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(Petar Vuković)

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(Jutka Rudaš)

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ZBORNIK RADOVA O
MAĐARSKOJ KULTURI I JEZIKU
U ČAST FRANCISKI ĆURKOVIĆ-MAJOR

GLAZBA CVRČAKA

ZBORNİK RADOVA O MAĐARSKOJ KULTURI I JEZIKU
U ČAST FRANCISKI ĆURKOVIĆ-MAJOR

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The English and Spanish translation of culture-bound lexical items in Szabó Magda's *The Door*¹

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This paper investigates the use of lexical transfer operations in the English and Spanish translations of Szabó Magda's novel *Az ajtó* (*The Door*, *La puerta*) focusing on words related to Hungarian history. Following a short summary of the most relevant techniques and approaches (*cultural realia*, *domestication*, *foreignization*, *generalization*, *lexical addition*), specific examples are provided from the novel to examine how the two translations use generalization and explanatory lexical addition. Based on these examples, it can be observed that, generally, the two translations exhibit similar approaches to these lexical items, but the grade of generalization is often higher in the English translation. On the other hand, the Spanish translation elaborates more on the historical and cultural background of the novel by means of explanatory additions and even footnotes.

Keywords: cultural realia, generalization, lexical addition, explanatory addition

1. Introduction

Szabó Magda's well-known novel *Az ajtó* was translated into English by Len Rix and into Spanish by Komlósi Márta, both of whom are recognized and experienced translators with a deep knowledge of Hungarian culture. There are a large number of culture-bound lexical items in *Az ajtó*, which pose difficulties for translators; however, a wide variety of techniques are available to provide a proper and fluent translation in the target language. This paper gives a brief overview of the techniques used in the translation of lexical items related to Hungarian history that appear in the novel, comparing the English and Spanish translations.

The most widely used techniques and relevant concepts concerning the translation of culture-bound lexical items are summarized in section 2, while in the following section, specific examples from the two translations are discussed. The cited

¹ I would like to thank Eszter Sermann (SZTE) for her helpful advice.

page numbers refer to the editions listed under *Primary sources*. The examples show that, in general, the two translations utilize similar approaches to the translation of these terms, although the Spanish translation seems to elaborate more on the historical and cultural background.

2. Characteristics of transfer operations

Culture-bound lexical items are often called *cultural realia*, and Klaudy (2005: 60–63) uses the term *realia* also to refer to historical events, names, etc., characteristic of the speakers of a language and sets up categories based on Vlahov and Florin (1980), out of which the lexical items examined in the present paper belong to the broader category of *Politics and Society*, more specifically *administrative divisions, organs and functions*, and *political and social life*.

Within the broad group of lexical transfer operations, the most relevant ones from our aspect will be *generalization* and *addition of meaning* (Klaudy 2003: 153–182). These terms will be presented in section 3 along with specific examples from the novel and its translations. Although *omission* and *total transformation* are also possible options in the translation of cultural realia, their occurrence is low in these two translations; therefore, their relevance is marginal in the present paper.

The distinction between *domestication* and *foreignization* has been thoroughly investigated by Venuti (1995: 20) and has also been given special attention in the context of translating cultural realia. As he puts it, domestication is the “ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values, bringing the author back home,” while foreignization is “an ethnodeviant pressure on those values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad.” Generalization and explanatory addition are considered domesticating techniques and are used in both translations frequently, as our examples show.

The *asymmetry hypothesis* put forward by Klaudy (2009) stems out from the observation that certain lexical and grammatical operations take place in both directions during the process of translation while others do not. The translation of personal pronouns is a good example of a symmetric operation: when translating the Hungarian third person singular personal pronoun *ő* into English, *he* or *she* specification takes place, while in the other direction it is generalization. As she puts it in connection with her observations on explicitation/implicitation: “I regarded the relationship as symmetric when explicitation in the L1-L2 direction was counterbalanced by implicitation in the L2-L1 direction, and as asymmetric when explicitation in the L1-L2 direction was not counterbalanced by implicitation in the L2-L1 direction.” (Klaudy 2009: 286) In another paper, Klaudy (2015) raises the question of whether there is a connection between the asymmetry of explicitation/implicitation and the distinction between domestication/foreigniza-

tion. Results show that translations of Hungarian literary works into Russian and English are characterized by domestication, that is, the translators use omission, generalization, or explanatory (lexical) addition. Based on the analysis of several hundreds of translations of literary works (English-Hungarian, Hungarian-English, Russian-Hungarian, and Hungarian-Russian translations) it can be concluded that translators tend to use domestication in both directions and therefore the translation of cultural items is asymmetric. Based on this observation, we can assume that culture-bound lexical items, and more specifically, those related to history and a certain historical period, will be handled in a similar way in both the English and the Spanish translation of *Az ajtó*.

Individual differences can be observed between the translators, and this is true for the translation of cultural realia too as Szíjj (2015) noted in her doctoral dissertation. Examining the works of two translators she found that one of them used more concretization while the other used more generalization in the Hungarian-Spanish translation of cultural realia.

As for the papers published about the translations of *Az ajtó*, Élthes (2009) analyses the translator's subjectivity in the French translation, which is out of the scope of this paper, but Körömi (2018) and Kaló (2018) examine the translation of cultural realia, and we will refer to them in the following sections in more detail.

3. Lexical transfer operations with examples from the translations

3.1. *Equivalentents in the target language*

In the following we will have a closer look at the lexical transfer operations based on Klaudy (2003, 2005) with specific examples from the translations. Despite the difference between the political background in Hungary and in the target language countries, several words related to communism could be translated without any significant changes. This is probably due to the fact that these terms are connected to more general political ideologies and not specifically to the Hungarian political regime. The following words and phrases are all handled similarly in both translations, using an equivalent in the target language: *dolgozó osztályok* (118), 'the working class' (127), 'la clase trabajadora' (128); *proletáriömegek* (118), 'proletarian masses' (127), 'masas proletarias' (129).

The proper names included in the translations without any addition or explanation are internationally well-known names such as *Marx*, *Gagarin*, or *Kennedy*, but several names of Hungarian politicians or historical figures also appear unchanged, which means that a firm background knowledge about Hungarian history is needed for the reader to understand the context of the novel. A list of proper names with their translations is included in 3.3.

The use of equivalentents is simply not possible in most cases of the analysed cultural realia, since the historical and political circumstances were fundamentally dif-

ferent in the target language countries. Körömi (2018) explains in her analysis of the French and the Russian translations of the novel that using a realia in the target language is sometimes a good option in Russian due to the similarities of the era, and that the translator could use a Russian realia with the same meaning for the Hungarian 'utcabizalmi' (121), while the French, English, and Spanish translators had to use other techniques (see 3.2.).

3.2. Generalization

When equivalents are not available in the target language, the translators may turn to generalization in a number of cases, which means using a word or phrase in the target language with a wider sense than the source language item. This section also includes some cases in which one of the translations uses generalization, while the other contains an explanatory (lexical) addition.

We can observe examples of generalization in both translations. The exact meaning of *részes arató* (32) is somewhat generalized in both translations ('harvester' (31), 'peón' (34)) because the Hungarian phrase also implies that the person was given a certain proportion of the harvested crops instead of getting paid in money.

Several lexical items more closely connected to the communist era are translated with a generalizing meaning. The Hungarian *házmester* (9) and *házfelügyelő* (10, 20) is translated as 'caretaker' (6, 17) and 'portera' (11, 22), which partly cover the original meaning; however, the "unofficial" function of these people as sort of general supervisors of a house or neighbourhood is lost, not to mention the possibility that they could also be informers. Similarly, neither the English 'party worker' (133) nor the Spanish 'miembro del partido' (123) is able to convey exactly the same meaning as the Hungarian *pártmunkás* (123), which assumes deep political and ideological bonds as well as power that may have triggered fear in many members of society. The Hungarian *tanácsstag* (121) translated as 'local council' (131) and 'delegado del consejo municipal' (132) are similar examples.

Although the translations of *lakás felosztása* (88) as 'The Kismester apartment was divided up' (94) and 'reparto del piso' (94) are quite precise as far as the main meaning of the phrase is concerned, they fail to include the well-known fact – at least for Hungarians – that apartments that the communist authorities considered too large for a particular family were divided up into two or three smaller apartments, where other families would be accommodated.

It is important to note, that the mere presence of these words may evoke feelings in the reader creating a certain atmosphere which is an inherent characteristic of the novel. In a number of cases one translator uses a single word which results in the generalization of meaning, while the other translator uses addition to make the translation more precise. Both methods follow a domesticating approach and make the target language text more fluent.

Despite the comparable approach of the two translators, occasional differences do occur, of course, and we may see examples where they decided to use a different grade of generalization. Some of the following examples lead us already to the next technique to be discussed because the Spanish translation contains explanatory additions. The English ‘employment book’ (64) is definitely a generalizing translation of the Hungarian *cseledekönyv* (61), while the Spanish ‘libreta de empleada doméstica’ (66) is more precise, including also the type of job Emerenc had.

The translation of *zsidótörvény* (40) as ‘the Jewish laws’ (41) in English and ‘las leyes antijudías’ (44) in Spanish is slightly different because there might be disagreement over whether ‘the Jewish laws’ is a generalization or not, although the Spanish particle ‘anti-’ can certainly be considered as a short explanatory addition.

The word *utcabizalmi* (121), which probably existed only in the communist regimes, referred to a politically and ideologically loyal person who helped the authorities by controlling and observing the people in the neighbourhood; therefore, its translation as ‘the street committee’ (131) is not specific enough. The Spanish ‘el encargado político del barrio’ (132) definitely provides more information with the help of lexical addition.

The categories of *generalization* and *addition* should be handled flexibly, since we may find several examples where the meaning is more generalized in the target language despite some lexical additions. In the following examples, the generalizing approach seems to be dominant in the English translations with some short additions, while the Spanish translation uses longer and more precise explanatory additions:

internál (119)

‘[she wasn’t] locked up’ (129)

‘[llevar] a uno de aquellos campos de internamiento’ (130)

népnevelő (93, 119, 120)

‘propaganda people’ (100), ‘party ‘educators’ (128), ‘the propagandists’ (129)

‘educadores ideológicos del pueblo’ (130), ‘adoctrinadores’ (130),

‘educadores’ (130)

márciusi ifjak (130)

‘the youth of 1848’ (141)

‘los jóvenes revolucionarios del marzo de 1848’ (143)

3.3. Addition

Examining thoroughly the English translation, Kaló (2018) draws attention to several examples of explicitation, which come from various fields of life (food,

objects, religion, etc.), and notes that the biggest losses may be observed in the case of words related to Hungarian folklore (Kaló 2018: 233). It should be noted, however, that providing a translation which perfectly covers the meaning of such cultural items is not possible using an equivalent or a short lexical addition. In most cases only a longer explanation could provide sufficient information but taking into consideration the focus of the novel, it would be irrelevant. A closer look at the translation of *komatál* sheds light on this issue. In the novel, Emerenc brings food for Magda because her husband has just come home from hospital, and she is very busy. To help her out, Emerenc brings chicken broth in a bowl which is called 'komatál'. The term may be used to refer to the bowl, but most commonly it refers to a meal which is offered to certain people at special occasions. In many Hungarian villages young people used to send a *komatál* to each other to seal their friendship, but it may be also food prepared by the family or friends to help a young mother who has just given birth. In the novel, however, the term refers to the bowl, so the Spanish translation 'una fuente de porcelana' (43) is a generalization and the English 'christening bowl' (41) might even be a bit misleading but does definitely not cover fully the original meaning. Nevertheless, the deviation is not relevant at all in either case since the novel explores the way the relationship between Emerenc and Magda develops, and the chapter where this term occurs is about the changes that a dog brings to their lives.

Looking at the terms connected specifically to twentieth-century Hungarian history and, more precisely, the communist era, we will come across many challenging examples which call for a decision from the translator on the extent of explanation. When Emerenc talks about the people she hid in the basement, she mentions the *ávós* (125), which appears in the English translation as 'a member of the secret police' (135) and 'un agente de la seguridad del Estado' (137) in the Spanish one. It must be noted that the Spanish translation also adds some information to the end of the previous sentence to specify the time when she met the person ('en el cincuenta y seis' – *in nineteen-fifty-six* – that is, at the time of the anti-Soviet rebellion, but no further explanation is added other than the year). Even though both translations use explanatory (lexical) addition and provide some extra information to the term, neither is able to convey all the connotations. It is revealed in both cases that the person worked for the state security, but it is not possible to communicate in the translation of one single word that a person referred to as '*azávós*' brings up feelings connected to the trying, torturing, and imprisonment of many innocent people committed by the officers of the communist *ÁVO* (State Security Department). No matter how good the translation is, some meaning is inevitably lost without the readers' thorough background knowledge; however, both local and global compensation strategies may contribute to maintaining the general atmosphere of the novel (Klaudy 2008).

Explanatory additions may overlap sentence boundaries, too, and this is more frequent in the Spanish translation. The idea of a government bond which people had to buy to support the government in its aims to achieve peace is unknown in the target language countries, especially if we take into consideration that these bonds were not paid back automatically but practically functioned as a kind of lottery. The Spanish translator uses a more thorough explanation, which affects the structure of two sentences.

[...] *ő volt az egyetlen, aki sose jegyzett békekölcsönt egy fillért sem* (93)
 'she was the only one who wouldn't pledge a penny to the Loan of Peace.' (100)
 '[...] resultado ser la única que se resistió a contratar, ni uno, de esos bonos que decían que tenían garantía estatal y que eran, todos lo sabemos, poco menos que obligatorios [...]' (100)

The mirror translation of *békekölcsön* as 'Loan of Peace' is a foreignizing technique, and we may come across a few more examples of this in both translations. The mirror translation of *az őszirózsás forradalomban* (117) into English as 'during the Aster Revolution' (126) is very straightforward, while the Spanish translator decided to omit the type of the rose from its name but added a short explanation instead: 'la revolución de las Rosas de otoño de 1918' (127). A similar approach appears when *nyilas idők* (220) is translated directly as 'the Arrow Cross period' (243) into English and with a minor grammatical transformation as '[habría sido forzada] en su época por los esbirros de la Cruz Flechada' (246) into Spanish. According to Körömi (2018: 282), foreignization is increasingly accepted in literary translation, and such mirror translations are not rare at all. Footnotes, on the other hand, which also belong to the category of foreignising techniques, are less popular nowadays because they interrupt the reading process.

The same bowl mentioned above (*komatál*) brings up the issue of translating names of historic figures, statesmen, and politicians, as the decoration on the bowl included both the portrait and name of *Kossuth*. As was mentioned above, some names are simply included without any addition, but the majority of the words and phrases including proper names and historical events connected to Hungarian history were translated using explanations of varying length. The name *Kossuth* appears as 'the great Kossuth' in English, and the Spanish translator adds a one-line long footnote about him. Footnotes occur four times in the Spanish translation to provide background information about people (e.g., Kossuth, the Árpáds, Toldi) as well as about a historical event (Segesvár). The following list summarizes how proper names connected to Hungarian history are handled in the two translations.

Hungarian	English	Spanish
Kossuth	the great Kossuth	unchanged + footnote
Segesvár	unchanged, no addition	unchanged + footnote
az Árpádok(ig)	the Árpáds	la dinastía de los Árpád + footnote
Szent László	St László	San Ladislao
Horthy	unchanged, no addition	unchanged, no addition
Rákosi	unchanged, no addition	unchanged, no addition
Lajos király	King Lajos	el rey Lajos
Toldi	unchanged, no addition	unchanged + footnote

Footnotes in the Spanish translation are used in cases of proper names connected to Hungarian history before the twentieth century, as if the translator assumed that the reader would be familiar with twentieth-century Hungarian history but would not know much about earlier times. It must be noted that the use of footnotes may also be based on editorial guidelines instead of the translator's personal decision.

4. Conclusion

Considering the examples analysed in the previous section, it may be concluded that both translations use a variety of methods in the translation of cultural realia, and in most cases the English and the Spanish translations have a similar approach. Furthermore, there seems to be a firm assumption concerning the background knowledge of the audience, and the translation of the cultural realia is tailored accordingly. In the translation of words related to Hungarian history, generalization is often used in both translations but the grade of generalization is often higher in the case of the English translation.

The examples show that the Spanish translation tends to use explanatory addition more often and also provides more background information than the English. Although both translators use mainly domesticating techniques like generalization and explanatory additions, foreignization in the form of unchanged proper names without explanation, mirror translation (in both languages) and footnotes (in Spanish) also occur.

It must be noted that these results reveal the characteristics only of these two specific translations, and thus should not be generalized to Hungarian-English and Hungarian-Spanish translations by and large.

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