

TRANSLATION OF LITHUANIAN CULTURE-SPECIFIC ITEMS INTO ENGLISH

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The present article sets out to investigate theoretical and practical issues that arise in the process of translating Lithuanian culture-bound items into English. Another major goal of the study is to analyse some of the practices currently employed by Lithuanian translators against the strategies that are proposed by Western scholars working in the field of Translation Studies. The empirical part of the research is based on a selected set of cultural items from the field of folk art.

Definition of culture-specific words

Cultural or culture-bound words may cause translation problems for a number of reasons. Baker enumerates eleven types of translation problems, one of them being *culture-specific concepts* (Baker 1992, 21). Other scholars use different terms to denote this notion. Newmark, for instance, refers to culture-specific items as *cultural words* (Newmark 1988, 94), Robinson (Robinson 1997, 222) and Schäffner & Wiesemann (2001) label them *realia*; the latter source also employs the phrases *culture-bound phenomena and terms* or *culture-specific items*. All these labels cover specific objects which may be defined as 'words and combinations of words denoting objects and concepts characteristic of the way of life, the culture, the social and historical development of one nation and alien to another' (Florin 1993, 123). In the present paper all the terms presented above will be used as synonyms.

Translation strategies of culture-specific terms

Newmark maintains that translation problems caused by culture-specific words arise due to the fact that they are intrinsically and uniquely bound to the culture concerned and, therefore, are related to the 'context of a cultural tradition' (Newmark 1988, 78). Drawing on Nida's insights, Newmark points out five areas (with sub-categories in each) that cultural items may come from: (1) ecology (flora, fauna, winds etc), (2) material culture (artifacts, food, clothes, houses and towns, transport), (3) social culture (work and leisure), (4) organizations, customs, ideas (political, social, legal, religious or artistic), and (5) gestures and habits (Newmark 1988, 94-103). It has to be pointed out, however, that Newmark's classification is only one of the possible ways to approach the subject (for a different point of view, see Florin 1993). In what follows, translation strategies

claimed appropriate for rendering culture-bound words as distinguished by leading scholars in the field of Translation Studies will be considered in some detail.

The actual choice of a particular translation strategy depends on a variety of factors, such as the purpose of the TT (target text), the intended readership, generic and textual constraints of a text/publication, and the importance of the cultural item itself.

Accepted standard (or recognized) translation. Newmark defines this procedure as 'the official generally accepted translation of any institutional term' (Newmark 1988, 89). For example, the French word *hors d'oeuvre* has its recognized translation in English as the *starter*.

Transference and naturalization are discussed by a number of authors. According to Newmark, transference is a strategy when a SL (source language) word is transferred into a TL (target language) text in its original form, for example, when the German word *Bundestag* is transferred into an English (TL) text as *Bundestag* (Newmark 1988, 81). Hervey & Higgins call this procedure *cultural borrowing* (Hervey, Higgins 1992, 31); Baker refers to it as a 'translation using a loan word' (Baker 1992, 34), Chesterman (1997) labels it *exoticization (foreignization or estrangement)*, whereas Schäffner & Wiesemann (2001) call it *naturalization*.

The decision whether to transfer or to transfer with some kind of adaptation depends on the degree of local colouring that the translator wishes to bring to his/her translation. Newmark suggests that this strategy is useful when a translator wants 'to attract the reader or to give a sense of intimacy between the text and the reader – sometimes the sound or the evoked image appears attractive' (Newmark 1988, 82).

Newmark prefers 'the more transparent term "through-translation"' to denote *loan translation* or *calque* (Newmark 1988, 84), the terms also used by Chesterman (1997). In a similar vein, Hervey & Higgins maintain that 'calque consists of TL words and TL syntax, it is not idiomatic in TL' (Hervey, Higgins 1992, 33). A typical example is the French phrase *cherchez la femme*. If rendered as '*cherchez la femme*' into the TT, it would be a cultural borrowing, while its equivalent '*look for the woman*' is a calque.

In order to avoid possible misunderstandings while transferring, naturalizing or using calques, many scholars recommend employing two or more translation strategies at the same time. Newmark calls this method *couplet*, *triplet* or *quadruplet* according to the number of strategies that are combined together to deal with a single problem. Schäffner & Wiesemann refer to this strategy as *combinations* and believe that they 'are frequently "safer" solutions, e.g. loanword with added explanation, loanword with an added culturally neutral TL term to define the source culture specific term' (Schäffner, Wiesemann 2001, 34). Baker proposes to join two specific strategies, i.e. using a *loanword* and an *explanation* (Baker 1992, 36), whereas Chesterman employs Pym's term *double presentation* to mean the same (Chesterman 1997, 95). The common feature of the proposed strategies is the use of a loan word to which an explanation is added. However, *explanation* or *paraphrasing* may be understood as a separate strategy.

Newmark (1988) distinguishes two separate strategies, *neutralization* and *paraphrase*. The distinction between the two procedures differentiated by Newmark occur on a linguistic level: *neutralization* means paraphrasing at the word level, whereas *paraphrase* signifies rewording of meaning at a higher linguistic level. To distinguish between these strategies is at times a problematic issue due to the fact that some scholars treat the procedure of *paraphrasing* from a different perspective. Newmark labels the strategy of paraphrasing as *neutralization* (Newmark 1988, 83-84) on the grounds that a SL word becomes neutralized or generalized when it is explained using some culture-free words. He further observes that in any explanation two elements are essential, i.e. description and function; consequently, two separate strategies of *functional* and *descriptive*

equivalent may be distinguished. To be more specific, *description* states size, colour or composition, whereas *function* clarifies the purpose of a SL culture-specific word. Newmark attaches central importance to the strategy of giving a *functional equivalent* and describes it as 'the most accurate way of translating i.e. deculturalizing a cultural word' (Newmark 1988, 83).

Baker refers to this translation strategy as *paraphrase* (Baker 1992, 37-38); it is considered to be the best strategy for the explanation of phrases. Chesterman, however, claims that this strategy results in a 'loose, free, in some contexts even undertranslated' TL version (Chesterman 1997, 104).

Schäffner & Wiesemann distinguish the strategy of *explanation as a footnote* (Schäffner, Wiesemann 2001, 34); a similar strategy of *notes, glosses and additions* is also singled out by Newmark (1988, 91). He observes that the translator may wish to supply some extra information to the TL version. This information possibly will cover miscellaneous aspects of the text - cultural, technical or linguistic - and may appear within the text or as a footnote in order not to interrupt the reader's flow of attention. *Explanation as a footnote* may be placed at the bottom of a page, at the end of a chapter, or at the end of a book. Chesterman labels this strategy *visibility change* because 'translator's footnotes, bracketed comments ... or added glosses explicitly draw the reader's attention to the presence of the translator' (Chesterman 1997, 112).

One more strategy might be compared to those analysed above. Newmark identifies a separate strategy of *classifier* which can be considered as a part of either *addition* or *neutralization*. *Classifier* is defined by Newmark as 'a generic or general or superordinate term sometimes supplied by the translator to qualify a specific term', as in '*the city of Brno*' (Newmark 1988, 282). This kind of addition may stand for either the function or the description of a SL word. It differs from the procedure of *neutralization* in that the latter involves a complete change of a word. Chesterman's (1997) strategy of *abstraction change* (i.e. changes between abstract and concrete terms) involves the use of a different word.

Adaptation of source culture-specific terms to target culture norms and expectations is given a variety of labels. Chesterman calls it *cultural filtering* and defines it as translation by 'TL cultural or functional equivalents, so that they conform to TL norms' (Chesterman 1997, 108). For Newmark the term *cultural equivalent* means 'an approximate translation where a SL cultural word is translated by a TL cultural word' (Newmark 1988, 82), for example, the French word '*bac (le baccalauréat)*' may be rendered into English as '*A level*'. In Baker's and Schäffner & Wiesemann's classification this strategy falls under the labels of *cultural substitution* and *substitution* respectively. Baker points out that the main advantage of this strategy is that the target reader can easily identify the item which has a currency in his/her language (Baker 1992, 31). Hervey & Higgins suggest using the strategy of *communicative translation* in cases when a literary rendering would be inappropriate for culturally conventional formulae (Hervey, Higgins 1992, 31). The procedure of *communicative translation* may not be compared to the ones distinguished by Newmark, Baker or Schäffner & Wiesemann due to the fact that it operates at the phrase level. As Hervey & Higgins point out, 'many proverbs, idioms and clichés have readily identifiable communicative equivalents in the TL' (Hervey, Higgins 1992, 31).

Analysis of the corpus material

The corpus of data related to the translation of folk art items that the present study is based on was drawn from reference books and publications for both specialized and wider audiences.

As regards reference books, two sources were considered. The first source, *Lithuania: An Encyclopedic Survey*, was published in 1986. It is possible to predict that translation strategies

employed in this type of publication will comply with the need to save space. In view of this, the procedure of an *accepted standard translation* was the most common way of rendering culture-specific items, e.g. *Trys Karaliai* (Epiphany) or *Užgavėnių karnavalai* (Shrovetide carnivals) (Lithuania 1986, 397). However, the *couplet* strategy was preferred for rendering those Lithuanian words which have no cultural equivalent in English (ibid):

- (1) *Vakaronė, a general evening festival ...*
- (2) *... the completion of seasonal farm labours (pabaigtuvės; for example, after harvesting rye...)*

In describing Shrovetide personages, the items *Kotrė*, *Morė* and *Gavėnas* are transferred without any explanation, while *Kanapinis* (Hemp Man) and *Lašininis* (Lard Man) are rendered by *calques*. Their symbolic meanings are not described in more detail due to the constraints of space.

The second source, *The Baltic States. A Reference Book* (1991), among other things, provides information on the types of dwelling houses. Compared to the 1986 publication, this information is presented in an almost identical way. Note the examples below:

- (3) *... dwelling houses (log cabins with hearths; pirkia and troba, houses in Aukštaitija and Dzūkija; stuba - houses in Suvalkija) ... (Lithuania 1986, 390)*
- (4) *... dwelling houses (log cabins with hearths, troba, pirkia, stuba) ... (The Baltic States 1991, 186)*

The examples show that the strategy of *transference* is combined with that of *descriptive equivalent*. The 1986 source, though, seems to indicate additional information related to the name of a dwelling house in terms of regional variation.

The *Religion and Church* section (*The Baltic States* 1991, 194) informs about ancient Lithuanian gods. To render the cultural terms in question, several strategies are used, such as providing *functional equivalents*, *transferring* an original Lithuanian word plus giving a *descriptive equivalent*, for example:

- (5) *the god of thunder and lightening Perkūnas (Thunder)*
- (6) *the guardian of wizards and sages Velnias (Devil)*
- (7) *the goddesses of forests and hunting Medeina and Žvorūnė*

Books for specialized audiences include coloured albums and other types of books that deal with some specific area of folk art (e.g. a description of distaffs, crosses, national costumes, etc.). A great number of the analysed texts contain photos which make it easier to understand what is meant by a transferred Lithuanian word. In such cases the cultural item is followed either by a descriptive or functional equivalent. The translation strategy for photo captions may be identified in Baker's terms *translation by illustration* (Baker 1997, 42). When a physical entity, which is lacked by a TL, is illustrated, it needs less explanation in the flow of the text and vice versa.

Other publications under analysis include Kudirka's *The Lithuanians: An Ethnic Portrait* (1991) and Brazytė-Bindokienė's *Lithuanian Customs and Traditions* (1989), translated by Vita Matusaitis. These publications exhibit more variety of translation strategies due to the absence of generic constraints that were essential for reference books. As the book *Lithuanian Customs and Traditions* by Brazytė-Bindokienė includes texts in both English and Lithuanian, it was possible to identify the strategy of *omission* which was otherwise impossible to trace in one-language texts. Examples of omission relate to the description of decorating Easter eggs (Brazytė-Bindokienė 1989):

- (8) *Raštas yra ryškesnis, jeigu kiaušinis nudažomas tamsesne spalva. Skutinėti galima ir svogūnų lukštais dažytus velykaičius. (p.167)*
- (9) *The pattern is more visible if the egg is dyed a dark color. (p.166)*

With this general introduction in mind, the tables below summarize different ways that were used in a variety of sources to render the culture-bound items *koplytėlė* (Table 1), *rūpintojėlis* (Table 2), and *verbos* (Table 3).

Some comments are in order as regards the semantic content of the two lexical items, 'chapel' and 'shrine', which were chosen as suitable equivalents for *koplytėlė*. *The Oxford Dictionary of Current English* defines 'a shrine' as a place for special worship (1992, 845), while 'a chapel' is described as a place for private Christian worship in a Cathedral or large church, with its own altar (1992, 136).

As is demonstrated in Table 1 and Table 2, the suggested equivalents of the Lithuanian culture-specific items include additional descriptive/explanatory elements.

Another culture-specific term, *Verbos*, deserves special attention. It should be noted that Lithuanians call both types of natural and woven Palm Sunday flowers by one term *verbos*. Kudirka notes that woven *verbos* 'were used for decorative purposes and never had the same ritual function as the Palm Sunday bunches of willow, yew and other green twigs' (Kudirka 1991, 77). The data analysis showed that while translating into English, two different variants of the Lithuanian word *verbos* emerge: one refers to natural branches of plants, and the other refers to hand-made *verbos*. Consequently, the rendering of the two kinds of *verbos* will differ.

Table 1. Ways of rendering 'koplytėlė'

Publication /Type of book	Rendering of the word 'koplytėlė'
<i>Lithuania. An Encyclopedic Survey</i> (1986) (encyclopedic text)	Roadside shrine
<i>Monuments of Lithuanian History</i> (1990) (album)	Roadside chapel
Kudirka J. 1991. <i>The Lithuanians. An Ethnic Portrait</i> (book)	Chapel
<i>Lietuvių liaudies menas</i> (1993) (album)	Chapels of farms / A shrine in a tree
Brazytė-Bindokienė D. <i>Lithuanian Customs and Traditions</i> (1989) (book)	Miniature wayside shrines
<i>Lithuania. Baltic Hospitality and Its Best</i> (1999) (booklet)	Miniature outdoor chapels

Table 2. Ways of rendering 'rūpintojėlis'

Publication /Type of book	Rendering of the word 'rūpintojėlis'
<i>Lithuania. An Encyclopedic Survey</i> (1986) (encyclopedic text)	<i>Rūpintojėliai</i> (figurines of meditative Christ)
Kudirka J. (1991) <i>The Lithuanians. An Ethnic Portrait</i> (book)	Pensive Christ
Marcinkas F. (ed) (1991) <i>Lithuanian Folk Society</i> (specialized book)	A statuette of Christ
<i>Lietuvių liaudies menas</i> (1993) (album)	Pensive Christ
<i>Welcome to Lithuania</i> (1996) (booklet)	Wooden statues of the Christ of Sorrows – the so-called <i>Rūpintojėlis</i> – which were fixed on crosses or placed in miniature chapels outside houses
<i>Lithuania. Baltic Hospitality and Its Best</i> (1999) (booklet)	Carved wooden statues of the Christ of Sorrow – the so-called <i>Rūpintojėlis</i>
<i>Lithuania</i> (2003) (booklet)	Wooden statues of the Christ of Sorrows – the so-called <i>Rūpintojėlis</i> – which were attached on outdoor crosses or placed in miniature outdoor chapels

Table 3. Ways of rendering 'verbos'

Publication /Type of book	Rendering of natural 'verbos'	Rendering of decorative 'verbos'
Brazytė-Bindokienė D. <i>Lithuanian Customs and Traditions</i> (1989) (book)	Plant branches called <i>verba</i> in Lith./ Bunches of juniper and pussy willows	<i>A verba/Vilnius verbos</i> are plaited from dried plants, flowers and bent-grass
Kudirka J. (1991) <i>The Lithuanians. An Ethnic Portrait</i> (book)	A bunch of juniper twigs/ A bunch of pussy willow	Palm Sunday flower/ Bunches of dried flowers
Balys J. (1993) <i>Lietuvių kalendorinės šventės</i> (summary)	A twig of juniper/A bouquet of green juniper twigs or willow sprouts, called <i>verba</i>	to flog with juniper twigs or <i>verba</i>
<i>Welcome to Lithuania</i> (1996) (tourist brochure)	Juniper twigs sold near churches	Verbos, which are the Palm Sunday flowers/decorative bunches of multicoloured dried plants, flowers and corn ears
<i>Lithuania</i> (2003) (tourist brochure)	Juniper twigs brought to church to be blessed	Verbos – the region's traditional Palm Sunday flowers. Juniper twigs have been exchanged by decorative interwoven bunches of multicoloured dried plants, flowers and corn ears

Table 3 exemplifies the point made above. In translating 'natural *verbos*', the plants that are taken to church tend to be enumerated, while rendering the item 'decorative *verbos*' most authors transfer a Lithuanian word and explain how *verbos* are made.

Conclusions

The analysis of the corpus of data allows us to make the following generalizations.

First, most translators tend to employ *couplets* or *even triplets* in order to render culture-specific items more precisely. The most frequently employed couplet strategies include (1) transference + neutralization (i.e. providing a functional or descriptive equivalent), (2) transference + cultural equivalent, and (3) transference + accepted standard translation (in cases where it exists). *Transference* evidently dominates in all analysed texts due to the fact that they tend to be more expressive than informative. Other strategies (*calques*, *naturalizations*, *omissions*) were not common because of the function that the target texts have to perform in the target culture, which is to introduce the material and social culture of Lithuania. *Notes* and *glosses* were not encountered either.

Second, the translation strategy chosen seems to depend on the appearance of the item in the text: the first mentioning of the culture-bound term (*transference*) is usually accompanied by a *descriptive equivalent*. Finally, the visual presentation of the Lithuanian word varies much with respect to authors and publication types. The items were italicised, presented in bold, introduced without any special emphasis, or marked in two ways, for example, put into quotation marks and italicised.

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LIETUVIŲ ETNOKULTŪROS TERMINŲ VERTIMAS Į ANGLŲ KALBĄ

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Santrauka

Straipsnyje nagrinėjami teoriniai kultūrinių realių vertimo aspektai ir aptariamos įvairios vertimo strategijos, kurias vertėjams raštu siūlo šiuolaikinis vertimo mokslas.

Vertimo strategijos, taikytos lietuvių etnokultūros terminų vertimui į anglų kalbą, buvo analizuojamos atsižvelgiant į teksto tipą, potencialaus skaitytojo poreikius ir kultūrinių realių unikalumą leidiniuose, publikuotuose Lietuvoje ir už jos ribų 1986 – 1996 metais.

Įteikta 2005 m. balandžio mėn.