in the second definition, as we are going to use the comparative method for studying translations of the text into different languages.
In modern studies, translation is no longer seen simply as a cross-linguistic transformation, but as its combination with an intercultural adaptation. This fact can be explained by the influence of intercultural communication as a modern research direction. The theory of intercultural communication is the scientific branch that functions in a field of several disciplines. The definition of intercultural communication means an adequate understanding of the two participants which belong to different cultures in one communicative act. The problem of dialogue of cultures is among the key problems of this theory.

In the researches for the most accurate definition of the dialogue of cultures, an important nuance can be discovered: knowledge of one’s native culture plays an important role. I.e. the dialogue between cultures as well as the intercultural communication does not involve a focus on one of the cultures: both sides of a potential intercultural conflict must be seen. According to Mironov, the dialogue of cultures is “discovering of an unknown culture through the native one and vice versa with the help of the cultural interpretation and cross-cultural adaptation in conditions of the semantic discrepancy”. Language is defined as the most important tool and the most meaningful condition of discovering new culture. In the actual papers we still can find this point of view which is based on the studies of the pioneers of the translation study’s research papers. E.g. Fernández Guerra in her paper, dedicated to the problem of translation of the cultural elements, notices: “Many scholars agree with the fact that language is an expression of culture and individuality of its speakers and have, hence, deeply examined cultural terms, as well as the problems involved in their translation when there is a lack of equivalence between two languages and cultures (Kade, Kutz, Nord, Rabadán, and Venuti, for example)” [5].

2. Cultureme as the Global Term. Classifications of the Culturemes

Though linguo-cultural studies are very popular nowadays, the unified term for unique cultural concept printed in the related word still doesn't exist. Meanwhile the term “realia” is common for the papers of Russian scholars, the terms “cultural element”, “foreign cultural word” are usual for the papers written in English. The term “linguoculturema” is familiar by the papers of Spanish linguists and it seems that it is very exhaustive as we can meet it among the Russian papers either.

One of the possible ways of the term cultureme appeared in the space of the Russian-speaking research field is that the Russian philosopher Karsavin introduced it. Being a phenomenon generated by the representatives of a certain culture, the cultureme is inextricably connected with the concept—another linguistic term—and originally belongs to the sphere of linguo-culturology [6]. Spanish linguists Olalla Soler and Hurtado Albir emphasize the inevitable influence of cultural elements, including culture, on the translation (as the result and as the process). They offer their definition of the cultureme, which is based on researches of Vermeer and Molina: “A verbal or extra verbal element, which is significant enough within a one’s culture, that normally provokes difficulties of the intercultural adaptation being in contact with some another culture” [7]

At the same time, the term realia remains relevant for naming any ethnocultural onyms. Since the term realia can be identified with the notions “cultural word” or “cultural term”, relevant for English-language papers, further it is fair to speak about thematic diversity of realities. It allows them to be divided into thematic species or types, that can create an extensive classification. There are many classifications in scientific discourse. For example, Russian contemporary philologist Khukhuni, author of studies on intercultural adaptation of the text, mentions geographical, ethnographic, socio-political realities (referring to the Vlahov and Florin’s work “Irreplaceable in translation”) [8]. Fernández Guerra notes that Vlakhov and Florin “seem to have been the first ones to coin the term realia to refer to cultural elements, and the term has now been generalized and is frequently used to refer to objects, customs, habits, and other cultural and material aspects that have an impact in shaping a certain language” [5].
Olalla Soler and Hurtado Albir present their taxonomy that is based on Nida and Molina’s studies and consists of 4 thematic categories:

1. natural environment (climate, flora, fauna, atmospheric phenomena, terrain, and toponyms);
2. cultural heritage (historical facts, elements of religious culture, folklore, myths and traditions, objects and products of national culture: music, films, etc.);
3. socioculture (social attitudes and habits, forms of politeness, moral values, political structure);
4. linguoculture (proverbs, sustainable expressions, names of their own, common metaphors, interjections, expletive vocabulary) [9, 7].

Researchers emphasize that such classification allows a large number of culturemes of different subtypes to be combined according to a logical and understandable principle, which simplifies the analysis of these linguo-cultural units.

Following the paper of Nida, Newmark establishes 5 categories of “foreign cultural words” or culturemes:

1. ecology (flora, fauna, winds, climate);
2. material culture (food, clothes, houses, towns, transport);
3. social culture (work and leisure);
4. organizations, customs, activities, procedures or concepts (including artistic, religious, political and administrative subcategories);
5. gestures and habits [10, 5].

Katan proposes 6 levels of the cultural prints in the language:

1. environment (including climate, housing, food);
2. behaviour (actions and ways of behaving in certain cultures);
3. capabilities, strategies and skills used to communicate (including non-verbal communication, rituals, etc.);
4. values of the society and its hierarchy;
5. beliefs;
6. identity [11, 3].

3. Cross-Cultural Adaptation of Culturemes. Comparative Study based on English Novel “Peter and Wendy” and Its Spanish Translation.

The novel “Peter and Wendy” written by English writer James Matthew Barrie in 1911 belongs to the Victorian era (XIX-XX).

It is quite interesting to compare various translations of the English-language text belonging to the English linguo-culture of the beginning of XX century as it can make clear the differences in the translators’ approaches to the text and in the ultimate purpose of the translation. The standard goal of the translator is not to overload the translated text and at the same time achieve the same stylistic level and keep the important functions of the fiction text—pragmatic and aesthetic.

A lot of culturemes found in the original text can be defined as the units reflecting socioculture. We can see it in the following example:

Mr. Darling <...> took a cab [12].

We recognize cab as a special type of the taxi, specific element of the British culture. In the Spanish version of the novel we see the following variant:

... menos el señor Darling, que fue en coche... [13].

El coche in Spanish has a wider semantic field than English word “cab”. The translator have chosen more neutral language unit, in the end the special cultural connotation was lost.

“I have one pound seventeen here... <...> say ten shillings...” [12].
The original text often contains currency units that are common for the UK of the period when the novel was written. Let's compare this part with the translation:

“Aquí tengo una libra y dieciséis chelines... <...> ...que son unos diez chelines...” [13].

Currency units are kept in the adapted text as a feature of the national culture.

...this nurse was a prim Newfoundland dog, called Nana [12].

Searching for existing analog is the most effective strategy for such translation cases. And we see the Spanish variant:

...la niñera era una perra Terranova llamada Nana [13].

In the translation, an analog existing in Spanish is chosen for the breed of the dog.

...chocolate-pudding day [12].

Pudding is known as traditional English food. Let's take a look at the translation:

...el día del postre de chocolate [13].

Spanish translation this cultureme is replaced by the word postre—a commonly used word in Spanish, that means any dessert, a kind of hyperonym. The word “ pudin” also exists in Spanish—it is borrowed from English and adapted to the peculiarities of the receiving language (silent consonants have been eliminated). In the present example, the translator prefers to use a recognizable language unit and not to keep the proper cultureme.

Next example is a perfect illustration of the cultureme of another type—the unit that reflects linguoculture of British society:

Now Wendy was every inch a woman, though there were not very many inches, and she peeped out of the bedclothes [12].

The analysis of a dictionary definition of the word inch shows a possibility of the use of this unit in an additional sense: “every inch—entirely, completely; He's every inch a soldier—he's a real soldier”. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the expression “to be every inch a...” means “to be exactly like somebody”, “to be similar, the same”. There is no translation of this phrase in Spanish variant of the text: the translator's decision was to eliminate this part. The word inch, in this case, is a national-ethnic component of the meaning of the idiom, which is lost in translation.

The cultureme, reflecting the cultural heritage of society, has the least frequency in this text:

It was not really a happy question to ask him; it was like an examination paper that asks grammar, when you want to be asked is Kings of England [12].

In Spanish translation, the cultureme is kept:

Lo cierto es que no fue una pregunta muy afortunada; fue como una hoja de examen en la que piden gramática, cuando uno quiere que le preguntén los reyes de Inglaterra [13].

This language unit plays in this text the stylistic function, referring the reader to the history of the UK.

4. Summary

Cultureme is a universal category that is commonly used in linguistic studies of text, including comparative studies of the texts of translations. It is inevitably found in most fiction texts.

At the same time, the problem of clarifying the definition of the term cultureme (as well as variations in the name of the phenomenon itself) is not solved yet, and in the space of linguistic scientific discourse, several definitions are coexisting.

For our current study, the term cultureme was chosen as a hyponym of the term “realia”. Examples showed that culturemes can be classified according to the different themes and depending on the characteristics of the transmitted knowledge about the linguistic culture which they belong to.
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