

TRANSLATION STRATEGIES USED IN TRANSLATING CULTURE-SPECIFIC ITEMS OF THE PETER PIŠŤANEK'S NOVEL RIVERS OF BABYLON

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Abstract

In this paper, translation strategies used in the English translation of the novel *Rivers of Babylon*, written by Peter Pišťanek and translated into English by Peter Petro, were analysed. The analysis focuses on so called culture-specific items which often represent a challenge for the translator. As for translation strategies, there are several typologies suggested by experts in the field of translation studies. For the purpose of this paper, four categories or strategies were examined, namely the opposition of foreignizing and domesticating strategies (borrowing, substitution, addition etc.) as well as the opposition of generalization and explication. In the studied novel, the most common way of dealing with culture-specific items regarding translation strategies appeared to be generalization and domesticating strategies.

Key Words: translation strategy, culture, culture-specific item, naturalization, generalization

Abstrakt

Štúdia analyzuje prekladateľské stratégie použité v anglickom preklade románu *Rivers of Babylon* od Petra Pišťanka, ktorý preložil do angličtiny Peter Petro. Analýza sa zameriava na tzv. lingvokultúrny, ktoré pre prekladateľa často predstavujú výzvu. Čo sa týka prekladateľských stratégií, existuje niekoľko typológií vymedzených odborníkmi v oblasti translatológie. V tejto štúdii boli skúmané štyri prekladateľské stratégie, a to opozícia exotizácie a naturalizácie (výpožička, substitúcia, pridávanie atď.), ako aj opozícia generalizácie a explikácie. V predmetnom románe sa pri preklade kultúrnych špecifik ukázali ako najbežnejšie prekladateľské stratégie generalizácia a domestikácia.

Kľúčové slová: prekladateľská stratégia, kultúra, lingvokultúrny, naturalizácia, generalizácia

Introduction

There are multiple translation strategies that translator opt for during the process of translation. This mainly concerns the lexis. As for grammar and syntax, the rules are rather consistent i.e. translators follow the rules and conventions of the target language and so manage to transfer sentences and texts from source to target language. However, what may be one of the cases of applying various translation strategies to the structure of sentences is for instance the use of long and complex sentences or, on the other hand, of short and apt clauses. This may be one of the features contributing to the author's style of writing.

Anthony Pym (2016) summarizes different translation solutions which are used by translators and he divides them into several groups.

Table 1 A typology of translation solution types (source: Pym, 2016: 220)

Copying	Copying Words	Copying Sounds
		Copying Morphology
		Copying Script
	Copying Structure	Copying Prosodic Features
		Copying Fixed Phrases
		Copying Text Structure ...
Expression Change	Perspective Change	Changing Sentence Focus
		Changing Semantic Focus
		Changing Voice ...
	Density Change	Generalization/Specification
		Explicitation/Implication
		Multiple Translation
		Resegmentation ...
	Compensation	New Level of Expression
		New Place in Text (notes, paratexts) ...
	Cultural Correspondence	Corresponding Idioms
		Corresponding Culture-Specific Items ...
		Correction/Censorship/Updating
Content Change	Text Tailoring	Omission of Content
		Addition of Content

1 Translation strategies applied in translation of culture-specific items

The creativity and the work of the translator can be observed in, among other aspects, translation solutions and strategies applied to translation of specific vocabulary. By this we mean above all the culture-specific items. These items were called by different terms by different authors, as listed in Veselica Majhut (2012), they are called “cultural word” (Ivir and Newmark), “realia” (Florin), “cultural reference” (Mailhac and Olk), “culture-specific item” (Franco Aixelá and Kwecinski) or “extralinguistic cultural reference” (Pedersen). They are related to a certain culture, in case of translation, it is foremost the source culture, and usually, they denote features which are well-known and perceived as something “normal” in the source culture, however, they are unknown to the target culture.

There are several classifications and ways of translating culture-specific items. Vladimir Ivir’s (1987) classification is summarized by Veselica Majhut (2012), he speaks of the following strategies:

1. Borrowing
2. Definition
3. Literal Translation or Calque
4. Substitution
5. Lexical creation

6. Omission

7. Addition

Veselica Majhut (2012) also lists Newmark's types of translation procedures (1995):

1. Transference

2. Cultural equivalent

3. Literal translation

4. Classifier

5. Componential analysis

6. Neutralization (functional or descriptive equivalent)

7. Translation label

8. Naturalization

9. Deletion

10. Accepted standard translation or recognized translation

11. Paraphrase

12. Couplet

2 Translating culture-specific features in Rivers of Babylon

The creativity and skillfulness of a translator can be observed in translation of culture-specific items. This is also one of the reasons why the Slovak novel *Rivers of Babylon* was chosen as corpus. Its language is affected by the source culture. The culture and the language of the former Czechoslovakia before and after Velvet revolution has its own features. Also, the political regime in Czechoslovakia was different from the one experienced by the target audience i.e. by the English-speaking readers. It must have been a challenge for the translator to transfer several words, preserving their connotations, into English. The translator could opt for various strategies and had to decide which solution would be the best in order to achieve the desired cultural transfer. Peter Petro himself admits that it was not easy to translate the novel by Piš'ánek.¹ He states that he did not originally want to use additions in his translation, but eventually, he wanted the text to be communicative, so the communicative function of the translation prevailed.

2.1 Generalization vs. Explicitation

Generalization and explicitation create an opposition of strategies which belong to the subcategory of density change as suggested by Pym (2016) in his typology.

Generalization is a strategy of using a general word in the target language which adequately covers the notion which has narrower meaning in the source culture. A specific word of the source

¹ <http://www.litcentrum.sk/36170>

culture is replaced (substituted) by a general term in the target culture. This may be perceived as a form of substitution, as defined by Ivir (1987) in his typology of translation strategies or as neutralization, as understood by Newmark (1995) in his typology. If the translation of a specific word requires generalization and substitution, the strategy is by Levý called “noetic objectivism” (Jettmarová, 2011)

Explicitation, on the other hand, means finding a specific word in the target language, some kind of an example of the word which has more general and broader meaning in the source language. It is also a type of substitution (Ivir, 1987) and may be understood as a type of componential analysis, as from the typology by Newmark (1995) as one component of a meaning is used which represents a word in the target language.

The chart below shows some examples of generalization applied in the translation of the studied novel.

Slovak original	Explanation	English translation	Translation strategy
domáce potreby		shops selling household goods	generalization
Mototechna		a car parts shop	generalization
Kožatex		a leather goods shop	generalization
emdžetka	a well-known textile factory in Bratislava	a textile factory	generalization
fiškál	colloquial expression denoting a lawyer as well as a cunning person	the lawyer	generalization
na vojne	during the compulsory military service	in the army	generalization

The translator mostly used general terms to translate several words which are culture-bound and rather specific for the source Slovak culture. As also stated by the translator, the main function of the analysed translation is to communicate i.e. to make the target text understandable and adequate for the target culture.

2. 2 Domesticating vs. Foreignizing strategy

The second opposition is the one of the two strategies focusing on culture used in the process of translating culture-specific items, the opposition of domesticating vs. foreignizing strategy. This distinction was presented by Newmark (Baker, Malmkjaer 2005: 240).

As for the translation solutions from the typology by Pym (2016), these two strategies could be discussed within the subgroup of cultural correspondence, as this is the main concern when talking about domestication and foreignization, the translator needs to decide which culture will be preferred, the target or the source culture.

Domestication or domesticating strategy means that the translation strategy is target-oriented, the translator chooses an equivalent which is well known within the target culture. This is in some typologies called naturalization (Newmark, 1995, Popovič 1971, 1975).

Foreignization or foreignizing strategy, on the other hand, is the strategy that is source-oriented, the translator keeps the word in its original source language form and so tries to incorporate the word into the target culture and so educate the target audience and enrich their vocabulary and cultural awareness. This strategy may be also understood as borrowing, a strategy introduced by Ivir (1987) in his typology. If the words of the source culture are transferred into target culture without change, it is by Levý called “noetic subjectivism” (Jettmarová, 2011). Popovič (1971, 1975) also calls this strategy exotization.

The chart below shows some examples of domesticating strategies applied in the translation of the discussed novel.

Slovak original	Explanation	English translation	Translation strategy
poľnohospodárska škola	a type of secondary school	agricultural college	domesticating
slobodárne	a type of cheap accommodation provided to single people by the government	dormitory	domesticating
samoobsluha		supermarket	domesticating
na vojne	during the compulsory military service	in the army	domesticating
vo varieté		in the Cabaret show	domesticating
bytom vo Viedni		residing in Vienna, Austria	domesticating, addition

It can be seen that domestication is the type of translation strategy that was often used by the translator in the process of translating culture-specific items. The original Slovak words are rather culture-bound and specific and they would most probably not be understood in the target culture, had they been left in their original form in order to achieve exotization. It would be the case of foreignizing strategy. However, this type of strategy appears not to be common when translation is done from a smaller language into a large language.

Conclusion

In the studied novel, the most common way of dealing with culture-specific items regarding translation strategies appeared to be generalization and domesticating strategies. Taking into consideration the size of the two cultures and languages – the small Slovak source culture and the

huge English speaking audience of the target culture – the choice of the mentioned strategies is understandable.

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