

INTERCULTURAL TRANSLATION - ACHIEVING DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCE IN TRANSLATING SPECIFIC TERMS OF MATERIAL AND SPIRITUAL CULTURE

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Abstract

A text is shaped not only by the author's individual style but also by his culture, because each text is always produced in a situation and this situation is embedded in a culture. The context of culture includes everyday traditions, values, norms, perspectives, etc. What the author chooses as the topic, what guiding motives he weaves into the text, what characteristics he assigns to his characters, how he structures the text, even more how this text is understood by its recipients, depend on the cultural context. This cultural context is also present at the micro level, i.e., in individual words, syntagms or sentences, and it causes translation problems, particularly where there are no exact equivalents for the elements in the target language. Translating such culture-specific elements is quite difficult because translating them literally could not produce the same effect on the recipient in the target culture. As a solution to such a seemingly insoluble problem, the American linguist Nida, an important representative of the communicative translation theory, offers the creation of the so-called 'dynamic equivalence'. We conduct this research in order to see how applicable this kind of equivalence for translating specific terms of material and spiritual culture is.

Keywords: *Culture, translation, culture-specific term, realia, equivalence.*

1. Introduction

Every country has its own geographical location, ethnic groups, religious beliefs, political systems, values and so on. All these shape the differences of culture, which are also embodied in the language. The influence of culture on language certainly brings difficulties in translating. Translation is seen as a complex process of interlingual and intercultural transferring contents because translation occurs in rather different circumstances and is aimed at target readers other than the source text. "For a truly successful translating, biculturalism is even more important than bilingualism, since words only have meanings in terms of the cultures in which they function." (Nida 2001: 82)

Taking into consideration Nida's concept for translating the "untranslatable", we have come to the idea to conduct research with the goal to reveal how applicable Nida's concept in translating culture-specific terms is. Furthermore, we consider, in a narrow sense, the problematical nature of the lexemes relating to objects or phenomena from the material and spiritual culture, and in the wide sense, the interculturality as a very significant entity in the process of succeeding interlingual communication through a mediator, i.e., translator. During the research, we apply different methods, starting from definitions of relevant terms, through comparative and translational analysis of original texts parallel with their translations, up to observation of gathered material and interpretation of the achieved results. We expect to prove that, to sustain a normal course of interlingual communication, the translator needs to aim at achieving dynamic equivalence.

2. Intercultural translation and Nida's theory of equivalence

Especially since the end of the 1990s, research in translation studies began to focus more and more on culture in translation, so culture has increasingly been incorporated into the definitions of the term 'translation'.

Translation is seen much more as a mediation between knowledge, behaviors, attitudes, perspectives or with other words between cultures. Vermeer (1994:36) sees translation primarily as an "intercultural transfer", because translation is an offer of information in a target culture and its language through an offer of information from a source culture and its language (Reiß/Vermeer 1984:105).

For Snell-Hornby translation is a reshaping of the text, according to a given situation, as part of the target culture (Snell-Hornby 1994:13).

Many linguists also deal with the term ‘culture-specific items’. For Nord (1993:22), culture-specific items are all forms of action and behavior (linguistic and non-linguistic) that are different from those of other communities on the basis of the norms, conventions and opinions prevailing in one cultural community. Hansen (1996:63) defines cultural specifics as all the cultural and socio-economic circumstances of a linguistic area that lead to a certain understanding and behavior in a particular situation. In linguistics the term *realia* also circulates as a synonym. Markstein defines *realia* as elements of the everyday life, history, culture, politics, etc. of a given people, country, geographical place, which do not have any correspondences in other peoples, other countries, or other geographical places (Markstein 1998: 288). According to her, *realia* are furthermore identity carriers of a national/ethnic entity and are associated with a country, a region, or a continent (Markstein 1998: 288). An important aspect of her definition is based on a specific distinction: *realia* are objects, phenomena, etc. which have no correspondence in other cultures, and not just in other languages (Markstein 1998: 288). Crucial in this context is the problem of equivalence. Most translation theorists and even practitioners agree that the goal of translation is achieving equivalence, which mostly refers to correspondence. However, for Lederer (2014:45) the basic difference between equivalence and correspondence is following: “equivalence exists between texts while correspondences between linguistic elements, words, syntagms, set expressions or syntactic forms within the text”. We, like many other linguists are of the opinion that, despite slight differences of correspondence and equivalence, achieving equivalence is the goal of translation.

For Nida (in his noted book *Toward a Science of Translating* published in 1964), the entire focus in translation is on the message itself both in form and content. Formal equivalence for him supposes that a target language item represents the literal equivalent of a source language item. Dynamic equivalence, on the other hand, is based on “the principle of equivalent effect”. In his opinion, “in such a translation one is not so concerned with matching the receptor language message with the source language message, but with the dynamic relationship, that the relationship between receptor and language should be substantially the same as that which existed between the original receptors and the message”. (Nida, 1964:159). That means that what the translator tried to do is to reproduce the text in such a way that the target language reader can understand the message clearly and exactly. Following this principle, he defines dynamic-equivalence in translation as finding “the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message” (Nida, 1964: 166). In other words, dynamic equivalence represents shaping a target text that is as understandable and natural as possible for the recipient in the target culture, so that similar reactions can be achieved, regardless of how big changes in language, even in meaning, must be made (Nida 1964, Nida & Taber 1982). In the following text we will reveal if translators have made big changes in translating culture-specific terms aiming at the creation of understandable and natural target-texts.

3. Research methodology

For the purposes of this research, we extract examples from source texts in both German and Macedonian, parallel with their translations in both Macedonian and German. The target of the analysis is the culture-specific terms of the material and the spiritual culture that would help us in coming to results considering the challenges in translating a text, especially its cultural segments. The extracts are presented in tables, followed by their interpretations. Each table consists of the author’s name, the novel’s title, the language, and the extract with its minimal context, as it has been found in the source. Beside the interpretation of each item, there is a description of each used methods as well as the type of equivalence (according to Nida’s classification) the translator has aimed at. Textual analysis is used as well, but also the observation of some relevant components of the complex semantic entities such as syntactic, lexical, stylistic, etc.

4. Results and interpretation

4.1. Specific terms of material culture in translation

Table 1.

<i>Author</i>	<i>Novel</i>	<i>language</i>	<i>text</i>
<i>Arthur Schnitzler</i>	<i>Leutnant Gustl</i>	<i>German</i>	<i>...um jeden <u>Kreuzer</u> muss man extra betteln. p. 11</i>
<i>Артур Шницлер</i>	<i>Поручникот Густл</i>	<i>Macedonian</i>	<i>...треба екстра да се моли за секоја <u>парицка</u>. p. 46</i>

The Lexeme *Kreuzer* (sometimes also *Kreutzer*) is an original silver coin with two embossed crosses which was widespread in southern Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Over time, however, it lost more and more value until it consisted of less precious and inferior metal. The translation was fulfilled via generalizing the term with the hypernym - *napa* (engl. *money*) in its diminutive form - *паричка*. With this approximate method the most important characteristic of the original lexeme has been covered and the dynamic equivalence has been achieved, which is very important for understanding the target text by the new recipient.

Table 2.

<i>Author</i>	<i>Novel</i>	<i>language</i>	<i>text</i>
<i>Gottfried Keller</i>	<i>Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorf</i>	<i>German</i>	... <i>sich ein allerbescheidenstes <u>Sonntagskleid</u> zu erobern...</i> p. 20
<i>Готфрид Келер</i>	<i>Ромео и Јулија на село</i>	<i>Macedonian</i>	... <i>да изнуди за себе најскромни <u>неделен фустан</u>...</i> p.40

A *Sonntagskleid* (eng. *Sunday's dress*) is a woman's clothing that was only worn on special occasions, e.g., when going to church on Sundays. This lexeme is rarely used today, alluding to the typical way of life of Germans in the past, where the celebrations took place on Sunday. Its literary translation by introducing minor changes in the grammatical structure (the determinative compound is given as a syntagma consisting of an adjective and a noun) is *неделен фустан*. The translation also evokes a picture of a dress worn on Sunday, which also refers to a kind of solemnity, but it does not sound so natural in the target culture.

Table 3.

<i>Author</i>	<i>Novel</i>	<i>language</i>	<i>text</i>
<i>Игор Додовски</i>	<i>Големiot куфер</i>	<i>Macedonian</i>	<i>Командирот, ми вели, те чести ручек, <u>сарми</u></i> ... p. 40
<i>Ivan Dodovski</i>	<i>Der große Koffe</i>	<i>German</i>	„ <i>Der Kommandeur spendiert dir ein Mittagessen</i> “, <i>sagte er...</i> „ <i>Sarma</i> ...p.33

The realia *Сарма* denotes one of the most famous Macedonian¹ traditional dishes and is problematic for translating because it is strongly culturally embossed. In the translation, this term has been borrowed by simple transcription in German without any explanations. So, the recipient has no idea what kind of dish it is. The establishing only of a formal equivalence accrues gaps for appropriate understanding in the target culture.

Table 4.

<i>Author</i>	<i>Novel</i>	<i>language</i>	<i>text</i>
<i>Венко Андоновски</i>	<i>Папокот на светот</i>	<i>Macedonian</i>	... <i>дека на главата имаше маска; црна <u>маска</u>, <u>бабарска</u> ...</i> p. 232
<i>Venko Andonovski</i>	<i>Der Nabel der Welt</i>	<i>German</i>	<i>dass er eine Maske vor dem Gesicht hatte, eine schwarze Maske, eine aus dem Neujahrsritus...</i> p.63

The realia *бабарска маска*, as part of the Macedonian cultural heritage is a kind of mask made of sheep or cattle fur that used to be worn by the so-called *Babars* during the New Year's rituals according to the Julian calendar (January 14th), under the superstition that this ritual could drive away evil and demons. When translating into German, the translator has aimed at a dynamic equivalence by explicating the term as *mask from the New Year's ritual*.

4.2. Specific terms of the spiritual culture in translation

Table 5.

<i>Author</i>	<i>Novel</i>	<i>language</i>	<i>text</i>
<i>Gerhart Hauptmann</i>	<i>Bahnwärter Thiel</i>	<i>German</i>	<i>Auf dem geteerten Plankenzaune eines <u>Kossätenhofes</u>...</i> p.13
<i>Герхард Хауптман</i>	<i>Тил, чуварот на железничката пруга</i>	<i>Macedonian</i>	<i>Врз накатрената испреплетена ограда на еден <u>косетски двор</u>...</i> p.159

¹ but of some other neighboring cultures as well

The German realia *Kossätenhof* testifies to the way of life of a group of people, so-called *Kossäten*, who in the past, somewhere from the XIV century onwards, owned houses or workshops outside the village community. In order to fill this gap, the translator has aspired at formal equivalence, by simple transcription of the first constituent in the compound (*косетски*), not letting the target reader know what it means.

Table 6.

<i>Author</i>	<i>Novel</i>	<i>language</i>	<i>text</i>
<i>Hermann Hesse</i>	<i>Der Steppenwolf</i>	<i>German</i>	<i>...erschreckte mich ein Mensch, ein einsamer später Heimkehrer...p.51</i>
<i>Херман Хесе</i>	<i>Стенскиот волк</i>	<i>Macedonian</i>	<i>...ме преплаши еден човек, осамен и <u>задоцнет</u> повратник дома...p.49</i>

The expression *später Heimkehrer* (eng. *late returnees*) testifies of the history of the German people. Late returnees were the former prisoners of the Second World War who were released from Soviet prisons after 1946. In the translation, we have formal equivalence with grammatical changes of the discourse (the adjective is given as a participial form and the determinative compound is translated by a noun-adverb-syntagma), not alluding to German history or to any kind of imprisonment.

Table 7.

<i>Author</i>	<i>Novel</i>	<i>language</i>	<i>text</i>
<i>Folk tale</i>	<i>Трите самовили, стариот слепец и келешот</i>	<i>Macedonian</i>	<i>...та се ватиле <u>оро</u> да играат...p. 159</i>
<i>Народна приказна</i>	<i>Die drei Feen, der Blinde und der Aussätzige</i>	<i>German</i>	<i>...um einen <u>Oro</u> zu tanzen, wie die <u>makedonischen Bauern</u>...p.19</i>

Oro is the traditional Macedonian¹ folk dance where the people hold hands and dance in an open circle to the rhythm of the folk melody. In the translation the word *Oro* has been taken as a borrowing with additional explanations: *as the Macedonian farmers*. By paraphrasing this realia, the translator has aspired for dynamic equivalence.

Table 8.

<i>Author</i>	<i>Novel</i>	<i>language</i>	<i>text</i>
<i>Владо Малески</i>	<i>Прва вечер</i>	<i>Macedonian</i>	<i>...на изутрина на <u>блага ракија</u> ќе ти дојдеме...p.48</i>
<i>Vlado Maleski</i>	<i>Diptychon, Erster Abend</i>	<i>German</i>	<i>...morgen früh kommen wir <u>zum heißen Schnaps</u> zu dir! p.30</i>

The Macedonian expression *доаѓа на блага ракија* (eng. *to come to sweet liquor*) describes a traditional ritual of Macedonian culture, which is performed the day after the wedding where the guests drink heated and sweetened liquor. In the German translation there is an adaptation by the paraphrase *zum heißen Schnaps kommen* (eng. *to come to hot liquor*) By mentioning one other semem of the meaning of the culture-specific expression (the liquor is both sweet and hot) the translator managed to more nearly describe the custom for the German reader again by aspiring at dynamic equivalence.

5. Conclusion

Language functions as a culture-specific phenomenon, but many culture specific phenomena are also part of a language. Realia of the material and the spiritual culture are often present in literature as well as in any kind of communication. However, without culture-specific items in the source text, the translation process would be like pure transcription. From a translator's point of view, realia are problematic in their nature, because if literally translated, they could not produce the same effect as for the recipient of the original text, as we saw in Tables 2, 3, 5 and 6. Furthermore, translation is a creative activity and the translator uses all disposable tools, that means, where the formal equivalence seems to be insufficient for a correct and esthetically solid translation, he needs to reach to achieving a dynamic equivalence. This especially refers to the realia in the translation process. According to the results of our research in 4 out of 8 analyzed examples (50%), the translator aimed at achieving dynamic equivalence. But, with literary

¹ but also of some other neighboring cultures

translation or borrowing words from the source language, the target recipient is though deprived of getting the real picture the original author had in mind. There occur even more losses, because there are losses in all forms of communication, whether it involves translation or not (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990:35).

Despite claiming that the translator should show big respect for the original by not changing the content of the original cultural words at his own will, the culture-specific terms can be successfully translated if the translator manages to make the target language reader feel like reading the original cultural-specific terms in their own familiar culture.

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