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Culture in the Translation Classroom: An Analysis of Students' Strategies La cultura en el aula de traducción: análisis de las estrategias de traducción

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Culture in the Translation Classroom: An Analysis of Students' Strategies in translation

La cultura en el aula de traducción:
análisis de las estrategias de traducción

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RESUMEN

El objetivo de este estudio es analizar cómo los estudiantes de tercer año del Grado en Traducción y Lenguas Modernas de la Universidad de Alcalá abordan la traducción de las referencias culturales de la novela *Anybody out there* de Marian Keyes (2007) de acuerdo con diferentes estrategias de traducción de domesticación y extranjerización. Para la realización del estudio explicamos una serie de conceptos teóricos a los estudiantes y distribuimos en el aula una actividad con un conjunto de extractos de la novela que incluían una referencia cultural. La metodología seguida fue cualitativa, ya que el estudio se basa en el análisis de las respuestas de los estudiantes a la actividad. Los resultados muestran que las estrategias que los estudiantes prefirieron seguir se basaron principalmente en la extranjerización, ya que en la mayoría de los casos no consideraron necesario agregar información adicional y no modificaron la referencia. Esto muestra claramente la tendencia predominante que podemos identificar en la actualidad de no adaptar las referencias culturales como se hizo, por ejemplo, en las series de televisión de los años ochenta, donde la transposición fue una estrategia clave para adaptar el contenido audiovisual al público meta.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Referencias culturales, traducción, domesticación, extranjerización, estrategias de traducción

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine how students of the third year of a B.A. in Translation and Modern Languages of the University of Alcalá approach the translation of cultural references of the novel *Anybody out there* by Marian Keyes (2007) according to different strategies of domestication and foreignization. After having explained the theoretical framework included in this article, we handed out an activity with a set of sentences each of which included a cultural reference. The methodology followed was qualitative since the study is based on the analysis of students' answers to the activity as it will be shown below. Results show that the strategies that students preferred to follow were based on foreignization mainly, since for most cases they did not consider it necessary to add any extra information and did not modify the reference in the ST. This clearly shows the predominant tendency that we can identify nowadays of not adapting cultural references as it was done for example in TV shows from the 80s, where transposition was a key strategy to domesticate the audiovisual content to the target audience.

KEYWORDS

Cultural references, translation, domestication, foreignization, translation strategies

INTRODUCTION

The translation of cultural references entails great amount of work for the translator as, in most cases, he or she turns into the author of the target text (TT), trying to reformulate a text from one culture to another and, more importantly, creating the same sensations in the audience of the TT as those intended for the addressee of the source text (ST). Translating fixed phrases, proper names and cultural aspects, that is, translating the identity of a country corresponds to one of the main difficulties or problems, as some may call them, a translator has to face. As teachers of future professionals of the field we need to present to them all the possible scenarios in which they would have to work, such as the translation of cultural references, and provide them with a set of tools to face their translation.

The aim of this study is to examine how students of the third year of a B.A. in Translation and Modern Languages of the University of Alcalá approach the translation of cultural references of the novel *Anybody out there* of Marian Keyes (2007) according to different strategies of domestication and foreignization. After having explained the theoretical framework included in this article, we handed out an activity with a set of sentences which each included a cultural reference. The methodology followed was qualitative since the study is based on the descriptive analysis of students' answers to the activity as it will be shown in this paper and did not aim at quantifying the information. This will be further explained in the methodology section.

The research questions that we aimed to answer were the following:

RQ1: Are students able to identify cultural references from short extracts from a novel?

RQ2: What translation strategies do students prefer to follow when translating cultural references?

It is important to acknowledge that with this study we did not have any prescriptive aims nor did we try to establish any norms on how to translate cultural references. Our only aims are based on the analysis of students' answers so as to reflect on how these activities allow them to apply theory to practice while developing their translation, research and creativity skills to propose their own solutions and to make the translated novel have a similar impact on the recipient culture as the original version had in its source audience.

CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE NOVEL

The novel of the bestselling Irish author Marian Keyes tells the story of one of the members of the Walsh family. This time, and after having told three other stories about them, it is Anna Walsh's turn to tell hers. The main character of this novel is back home in Dublin after a terrible car accident where she will try to heal from her physical and psychological wounds. After some months of recovery, she returns, still with deep scars, to the place which she calls "home": New York, to where her friends and her job are waiting. However, she has to deal with a different situation now, she is not the same person as she was before the accident and she is missing an important part of her life, to which she has to get used to or at least try to.

Marian Keyes is one of the most successful Irish novelists of all time and since 1995 she has published a total of seventeen books (thirteen novels, one cookbook and several short story books), which range from comedy to darkness and that cover topics that go from depression to addiction and illness. Her novels have been translated into thirty-six different languages and have reached the top-ten in worldwide bestselling lists.

The reason behind the choice of this book for the activity here presented is the frequent inclusion, in Marian Keyes' novels, of cultural references, mainly those related to pop culture, which we thought could be a challenge to translate for our students. This novelist recurs to this type of references so that the reader feels close to the story and identifies himself with the plot and the main protagonists. By introducing references to songs, TV series, TV programs and famous English actors, among others, our students get a first glance to the translation of cultural references in novels and to the "problems" these could pose for them in their future as professional translators. Moreover, by bringing this activity to the classroom they learn to search for resources, as well as to listen to what other classmates suggest and to reach an agreement for the most adequate translation and the one that is closer to the ST, and more importantly, to the source culture.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Ranzato (2016) defines cultural references as “words denoting concepts and things that another language has not considered worth mentioning, or that are absent from the life or consciousness of the other nation”. These reasons are seen as differences in “the ways of life, traditions, beliefs, historical developments – in one word, the cultures of the nations”, as well as on conceptual level.

Cultural references, apart from being an abstract and complex (Altahri, 2013) concept, have been studied by a large number of scholars who have used various designations to research them. Vlachov and Florin (1970) used the term *realia*, whereas Vermeer (1983) preferred the term *cultureme*, which was later adopted by Hurtado Albir (2001) and Nord (1997). Newmark (1988), on the other hand opted for the term *cultural words* and Nedergaard-Larsen (1993) chose *cultural references*. Finally, Yarosh (2013) resorted to *culturally-specific elements*. These authors, as demonstrated, disagree on the term used to refer to those elements related to the culture of the text but, as Clouet and Sánchez (2008) defend, they all agree on the fact that translating is a linguistic, intersemiotic and intercultural act.

The difficulties that cultural references included in the ST impose (Fernández Guerra, 2012), oblige translators to resort to strategies that allow them to produce the same effect on the addressee of the TT according to the objective and the general translation method that the translation assignment demands. Although, it is clear that “there are no specific strategies to translate meaning at individual CRs” (Hala, 2016, p. 97). As with the designations of the term, the translation strategies vary from author to author. It should be noted that many authors (Catford, 1965; Hönig & Kussmaul, 1982; Wills, 1982; Krings, 1986; Lörcher, 1991; Chesterman, 1997; Hurtado Albir, 2001; Klauudy, 2003; Martí Ferriol, 2006) have contributed to define the concept of strategy and have suggested different terms, such as *procedure*, *technique*, *method*, among others. We will refer in this study to the term *strategy* to analyze, study and describe the translation solutions our students have suggested for the translation of cultural references from English into Spanish.

Klauudy (1995), for instance, refers to them as *culture-specific operations* (CSO) and includes four main groups: (1) broadening of meaning, (2) omission of meaning, (3) addition of meaning and (4) total transformation. Ordudari (2007) opts for, however, using four different strategies to translate what he calls *culture-specific concepts* (CSC): (1) to invent a new term, (2) to explain the meaning of the expression instead of translating it, (3) to preserve the term in the TT as it is in the ST and (4) to opt for a similar term or expression to that used in the ST. Harvey (2000) is another author that digs into the concept of what he designates as *culture-bound terms* (CBT) and suggests four main translation strategies: (1) functional equivalence, (2) formal equivalence or linguistic equivalence, (3) transcription or borrowing and (4) descriptive or self-explanatory translation. These are just some of the authors that have come up with strategies to translate cultural references and, as demonstrated by the variety of strategies each of them include, there is not an established classification strategy applicable to every translation task, but the need to make the adequate

decisions in order to bring the author of the ST and the reader of the TT as close as possible. Each and every strategy that has been suggested above is based, to a lesser or greater extent, on Venuti's (1998) techniques of foreignization and domestication.

It should be mentioned that the translation of cultural references is based mainly on these two techniques, foreignization and domestication, although this does not imply that the translator can only choose between one of them. Indeed, as Massardier-Kenney et al. (2016, p. 9) and Bush (2016, p. 166) argue, these are not completely opposite options and adopting one over the other depends on the process that the translator follows. Munday (2001) examines the question of domestication and foreignization in his book *Introducing Translation Studies*. As he states (2001, p. 146), domestication and foreignization "concern both the choice of text to translate and the translation method". To explain both techniques, he cites Venuti as an author of reference. According to this author, foreignization entails choosing a foreign text and developing a translation method along lines which are excluded by dominant cultural values in the target language" (Venuti 1998, p. 242), whereas domestication implies "an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign language to target language cultural values, bringing the author back home" (1995, p. 20). Although this author is in favor of foreignization, he underlines that this is a subjective concept that depends on the dominant values of the target culture, which entails a slight domestication of the translated expression. His main argument as to choose foreignization over domestication is that the former is equally biased to the latter when interpreting a text in a foreign language.

In order to explain the different strategies of domestication and foreignization, we decided to follow the classification offered by Pederson (2007), which was also used in a previous descriptive study that focused on the translation of cultural references in the novel *The Country Girls* by Edna O'Brien (Alcalde and Barros, 2018).

Tables 1 (strategies of foreignization) and 2 (strategies of domestication) include the definition and examples of each technique according to the category they belong to.

Table 1: Strategies oriented to the source language (foreignization)

Strategies of foreignization	Definition	Example
Specification	The use of a word in the ST with a more specific meaning in the TT than the general term applicable to it.	The translation of <i>window</i> in the ST as <i>ventanuco</i> in the TT.
Loans	The use of the same word both in the ST and in the TT.	The use of <i>selfie</i> without any changes in Spanish or the adaptation of terms in the TT such as <i>lider</i> .
Addition	The inclusion of information in the TT to facilitate its understanding.	The use of footnotes by the translator with clarifying information.

Calque or literal translation	The translation word by word of a structure in the TT.	The English term “Normal School” from the French language (<i>École Normale</i>).
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Source: Own elaboration

Table 2: Strategies oriented to the target language (domestication)

Strategies of domestication	Definition	Example
Generalization	This technique could be considered the opposite of specification. In this case, it is the technique of translating a word in the TT with a more general meaning than that specific term applicable to it.	The translation of <i>August</i> in English by <i>verano</i> in Spanish.
Substitution	Replacing one cultural reference of the source culture by the same one in the target culture.	The translation of <i>midnight mass</i> in English by <i>misa del gallo</i> in Spanish.
Creation of neologism	The creation of new terms to convey a reality from the other language.	This is what happens nowadays with many terms related to new technologies (<i>tuítear, bloguero</i>).
Transposition	One cultural element of the original culture is replaced by another one of the target culture.	This is done when we change the title of a movie or song to one that is well known by the target audience.
Omission	One cultural element of the ST is omitted in the TT due to the non-existence of the element in the target culture.	In some Arab countries greetings include many more words that are not necessary in English, in which case it would be enough to use only “Good morning!”
Compensation	Adding cultural references in the TT to compensate for possible losses of the ST.	The omission of a cultural reference as <i>tea time</i> in Spanish and its compensation by including the term <i>churros</i> later on in the text.

Source: Own elaboration

The task of translating, as a communication act, should be considered within the core of language, which is an intrinsic part of culture. As stated by Lotman, Uspensky and Mihaychuk (1978, p. 212) “no language (in the full sense of the word) can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture; and no culture can exist which does not have at its center the structure of natural language”. Within the field of Translation Studies, “translating involves not just two languages, but a transfer from one culture to another” (Hervey & Higgins, 1992, p. 28). For this reason, and as stated by Bara (2014, p. 1), every translator should acquire “those cultural skills that complement the component of language proficiency, in both languages involved in translation”, so as to make the correct decisions to reproduce a “emotional and psychological responses

in the target language similar to those produced in the source text” (Landers, 2001, p. 49).

METHODOLOGY

Before completing the activity of translating cultural references, the theoretical framework included above was explained to students. Once the theory of the translation of cultural references was clear to them, they were given the following instructions to complete the activity: “Identify the cultural reference in each sentence, explain what it means in the ST and decide how to translate it according to one of the strategies of foreignization or domestication. Explain why you have chosen this strategy and what the result of your translation means for the target reader”. They were asked not to consult the ST in case they had access to it since what would be assessed would be their ability to identify the cultural reference and develop their translation skills through the application of the above-mentioned strategies. Students were divided into five different groups of three and their answers will be shown below. We will also compare results from our study to the solution adopted by the official translation of the novel as it was published in Spanish.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

In order to limit our study, students were given only eight extracts from the book so that they had enough time in class to compare and contrast their opinions on how to translate them with the rest of the members of their group. The published translation of the extract is also shown so that we can analyze the students’ answers in accordance to it. Cultural references from each extract are underlined so that the reader can clearly identify them and compare the versions in the two languages.

Extract 1: Persons unknown threw a stone through the television-room window during an episode of EastEnders [...]

Published translation: “Alguien lanzó una piedra por la ventana de la sala de la tele durante un episodio de Eastenders [...]”

Group 1: They identified “television-room window” and “Eastenders” as cultural references. For the first one they decided to opt for generalization using the term in Spanish “salón” and calque or literal translation for the second one as “episodio de Eastenders” since they thought that it was clear from the context that it was a television show. Therefore, they considered that they could apply domestication and foreignization techniques in the same sentence.

Group 2: These students also used generalization to translate “television-room” as “sala de estar” and added “telenovela” to EastEnders to specify to the target reader the kind of TV program the text referred to. As Group 1 did, they also opted for domestication and foreignization strategies in the same sentence.

Group 3: These students considered it necessary to add extra information in a footnote as follows: “Telenovela británica televisada en 1985 en la cadena BBC One”.

Group 4: They maintained the same version as in the ST without adding any extra information.

Group 5: They did not consider adding any terms to clarify the reference.

As we can observe in the published translation, the translator did not include any specific piece of information to clarify what the TV-show consisted of. Students did not feel the need to specify what the reference was about either.

Extract 2: [...] Except Dad, and only because he was the one who had sweep up all the broken glass and Sellotape a plastic bag over the hole [...]

Published translation: [...]. A papá no, pero solo porque le tocó barrer los cristales y tapar con una bolsa de plástico el hueco [...]

Group 1: They identified “Sellotape” as the cultural reference and they decided to generalize using the word “celo” in Spanish, which does not refer to any specific brand.

Group 2: They opted for the same solution as Group 1.

Group 3: They also generalized but using “cinta adhesiva”, which is even a more general term than “celo”.

Group 4: They used the same strategy as Group 3.

In this case the solution adopted by the translator of the novel seems adequate, since translating *Sellotape* as “celo” could not be the most transparent solution for all Spanish readers as the word is not common in all parts of Spain. Thus the option of “cinta adhesiva” adopted by some of the groups would be more neutral in this case.

Extract 3: For years it was just a dumping ground for rusty bicycles (ours) and empty Johnnie Walker bottles (also ours) [...]

Published translation: Durante años no fue más que un vertedero de bicicletas oxidadas (nuestras) y botellas vacías de Johnnie Walker (también nuestras) [...]

Group 1: The reference to the whisky brand Johnny Walker was not identified as something that needed to be made more transparent in the target culture, so they adopted the solution “botellas vacías de Johnnie Walker” in Spanish.

Group 2: They added the term “whisky” to specify the kind of drink it was.

Group 3: Same solution as Group 1.

Group 4: They applied the same strategy as in the first case and did not add any extra information.

Group 5: They also followed the same strategy and did not use any extra words to specify what the brand consisted of.

We believe that the translator's and the students' solution is adequate for the context, since it is a well-known brand. However, adding "whisky" as Group 2 did would be also a good way of specifying in a very concise way what the reference was.

Extract 4: And although there was no way I could tell anyone this, because they would have sent for the men in the white coats.

Published translation: Y aunque no podía decirselo a nadie, porque habrían llamado a los loqueros [...]

Group 1: They identified "white coats" as a cultural reference that appears in humoristic contexts so they used the transposition technique and replaced it with the term "loquero" in Spanish which transmits the same idea in a similar context.

Group 2: The same strategy was applied as in the previous case.

Group 3: Same strategy as the previous groups.

Group 4: In this case they replaced the reference with "psiquiátrico", which is a more general term than "loquero" and the reference is lost in a way, although the meaning is transmitted.

Group 5: They used the term "loquero" to translate the reference.

In this extract the writer recurs to a stylistic device called metonymy, which is a phenomenon of semantic change by which a thing or idea is designated by the name of another, using some existing semantic relationship between the two. Therefore, in this case "loquero" would not convey the same stylistic device but would at least transmit the same meaning with a term that has humoristic connotations.

Extract 5: I struggled to my feet and went inside where I watched *Home and Away*, had lunch (half a cheese scone, five satsuma segments, two Maltesers, eight pills), the Mum dressed up my wounds again before my walk.

Published translation: Me levanté despacio; entré en casa, donde vi *Home and Away*; comí (medio bollo de queso, cinco gajos de mandarina, dos maltesers y ocho pastillas), y mamá volvió a vendarme antes de mi paseo.

Group 1: To be consistent with the first solution they gave to the Eastenders TV-show of the first extract, they also left *Home and Away* as it was, since they considered that the verb that came with it made it clear for the target reader that it was referring to something to watch on TV. As for the references to food, they also left Maltesers since they considered it a well-known brand in Spain too and generalized “scone” and “satsuma segments” using “panecillo de queso” and “gajos de mandarina”.

Group 2: They also opted for the same solutions as Group 1.

Group 3: Same strategy as in the previous examples. However, as they did for the translation of the first extract, they added two footnotes. In the case of “Home and Away” they specified the following information: “Serie australiana con más de seis mil episodios que comenzó a transmitirse en 1988”. As for Malteser they added “dulce producido por Mars que consiste en varias bolas de chocolate juntas siguiendo una estructura similar a la de un panel de abejas”.

Group 4: They used the same strategies as Group 1 and 2.

Group 5: Their translation was the following: “Me levanté y me fui dentro donde vi Aída, almorcé una napolitana de jamón y queso, un trozo de mandarina, dos caramelos M&M’s y 8 pastillas, mientras que mamá me curaba las heridas antes de mi caminata”. In this translation these students clearly try to domesticate all cultural references to what would be familiar to the Spanish target reader. The transposition of *Home and Away* as Aída, which was a very popular Spanish TV show that was aired from 2005 to 2014 is the first example. The second one is “napolitana de jamón y queso” which would be something very typical to eat in Spain as a snack. However, if we observe the way this group translated the other references, we can see that they were not consistent with their decisions, since they did not apply the same strategies for the other references that would have needed some extra information to make them completely familiar to the target reader.

The translator chooses not to adapt the reference of the TV show *Home and Away*. However, in this particular case we believe that a Spanish reader would not understand if it refers to a television show or a movie. Therefore, an intermediate formula with the introduction of the word “TV show” would seem adequate so that the reader can get to know more about British culture but without losing the thread of what he is reading. The rest of the references from this extract are more transparent and could be translated in a more neutral way as “panecillo de queso” and “mandarina” without adding any extra information.

Extract 6: A perfect circle of flesh had been removed from the very centre of my chin. It will come in handy when I want to do Kirk Douglas impersonations.

Published translation: Un redondel perfecto de carne había saltado del centro de mi barbilla. Será perfecto cuando quiera imitar a Kirk Douglas.

Group 1: In this case they considered that the actor was well known and that everyone would understand that the circle of flesh referred to his dimple, so they left it as “imitaciones de Kirk Douglas”.

Group 2: As in the previous extracts, group 2 decided to add “actor” before Kirk Douglas to clarify who he was.

Group 3: In order to be consistent with their style, they added a footnote specifying that the reference to Kirk Douglas was due to his dimple.

Group 4: Following their style, they did not use any extra information for Kirk Douglas.

In this case we believe that so as not to lose the reference to his famous dimple, we could have said “cuando quiera imitar al actor con el famoso hoyuelo: Kirk Douglas”. The information added would be concise but at least the reference would be completely transparent to the target reader.

Extract 7: Mum – I worried that she might have been suffering from boredom – had developed a sudden, late-in-life longing for a fast, sexy car. She watched Top Gear and she knew (a little) about Lamborghinis and Aston Martins.

Published translation: Mamá —me preocupaban sus síntomas de aburrimiento crónico— había desarrollado el deseo de tener un coche rápido y llamativo. Veía *Top Gear* y sabía (algo) de Lamborghinis y Aston Martins.

Group 1: Again this group followed their trend of not adding any information and did not consider it important for the car program Top Gear, as it was also the case of the published translation.

Group 2: They added the word “program” before Top Gear.

Group 3: They also added a footnote stating that it was a car TV-program.

Group 4: As in previous cases they did not add any extra information.

As explained in previous examples, we believe that adding at least the information about what the program was about would have made more sense for the target reader. Therefore, a possible translation of this extract could be: “Veía el programa de coches *Top Gear*...”.

Extract 8: But if you say they’re going to the *Nebraska Star*, for example, and they’re really going to your mammy in Dublin, people are unlikely to check [...]

Published translation: Pero si dices que son para el *Nebraska Star*, por ejemplo, y en realidad son para

tu madre, que vive en Dublín, es poco probable que alguien se moleste en comprobarlo [...]

Group 1: As part of their research process, they found that Nebraska Star was a party but they did not consider it necessary to add any extra information to clarify this reference to the target reader.

Group 2: They applied the same strategy as Group 1.

Group 3: They added a footnote explaining the kind of party it was.

Group 4: They did not add any information and maintained only the reference.

Group 5: They did not add any information either.

For the translation of this cultural reference we believe that the translator's role is fundamental to make the culture of the ST more accessible to the target readers. Therefore, the addition of the word "party" before Nebraska Star could have been a way to do this.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, in order to answer the research questions of this study, students were indeed able to identify the cultural references from the extract of the novel. The strategies that they preferred to follow were based on foreignization mainly, since for most cases they did not consider it necessary to add any extra information and left the reference as it was in the ST. This clearly shows the predominant tendency that we can identify nowadays of not adapting cultural references as it was done for example in TV shows from the 80s, where transposition was a key strategy to domesticate the audiovisual content to the target audience. Students are not "scared" by references that they do not know about since they are part of a global audience that consumes content from all over the world via the Internet. Only one group added footnotes in two examples and another one used the transposition technique to replace the reference with another one that would be more typical of the Spanish context. However, in these cases they were not coherent with all the translation solutions which they proposed. This again shows what was stated in the theoretical framework of this article regarding the negotiation process a translator follows when translating this kind of references.

After having conducted this study we can state that it has served the purpose of making students reflect on the translation of cultural references. The combination in the same activity of translation theory, research skills and creativity gave them the opportunity to discuss different solutions and realize that there is not only one possible solution to a translation problem, but that different approaches can be adopted depending on the style and context. As we have observed, a general rule cannot be applied to each of the cultural references, since each one depends on its context and on many other factors such as the translation commission, the target

reader, etc. What cannot be negotiated is that fact that the role of the translator is paramount when it comes to translating cultural references, since thanks to it the reader may or may not have access to a whole different world that can be transmitted through the art of literature.

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