TRANSLATION STRATEGIES FOR CULTURE-SPECIFIC TERMS

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Abstract

Culture is inextricably bound to translation. Transferring culture from a source text (ST) to a target text (TT) is a fundamental aspect of the phenomenon of translation. Translators are entrusted with the task of bridging cultural differences and enabling TT receptors to understand the original message in its entirety, just like its ST receptors. Taking into consideration the wide array of culture-specific terms presents in each language, it only follows logically that, sometimes, these terms can be notoriously difficult to translate. However, many translation theorists purport that difficult though it is to handle culture-specific terms in translation, it is not entirely impossible. In that respect, they classify the culture-specific terms in various domains and propose numerous translation strategies for rendering culture-specific terms (e.g. borrowing, adaptation, explanation, generalization, reduction, etc.), their general tendency being either towards 'domesticating' or 'foreignizing' the translated text as a whole.

Key terms: translation, CST-culture-specific terms, strategies, SL-source language, TT-target text,

In discussing culture – translation interface, the focus is mainly placed on translating words, phrases and expressions which originate in a particular culture and are non-existent in another culture. That is exactly why, traditionally, culture specific terms (CST) are regarded as a potential source of untranslatability. Translation theorists who have dealt with this issue, in general, contend that CST are manageable, i.e. translatable; still they point out that CST call for special treatment and that translators need to be well-equipped with ample knowledge of both source and target language/culture (SL/C and TL/C) to be able to handle the transference effectively.

Transposing culture from the ST to the TT, manifestly implies replacing words, phrases and expressions specific to a given language and culture with suitable words, expressions and phrases from another language and culture. Languages encompass plenty of such linguistic items and this issue has been

frequently tackled by many translation theorists and practitioners, which accounts for the abundance of expressions used to refer to these terms (e.g. 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 (Lungu Badea, 2004), etc.) (in Shiryaeva & Lungu Badea, 2014). Aixela (1996) refers to them as culture specific terms (CST) and defines them as "elements of the text that are connected to certain concepts in the foreign culture (e.g. history, art, literature) which might be unknown to the readers of the TT".

In an attempt to delineate CST, Baker (1992) underlines the following three general features of CST:

1) the concept that a CST represents is totally unknown in the target culture;

2) the expression does not have any true equivalent in the target language;

3) the concept expresses a particular fact that is closely linked with a specific culture, its habits, language or environment.

In this article, we decided to focus on Fernandez Guerra's (2012) classification of translation strategies used for dealing with CST in the translation process. It comprises the following 6 translation strategies:

1. Adaptation is replacing a SL cultural element by another term from the TC. The basic goal of the translator when trying to 'adapt' the translation is to have a similar effect on the TL readers.

2. Borrowing is taking a word or expression straight from another language, without translation. The procedure is normally used when a term does not exist in the TC, or when the translator tries to get some stylistic or exotic effect. It can be "pure", if there is no change of any kind in the foreign term, or "naturalized", if the word has some change in the spelling, and perhaps some morphological or phonetic adaptation.

3. Calque could be described as a literal translation (either lexical or structural) of a foreign word or phrase. It could actually be considered a special type of loan or borrowing, since the translator borrows the SL expression or structure, and then transfers it in a literal translation. The difference between loan/borrowing and calque is that the former imitates the morphology, signification and phonetics of the foreign word or phrase, while the latter only imitates the morphological scheme and the signification of that term, but not its pronunciation.

4. Compensation introduces a SL element of information or stylistic effect in another place in the TL text, because it cannot be reflected in the same place as in the SL.

5. Compression/reduction/condensation/omission happens when the translator synthesizes or suppresses a SL information item in the TL text, mainly when that information is considered unnecessary because the cultural term does not perform a relevant function or may even mislead the reader.

6. Description is when a term or expression is replaced by a description of its form or function. It could, thus, be regarded as a sort of paraphrase, or even as an amplification or explanation of a SL term.

Conclusion

Translators need to pay special heed when they transpose linguistic material from a source language to a target language as the transference of linguistic material is closely intertwined with transferring culture as well. They need to be aware of the different types of culture specific terms as well as the host of translation strategies they can employ when dealing with these terms. Nevertheless, their starting point should always be the decision whether they would opt for the 'domesticating' or the 'foreignizing' approach, which in turn will dictate the choice of the translation strategies.

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