Grzegorz Gwóźdź

TRANSLATION STUDIES, CULTURE AND TRANSLATION

Tłumaczenie słów kulturowych nigdy nie było i prawdopodobnie nigdy nie będzie łatwym zadaniem dla żadnego tłumacza. Wykorzystanie strategii tłumaczeniowych, ale także kategoryzacji owych słów pomaga w przekazaniu w języku docelowym skomplikowanych treści budujących dane słowo bądź wyrażenie kulturowe. Poniży artykuł jest tekstem ukazującym sposób, w jaki pojęcie kultury wdzierając się do przekładoznawstwa znalazło w nim swoje trwałe miejsce, jednocześnie stając się nowym fundamentem oraz punktem wyjścia dla współczesnych badań przekładoznawczych.

As David Katan[1] reports, by 1952, Alfred Louis Kroeber and Clyde Kluckholn both American anthropologists, had compiled a list of 164 definitions of culture and brought forward the 165th of their own which states that

> Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiment in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values. Culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other hand, as conditioning elements of future action[2].

In order to simplify this anthropological standpoint Newmark's language-oriented approach should be of help. In his Textbook of

---

[1] Katan, David: Translating Cultures. An Introduction for Translators, Interpreters and Mediators. Manchester: St Jerome Publishing. 1999. P. 16.

[2] Kroeber, A. L. and Kluckhohn, C: Cultures: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions. Cambridge: Harvard University. Peabody Museum Papers Vol. 47, no. 1. 1952. P. 181.

Translation, Newmark defines culture "as the way of life and its mani-
festations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as
its means of expression"[3]. The thing that strikes me most about these two
definitions is that the former makes no reference to language, whereas
the latter mentions language without providing any elaboration on the gene-
ral and to some extent hazy concept of 'life manifestations'.

   If one were to formulate a definition of culture that would be of more
help for Translation Studies, it would be advisable to blend the two already
mentioned definitions since culture is extensively embedded in language and
the other way around. In order to be relevant to Translation Studies, the
concept of culture cannot be understood as advanced intellectual develop-
ment as embodied by arts, but should be regarded as an aggregate
knowledge, including "all socially conditioned aspects of human life"[4]
as it is viewed by the extensive Goodenough's definition below:

> As I see it, a society's culture consists of whatever it is on has to know or
> believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and do so
> in any role that they accept for any one of themselves. Culture, being what
> people have to learn as distinct from their biological heritage, must consist
> of the end product of learning: knowledge, in a most general, if relative,
> sense of the term. By this definition, we should note that culture is not
> a material phenomenon; it does not consist of things, people, behaviour,
> or emotions. It is rather an organization of these things. It is the forms of
> things that people have in mind, their models for perceiving, relating, and
> otherwise interpreting them. As such, the things people say and do, their
> social arrangements and events, are products or by-products of their culture
> as they apply it to the task of perceiving and dealing with their cir-
> cumstances[5].

   In consequence, this total knowledge becomes a prerequisite for the
translator, who apart from being proficient in both the SL and the TL must
be also bicultural. Lefevere expresses the idea in the following way:

---

[3] Newmark, Peter: A Textbook of Translation. New York: Prentice Hall. 1998. P. 94.

[4] Snell-Hornby, Mary: Translation Studies. An integrated approach. Amsterdam / Phila-
delphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company. 1995. P. 39.

[5] Goodenough, Ward: Cultural Anthropology and Linguistics. [in:] Hymes, Dell. (ed),
Language in Culture and Society. A Reader in Linguistics and Anthropology. New York:
Harper & Row: 1964. PP. 36–40.

Translators need to understand the position of the source text in the source literature and the source culture; without such knowledge they cannot cast around for the relevant analogies in the target literature and the target culture[6].

To sum up, since linguistically oriented translation theories can no longer account for numerous translation phenomena, culturally oriented approaches naturally entered and became the integral part of the Translation Studies.

Claiming that a culture-oriented translation approach is an outcome of earlier attempts of connecting culture, language and behaviour, is stating the obvious. One of those, who made such connections was Malinowski who claimed that "language is essentially rooted in the reality of the culture […] it cannot be explained without constant reference to these broader contexts of verbal utterance"[7]. Much earlier than Malinowski, this time, a language scholar, Humboldt regarded translation as "a tool for the broadening of the mind of both individuals and whole cultures"[8]. To Humboldt, language was not a static inventory of items but something dynamic. Moreover, Humboldt's language is the articulation of both the culture and the speaker's individuality, whose perception of the world is determined by language. Out of these thoughts a well-known hypothesis combining two principles, namely that language determines the way we think (linguistic determinism); and that the distinctions encoded in one language are not found in any other language (linguistic relativity), was proposed by the US linguist Edward Sapir and his pupil Benjamin Lee Whorf[9]. The view that the distinctions encoded in one language are not found in any other lead to the extreme point at which we speak of radical linguo-cultural relativism, which in turn leads to the concept of untranslatability. Although the concept of untranslatability is rather all past history now, there were some supporters of the idea, for instance Weisgerber or Humboldt (in an oscillating, creatively dialectic fashion). Bałuk-Ulewiczowa goes even further

[6] Lefevere, Andre: Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame. London: Routledge. 1992. P. 92.

[7] Malinowski, Bronislaw: The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages. [in:] The Meaning of Meaning, Supplement 1, Ogden, C. K. and Richards, I. A. (eds) London: Kegan Paul. 1923/1935. P. 305.

[8] Humboldt, von Wilhelm: The More Faithful, The More Divergent, From the introduction to his translation of Aeschylus' Agamemnon trans. by Douglas Robinson. 1816.

[9] Crystal, David: The Penguin Dictionary of Language, London: Penguin Books. 1999. P. 297.

and introduces the concept of absolute untranslatability. According to Ba-łuk-Ulewiczowa,

> absolute untranslatability occurs whenever a text is presented for translation the full comprehension of which by its source-language recipients requires the application of extra-textual subjective information or, more generally, extra-textual emotional experience which is inaccessible to the recipients of the target language for the translation. Ultimately absolute untranslatability involves irreconcilable differences of collective social identity between the group of recipients of the original text in its source language and the target group of recipients of the translation in the target language. These irreconcilable differences of recipients' communal identity create insurmountable, absolute, barriers preventing the full transfer of the original message in the translation – however good the linguistic quality of the translation[10].

By 'extra-textual subjective information' Bałuk-Ulewiczowa means "those features of reception which are specific and exclusive to the whole of the particular group of original recipients"[11], and gives samples of Clark's successful renderings of Wyspiański's poetry, which still fail to transfer native cultural elements.

Table 1. The translation of Wyspiański's *Wesele* by Clark

Wyspiański[12]	**Clark**[13]
(Radczyni) Wyście sobie, a my sobie. **Każden sobie rzepkę skrobie.** (I, 4)	You have your ways, we have ours – up to each to use her powers! (p. 24)
hulaj dusza bez kontusza z animuszem, hulaj dusza! (II, p. 29)	Noble be – and life's a spree – so enjoy it thoroughly! (p. 107)

The above-presented examples by Clark may as well be perceived as the proof of the fact that we cannot talk about absolute untranslatability. Of

---

[10] Bałuk-Ulewiczowa, Teresa: Beyond cognisance: fields of absolute untranslatability. [in:] Kubiński, W. Kubińska, O. i Wolański Z. T. (eds) Przekładając nieprzekładalne. Mate-riały z I międzynarodowej konferencji translatologicznej, Gdańsk – Elbląg: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego. 2000. P. 173–182.

[11] Ibid., P. 174.

[12] Wyspiański, Stanisław: Wesele. Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków – Gdańsk: Ossolineum. 1973. P. 29.

[13] Wyspiański, Stanisław: The Wedding. London: Oberon Books. 1998. P. 107.

course, a major concession on the side of the translator was made but Wyspiański has been translated into English after all. Thus, the radicalism of Bałuk-Ulewiczowa's opinion on absolute untranslatability could definitely be trimmed down by Wojtasiewicz's and Hejwowski's words. The former observes that each

> allusion evokes associations intended by the author only in those recipients who understand it. Naturally, in the case of translations the probability of not understanding allusions increases greatly, as the recipients of the translation have much less erudition necessary to understand the original. Therefore the translator can usually explain the allusion to the recipients of the translation but he cannot translate it, in our understanding of the word, as his formulation will not be the equivalent of the original formulation, it will not evoke such associations in the recipients of the translation as those that arise in the recipients of the original[14],

whereas the latter speaks of "the claim of 'untranslatability' which results from excessive and unrealistic expectations"[15] and explains that it is unrealistic to expect, for instance, the Spanish to experience Joyce's works as the Irish do. As it has been already stated, the concept of untranslatability and linguistic relativity approach fail to be of central interest to most of translation theory.

One of the relatively new concepts, suggested by Hönig and Kussmaul 1984; Reiss and Vermeer 1984 and Holz-Mänttäri 1984 is the concept comprising three approaches that are focused more on cultural rather than linguistic transfer. Additionally they perceive translation as an act of communication, they concentrate on the function of the TT and they regard the text as an integral part of the world. Although the three studies are of interrelated character, for the purpose of the present article, Vermeer's and Holz-Mänttäri approaches will be outlined.

First of all, translation for Vermeer's theory is based on the function of the translated text; Vermeer's approach to text is not absolute. On the contrary, relevant to a particular situation, his approach is dynamic. Moreover, translation for Vermeer is both a cross-cultural transfer (that is why a translator should be at least bicultural) and a cross-cultural event

---

[14] Wojtasiewicz, Olgiert: Wstęp do teorii tłumaczenia, Warszawa: Tepis. [in:] Hejwowski, Krzysztof: Translation: A Cognitive-Communicative Approach, Olecko: Wszechnica Mazurska. 2004. PP. 128–129.

[15] Hejwowski, Krzysztof: Translation: A Cognitive-Communicative Approach, Olecko: Wszechnica Mazurska. 2004. PP. 128–129.

(since translation happens between two languages). Furthermore, contrary to Hönig and Kussmaul who focused on 'words-in-text,' Vermeer concentrates on 'text-in-situation. As to Holz-Mänttäri's ideas, they differ with those of Vermeer on the approach to text, which she rejects and introduces the concept of *Botschaft*, of which the text is *Botschaftsträger*. Translation in turn is also perceived as an act of communication across cultural barriers with an emphasis on the translation recipient and its specific function[16].

In the area of Translation Studies a more revolutionary in terms of culture approach was suggested by Toury who claims that "translations are facts of target cultures; on occasion facts of a special status, sometimes even constituting identifiable (sub)systems of their own, but of the target culture in any event"[17]. What is more, the status of a particular source text seems to be determined by the culture in which it [the ST] will change and function as a translation. The force being "the observation that something is 'missing' in the target culture which should have been there and which, luckily, already exists elsewhere"[18].

As for the translation of culture-bound items it should be recollected that languages differ in what they must convey and in what they may convey, and that is why translations need some additional information as the grammatical pattern of a language determines those aspects of experience that must be expressed. This, in fact, could be one of the conclusions derived from Jakobson's three kinds of translation, which are known all too well.

In his essay On Linguistic Aspects of Translation, Jakobson[19] provides the example of the word *death*. Since in Russian the word is feminine and that is why it is represented as a woman, whereas in German the word is masculine and that is why represented by a man, the cultural context of the translation must be taken into consideration. The above translation problem exemplified by Jakobson could be solved by even an inexperienced translator. Things get more complex when, using Catford's words "a situational feature, functionally relevant for the SL text, is completely

---

[16] Snell-Hornby, Mary: Transaltion Studies. An integrated approach. Amsterdam / Phila-delphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company. 1988/1995. PP. 43–48.

[17] Toury, Gideon: Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond. Amsterdam / Philadelphia: J. Benjamins Publishing Company. 1995. P. 29.

[18] Ibid., P. 27.

[19] Jakobson, R. 1959. "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," [in:] Venuti, L. The Trans-lation Studies Reader, London and New York: Routledge: 2000. PP. 114–115.

absent from the culture of which the TL is a part"[20]. The situation gets more complex if you take Nida's view into consideration that

> Since no two languages are identical either in meanings given to corresponding symbols, or in ways in which such symbols are arranged in phrases and sentences, it stands to reason that there can be no absolute correspondence between languages … no fully exact translation … the impact may be reasonably close to original but no identity in detail[21].

The above quotations, especially the first one, describe what Catford called cultural untranslatability. The concept does not differ much from the concept of untranslatability that has already been discussed, except for that it is concentrated on cultural words exclusively. Perhaps the best way to solve the above problem would be to fall back on the premise that the problem of untranslatability is the problem of the extent to which a given cultural item is (un)translatable.

If we want to approach cultural items properly, we must first identify and then translate them. Newmark writes that "most 'cultural' words are easy to detect[22]„, and, after Nida, suggests the following categorization of such words.

Table 2. Newmark's categorization of cultural items

CATEGORY	ILLUSTRATION
Ecology	Flora, fauna, winds, plains, hills: 'honeysuckle', 'downs', sirocco', 'tundra', etc.
Material culture (artefacts)	Food: 'zabaglione', 'sake', Kaiserschmarren Clothes: 'anorak', kanga (Africa), etc. Houses and towns: kampong, bourg, bourgade, etc. Transport: 'bike', 'rickshaw', 'Moulton', etc.
Social culture – work and leisure	ajah, amah, condottiere, biwa, etc.
Organizations, customs, activities, procedures, concepts	Political and administrative Religious: dharma, karma, 'temple' Artistic
Gestures and habits	'Cock a snook', 'spitting'

---

[20] Catford, J: A Linguistic Theory of Translation. London: Oxford University Press. 1965. P. 99.

[21] Nida, Eugine: Towards a science of Translating, with Special Reference to Principles and Procedures Involved in Bible Translating. Leiden: E.J. Brill. 1964.

[22] Newmark, Peter: A Textbook of Translation. New York: Prentice Hall. 1988. P. 95.

In order to translate culture-bound items successfully, Katan[23] suggests the strategy of chunking. The term 'chunking' is derived from computing and refers to changing the size of a particular unit. A particular unit can be either chunked up or chunked down, which means that a unit is viewed from the specific towards the general perspective or, in the case of chunking down the reverse is true. The importance of chunking down is especially relevant to both understanding the semantic field of individual words and to finding equivalent frames in the target culture, in the case of which we speak of chunking sideways or laterally. The strategy of chunking has been discussed by Baker who proposes to find a more general word (chunking up) in order to handle the problem of non-equivalence or by Newmark, who suggests his cultural componential analysis[24].

According to Katan, the procedure of chunking can be applied to:
− culture-bound lexis,
− culture-bound behaviour,
− cultural orientation.

Having analyzed both Newmark's and Vinay and Darbelnet's approaches, Hejwowski proposes his own techniques to tackle the problems connected with translating culture-bound items:

1. Transfer without explanation.
2. Transfer with explanation.
3. Syntagmatic translation without explanation.
4. Syntagmatic translation with explanation.
5. Recognized equivalent.
6. Functional equivalent.
7. Hypernym.
8. Descriptive equivalent.
9. Omission[25].

Although culturally related, (the translation of) proper names may surely be regarded as a separate (translation) entity that is both intriguing (cf. Berezowski 2001)[26] and hard to deal with at the same time.

---

[23] Katan, David: Translating Cultures. An Introduction for Translators, Interpreters and Mediators. Manchester: St Jerome Publishing. 1999. P. 145.

[24] Newmark, Peter: A Textbook of Translation. New York: Prentice Hall. 1988. P. 83.

[25] Hejwowski, Krzysztof: Translation: A Cognitive-Communicative Approach, Olecko: Wszechnica Mazurska. 2004. PP. 136–143.

[26] Berezowski, Leszek: Articles and Proper Names, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego. 2001.

Cultural markedness of proper names, domestication when recognized translation is non-existent, diversity or intentional use of proper names are only exemplary problems to overcome during the process of translation. In order to deal with the possible difficulties, translators are advised to follow various instructions, a good illustration being a quotation from Belczyk's *Poradnik tłumacza* on translation from English into Polish, in which he writes:

> Ogólna i dość oczywista zasada głosi, że to, co ma juz polską pisownię, powinno w takiej właśnie formie, usankcjonowanej tradycją, pojawić się w każdym tekście polskojęzycznym, a więc i w przekładzie. Natknąwszy się na nazwę własną, tłumacz ma zatem obowiązek w pierwszej kolejności zawsze ustalić, czy i w jakiej postaci funkcjonuje ona w języku polskim (bywa to oczywiście uciążliwe, szczególnie gdy chodzi o mniej znane nazwy egzotyczne – nie tylko miejsc, ale i np. ugrupowań politycznych), a jeśli tak, to bezwzględnie ją stosować[27].

Newmark writes that in translation "normally, people's first and surnames are transferred, thus preserving their nationality, and assuming that their names have no connotations in the text" and enumerates some exceptions. As for names of objects, Newmark states that "they are normally transferred, often coupled with a classifier if the name is not likely to be known to the TL readership"[28]. According to Newmark, in the case of geographical names translators should be up to date with the most recent sources and they should not invent new terms. Apart from that, he provides some tips on how to tackle puns, measures, weights, quantities and currencies.

Hejwowski in turn suggests that translators

1) may leave the foreign proper name intact (transfer):
   a) without any explanations,
   b) with a footnote or a gloss/classifier in the body of the text;
2) may slightly modify the foreign proper name, adjusting it to the spelling or grammar norms of the target language;
3) may transcribe the foreign proper name (in the case of significant orthographic differences between SL and TL);

---

[27] Belczyk, Arkadiusz: Poradnik tłumacza z angielskiego na nasze, Kraków: Wydawnictwo IDEA. 2002. P. 94.
[28] Newmark, Peter: A Textbook of Translation. New York: Prentice Hall. 1988. P. 214.

4) may translate the foreign name:
    a) replacing it with the recognized TL equivalent,
    b) replacing it with an 'equivalent' invented for the purposes of the translation,
    c) replacing it with a TL lexical item which is not a proper name (hypernym, description);
5) may replace the foreign proper name with a TL proper name that is not its equivalent (in any of the commonly accepted senses of the world);
6) may omit the foreign proper name (sometimes with the nearest context)[29].

Proper names understood as translation product and the fashion translators finally decide on a particular translation have been a subject of heated debates among readers (cf. the translation of names in the Polish versions of *The Lord of the Rings* by J. R. R. Tolkien). Certainly, the dilemma whether to retain, modify, translate literally or invent another name that would sound familiar in the TL culture will not be resolved here. Hagfors, an advocate of the first option writes as follows:

> One of the great aspects of literature is that it not only entertains us, but also broadens our mind and our view of the world by providing us information about other cultures and times, other types of ideas and values than those that prevail in our own society. This applies to both literature for adults and children which is why children too should have the right to enjoy stories where references are translated in a logical, consistent way[30].

Proper names are also the concept that has been of interest to linguists, logicians and philosophers whose approaches, as yet, have not been unified. They were studied by such scholars as Mill (1943), Russel (1918), Wittgenstaein (1953) or Dummett (1973).

It would seem that translating culture-bound items has never been and probably will never be an easy task to complete. The complexity and the legacy of the social and historical events, which shape particular cultures are sometimes hard to express even in the native language, let alone translation. Mediation between cultures, however, is one of the basic roles of the translator, who together with such tools as translation techniques, strategies and pretty rare, however not impossible direct contacts with the SL text

---

[29] Hejwowski, Krzysztof: Translation: A Cognitive-Communicative Approach, Olecko: Wszechnica Mazurska. 2004. PP. 155–156.
[30] Hagfors, I: The translation of culture-bound elements into Finnish in the post-war period. Meta vol. 48, nos 2003. 1–2, P. 125.

author, is able to do much more than do not do anything at all to make the foreign culture less obscure to the TL readership.

Bibliography

Bałuk-Ulewiczowa, Teresa: Beyond cognisance: fields of absolute untranslatability, [in:] Kubiński, W. Kubińska, O. i Wolański Z. T. (eds) Przekładając nieprzekładalne. Materiały z I międzynarodowej konferencji translatologicznej, Gdańsk–Elbląg: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego 2000. PP. 173–182.

Belczyk, Arkadiusz: Poradnik tłumacza z angielskiego na nasze, Kraków: Wydawnictwo IDEA 2002.

Berezowski, Leszek: Articles and Proper Names, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego 2001.

Catford, J: A Linguistic Theory of Translation. London: Oxford University Press 1965.

Crystal, David: The Penguin Dictionary of Language, London: Penguin Books 1999.

Dummett, Michael: Philosophy of Language, London: Duckworth 1973.

Goodenough, Ward: Cultural Anthropology and Linguistics, [in:] Hymes, D. (ed), Language in Culture and Society. A Reader in Linguistics and Anthropology, New York: Harper & Row 1964. PP. 36–40.

Hagfors, I: The translation of culture-bound elements into Finnish in the post-war period. Meta vol. 48, nos 1–2 2003. PP. 115–127.

Hejwowski, Krzysztof: Translation: A Cognitive-Communicative Approach. Olecko: Wszechnica Mazurska 2004.

Holz-Mänttäri, J: Translatorisches Handeln: Theorie und Methode, Helsinki: Suonalainen Tiedeakatemia 1984.

Humboldt, von Wilhelm: The More Faithful, The More Divergent, From the introduction to his translation of Aeschylus' Agamemnon trans. by Douglas Robinson 1816.

Jakobson, Roman: On Linguistic Aspects of Translation, [in:] Venuti, L. The Translation Studies Reader, London and New York: Routledge 1959. PP. 114–115.

Katan, David: Translating Cultures. An Introduction for Translators, Interpreters and Mediators. Manchester: St Jerome Publishing. 1999. P. 16.

Kroeber, A. L. and Kluckhohn, C: Cultures: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions. Cambridge: Harvard University. Peabody Museum Papers Vol. 47, no. 1. 1952. P. 181.

Lefevere, Andre: Translating Literature. The Modern Language Association of America. New York 1992.

Malinowski, Bronisław: The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages. [in:] The Meaning of Meaning, Supplement 1, Ogden, C. K. and Richards, I. A. (eds) London: Kegan Paul. 1923/1935. P. 305

Mill, J: A System of Logic, London: Longman 1843.

Newmark, Peter: A Textbook of Translation. New York: Prentice Hall 1988.

Nida, Eugene: Towards a science of Translating, with Special Reference to Principles and Procedures Involved in Bible Translating. Leiden: E.J. Brill 1964.

Robinson, Douglas: Western Translation Theory: From Herodotus to Nietzsche. Manchester: St Jerome Press 1997.

Russel, B: "Descriptions," [in:] Rosenberg, J. and Travis, Ch. (eds) Readings in the Philosophy of Language, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall: 1918. PP. 166–175.

Toury, Gideon: Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond. Amsterdam / Philadelphia: J. Benjamins Publishing Company 1995.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig: Philosophical Investigations, New York: The MacMillan Company 1953.

Wojtasiewicz, Olgiert: Wstęp do teorii tłumaczenia, Warszawa: Tepis 1957/1992.

Wyspiański, Stanisław: The Wedding. London: Oberon Books 1998.

Wyspiański, Stanisław: Wesele. Wrocław, Warszawa, Kraków, Gdańsk: Ossolineum 1973.