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HANDLING OF CULTURE-SPECIFIC TERMS IN TRANSLATION

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to make an in-depth analysis of the translation strategies used in transposing culture specific terms from Oscar Wilde's play - "The Importance of Being Earnest" - into its Macedonian translation, "Vazno da si Bogumil", by Dragi Mihajlovski. More precisely, the paper seeks to ascertain what culture specific terms have been used in the source text and whether the culture specific terms used in the translation belong to the same domains as those from the source text. It also seeks to determine what translation strategy is most frequently utilized, and whether the overall tendency is more towards 'domesticating' or 'foreignising' the translated text. The findings indicate that the culture specific terms used in the translation do not always belong to the same domains as those used in the original. Furthermore, the most prevalent strategy employed by the translator was adaptation which means replacing the culture specific terms from the original text with culture specific terms typical of the target language and culture.

Key terms: *translation, culture-specific terms, strategies*

Introduction

Translating culture is a particularly challenging issue. Translators need to be acutely aware of the cultural differences and similarities of the source and target culture, when they translate linguistic material from a source language to a target language. Literary works in particular abound with culture specific terms, and as a result are extremely challenging when it comes to translation.

The paper at hand looks into the handling of CST in the Macedonian translation of the well-known English play – "*The Importance of Being Earnest*" – written by the renowned 19th century English author, Oscar Wilde. What makes this study particularly challenging is the fact that translating culture is monitored closely

in the context of two completely dissimilar languages and cultures, namely English and Macedonian.[1]

The first section of the paper lays out the necessary theoretical background related to translating CST; the subsequent section is concerned with the methodology of research. Finally, the last two sections of the paper present the results and the conclusions obtained from the research, respectively.

Theoretical background

Transposing culture from the ST to the TT, implies replacing words, phrases and expressions specific of a given language and culture with suitable words, expressions and phrases from another language and culture. These items in literature have been recognized under different names: *cultural words* (Newmark, 1988), *culture-specific concepts* (Baker, 1992), *realia* (Robinson, 1997), *culture-bound phenomena and terms* or *culture-specific items* (Schäffner, Wiesemann, 2001), *culturem* (LunguBadea, 2004), etc.).

Newmark (1988) proposes five different domains for classifying all existing culture words: 1) ecology (flora, fauna, winds, plains, hills); 2) material culture (food, clothes, houses and towns, transport); 3) social culture (work and leisure); 4) organizations, customs, activities, procedures, concepts (political and administrative, religious, artistic, etc.), and 5) gesture and habits. Fernández Guerra (2012), on the other hand, organizes culture specific terms (CST) in four major domains:1) geographic and ethnographic terms; 2) words or expressions referring to folklore, traditions and mythology; 3) names of everyday objects, actions and events (such as food and drinks, clothes, housing, tools, public transport, dances and games, units of measurement, money, etc.); 4) social and historical terms denoting territorial administrative units or divisions; departments, professions, titles, ranks, greetings and treatments; institutions, patriotic and religious organizations, etc.

Obviously, there exists a wide range of different types of CST which belong to different domains. Naturally, some of them reflect the reality of only one culture, and are non-existent in another culture. Hence, translators bear a great responsibility in handling CST – first, they need to detect, adequately comprehend, and, then, suitably transfer them from SL to TL. That puts translators in a strenuous position to decide whether it is more convenient to remain loyal to the original text ('foreignization'), or to give priority to the target text and bring it closer to the target language and culture ('domestication').

Many translation theorists have tackled this issue and, as a result of their endeavors to shed light on it, they have proposed a number of translation strategies

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[1]Although both the English language and the Macedonian language belong to the Indo-European family of languages, the English language belongs to the branch of Germanic languages, whereas the Macedonian language to the branch of Slavic languages. Furthermore, the historical, political, economic and social circumstances of the manifold smaller, landlocked Macedonian state have been drastically different from the ones related to the descendent of the once great British Empire, that comprised almost a quarter of the whole world – the United Kingdom of Great Britain.

(Newmark, 1988; Baker, 1992; Alvarez & Vidal, 1996; Graedler, 2000; Harvey, 2000; Badea, 2004; Pedersen, 2011, Fernadez Guerra, 2012, etc.).

For the purposes of this study, we opted for Fernandez Guerra's (2012) classification, more precisely we concentrated on the following translation strategies: adaptation, borrowing, literal translation, explicitation, generalization, particularization, compensation, compression, omission, linguistic-paralinguistic substitution, transposition and variation.

Methodology

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the strategies utilized for translating CST in the translation of Oscar Wilde's "*The Importance of Being Earnest*" into Macedonian "*Vazno da si Bogumil*". More specifically, the aim is to determine the frequency with which the translation strategies are used in the translation, and, ultimately, whether the translator is more inclined towards 'domesticating' or 'foreignizing' the TT as a whole.

The first step of the analysis involves extracting the CST from the original text, and allocating them to the different domains (e.g. personal names, toponyms, food, drinks, etc.) put forward by Newmark (1988) and Fernández Guerra (2012). The subsequent step is to trace their translational counterparts in TT, and possibly identify CST added by the translator, allocating them to the different domains too. Another step of the analysis is to detect whether the CST identified in the original and the translation belong to the same domains. Finally, each pair (the CST used in the original and its translation counterpart in TT) is closely examined in an attempt to identify the translation strategy that has been employed in rendering CST from SL to TL.

Analysis and results

CST domains

The analysis shows that there are a total of 135 CST in the source text. Of these, 132 were preserved in the translation and additional 87 were identified, which seem to be missing in the original and which the translator apparently adds in the translation. The analysis of the domains in which these CST belong shows an interesting result. The highest number of CST found in the original belong to the following domains (Chart 1): names (26.67%), toponyms (8.15%), national reference and institutions (7.41% each) and buildings (5.19%).

Chart 1: CST in the original by domain
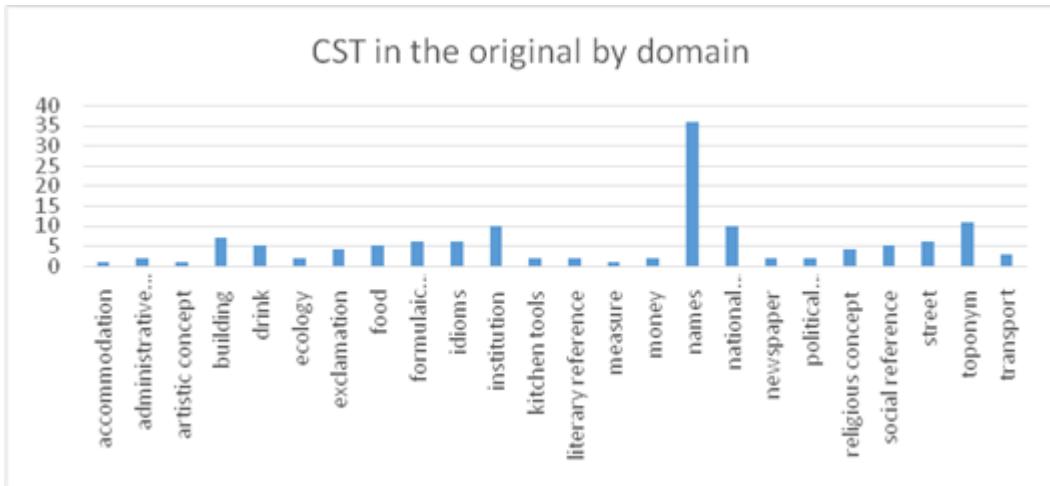
In contrast to this, the highest number of CST identified in the translation belong to the following domains (Chart 2): names (16.89%), idioms (15.53%), formulaic language (11.42%), social reference (5.94%) and toponyms and national reference (with 5.48% each).

Chart 2: CST in the translation by domain
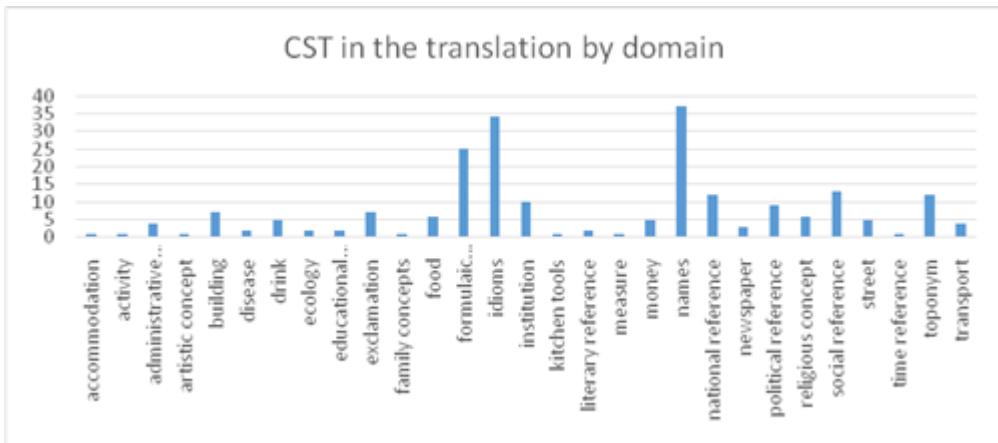
The analysis of the CST which the translator added shows the following domain breakdown (Chart 3): idioms (32.18%), formulaic language (21.84%), social (9.2%) and political reference (8.05%).

Chart 3: CST added in the translation by domain
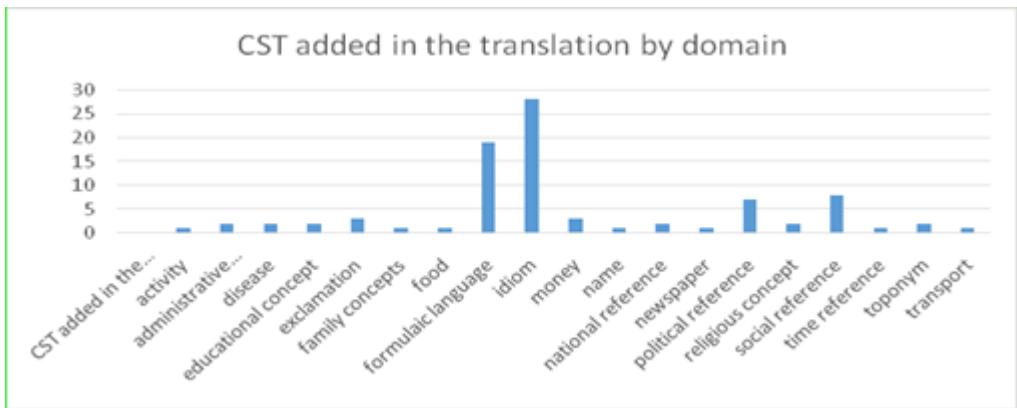
In both the original and the translation, the remaining CST refer to exclamations, food, drinks, religious concepts, money, streets, transport, administrative and artistic concepts, accommodation, diseases, ecology, educational and family concepts, kitchen tools, measures, newspapers, literary and time references.

The difference in dominant CST domains between ST and TT is indicative and suggests that the translation has undergone significant transformation. The quantitative data show that, apart from names and toponyms, which are inevitable, the translator focuses on idioms and formulaic language to better accommodate the translation in the target language. In addition, he makes a number of social and national references, as well as adding political references to the target culture. Shifting the domain focus in the TT seems to suggest that the translation approach is that of domestication. But, before drawing any definitive conclusions, let us study the texts further. The following subsection presents the analysis of the translation strategies used.

Translation strategies

The analysis of the translation strategies shows that the prevailing translation strategy is that of adaptation (53.15%), followed by addition (39.19%). The strategy of addition was not found in the theory we have quoted above, but it was borne out in our results and even so to a large extent, therefore it is important that we add it to the classification of strategies identified. The other strategies were much less frequently used: generalization (4.5%), omission (1.35%), compression (0.9%), explicitation (0.45%) and particularization (0.45%) (Chart 4). No instances of borrowing, literal translation, compensation, linguistic-paralinguistic substitution, transposition and variation were found.

Chart 4: CST Translation Strategy Distribution

CST translation strategy distribution

- Adaptation
- Omission
- Compression
- Explicitation
- Generalisation
- Particularisation
- Addition

53%
39%
1%
0%
1%
1%
5%
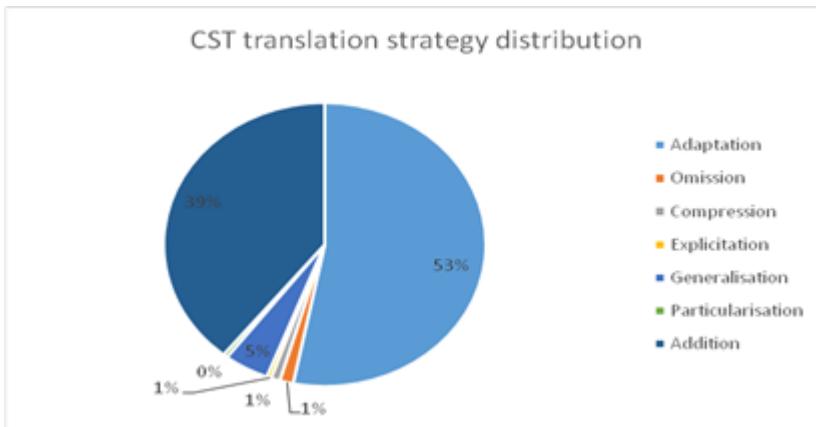
Below we present and discuss some examples of the different translation strategies identified in the analysed corpus.

Adaptation

Adaptation is used for a wide variety of CST, including names, social and political terms, geographic terms as well as material culture. As the translator explains in the preface to his translation (Mihajlovski 1999: 13), the name in the title of the play triggered the whole adaptation approach. Notably, in order to preserve the pun on the name Earnest, around which the plot develops, he had to change it to a name that would bear a similar pun in Macedonian. This change necessitated the change of all other names and cultural references. Thus, all English names have been replaced by Macedonian names, some of which are typically Macedonian (e.g. Lane - Трајче (Trajche), Gerald - Кире (Kire), Cecily - Љубица (Ljubica), Gwendolen -Милица (Milica), Augusta - Теодора (Teodora), etc.). As to toponyms, all the English place names have been carefully substituted with Macedonian ones. The entire setting of the play has been transferred from England, more precisely, London and nearby places, to Macedonia's capital – Skopje – and to some other Macedonian villages and towns (e.g. Sussex - Богомила (Bogomila), Brighton - Битола (Bitola), etc.). Other geographic references have also been adapted. The English names of the streets, institutions, churches, restaurants, hotels, stations, means of transport, have also been replaced with well-known Macedonian names. Moreover, to make the culture transfer into the Macedonian context complete, the translator was careful to replace the terms referring to food, drinks, newspapers, measures and money with suitable Macedonian terms as well (Table 1).

Table 1: Examples of adaptation

CST type	English original	Macedonian translation[2]
street	Half-Moon street	улицата ЈНА (JNA Street)

[2]Back-translation is provided under each example in brackets. Where it is necessary, explanations are provided marked by an asterix.

restaurant	Willis's	Лав (Lav)*name of restaurant
institution	The Metropolitan police	МВР (MVR) *Acronym for Ministry of Interior
station	Victoria Station	Скопската железничка станица (Skopje Railway Station)
food	cucumber sandwiches	Кифлички со кашкавал (small rolls filled with hard yellow cheese)
drink	not a first-brand champagne	Кавадарка (Kavadarka)*a brand of Macedonian wine
transport	dog-cart	такси (taxi)
newspaper	Political Economy	Нова Македонија (Nova Makedonija)*name of newspaper

The change of the physical location necessitates a change in the social, political and religious context too (Table 2).[3]

Table 2: Examples of adaptation

CST type	English original	Macedonian translation
national reference	French drama	српско-хрватски драми (Serbo-croatian drama)
	happy English home	Среќно македонско семејство (happy Macedonian family)
	Indian climate	Босанската клима (Bosnian climate)
political reference	Tories	Црвени како нас (the red ones – just like us)
social reference	Society for Prevention of Discontent among the Upper Orders	Здружение за спречување незадоволство меѓу новопечените бизнисмени (Association for Preventing Discontent on the part of the Self-made Businessmen)
religious concept	Rectory	Црквата (The Church)

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[3]The English society at the end of the 19th century (1890s) is rendered as a Macedonian society at the very end of the 20th century (the translation was published in 1999). Wilde's satire of Victorian society is turned into Mihajlovski's comment on Macedonian society soon after the country's independence.

The adaptation strategy is also applied in the case of idioms, exclamations, formulaic language and literary references (Table 3). If the action takes place in post-independence Macedonia and all characters are Macedonian, to be totally credible and realistic, they must speak their own idiom and use language as it would come naturally to a native Macedonian speaker in a given situation and pragmatic context.

Table 3: Examples of adaptation

CST type	English original	Macedonian translation
idiom	You have lifted a load from my mind	Ми тргна товар од срце. (You lifted a load from my heart)
	To cast a stone	Да покаже со прст (To point a finger)
formulaic language	On this point, as indeed on all points, I am firm.	За ова како и за сѐ друго повеќе нема дискусија. Ова е мој последен збор. (On this and on everything else, no more discussion. This is my last word.)
exclamation	Jack! Oh!	Леле мајко! Манол! (Lele (*common exclamation) Mother! Manol!)
	Good heavens! (in three separate cases)	Господе боже! (Dear Lord!)
literary reference	It is rather Quixotic of you.	Ако сакаш да си Дон Кихот повели. (If you wish to be Don Quixote, be my guest.)

Addition

The translator often adds explicit cultural references and provides details that are not present in the English version. This strategy is applied to a wide array of different CST ranging from social, political and national reference, to material culture, to idiom and formulaic language (Table 4).

Table 4: Examples of addition

CST type	English original	Macedonian translation
formulaic language	Every serious Bunburyst knows this.	Секо јсериозен авакумист ова го знае дури и наполноќ да го разбудиш и да го прашаш. (Every serious Avakumist knows this, even if you wake him up at midnight and ask him)

social reference	There is something in that name that inspires confidence	Има нешто во тоа име што ти дава сигурност. Гледај каде живееме. Ако јас не сум сакам барем мажот ми да е мил на бога. (There is something in that name that inspires safety. Look where we live. If I am not, I wish that at least my husband was dear to God!)
social reference	//	Науката не е за млади луѓе. И без неа се во тешка депресија. (Science is not for young people. They are deeply depressed anyway.)
transport	//	Во метежот средната се затвори, а јас морав силно да ја повлечам. (In the chaos, the middle (*door of a city bus) closed and I had to pull it very strongly.)

Other examples of addition refer to the translator changing the tone, the style or the social or geographical dialect. It is used in our corpus mainly in idioms where there is a change in style usually from formal to less formal or informal style (Table 5). It seems the purpose of this approach is to indicate the colloquial nature of the conversations and the close relationship between the characters.

Table 5: Examples of addition

CST type	English original	Macedonian translation
Idiom	You look perfectly ridiculous in them.	Личиш на страшило за на бостан. (You look like a scarecrow in the field.)
Idiom	You are certainly not staying with me for a whole week as a quest or anything else.	На кукувден ќе ми бидеш гостин цела недела во мојата родна куќа. (It will be on kukuvden (*idiom meaning never) that you will be my guest for a whole week in my native house.)
Idiom	What a fearful liar you are!	Лажеш сушиш (You are lying through your teeth)
Idiom	If you are not too long.	Да ама ако не се кљанкаш. (Yes, if you do not move at a snail's pace).

Generalization
The translator avoids using explicit ST cultural references in some cases by replacing them with more general or neutral words. Apart from CST with national and social references, CST of material culture and arts are conveyed using this strategy (Table 6).

Table 6: Examples of generalization

CST type	English original	Macedonian translation

food	I had some crumpets with Lady Harbury.	Грицнавнештокај г-ѓаДурда. (I had a bite at Mrs. Durda's.)
artistic concept	a lorgnette	очила (glasses)
transport	Gower Street omnibus	градскиотавтобус (city bus)
kitchen tools	plate stand	прибор (cutlery)

Compression and omission

Compression and omission are not used much in our corpus. Where they are used, it may be due to the translator's thinking that the sentences or phrases compressed or omitted are not of crucial importance to the plot. They occur with CST of material culture or formulaic language (Table 7 and Table 8).

Table 7: Examples of compression

CST type	English original	Macedonian translation
formulaic language	There is just one question I would like to be allowed to ask my guardian.	Имам само едно прашање до мојот старател. (I have only one question for my guardian.)

Table 8: Examples of omission

CST type	English original	Macedonian translation
Street	What number in Belgrave Square?	/
kitchen tools	the tongs	/
Toponym	at Leamington	/

Explicitation

Explicitation is used to expand and amplify the content using more words to express the same idea (Table 9).

Table 9: Examples of explicitation

CST type	English original	Macedonian translation
formulaic language	Yes: to good heavens, Gwendolen, I mean to Gwendolen.	Да! Со боже господе Милица, со Милица ами со кој? (Yes! With Milica, for God's sake, with Milica, who else?)

Particularization

On one occasion the translator chooses to use more precise and concrete target culture bound term or phrase where the original author uses a more general term. This is done using a social and political reference (Table 10).

Table 10: Examples of particularization

CST type	English original	Macedonian translation
social reference	I believe it is customary, in good society to take some slight refreshment at five o'clock.	Знаеш како е. Кога живееш во една млада и културна држава некултурно е да си гладен барем во 5 поручек. (You know how that works. When you live in a young and cultured country, it is uncultivated to be hungry at 5 in the afternoon.)

Discussion and conclusion

The analysis shows that the predominant translation strategy in the translation of CST in the analyzed corpus is adaptation, i.e. replacing the CST in the source text with CST in the target text, that are typical of the target culture. Another salient finding is that the second most frequently used translation strategy is addition. Namely, at a great number of points in the text, the translator added CST typical of the target language and culture which did not have any equivalent in the source text.

The translation this particular case has clearly opted for 'domesticating' the translated text. This means that TT manifestly departs from the original wording and context in order to achieve its own specific pragmatic goal. The action is shifted from England to Macedonia and the characters are Macedonians rather than Englishmen. The change of the physical location results in changes in the social, political and temporal context, so the 19th century English society becomes a 20th century Macedonian society, whereas Wilde's satire of Victorian England is turned into Mihajlovski's comment on Macedonian post-independence society.

Although, on the one hand, it seems that TT is brought closer to the target text recipients as all CST are easily understandable, still as Komissarov (1991) puts it, such an approach to translation may create a number of problems because the receptors receive a false impression that the SL culture does not differ much from their own. Thus, rather than serving as an important vehicle of intercultural contact, broadening the receptors' cultural horizons and bringing new facts and ideas into the target culture, translation pretends the cultural gap never existed.

In our opinion, the domesticating approach in this particular case could be justified if the translated text served as a play script to be staged. For the comedy to work and for viewers to be amused, all cultural references must be immediately available to them. This is much more likely to happen if they are deeply immersed in the culture and recognize the cultural allusions arising from their past or current cultural context, rather than if they encounter a foreign culture no matter how familiar they are with it.

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