On Lacunarity in Translation of Culture Specific Concepts

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Abstract

A socio-cultural stereotype is a specific culture concept, distributed by a language community in form of implications completely or partially unintelligible for representatives of other cultures. This specific fragment of a national "world picture", called lacuna, presents much difficulty in translation. Lacunarity of a sociocultural stereotype in interlingual translation is determined by lexical, cultural, historical, and social factors. Decomposition of a stereotype pragmatic information into components enables to emphasize relevant for a particular context feature, which is possible to render by means of translation language. Reproducing noticeable implications is of special importance for reproduction of a pragmatic meaning of sociocultural stereotypes.

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Introduction

A sociocultural stereotype is a culture specific concept that reflects emotionally evaluated moral, behavioral, gender, and physical features of a social group. A sociocultural stereotype is formed under invariable influence of language that activates pragmatic information in course of communication.

Values, assumptions, beliefs, and preconceived notions that constitute the content of pragmatic meaning of a sociocultural stereotype is difficult or, sometimes, impossible to convey in translation. These blanks in the recipient culture, or lacunars, proceed to draw much attention from linguists, as well as

translation specialists Lacunarity in interpretation of sociocultural stereotypes is a challenging task that evokes rethinking means of translation.

The aim of our work is to recognize parameters that determine lacunarity and consider the ways to attain adequacy in translation of specific cultural concepts.

We illustrate our idea of lacunarity by an example of American sociocultural stereotype *Flapper*. We analyzed 13 English-Russian, 5 English-Ukrainian, an English-Italian and English-German dictionary entries. The ways to eliminate stereotype's lacunarity in translation are deduced in Russian and Ukrainian languages. Our considerations are exemplified by the abstracts from F.S. Fitzgerald's books, that popularized flapper culture, and criticizing flappers newspaper article of 1925.

Translatability of Specific Cultural Codes

A verbal unit that represents a sociocultural stereotype in discourse is a symbol for a definite national community that preserves pragmatic information about phenomenon of a social and cultural importance. Decoding this information by means of another language brings up the question about possibility of translation from one language to another.

Due to difficulties in translation of specific fragments of a source culture, the problem of translatability was raised. This fundamental problem concerns the parity between belonging to different cultures source and target texts, which enables to acknowledge the fact of dependence of target text on the source text (Basylev, 2012).

For centuries, philosophers, linguists and literary critics discussed the concept of translatability. The approach to the problem depended on the understanding of language role in interpretation of reality. Diametrically opposite views on translatability rests on different approaches to cultural commensurability.

Absolute translatability conforms to the idea of universal symbolism of languages by R. Descartes (1596-1650) and G.W. Leibniz (1679), who considered all natural languages as variations of *lingua universalis*. The outstanding philosophers and mathematicians regarded language units analogous to mathematical symbols, thus any idea conveyed by means of one language can be rendered into another, hence the translation process is connected with search of conceptual identity in different cultures.

The principle of universal features and limited series of grammar rules was developed later by Noam Chomsky (1965). The creator of Universal Grammar states distinctive properties of languages are not insuperable in translation. Indeed, semantic decomposition of language units representing universal concepts can reveal a number of identical constituents in comparing languages. Nevertheless, specific conceptual representations are often found in different cultures.

The opposite view on translatability was expressed by W.F. Humboldt and L. Weisgerber, (Seuren, 2013), who asserted impossibility of translation on the ground that each language possesses its own "picture of the world" determining the specific ethnic perception of the reality expressed in language units. Corresponding to linguistic relativity principle (also known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis), untranslatability is explained by language impact on cognitive activity of speakers that think and behave differently in different cultures (Ibid.). This difference in perception of the world and mental organization of reality can explain the existence of certain "gaps" between languages, which are difficult to eliminate. Arguing with untranslability dogma R. Jakobson wrote: "All cognitive experience and its classification is conveyable in any existing language" (Jakobson, 1959). The prominent linguist states interpretation of a specific cultural code units between two different verbal sign systems are possible, though source code units undergo substantial changes of form and sometimes in meaning in the process of translation.

Though absolute sameness is impossible in translation, the attempt to achieve adequacy opens a horizon for a new performance of cultural identity as a process of dynamic exchange between semiotic registers motivated by movements of meaning and identity (Longinovic, 2002).

Meaning Equivalence

Appeared centuries ago, the term "translation" acquired extensive meaning that comprises the product, the process, and study case of translation. Originated from Latin *translatio* in the meaning "transmission, transference, transplantation", the term indicates the conversion of meaning from one form or medium into another. Interlingual translation, as R. Jakobson called interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language, ordinary does not result in full equivalence of code units (Jakobson, 1959).

The eminent scholars (R. Jakobson, E. Nida, J.C. Catford, etc.) gave particular importance to the meaning transferred to another language. Translation has often been defined with reference to meaning (Catford, 1965) of a text into another language in the way that the author intended the text (Newmark, 1988). The procedure of translating starts from the meaning within a sematic field (Veney and Darbelnet, 1995).

Pioneering translation theory E. Nida stated: "Translating consists in reproducing the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style" (Nida, 1969). Emphasizing the priority of meaning equivalence over formal correspondence, E. Nida thinks the form should be changed to preserve the content of the message (Nida, 1969).

The principles of cognitive linguistics, introduced by Nida in translation theory, concern empirical determination of meaning, deep structures transformations, pragmatic background of the utterance which are to be translated. Asserting "words only have meaning in terms of the culture of which they are a part" (Nida, 2003), E. Nida declares meaning context-dependent in historical and cultural view.

Equivalent receptor response, named by Nida "dynamic translation", is achieved through grammatical, lexical and cultural adaptions to produce "a high degree of equivalence of response, or the translation will have failed to accomplish its purpose" (Nida, 1969).

Intelligible translation "is not to be measured merely in terms of whether the words are understandable and the sentences grammatically constructed, but in terms of the total impact the message has on the one who receives it" (Nida, 1969: 22). Establishing priority of total impact, Nida draws attention to "one of the most essential, and yet often neglected, elements", i.e. the expressive factor, "for people must also feel as well as understand what is said" (Ibid.). To preserve the effect of the author wanted to produce on readers, the translator needs to find ways to convey connotative meaning, even at the expense of denotative meaning alterations in translation (Nida, 1964).

Following the tradition of Nida, A. Pym introduces the equivalence of value, which concerns the same worth or function in translation text. The value equivalence is seen by A. Pym in focusing on contextual signification rather than systematic meaning; this can be achieved by undertaking componential analysis, comparison and deverbalization (i.e. comprehension and reformulation) (Pym, 2014). Equivalence in difference, whether cultural or

purely linguistic, is central issue of translation, therefore the cultural approach in translation studies is acquiring ever more popularity. The concept of cultural translation coming from two broad fields, anthropology and cultural studies, have produced a new approach aimed to examine socially and historically situated circumstances of negotiating meaning. Investigating displacement as a function of cultural translation, this approach urges to find the equilibrium between linguistic expression and cultural value of experience of an alien community (Conway, 2012).

The effort to eliminate the difference between a source and target culture may cause a cognitive irrelevance that occurs when cultural concepts or notions introduced by a translator seem incompatible and incongruous for a recipient of the text. Distortion of the message so that the meaning received by a reader is different from intended by the author creates a semantic noise. It is caused by social and cultural differences between the sender and the recipient of the message. The way to overcome semantic noise is by means of feedback, which is a verbal or nonverbal response of the participants in the process of negotiating ideas and exchanging meanings to each other (Steinberg, 2007). The feedback of a recipient who reads translated text is not possible to observe. Therefore, solutions to semantic noise are laid upon the translator. For this purpose, the problematic for translation units undergo semantic analysis.

P. Newmark recommends "to study such an item first in context, then in isolation, as though it were a dictionary or an encyclopaedia entry only, and finally in context again" (Newmark, 1988). P. Newmark also states the relevance of componential analysis in translation "as a flexible but orderly method of bridging the numerous lexical gaps, both linguistic and cultural, between one language and another" (Ibid.).

In our work, we analyze separately and in the context a specific culture code that constitute a gap in translation culture.

Sociocultural Stereotypes as Culture Gaps

A translator experiences much difficulty encountering culture gaps. These specific fragments of national "world picture" are designated by different terms: exoticisms (A. Suprun, 1958), blank spots on the semantic map of language (Yu. Stepanov, 1965), lacunae (Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet,

1958; V. Muraviev, 1975; Yu. Sorockin, 1988), nonequivalent lexemes (I. Markovina, 1982), zero lexemes (I. Sternin,1989), limits of a culture, or identity markers, which resist translation (A. Pym, 1993). The most apt, in our opinion, and widely spread term is seemingly lacuna.

Originated from Latin word in the meaning "gap or loss", lacuna is the result of language-specific categorization, which is dependent on semiotic experience of a certain ethnic community. Comprehension of such specific cultural units is conditioned by peculiarities of language and culture in which the units arose. Therefore, lacunae are completely or partially unintelligible for representatives of other cultures.

Researchers identify different types of lacunae: lexical, functional, cultural, and cognitive. A cognitive lacuna is conditioned by correlation between the concept and the lexical unit, which determines a non-existent concept in any other culture.

Cultural and cognitive lacunae cause cultural untranslatability, described by J. Catford as a situation, which emerges when certain features, functionally relevant for the source text, are completely absent in the culture of translation (Catford, 1965).

Peculiar for definite cultural community words, which denote the way of life and its manifestations are named by P. Newmark "cultural words". They are associated with a particular language and cannot be literally translated (Newmark, 1988).

P. Newmark differentiates several categories of cultural words, among them the group denoting social customs and ideas (Newmark, 1988), to which we refer sociocultural stereotypes.

Stereotypes occur as signs of a social reality interpretation within the scope of cognitive models. Conveyed by means of linguistic signs (R. Tagiuri, 1969; S. Moscovici, 1984; J.H.Turner, 1994; P.N. Schiherev, 1999; V.V. Krasnyh, 2002), stereotypes are maintained and changed in the language and communication.

The researchers assume stereotypes can be revealed on all levels of the language. As subjectively determined idea, a stereotype reflects on a syntactic level of language, in forms of judgements about certain features of stereotyped objects (U.Quasthoff, 1978). A stereotype can be represented by a lexical item that codifies and interprets a category of a social world (Jerzy Bartmiński, 1995). It can be also found in connotations of the word, that make a stereotype prominent as "social meaning" in a definite context (Coulmas, 1981).

Nouns, that name stereotypes, denote the clusters of descriptive and evaluative features, including those of the character, physical appearance and typical behavior of the stereotyped groups. These nouns act like labels of social categories that codify extensive net of attributes, implications and beliefs. A word (or a group of words), connected with a stereotype, stimulates activation of the stereotype's content in a certain context, thus forming the center of semantic and cognitive associations.

A specific social category that exists in a source culture in the form of pragmatic predispositions, namely sociocultural stereotype, which has no equivalent notion as well as a word in translation culture and language, is considered in our work a lacunar stereotype. The words denoting sociocultural stereotypes evoke numerous images, built in accordance to cultural and ethnic patterns, therefore such stereotypes are almost impossible to maintain in translation language. The uniqueness of such stereotypes is perceived in the process of translation or cross-cultural communication. A lack of appropriate lexical means in translation language inevitably leads to some losses in denotative meaning, whereas connotative meaning is not possible to render adequately because of discrepancy between axiological systems of source and receiving cultures.

We single out such parameters that determine lacunarity of a sociocultural stereotype in the interlingual translation:

(1) lexical, non-availability of a corresponding word in lexicographic sources of translation language;

(2) social, lack of a corresponding social group in the national stratification;

(3) historic, absence of social, economic, demographic prerequisites for such grouping;

(4) cultural, deficiency of allusive names and situations connected with the stereotype.

Supporting the stated, we demonstrate the instance of the noun *flapper* that represents a sociocultural stereotype of the 1920s. It has regained its popularity nowadays owing to success of the musical "Chicago" and the film "The Great Gatsby". It is lacunar for other cultures on account of deficiency in language, historic, and cultural conformity.

In spite of a long existence of the word *flapper* in the English language (it was registered in the dictionary of 1570), the stereotype *Flapper* was formed after

the World War I, at the time of economic prosperity and social changes in the American society. A British slang word *flapper*, pejoratively used to denote inexperience of young girls, in American culture denotes a new phenomenon – a modern American woman who freely finds her own way in life. The stereotype reflects changes in standards of behavior and look, that happened in the 1920s in the USA. In 1928 the compound *flapper-vote* was "exported" to the Great Britain in the meaning of "feminine suffrage" (Baron, 1986). The word *flapper*, that came to use to designate the phenomenon, lost its slang affiliation and became the symbol the definite period in American history.

As a social group, flappers distinguished themselves from previous generations of American women by their own source of income, for they earned their living, and entertainment possibilities, permitted earlier for men only. They presented new standards of behavior breaking the rules of patriarchal society.

As representatives of a subculture, flappers introduced new fashion trends beauty standards, and youth slang. Associated with the stereotype allusive personal names (Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald, etc.) and books (The Beautiful and Damned, The Great Gatsby, etc.) are known by the majority of Americans. Allusion to these names or peculiarities of flapper's appearance in a source text is rather difficult to preserve in translation for the reason of absence of this information in a translation culture. Adequate representation of this lacunar sociocultural stereotype is possible only by an appropriate descriptive or functional equivalent to avoid distortion of their meaning in a target text.

Eliminating Lacunarity of Stereotypes in Translation

The representation of absent in a host culture stereotypes may be realized through different translation strategies and different kinds of solutions in each specific case. We considered some variants to eliminate lacunarity and applied them to rendering information about specific sociocultural stereotypes.

The deficiency of code-units is corrected by loan words, loan translations, neologisms, semantic shifts, and circumlocutions, or periphrasis (Jacobson, 1959). The variety of suggested means to solve the problem of culture gaps can be brought to the main two strategies: (1) interpreting unknown for the recipient word or (2) introducing a cultural element, which is familiar for the recipient. In some cases, especially literary translations, the interpreting lacunar stereotypes involves the risk of overtranslation, because "an array of linguistic

signs is needed to introduce an unfamiliar word" (Jacobson, 1959). For example, the periphrasis of the word *flapper* is rather unwieldy. It should comprise physical and moral aspects of social category: "A bold and modern young girl of the 1920s in America, given to exaggerated fashion styles and sophisticated conduct, inclined to revolt, interested in music, parties and new ideas" (Lyubimova, 2015). This, or even shorter explanation of the stereotype meaning, apparently presents overtranslation case, which Vinay and Darbelnet defined as rendering by several units, when there is only one (Vinay and Darbelnet, 1995). To avoid overtranslation compensation techniques are applied, e.g. transliteration, though intelligibility of the cultural stereotype in this case is limited.

The introduction of a universal term *girl*, though it alludes to a familiar concept, does not convey the meaning of the stereotype. A way to concisely introduce the stereotype is the usage of the classifier with compensatory word *flapper*, i.e. a functional equivalent, expressed by a culture-neutral word *girl* (in Ukrainian "дівчина") comes together with English *flapper*, which, in terms of P. Newmark, emphasizes the culture. However, S. Hervey and Ia. Higgins warns: "while compensation exercises the translator's ingenuity, the effort it requires should not be wasted on textually unimportant features" (Hervey and Higgins, 1992).

Lexicographic sources introduce the meaning of the word highlightening one or two prominent features of the stereotype. Thus, in Italian the word *flapper* is translated as *maschietta*, i.e. a girl with boyish manners, hoyden. The translation indicates mischievous behavior of young girls and their specific feature – a short haircut, which was considered daring in the 1920s.

In a multivolume dictionary of contemporary German, the word *flapper* is marked as English adoption in the meaning of "a lively girl". In major English-Ukrainian dictionaries, the word is presented in its denotative meaning with the emphasis on adolescent age. In 18 English-Ukrainian and English-Russian dictionaries the word *flapper* is represented as a young girl or a woman of 21-30 yeas old (Ukrainian *молода дівчина/ жінка*), marked as conversational, slang, or historical (Lyubimova, 2015).

Few dictionaries introduce a part of connotative meaning of the word that shows disrespect to frivolous girls (Ukrainian *вертуха, легковажна жінка*). Rejection of the girls to accept society standards of behavior is reflected in the translation that conveys free and easy character of a single woman's life*: девушка, чуждая условностей, холостячка* (Russian).

Representing the 1920s' social evaluation of the girls' behavior some dictionaries introduce phrasal translation *легковажна жінка* (Ukrainian), *женщина свободной морали*, *распутница*, *девка* (Russian). Free spirit and the wish of flappers to enjoy equal with men rights is reproduced in Russian translation *эмансипе*. Quite often used ironically, the word is a loan from French (*femme émancipé*). However, manifesting only one feature of the category the word *emancipatress* does not express a pragmatic meaning of the stereotype (Lyubymova, 2015).

Marked as a slang, Russian translation *вертушка* is a pejorative designation of restless, fidgety girl or thoughtless, frivolous woman. Though a connotative meaning of disrespect to light-minded girls is rendered, other implications of the stereotype remain unveiled.

Preoccupation of flappers with fashion trends is reflected in Russian translation *модница*. Ukrainian translation *модниця-вертуха* renders not only addiction of flappers to fashion, but also flippancy and light-mindedness which are implied from this passion (Lyubimova, 2015).

An interesting case is a phrasal translation *современная девица* (Russian), in which an archaic word *девица* implies ironic attitude to a young and arrogant girl. However, this variant is also not fully represents the meaning of the word *flapper*.

The assertion of P. Newmark to "give precedence to its connotations" (Newmark, 1988) is of special importance for reproduction of pragmatic meaning of sociocultural stereotypes. Studying synonyms that bear connotational meaning is applicable technic to reproduce noticeable implications of the stereotype. For instance, flapper's buoyancy is represented by such words as *tomboy – hoyden – romp*, which can be rendered in translation with required connotation (in Ukrainian *бешкетниця*, *пустунка*, *веселуха*). A. Pym wisely notices: "The pragmatic heterogeneity is an important part of translation, and transcultural relations in general. Such solutions can be classified as transpositions, substitutions or modulations, they are of a variety and moral complexity" (Pym, 2014).

In the extract of S. Fitzgerald novel "The Beautiful and Damned" (Fitzgerald, 2000: 460), implicitly stated attitude of the author to flappers is observed. The girls seem not less refined and graceful, than previous generations of women: *You will be known during your fifteen years as ragtime kid, <u>a flapper</u>, a jazz baby, and a baby vamp. You will dance new dances neither more nor less gracefully than you danced the old ones.* Correlation of the word *flapper* with other words in the row (*ragtime kid*,

jazz baby, *baby vamp*) emphasizes attractiveness and popularity of young women – features prominent and primary for rendering in this context. Meaning, as stated by R. Jakobson, is the semiotic fact that "cannot be inferred from non-linguistic knowledge of the world without assistance of the verbal code" (Jakobson, 1959). The synonymy of *ragtime kid, a flapper, a jazz baby, and a baby vamp* assists in translation, as the words are textually and culturally identical. Thus, for this context we suggest Ukrainian *спокусниця*.

In the the leader article "The Pestilence of Fanatism", written by the senator J. Reed, we observe an excessive manifestation of the flappers' character: "*Per contra, the dresses are little shorter, the flapper is little flappier, the hair-bobber becomes more opulent, cigarette vendor enjoys a boom*" (Reed, 1925). The word *flapper* in this context conveys affiliation of flappers with established at that time social category, a prominent feature of which was conspicuous consumption. Translation into the Ukrainian or Russian language cannot underline this meaning. We suggest translating *flappers* in the context as *нове покоління дівчат* (Ukrainian), thus showing mass character of the phenomenon that belongs to a new generation of women. Derived from the verb *flap*, adjective *flappy* in the meaning of "to attract attention" is used by the senator in superlative degree to express growing unfavorable attitude to flappers who, attracting even more attention by their life-style, were considered by the society extravagant and reckless. This information, constituting the part of a pragmatic meaning of the stereotype, cannot be rendered adequately in Slavonic languages, however the translation can convey recklessness attributed by American society of the 1920s to flappers. Thus, the adjective flappier in this context can be translated in Ukrainian by a phrase *ще більше нерозважливі*.

To reduce a variety of the stereotype's characteristics a translator dwells on a relevant for the context. This requires analysis, aimed to detach a component common to source and translation language "to exclude the culture and highlight the message" (Newmark, 1988). The context restricts the scope of the stereotype's features thus assisting a translator in choosing relevant for the situation.

As we see, indisputable solutions are rarely generated by normative principles. J. Catford stated, the disclosure of lacuna in translation text depends entirely on the competence of a translator (Catford, 1965).

Conclusion

Formed according to cultural and ethnic patterns a socio-cultural stereotype is largely found in produced and distributed by the language community implications, which make a socio-cultural stereotype unique and lacunar for translation culture. Lacunarity of such stereotypes in the interlingual translation is determined by linguistic, social, historic, and cultural parameters, which are difficult to maintain in translation.

A stereotype represented by a single lexical unit, as in case of the stereotype *Flapper*, functions in a source culture as a national code that ciphers heterogeneous information including axiological, historical, and ethnographic knowledge. An adequate rendering of this multifarious information demands scrupulous attention of a translator to a semantic structure of a word that represents culture specific concept.

The search of infilling semantic gap requires consideration of the context in which the original is represented. Study of a sociocultural stereotype *Flapper* shows that decomposition of a stereotype meaning into figurative, extra-linguistic (or historic), and connotative components enables to emphasize relevant for particular context pragmatic component. Thus, the most efficient way of translating the content of a stereotype is to find implicational equivalence, or dynamic equivalence, highlighting the relevant component of pragmatic meaning.

As our analysis showed, another productive way to find implicational equivalence for a particular context is to reproduce noticeable features of a stereotype by synonyms that bear connotational meaning.

Rendering a lacunar stereotype is a mode to recognize its essence and pragmatic potential conveyed by language code of translation culture. This process provides opportunity to know better a source culture as well as a target culture by means of comparing and verifying concepts of different cultures.

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