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LEXEMES DENOTING CULTURE-SPECIFIC ELEMENTS
IN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE FICTION AND WAYS OF RENDERING
BY MEANS OF THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE

(Based on the Novel *Pushkin and the Queen of Spades* by A. Randall)

В статье освещены вопросы определения, классификации и перевода реалий, функционирующих в англоязычном художественном дискурсе, на материале романа Э. Рэндалл «Пушкин и Пиковая Дама». Установлено, что в научной литературе нет единого определения термина *реалия*. Лексемы, номинирующие реалии, являются неотъемлемой частью любой культуры и, соответственно, художественных произведений, относящихся к определенной культуре. Была предложена тематическая классификация реалий, а также возможные способы их перевода средствами русского языка.

To begin with, it must be stated that there is no clear-cut definition of the vocabulary comprising cultural aspects pertaining to individual countries and their cultural heritage. In non-fiction literature, this vocabulary is normally referred to as background vocabulary, culturally-marked words, country-specific words, culture-specific elements or items, etc. Sometimes, these lexemes are defined as a special means of expression implying the former generally name various objects, items, phenomena, etc., pertaining to the life, culture and peculiarities of social development of a particular country without yet being familiar to the representatives of other cultures.

P. Newmark introduces the notion of a “cultural word” [1, p. 96] which the readership is unlikely to understand, and the translation strategies for this kind of concept depend on the particular text-type, requirements of the readership and importance of the cultural word in the text. M. Baker refers to such cultural words as “culture-specific items” conceding they may express a concept which is totally unknown in the target culture. She points out that the concept in question may be “abstract or concrete, it may relate to a religious belief, a social custom, or even a type of food” [2, p. 21]. C. Nord uses the term “cultureme” to refer to these culture specific items. He defines cultureme as “a cultural phenomenon that is present in culture X but not present (in the same way) in culture Y” [3, p. 34]. Y. Gambier also refers to such concepts as “culture-specific references” and asserts that they connote different aspects of life: “Culture-specific references connoting different aspects of everyday life such as education, politics, history, art, institutions, legal systems, units of measurement, place names, foods and drinks, sports and national pastimes, as experienced in different countries and nations of the world” [4, p. 159].

What must be kept in mind is that such words do not normally have exact rendering equivalents in languages other than the original one and have to be approached individually by fiction translators. Cultural translation is one in which

additions are made which cannot be directly derived from the original wording. Thus, these additions might take the form of ideas culturally foreign to the source language or elements which are simply inserted to provide necessary background information.

Indeed, one of the most difficult problems while translating fiction texts consists in the proper way of rendering differences between cultures. People of a given culture look at things from their own perspective. However, in the case of similar cultures the conditions are not the same: when the cultures are similar, there is less difficulty in translating. This is because both languages will probably have terms that are more or less equivalent for the various aspects of the culture. When the cultures are very different, it is often difficult to find equivalent lexical items.

Thus, a translator who uses a cultural approach is simply recognizing that every language contains elements which are derived from its culture, that every text is anchored in a specific culture, and that conventions of text production and reception vary from culture to culture. Awareness of such issues can at times make it more appropriate to think of translation as a process which occurs between cultures rather than simply between languages. Most “cultural words”, according to P. Newmark, “are easy to detect since they are associated with a particular language and cannot be literally translated. There are cases where literal translation would distort the meaning and thus the translation may include an appropriate descriptive-functional equivalent” [1, p. 95].

The novel under consideration is *Pushkin and the Queen of Spades* written by Alice Randall, a contemporary American novelist [5]. The novel elucidates the life of Windsor Armstrong, an African-American literature professor whose son is about to marry a Russian lap dancer. The interesting fact about the novel is that it contains a number of both American and Russian culture-specific elements with the story set in both the countries. In this article, I would like to pinpoint American cultureemes used by the author and suggest the ways of rendering them by means of the Russian language.

Hence, according to their subject-matter, culture-specific items in the novel can be divided into the following groups.

1. Proper names: *Marvin Gaye*, *John Harvard*, ‘*Wu-Tang Klan*’, *Robert Diggs*, etc.

2. Place names: *Brentwood*, *Broadway*, *Cleveland Park*, *Connecticut Avenue*, *the Cumberland*, etc.

3. Items pertaining to the US cultural heritage: *Batman*, “*Bewitched*”, “*Breathing*”, “*Closet Freak*”, “*Happy Home*”, *Harvard’s Widener Library*, “*Kubla Khan*”, etc.

4. Items pertaining to the social and political development of the US: *Afro-Russianness*, *the CIA*, *Communist Club*, *Episcopal Boys’ School*, *the FBI*, etc.

5. Items relating to Americans’ every-day life: *beanpole*, *blazer*, *blubberbubble*, *boogie*, *broad*, *browny*, *clique*, etc.

The suggested ways of rendering such vocabulary go as follows.

1. The method of transcription, sometimes combined with that of transliteration, can be used while translating proper names and place names (it must be noted, however, that at times it is recommended to make some additional remarks in footnotes for readers to better understand the essence of the lexical unit in question): *Marvin Gaye* – ‘Марвин Гэй (1939–1984, американский музыкант, стоявший у истоков современного ритм-энд-блюза)’, *John Harvard* – ‘Джон Гарвард (1607–1638, английский миссионер, в честь которого назван Гарвардский университет)’, *Cleveland Park* – ‘Кливленд-Парк (район г. Вашингтона)’, etc.;

2. Word for word translation, or the method of semantic borrowings, can be employed in the following cases: *NFL* – ‘НФЛ (Национальная футбольная лига)’, *World’s Fair* – ‘Всемирная выставка’, “*The Top of the Flame*” – ‘кафе «На вершине пламени»’, etc.

3. The method of providing functional equivalents can be resorted to when translating the following lexemes: *Prohibition* – ‘«Сухой закон» в США в 1920–1933 гг.’, *hillbilly* – ‘деревенщина’, *Ferris wheel* – ‘колесо обозрения’, etc.

4. The method of transformation is often used when translating the titles of books, songs, movies, some organizations, etc. Sometimes, if the translator considers it necessary, additional remarks can be provided: “*Bewitched*” – ‘«Моя жена меня приворожила» (американская комедия положений, транслировавшаяся на канале ABC с 1964 по 1972 гг.)’, “*Closet Freak*” – ‘«Притворно-нормальный» (песня американского рэп-исполнителя Си-Ло)’, “*Make it Clap*” – ‘«Давай же хлопать» (песня американского рэп-исполнителя Басты Раймз)’, etc.;

5. The method of substituting subnotions for generic notions is also popular: “*Cutty Sark*” – ‘виски’, “*Now and Later*” – ‘жевательные конфеты’, “*Jim Beam*” – ‘бурбон’, etc.;

6. Descriptive translation is used if all the methods mentioned above prove abortive: *negritude* – ‘самосознание африканских народов’, *niggerati* – ‘ироничное название группы афроамериканских художников и других деятелей искусства периода «Гарлемского Возрождения» (1920-е гг.)’, *graduation gown* – ‘мантия, предназначенная для церемонии вручения дипломов’, *snagger* – ‘уверенная походка’, etc.

It seems possible to conclude by reiterating that words containing cultural aspects always represent a challenge for a fiction translator. Nonetheless, the conflict of cultures can be coped with provided the translator is a competent specialist aware of the ways culture-specific elements can and should be rendered by means of the target language and capable of making the right choice of the latter depending on the context and target readership.

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The article deals with the issue of culture-specific elements functioning in English-language fiction as well as their classification and the ways of rendering by means of the Russian language.