

CULTURAL TRANSLATION VS CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

КУЛЬТУРНЕ ПРИСВОЄННЯ В КОНТЕКСТІ КУЛЬТУРНОГО ПЕРЕКЛАДУ

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The article discusses the notion of cultural appropriation, which is seen as a certain power dynamics, in which representatives of the dominant culture attribute elements of the cultures systematically suppressed by that dominant community, in the context of cultural translation as a translation practice, which primarily focuses on the peculiarities of culturally nonhomogeneous source and target texts translation.

Key words: cultural translation, culture-specific notions, author's idiosyncrasy, personality of the translator, cultural appropriation.

У статті в розрізі культурного перекладу як перекладацької практики, що насамперед враховує особливості перекладу культурно негомогенних вихідного й цільового текстів, висвітлено поняття культурного присвоєння, яке бачиться як певна силова динаміка, за якої представники домінуючої культури присвоюють елементи культури спільнот, які систематично пригнічувалися домінуючою спільнотою.

Ключові слова: культурний переклад, культурно специфічні поняття, ідіосинкразія автора, особистість перекладача, культурне присвоєння.

В статье в разрезе культурного перевода как переводческой практики, прежде всего учитывающей особенности перевода культурно негомогенных исходного и целевого текстов, освещено понятие культурной апроприации, являющей собой некую силовую динамику, в ходе которой представители доминирующей культуры присваивают элементы культуры сообществ, систематически подавляемых доминирующим сообществом.

Ключевые слова: культурный перевод, культурно специфические понятия, авторский идиосинкразия, личность переводчика, культурная апроприация.

Stating the problem. The discussions around considering cultural phenomena and national-specific issues in translation have been around for quite some time now. With the rapid emergence of Postcolonial fiction and the growing influence of Oriental authors on the global plane, cultural translation has been a subject of a controversial dialogue since in view of cultural translation the translator should successfully transmit cultural connotations intended by the author into a target language and target culture respectively. Since the translator's choice of tools and techniques to preserve cultural connotations can be subjective and at times intuitive, some argue cultural appropriation is involved.

Resent publications and research analysis. The concept of cultural translation, the influence of the translator's personality on the target text as well as the issue of his/her "visibility" in the translated text, the translator's ability to read the author's communicative and artistic intentions as well as the question of the translation adequacy and equivalency in case when non-homogeneous cultures are involved

have been the subject of current research in the field of theory and practice of translation (C.G. Brunk, S. Bunch, L.A. Crayton, A. Dingwaney, K.M. Faull, T.I. Kovalevska, A.G. Macedo, C. Maier, O.A. Matsera, M.E. Pereira, M. Schnese, J.O. Young). Nonetheless, cultural translation is not to be confused with cultural appropriation, although some argue that in case when a source text displays cultural appropriation, it is unavoidable in the target text.

The aim of the article. In view of the above said, the aim of this article is to highlight the essence and the tools of cultural translation in fiction, to further discuss author's personal style and the personality of the translator as factor inevitably influencing the target text and, finally, to overview the phenomenon cultural appropriation in relation to fiction and translation.

Basic material presentation. Cultural translation is a translation practice, which involves cultural differences. Cultural translation can be also defined as a practice whose aim is to present another culture via translation [4, p. 46]. This kind of translation solves

some issues linked to culture, such as dialects, food or architecture.

The main issue that cultural translation embraces consists in translating a text as showing cultural differences of this text, in respecting the source culture [5, p. 19].

In the process of translation the two types of factors should be specified.

Factors external in relation to the text include intended text functions, sender, recipient, time and place of text reception, medium (oral/written), motive (why the source text was written and why it is being translated).

Intratextual factors encompass subject matter, content, presuppositions (real-world factors of the communicative situation presumed to be known to the participants), composition, non-verbal elements (illustrations, italics), lexis (including register, specific terminology), sentence structure [6, p. 106].

Context of culture and context of situation are outside of language itself. Co-text, also known as linguistic context, is certainly inside of language itself. There is a close interdependent relationship between language and context. Context determines and is constructed by the choice of language.

On the one hand, language, when considered as a system – its lexical items and grammatical categories – is related to its context of culture. While on the other hand, the specific text and its component parts are related to its context of situation. To be specific, context of culture is related to genre, context of situation is related to register, and co-text to the discourse itself [7, p. 93].

Seeking the equivalence of meaning is in fact seeking the equivalence of situational context. In translation, equivalence should not be based on one aspect of meaning (say ideational meaning); the translator must pursue equivalence of three aspects of meaning at the same time. Since the complete identity of situational context and meaning system between cultures is impossible, the complete equivalence is equally impossible. Texts in different languages can be equivalent to different degrees (fully or partially equivalent in respects of context, semantics, grammar, lexis etc.), and at different ranks (word-for-word, phrase-for-phrase, sentence-for-sentence) [6, p. 107]. Something is always lost in the process.

The question is what should be “preserved” and what should be “left out”? The translator is obliged to take these register variables into consideration in the process of translation rather than make decisions randomly or according to his/her personal favor.

The individual author’s style i. e. the way of verbal material arrangement, that reflects author’s artistic

vision by creating a new image of the world, peculiar only to him/her, undeniably poses another challenge for a translator. Somehow each text always contains personality of its creator and contains his/her own vocabulary, grammar and pragmatic features. So any display of real author must be taken through the prism of the writer’s consciousness. The author functioning in the work of art causes his role in design and organization of the whole text. A writer’s life style and personal sensation of the world influence the esthetic transformation of his/her language and result in appearing of the notion of “idiostyle” [5, p. 61].

Author’s idiostyle is often manifested in occasionalisms – complex or derived words, unknown to a translator, found in a literary work, striking the translator as a possible occasionalism created by the literary author, because creating occasionalisms is part of poetic license typical of many authors as a necessary first, creative step.

Personality is one of the unique characteristics that affect all parts of an individual life and it probably affects translator’s decision during the process of translation. In the process of translation, translator faces many choices for selecting lexical equivalent, meaning, and etc. that he/she must select one of them among others. In this situation, different translators make different decisions and somehow this diversity might come from translators’ individual differences such as their personalities.

This concept throws new lights to the age-old debate concerning the translator’s priorities: “literal” versus “free”, “form” versus “content”, “formal” versus “dynamic” equivalence, “semantic” versus “communicative” translating, “domestication” versus “foreignization” and translator’s “visibility” versus “invisibility”. In order to answer the above question, the translator has to turn to cultural context, since what are relevant to translation are not only situational context but also cultural context. Language is a substantial but partial reflection of a culture. A language reflects the culture of a society, not only in its option of vocabulary, but also in its syntax and way of organizing ideas. In single context world, the author communicates with the source text readers who share the same cultural background knowledge with him/her [7, p. 204]. Therefore, they can co-operate with each other in the process of communication quite harmoniously. But the process of translation often breaks this harmony. Translation is displaced and disjointed communication. In translation, the original text is deprived of its context and the information it carries is encoded in an entirely different language with an entirely different context. The reader may not be able to meet the expectation

of the author, thus there comes information gap. The translator's job is to make up this gap and harmonize the communication.

The translator needs to understand beliefs, attitudes, values, and the rules of the source language audience in order to adequately understand the source text and adequately translate it for people who share a different set of beliefs, attitudes, values, and rules. Each language group has its own culturally specific features, that may not have equivalents in other languages.

Common ways to create occasional equivalents and to render equivalent-lacking units include:

1) using long words – imitating in target language the forms of the source language word or word combinations. This technique implies transcription or transliteration exclusively;

2) transcription of transliteration and explication of their authentic nationally specific meaning;

3) using a descriptive explanation to convey the meaning of the source text unit;

4) translating componential parts and additional explanation of units of the nationally-bound lexis;

5) using appropriate substitutes or semantic analogy, i.e. words with similar meaning, which is extended to convey information;

6) by ways of word for word translation;

7) using all kinds of lexical transformation modifying the meaning of a source language unit [6, p. 108].

Nevertheless, recent global dialogue has given rise to a very contrasting point of view – the issue of cultural appropriation. First coined by sociologists in the early 1990s, allegations of cultural appropriation have grown increasingly common in recent years, with critics casting doubt on the legitimacy of everything from burrito bars to festival fashion choices.

Oxford Dictionary, which only put the phrase into its official lexicon last year, defines cultural appropriation as “the unacknowledged or inappropriate adoption of the customs, practices, ideas, etc. of one people or society by members of another and typically more dominant people or society” [2]. Simply put, it is when someone adopts something from a culture that is not his or her own – a hairstyle, a piece of clothing, a manner of speaking, even a type of exercise (yoga, for example).

Unlike cultural exchange, in which there is a mutual interchange, appropriation refers to a particular power dynamic in which members of a dominant culture take elements from a culture of people who have been systematically oppressed by that dominant group [3, p. 38].

Originally derived from sociologist writing in the 1990s, its usage appears to have first been adopted by indigenous peoples of nations tainted by histories of colonisation, such as Canada, Australia and the United States.

It's often fine to take on aspects of another culture whether it's putting on espadrilles or making coffee with an Italian espresso machine. The problem arises when somebody takes something from another less dominant culture in a way that members of that culture find undesirable and offensive. The point is that the more marginalised group doesn't get a say, while their heritage is deployed by someone in a position of greater privilege – for fun or fashion, perhaps, and out of a place of ignorance rather than knowledge of that culture [2].

Often a more marginalised culture will adopt aspects of the stronger in order to fit in, not stand out. Listing the dos and don'ts of cultural appropriation, it is always important to pay homage to artistry and ideas, and acknowledge their origins; don't adapt sacred artefacts as accessories; treat a cultural exchange like any other creative collaboration – give credit, and consider royalties; don't forget that appropriation is no substitute for diversity and never play up to racial stereotypes [2].

Some would think yes, artists, if they did research and tried to stay away from stereotypes, should be allowed to write essentially whatever they want. Others would say no, arguing that some people do not have the authority or right to showcase one person or group of people who are different from them on basic levels such as ethnicity. Susan Barker, after she was addressed by a Chinese man who said that she could never understand the Chinese whom she focuses on in her novel “The Incarnations”, due to the fact that she is half white, says in her article “Should Ethnicity Limit What a Fiction Writer Can Write?” that “the identity of the author shouldn't be of much significance”. She concedes, however, that in our new “media age” in which it is so easy for people to learn about the upbringing of an author, the writer's “identity can become integral to the interpretation of the text and the determination of its validity”. In other words, understanding where an author or artist comes from, or what ethnicity they are, can greatly impact how audiences view their work [8].

In the case of fiction or creative writing a writer should not be held back due to race, gender or nationality, but that writers should be aware that not everyone is going to like or agree with their stories. At the end of the day, people will be triggered by things in art, whether it be visual, music or writing [10, p. 203]. An artist cannot necessarily think about everyone's

response to something they create, but when an artist wants to venture into the territory of a different culture, they should be careful and make sure to research and plan their characters so that they can avoid stereotyping.

In other words, people should be allowed their voices, whether they come from the background they are writing about or not; they just need to be cognizant of how serious representation is taken by audience members [8].

Clearly, if writers were barred from creating characters with attributes that we do not “own” (gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and so on), fiction would be impossible. Stories would be peopled by clones of the author. Since trespassing into otherness is a foundation of the novelist’s work, should we restrict ourselves in some way, so as to avoid doing violence to those who identify with our characters? The injunction to refrain from “cultural appropriation” sounds like a call for censorship, or at best a warning to self-censor, an infringement of the creative liberty to which so many surprising people profess themselves attached [9].

Good writers transgress without transgressing, in part because they are humble about what they do not know. They treat their own experience of the world as provisional. They do not presume. They respect people, not by leaving them alone in the inviolability of their cultural authenticity, but by becoming involved with them. They research. They engage in reciprocal relationships.

It does not seem like a particular infringement of liberty to pass through the world without being its owner, unless someone else is continually asserting property rights over the ground beneath your feet. The panicked tone of the accusations of censorship leads to suspect that what is being asserted has little to do with artistic freedom per se, and everything to do with a bitter fight to retain normative status, and the privileges that flow from it [9].

Jonathan Franzen’s remarks about not being able to write a black woman character because he has never been in love with a black woman seem groundless. He claimed he has to have experience of loving a category of person before he can write about them. That’s hard to believe for all sorts of practical reasons, but beyond that, writing is about imagining how others think and feel and how that informs their behaviour; it is about offering a different way of seeing and in so doing it creates empathy. A fruitful formula can be put forward as follows: don’t write what you know, write what you want to understand, write from a place of deep curiosity about the world. Every writer is free to write about who and what they want,

but that does not mean the work cannot be critiqued. People who belong to minority groups have had to live with limiting, irritating and insulting portrayals all their lives, as well as always dying before the end of the movie. In many modern novels a white writer’s purpose in including a character of colour has been merely to make a point about race or reflect a white character’s value system, which is simply put – bad writing [9].

A good novelist is a good observer – everything else is just style. A writer must be alive to what goes said and unsaid in the world, making themselves small until only the reader is reflected in the work. A well-crafted novel is a mirror, and a reader shouldn’t mind where the glass was made or how it got its silver. They should only require that its reflection is fair.

Readers are mostly ignored in this debate, but the worldly and widely read reader has a hinterland, is quick to spot an agenda and is willing to call out fakes. Readers are more heterogeneous than writers will ever be, and in their multiplicity a book finds its measure of truth [9].

“We Need to Talk About Kevin” author Lionel Shriver’s decision to sport a sombrero whilst delivering a speech about the silliness surrounding the debate over “cultural appropriation” earns her a spot in the Trolling Hall of Fame. “But what does this have to do with writing fiction?” she asked of her decision to don the wide-brimmed hat, the wearing of which by students at a Bowdoin College party had sparked outrage and national headlines. “The moral of the sombrero scandals is clear: you’re not supposed to try on other people’s hats. Yet that’s what we’re paid to do, isn’t it? Step into other people’s shoes, and try on their hats” [1].

The sight gag helped Shriver convey a serious point about the dangers of demanding that authors stick to writing about their own kind and literalize the idea that writing of any sort, but especially fiction, is an exercise in empathy, in understanding [1].

Unfortunately, the debate is likely here to stay, as evidenced by the outraged walkouts during Shriver’s speech and the Brisbane Writers Festival’s hasty efforts to arrange a new event: a “right of reply” designed to counter Shriver’s devastatingly hurtful opinions.

Far more troubling is the mind-set behind her meltdown, the suggestion that writers should write only about their own experiences, that characters from different backgrounds should be treated with kid gloves. As Shriver noted in her remarks, authors currently face a Catch-22: They are required to include a smattering of non-white characters lest they face accusations of erasure or whitewashing, yet not delve

into them too deeply or make them leads, lest they be accused of appropriation [1].

Taken to its logical conclusion, such a rule means pigeonholing writers of all backgrounds. Imagine suggesting that writers from African nations avoid writing about Europe or the Americas, or that those from poorer backgrounds avoid writing about the wealthy, or that a Chinese woman write solely about Chinese women. What could any of these authors know about middle-class white folks anyway?

The great joy of fiction is its ability to put the reader in the minds and bodies and situations and times of characters otherwise unknowable to the reader. It's a way to better understand others and, hence, better understand the world.

While it may seem odd that such a statement even needs to be made, these are odd times. Debates over "cultural appropriation" – should a singer be allowed to perform with a certain accent; should a director be able to tell certain stories; should a dancer be allowed to perform certain moves, should a translator be allowed to make certain cultural explanations – now consume more of the discussion of the arts than ever before [1].

Requiring writers to write about only that which they know firsthand is not some sort of key to greater diversity on bookshelves; if anything, it would likely just lead to fewer portrayals of characters of color. In this regard, arguments against cultural appropriation are the enemy of empathy.

Conclusions. To sum it up, cultural translation facilitates cross-cultural communication as it allows for more adequate and comprehensive representation of the source culture in the target text. Its success largely depends on the translator's ability to read the author's creative intentions and connotations and his/her proficiency in applying appropriate tools and mechanisms of translating culture-specific units. Nevertheless, cultural appropriation as a particular power dynamic in which members of a dominant culture take elements from a culture of people who have been systematically oppressed by that dominant group, is discussed as a possible backlash of modern fiction as well as its translations.

It remains to be further investigated whether such precautions against the misuse or, rather, abuse of culture have deep implications when it comes to translation.

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