

# Contrastive Analysis of Culture References in John Grisham's Novel *The Pelican Brief*

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## Introduction

In order to study the issue of culture references from the aspect of contrastive analysis it is necessary to discuss and agree upon the definition of culture references. First of all it is very subjective matter: what is regarded as culture reference because it may be recognized as culture reference in one culture, for example, in source culture, but it does not show any reference attributed to the target culture. The given paper deals with the subjectivity in the identification of Culture References (CR). The translator's approach is very important because that may add even more subjectivity to the researched culture references. Some theoreticians, for example, H. M. Olk (2013) and F. O'Neill (2013) discuss and propose the term "culture references", but some researchers, as A. Wierzbicka (2006), use the term "culture – specific lexical items". Although there is no difference in the subject matter and they mean the same lexical units, it is affordable to use both variants interchangeably. One of the main issues discussed in the paper is the description of translation procedures and distinguishing between 'foreignization' and 'domestication'.

The source text (ST) was chosen from John Grisham's novel *The Pelican Brief* and its translation into Latvian *Pelikānu lieta*.

There were spotted 329 culture-specific lexical units in the source text and found 273 culture-specific lexical units in the corresponding target text (TT). 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.

The operational definition of culture reference (further in the text CR) according Harald M.Olk states that, "[c]ultural 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" (2001, 30, emphasis added).

The goal was to identify culture-specific lexical items which could pose problems in a translation of the text into target language.

For the analysis the following framework classifying seven translation procedures was established:

- Transference of a cultural item
- Transference + explicitation

- Transference + explanation
- Target-language expression referring to the source culture
- Neutral explanation
- Omission
- Substitution of a CR with a cultural equivalent

The following sections 2-8 will discuss the above-mentioned translation procedures in detail and will provide examples from the compared texts both in English and in Latvian.

## 1 Transference

Instances where a culture-specific item from the source text is transferred into the target text are categorized as 'transference'. In the case of transference the distance between ST expression and TT 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 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. The research shows that those culture-specific lexical units which are supposed to be more general or well known and established in the world are usually translated using transference.

## 2 Transference + Explication

In the case of explication translators expand the target text, building into it a semantic redundancy absent in the original. The translators provide information that would normally be redundant to a source-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 the 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

### 3 Transference + Explanation

When a cultural item is transferred and has its denotative meaning explained in the target text, this is categorized as 'transference + explanation'. The explanation explicitly acknowledged and underlined the conceptual 'foreignness' of the item. Explanations range from a simple generic term to long and detailed glosses, which are integrated to different degrees into the text. Glosses and explanations give 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 pārliecību.*' The syntactically longer target language variant gives more clear idea about the personage, and adds to better understanding of the American lifestyle and the American cultural environment.

### 4 Target-Language (TL) Expression Referring to the Source Culture

This category comprises those translations in which a cultural reference is not transferred, but replaced by a word or phrase in the target language which is still rooted on the source culture. 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.

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*', which, after using the control method of backward translation, means "*nothing special*" and that does not correspond to the original source text at all. The meaning of the lexical unit is lost. The same feature is seen in the next transference example: '*smelled blood*' – '*sajuta asinis*'. In this example "*smelling*" is not the same as "*sajuta*" (backward translation then should be "*felt*" expressing feeling of the blood). Usually such nuances lessen the richness of expression of the source text.

### 5 Neutral Explanation

A cultural reference 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'.

## 6 Omission

Deliberately omitted reference is counted as 'omission'. Omission is often associated with a translator admitting defeat in the face of a word that appears to be untranslatable. Omission can be regarded as another way that neutralizes the cultural identity of the text. Sometimes omission can be the most adequate solution as M. Baker remarks that "the meaning conveyed by a particular item or expression is not vital enough to the development of the text to justify distracting the reader with lengthy explanations" (1992, 40).

There may be observed four types of omission (in the following examples the omitted items are underlined and bold text type is used):

(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 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 Latvian text.

As it was stated already in the introduction, the phenomenon of omission is the translation procedure that makes the striking difference between culture references

in the source text and in the target text. Translator's task is to look for and find other possible ways to retain the culture-specific lexical items also in the target text thus providing the final reader with appropriate knowledge of the source culture.

## 7 Cultural substitution

Whenever a cultural element in the source text is replaced by a target-language word or phrase that 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'. 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. Very often this substitution of culture-specific lexical units is closely connected with the use of stylistic devices of a literary works.

The examples which prove acceptable and appropriate transference from the source language to target language are as follows:

*'a towering legend' – 'unikāla leģenda';*

*'No downside.' - 'Tas nav uz sliktu.';*

*'reelection' – 'vēlēšanas'.*

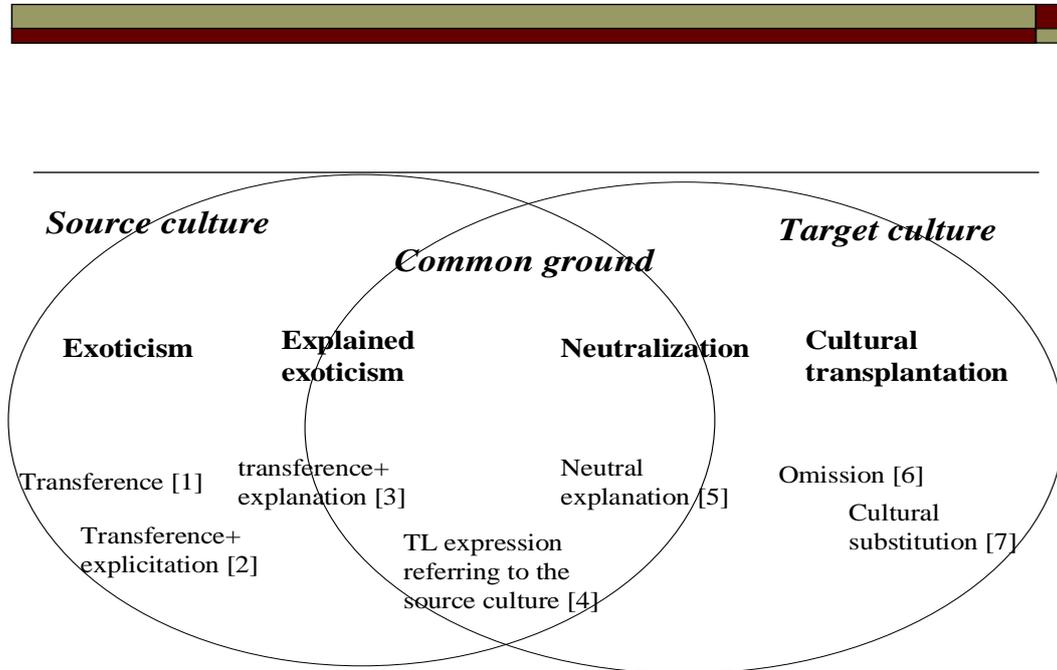
The last example shows the difference in the cultures, although the semantic meaning of the given lexical unit is the same.

## 8 The Model of Text Procedures

Basically the model of text procedures is established to show the degree of "foreignization" and "domestication" of the translated text. The target text may be left during the translation procedure almost unchanged and by that manifests foreignization in the target language and culture. When translation is carried out taking into account the correspondence of culture-specific lexical items in the source text and culture to those culture-specific lexical items existing in target culture, the target text becomes domesticated. There are large discussions going on among theorists (A. Pym, F. Schleiermacher, E. Nida, P. Newmark, and others) about the directional equivalence which is based on two opposed ways of translation. When the translator pays more attention to the source text, leaves it closer to the source culture, the reader of the translation gets more exoticism or explained exoticism. But when the translator decides to give the translation the touch of target culture as it may be more understandable to the final user, the translation usually becomes more neutral or even the transplantation of culture is felt. Depending on the translation procedures used during the translation process the translation can be located either in the source-culture or in the target-culture. However, there exist also the third possibility that the translation can be located in the "common ground" where the culture-specific lexical units are translated revealing the culture-specific aspects of

the source culture and at the same time they are completely understandable for the target culture reader.

In Picture 1 there are shown two cultural systems involved in the translation and indicated in what cultural space a CR translation or text procedure can be located.



Picture 1. Two culture systems (SC and TC) and text procedures involved in the translation.

The idea of such division was firstly deliberated by J.-P. Mailhac (1996) and then developed by H. M. Olk (2013). The author of the given paper regards the findings of the above-mentioned researchers very useful when investigating the text translation procedures and their application to the analysis of the translation of culture-specific lexical items.

## Conclusions

- Translation of cultural references are used to identify „foreignization” or „domestication” tendencies in the translator’s approach to handling the cultural load of a text.
- One of the main issues in the analysis of CR translations lies in the reliable identification of cultural references, which is to some extent an intuitive and therefore subjective process.
- The difference in the number between the culture-specific lexical units in both compared languages (EN – LV) appears due to the great number of omission used by the translator.

- When analysing the translations of culture-specific lexical units, four types of omissions were distinguished: (1) an omission of a word, (2) an omission of a phrase, (3) an omission of the sentence, (4) an omission of several sentences.

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## Summary

### **Contrastive Analysis of Culture References in John Grisham's Novel *The Pelican Brief***

The present article discusses the culture references and their translations from English into Latvian. The studies of authentic literature offer many facts of culture references. For those who do not read in the given foreign language there is a possibility to read the translated version of the fiction. The problem arises when the translation and the original work are compared, when the contrastive analysis is carried out. There has been studied the culture references in John Grisham's novels, here in particular the exemplification is based on the novel *The Pelican Brief*, at the same time comparing them to those in the translated text. Seven different text translation procedures are discussed and exemplified. Relationship between the source culture and target culture is shown graphically describing the distribution of the discussed text translation procedures.

## About the Author

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