

Translating Culture-specific Items in Tourism Brochures

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Abstract

The paper discusses and describes the different translation techniques applied in the English translations of Hungarian tourism brochures. Tourism brochures are texts loaded with culture-specific items. It is important to transmit the message adequately, or it may lead to loss of business. The paper first gives a short overview of the concept of culture-specific items and of the techniques that are applied when translating them, and then shows the techniques applied in these tourism brochures.

Keywords: brochure, culture-specific items, special language, tourism, translatability

Introduction

Translation is closely related to culture. Translatability of the so called culture-specific, culturally-bound expressions has always been in the focus among theorists of translation and translators. Most studies are concerned with literary translation, although there are several studies dealing with other types of texts (e.g. Wallendums 2003, Horváth 2004).

The objective of the present paper is to examine different translation techniques applied in the English brochures of the Hungarian National Tourist Office (HNTO) with a special focus on culture-specific items. Six publications of the HNTO that were published in 2010 were examined.

The concept of culture-specific items

“Translation is a craft consisting in the attempt to replace a written message and/or statement in one language by the same message and/or statement in another language” (Newmark 1981: 7). However, with culture-specific items this often seems to be impossible as the meanings which lie beyond these expressions are always strongly linked to a specific cultural context.

It is not always clear which words and expressions should be considered culture-specific items, even in the literature of translation several names exist for these items: *realia*, culture-specific items and culturally bound items. The word *realia* originates from Latin and means “the real things”. In this meaning, the word signifies the objects of the material culture. In the field of translation studies *realia* – also *culturally-bound, culture-specific expressions* – cannot be easily well-defined. They do not mean only objects, but also words that signify concepts that are related to a specific culture.

Vlahov and Florin (1980) (cited by Tellingner 2003) speak of *realia* and categorize these items as follows: 1) **geographical** (geographic formations, man-made geographical objects, flora and fauna that is special to a certain place); 2) **ethnographic** (food and drink, clothing, places of living, furniture, pots, vehicles, names of occupations and tools); 3) **art and culture** (music and dance, musical instruments, feasts, games, rituals and their characters); 4) **ethnic** (names of people, nicknames); and 5) **socio-political** (administrative-territorial units, offices and representatives, ranks, military *realia*).

The concept of culture is essential to understand the implications of culture-specific items. Larson (1984: 431) defines culture as “a complex of beliefs, attitudes, values, and rules

which a group of people share”, the translator needs to understand these beliefs, attitudes values and rules of the source language audience in order to adequately translate it for people who have a different set of beliefs, attitudes, values and rules.

Newmark (1988) speaks of cultural words; he defines culture as the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression, thereby acknowledging that each language group has its own culturally specific features. He classifies cultural words as follows: 1) **ecology**: flora, fauna, hills, winds, plains; 2) **material culture**: food, clothes, houses and towns, transport; 3) **social culture**: work and leisure; 4) organizations, customs, activities, procedures, concepts: political and administrative, religious, artistic; and 5) gestures and habits.

According to Baker (1992) a source language word may express a concept which is unknown in the target culture. It can be abstract or concrete, may be a religious belief, a social custom or even a type of food.

Klaudy (1997:60) states that the term *realia* itself has two meanings: it is either used to denote objects, ideas, symbols or habits (a number of them connected with eating and drinking), specific to a given language community, or it may be used to name these things or concepts. *Realia* is understood in a broad sense as it includes feasts, historical events, names and titles.

Gambier (2007) asserts that these items connote different aspects of life such as education, history, art, institutions, legal systems, units of measurement, place names, foods and drinks, sports and national pastimes.

Valló (2000) and Vermees (2004) point out that culture-specific items are context dependent as any kind of text element can become a culture-specific item in so far as it carries a connotative meaning in the source culture. They also state that these items can only be understood in correlation between two languages.

In another study of culture-specific items Heltai (2007) approaches these items from the viewpoint of equivalence. The meaning of a word consists of different components. The meaning heavily depends on the referential meaning that is to which part of the reality it refers to, and on its relationship with the meaning of other words in the lexical system of the given language. The word can possess different emotional and associative meanings, and extralinguistic knowledge. Among the words of two languages absolute equivalence can never be found as their lexical items differ from each other from some points of view, however, considering referential equivalence we can find absolute equivalence. As the words of two languages can refer to the same reality and the segmentation of reality can also happen the same way, we can talk of absolute and working equivalences of two languages. Although because of the different segmentation in the two languages the meaning of a word is not the same, as they are to be found somewhere different places in the system, in this case we would find partial equivalents. The society, the material and intellectual culture is different for each nation therefore there are some elements that cannot be found in the other language. The reasons can be that the denoted item does not exist in the other culture; there are some items that can be found but they do not have any lexicalized forms (as what is important to one culture, it might not seem to be that important to another); and there are some elements that might show great similarities compared to each other but because of the different concept system they are not equivalent to each other in the end.

From our point of view those cases are interesting where the reality is different as the meaning of items belonging to this concept refers to the society, the material and the intellectual culture, beliefs, attitudes and values. The different types of the referential

equivalence are summarized in the following table by Heltai. The examples are given from the analysed publications of the HNTO.

same reality			different reality		
similar segmentation		different segmentation	lacking unit	not lexicalized concepts	different system
absolute equivalence	working equivalence	partial equivalence	lack of equivalence	weak/lack of equivalence	weak/lack of equivalence
terminology	international vocabulary	major part of the central vocabulary	culture-specific items		
<i>világörökség</i> -world heritage	<i>múzeum</i> - <i>museum</i>	<i>hegy</i> – <i>mountain,</i> <i>hill</i>	<i>lakodalmas</i> - ∅	<i>ezüstvasárnap</i> –the second Sunday before Christmas	<i>templombúcsú</i> <i>church</i> <i>events??</i>

Figure 1 The types of referential equivalence

If we summarise the above outlined approaches of culture-specific items, it can be clearly seen that whether theorists actually categorize these items or just list them, they all agree on what these words refer to. Thus the words of a language which refer to beliefs, social customs, historic events, symbols, foods and drinks, geographical formations and art and culture of a specific country are considered as culture-specific items. Also it is worth keeping in mind that these items are context dependent and the referential equivalence approach can make it easier to understand these items and so the needed lexical item can be found easier, also the method of translation can be facilitated.

In this study we understand culture-specific items as lexical units that refer to everyday life, art, culture, traditions, customs, natural environment that are strongly linked to a group of people and carry additional meanings for them: connotative and emotional. We also keep in mind that culture-specific items are context dependent.

Translating culture-specific items

The role of the translator is to facilitate the transfer of message, meaning and cultural elements from one language into another and create an equivalent response from the receivers (Nida 1964:13). He conferred equal importance to both linguistic and cultural differences between the source language and the target language and concluded that differences between cultures may cause more severe complications for the translator than differences in language structure. The literature of translation usually gives strategies to overcome this problem.

Newmark (1988) suggests two opposing methods: *transference*: a strategy when a source language word is transferred into a target language text in its original form which gives colour to the text, for example keeping cultural names and concepts; and *componential analysis* which excludes the culture and highlights the message.

According to Baker (1992) for a translator it is necessary to have knowledge about semantics and lexical sets and the value of the words in the source language and so the translator can develop strategies for dealing with non-equivalence semantic fields. These strategies are arranged hierarchically from general to specific.

Katan (1999) writes about lexical gaps and conceptual gaps, although no distinction is made between the two, and suggests three solutions: (1) borrowing or adaptation, (2) omission and (3) creating one's own expression.

Tellingner (2003: 58-60) reviews some of the definitions of culture-specific items (Markstein, Vlahov-Florin, Sipko) according to these definitions culture-specific items are understood in a broader sense and are specific to a country. After examining two literary translations, he concludes that there are two opposing methods. The first is transcription and transliteration to keep the feeling of strangeness in the target text. The second is when translators try to substitute the realia with target language analogues.

Klaudy (2003) mentions *generalisation*: the source-language unit of a more specific meaning is replaced by a target-language unit of a more general meaning; *circumlocations*: that is explanation, the use of many words to say something that could be said in one word or in a few words; *additions*: new meaningful elements, that cannot be found in the original, appear in the translation to supply background knowledge for the target-language readers; and *omission*: lexical omission means dropping meaningful lexical elements of the source language text. Earlier (1999) she asserts that culture-specific items have different functions, these are: dramaturgical, evocative, educational and transmission of culture, if these functions are important, translators use the technique of circumlocation.

It is known that a perfect translation of culturally-bound texts is impossible. The translation focusing on the purpose of writing the source language text is, however, always possible. Whether we translate them or not, and the chosen technique depends on their importance and function in the given text.

The corpus

The attraction of travelling is the desire to go from a known to an unknown place. Travelling and writing go hand in hand. Several novels, short stories and travelogues take us to unknown places and introduce us to foreign cultures. Reading all these we feel an urge to travel. Travel brochures, travel advertisements in newspapers and magazines and many other travel-related publications play an important role when choosing the destination.

Several themed travel brochures and market-specific brochures are published by The Hungarian National Tourist Office in order to promote Hungary as a tourism destination and show Hungary's tourist attractions and services and thereby contribute to the increase of receipts realized in Hungary from domestic and international tourism. Therefore these publications are available not only in Hungarian but also in English, German and French. To attract more and more tourists to Hungary, these publications have to be attractive with many colourful photographs. However, the appearance is only one of the factors to success. If the brochure is accurate linguistically, the descriptions of unknown places, traditions and customs of people are clear, the choice of the traveller can be made easier and the feeling of strangeness can be reduced.

Compiling these materials the authors/translators can face difficulties, as these publications of the tourism regions introduce the regions' attractions (geographical locations,

events, everyday life, traditions and feasts) that are part of the Hungarian culture. Therefore the texts contain a number of cultural terms, names of culture-specific items and historic events. These words and expressions can cause trouble for the translators as they are culturally determined and extralingual help is needed to render them into the target language. The other difficulty is the target readers of these travel brochures. As mentioned above they are published in English, German and French, however, the readers are not necessarily only native speakers of these languages and so they do not share the culture either of the source language or the target language. Sometimes culture-specific items can be easily rendered into the target language as in the case of topographical expressions, however, the translator has to cope with true dilemmas when they are faced with items from everyday life, historic events etc.

Results

First we collected all the items that were considered culture-specific items according to the above mentioned. Following from the function of the travel brochures the culture-specific items were grouped according to the categories established by the above mentioned theorists: geographical, ethnographic, ethnic as well as art and culture.

Geographical items

Further subcategories can be made where the two languages segment the same reality differently and where the segmentation is similar.

Different segmentation of the same reality:

- (1) Gellért-**hegy** → Gellért **hill**
Strázsa-**hegyi** barlang → Strázsa **Hill** Cave
Bodor **major** → Bodor **farm**
Kaczár-**tanyához** → Kaczár **farm**
Ruszwurm/Auguszt/ Daubner **cukrászda** → Ruszwurm/Auguszt/ Daubner **Café**

The Hungarian **hegy** has an English equivalent **mountain** but because of the different segmentation, these two mountains are not mountains in a geographical sense, in the target text the geographically correct expression is used. The Hungarian language distinguishes different farms: **major** and **tanya** they are translated with a general term farm, the reason for this could be that the difference between the two types of farms, although there is a loss of meaning, is not significant in the text. In the case of **cukrászda** (confectionery) an analogue term was applied by the translators.

Similar segmentation of the same reality:

These topographical items do not cause problems for the translators, the English equivalents for the components of the culture-specific items are used.

- (2) vár → castle
várrom → castle ruin

Hősök tere → Heroes' square
 Halászbástya → Fishermen's bastion
 Margit híd → Margaret Bridge
 Várnegyed → Castle district
 Lánchíd → Chain bridge
 Szabadság-híd → Liberty Bridge
 Városliget → City Park
 Dera-szurdok → Dera Canyon
 Oszoly-szikla → Oszoly Rock,
 Vaskapu-szoros → Vaskapu Strait
 Holdvilág-árok → Holdvilág Dyke
 Szépasszony völgy → the Valley of the Beautiful Woman
 Öreg-tó → Old Lake
 Kilenclükú híd → Nine-Arch Bridge

These items are parts of Hungarian cities, natural and man-made geographical features that are important parts of the Hungarian culture but probably no additional meanings or special feelings are linked to these items.

The translators used the technique of addition which means that a new meaningful element appears in the text to make the reader more familiar with the attraction of Hungary.

- (3) Duna → The Danube, the river Danube
 Milleniumi Emlékmű → Heroes' Square (with its Millenium Monument)
 Víziváros templomai → the churches of Víziváros (Water town)
 Fertő tó → Neusiedlersee, Lake Fertő
 Balaton → Lake Balaton
 Budai Vár → Buda's castle hill
 Vigadó → Vigadó Building

Circumlocation, providing explanation, is used to supply background knowledge so that the reader can imagine better what that particular item means. This technique was applied in order to arouse interest in a certain attraction.

- (4) Duna-kanyar → the Danube bend - so-called because it falls at the point where the river takes a sharp turn southwards
 Szoborpark → Statue park, a remarkable collection of communist monuments
 Váci utca → Váci street/ Váci utca (the main shopping street)

Ecology

Hungary has 10 national parks, so one of the main attractions is its natural environment with its unique flora and fauna. One of the analyzed brochures was on National Parks. It was interesting to see that only a few culture-specific items were found. The original Hungarian text also used general terms for these items. The technique of transcription/transference: when the source language item is transferred in its original form into the target language, is applied for these items, combined with other techniques.

The Hungarian lexical item and its Latin equivalent were given.

- (5) agárkosbor → agárkosbor (Orchis morio)
búbos banka → búbos banka (Upupa epops)

The Hungarian lexical item remains and an explanation is added at its first mention. The reason for this can be that the Hungarian Puszta is one of the most often visited areas by tourists and to keep the exotic feature the technique of transcription/transference was used.

- (6) Puszta → Puszta (the typical Hungarian grassland)

A unique feature can be mentioned when we examine these brochures. As mentioned above in these brochures not only the language plays an important role. It is clearly seen when it comes to the typical Hungarian dog and sheep breeds, where the Hungarian lexical item is given *Racka sheep, puli, komondor, szürkemarka* (grey cattle) and in the background the picture of these animals can be seen.

Ethnographic items (foods, drinks, customs, and feasts)

We grouped all the items here that refer to foods, drinks and customs. In case of foods and drinks the transcription/transference method is applied. As we could see above in case of the items referring to ecology, this method is supplemented with some explanatory sentences.

- (7) Pick szalámi → Pick salami, the spicy stuff
paprika → paprika – the rich red spice
lángos → lángos – fried dough with sour cream and cheese
pogácsa → pogácsa – a type of savory scone

Some examples were found where one of the elements of the culture-specific item was translated. This technique is applied when it describes a type of food that is prepared with typical Hungarian cooking methods.

- (8) csirke paprikás → chicken paprika
marha pörkölt → beef pörkölt
marha gulyás → beef gulyás

The lexical items referring to typical Hungarian drinks or brand names of drinks are left in their original form, so the method of transcription/transference is used, and an explanatory sentence is given, but only at their first mention.

- (9) pálinka → pálinka – the Hungarian fruit brandy
fröccs → fröccs – wine spritzer
feles → feles – half a shot
Tokaji Aszú → Tokaji Aszú – the wine of kings, the king of wines
Unicum → Unicum – a bitter spirit
Traubisoda → Traubisoda – grape-flavoured fizzy drink

Of course, in these brochures one expects to find several descriptions of customs and traditional events. Again the method of transcription/ transference is used: e.g. busójárás, locsolás and lakodalom. No explanation is given to these lexical items, but the visitors are encouraged to come and find out what they are for themselves. There is one example when 'lakodalom' is translated with a general term and circumlocation is applied.

- (10) Zsámbok lakodalmas → Zsámbok Feasts: it includes everything you could want for a real feast, including a best man, an eloping bride, traditional soup and a cake...

Most of the feasts do not cause any problems for the translators as the reality is segmented the same way in both languages, of course the name of the region or city is given in its original form.

- (11) Visegrádi Palotajátékok → Visegrád Castle Games
Debreceni virágkarnevál → Flower Carnival of Debrecen
várjátékok → castle games
Pécsi hagyományörző napok → Pécs Folk Days

Occupations and their activities

As the target language culture is quite similar to the source language culture, only a few occupations and activities are mentioned that are characteristic only of the Hungarian culture, so they segment the reality the same way, it means that an English equivalent could be found easily for the Hungarian term.

- (12) fafaragás → wood carving
szövés – fonás → weaving
korongozás → pottery
lovász → groom

In cases where the English equivalent does not exist because of the different segmentation, a general term was given. Only two examples could be found for this and it seems that these occupations are related to preparing Hungarian food.

- (13) kürtőskalácsütő → baker
kalácsütő → baker

The following two examples can be found in all cultures so the method of giving the analogue term was applied.

- (14) pásztor → cowboy
betyár → bad boys/ bandit

Art and culture

These items in the brochures referred to dances and musical instruments. The method of transcription/ transference was applied when these items occurred: *csárdás*, *verbunkos*, *citera* or they are referred to as Hungarian dances and musical instruments in the target text.

Conclusion

It can be clearly seen from the results that the typical translation techniques in the tourism brochures of the Hungarian National Tourist Office are transcription/transference, circumlocation and addition, in some cases an analogue or generalised term was used, however, the number of their appearance is not significant. It can also be seen that the culture-specific items referring to geographical units do not cause problems as the two languages segment reality the same way.

If we examine it closer, it can be stated that the method of transcription/transference is applied more often than any of the methods observed, which contradicts Klaudy's observation. That is when the culture-specific item has an educational function or transmits culture translators use the technique of circumlocation. The reason for this can be found in the function and goals of these brochures. Their main function is to arouse interests of the potential tourist. When travelling the strangeness is something that attracts us to our destinations, with the technique of transcription/transference this can be achieved. Of course there is a certain degree of loss in meaning, however, with lengthy explanations, additions the flow of the text would be broken and the main function of the text would be lost.

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In *SKASE Journal of Translation and Interpretation* [online]. 2011, vol. 5, no. 2 [cit. 2011-11-21]. Available on web page <http://www.skase.sk/Volumes/JTI06/pdf_doc/02.pdf>. ISSN 1336-7811.