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Dealing with Non-equivalence: A Case of Rendering Latvian Ethnographic Lexis in English Translation

Summary: *The significance of the study lies in the necessity to help translators approach and render culture-specific discourse containing a vast variety of realia based on cultural, dialectal, ethnographic, and etymologically charged elements. The present publication is devoted to the issue of rendering non-equivalent culture-specific ethnographic and dialectal lexis related to the Latvian traditional bread-making sphere in order to ensure translation that provides readers with an opportunity to embrace Latvian traditional way of life.*

Key words: *culture-specific lexis, translation, non-equivalence, bread-making culture*

The significance of culture and its influence on most aspects of people's life including language, which is undoubtedly one of the most distinctive characteristics of one's culture, is undeniable. Views, beliefs, religions, and social values are reflected through languages, making certain linguistic concepts decodable only within a given culture. Getting acquainted with a foreign culture cannot be imagined without being introduced with its representatives' traditional way of life. Thus, one of the most challenging tasks to be accomplished by any translator, who serves as a mediator between cultures and languages, is to understand and render culture-specific concepts and lexis adequately. This requires a skill to create cross-cultural links and analyse differences between the source and target text cultures, rendering the initial message professionally preventing the distorted perception of the text.

“Having grown up in another culture, the TT receiver has a different knowledge of the world, a different way of life, a different perspective on things, and a different ‘text experience’ in the light of which the target text is read” [1, p. 28]. Thus, the target reader may not be familiar with the subject matter of the source text, or with its special lexis, which is supposed to be familiar to the source language speakers. Cultural differences create a challenge for the translators who must render texts containing culture-specific lexis, idiomatic expressions, cultural views, diminutives, dialects, poems, rhymes, etc. In order to render texts that are comprised of subject-specific lexis, the translator must conduct a detailed research and obtain extensive knowledge of the subject. In terms of the present study, the subject specific lexis and professional terminology are limited to the sphere of traditional bread-making of Latvian rye bread, preservation of Latvian culinary heritage, and promotion of customs and traditions of Latvian bread-making.

Being an integral part of every national and regional culture, food touches everything that is important to people – marking a social difference and

strengthening social ties. Mutual to all people, food signifies very contrasting things from table to table [2, p. 6]. Every culture has developed its own traditional cuisine with culture-specific dishes and traditional methods of cooking that are passed on by generations. Historically, bread is one of the oldest types of food in the world, and people are known to have processed cereal thousands of years ago. Thus, bread is staple food in many cultures globally. Every culture has their own traditional bread and bread related customs, traditional bread-making methods starting from traditional ways of growing grain, using different grain types, and processes of milling grain into flour, making bread dough, baking and serving bread, as well as beliefs, folklore, and superstitions related to bread-making and bread itself.

Traditional Latvian bread is dark rye bread baked in a wood-fired bread oven. The traditional ways of making and baking it are part of culinary history, and nowadays people are exposed to a rich choice of countless bread types of different recipes and origin that are widely available in every supermarket. Latvians also use leftover bread in rye bread puddings that are layered rye breadcrumbs with jam and cream as well as in soup-like consistency pudding cooked with dry fruit and served with whipped cream. Moreover, a traditional beer snack is crispy fried rye bread with garlic, and rye bread is also used salads. In every culture, whether small or large, it is important to keep traditions alive as they are part of cultural heritage and form national identity.

Language constitutes “the most distinctive feature of a culture, which may be described in a simplistic manner as the totality of the beliefs and practices of society” [3, p. 13]. Nida states that within any culture there are also substantial sets constituting cultural areas, e.g. talking, bathing and eating. “The set involving eating relates to time, place, with who, what, how and the order in which food is served and eaten” [4, p. 21]. “Competent translators are always aware that ultimately words only have meaning in terms of the corresponding culture. But while a language can usually be acquired within a period of ten years, it takes a lifetime to understand and become an integral part of a culture” [5, p. 13]. In relation to ‘culture-specific’ lexis, Baker states that “the source language word can express a concept that is not known in the target culture at all. This can be abstract or concrete, being related to religious and social customs or even type of food” [6, p. 19].

Realia are words and phrases heavily grounded in one culture, and they are nearly impossible to translate. “Long debates have been held over when to paraphrase, when to use nearest equivalent, when to coin a new word by translating literally and when to transcribe” [7, p. 186]. Therefore, the most serious culture-based challenges that beset translators may be found among the many words and expressions that contain potentially incomprehensible or misleading cultural aspects.

The significance of the study lies in the necessity to help translators approach and render culture-specific discourse containing a vast variety of *realia* based on cultural, dialectal, ethnographic, and etymologically charged elements.

In order to do so, translators must be able to excerpt and determine culture-specific items in the source text and to establish what translation methods need to be

applied to conduct a high-quality translation, conveying the meaning of the source in a comprehensible manner. To do so, they should be aware of what ways and means of translation must be used when they face non-equivalence in a text that is related to the culinary heritage, customs, and traditions.

Ethnographically specific Latvian words that belong to the sphere of traditional bread-making may cause difficulties when rendered in English as they define domestic objects that are not found in the target language culture. Therefore, their translation requires application of special transformations: generalisation, transcription, specification, transliteration, etc. Additional study of the etymological background of these lexical units may help choose closer equivalents.

The functional equivalent is a commonly used means to be “applied to culture-specific words, which needs the use of a culture-free word, perhaps a new specific word or a term; which then makes the source text word neural, general; or more specific. By using this method, the translation is more accurate i.e. a cultural word is deculturalised” [8, p. 83]. This translation approach “causes a similar reaction in both – the source and target text readers. To achieve this effect, due to cross-cultural differences the target text might need to be adapted” [9, p.105].

Another means is the descriptive equivalent, where the explanation must occasionally be weighed against function. Baker determines 8 strategies to deal with word level non-equivalence: 1) a more general word (superordinate); 2) a more neutral / less expressive word; 3) cultural substitution, i.e. replacing a culture-specific word / expression with a target language item that does not have the same propositional meaning but is likely to have similar impact on the target reader; 4) a loan word or loan word plus explanation to deal with “culture-specific items, modern concepts and buzzwords” [10, p. 49]; 5) paraphrasing using a related word; 6) paraphrasing using an unrelated word; 7) omission; 8) illustration, e.g. a photographic step-by-step recipe instruction [11, pp. 24-45]. Where there is non-equivalence, transcription may be applied to help pronounce words that are transcribed and ensure that the new word may be used by target language speakers [12, p. 87].

On special occasions, the zero-translation method may be used, however, it is limited by difficulties of pronunciation. “Where still no solution can be found, the translator may have to resort to: paraphrasing, annotated explanations, or even deletion if the term’s omission does not detract from the essential meaning” [13, p. 105]. However, paraphrasing is “the loosest translation procedure, which simply irons out the difficulties in any passage by generalising” [14, p. 39].

The object of the present study is Vija Ancane’s book *Maizes gramata* (“The Book of Bread”) [15]. Vija Ancane, is the founder and director of *Aglonas Maize Ltd.* and the founder and director of the first and only Bread Museum in Latvia, which was opened on June 28 2005.

At the museum, everyone can get acquainted with traditional bread and bread-making process as well as to taste freshly baked bread, herbal teas, and culinary heritage dishes of Latgale.

The book is a compilation of information and facts about history of Latvian bread, the process of bread-making, traditions, values, Latvian folklore related to bread, amusing facts about bread and recipes of dishes made from different types of grain. Therefore, it might be assumed that the author's motive for communication is related to the *Bread Museum* and the popularity and recognition the author and the museum have gained.

The text presupposes certain knowledge of Latvian history, poetry and prose, as well as folklore and traditions related to bread-making. The text provides information on bread-making history, bread-making process, and traditions related to bread. Being an integral part of Latvian historical and ethnographic heritage, the text contains a vast layer of culture-specific lexis. That creates difficulty to conduct a translation aimed at English-speaking readers because the receiver's comprehension of the text might differ from that by the original addressee.

The conducted preliminary text analysis has revealed a significant number of unique lexical units that denote ethnographically marked household objects and proper names that are used specifically in Latvian culture. The detailed study has proved that the functional and descriptive equivalents used to render such vocabulary do not contribute to the understanding of the cultural diversity of the objects these words define. These include lexis related to traditional bread-making processes, tools, traditions, activities, and people and jobs involved in the processes of bread-making, as well as historically bound words, including verbs related to bread-making. The method of continuous sampling and the comparative semantic analysis of the translated realia helped determine 392 lexical units of this type.

The analysis of the text and the translation procedure proved a necessity of compilation of a special explanatory Latvian – English glossary to be published in a special appendix at the end of the translation to help English-speaking readers realise the diversity of lexis used in bread-making and to demonstrate the diversity of the objects related to bread-making and a variety of other topic related words. Moreover, additional study of the etymological background of these lexical units helped choose the closest possible equivalents for their rendering. The compiled 392-entry thesaurus type glossary that contains only culture-specific ethnographic vocabulary which is connected to the traditional Latvian bread-making and which is both dialectally and chronologically biased as it defines objects that belong to the sphere of ethnography. The process of glossary compilation required an extensive research of all these lexical units to gain a comprehensive understanding of their etymological background and determining their precise meaning. The first part of the glossary contains 57 entries of culture-specific ethnographic lexis related to traditional bread-making. The words have been distributed in groups based on their function, semantic meaning, and the use of the objects they name.

The groups contain words that define different types of the *kneading trough*, *dough starter*, *stove brush*, *stove rake*, *mixer*, *flour for sprinkling* either on a bread shovel or under the bread loaves, *stuffed bread*, *fried bacon with onions*, and *Latvian bread names*.

English-speaking readers require a detailed explanation of these words because being exposed to a large variety lexis that does not have equivalents in their language and culture may become overwhelming and obstructive for a foreigner. Therefore, the glossary has been supplied with transcription based on the international alphabet of English transcription symbols for the original Latvian words to help readers perceive and pronounce these words correctly.

The main challenge was to find suitable definitions and meanings of the excerpted ethnographic lexis. A wide range of dictionaries (see the list of references [16]) had to be examined in order to conduct a comprehensive research. The source text also contains a large number of colloquial dialectal lexis, meanings and origins of which required additional study.

The two tables below demonstrate two complete lexical groups from the first part of the glossary. Each table represents one category of one lexical group and consists of two columns. The first column shows the original Latvian word with its adapted transcription, while the second provides the reader with the lexical meaning of the word and offers a brief ethnographic and etymological explanation.

Table 1 contains six entries with the words that are used for **the stove brush**. The diversity of the lexis is explained by their regional, social, and domestic background.

Table 1

Latvian synonyms of the stove brush

№	Original in Latvian	Definition / Meaning
1.	Krāsns slota [ˈkraːsns slɔtā]	a crooked shaped brush, birch whisk fixed to a handle usu. used for sweeping the stove [Kagaine, Raģe 1977]
2.	Čaucere [ˈtʃaʊtsɛrə]	a bread stove brush
3.	Čaukstere [ˈtʃaʊkstɛrə]	a bread stove brush with a crooked tip so that the ash could be well swept out; in folklore, also mentioned as a means of witch transport [Kursīte 2009]
4.	Čauksturis [ˈtʃaʊksturɪs]	a dialect word for bread stove brush with a crooked tip to sweep the ash out well [Kursīte 2009]
5.	Pažaga [ˈpaʒəgā]	a dialect word for a stove brush with a long handle, tied up from leafy branches or branches with needles [Kursīte 2009]
6.	Pažags [ˈpaʒəgs]	a dialect word for a stove brush with a long handle, tied up from leafy branches or branches with needles [Reķēna 1998]

All the words in the table are dialect words. The words *čaucere* and *čauksturis*, which correspond to the feminine and masculine grammatical gender, are derived

from the word *čaukstere*. Most of the words above mean *a stove brush*, however, they describe a variety of the types of branches that it is made from, e.g. leafy branches, branches with needles from evergreens in the winter, or birch whisks fixed to a long handle that are dried from summer for use in the bathhouse.

Table 2 demonstrates a group of five words that are used to name **the stove rake**.

Table 2

Latvian synonyms of the stove rake

№	Original in Latvian	Definition / Meaning
1.	Krāsns kruķis [<i>'kra:sns krutjɪs</i>]	a wooden tool with a metal tip (for mixing coal in the stove) [Kagaine, Raģe 1977]
2.	Bigulis [<i>'bigulis</i>]	an oven rake –a crooked widened iron rod for poking firewood [Latviešu literārās valodas vārdnīca 1972-1996]
3.	Biksteklis [<i>'biktəklis</i>]	a rake for poking fire in the stove [Latviešu Konversācijas vārdnīca 2000-2004] a piece of wood for mixing coal in the stove [Bušmane 1989]
4.	Skruķis [<i>'skrutjɪs</i>]	a wooden tool with a metal tip (for mixing coal in the stove); a tool for pushing sth [Kagaine, Raģe 1977]
5.	Urķis [<i>'urtjɪs</i>]	A small (wooden) skewer, wooden peg, small pole [Kagaine, Raģe 1977]

Several words above describe a tool of multipurpose use, e.g. the words *biksteklis* and *bigulis* define a stove rake used for poking fire or moving coal in the stove. However, this tool is not meant only for the bread stove, but is also used for any fire stove, which in old times was an inalienable object in every house in the countryside and was used as a cooker with removable rings to fit pots of different sizes used for cooking. The words *krāsns kruķis* and *skrunķis* have the meaning which specifies that it is a wooden tool with a metal tip. *Skruķis* is derived from 'kruķis'. Thus, all the words in the table are used for a wooden pole but three of them (as analysed above) define a wooden pole with a metal tip.

The analysis of traditional bread-making lexical units plays a small part in the whole area of culture-specific lexis and historically bound words. Nevertheless, a further research on this topic and other topics related to traditional culinary traditions may be conducted to broaden the existing special glossaries as there is a need in a compilation of special dictionaries of Latvian culture-specific lexis that belongs to the sphere of ethnography.

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