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Culturemes and non-equivalent lexis in dictionaries

Summary

The article raises the question of the need to improve the structural diversity and operational capabilities of the modern dictionary (bi- or multilingual) to avoid lacunes in the transmission of culturemes and non-equivalent words into another language. Without it the dictionary is incomplete and languages are unequal. The article deals with various options of asymmetry reflection of the culturemes in the context of social and ethno-psychic reality of a native-speaking community. The specifics of lexicographical transmission is observed in order to emphasize the need of further investigation of the linguistic map of the world.

Keywords: cultureme, non-equivalent vocabulary, lacune, asymmetry, dictionary entry.

1. Introduction

Linguistics of the recent years is a good illustration of general trends in the modern humanitaristics: we witness an increasingly obvious inclination to interdisciplinarity and interparadigm in approaches to such complex objects as a language, deep understanding of it as an anthropological phenomenon in the immanent relationships with psychological and behavioural matrices, with ethno cultural origins of the linguistic picture of the world. Therefore, linguoculturology is one of the most dynamically developing fields of linguistics and linguocultural studies which develops both traditional (the relationship of culture and language, speech and language, comprehension of meaning-making rules) and new (conceptology and culture, linguistic and mental pictures of the world, non-equivalence and lexical gaps, semantics and pragmatics of language signs) issues.

Indeed, the ability to speak and think in a certain language largely defines a cultural identity. Individual understanding of the world is connected with the linguistic group, which we belong to. Since the speakers of different languages perceive the world differently, it is impossible to learn a particular language without simultaneous examining its cultural context (Hall, 2002).

The linguocultural works of recent years have accumulated a lot of terminological concepts which in one way or another reflect an important cultural meaning and appeal to the

national, cultural specificity of meaning-making: cultural component, culture-related vocabulary, the national-authentic language, linguo-specific vocabulary, ethno-cultural vocabulary, lexical gaps, non-equivalent lexis, culture-carrying vocabulary, background knowledge, realia, culturemes, culturonym, linguocultural environment, the national specificity of verbal communication, lexical background, linguistic episteme, national concept, national symbol, etc. The research of similar phenomena is moving divergently as well – both by means of language clichés analysis and the study of phraseological units, stylistically marked vocabulary and identification of stereotypes of linguistic consciousness, as well as examination the underlying word semantics.

2. About the term "cultureme"

The term "cultureme" itself was created outside the boundaries of linguistics, in the cultural theory of S. Lem, in which it describes, first of all, the minimal, indivisible units of culture: rituals, values, and stereotypes.

In modern linguocultural research the term "cultureme" is a hotly debated topic and demonstrates various approaches to its content. V. Gak considers cultureme "as a sign of culture that also has a linguistic expression" (Gak, 1998). A. Vezhbitskaia regards cultureme as "an integrated interlevel unit, the form of which is the unity of a sign and language meaning, while the content – the unity of language meaning and cultural value" (Vezhbitskaia, 1999). V. Vorob´ëv singles out a linguistic cultureme along with a cultureme, given that "a cultureme" is considered to be an element of reality (an object or a situation), attributed to a particular culture, while "a linguistic cultureme" is the projection of the culture element into a language sign" (Vorob´ëv, 1997). However, this approach is linguistically restricted and ignores the immanent asymmetry of the meaning and the implementation, as semantic load of cultureme is much higher than that of realia, since it appeals to culturally significant information, it is extrapolated to other levels of the ethno-cultural picture of the world.

Various languages differ from one another in the way of organizing informative differences (perception and conceptualisation of the world), and not in separate culturemes, although it's worth noting that the national specificity of cultureme content most fully reveals itself only in comparison with the possible units of implementation in another language,

interculturemes (*любі друзі, na ruski rok*) and intraculturemes (*пранці, червонец, имхо, niebieskie migdały, ale Meksyk*) reveal namely in the asymmetry and lexical gaps.

Therefore, the attempts to convey the linguocultural material by means of another language is constantly associated with difficulties of reconstruction of all the linguistic consciousness and, in this way or another, doomed to struggle with the lexical gaps to overcome the natural asymmetry of languages.

3. Culturemes: a classification

A. Bukhonkina suggests the classification of culturemes (Bukhonkina, 2002), based on the specific characteristics of their inner form and specificity of interlinguistic asymmetry; however, this approach is more applicable to the realia, since the cultural significance and immanent signification is often ignored. So, the researcher singles out (as the examples Ukrainian and Polish culturemes were used, both taken from traditional ethno-culture and modern ones, with semantic layers, and shifts in the inner form):

1. Culturemes-realia (nominative culturemes), which several semantic fields refer to:

1.1 public/social life: *козак*, *майдан*, *бандерівець*, *укроп*, *село* («можна вивести дівчину з села, але не село з дівчини»), *карусель*, *тітушка*, *blachara, ubek, sarmatyzm, kiełbasa wyborcza.*

1.2 art: *гопак*, *Трипілля*, *витинанка*, *фаянсовий набір «Рибки»*, *вишиванка*, *лялька-мотанка*, *кам'яна баба*, *Młoda Polska, mazur, ceramika bolesławska, „Hej Sokoły".*

1.3 everyday life and day-to-day routine of the society: *борщ*, *вареники*, *свіжина*, *пундики*, *czarna polewka, groch z kapustą, schabowy, piernik toruński* and in general, all the gustics (the branch of non-verbal communication studies that examines the cultural role of taste sensations, rituals and traditions, associated with food, cuisine as a reflection of national mentality), *хустка*, *гривня*, *шевченківська хата*, *картата сумка*, *стінка*, *meblościanka, bambetle, siatka, dres, remiza.*

1.4 geography and meteorology: *пороги*, *Славутич*, *Жмеринка*, *Слобожанщина*, *Таврія*, *Крижопіль*, *крупа*, *Grójec, Szczebrzeszyn, Częstochowa, kapuśniak.*

1.5 religion: *Великдень*, *писанка*, *паска*, *поминальні дні*, *щедрівка*, *дідух*, *храм*, *коливо*, *Маковій*, *Покрова*, *szopka krakowska, Wielkanoc, święcenie kredy (na Trzech Króli), Papież-Polak, Święto Matki Boskiej Zielnej.*

3

2. Denotative culturemes (*Вєрка Сердючка*, *сало*, *кравчучка, disco-polo, ksiądz, napiwek*). However, their similarity to the previous type should be noted, because the language implementation of realia is based on the principle of denotation, though the very essence of cultureme as a meaningful unit is somehow opposed (extended) to the denotative.

3. Significative culturemes (symbolic semiotisation of a phenomenon as a sign, the linguistic reflection of non-verbal communication also refers to them) (*дуля*, *бовдур*, *пранці*, *свекруха-невістка*, *калина, sto lat, tłuk, gest Kozakiewicza, dzień bez Teleranka*) – is the most common way of rethinking realia, shifting them into the sphere of conceptology and semantic extension.

4. Connotative culturemes (*бджілка*, *козир*, *Пан Коцький, biedronka, żabka*), however, it should be noted that a cultureme is more often connotative and is enriched with associations and personal experience of the culture bearer, while a linguistic cultureme in its lexicographical implementation rather tends towards denotation that impoverishes the cross linguistic transmission. Even in case of the ideal and complete translation a cultureme will lose its individual associative load, it would be understandable, but devoid of apperception.

5. Image culturemes, close to phraseology and visual iconic signs: *як я люблю оці години праці*, *сім'я вечеря коло хати*; *ці руки нічого не крали*; *маємо те, що маємо*; *а вона працює; białe jest białe, a czarne jest czarne; trza być w butach na weselu, nie ze mną te numery, Bruner; ciemność, widzę ciemność.*

Linguocultural competence (N. Alefirenko), therefore, does not depend as much on the mastery of the language laws as it does on the extralinguistic information field (the semiotic code), which hampers the transmission and perception of another culture-bearer.

A great importance in the process of intercultural interaction in the reception of culturemes, obviously, is given to lexicography as a field dealing with professional commitment to solving the problems of cross-linguistic asymmetry and overcoming the problem of lexical gaps. It should be noted that modern lexicography also reflects modern tendencies of convergence of linguistics with other fields of humanitaristics. Consequently, linguocultural studies is an important and topical issue in the theory and practice of compiling dictionaries. Lexiografication of linguoculture (particularly, the intercultural one) involves both the traditional problems of linguistic material and the new ones, related to the evolution of forms and ways to transmit semantics.

4. Reflecting culture in lexicography

Given the long history of compiling and functioning of dictionaries, just recently, that is, more or less since the 1950s, the efforts of some lexicographers have been focused on the theoretical aspect of this work.

The work of lexicographers aims at a dictionary to become as efficient and non-ideological tool as possible. Nowadays, no one doubts that the so-called ''corpus revolution'' (Hanks, 2012; Krishnamurthy, 2002; Rundell, 1992) has helped to better reflect how the language really functions within a specific group of its users. For instance, it was noted that pre-corpus dictionaries usually contained rare meanings of some same lexical units (and their equivalent translation), but they lacked other important common units. Sometimes the words which are frequently used do not appear in the dictionary macrostructure; in other cases, the words are included in the macrostructure, but their definition leaves a lot to be desired. Nowadays the measurement of frequency is part of the standard of lexicographical work. But the keyword concordances and the frequency of elements have become not only an indispensable resource for lexicographic documenting of the statistic content, but also increasingly often on the web-sites of online dictionaries, the statistic content of the headwords is complemented (or even replaced) by dynamically generated content, based on corpus information.

It is natural that the primary task of the adequate reflection of pragmatics which lexicography faces is an adequate understanding of a linguistic sign, overcoming ethno-linguistic barrier, which is obviously based on the asymmetry of ethno-mental culturemes. This means dealing with two (or more) linguistic pictures of the world and with mastering non-equivalent vocabulary.

5. The (non)equivalence issue

The problem of equivalence lies in the area, in which an interdisciplinary consensus has been achieved: lexico-semantic structures of lexis of a particular language are peculiar, specific to this language and, therefore, they are partially unique. It means that the lexical-semantic structures of two (or more) languages are non-isomorphic. Non-isomorphy of lexis forms the theoretical and observed empirical circumstances, examination of which leads to concrete manifestations of the problem of equivalence in different disciplines. In this case, we are only interested in the metalexicographic aspect of this issue. We believe that the notion of

equivalence in the lexicographical research should not be constructed anti-intuitively, away from its use in the common language sense, but must be more precise, and also must be different from the concept of equivalence in related disciplines, especially if we refer to contrastive linguistics and translation theory.

Equivalence (or its absence) is a marginal phenomenon, if lexicological studies are related to only one language. For example, you can refer to the lexical synonyms within the limits of designator lexis (*клубника*, *полуниця и truskawka*). They are extensionally equivalent, which means they have the same number of meanings. The notion of equivalence, on the other hand, plays a crucial role in contrastive or confrontational lexicology. There are also various lexicological manifestations of the problem of equivalence.

Comparative lexicology is regarded as a partial discipline with an emphasis on *langue*. Accordingly, the notion of equivalence in lexicology is concentrated on the language system, but, in general, is relatively vague. The basis of the designator lexis is polysemic understanding of the language signs. Therefore, the elements of the lexis can be several times polysemantic. While correlating one element of language A with another element of language B, their denotative relationship is generally accepted as a basis for the comparison. Thus, there appears equivalence, commonly referred to as semantic equivalence, under the conditions that, firstly, the number of sememes in language A equals the number of sememes in language B (and they have the same meaning) and, secondly, their denotation (in pairs of sememes) is the same.

It is necessary to remember about various approaches to the definition of the equivalent and equivalence in translation studies. Equivalence of translation is defined as the common content of the original text and the translation.

A. Ivanov regards an equivalent as "functional compliance in a target language, transmitting expression on the similar level (words, collocations) to all relevant components within the given context, or one of the variants of meaning of the original unit in the source language" (Ivanov, 2006)

A good example of broader understanding of the concept of non-equivalence is the *Polish-Ukrainian Dictionary of Word Equivalents* by A. Luchyk and O. Antonova (Luchyk, Antonova 2012). We fully agree with the authors of the dictionary on the fact that one of the major problems of creating a modern dictionary is defining the notion of the word and its boundaries.

Obviously, the nature of the problem allows us to define equivalents as elements of a various linguistic status. Researchers all over the world face a similar problem. Equivalents of words have been the subject of analysis rather infrequently, and they definitely deserve more attention of researchers. Of all the lexicographical projects we are interested in, the work on a multilingual dictionary (English-Bulgarian-Polish), which is carried out at the Institute of Slavonic Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences is especially worth mentioning. It is interesting to note that the lexicographers involved in the project pay a lot of attention to the difficulties that arise in connection with the presentation of the equivalents in the dictionary:

> "The main problem in the trilingual dictionary is the presentation of adequate equivalents. Adequate selection indicates that 1. The range of meanings of equivalents is identical (compare Polish *grypsera.* "language of criminals", Bulgarian *гаменски жаргон* and Russian *блат*. *'жарг.* ' code language, thieves argot', 2. These equivalents belong to the same part of speech (compare Russian adverb *авансом* and the Polish. secondary preposition *z góry*), 3. compatibility of equivalents coincides (compare Polish *komunikat* and Russian *Бюллетень*), 4. grammatically and semantically equal equivalents are also equal, pragmatically (...). It would certainly be naïve to rely on the principle that a language unit in one language corresponds to an identical unit in another language semantically, grammatically and pragmatically. Therefore, one needs to take into account the fact that in a multilingual dictionary a given language unit may correspond to two or more equivalents in another language, or that the equivalent in another language might not be a complete equivalent (that is, it will be different in one of the above mentioned characteristics) (...). The information about the difference of the equivalent must be given *expressis verbis*." (Kisiel, Satoła-Staśkowiak, Sosnowski, 2014)

A classical sentence from the textbook on translation studies is as follows: "Translation starts with establishing equivalence on the word level" (Ivanov, 2006). Undoubtedly, the problems of translation begin at the level of a separate word or collocations, when there appears non-equivalent lexis, i.e. lexical units which do not have their equivalents in the target language. We believe that non-equivalent lexis (as a phenomenon both in translation studies and lexicography) presents a range of problems. In translation it is connected with what is commonly referred to as "untranslatable"; as for lexicography, the problem is more complicated, because a dictionary does not provide as many possibilities as a text does for different types of lexical transformations, with the help of which a non-equivalent notion can be identified.

The term itself is common for many authors, who understand it in a different way: some authors regard non-equivalent lexis as a synonym of realia, the others see just words,

which due to cultural differences do not exist in the other language. S. Vlakhov and S. Florin in their book *The Untranslatable in Translation (Neperevodimoe v perevode)* give the most complete description of types of lexical units, which can be regarded as non-equivalent ones (Vlakhov, Florin, 1980). It seems that non-equivalent lexis, as well as lexical gaps (composing a significant part of the national specificity in any language) are the terms on the junction of various academic disciplines, which complicates the approach to their definition within the framework of lexicography. However, the experience of modern lexicographers clearly shows that in the process of compilation of any bilingual or more lingual translation dictionary, the issues of conveying culture specificity, absent in another language, do not lose their importance:

> "…in every culture there exist concepts or phenomena not to be found elsewhere in the world. Such discrepancies between cultures, or cultural gaps, give rise to lexical gaps in the vocabularies of the concerned languages, manifesting themselves most vividly in the process of establishing interlingual equivalence. This, in turn, makes life difficult for both bilingual lexicographers and translators. Vocabulary items denoting concepts characteristic of a particular culture are referred to by a number of names in the literature on the topic. Kalėdaitė and Asijavičiūtė enumerate such labels as cultural or culture-bound words, culture-specific concepts, realia, culture-bound phenomena and terms and culture-specific items. However, the proposed labels call for a certain disambiguation. As has been remarked, culture-specificity is not as easy to pinpoint as it may seem. There are those who argue that in fact very few – if any – vocabulary items are culture independent: "As language is created and used in context, it is inevitable to be tinted with the color of cultural idiosyncrasies" (Podolej, 2009)

Translateme in the process of intercultural communication (recoding of linguocultural material by means a different language system) and the application of various translation techniques create a special linguistic and translation meaning of a cultureme, based on various relationships of equivalence (Gusarov, 2002): signification (methods of transcription, transliteration, calquing), semantisation (a method of descriptive translation), reference (a method of elimination of national cultural specificity, descriptive translation), syntagmatics (a method of translation periphrasis) and functionality (a method of approximate translation, descriptive translation).

Naturally, all the suggested variants of equivalence search are peculiar solutions of the problem of lexical gaps elimination, their thinking, re-semantisation and the new language implementation. Understanding of the empirical material (informatemes) leads first of all to

the usual problems, while implicitness of culturemes reveals quite different lexicographical problems – an inclination to cognition of processes of implicit meanings interpretation.

The divergence of the pragmatic meaning, in its turn, was traditionally connected with the lack of equivalence. This can be explained by the belief of translators themselves and some experts in the field of translation studies, that in the process of translation almost everything can be made up for by various methods. Nevertheless, preserving the pragmatic meaning of translation is important already at word level. It should be emphasised that one can find examples of pragmatic inaccuracies in translation much more often than errors in the transferring of the referential meaning. Any comparison of languages will give us examples of the words which have the same meaning in both languages, but will be different in terms of style (registers) or emotional connotations. This pragmatic non-equivalence can be explained, for instance, with the help of Spanish names of currency: *duro (5 pesetas), talego (1000 pesetas), boniato (5000 pesetas)*. A good example will also be pragmatically rich colloquial Polish adjectives denoting nationality, which are hard to translate into Spanish: *Rusek, Szwab, Rumun*. The example of the Spanish language shows dialectal nuances of the words used in other diatopic variations, will be another problem. Their Polish (and in general, Slavic) equivalents do not convey a full pragmatic component, e.g. *la calor - ciepło* (warmth), usually a noun of the masculine gender, *ahorita - chwileczkę* (just a moment!), a diminutive suffix '-ita' is primarily used in dialects of Spanish-speaking South America).

7. Pragmatic non-equivalence: an example

An obvious example of the absence of pragmatic equivalence is the translation of the forms of address. The choice of an appropriate form of address has not ceased to be one of the main difficulties in learning a foreign language at the level of its pragmatics. Therefore, we believe that an important task of modern dictionaries is to include pragmatic information in a dictionary entry. This aspect of lexicographic work is referred to by Koseska-Toszewa, Satoła-Staśkowiak, Sosnowski:

> "The analysis of monolingual and bilingual dictionaries of Polish, Russian, and Bulgarian yielded the following conclusions. Firstly, monolingual dictionaries often describe the meaning of forms of address including their scope of use in a given culture. Nevertheless, the descriptions are insufficient to use given lexemes in real speech in accordance with the usage patterns sanctioned by a given culture (…). Secondly, in traditional bilingual dictionaries forms of address are usually disregarded

and the user does not receive the information about the correct patterns of use of a given lexical unit, which would conform to the norms currently accepted by the society". (Koseska-Toszewa, Satoła-Staśkowiak, Sosnowski, 2013)

As we have attempted to demonstrate, the cultural component of a dictionary entry is extremely important for a full transfer of semantics stereoscopy of lexical units (keeping in mind that its reception is variable) at all levels.

Therefore, the ideal structure of a dictionary entry according to both V. Morkovin and P. Denisov are clearly outdated nowadays in terms of movement of scientific, educational, and publishing technologies of our time. All the macro-and microstructure of a dictionary are undergoing changes and are becoming more functional and synthetic, that is, are structurally and semiotically close to overcoming the ethno-linguistic barriers and a more adequate transfer of culturemes.

8. Computer lexicography: a possible solution

Computer lexicography is becoming quite a full response to the requirements of modern times and is a complex collection of traditional tools and methods of lexicography and the software for processing and presentation of the text (and cultural) information. Dictionary creation is now an even more labour-intensive process, especially if we mean complex multimedia dictionaries. Interactive and multimedia dictionaries of the encyclopaedic type, as well as heterogeneous dictionaries, combining the characteristics of translation (two-, three-or multilingual), spelling (often with the pronounciation component), grammar, definition and linguistic-cultural dictionaries, at least in the form of cultural labelling or commenting, appealing to the linguistic picture of the world (gender, social, ideological, historical markers, etc.).

Therefore, we can say with confidence that the problem of adequate implementation of culturemes and non-equivalent lexis in dictionaries is still waiting for its solution, though new technological possibilities and inner dynamic development of modern lexicography give us a reason to hope for overcoming numerous problems of cross-cultural gaps of meanings in the future.

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