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REALIA IN LITERARY TEXTS: ITS CULTURAL VALUE IN TRANSLATION

The given article deals with the cultural value of realia, namely its translation in literary texts. We analyze the interaction of language, translation and culture; explore the notion of realia, its classification as well as various translation techniques.

The aim of the research is to analyze realias in Armenian texts and to display their possible equivalents in the English language.

Key words: realia, culture, literary text, equivalent, translation techniques, transliteration, transcription, omission, substitution, generalization.

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РЕАЛИЯ В ЛИТЕРАТУРНЫХ ТЕКСТАХ: ЕЁ КУЛЬТУРНАЯ ЦЕННОСТЬ В ПЕРЕВОДЕ

В данной статье рассматриваются реалии в литературных произведениях. В центре изучения – культурная значимость реалий при переводе. Мы изучаем взаимодействие языка, перевода и культуры; рассматриваем понятие реалии, классификацию и различные приемы перевода.

Цель исследования- выявить реалии в армянских литературных произведениях и их возможные эквиваленты в английском переводе.

Ключевые слова: реалия, культура, литературный текст, эквивалент, приемы перевода, транслитерация, транскрипция, опущение, замена, обобщение.

Նարինե Մինասյան
ԱրՊՀ

ԻՐՈՂՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ ԳՐԱԿԱՆ ՏԵԲՍԵՐՈՒՄ. ԴՐԱ ՄՇԱԿՈՒԹԱՅԻՆ ԱՐԺԵՔԸ ԹԱՐԳՄԱՆՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՄԵՋ

Հոդվածում դիտարկվում է իրոյթների /ռեալիաների/ մշակութային արժեքը գրական երկերի թարգմանության մեջ: Վեր է լուծվում լեզվի, թարգմանության և մշակույթի փոխհարաբերությունը, իրոյթի հասկացույթը, նրա դասակարգումը և թարգմանության տարբեր հնարները:

Ուսումնասիրության նպատակն է վերլուծել իրոյթները հայերեն գրական տեքստերում և արտացոլել նրանց հնարավոր համարժեքները անգլերեն լեզվում:

Հիմնաբաներ՝ իրոյթ, մշակույթ, գրական տեքստ, համարժեք, թարգմանության հնար, տարադարձում, փոխադրություն, սրում, փոխարինում, ընդհանրացում:

Throughout history, language has proved to be the best tool with which human beings could express most of their feelings, needs, experiences and attitudes, and at the same time, entrap the knowledge and traditions of the time to remain available not only for the next generations of the same speaking community, but for other nations and ethnicities as well. The problem, however, is that not all people share the same language and culture.

First of all it is necessary to reveal the interaction of language, translation and culture. This problem is investigated by S. Ter-Minasova, M. Bergelson, E. Vereschagin, V. Kostomarov, V. Komissarov, M. Brandes, L. Barkhudarov, G. Toury, A. D.Schweitzer, J. Catford, Newmark, Malinowski, Munday, and many others.

Larson defines culture as “a complex of beliefs, attitudes, values, and rules which a group of people shares.”¹ Hongwei regards language as a portrait of culture.² The role of culture in language was analyzed by Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf. Sapir, like Malinowski, was convinced that language could only be interpreted within a culture. However, he went further, suggesting that “no two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels.”³ Kramersch’s belief on the relationship between language and culture is worthwhile. She believes that: language is a system of signs that is seen as having itself a cultural value.⁴

¹ Larson M.L., Meaning based translation: A Guide to Cross-Language Equivalence, Lanham and New York: University Press of America, 1984, 34 p.

² Hongwei C., Cultural difference and translation, New York: New York press, 1999, 13 p.

³ Sapir E., Culture, language and personality. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1949, 69 p.

⁴ Kramersch C., Language and culture, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, 98 p.

Anyone who has ever attempted to translate a text knows that knowledge of the languages alone does not guarantee success. Toury states that “translation is a kind of activity which inevitably involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions, i.e., at least two sets of norm-system on each level”.¹

So only a bilingual and bicultural translator is able to carry out a complete translation.²

As it was mentioned above translation and culture move in the same path in parallel to each other. House’s statement about translation confirms these findings. She remarks that: translation is not only a linguistic act, it is also a cultural one, an act of communication across cultures. Translation always involves both language and culture simply because the two cannot really be separated. Language is culturally embedded: it both expresses and shapes cultural reality, and the meanings of linguistic items, be they words or larger segments of text, can only be understood when considered together with the cultural context in which these linguistic items are used.

House states that “in the process of translation, therefore, not only two languages but also two cultures come into contact. In these sense, translating is a form of intercultural communication.”³

V. Komissarov considers that “translation is a complicated and many-sided kind of human activity”. Though usually people speak about translation “from one language into another”, actually, it is not simply a replacement of one language with another. The different cultures, people, ways of thinking, literatures, epochs, levels of development, traditions and world views clash with each other in translation.”⁴

According to M. Brandes, “translation is a kind of language mediation where the content of the foreign text (original) is transferred to other languages by way of creating a communicatively equivalent text in this language.”⁵

In L. Barkhudarov’s opinion, “translation is a process of transformation of a speech product in one language into a speech product in another language, the invariable meaning being preserved.”⁶

G. Toury believes that “translation is a kind of activity which inevitably involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions.”⁷

Literary texts display many linguistic peculiarities, as well as social and cultural aspects of our lives and, thus, we can assert that literary translation is one of the main ways of communication across cultures. One of the problems a translator can face translating literary texts arises from the fact that some words or phrases denoting objects, facts, phenomena, etc... are so deeply rooted in their source culture and so specific (and perhaps exclusive or unique) to the culture that they have no equivalent in the target culture, be it because they are unknown, or because they are not yet codified in the target language. Not only two languages interact in translation process, but also two cultures having both common features and national specificity. Revealing this specificity is crucial in studying intercultural communication and translation.

The aim of the research is to analyze realias in Armenian texts and to display their possible equivalents in the English language. The term realia (Robinson) can be substituted for culture-specific concepts (Baker), cultural words (Newmark), others label as the culture-bound terms or culture-specific items. All these labels cover specific objects which may be defined as ‘words and combinations of words denoting objects and concepts characteristic of the way of life, the culture, the social and historical development of one nation and alien to another’.

According to the dictionary definition, realia is a culture-specific word or phrase which is often difficult, if not impossible to translate into target language (Latin *realis-actual, true, and material*).⁸ Vereshchagin and Kostomarov consider realias to be words, word combinations or phrases expressing notions which are unfamiliar to another culture and language; words referring to the particular cultural elements, which are typical for culture A and absent in culture B, and are unrenderable, which have no equivalents in target languages.⁹

We have analyzed Armenian literary texts (H. Tumanyan’s works “The liar”, “The miller king”, “The sparrow”, “The master and the labourer”, “Life’s a party”, “Gikor”, “My friend Neso”, Ghazaros Aghayan’s work “Anahit” and some others) and revealed the following realias which we would like to present basing on Vlahov and Florin’s classification:¹⁰ 1) geographical (geographic formations, man-made geographical objects, flora and fauna that is special to a certain place) Vana Katu 2) ethnographic (food and drink, clothing, places of living, furniture, pots, vehicles, names of occupations and tools) բաղարջ – զթթված խմորից թխած հաց; խաշ – անասունի ոտքերից, գլխից պատրաստվող կերակուր; լոշիկ – լավաշ, թոնրում թխված տափակ, բարակ հաց; մածուն – հատուկ մերանով կաթից ստացվող մթերք; չիբուխ – ծխամորճ, ծխափող; քուրք – մուշտակ; փոստալ – մորթե հնամաշ գլխարկ; տրեխ – կիսամշակ կաշվից պատրաստված ոտքի անկրունկ հագնելիք; խալիչա – գորգ;

¹ Toury G., *The nature and role of norms in translation, the translation studies reader*, London and New York: Routledge press, 1978-2004, 55 p.

² Armstrong N., *Translation, linguistics, culture: A French-English handbook*, New York: Now York press, 2005, 44 p.

³ House J., *Translation*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University press, 2009, 85 p.

⁴ Komissarov V.N., *Introducing Modern Translation Studies*, Moscow: Moscow press, 2001, 103 p.

⁵ Brandes M., *Translational text analysis*, Moscow: Moscow press, 2001, 23 p.

⁶ Barkhudarov L.S., *Language and Translation*, Moscow: Moscow press, 1975, 39 p.

⁷ Toury G., *The nature and role of norms in translation, the translation studies reader*, London and New York: Routledge press, 1978-2004, 28 p.

⁸ CED, *Collins English Dictionary*, 3rd edition, Glasgow: Harper Collins, 1991, 42 p.

⁹ Vereshchagin E. and Kostomarov V., *Language and Culture*, Moscow: Moscow press, 1988, 59 p.

¹⁰ Влахов С., Флорин С., *Непереводимое в переводе*, Москва: Московская пресса, 1970, 44 с.

չուստ – հողաթափ տանը հագնելու համար; սուլեր – մաշիկ; ցնցոտի – մաշած, պատառոտած, քրքրված շոր 3) art and culture (music and dance, musical instruments, feasts, games, rituals and their characters) գուռնա – արեվելյան սրինգի մի տեսակ; թմբուկ – գլանի նման հարվածային գործիք; սազ – պղնձե լարերով արեվելյան երաժշտական գործիք 4) ethnic (names of people, nicknames) խնամիներ – ամուսիններից մեկի ծնողները and 5) socio-political (administrative- territorial units, offices and representatives, ranks, military realia) շահ – արեվելյան երկրներում միապետի տիրոջ; վեզիր – Մերձավոր Արեվելքի մի շարք շրջաններում բարձրաստիճան պաշտոնյա; աշուղ – գուսան. There are different classifications of realia (Newmark, Baker, Klaudy, Gambier) as well.

According to Newmark the role of the translator is to facilitate the transfer of message, meaning and cultural elements from one language into another and create an equivalent response from the receivers. He conferred equal importance to both linguistic and cultural differences between the source language and the target language and concluded that differences between cultures may cause more severe complications for the translator than differences in language structure.

There are various translation techniques of realia. Newmark suggests two opposing methods: *transference* and *componential analysis*.¹

Katan suggests three solutions: borrowing or adaptation, omission and creating one's own expression.²

Toury concludes that there are two opposing methods. The first is transcription and transliteration to keep the feeling of strangeness in the target text. The second is when translators try to substitute the realia with target language analogues.³

Klaudy mentions generalization, circumlocutions, additions and omission.⁴

J.House has introduced the central distinction between overt translation and covert translation.⁵

According to Vlahov and Florin there are 3 approaches to the translation of a text containing realia: substitution, approximation (generalization, functional analogue, description, explanation, interpretation) and contextualization.⁶

Having studied a number of works by famous Armenian writers we noticed that very often the real meanings of culturally bound expressions have been distorted. In many cases cultural expressions have been omitted or generalized.

Եվ երբ ճանապարհի ընկանք, ես ձիու վրա, իսկ Նեսոն իր *ցնցոտիներով, տրեխներով, կապենով* ձիու ետևից, ինձ սաստիկ ծանր եկավ:

As we started, I on horseback and Neso in *worn out clothes* walking alongside, I found this weighed too heavily on my heart.

Ամբողջ գիշեր հյուրերը փորձում էին *յարխուշտա* պարել սովորել: Ինչքան էլ որ ջանք թափեցին, արդյունքը գովելի չէր:

All the night the foreign guests were trying *to learn to dance*. Despite their efforts, the result was not complimentary.

The Armenian scientists S. Gasparyan and L.Gasparyan reveal a number of realias in 'History of Armenia' by Movses Khorenatsi which are of great historical and cultural value due to the national colouring they are charged with. One of the realias is the word *տանուտեր*, in the target text the given word appears in its transliterated form (tanuter). Though transliteration is an accepted method of transformation in the theory of translation, it cannot be considered reliable in the process of translating historical realias as transliterated forms without any additional explanations donot reveal the significance of the culture-bound elements in the context. *Sutnututer* is explained as *ցեղապետ, ազգապետ, նահապետ, իշխան* and has a number of interlingual variants in English (tribal head, tribal lord, tribal ruler).⁷

According to Diana Hambarzumyan equivalent-lacking words in English are names of specific national phenomena, a number of "ordinary" words, some grammar forms, and categories. The author analyzes William Faulkner's Sartoris translated into Armenian and Ruben Hovsepian's "I am your memory" translated into English. She concludes that a translator should reveal equivalent lacking words in the source language and their contextual substitutes (loan words, approximate substitutes, lexical transformations, an explanation) in the target language.⁸

G. Gasparyan in the scientific article entitled "Pragmatic adaptation of nationally conditioned linguistic elements in the translation of literary texts" deals with the problem of inadequate translation which distorts the real meanings of expressions bearing cultural significance and value. Vivid examples are presented from W. Saroyan's "My cousin Dikran, the orator". One of the most interesting elements of national-emotional register is the interjection Ahkh (when the Armenians experience painful and exciting emotions they sigh this way). In the English objective reality there is no such interjection, and in order to be understood the author employs an explanation with the help of the verb "to groan"- "Ahkh, the old man would groan, it is all beyond me. I don't remember." In the Armenian translation not only the interjection, but also the semantic meaning of the verb "to groan" has been preserved "Ա՛խ – հոգոց էր քաշում ձերունին". However, in the Russian variant of translation G.

¹ Newmark P., Approaches to translation, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1981, 45 p.

² Katan D., Translating Cultures. An introduction for Translators, Interpreters and Mediators, Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 1999, 21 p.

³ Toury G., The nature and role of norms in translation, the translation studies reader, London and New York: Routledge press, 1978-2004, 27 p.

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⁵ House J., Translation, Oxford and New York: Oxford University press, 2009, 65 p.

⁶ Влахов С., Флорин С., Непереводимое в переводе, Москва: Московская пресса, 1970, 48с.

⁷ Gasparyan S. and Gasparyan L., On the English Translation of 'History of Armenia' by Movses Khorenatsi: Problems of Equivalence, VEM Pan-Armenian Journal №3(28), 2009, 154-155pp.

⁸ Համբարձումյան Դ., Գրական-գեղարվեստական թարգմանչի ձեռնարկ, Երեվան: Երեվան լինգվա, 2009, 140 էջ

Gasparyan reveals the semantic change of the mentioned utterance's meaning. "А-а, - зевал старик..." The translator substitutes the interjection Ax for A-a as it will be better perceived by Russian readers. However, such kind of free interpretation of the original text is quite inappropriate as it distorts the whole meaning of the utterance, moreover a Russian reader in this case does not need the pragmatic adaptation of the linguistic material. It should be emphasized that the translators' task becomes more complicate as the national linguistic element has already been subjected to a certain pragmatic adaptation by the author himself for English readers.¹

The following example is taken from Khachatur Abovyan's "Վերք Հայաստանի": The translation of the word *խանութ* is a brilliant illustration of different approaches of translators to the problem of realia:

*Մեկ աղջիկուներ, շատ տեսակով
Անուն՝ Ծովհնար խանութ:*

Shalyan comments the word *խանութ* in the footnote, Levon Surmelyan translates Ծովհնար խանութ as "Beautiful Dzovinar", Misha Kudian as "the beautiful Dzovinar", "the fair Dzovinar", "Princess Dzovinar", "Dzovinar".

Some examples of inadequate translation are taken from the epic "David of Sassoun". The analysis made on the basis of three versions of translation shows that translators of the Armenian epic approach to this problem differently. In Artin Shalyan's translation we find a large number of footnotes in which explanations of culture-specific words are given with the help of transcription and transliteration. The first lines of Shalyan's translation are:

*Ըսկիզբն էր կրոնապաշտ Խալիֆան
Մեկ էլ հայոց Գագիկ թագավոր...:
In the beginning there was a pagan Khalif
There was also an Armenian king Cagik.*

Khalif is explained in the footnote in the following way: Khalif- a word of Arabic origin, used by minstrels of the Middle East as a substitute for the word "king".

Khandut Nersisyan 223interchangable. Moreover, such realias as "pasha", "emir", "vezir", (used in the text) belonging to the same group of socio-historical realias are not commented in the footnotes.

But on the other hand, the substitute of the word "Khalif" for "King" helps the reader guess that the author tells about the supreme governor of the country, who has the same high social status as a king.

Levon Surmelyan does not explain the word "Khalif". He suggests that a reader of average erudition should know such words as "Khalif", "vezir", "pasha", "saz", "amir", "xurjin" belonging to eastern lexis.

The beginning of the epic in Surmelyan's translation is the following:

It all began with the feud between the Caliph of Baghdad Senacherib and the king of Armenia.

The eastern and archaic word *վարիլ* is translated by Shalyan in the following way:

*Վարիլ, վագիր ընկան, Մըսրա Մելիքի նո-ձենյագին
The vizier and deputies fell on their knees, kissed Melik's hand and feet
Պաճիկ թագավորն էլ ասավ իր վագիր, վարիլ, Առավիր սինդներ
King Bajig took with him his vizier, Ministrels and counselors*

Shalyan translates the word *վարիլ* as "deputy" or "minister" but these words do not correspond with the reality of the "the Middle Armenian period" depicted in the epic.

Culture-specific words(in this case- archaic words) are a source of information of a certain period of time. The following example also shows incorrespondence between the middle Armenian period and modern words which are used in the translation of Surmelyan:

*Have a cup of tea or coffee with me.
We shall prepare...your coffee, tea*

L. Surmelyan substituted աղբյուրի ջուր, 7 տարվա նռն գինի for "tea and coffee". The translator breaks the "time distance" and using the words "tea and coffee" modernizes the context of the VII-X centuries.

The following realia լավաշ belonging to the material culture group is translated by Kudian within the text, by means of transliteration: *and took a quantity of lavash – the sheet – bread eaten by Armenians*. Surmelyan gives the meaning of this realia in the same way: *thin sheet of bread, flat sheet of bread*.

A very interesting example is the translation of the following realia *հարիսա* also belonging to the material culture group. Shalyan comments in a very detailed way: *Harisa is a thick porridge of lamb's meat and wheat served to those attending the memorial service*.

Surmelyan uses two methods of realia explanation: within the text and in the footnotes. *On the feast of St. Mary people go to church and cauldrons of porridge are cooked with minced meat which people eat in communal meals for the salvation of the souls of their dead. In the country districts no holiday feast is complete without this porridge harisa cooked slowly in the tonir*.

Kudian translated the realia *հարիսա* within the text by means of transliteration.

I waited for it to end and the priest to bless the hareessa for the offering... Allas I would enjoyed that meat dish so much. The aged widow herself began to serve this very special dish...And she took a large earthenware pot, scooped out the hareessa added the molten butter which went with it...

¹ Гаспарян Г. Р., Прагматическая адаптация национально обусловленных языковых элементов при переводе художественного текста, Перевод: Язык и Культура, Ереван: Лингва, 2009, 30с.

In order to be able to translate a work of verbal creativity adequately, the translator must have a good command of both languages-the source language and the target language. In addition to this, good knowledge concerning the global vertical context of the work (i.e. the information of historical-philological, social, political, geographical, etc. character, the work of verbal art has been impregnated with), as well as artistic flair is salient in the process of translation.¹

The translator here is expected not to merely concentrate on words as language units but also dig out their inner resources and the semantic, stylistic and associative connotations acquired by them in this or that particular context, very often even changing the words, if necessary, and introducing equivalent images into the translation.

Inappropriate or inconsistent cultural displacements deform the image and create the reader's incorrect idea of the initial culture and the author's intention.

Thus, we can state that literary texts including culturally bound expressions or otherwise called realias should be translated taking into account their cultural value in order to achieve the desirable effect and to produce a worthy interpretation.

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