

CULTURAL WORDS IN TRANSLATION CLASS

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Abstract: The author in her paper deals with translation of cultural words. Using one word, *lugger*, she suggests possible ways of dealing with culture in translation class, as well as ways of finding out about the meaning of cultural words and ways of searching for the most appropriate equivalent in the target language. The introductory activity is intuitive translation, whose adequacy is verified through visualisation of the denoted object and through a search in monolingual and translation dictionaries, in dictionaries of synonyms, encyclopaedias, corpora and other referential sources. The found definitions are the basis for compositional analysis, which revealed a difference in the sense component *size of a vessel*, which influences the choice of the most suitable translation of a cultural word in the target language. Among interesting findings is also a coincidence between historical facts and the usage of the word *lugger*.

Key words: cultural words, four levels of translation, dictionary and corpus search, transference, componential analysis, genre

Introduction

Part of a teacher training curriculum, Translation Course helps to develop students' command of the English language and enables them to experience a comparative view of English and Slovak. Teacher trainees appreciate the course as a challenging chance to put their language knowledge into practice - to practise grammar in a meaningful context and to enlarge the vocabulary. The latter is of great value as a means of mastering and understanding the meaning of the considered words in variety of situations and genres, which is not provided by textbooks and dictionaries. Translation of socially and culturally oriented texts creates a natural intercultural space in the classroom, making students contemplate diverse aspects of the current and past life in two different environments. I have chosen a cultural word from a tour guide text about the town of Hastings in order to illustrate strategies of translating culture-bound words and their underlying concepts. Students (translators) often start with intuitive translation, and then proceed with searching in monolingual dictionaries, translation dictionaries and dictionaries of synonyms, visual inputs, encyclopaedias, etc. If no referential source results in a satisfactory translation option, the translation method called componential analysis can be applied or experts in the given field can be addressed. Thus, a process of translation of a single word, *lugger*, is described as a possible model for copying with realia translation.

Four stages of translation

The initial enthusiasm often wanes when students have to deal with pitfalls of translation and when they find out how difficult it is to find the right word in the target language if cultural limitations occur. To make the process of translation a more transparent and systematic activity, I introduce the students to four stages of translation, as suggested by P. Newmark (1988, p. 22 - 30):

- textual level
- referential level
- cohesive level

- level of naturalness

Work at the textual level focuses mostly on syntax and transference of the sentences structure from the source text language to the target text language, which reveals differences between the two languages and suggests necessary shifts when verbalising the target text. At the referential level the translator decodes the meaning of the source text and refers the words to the represented concepts. Decoding of the meaning is followed by searching for the words in the target language that would express the meaning intended by the author of the source text as accurately and clearly as possible. This activity leads the translator to the level of cohesion, which is about combining the words in such a way that will, apart from fulfilling other requirements, sound natural to the reader of the translated text. Thus, at the cohesive level, it is necessary to consider a vast range of grammatical and lexical relationships, with collocations being among the crucial ones.

Cultural Word Exploration

The very first text that is analysed and translated in my translation classroom is a tour guide text about the town of Hastings. I have intentionally chosen translation into Slovak as it enables students to assess the translated text also on the level of naturalness. The students can see flaws in the text translated into their native tongue text better than in the text translated into a foreign language. Self-assessment of their own and their peers' texts makes them consider cultural words an important part of text cohesion as a word that does not match the context or is unclear to the reader is felt as a truly disturbing element.

Five ways of cultural words exploration are provided, which enhances both translation skills and culture understanding of students. The phrase *a colourful jumble of fishermens' luggers* creates an image and reflects the reality that the author of the original text tried to express via the combination of the selected words. What is important to decide is translation of *luggers* as it is the key noun of the given phrase.

I. Intuitive Translation

The following example illustrates how students coped with translation of a cultural word in the above mentioned text. Their translations were done prior to any formal instructions, with the exception of the information on four stages of translation; thus, can be considered an example of intuitive translation.

The original clause: On the fishermen's beach or "Stade" you'll find *a colourful jumble of fishermens' luggers*...

Students' translations: Na rybárskej pláži „Stade“ nájdete

1. *pestrofarebnú hŕstku lodiek...*
2. *pestrofarebnú zmes rybárskych lodí....*
3. *mix pestrých rybárskych plachetníc...*
4. *pestrofarebnú splet' rybárskych plachetníc...*
5. *hromadu farebných plachetníc...*
6. *hŕbu neusporiadaných rôznofarebných rybárskych člnov ...*
7. *pestrú paletu rybárskych člnov ...*
8. *množstvo pestrofarebných rybárskych člnov ...*

The eight randomly chosen students' translation of the phrase *fishermen's luggers* elicited eight translation options. Translators often have to consider more options and select the most appropriate one.

II. Visualisation

To make a translation decision easier, the students are provided with a picture of the fishermen's beach in Hastings, which is helpful at the referential level of translation. Thus, translators do not rely merely on the words but can use also a visual representation of a verbally described object. Pictures might help choose the best of the suggested options in Slovak and answer the following question: What can we see on the Hastings beach – *lod'ky*, *rybárske lode*, *rybárske plachetnice*, *plachetnice* or *rybárske člny*? If it is difficult to make up one's mind, more exploration work is needed in both English and Slovak.



III. Monolingual Dictionary Search

Although the minimum phrasal context as well as the pictures suggest what *lugger* is, it will be helpful to learn more about this word in order to find a suitable equivalent in Slovak. Firstly, a monolingual dictionaries search is conducted, resulting in the following definitions:

- a small boat with one or more sails
- small fishing boat rigged with one or more lugsails
- a small boat used for fishing, sailing, or coasting and having two or three masts, each with a lugsail, and two or three jibs set on the bowsprit
- a class of boats, widely used as [traditional fishing boats](#), particularly off the coasts of France, Scotland and England.

All the consulted dictionaries claim that the word *lugger* is a hyponym of the word *boat*, which is the basic and more frequently used word of the given semantic field. A *boat* is defined by Longman dictionary by its function as *a vehicle that travels across water*, using the hypernym *vehicle*. If a more specific member of the given semantic field is defined, more details are provided by monolingual dictionary definitions in order to differentiate hyponyms that can be found in a certain language / culture.

IV. Translation Dictionary and Dictionary of Synonyms

The word *lugger* occurs just in one online translation dictionary, which gives a descriptive and functional equivalent – *druh rybárskej plachetnice*, suggesting the existence of more kinds of fishing boats with sails, and a difference in lexicalization in two languages. While in English there is the abundance of words denoting different types of boats and ships, Slovak vocabulary is limited to a few basic types of vessels, further specified by adjectives. To justify this claim, the list of synonyms of the word *boat* is provided in both English and Slovak, using [thesaurus.yourdictionary.com](#) and [slovník.azet.sk/synonyma](#) websites:

Types of small boats include: rowboat, shell, scull, kayak, dugout, canoe, scow, jolly boat, raft, pinnace, launch, cockboat, motorboat, shallop, dory, Johnboat, galiot, catboat, tartan, sharp, pulp, hydrofoil, speedboat, sunfish, yawl, iceboat, sloop, cutter, ketch, schooner, gig, lifeboat, tugboat, barge, cockleshell, wherry, punt, outrigger, dinghy, pontoon, bateau, pirogue, racer, hydroplane, catamaran, trimaran, skiff, umiak, gondola, proa, longboat,

coracle, war canoe, clam boat, Baltimore buckeye, settee, bombard, flatboat, junk, collapsible boat, sponson, sharpie, ferry, houseboat, river boat, canal boat.

člnok p.čln: druh menšieho plavidla • člnok: rybársky čln, člnok • lod'ka: plavíť sa na lod'ke • bárka (čln s veslami al. plachtami): veslica (čln s veslami) • gondola (benátsky čln) • hovor. šlep (vlečný čln) • nár. hajov (Rázus, Jégé)

V. Componential Analysis

The translator can use an option found in a translation dictionary provided that it really corresponds to the contextual meaning of the original word. If there are doubts about the suitability of the suggested option of a culture related word, Newmark proposes two methods: transference and componential analysis (1988:96). When transference is used, original cultural names might enhance the feeling of the source culture, but sometimes can be confusing for the target reader. Then the usage of componential analysis is a good solution as it enables to identify and compare semantic components of the original word and its potential translations.

Referring to the monolingual dictionaries definitions, among crucial meaning items of the word *lugger* are size (small), function (fishing, sailing, coasting), description (one or more sails and musts), location (France, Scotland, England). Geographical specification points out that the word *lugger* denotes an object that is culture specific and will call for a specific solution when translating into Slovak. And it is geographical specification that has brought an interesting finding. According to the information published by Hastings Fishermen's Protection Society, the size of the *luggers* used in Hastings was different from the size suggested by dictionaries:

These were the '**large fishing craft**', the vessels the Hastings fishermen called 'luggers'. Up to 55 feet long overall (between the extreme ends of the hull), with three masts and a crew of eight-ten, the Hastings luggers were almost as big as the largest of the middle-water fishing vessels then found on the British coast.

Thus, not **small boats**, but **large fishing craft**, which leads to posing further questions: Is it an old-fashioned word or is it still in use? Was it used correctly in the source language text or was it used to add a historical and cultural colouring aiming at the creation of a more alluring image of the town of Hastings? Would native speaker use the word *lugger* when naming the boats seen in the illustrating pictures and seen also on the current Hastings beach? Is there a word in Slovak whose meaning would cover all the above-mentioned essential meaning components of the English word *lugger*? The first three questions are related to the usage of the word in the source culture while the fourth question focuses on its translation.

Conclusion – Pragmatic and Genre Considerations

In conclusion we will try to answer the questions that resulted from the examination of the word *lugger* and from the suggested options of translation. The questions related to the usage of the word in English reflect pragmatic and genre considerations. A Google search and a search in the corpora of British English, Contemporary American English and Historical American English suggest that the word *lugger* is not widely used anymore. The proofs: a/ BNC, which covers the late 20th century usage, provides just 10 examples, with 7 examples coming from one source; b/ COCA, covering the period from 1990 to 2011, provides 29 examples, with most examples referring to surnames or trademarks of diesel engines and just a few referring to a boat; c/ COHA (from 1800 to 2000) provides 128 examples, showing the

most frequent usage in the 1840 and 1880 decades. Surprisingly, this corresponds to the information found on the website of Hastings Fishermen's Protection Society, which outlines *luggers* to the period 1848 – 1874; d/ most of the visited Internet articles about Hastings mention *boat* not *lugger*. Thus, from the users' perspective, i.e. from a pragmatic point of view, *a lugger* might be considered a word now just occasionally used by current speakers. To find out about its current regional usage in Hastings, an interview with locals would have to be conducted.

To answer the fourth question, we turn to the Slovak language and culture. We search for a word in Slovak whose meaning would cover **all** the above-mentioned essential meaning components of the English word *lugger*. Realizing cultural differences, we have to set a more humble goal – a word in Slovak whose meaning covers **some** essential meaning components. The search corpus of translation options consists of the students' translations and the words from the Slovak dictionary of synonyms. Two translation options have been selected as the most matching ones the English phrase *fishing luggers* – *rybárske lode* and *rybárske plachetnice* as they meet the characteristics suggested by the above given examination best. We also consider the genre and the audience. If a cultural word is used in a more technical or professional type of text, a translation equivalent with more detailed description would be preferred, pointing out either technical or historical data.

The described procedure might seem too long and time-consuming; nevertheless, if a cultural word is a key term of a text, and its proper understanding is inevitable, the translator is obliged not to rely just on their intuition but conduct a thorough search.

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