

PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF CULTURE-SPECIFIC WORDS IN LITERARY DISCOURSE

В данной статье освещаются проблемы определения культурно-специфической лексики, ее функционирования в художественном дискурсе, а также передачи средствами языка перевода. Установлено, что данный пласт лексики играет важную роль в процессе создания особой образности, колорита художественного произведения, а также передачи страноведческой информации. Материалом для исследования послужил роман «Пушкин и Пиковая Дама» современной американской писательницы Э. Рэндалл. В статье предлагаются способы передачи культурно-специфической лексики средствами русского языка (транскрипция и транслитерация, калькирование, использование функционального аналога, трансформация, родо-видовая замена, описательный перевод). Выбор конкретного способа перевода реалий обусловлен необходимостью адекватной передачи коммуникативно-прагматических установок автора художественного произведения.

К л ю ч е в ы е с л о в а: культурно-специфическая лексика; культурема; прагматические функции; художественный дискурс; способы передачи.

The article elucidates the views on defining culture-specific vocabulary, its functioning in the literary discourse as well as the ways of rendering in the target language. It is stated that culture-specific words play an important role in forming the unique cultural atmosphere of a given work of fiction while also carrying essential country-specific information. The practical part of the research is based on the novel “Pushkin and the Queen of Spades” by Alice Randall. The following ways of rendering culture-specific words by means of the Russian language are suggested: transcription and transliteration, semantic borrowings, functional equivalents, transformation, substitution, and descriptive translation. The choice of the specific way of rendering such words in the target language is determined by the necessity to convey the communicative and pragmatic aspects of a given work of fiction.

Key words: culture-specific vocabulary; cultureme; pragmatic functions; literary discourse; ways of rendering.

So far, scholars have seemingly not agreed on the clear-cut definition of the vocabulary comprising the cultural aspect 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, culturemes, etc. Sometimes, these lexemes are defined as a special means of expression implying that the former generally denote various objects, items, phenomena, etc., pertaining to the life, culture and peculiarities of social development of a particular country without existing in the target language(s) and, consequently, being familiar to the representatives of the target culture(s).

Newmark P. introduces the notion of a “cultural word 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” [1, p. 96].

Baker M. 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].

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]. According to Pamies, A., “culturemes constitute a shared knowledge, generating implicit allusions to customs, prejudices, religion, mythology, superstitions, historical facts, famous characters (real or fictional), agriculture, hunting, fishing, livestock, trade, folk medicine, colors, fine arts, literature, songs, gastronomy, clothing, artistic creations, games, sports, etc.” [4]. He also claims that “culturemes should be distinguished from realia, since contrary to the latter (e.g., rs. *vodka* ‘водка’, *balalaika* ‘балалайка’), whose referents are lexical gaps in all the other languages because their original referent existed only in one country, the literal referent of a cultureme may exist in many places. For instance, the Russian cultureme *береза* is not a lexical gap (eng. ‘birch tree’). Hence, there is no direct relation between realia and culturemes, however, nothing prevents the former from becoming the latter if their literal referent has also an extralinguistic symbolic function. Realia are defined with regard to other languages, while culturemes are intra-linguistically active, but when a realium is at the same time a cultureme, the translation difficulties increase” [Ibid].

Gambier 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” [5, p. 159].

It should be noted that whatever the view on how to interpret the notion in question, culturemes, from the functional point of view, are essential to the literary discourse for they are regularly used by fiction writers for numerous purposes. Namely, the ethnically and culturally specific semantics of such items makes it possible for the target culture readership to steep in the source language culture as well as background knowledge that to a great extent determines the meaning of the whole of a message [6].

Pamorozskaya N. notes that “culture-specific words help form the nationally and historically specific atmosphere, or the cultural background of a given work of fiction” [7, c. 59]. “It is not only the plot of the novel that readers take interest in, but also the epoch pictured by the author. Culture-oriented linguistics helps solve one of the major philology problems, that is the proper interpreting of a given text,

while the culture-oriented approach to the analysis of culture-specific words in a given work of fiction helps identify the components of its cultural image” [7, c. 59].

Schumager, E. underlines that “culturemes carry essential country-specific information allowing readers by means of words themselves to take a glance at the life of other people, find the reflection of numerous specific material, social and spiritual processes the society of a given culture is undergoing” [8, c. 129].

The above-mentioned opinions seem to be shared by Bondareva, L. claiming “the use of such vocabulary serves the formation of a specific temporal, local, social, and cultural atmosphere of a given text” [9].

What must be kept in mind in this respect is that culture-specific vocabulary does 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 the 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 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 [10]. 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 abounds in both American and Russian culture-specific elements with the story set in both the countries. In this article, I would like to suggest the ways of rendering American culturemes used in the novel by means of the Russian language.

Depending on the semantic type of the cultureme itself as well as the “culture load” it carries, the ways of rendering are suggested as follows:

1. Transcription, sometimes combined with transliteration, can be used while rendering proper names and place names (it must be noted, however, that at times it is better to make additional remarks in footnotes for readers to better understand the essence of the lexical unit in question as well as its cultural background): *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 cases when transcription and translation fail or when they are seen as phonetically “inconvenient” in the target language: *World’s Fair* ‘Всемирная выставка’, *The Top of the Flame* ‘кафе «На вершине пламени»’, etc.;

3. Providing functional equivalents can be resorted to when rendering lexemes comprising the cultural component similar to the one native to the target language : *Prohibition* ‘«Сухой закон» в США в 1920–1933 гг.’, *hillbilly* ‘деревенщина’, *Ferris wheel* ‘колесо обозрения’, etc.;

4. Transformation is often used when rendering the titles of books, songs, movies, names of organizations, etc. Sometimes, if the translator considers it necessary, additional remarks can be made to specify the cultural background of a given culture word: *Bewitched* ‘«Моя жена меня приворожила» (американская комедия положений, транслировавшаяся на канале ABC с 1964 по 1972 г.)’, *Closet Freak* ‘«Притворно-нормальный» (песня американского рэп-исполнителя Си-Лю)’, *Make it Clap* ‘«Давай же хлопать» (песня американского рэп-исполнителя Басты Раймз)’, etc.;

5. Substituting generic notions for subnotions is quite popular as the equivalent in the target language presents a simplified and generalized version of the original notion, however, in such cases, the specific cultural character of the source language item is lost : *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, or it can be combined with the latter as in most cases it is the only way to properly render the cultural component of a given culture word: *negritude* ‘самосознание африканских народов’, *niggerati* ‘ниггерати (ироничное название группы афроамериканских художников и других деятелей искусства периода «Гарлемского Возрождения» (1920-е гг.))’, *graduation gown* ‘мантия, предназначенная для церемонии вручения дипломов’, etc.

It can be concluded by reiterating that culture-specific words always present a challenge for a fiction translator since they contain the semantics alien to the target culture and, in most cases, language. However, due to the functions such vocabulary performs in the literary discourse, the conflict of cultures has to be

coped with. It is often through the translator's competence and being aware of the ways culture-specific elements can and should be rendered by means of the target language that the right choice of the latter is made depending on the context and target readership.

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