УДК 81'2.811.111

I. ISCHENKO,
Senior Lecturer of English Philology and Translation Department
Alfred Nobel University, Dnipropetrovsk

DIFFICULTIES WHILE TRANSLATING REALIA

This article deals with translation of realia and their classification. It provides the analysis of the role which correct rendering of realia plays for conveying a source text. There are presented the ways to solve the difficulties which may occur in the process of translation.

Key words: communicative competence, realia, connotative lexicon, background lexicon, equivalence, transcription, transliteration.

The main purpose of teaching any foreign language is not only acquisition of knowledge and skills but also acquiring of cultural, traditional and linguistic background by the students of the Translation Department. Therefore there arises a question of the country-study aspect.

Culture-oriented linguistics studies the language itself as well as the cultural and traditional background. The main aim of this subject is to provide the communicative competence in the act of communication, mainly through the adequate perception of the interlocutor's speech and understanding of the authentic texts.

The main task of the culture-oriented linguistics is to study the linguistic units, which the most brightly show the national peculiarities of the culture of the native speakers: realia, connotative lexicon, background lexicon.

Any translator considers the translation of relias to be an interesting as well as difficult work, because insufficient awareness of history, culture, traditions, social order, political life can result in inadequate translation which can fail to be perceived by the recipient or be perceived in a wrong way.

Such a situation can occur because realias are the words which may convey the cultural identity of the native-speaking population. The peculiarities of the culture may be unknown to the definite person from another country so the translator is that very person who is responsible for the 'clear' translation.

Translation as a term has a polysemic nature, its most commonly known and the most general meaning is connected with the process of communicating the meaning of the word, group of words, sentence or abstracts from the text from the source language into the target language [5, p. 203]. The term 'translation' is also a replacement of the textual material of the source language with the equivalent textual material of the original language [2, p. 132]. The main task of any translator is to provide the adequacy. The adequacy is a complete rendering of the meaning content of the original and full functionally-stylistic corresponding to it. It is clear that it is necessary for the content of the source text and the target text to be identical, thus we may make a conclusion that the translation has to preserve the content of the source text: full-value of the translation means the complete communication of the source content and full functionally-stylistic correspondence to it [4, c. 203]. But A.S. Burkhudarov considers the full correspondence to be quite relative, as it is impossible to avoid omissions while translating, or

there appears incomplete conveying of the notions from the original texts [2, c. 100]. According to this the target text may never be full and completely equivalent to the original text. Hence it is necessary to specify that the terms «equivalence» and «adequacy» are different in some way.

Equivalence performs the function of the base of the communicative interchangeability, which makes the text be a translation.

The term «equivalence» means conveying the content of the original text by means of translating, which is regarded as the total information contained in the text including emotional, stylistic, imaginative, aesthetic functions of the linguistic units. This way equivalence is a wider notion, than «accuracy» of translation, which only means the preservation of the logical content of the original text. That is to say, the level of equivalence is a demand for the maximum correspondence to the original text.

By its meaning adequate translation is equivalent, though the level of the notional similarity between the original text and the target one may be different. The most complete equivalence means the most possible similarity between the texts. Equivalent translation will not always be considered adequate only because it satisfies the demand for the notional approximation to the original.

A lot of Ukrainian, Russian and foreign researchers devoted their work to the study of the realia. This issue has been researched intensively and skillfully enough, but from our point of view it still remains relevant and, in some way, quite new for the modern scientists, because life of people is developing and changing thus creating new realia, notions which need to be studied. Also this issue is still relevant, because we may find the fields of the realia research which have not been studied well and try to observe the realia in these unknown fields.

To enter this field it is necessary to understand what «realia» means in the first place, both within translation studies, and without; in this we will be helped by two Bulgarian researchers, Sergej Vlahov e Sider Florin, who in 1980 published a whole book covering what is normally called «untranslatable», realia included.

The word «realia» has its origins in Latin, not the language spoken by Romans, that used by Middle Age scholars in many European countries as a language of science, research, philosophy. Since in Latin the plural neuter nominative of an adjective transforms it into a name, «realia» means «the real things», as opposed to words, that are considered neither «things» nor «real». For this reason, the word is a plural of «realis» (real), that, however, is not found in most Latin dictionaries because they usually contain the Classical, not Medieval, Latin occurrences.

In this meaning, the word signifies the objects of the material culture.

Entering in the field of translation studies, a radical terminological change must be enforced: «realia», in fact, does not mean objects, but signs, words and, more precisely, those words signifying objects of the material culture, especially pertaining to a local culture. It is, therefore, necessary to distinguish realia-objects (mostly outside translation studies) and realia-words (mostly inside translation studies).

In every language, there are words that, without in any way distinguishing themselves in the original from the verbal co-text, nonetheless they are not easily transmissible into another language through the usual means and demand from the translator a peculiar attitude: some of these pass to the text of the translation in unaltered form (they are transcribed), others may only partially preserve in translation their morphological or phonetic structure, still others must sometimes be substituted for lexical units of a completely different value or even «composed». Among these words, we meet denominations of element of everyday life, of history, of culture etc. of a given people, country, place that do not exist in other peoples, countries and places. Exactly these words have received in translation studies the name of «realia».

Linguistic differences notwithstanding, we need to be careful not to confuse the field of realia with the field of terms. Let's get Vlahov and Florin's opinion on the subject.

Between realia and terms there is a fundamental difference. Terms are the basis of scientific lexicon; their scope is specialized, scientific literature; in other spheres, above all in artistic literature, they are used with a definite stylistic aim. Realia are not met mainly in artistic literature, as it is well known they represent elements of the local and historical color; we find them in some descriptive sciences also, but they are now used, above all, as denominations of described objects or even as pure terms [3, p.102].

There exist several classifications of the notion «realia», but all of them are quite similar.

Realia as the units of translation are divided into abbreviations and phrases. Also they may be divided into the geographic and ethnographic realia. The geographic realias are names of the geographic and atmospheric objects and endemic species. Etnographic realia describe everyday life and culture of nations, their spiritual and material culture, traditions, religion, art, folklore etc. Etnographic realias are those connected with everyday life, art and culture, names of residents and ethnic objects, currency units.

Within one language we should distinguish own realias and borrowed realias which in their turn are divided into national (known to all the citizens of the country), local (belonging to one dialect), microlocal (peculiar to definite locality).

Comparing several languages we may distinguish regional realias and international, existing in the lexicon of many languages, which entered the vocabulary though preserving their initial colour.

Taking into consideration everything mentioned above we may say that the main feature of the realia is their colouring. To convey this colouring is the most difficult task for any translator while translating.

Some researchers such as Vereschagin and Kostomarov refer realias to the non-equivalent lexicon, claiming that they may not undergo any translation. However, realia is a part of the source text that is why its correct interpretation in the target text is one of the conditions for the translation to be adequate. Therefore the question whether to translate the realia is not the problem, but that of the way of its interpreting.

Translation of the realia demands the translator to be especially careful. Although we mean the notions and objects which may be accurately described and defined, while translating them into the target language there may occur remarkable deviations and variations. It is connected with the fact that by the frequency of use, by the role in the language, by the household meaning, the words naming the realias do not have any term colouring; they do not outstand even in the most everyday content of the source text thus being usual for the source language which is the biggest difficulty for the translator.

To translate the realia in a correct way it is necessary to take into account the following factors: the type of the text, the meaning of the realia in the text, the type of th realia and its systematic role in the culture of the source language, the degree of perception of the unusual word-collocations and «exotic» expressions in the target language.

It is clear that to communicate the definition of the objects used in the source language and the images connected with them, it is necessary to have definite awareness of the reality described in the source text. In the theory of translation such awareness is called «background» which is a complex of the ideas about the real background of the life in the country of the source language [1, p. 93]. Background lexicon is the words or expressions bearing some additional meaning and definite semantic and stylistic flavor, which affect the main meaning and are known to all the people belonging to some peculiar language group.

There exist four ways to render the realia into the target language: transcription or transliteration; neologism (calque, half calque, appropriation, semantic neologism); realia substitution; approximate translation (generalization, functional analogue, description, explanation, interpretation).

Transcription is, in its turn, divided into transcription proper and transliteration. By «transcription» we mean transmission of sounds of a foreign language (usually proper name, geographic name, scientific term) using the letters of the alphabet of the receiving culture.

Whether or not the target language and the source language use the same or different alphabets involves further differences. If the alphabet is different, the change is even more necessary (although there are also text insertions in different alphabets) so that the target language reader could be able to process the message. If the alphabet is the same, there can be cases of adaptation reproducing the pronunciation. Transliteration is on the other hand a transmission of letters of a foreign word using the letters of the alphabet of the target language.

Transcription makes emphasis on the sound, while the emphasis of transliteration is on the graphic form. When transliteration is taken to the extreme, it is possible to anyone (even

a computer) reconstruct the original form of a word, as if it were the coding/decoding of the Morse alphabet.

One could even go further, and say that the transcription approach is useful in direct interpersonal relationships, in everyday, matter-of-fact situations, while transliteration is useful in the more intellectual relationships, mediated by written formulation.

Next way of translation realia is the neologism, often amounting to a calque. By «calque» we usually mean the «translation calque»: with material of the receiving language a simple or composed word is formed by literally translating the elements of the expression in the source culture. One classic example is the English *skyscraper*, that has many calques in different languages: the Russian *neboskreb*, the Italian *grattacielo*, the French *gratte-ciel*, the German *Wolkenkratzer*, for example.

Then there are half-calques, in which just a part of a composed expression in preserved.

There are instances of appropriation, i.e. of adaptation of foreign realia: a word in the receiving language is created that, however, fundamentally is worn over the frame – even from a phonemic point of view – of the original word.

The semantic neologism, on the other hand, is different from the calque due to the absence of an etymological connection to the original word. It is a word, or word combination, «created» by the translator in order to permit the rendering of the meaning contents of realia. It is also called semantic calque. One example is the English *snowshoes* from which the Russian *snegostupy* derives, formed with the sneg-root, meaning «snow» and the root stup-, meaning «step» (and having the same etymology of the English word).

There are also instances of fake calques, or pseudocalques, or presumed calques. For example, in American English the Italian word latte is used to mean not what in Italian is meant by latte (milk), but «espresso coffee mixed with steamed milk», i.e. «cappuccino», another element of realia that, by contrast, has passed unchanged in the English-speaking culture.

According to Vlahov and Florin, this method causes an unacceptable «substitution» of the prototext's colour with a different colour. There are paradoxical situations in which the nearest realia to foreign realia in the receiving culture are realia, often themselves adopted (from a foreign culture), often international, but close, understandable to the reader and somehow colourless, for which reason they are preferred [2]. They are chosen, implicitly, by translators preferring such a strategy. Even on this plane, it is impossible to state that one strategy is absolutely better or worse than another. Realia substitution can make sense, especially if the text has a pragmatic, utilitarian dominant, and the style can be given a low priority. It is clear that such a strategy, whenever applied to literary texts, tends to flatten the cultural differences, to negate them, to alter reality in order to render a text understandable, better, to make it understood without the effort to accept its diversity.

Then there is approximate translation of realia that, according to Vlahov and Florin, is the most popular. This approach allows to translate the material content of an expression at least in a vague way, but the color is nearly always lost, because instead of the connotation prescribed by the author's strategy, we have an expression necessarily deprived of that intent connotation, having a neutral style. Within such approach there are some subtypes:

The principle of substitution with a generic expression of broader meaning is resorting to the noted translation principle of generalization. The approach is indicated whenever the translator arbitrarily decides not to translate the local colour, knowing that in this way he can give an idea of the objective, material reference. Another subtype provides the substitution with a functional analogue. The definition of this strategy is very poor, because it merely says that the substituted element arouses a similar reaction in the receiving culture reader to the one aroused by the prototext on the source culture reader. Speaking of aroused reactions is very dangerous, because there is neither objective confirmation nor the possibility of distinguishing the reactions of one reader from those of another, there is a supposition on a sort of standard reader.

Based on such a technique, for example, a not widely known game very popular in the source culture can be substituted for a very popular game in the receiving culture. In a translation from Russian into Bulgarian, since *chess* was not well known, a translator has transformed a *chess game* into a *checkers game* (and maybe he would have turned it into a volleyball game, but he couldn't, because the two men had «sit to play»).

A third subtype is regarded as the description, explanation and interpretation of the realia elements instead of realia, a periphrasis is introduced explicitating the denotative content. For example, instead of a Russian *armyak* you write *«rough cloth coat»*.

There is a fourth translation strategy consisting in the contextual translation of the realia. Realia elements are substituted with words that, in the context and co-text in which they are placed in the original, explain the sense of such a collocation. Instead of translating the lexical meaning, the systemic, relational meaning is translated, that would be, naturally, vane to search for in the dictionary. This option is followed when the translator thinks that the context is the dominating factor in a given message. The example reported by Vlahov and Florin is the Russian sentence *Skol´ko stoit putyovka na sovetskij kurort?* that is translated: *How much are accommodations at Soviet spas?* In this way the sense of *putyovka* is lost, it being a sort of official certificate given to someone going on vacation, or taking a refresher course, or going on retreat, that, in Soviet times, could have been free or cost a symbolic sum. Evidently this word has no 'analogue' in cultures outside the Russian-Soviet one.

Obviously all those types of translation realia are almost never used separately, they are usually combined as if using only one way of rendering the text may lose its national peculiarity or, vice versa, can be over flooded with the foreign speech (for example while using transliteration only).

Now we proceed to the choice of one or the other strategy.

The first choice to be taken is, of course, between transliteration and translation. It is possible synthesize the variables on which such a choice depends into five points: the type of text; the significance of the realia in the context; the type of realia, their systemic role in the source culture and in the receiving culture; the languages, the collocations, the degree of acceptance of unusual collocations and exotic expressions in the receiving culture, and the translator's will to «force» the reader to overcome mental laziness in favor of a richer world awareness.

If the text is a scientific text, there are probably not many realia, and the few present are mostly actually terms (words of technical terminology), that usually have the corresponding term in the receiving culture as the resulting translation. In public affairs writing, transliteration is statistically more frequent, while in fiction the choice depends mostly on the translation strategy.

The presence of realia in the text can be more or less significant, their role can have a greater or lesser semantic value. The realia elements being alien or proper to the source language constitutes a major difference in their consideration. When realia are alien to the source culture, it is probable that a neuter translation strategy consists in transliterating or transcribing them. The presence of realia pertaining to the source culture, on the contrary, poses a much more serious problem to the translator.

In the different national dictionaries, there is no uniform quota of foreign words. Some cultures are more inclined to adsorb words from «alien» cultures than others. And, for historical reasons of the single nations, some cultures leave their mark on others. For example, in the former Soviet countries, like the Baltic countries that are entering the European Union, until 1991 the quantity of Russian borrowings was very high, due to the political domination. It is very probable that, within the bounds of reason, such borrowings have been going into disuse since 1991, when these republics became independent again.

The degree of awareness of determined realia in a given culture is an essential parameter. Some hardly ever arouse any doubts: it is the case of ruble, franc, Bolshevik, toreador, Thermidor, Jacobin. These are words found in almost any dictionary, and in these cases transcription is a nearly obliged choice, because the reader that could in the event not being aware of their meaning can easily indirectly access it. The realia that really challenge are national, regional and local realia (of the source culture). Of these, the ones semantically more active can be transcribed, the secondary ones can be translated, according to the whole translation strategy.

While translating realia the translator may face some difference between the semantic systems of different languages. There are three main types of correspondence between lexical units of the two languages: 1) full correspondence; 2) partial correspondence; 3) absence of correspondence.

Full correspondence is quite rare to meet. As a rule these are the words, which have only lexical meaning in both languages. They are proper names and geographical names (*Homer* –

Гомер; Poland – Польша); Scientific and technical terms (*logarithm – логарифм, sodium – натрий).*

Partial correspondence means that a word from the source language has several semantic equivalents in the target language. For example, a Russian word *рука* has two corresponding translations into English – *arm* and *hand*, each of them having more narrow meaning: *arm* means the upper part of the limb whereas *hand* means its lower part.

In other cases visa versa the English words may be semantically non-differentiate in comparison with the Russian ones. For example, stove – *печь* and *плита.*

It is necessary to mention that to have the most adequate translation the translator needs to use the reconstruction of the syntactic structure of the sentence, lexical replacements with full change of the meaning of the word from the target language or both of those methods at same time, thus using so called lexico-grammatical transformations.

Bibliography

1. Бархударов Л.С. Язык и перевод / Л.С. Бархударов. – М.: Международные отношения, 1975. – 235 с.

2. Влахов С. Непереводимое в переводе. Реалии. «Министерство Перевода». Сборник статей / С. Влахов, С. Флорин. – 1969. М.: Советский писатель, 1970. – 320 с.

3. Комиссаров В.Н. Лингвистика перевода / В.Н. Комиссаров. – М.: Международные отношения, 1980. – 167с.

4. Федоров А.В. Основы общей теории перевода / А.В. Федоров. – М.: ООО Филология три, 2002. – 416 с.

5. Korunets I.V. Theory and Practice of Translation / I.V. Korunets. – Vinnytsia.: 2001. – Nova Knyha Publishers. – 446 p.

У статті розглядаються способи перекладу реалій та їх класифікація. Подається аналіз того, наскільки важливим є правильний переклад реалій для передачі змісту вихідного тексту, а також труднощів, які можуть виникнути в процесі перекладу.

Ключові слова: комунікативна компетенція, реалія, конотативна лексика, фонова лексика, еквівалентність, транскрипція, транслітерація.

В статье исследуются способы перевода реалий и их классификация. Даётся анализ того, насколько важным является правильный перевод реалий для передачи смысла исходного текста, а также трудности, которые могут возникнуть в процессе перевода.

Ключевые слова: коммуникативная компетенция, реалия, конотативная лексика, фоновая лексика, эквивалентность, транскрипция, транслитерация.