
Ways of Rendering Culture-Bound Lexicon in Translation

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Introduction

In the lexicon of every language there is a large group of words, which reflect the specifics of the culture the language belongs to. The cumulative function of the language is to reflect, retrieve and transfer to the next generation the collective knowledge of the community of people speaking this language, its culture, in the broad sense of the word. Words of the language contain in their semantics certain information related to extralinguistic reality, which, in any culture, is a holistic fusion of intercultural, universal experience, common to all humankind, and unique experience, proper only to the given cultural group. The majority of words in any language are of the first kind denoting, or signifying, factors and phenomena of various aspects of life shared by all people. There are, however, words that reflect the second kind of national experience, the one that manifests exceptional specifics of the given culture. While the first, the predominant group of words makes communication between people of different cultures possible thanks to establishing equivalent reference to universal elements of reality via translation or interpretation, the second group of words presents certain difficulty for translation as these words do not have equivalents due to unique specifics of the phenomena they denote. In linguistics, they are commonly termed culture-bound, culture-loaded, or non-equivalent lexicon. Translation theory and practice have worked out various ways of rendering such words, depending on several factors, such as the importance of the phenomena themselves in national and intercultural communication, the types of text under translation, the role or function of culture-bound words in the text, and others.

This article analyzes different approaches to translating Ukrainian/Russian culture-bound lexicon into English used by the translators of two books, fiction and non-fiction, written by a prominent modern Ukrainian writer Andrey Kurkov, and seeks to establish a rationale for translators' choices in achieving equivalent translation.

Equivalence in Translation

There is probably no need to describe what translation is, which is essentially “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, p. 7). In other words, it is the replacement of textual material in a source language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another, target, language (TL) (Catford, 1965).

The main objective of any translation consists of reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style (Nida & Taber, 1982). Thus, equivalence is a fundamental category of translation, to the degree that, according to Pym (2007), equivalence is supposed to define translation, and translation, in turn, defines equivalence (p. 37). However, a centuries-old dispute of scholars and practitioners alike about the nature of equivalence has not yet arrived at any universal, acceptable to all definition. As was succinctly stated by Wilss (1982), the concept of translation equivalence has been an essential issue not only in translation theory and practice over the last 2000 years but also in modern translation studies, however, “there is hardly any other concept in translation theory which has produced as many contradictory statements and has set off as many attempts at an adequate, comprehensive definition as the concept of translation equivalence” (p. 134). Xiabin (2005) contends that achieving equivalence faces a number of linguistic, temporal and cultural challenges and has to take into account numerous factors, such as text types, translation purposes, demands of the clients and expectations of the target readers, among many others. His conclusion is that equivalence is never a static term, and it is not sameness to the source texts which is neither possible nor even desirable; still equivalence will remain central to the practice of translation ... even if it is marginalized by translation studies and translation theorists” (Xiabin, 2005, p. 19).

Taking into account the complexity of factors surrounding equivalence it is not surprising that Translation Studies have come up with a number of different concepts of equivalence, none of which, however, excludes or contradicts the other. Without going into much detail, which can be supplied by any comprehensive textbook on translation, it is necessary to state that my analysis of the ways translators treated culture-bound lexicon in Kurkov’s books was based on the formal, dynamic, situational and contextual models of translation. Formal equivalence advocated both by Nida (1964) and Catford (1965) seeks establishing the closest possible proximity of the source text (ST) and target text (TT) components. This, in Catford’s model, is reinforced with the textual equivalence that is rendering the meaning of the source text, while Nida’s model emphasizes dynamic equivalence, which is “reproducing in the receptor’s language the closest natural equivalent of the message of the SL, first in terms of meaning and second in terms of style” (1975, p. 95). The “natural” aspect of equivalency, for Nida, is in delivering a readable text, which preserves the meaning and style of the original, and is capable of producing the same effect upon the TL audience as the original has on the SL readers.

Exactly the same purpose is emphasized in translation by Newmark, who suggested “communicative” translation, which “attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original” (1981, p. 95). His notion of situational equivalence goes further than Nida’s dynamic equivalence in rendering of meaning and sense of the text rather than achieving proximity in semantics between the two texts. While being committed to the word (“We have to get the words right. The words must stretch and give only if the thought is threatened”¹), Newmark is particularly sensitive to the context, or situation, with all variety of factors—linguistic and extralinguistic—it involves:

Visibly and linguistically, words are put into context by their collocation, their grammatical function and their position in the word order of a sentence. Outside language, invisibly and referentially they are within a context of a real or imagined situation, a cultural background, a topic and a shared experience with the reader. (Newmark, 1991, p. 87)

Other researchers further expand the notion of context, or situation, of translation, including into the equation pragmatic understanding and analytical processing of the SL text (Wilss, 1982); the nature of the participants of the process (client, sender, translator, receiver); and their cognitive and socio-psychological

1 Newmark, 1988, p. 73.

characterizations, as well as linguistic realization of the communicative purposes of the text (Bolanos, 2005), and many other factors.

The complexity of the concept of textual equivalency made Snell-Hornby (1988) claim that textual equivalence is “imprecise,” “ill-defined” and as illusionary as any symmetry between languages. This is particularly true for the cases when even “illusionary” symmetry of any degree is absent, as in the cases of so-called untranslatability, or nonequivalence.

Culture-Bound Lexicon

Any translation essentially starts at the level of words, as was explicitly outlined by Newmark: “we ... translate words, because there is nothing else to translate” (1988, p. 73), but it is on the level of words that asymmetry between languages is the most obvious. Catford (1965), classifying equivalence into formal equivalence, when the word occupies a similar place in TL text as in the SL text, and textual equivalence, when meaning is rendered by other means, pointed to the instances where the absence of corresponding formal or cultural units leads to “untranslatability,” and in such cases translation, as we understand it, is impossible.

It is a common approach to attribute cases of evident lack of equivalence to either extralinguistic, culture specific factors, or linguistic ones, born out of the specific way the given language is construed. Newmark stated that between the words of two languages, one always covers more ground or not exactly the same ground in meaning than the other, and concluded that “it is impossible to expect perfect translation equivalence between SL word and its TL correspondent” (1991, p. 100).

The most comprehensive list of occurrences, when translators encounter untranslatability at the word level, was suggested by M. Baker (1992). The researcher lists the following typical cases of lack of equivalence:

1. Culture-specific concepts—the words that express a concept totally unknown in the target culture;
2. The SL concept is not lexicalized in the TL, even though it is not unique or culture-specific;
3. The SL word is semantically complex;
4. The source and target languages make different distinctions in meaning;
5. The TL lacks a superordinate term (hyperonym) of a lexical field;
6. The TL lacks a specific term (a hyponym);
7. Words of SL and TL display differences in physical or interpersonal perspective: “Interpersonal perspective draws the attention to the relationship among participants in the discourse” (Baker, 1992, p. 23), e.g. *come* and *go*;
8. Words of SL and TL display differences in expressive meaning (connotation);
9. Words of SL and TL display relevant for the text differences in form;
10. Words of SL and TL display differences in frequency;
11. Loan words in the source text are either absent in TL or their function is different.

In Baker’s classification, the first group comprises the words meaning of which denotes various unique, proper only to the given culture phenomena. They may be abstract or concrete, such as social customs, religious beliefs, food, handicrafts, and so on, and as such these words do not have equivalent counterpart in any other language. However, even other groups, considered as instances of linguistic untranslatability, may comprise words that are semantically different from their TL counterparts due to the specifics of the cultural experience of SL speakers. For instance, TL may lack a hyponym and a concept may not be lexicalized due to its lesser significance for the given culture. A well-known example is the lack of hyperonym “snow” in all dialects of Eskimo language, which has a number of specific lexemes (semantic bases) for

different kinds of snow, which, in their turn, are missing in English². This linguistic asymmetry is definitely grounded in the extralinguistic reality; after all, “languages do not simply name existing categories, they articulate their own” (Culler, 1976, p. 21). This Culler’s conclusion echoes that of Palmer, who stated: “The words of a language often reflect not so much the reality of the world, but the interest of the people who speak it” (1976, p. 21).

Culture-specific information can be carried by different types of the lexical meaning of a word or a lexical unit. Cruse (1986) distinguishes between four main types: propositional meaning, expressive meaning, presupposed meaning, and evoked meaning. The propositional, or denotative, meaning arises from the relation between a word and what it refers to in a real or imaginary world. Developing the concept of culture-bound lexicon, culture-specific words are those, which carry specific cultural information in their propositional/denotation/referential meaning.

Expressive meaning relates to the speakers’ feelings or attitudes towards the word or the concept it denotes. Functioning of certain objects and phenomena in a given cultural formation can generate specific associations or emotional and esthetic value, reflected in the expressive meaning of the word, or its connotation, making it also culture-specific. Another terms for this kind of meaning are “connotational” or “pragmatic.”

Presupposed meaning arises from co-occurrence restrictions, selectional or collocational, and is determined by the linguistic norms of the language rather than specifics of the relevant culture. However, the fourth type of meaning distinguished by Cruse, evoked meaning, is also culturally-bound since this meaning arises from dialect and register variations. Words with evoked meaning connected with a dialect can be geographically or temporally specific or marked by their association with different social classes and groups. The evoked meaning arising from register is related to a field, or situation, of discourse (e.g., different vocabulary for cooking or discussing dishes) and mode of discourse, connected to genre and medium of communication (e.g., oral instructions versus those made in the written form). But evoked meaning can also be connected with tenor of discourse, reflecting the relationships between its participants, and as such it is also culture-specific. As Baker points out, “getting the tenor of discourse right in translation can be quite difficult” (Baker, 1992, p. 16), as the degree of formality/informality in interpersonal relations varies widely from culture to culture (take, for instance, tenor of talking to one’s mother in American and Japanese cultures).

While “the very notion of ‘types of meaning’ is theoretically suspect” (ibid.), and in practice, all of them are so tightly fused together that it is almost impossible to differentiate them, the understanding of different semantic levels where culturally-specific information can be stored is important. Having this consideration in mind, I have selected for the purposes of this research all those types of words, the semantics of which comprises certain explicit or implicit culture-specific component and which, due to this component, do not have correspondents in the lexical systems of other languages. In the context of interlinguistic and intercultural comparisons, these words are bound to a certain culture and convey information about the unique features of the given culture in its multiple manifestations, such as names of various phenomena of material and immaterial world, their specific social role and functioning, as well as specific attitude to them on the side of speakers of the given language. I term this lexical stratum as culture-bound lexicon and classify it into four major groups.

The first group are words denoting culture-specific concepts, as in Baker’s classification, the words denoting the “trademarks” of the given culture, its unique attributes, such as names of social, political, ethnographic, historic and so on phenomena. Cultural component of such words does not only comprise their

2 This finding of anthropologist Franz Boas in 1911 has been subjected to much skepticism and was even termed as “the Great Eskimo Vocabulary Hoax.” Current research, however, proves it to be true (Woodbury, 1991).

propositional, or referential, meaning, but is naturally affixed to other types of meanings as well. These words are typical examples of untranslatability and nonequivalence, since they have no analogous correspondents in other languages (e.g., *tory*, *wasabi*, *banshee*, *borsch*). In this paper, I term such words as nonequivalent words and culture-specific vocabulary.

The second group of words, culture-bound lacunae, can also be nonequivalent, even though the phenomena or concepts they denote, though not unique, have been lexicalized only in a given language due to the specific significance these concepts have in the given culture. An example can be the Russian word *intelligentsia* denoting a distinct social class in Russia. Similar examples are *perestroika* and *glasnost* of Gorbachev's era, which were borrowed by many languages even though in English, for instance, they can be easily translated as *reconstruction* and *openness*.

Borrowing a term when translation is essentially possible, as with the last two examples above, helps to retain in translation "the shade of specificity" in the foreign object or institution (Fedorov, 1953, pp. 160–161). In the third group of words that I distinguish in culture-bound lexicon, this "shade" is much more subtle and is implicitly connected with the culturally-specific background knowledge the language community associates with the word. It is difficult to pinpoint the type of meaning, which stores this information. Definitely it is not its referential meaning but rather a broad context of the word's usage, which gives me the reason to call this group a contextually-specific culture-bound vocabulary. Such words do have counterparts in other languages but their social, cultural and historic significance, as well as specific attitude towards the phenomena they denote are different from those of other languages due to the specific cultural and historic experience of the given community. For example, *ocha* can be translated as *green tea* in other languages but none of other cultures will have a similar variety of associations with the word as Japanese does.

One more group of culture-bound lexicon also bears cultural specificity due to unique associations the words evoke in speakers of the given language, but in this group these associations are of emotional and esthetic nature. *Mimosa*, for instance, for many Russian women of older generations is associated with March 8th, the International Women's Day, a national holiday of all women when they were presented with those flowers, the only fresh ones available at that time of the year. In a similar way, *береза* (a birch tree) and *черемуха* (a bird cherry) have specific national symbolic connotations in Russian, while *holly* and *mistletoe* do not as their connotation is grounded in English culture. This group of words is listed in my classification as culturally-connoted vocabulary. Fawcett remarks that connotational meaning is difficult, fundamentally impossible to translate (1997, p. 25). Ladmira (1979) suggests a number of solutions from nontranslation, when connotational meaning is ignored, to "minimal mistranslation," where connotation of the word is deemed more important than its denotation (p. 244).

Finally, there is a group of proper names, from personal names to the names of streets, cities, brands and so on. Cultural affiliation of national onomastics is quite specific: on the one hand, it is expressed in the form of the words, making them explicit markers of the given culture (e.g., *Juan*, *Catherine* or *Ekaterina*); on the other hand, it may be stored in the associative or connotational background of these words. Also, some names are meaningful, like *Maidan Nezalezhnosti* (Independence Square) or *Naberezhnaya Pobedy* (Victory Embankment in translation). But whether this meaning needs to be translated or not is a decision of the translator in each particular case. Likewise, every group of my classification calls for a different treatment in the process of translation depending on the number of factors, listed below.

Ways of Translating Culture-Bound Lexicon

As varied and complex as it might seem, untranslatability connected with culture-bound lexicon is a common occurrence in translation, which has worked out a number of ways of dealing with it. Ceramella

(2008) points out that the techniques, which can be used to deal with nonequivalent words, vary according to the conceptual analysis for the specification of word meaning, the realization of lexical and semantic fields, and the measurement of connotative meaning using the technique of the semantic differential. These and other factors of the analysis define the choice of a method that the translator chooses in each case from the wide arsenal of methods.

Taxonomies of translation techniques vary across different schools of translation but irrespective of various terminology they can be brought down to the following, most common ways of dealing with culture-bound lexicon.

1. Borrowing, or using the SL word in its transcribed or transliterated form in the TT. As Fawcett remarks, “borrowing may sound superficially unproblematic: if the target language does not have a word for something, just borrow it from a language that does.” But he also warns that this simplicity is only superficial, as “it raises important questions of national identity, power, and colonization” (1997, p. 35). Another consideration with regards to the term “borrowing” is that it is also used in lexicology, but there it usually defines a word that has gone through a process of assimilation in TL and can be considered as part of its word stock (like Fr. *résumé* or Rus. *sputnik*). A borrowing, or in other taxonomies, a loan word is often accompanied by explanation, at least at its first appearance in the text.
2. Close to borrowing is calque, borrowing of the morphemic structure of the source word while translating the morphemes, or of a phrase structure while translating the words it is made of. In other words, it is a literal translation on the morphemic structure level or on the level of the phrase, like a calque from French *Anglo-Saxon* meaning *English and American*.
3. Translation by paraphrasing: instead of nonequivalent word, “the paraphrase may be based on modifying a superordinate or simply on unpacking the meaning of the source item particularly if the item in question is semantically complex” (Baker, 1992, p. 38).
4. Translation as analogy (also cultural substitution, or adaptation), when nonequivalent word is replaced by the TL term likely to have a similar effect on the target reader, e.g., It. *pasticcERIA* > Eng. *pastry*.
5. Translation by various replacements, involving hyponymic/hypernymic shifts, such as replacing the nonequivalent term by hyponym (concretization) or hyperonym/superordinate (generalization), or logical derivation (metonymy).
6. Translation by omission, if the meaning of a particular item is not “vital enough to the development of the text to justify distracting the reader with lengthy explanations” (Baker, p. 40).

There are other less common ways, such as coinage (creating a new word), translation by illustration, and others. Whatever taxonomy is taken, it can be subjected to a number of criticisms. Among those listed by Fawcett the most serious are that taxonomies deal more with contrastive linguistics than with dynamics of translation; that they are not predictive, as they do not prescribe when to use them; moreover, they are “just fancy names for what translators already do (or think they do) intuitively” (Fawcett, 1997, p. 51). Still, the concise list of techniques suggested above is instrumental for the analysis and critique of the translations, which constitute the purpose of this study.

Andrey Kurkov and His Works

Born in Russia (St. Petersburg), a Russian-speaking citizen of Kiev, Ukraine, Andrey Kurkov is the most successful, best-selling and internationally acclaimed writer of contemporary Ukraine. He is the author of 20 books, which have been translated into 35 languages, and 20 scripts for movies and documentaries. A member of the British PEN Club, a chevalier of the French *Ordre National de la Légion d'honneur*, he was also, unofficially, titled a “realist of magic” and “the most serious, in Ukraine, writer of absurd.”

When in November of 2013, Yanukovich, the country's Russia-sponsored, scandalously criminal president suddenly abandoned a deal with the EU, a popular revolution, nicknamed the Maidan, and later the Revolution of Dignity, started. Kurkov's *Ukraine Diaries. Dispatches from Kiev* (2014) recorded the development of EuroMaidan events from the very first day, Thursday 21 November 2013, until Thursday April 24 2014, when Ukraine was getting ready for new presidential elections. The book was first published with the title *Ukrainisches Tagebuch* by Haymon Verlag (Innsbruck-Wien, 2014). The English edition used for the analysis in my research was translated from the French edition, *Journal de Maidan* (2014), into English by Sam Taylor with an afterword translated by Amanda Love Darragh. The highly acclaimed by international publishers and critics *Diaries* describe the most historically significant events of the crisis, from violent clashes in the Maidan, the impeachment of Yanukovich, Russia's annexation of Crimea to the separatist uprisings in the east of Ukraine. Kurkov's informed, objective and often passionate presentation of the events in his country going through dramatic transformation makes *Diaries* stand out among other documentary works of the writer.

The other book by Kurkov chosen for my analysis, *Death and the Penguin*, translated from Russian by George Bird (Vintage Books, 2003), has been in the top-ten of European bestsellers and is, perhaps, the most popular in Ukraine book by a Ukrainian writer. Called "a tragicomic masterpiece" by the *Daily Telegraph* and "a chilling black comedy" by the *Guardian*, the book has been highly hailed by international reviewers as a brilliant, satirical tale of a chaotic, post-Soviet life in Kiev and Ukraine. Some critics even praise Kurkov for his story of an inspiring writer Victor and his unusual pet penguin Misha for conjuring up "both Gogol and Dostoevsky in a conspiracy laden plot" (the *Scotsman*).

Both books under the analysis are about life in Ukraine, so inevitably they deal with various aspects of Ukrainian culture and are compelled to employ the Ukrainian culture-bound lexicon. But the books are different in genre, so the role of these words in each narrative is expected to be different. Also the books have different translators who might have their own individual approaches to untranslatability and treatment of culture-specific lexicons. Nevertheless, Kurkov's writing presents a valuable opportunity to compare the originals with the translations and to reveal translators' choices with regards to culture-bound lexicon. It is not the objective of this paper to provide a detailed critique of the translations; rather it is an attempt to better understand how translators should and should not deal with culture-bound lexicon of the original.

Ways of Treating Culture-Bound Lexicon in the Translations of Kurkov's Books

Kiev Diaries

Due to the documentary nature of the *Diaries* describing in detail the momentous events of the Revolution of Dignity (2013–14), the major group of culture-bound lexicon is represented by onomastics, mainly the names of people, places, parties and various institutions (see some examples in Appendix 1). Names of people and places are rendered by Sam Taylor, naturally, by transcription, supplied by in some cases with the background information about them. This addition is done in three ways: in-text additions, footnotes, or for some important personalities and notions, requiring extensive explanation, in the form of the post-text notes, provided by Kurkov for his foreign readers. The examples of the in-text additions are **Cardinal Lyubomyr Huzar**³, **the singer Ruslana** (she is also included in the post-text Notes), Slava Vakarchuk (**singer with the rock band Okean Elzy**), the Maidan **Nezalezhnosti, Ukraine's Independence Square**, and others. There are only three cases of footnotes provided by the translator for onomastics: for Yulia Pilipenko (a champion of the World Transplant Games in Bangkok), the Donbas region (the eastern provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk), and Ukrinform (the national news agency of Ukraine). Other footnotes (and there

3 Here and further on, the translator's additions to the original text are presented in bold.

are surprisingly few of them for the book so heavily loaded with the specific cultural information) are used for other kinds of culture-bound lexicon to be discussed later. The post-text Notes (there are 13 entries there) are marked as reference for seven personal names (Yulia Tymoshenko, Viktor Yushchenko, Georgiy Gongadze, Ruslana, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Stepan Bandera, and Yurko Vynnychuk) and the name of one place, Western Ukraine.

Another big group treated as onomastics in this study is the names of various political parties active on the stage of the revolutionary events in Ukraine. Most of them are also transcribed though translation is possible, e.g., Batkivshchina (literally *Fatherland*), UDAR (*Blow, Punch*), Svoboda (*Freedom*), and Pravy Sektor (*Right Wing*). The only two exceptions are the name of the then ruling party, the Party of Regions, and the Russian Unity Party, which are calques. The name of UDAR party, though, gets translated in one place in order to stress the association of the name with its leader: “Enter Klichko (**the former boxing champion and leader of the centrist UDAR party (udar means ‘punch’ in Ukrainian).**” Another context-induced translation is “Oplot — **the pro-Russian organization in Kharkiv, whose name means ‘rampart’.**”

Leaving the names of the leading parties without translation, though it might have given a reader some additional, though not very important, notion of the parties’ orientation, the translator chooses to act differently with the names of some newspapers, restaurants, hotels and stores, many of which are transcribed and translated, e.g., the newspaper *Segodnia* (**‘Today’**), the newspaper *Vesti* (**‘News’**), Sem’ Dnei Hotel (**‘Seven Days’ Hotel**), a large bookshop — Naukova Dumka (**‘Scientific Thought’**), TsUM (**Central Universal Department Store**), restaurant The Bakinsky Dvorik (**‘The Cozy Courtyard from Baku’**), cafe Sova (**‘the Owl’**) and some others. Certain lack of consistency is observed with onomastics, comprised of the names of places, specifically city streets. The common practice of translation is to leave them transcribed without translation, like Bankova Street, Sadovaya Street (though they literally mean *Bank Street, Garden Street*). Sam Taylor, however, chooses to transcribe and translate some others, e.g., Victory Square, Glory Square.

The main function of onomastics is nomination, but in translation it is also a bearer of the national coloring, bonding the narration to a specific cultural setting and forming a certain cultural background for the story. Vereshchagin and Kostomarov treat it as a cultural-connotative function of proper names, as culturally unique information is rendered at the level of the connotative meaning of the word (Верещагин & Костомаров, 1973). For rendering these two functions transcription is sufficient, but in the texts of the documentary genre, such the one under the analysis, onomastics can perform one more function, ideological. This function is realized when translation of the proper name reveals to the TL reader the social significance of the name in SL, reflected in the meaning of the name. Perhaps this consideration was taken into account by the translator of the *Diaries*, as in the case of the last two examples of onomastics, even though this approach was not followed consistently throughout the whole TL text.

The second largest group of the culture-bound lexicon in the *Diaries* are culture-specific concepts, or nonequivalent vocabulary per se (Appendix 2). These are the names of various social and political groups, movements, institutions, organizations, and, since *Dispatches from Kiev* is also a personal diary that reflects everyday life of the author, names of food and drinks. It should be noted that in most cases Taylor tries to preserve in his translation all those prominent markers of the Ukrainian political and social culture by transcribing them and supplying the borrowings with in-text explanation. On the pages of *The Diaries* readers of the translation encounter the key players of the revolution: Maidan and Maidanistas, the Auto-maidan, the Bikemaidan, the ‘heavenly *sotnya* (**a hundred who died in February**), and their opponents: the Berkut (**the special police of the Ministry of Internal Affairs**), *berkutovtsy* (**Berkut agents**), *siloviki* (**the main enforces of law and order**), *veveshniki* (**the soldiers from internal forces**), *grushniki* (**GRU agents, the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Russian Federation**), *efesbeshniki* (**FSB agents**), KGB, and *titushki*. The latter word (**one of the most recent acquisitions of the Ukrainian language, applied to**

anyone hired as a mercenary by government representatives to intimidate, provoke clashes or carry out violent acts against the regime's opponents) is explained in much detail in the post-text Notes⁴. Most of these words are given in italics as foreign for English borrowings; the in-text explanation (such as in the above examples presented in bold font) accompanies the words at their first introduction, further on in the text no explanation is provided. As was mentioned before, the book is not overloaded with footnotes, which tend to impede the dynamics of the narration, so the footnote explanation is given only for three nonequivalent words. They are Maidan, *belyash* (footnote '**meat pasty of Tatar origin**') and *zelenka* (footnote '**a green dye, commonly used as an antiseptic in the countries of the former USSR. The ruling party supplies it to its activists so that they can spray protesters with it, as a way of humiliating them**'). Naturally, all culture-specific words, which can be considered as assimilated by the English language, are given without any explanation: rouble, datcha, *kasha*, vodka, pogrom, and others. The same method is used with *perestroika* and *glasnost*, belonging in my classification to the group of culture-bound lacunae. Lack of italics probably shows a higher degree of assimilation, and consequently assumed familiarity of the notions to the readers of the translation.

High saturation of the translation with transcribed loan words of the Ukrainian and Russian origin testifies to the desire of the translator to render the uniqueness of the Ukrainian culture, and thus corresponds to the dynamic model of translation with situational equivalence. This observation is also supported by the very few cases, when Taylor chooses to use a replacement of nonequivalent vocabulary with TL analogy, or cultural substitution. Thus, бандеровец (a member of the anti-Soviet nationalist gang of the 1930's-40's) is replaced with the superordinate 'nationalist' in translation. Also милиция ('militia') is substituted with 'police,' so both милиционер ('militiaman') and гаишник ('road patrol officer') in translation are rendered as 'policeman.' While these replacements can be justified as they do not interfere with the meaning of the SL text, the use of analogy in three other cases leads to a faulty cultural substitution. This is the use of 'yards' instead of *meters*, 'schnapps' instead of самогон (Ukrainian moonshine alcohol) and 'a Macedonian salad' instead of the famous Russian salad оливье (commonly known as Russian salad). Such cultural substitutes not only differ from their SL counterparts in meaning, but also introduce elements of other cultures, foreign to the Ukrainian context.

These few inaccuracies, however, do not much degrade the quality of Taylor's translation, which can be commended for its close attention to preserving the national cultural specifics of the ST. Consider this: out of 52 words of the first group of my classification, words denoting culture-specific concepts, 38 were transcribed and explained (78%), 25 were transcribed (20%) and only 4 (1%) were replaced and 1 omitted. Also, significant numbers of translated onomastics show that Sam Taylor was not just interested in the quantity of the cultural specific markers of his translation but also in their meaningful aspects, making cultural specifics of the ST understandable.

Death and The Penguin

Completely different from a documentary reflection on the actual events in Kiev and Ukraine (*Ukraine Diaries*) another book by Kurkov, *Death and The Penguin*, is a novel of absurd, set up, however, in the recognizable realistic setting of Kiev. A struggling writer Victor is adopting from the struggling Kiev zoo a bizarre pet, a penguin called Misha. Victor is profoundly lonely, no friends, no girlfriend (the last one left him a year ago), so Misha the Penguin becomes his only affection in this world. Bizarre is the job that Victor gets from one newspaper —to write obituaries for important officials from the government, parliament, law and such, for which he receives a hefty (for Ukraine of the 1990's) salary of \$300 a month, with

4 Two other culture-specific notions elaborated in the Notes are Holodomor (the Great Famine of 1932–33) and Road Control (a non-governmental organization, working to defend the rights of Ukrainian motorists against illegal police practices).

some urgent orders paid at \$500. What makes his job weird is that the subjects of his obituaries, called in the original крестики ('crosses') and in translation "obelisks" are still alive. Soon however they start dying one after another under mysterious circumstances—falling from a six-floor window, shot, strangled and so on. The newspaper he works for hints that there might be a connection with a real war waged by two warring Mafia clans. What puts Victor's mind to some extent at ease is that the background dossiers he receives for his "obelisks" reveal that all his "clients" are actually criminals, involved in corruption, fraud, theft and other illegal activities. At some point he gets an order for "obelisks" from a shady Misha-non-penguin, who later has to go into hiding and who entrusts Victor with his four-year old daughter Sonya, lots of money and a gun. At some point Victor himself is about to become an object of *social cleansing* performed by the rival clan and has to escape to the Antarctic in lieu of Misha the Penguin, for whom he initially has bought a place in the scientific expedition.

This darkly comical thriller, full of menace and absurdity, is also a striking representation of gloomy, chaotic, miserable life in post-Soviet Ukraine, where most of the characters are either unemployed or engaged in various criminal activities. A sinister satire is set up amidst real places and realistic every-day-life details, endowing Kurkov's characters with recognizable authenticity. It is composed of the names of places the characters go, food and drink they have, cars they drive, household items, and so on. And as such, narration inevitably involves the use of various groups of culture-bound lexicon, which should be accurately rendered in translation. However, it is not always the case with George Bird's translation, even though these words are not many, since Kurkov does not use in his book as much nonequivalent terminology as he did in the *Diaries*.

Onomastics naturally helps to build a culturally specific reality background of the novel, and Bird faithfully preserves almost all Ukrainian onomastics by transcribing it. These are personal names with patronymics (e.g., Lyosha, Boris Leonidovich, Victor Alekseyevich, Stepan Yakovlevich Pidpaly), the names of cities and streets (Sumy Street, Kreshchatik Street, Hydropark), some car brands (*Zhiguli*, *Zaporozhets*, *Moskvich*, *Lincoln*), names of restaurants (*Okhotnik*, *Mlin*). Some onomastics, however, is fully or partially translated (newspaper "Capital News," Red Army Street) or is rendered by combination of transcription and translation (Vladimir Rise, Vladimir Hill).

When it comes to the specific markers of the Russian-Ukrainian culture, nonequivalent lexicon per se, the translator shows his clear preference of analogy, paraphrasing and various replacements (Appendix 3). The only one word that has been transcribed is "datcha," an already assimilated English borrowing, and another one that has been transliterated "MVD" (Ministry of Internal Affairs). There are also two culture-specific words based on proper names, "сталинские здания" and "хрущевка," which the translator renders in transcription with the in-text addition explaining the relevant phenomena: "Stalin-**baroque** block" and "Khrushchev **slum**."

Other elements of every-day Ukrainian reality are replaced or paraphrased. Thus, "жезла" (a small pot for boiling coffee on the stove) has become "a Turkish coffee-maker," "паспортный стол" is Registry, and "купоны" (low-quality paper coupons, which were used in early 90's instead of money) is replaced with "grossly inflated national currency." The translator prefers to unpack the meaning of a culturally-specific word, rather than borrow it in transcription. In some cases it does not present a significant for the story departure from the original, like with the following words: "омоновец," rendered as "special task militia," "рукав ватника" (a sleeve of a cheap cotton-padded quilted coat) as "padded sleeve of quilted jacket," and even "дворники" (the key figures of a city housing community, its caretakers) is acceptable as "clearers of courtyards and pavements." Some analogy, however, sounds too foreign for the novel's context (Ukrainians eat cheap "сардельки," not "polonies") or presents a different cultural reality, (in schools in Ukraine, a 5-point system is used, so Victor gives Sonya "four" for her drawing, not "eight out of ten"). A favorite character of all Ukrainian children Доктор Айболит is substituted by its English prototype Dr. Dolittle.

Moreover, the analogy “deputy,” used for “депутат” (which can be translated as “MP”) violates the propositional meaning of the word. With some cultural substitutes a reader of the translation gets a wrong impression of the economic status of the novel’s characters. Thus, they drink from “стопка” and “граненный стакан” (very cheap low-quality glasses, typical for poor households), and not from “small crystal glasses” and “cut-glass tumblers,” associated with much more affluent environment.

Also, Bird’s translation is not sufficiently adequate in dealing with culture-specific connotations of many words. Many slang words characteristic of criminal groups are rendered by their neutral equivalents: баксы (bucks) are always rendered as “dollars”; “крутая иномарка” (a symbol of effluence, often illegal) as “impressive foreign-made cars” (though “fleshy” would be a more successful description). In one place, a slang word “музычка” is substituted by the other attributes of a funeral not typical for Ukraine of the described period. During the burial of Pidpaly, a lonely destitute scientist, a graveyard worker comments on the absence of the funeral band: “Что так бедно? Без музычки?” Bird tries to render a colloquial nature of speech but chooses to use concepts of a different cultural reality: “Poor sort of do ... No priest, no palaver.”

Russian is rich in diminutive suffixes, which are typically rendered by a superordinate with the addition of “little.” Bird also uses this technique rendering the endearing way of talking to children. Thus, Nina, Sonya’s governess, uses the words “курточка” and “ботиночки” talking to a little girl, which are translated by Bird as “little jacket”, “little boots.” However, the affectionate attitude of Victor to his pet Misha, also reflected in the diminutive words that he uses “грудка” (little chest) and “плечики” (little shoulders) is missing in the translation altogether, as they are either omitted or substituted with the neutral equivalent (e.g., “shoulders”).

In overall, it seems that Bird is much more concerned with the development of the story than with the detailed representation of its cultural setting. For me, familiar with the original, the impression of the translation is of the text lacking most of the cultural coloring of the former and presenting rather neutral, even bleak, cultural background. Interestingly enough, a similar opinion is expressed by the English-speaking critic of the translation Ken Kalfus (2001):

Unfortunately, Kurkov never makes clear how Viktor’s obituaries serve the shadowy criminals, government officials and corrupt journalists who employ him. Some of the confusion may be laid to the translator, George Bird, who has peppered key passages of the text with obscure Britishisms that not only give the novel an oddly bangers-and-mash flavor but sometimes make it difficult to follow. My favorite moment of incomprehension comes when a visitor drops by Viktor’s apartment and asks, “How about a dekko at the penguin?” -- employing (I looked it up) a dated slang word for “look” or “peep” derived from the Hindi.

Final criticism should be addressed to the translation of the title of the novel. The original is called *Смерть Постороннего* (The Death of a Stranger), while the translation’s title omits an important contextual notion of a “stranger” and includes “penguin” instead. While penguin is indeed a central character of the book, the omitted concept relates to a no less significant motive of the story, Victor’s involuntary involvement in the numerous deaths of the objects of his premature obituaries. George Bird also chooses to include penguin in his translation of the sequel to the novel, titled by him *Penguin Lost*, while Kurkov’s original is called *Закон Улитки* (The Law of the Snail) thus missing on another important contextual motive envisioned by the author of the original.

Conclusion

Nonequivalent culture-bound vocabulary is a set of words, which reflect a unique cultural experience of the given people. While presenting a serious problem for translation, as these words do not have equiva-

lents in other languages, culture-bound lexicon plays an important role in any kind of a narrative about the given culture. Depending on the genre of the original, in some texts they are less prominent and less important than in others, and translators may choose different ways of treating these words.

My research focused on the analysis of the translations of two books by Andrey Kurkov, a famous Ukrainian writer, a documentary book *Ukraine Diaries. Dispatches from Kiev* and a novel *Death and the Penguin*. Both books are about the post-Soviet Ukrainian reality, and culture-bound vocabulary used by the author constitutes a significant part of the narration and cultural background of the original texts. The translators of these books chose, however, different approaches to rendering these words in their translations, guided, perhaps, by the different perception of the role of culture-bound vocabulary in the original texts.

Thus, Sam Taylor, the translator of the *Diaries*, treats culture-specific lexicon with remarkable care, transcribing (borrowing) all typical markers of the Ukrainian culture and explaining their propositional meaning by various types (in-text, footnote) of additional comments. George Bird, the translator of *Death and the Penguin*, on the other hand, tends to ignore such words, and, giving preference to analogy or paraphrasing, decreases to a certain degree the adequacy of his translation.

The danger of analogy in rendering culture-bound lexicon has been emphasized by many scholars and practitioners of translation, who stated that a serious consideration should be given to the extent to which translation can tolerate a significant departure from the propositional meaning of the text. While through target culture analogy, the source culture can be more fully understood, it should not make the TT sound as though it belongs to TL culture. Obviously, adequate translation should find a fine balance between loading the text with foreign borrowings, thus making it heavy and incomprehensible, and complete disregard for lexical elements that make the translated text an indispensable part of the culture, which it represents and of which it was born.

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Appendix 1. Onomastic Words in *Ukraine Diaries*

#	Russian	English	Translation Method
1	Майдан	The Maidan Nezalezhnosti, Ukraine's Independence Square	transcription+addition
2	Укринформ	Ukrinform (in the footnote: Ukrinform is the national news agency of Ukraine)	transcription+addition
3	Мистецький Барбакан	Mistetski Barbakan ('Artistic Barbican')	transcription+translation
4	Руслана	The singer Ruslana	transcription+addition
5	Наукова Думка	A large bookshop – Naukova Dumka ('Scientific Thought')	transcription+translation
6	НБУ	NBU, Ukraine's national bank	transliteration+translation
7	газета "Сегодня"	The newspaper <i>Segodnia</i> ('Today')	transcription+translation
8	ресторан О'Панас	Restaurant O'Panasy	transcription
9	Зоряний	The Zoryany cinema	transcription
10	Ярославна	Yaroslavna (café)	transcription
11	Закарпатский	Zakarpatsky cognac	transcription
12	Площадь Победы	Victory Square	translation
13	Площадь Славы	Glory Square	translation
14	Улицы Банковая, Садовая	Bankova Street, Sadovaya Street	transcription
15	гостиница "Семь Дней"	Sem' Dnei Hotel ('Seven Days' Hotel)	transcription+translation
16	Набережное шоссе	Naberezhnoye Road, on the riverbank,	transcription+addition
17	Любомир Хузар	Cardinal Lyubomyr Huzar	transcription+addition
18	Печерская Лавра	The Pechersk Lavra	transcription
19	ЦУМ	TsUM (Central Universal Department Store)	transcription+addition
20	Гидропарк	The Hidropark	transcription
21	Подол	Podil	transcription
22	ресторан "Бакинский Дворик"	restaurant The Bakinsky Dvorik ('The Cosy Courtyard from Baku')	transcription+translation
23	"Сова"	Sova ('the Owl')	transcription+translation
24	Партия «Русское Единство»	Russian Unity Party	translation
25	РНЕ	RNE, Russian National Unity	transliteration+ translation

26	Фонд «Возрождение»	the Vidrodzenie ('Renaissance') Foundation	transcription+translation
27	«Вести»	<i>Vesti</i> ('News')	transcription+translation
28	«Знания»	Znannya bookshop	transcription
29	Харьковский «Оплот»	Oplot – the pro-Russian organization in Kharkiv, whose name means 'rampart'	transcription+translation+addition
30	«Твердыня»	the publishing house Tverdynia ('Forthress')	transcription+translation
31	ЦИК	TsIK, the central electoral committee	transliteration+addition
32	Харчевня «Три Карася»	The Three Carp restaurant	translation
33	«Новая Газета»	Opposition newspaper Novaya Gazeta	transcription
34	ФСБ	FSB (The Federal Security Service for the Russian Federation)	transliteration+addition
35	МВД	MVD (Ministry of Internal Affairs)	transliteration+addition

Appendix 2. Culture-Specific Words in *Ukraine Diaries*

#	Russian	English	Translation Method
1	КГБ	KGB	transliteration
2	гаишник	police officer	replacement
3	«веломайдан»	The Bikemaidan	calque
4	Автомайдан	Automaidan	transcription
5	Рада	The Rada – Ukraine’s parliament	transcription+addition
6	участковый милиционер	local police officer	paraphrasing
7	Беркут	The Berkut – the special police of the Ministry of Internal Affairs	transcription+addition
8	беркутовцы	<i>berkutovtsy</i> - Berkut agents	transcription+addition
9	паски	<i>paskhas</i>	transcription
10	водка	vodka	transcription
11	самогон	schnapps	analogy
12	«грушники»	<i>grushniki</i> (GRU agents, the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Russian Federation)	transcription+addition
13	фсбшники	<i>efesbeshniki</i> (FSB agents)	transcription+addition
14	много автоматов Калашникова	lots of Kalashnikovs	transcription
15	СБУ	SBU, Ukraine’s security service (further used without explanation)	transcription+addition
16	казак	Cossack	transcription
17	гривны	<i>hryvnas</i>	transcription
18	Майданы	Maidanistas	transcription+calque
19	бюджетники	<i>byudzhethniki</i> – government workers	transcription+addition
20	милиция	police	analogy
21	курсанты	student officers	analogy
22	маски, балаклава	balaklavas (always)	transcription
23	«Дорожный контроль»	Road Control	calque
24	сотня, сотни	<i>sotnya, sotnyas</i>	transcription
25	вече	<i>veche</i> – the popular assembly	transcription+addition
26	силовики	siloviki – the main enforces of law and order	transcription+addition

27	вэвэшники	<i>veveshniki</i> -the soldiers from internal forces	transcription+addition
28	перестройка	<i>perestroika</i>	transcription
29	гласность	<i>glasnost</i>	transcription
30	Евромайдан	<i>Euromaidan</i>	transcription
31	титушки	<i>titushky</i>	transcription
32	совхоз	<i>sovkhoz</i>	transcription
33	маршрутка	<i>minibus</i>	replacement
34	салат оливье	a Macedonian salad	analogy
36	дача	<i>dacha</i>	transcription
37	борщ	<i>borscht</i>	transcription
38	котлеты	<i>kotlety</i>	transcription
39	чебуреки	<i>chebureki</i> – those meat-filled pastries that are a speciality of the CrimeanTatars	transcription+addition
40	зеленка	<i>zelenka</i> (a footnote explaining p. 70) p. 141, 149 used in italics without explanation	transcription+addition
41	погромы	<i>pogroms</i>	transcription
42	каша	<i>kasha</i>	transcription
43	водка-хреновуха	<i>khrenovukha</i> – vodka with horseradish	transcription+addition
44	“зеленые человечки”	–	omission
45	дикий «бандеровец»	crazy nationalist	replacement
46	Небесная Сотня	The ‘heavenly <i>sotnya</i> ’ – a hundred who died in February	calque+transcription + addition
47	300 метров	three hundred yards	replacement
48	беляш	<i>belyash</i> (footnote ‘meat pasty of Tatar origin)	transcription
49	субботник	‘Volunteer Saturday’	replacement
50	рубль	Russian rouble	transcription
51	царский	Tsarist	transcription
52	Голодомор	Holodomor	transcription

Appendix 3. Culture-Specific Words in *Death and the Penguin*

#	Russian	English	Translation Method
1	стопка	small crystal glass	replacement
2	жезла	turkish coffee-maker	paraphrasing
3	дубленка	sheep-skin coat	paraphrasing
4	омоновец	special task militia	paraphrasing
5	паспортный стол	Registry	analogy
6	воспитательница детсада	nursery governess	analogy
7	граненый стакан	cut-glass tumbler	analogy
8	шалашик	Wigwam	analogy
9	клан (mafia group)	little group	replacement by hyperonym
10	МВД	MVD	borrowing/transcription
11	сардельки	Polonies	analogy
12	Айболит	Dr. Dolittle	analogy
13	купоны	grossly inflated national currency	paraphrasing
14	дача	datcha	borrowing/transcription
15	“четверка” (по пятибалльной системе)	eight out of ten	analogy
16	депутат	deputy	analogy
17	рыбный балык	cured fish fillet	analogy
18	хрущевка	Khrushchev slum	transcription + compensation
19	шинельное одеяло	Greatcoat	analogy+omission
20	рукав ватника	padded sleeve of quilted jacket	paraphrasing+omission
21	сталинские здания	Stalin-baroque block	paraphrasing
22	дворники	clearers of courtyards and pavements	paraphrasing
23	играли в карты, преферанс с болванчиком	played cards	omission