ON THE METHODS OF TRANSLATING CULTURALLY MARKED UNITS

ABSTRACT

The present article is a special reference to the translation principles of the culturally marked units in H. Tumanyan’s works. The focal interest of the research is based on the target text reader perception and the relevance of “naturalness” in translation. Special attention is paid to the methods of translation and interpretation of culturally marked units, which have expressive-evaluative-emotional overtones and are of unique usage in the author’s works.

Key words: methods, culturally marked units, natural translation, target reader, Hovhannes Tumanyan.

РЕЗЮМЕ

О МЕТОДАХ ПЕРЕВОДА КУЛЬТУРНО-МАРКИРОВАННЫХ ЕДИНИЦ

Данная статья посвящена принципам перевода культурно-маркированных единиц в работах О. Туманяна. Фокусируя свое внимание на восприятии текстов, связанных с культурой армянского народа, а также на принципе «естественности» их перевода, авторы статьи рассматривают вопрос интерпретации и перевода культурно-маркированных единиц, которые имеют эмоционально-оценочные коннотации в произведениях О. Туманяна.

Ключевые слова: методы, единицы культурной маркировки, «естественнй» перевод, читатель перевода, Ованес Туманян.
The art of translation remains on the agenda of scientists and theorists especially in the era of globalization and cross-cultural communication. Nowadays, in the sphere of translation studies, there is a tendency to interpret the translatability of culturally marked units and expressions. In this vein, there are many valuable and beneficiary insights into translation theories, the usage of which will be of great aid to practitioners. Culturally marked and folk-oriented units are complex and multi-content entities, which have their own expressive overtones and value in the language cognition. Despite the fact that many theorists elaborated and discussed the essence of culturally marked units, there is still a necessity to refer to the practical and theoretical framework of the aforementioned units within the translation of Armenian literature.

As Benjamin (1923) stated, translation comes later than the original and the translation of the original marks the stage of continued life, in other words the idea of afterlife of the works of verbal creativity. Evidently there are certain influential works which have gained significance due to their translation. According to statistical research the Holy Bible is proved to be
the first and important impeccable gem for translation, the second most translated book in the world is “The Little Prince” by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, as well as the translations of Anderson’s fairy-tales and Lewis Carroll’s Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland.

Some theorists consider translation to be the indispensable part of literary criticism. To understand and translate a piece of verbal creativity presupposes several stages, which may open new vistas for equivalent and adequate translation. The first procedure is experience. In the process of reading literature some emotions and memories may evoke and it is a kind of reader response. These emotions are attached to the memory of the reader or the translator. The second procedure is the interpretation. In this connection Ch. Nord (1991) stated: “The complex process of text comprehension and interpretation inevitably leads to different results by different translators. To my mind, this is not at all a bad thing. Since different readers will interpret the original differently, translators should have the right to translate their interpretation of the text (after thorough investigation, of course). It is interesting to observe that, in history, translations based on the most personal interpretations are often the ones that become most famous”.

The next procedure is the evaluation, the process of assessment of the quality and value of the literary work. For translators it is the stage of pre-evaluation. Further comes the process of comparing and contrasting of source language and target language. In the first case the translator goes deep into the sphere of style, genre, historical, political, religious, cultural peculiarities (Gabrielyan, Meloyan, Hovhannisyan, Aristakesyan, 2013).

One of the most influential language scholars and educational reformers in Western theory K. W. von Humboldt once stated that all works of great originality are untranslatable and as no word in one language is ever entirely like its counterpart in another. The translation charges with this or that connotation of the source language for reaching the affective response. The main idea for Humboldt is that, just as every language is utterly unique and possesses its own special inner form and energy, so too is every word unique
and has no equivalent in any other language. Still, the scientist argues that we should not let this keep us from translating and the translation of literature is an urgent task for the broadening of the mind of individuals and cultures (Humboldt, 1816).

Goethe formulated tripartite scheme of translation considering that every literature should pass these phases. The first phase presupposes the acquaintance of foreign linguo-cultural peculiarities which is actual in today's globalized world, in the second phase the translator tries to enter into the foreign consciousness and reconstruct it in the translation, in other words “parodistic” translation. The third phase is the highest phase as there should be perfect identity between the source text and the target text. An example was Johann Heinrich Voss - the translator of “Homer” and whose work Goethe considered to be an impeccable gem and an essential work in bringing German Hellenism (Латышев, Семенов, 2005; Goethe, 1819; Steiner, 1976; Lefever, 1977).

Gachev (1988) underlined that each nation perceived the world through the prism of unique national thinking, in other words through the national literary “logic”. Based on this statement many theorists consider such units as untranslatable determined by the traditional linguistic and cultural identity of each nation. Therefore a widely acknowledged classification of culturally marked units is given by Newmark (1988) who distinguished 5 categories: 1) ecology, 2) material culture, 3) social culture, 4) organizations, customs, activities, procedures, concepts, 5) gestures and habits.

The Armenian scholar H. Baghdasaryan (2007) who touched upon the nature of culturally marked units based on different Russian and Western theorists, differentiates the following factors which characterize the culturally marked units.

1. culturally marked units are typical for the way of thinking of the given nation through the prism of which they perceive the objective reality.
2. culturally marked units are the imaginative aspect of the given language on which there is the influence of linguistic and extra-linguistic factors.

3. culturally marked units represent the culture and the tradition of the nation.

4. culturally marked units depict historical, religious, political, economical events of the nation.

5. culturally marked units may carry psychological peculiarities of the national identity.

Generally, one of the underlying principles of translation norm is a natural reverberation of the original, which presupposes the following procedures: 1) the translation should make sense, 2) the target reader should perceive the language of translation in an ordinary way, 3) there should be a dialectical unity between the original and the translation. The translation theorist Davies (2003) defined and elaborated the following translation strategies, which are:

1) Preservation - the maintenance of culturally marked units in the target text because of the absence of the close equivalent. It is a special type of cultural borrowing or calque.

2) Addition - where the translator adds or interprets the culturally marked unit by using two or more words for making the target text more reader friendly. In this connection Aixelá (1996) differentiates two types of translation addition: intratextual and extratextual. The extratextual additions presuppose the usage of footnotes, endnotes, glosses or comments in italics, whereas intratextual addition is the insertion of extra information directly into the target text.

3) Omission strategy aims at omitting culturally marked words because of the absence of the notion in the target text.

4) Globalization translation strategy described by Davies (2003) as follows:
the process of replacing culturally specific references with ones that are more neutral or general, in the sense that they are accessible to audiences from a wider range of cultural backgrounds.

5) Localization is the special type of domestication or cultural equivalent where culturally marked units of the original are replaced by culturally marked units familiar to the target reader. Thus, the translation sounds like as if it originated in the culture of the target language.

6) Transformation is a procedure of alteration or distortion of the original culturally marked units.

7) Creation is a case when the translator creates culturally marked units, which do not exist in the original. Thus, creation is just the opposite of omission. It is a rare strategy and needs special artistic creativity. Creation may sometimes intend to compensate for other losses of the source culture that occur at the rest of the target text.

Embarking on the methods of translation of culturally marked units it is of paramount importance to refer to the theories of Canadian scholars Vinay and Darbelnet (1958/1969) who distinguished between direct or literal translation and indirect or oblique translation. The theorists underlined that the translators may also be aware of gaps or “lacunae” in the target language which have to be filled by some equivalent means, as that the global impression is the same for the two messages, so they carried out special procedures for the gaps or “lacunae”. These procedures are borrowing, calque, literal translation, transposition, modulation, total syntagmatic change and adaptation.

Translation fiction is a challenging task as the translator may encounter stylistically coloured units, realias, lacunas and other components, which make the text unique and special. The translator is a bridge, a messenger with bi-cultural background whose primary task is to ensure the equivalent transfer of the original by preserving the aesthetic impact of the text as much as possible. The following article is a subtle attempt to compare the original and translation of Tumanyan’s work, with special reference to his fairy-tale
“The Death of Kikos”. The works of Hovhannes Tumanyan are the impeccable gems of Armenian literature and may relish the taste of any reader beginning from early childhood to the old ages (Դոլուխանյան, 2019).

Having been a multi-genre writer, Tumanyan underlined the identity of the Armenian nation, introduced unforgettable themes to the literary heritage of the Armenians. The illustration of Tumanyan’s works in different languages is really a complicated procedure, as the author used culturally marked units and realias, however the translation of his works is important for illustrating Tumanyan’s wisdom, philosophical and psychological approach towards life and for representing national values.

Generally, H. Tumanyan’s tales depict the richness of accumulated knowledge, aesthetic value and historical treasure of the nation. The extracts with their emotional-evaluative-expressive overtones represent also the Armenian culture and tradition. At first sight the tale has a simple plot where an average Armenian family is represented; the father was at work, he got thirsty and asked his eldest daughter to bring him some water from the spring. All of a sudden, the eldest daughter noticed a tall tree near the spring and imaged the pessimistic scenery of how her not yet born son – Kikos fell from the tree. She wove even a special verse for representing the image of Kikos and how he fell from the tree. The verse has the following texture in Armenian.

Գնացի մարդի,
Ունեցա որդի,
Գդակը պոպոզ,
Անունը Կիկոս.
Վեր ելավ ծառին,
Ցած ընկավ քարին...
ՎաՅ Կիկոս ջան,
ՎաՅ որդի ջան...

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The English translation of the tale done by Nairi Hakhverdi (2019) has an accurate style and language. The extract has the following English version.

“I found me a husband,
I had me a son,
His hat was pointy,
His name was Kikos,
He climbed up a tree
And fell on a rock.
Oh, my dear Kikos,
Oh, my dear son!”

The verse has a special repetition of sounds like “դի”/di/ in “մարդի”, “որդի”, “ո/ in “որդի”, “պոպոզ”, “Կիկոս”, “ին”/in/ “ծառին”, “քարին” and interjection repetitions like “Վա՜յ”, “ջան”. One cannot fail to observe that the sound repetitions are not preserved, however we may notice the tendency of generalization strategy by the usage of the repetition of the words “Oh!” and “my dear”. Naturally, the interjections are culturally marked and have emotional overtones hidden in their meanings, hence some translators apply the method of transliteration for implementing the target culture into the texture of the text.

After this imaginary misfortune, the mother of the family sent her younger daughter to the spring to see where her sister was, and here we are. Dwelling upon the further observations of the tale, we notice that the mother of the family sent her third daughter to the spring, as the eldest and the younger daughters did not return and the same situation occurred to the third daughter. Later the mother went after them and started to grieve. The same verse is introduced to the reader for five times, as if implementing psychologically to the mind of the reader the obsessive thoughts of the elder daughter towards her notorious child.

As soon as the eldest daughter saw her sister, she cried by saying.
“Come, come, unfortunate aunt! Look at what happened to your Kikos!”

“What Kikos?”

“I found me a husband,
I had me a son,
His hat was pointy,
His name was Kikos,
He climbed up a tree
And fell on a rock.
Oh, my dear Kikos,
Oh, my dear son!”

“Oh, in the name of your auntie, my dear Kikos, oh!”. And she, too, slapped herself on the head and sat next to her sisters, and they began to echo each other.

The extracts were translated very accurately which show the awareness of “background knowledge”, “global vertical context” and the lingual-cultural
aspects” of the work. The translator tried to maintain the verse line transferring the semantic - syntactical peculiarities by nuancing coloured units, however the target text has some formal overtones. For example, the combination “Արի’, արի’, անբախտ մորքուր” is semantically correct in English, but in the original it emphasizes tragedy by implementing not only culturally marked vocabulary, but also the punctuation which naturally cannot be transferred into target language. Or the combination “-Վա՜յ քու մորքուրին, Կիկոս ջան, վա՜յ” the translator reproduced for the benefit of the natural smoothness of the target text by employing “Oh, in the name of your auntie, my dear Kikos!” combination, so the target reader can perceive the context, however the folk coloring of the context became neutral. In this connection H. Tumanyan elaborated the concept of translation, thus saying that translation is like a flower under the mirror, one can admire its beauty but cannot smell.

The translator faced up a double challenge: the art of the author and the English-speaking environment. The translation of Tumanyan’s tales is an uneasy task, for there are many folk-oriented phraseological units which are practically untranslatable, like: “դիմարեն գայրեն”, “քվեսնար գայրեն ի ե կ կող”, “ուր հունահորեն”, “Դաի ւի պատարագ անենք”, “Կիկոսի գլուխն ի՞նչ է եկել”, “Այծը հիմարներ”, “Ժամ ու պատարագ անենք”, “Կիկոսի քելեխը տանք”, “Աշխարհքի կարգ է” etc. which are translated as “Oh, may your grandma’s eyes go blind”, “slapped their knees”, “come and see what happened to Kikos”, “Oh, you idiots”, “church and mass”, “a funeral banquet”, “the rule of the world”. The translator employed the strategy of generalization for transferring the meaning of the context, however in some cases it is preferable to put footnotes to explain the traditional usages and expressions.

Eventually the father went near the spring where he saw his wife and daughters crying for his imagery grandchild. The “wisest” man decided to slaughter the ox and bake bread, call people over and mass for Kikos. This is the rule of the world.
Another nice tale is “The Flower of Paradise” translated by Nazareth Seferian. The story revolves around a merchant who has a daughter named Flower. Once she asked a present from his father – a paradise flower. After a thorough search the merchant found the flower but the White Demon kept and watched it. As soon as the merchant plucked the flower the demon appeared. Here is the extract.

What else would a father do? He headed toward the road the old man had indicated and set off on it. He kept going and going, and who knows whether he went a long distance or a short one, but he finally arrived at the place where the Flower of Paradise bloomed. As soon as he got there and plucked the flower, the wind kicked up in a storm, and a demon appeared in the gale. You wouldn’t call it a man for it wasn’t one, nor would you call it beast, but it roared like a monster.

“Why did you pluck my flower? For that, you must die. For that, you must DIE!” The voice seemed to reverberate from all sides…

The man, neither dead nor fully alive, fell before the beast.

“Forgive me” he said, “Oh powerful one… my daughter asked for it…”
“I’ll forgive you,” the monster growled, “only if you give your daughter to me.”

“I agree.”

Tumanyan’s style and language is supremely melodious and incredibly natural. One cannot fail to observe that the translator tried to reproduce and depict the flavor of the tale. The comparative analysis has shown that there is a tendency to context domestication for the further natural perception of the target reader, like for example “հոր սիրտ է - what else would a father do; քո մահն է հիմի - For that, you must die. For that, you must DIE etc.”. An excellent translation solution is done in the following combination “մարդը ոչ մեռած, ոչ կենդանի՝ հրեշի առաջն է ընկնում - The man, neither dead nor fully alive, fell before the beast”.

The poor father agreed and headed towards his home. His unsuspecting daughter rushed toward to embrace him. Then the daughter noticed that one of the petals of the flower had the image of a coffin on it and she realized that something was going wrong. At first the father concealed the truth, however when the time came he told the whole story to her daughter. So the daughter dressed in her best clothing and with the Flower of Paradise in her hand went to the White Demon. Months passed and at the beginning of spring, the girl managed to escape from the crystal fortress. However the demon discovered the absence of the girl, he gathered all his demonic powers and rushed to search the girl. Meanwhile the girl had already reached the foot of Mount Aragats. As soon as she saw the demon coming towards her, she called out for help and a door appeared before her and she entered the mountain. When Flower entered that magic door, she ended up in heavenly garden, where thousands of voices sang. Here are the Armenian and English extracts.

Զմրուխտ պալատում, ոսկի դագաղում,
Pառկած է չարի ուժով կախարդված,
Pառկած է Արին ոչ մեռած,
Ու աշխարհքն ամեն սև սուգ է մտած։
In the Emerald Palace, in the coffin of gold,
Bewitched by evil, there he lies
Ari lies there, not dead, not asleep.
And the world in black mourning cries.
He lies there until that wonderful day,
That brilliant day that he will live
She’ll come with new life and a new love
And she’ll cry sweetly and a kiss she’ll give.
And here she is, the beauty
His love, his queen,
And he shall rise from his cold coffin
Our brave Ari-Armaneli.
Our king shall rise,
The strong Ari-Armaneli
And the bright eyes shall smile,
The world will bloom and be green
Now the curse will be beaten
Of the White Demon that villain
Now the green life will return,
The smell of flowers, the rays of the sun.

The tremendous artistry of the Armenian verse line was transferred into English with unique transparency. There is a clear tendency to reverberate the words and expressions so as to make them more accessible to modern readers. From time to time, for maintaining the culturally marked units the translator used nuanced generalized approach by preserving stylistically coloured units. The verse was reproduced for the benefit of the natural smoothness of the target text and it was translated accurately and with artistic imagery. The focal attention is paid to the form and content of the verse trying to reverberate faithfully the features of the original. The translator faced up a double challenge: the unique art of the author and the English-speaking environment. Tumanyan tends to use very simple diction, words and expressions that even a child could understand. But, needless to say, the works of the authors are not so simple as they seem. They are the juxtaposition of wisdom, morality, simplicity and creativity. Even visually we can notice that the translator tried to preserve the marked linguistic units of Armenian in English by employing different methods.

Dwelling upon the further observation of the context of the tale, it is revealed that Flower walked across the garden and saw an emerald palace, and inside the palace, a gold coffin, and inside the coffin, a young and handsome man who was neither asleep nor dead. As soon as Flower saw him she began to cry and her tears dripped on the face of the young man- Ari-Armaneli. Suddenly the young man opened his eyes and here we are, he asked the name of the maiden, who told him the whole story of the White Demon and the crystal castle. The tale finished with the battle between the
White Demon and Ari-Armaneli who defeated the demon. And a heavenly celebration began in the Arax valley.

The events and the characters of Tumanyan’s tales are simple people, which became part of literary image in the Armenian literature. The author created beautiful artifacts showing the dialectical unity of simplicity and complexity of the intellectual mind and wisdom. The close inspection of the tale reveals that it is a piece of literary gem, which makes aesthetic impact on the reader. The translator employed different strategies for transmitting the thematic complexity of the original into the different sociocultural context. The main strategy is the generalization, which makes the reader more accessible to the source text peculiarities.

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