

# Crossing Boundaries: The Translation of Cultural Referents in English and Spanish

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## Abstract

Since language is always attached to the particular singularities of a certain “place”, translators are permanently faced with the problem of how to cross linguistic and cultural boundaries as they deal with the cultural peculiarities implicit in a source text. The main difficulties arise when specific references deeply rooted in a specific place challenge their being rendered in another target language and culture. Through the discussion of typologies and classifications of culture-specific terms, this paper reflects on the main translation procedures that can be employed in order to solve the problems involved in translating differences between cultures. Conclusions are based on a study of the different choices made by a group of professional and non-professional translators when confronted with texts characterized by the presence of a significant number of culture-bound references.

**Keywords:** *translation, cultural terms, procedures, (non-)professional translators*

## Introduction

Translation certainly poses many problems since texts are normally bounded in a specific language and a specific place, thus displaying many linguistic peculiarities related to social and cultural aspects. One of the problems a translator can face when dealing with different places arises from the fact that certain words and expressions may refer to objects, facts and diverse phenomena deeply rooted in their source culture (SC), often so specific (and perhaps exclusive or unique) of the culture that produced them, that they have no “equivalent” in the target culture (TC), be it because they are unknown, or because they have not been codified in the target language (TL). The complexities of the interconnection between language and culture have been approached by a large number of translation scholars from different perspectives. Eugene Nida, one of first commentators who discussed the problems of correspondence in Bible translating, thus explains that “differences between cultures may cause more severe complications for the translator than do differences in language structure”<sup>1</sup>. After Nida, a good number of theorists have referred to the notion of “untranslatability” in the case of those texts which are so culture-bound and culture-specific that they seem to defy translation. Certainly, in those cases, when the differences between cultures and languages seem insurmountable, the task of the translator may present itself as

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<sup>1</sup> E. Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating with Special Reference to Principles and Procedures Involved in Bible Translating* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1964), 130.

impossible since even the slightest variation from the source language (SL) will result in an inevitable loss.

The aim of the present paper is threefold: (1) to revise the literature dealing with the main typologies and classifications proposed as regards culture-bound terms, (2) to discuss the main translation procedures that can be employed when translating differences between cultures, and (3) to present the results of a study based on the translation of texts that relied on cultural aspects, in order to analyse the different translation procedures used by professional translators and students.

## The Translation of Places: Typologies of Cultural Terms

Translation inevitably involves two different languages and two different places<sup>2</sup>, which may vary in terms of historical, geographical, political, social and cultural differences. The notion of culture is, in fact, essential in translation since the role of the translator is, after all, to mediate between cultures. As has been repeatedly discussed by translation scholars, language is an expression of culture and, hence, the examination of culture-bound terms, or *realia*<sup>3</sup>, particularly in the context of translation, has originated a good number of taxonomies<sup>4</sup>.

Following Nida and applying the concept of culture to the task of translation, Newmark<sup>5</sup> puts forth his classification of foreign cultural words, establishing five categories: (1) Ecology (flora, fauna, winds, climate, etc.); (2) material culture (food, clothes, houses, towns, transport); (3) social culture (work and leisure); (4) organizations, customs, activities, procedures or ideas, which include artistic, religious, political and administrative subcategories; and (5) gestures and habits. Katan<sup>6</sup> also provides a comprehensive view of how culture reveals itself at each of the following logical levels: (1) Environment (including climate, housing, food, etc.); (2) behaviour (actions and ways of behaving in certain cultures); (3) capabilities, strategies and skills used to communicate (including non-verbal communication, rituals, etc.); (4) values of the society and its hierarchy; (5) beliefs; and (6) identity. Ku<sup>7</sup> reduces his taxonomy to

<sup>2</sup> Gideon Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* (Amsterdam, Philadelfia: John Benjamins, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> Sergei Vlakhov and Sider Florin (“Neperovodimoe v perevode. Realii.” *Masterstvo perevoda* 6, 1969, Moskvà, Sovetskij pisatel, 1970, 432-456) seem to have been the first ones to coin the term *realia* to refer to cultural elements. The term has now been generalized and is frequently used to refer to objects, customs, habits, and other cultural and material aspects that have an impact in shaping a certain language.

<sup>4</sup> Mona Baker, *In other words. A coursebook on translation* (London: Routledge, 1992); David Katan, *Translating Cultures. An Introduction for Translators, Interpreters and Mediators* (Manchester: St. Jerome, 1999); Meng Ku, “La traducción de los elementos lingüísticos culturales (chino-español). Estudio de Sueño en las Estancia Rojas” (PhD diss., Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2006); Roberto Mayoral, “La explicitación de la información en la traducción intercultural,” in *Estudis sobre la traducció*, ed. A. Hurtado Albir (Castellón: Universitat Jaume I, 1994), 73-96; Lucía Molina, “Análisis descriptivo de la traducción de los culturemas árabe-español” (PhD diss., Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2001); Peter Newmark, *A Textbook of Translation* (London/New York: Prentice Hall, 1988); Eugene A. Nida, *Componential Analysis of Meaning. An Introduction to Semantic Structures* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975); Julio César Santoyo, “Traducción de cultura, traducción de civilización,” in *Estudis sobre la traducció*, 141-152; Vlakhov and Florin, 432-456; etc.

<sup>5</sup> Newmark, *A Textbook of Translation*, 21.

<sup>6</sup> Katan, *Translating Cultures*, 17.

<sup>7</sup> Ku, “La traducción de los elementos lingüísticos culturales”, 91-98.

the four generic types proposed by Molina: (1) Environment: ecology, place names, etc.; (2) cultural heritage: religious beliefs, historical events, characters, festivities, folklore, housing, objects, etc.; (3) social culture: conventions, beliefs, habits, social organizations, etc.; and (4) linguistic culture: fixed expressions, idioms, insults, etc. Fernández Guerra<sup>8</sup> identifies four major types of cultural referents which can further complicate the translation process: (1) geographic and ethnographic terms; (2) words or expressions referring to folklore, traditions and mythology; (3) names of everyday objects, actions and events (such as food and drinks, clothes, housing, tools, public transport, dances and games, units of measurement, money, etc.); and (4) social and historical terms denoting territorial administrative units or divisions; departments, professions, titles, ranks, greetings and treatments; institutions, patriotic and religious organisations; etc.

As indicated before, many scholars have proposed classifications for references emphasizing local colour and cultural features, yet they have recognised, more or less explicitly, the difficulties and often the “impossibility” of translating such terms. However, although the translation of cultural elements is not an easy task, a good number of theoreticians, particularly those of the Leipzig school<sup>9</sup>, claim that all languages can say (or are capable of saying) the same things; but, as a rule, all of them say it in a different way. Indeed, should two languages say it in the same way, then we would not be speaking of two languages, but of one and the same language. In this respect, we could argue that, provided the translator is culturally aware of those differences, he can choose from various procedures, techniques or strategies to deal with such translation problems, as can be seen in the following section. It is up to the translator to choose the most suitable way to render SC referents in the TL, and for the TC, depending on the aim, the time available, the potential readers, of his/her translation.

As regards how to approach the difficulties involved in translating these terms, Christiane Nord has appropriately argued that we face two extremes: either we transform the text so that it works under TC conditions, or we replace the source text functions with the respective meta-functions<sup>10</sup>. Recent studies abound in the same idea that these are the two main approaches or the two ways out for the translator<sup>11</sup>. The question may be, then, is the translators’ task to focus primarily on the SC or on the TC?

<sup>8</sup> Ana Fernández Guerra, “Tradicionalismo y traducción: aportaciones del paradigma lingüístico tradicional a la teoría y práctica de la traducción,” in *Insights into Translation*, ed. Adolfo L. Soto Vázquez (La Coruña: Universidade da Coruña, 2003), 139.

<sup>9</sup> Otto Kade, *Probleme des übersetzungswissenschaftlichen Textvergleichs* (Leipzig: VEB Verlag Enzyklopädie, 1981); Gert Jäger, “Zu Gegenstand und Zielen der Übersetzungswissenschaft,” in *Vermittelte Kommunikation, Sprachmittlung, Translation*, ed. Otto Kade (Leipzig: VEB Verlag Enzyklopädie, 1977), 14-26; Albrecht Neubert, *Text und Translation* (Leipzig: Enzyklopädie, 1985).

<sup>10</sup> Christiane Nord, “Translating for Communicative Purposes across Cultural Boundaries,” *Journal of Translation Studies* 9 (2006), 59.

<sup>11</sup> We may find in them different terminology but their meaning seems to be similar: direct vs. oblique translation (Jean Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet, *Stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais. Méthode de traduction* [París: Didier, 1977]), formal vs. dynamic translation (Nida, *Toward a Science*, 59), semantic vs. communicative translation (Newmark, *A Textbook of Translation*, 46-47), overt vs. covert translation (Juliane House, *Translation Quality Assessment. A Model Revisited* [Tübingen: Narr, 1997], 111), documentary vs. instrumental translation (Nord, “Translating for Communicative”, 73), foreignisation vs. domestication [Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation. Towards an ethics of difference* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 240], etc.

There is no clear-cut answer, but there seems to be a common agreement, nowadays, in that the main criterion is the communicative function of the TL text, as Nord states:

Communicative purposes can only be achieved under certain conditions, such as culture-specific knowledge presuppositions, value systems or behaviour conventions. Therefore, the translator will have to analyse the target-culture conditions for which the translation is needed (as specified in the translation brief) in order to decide whether, and how, any source text purposes can work for the target audience according to the specifications of the brief.<sup>12</sup>

## Procedures to Translate Cultural Terms

According to Krings or Lörscher<sup>13</sup>, among others, translation strategies are usually defined as the procedures leading to the optimal solution of a translation problem. The procedures or strategies based on comparative stylistics (Vinay y Darbelnet, Malblanc, Intravaia and Scavée<sup>14</sup>)—also used by other scholars, like Vázquez Ayora<sup>15</sup>—, or the techniques suggested by Bible translators (Nida and Taber, Margot, etc.<sup>16</sup>), had in mind to propose a metalanguage and to catalogue possible solutions in the task of translation. Such procedures have been sometimes criticized, among other reasons because there is even a lack of consensus as to what name should be given to these categories—procedures, techniques, strategies or methods are often interrelated and used as synonyms—; because the procedures sometimes overlap, because they only catalogue differences in terms of language and not in terms of usage, and because they focus on translation results rather than on the translation process. There have been, however, several attempts to differentiate these terms, translation method referring to the way a whole translation is carried out in terms of the translator's objective (literal, free and philological translations, for instance), translation strategies being the procedures (conscious or unconscious, verbal or nonverbal) used by the translator to solve problems in the translation process, and translation techniques involving the procedures used to find suitable solutions for a translation unit (adaptation, borrowing, compensation, etc.)<sup>17</sup>.

In any case, the procedures or strategies that are usually mentioned in translation manuals and some scholarly publications serve both to analyse and catalogue translation equivalence and to improve the acquisition of translation competence, since knowing

<sup>12</sup> Nord, "Translating for Communicative", 59.

<sup>13</sup> Hans P. Krings, "Translation Problems and Translation Strategies of Advanced German Learners of French," in *Interlingual and intercultural communication*, ed. by Julianne House and Shoshana Blum-Kulka (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1986), 263-275; Wolfgang Lörscher, *Translation Performance, Translation Process, and Translation Strategies. A Psycholinguistic Investigation* (Tübingen: Narr, 1991).

<sup>14</sup> Vinay and Darbelnet, *Stylistique comparée*; Alfred Malblanc, *Stylistique comparée du français et de l'allemand: Essai de représentation linguistique comparée et étude de traduction* (Paris: Didier, 1963); Pietro Intravaia and Pierre Scavée, *Traité de stylistique comparée du français et de l'italien* (Paris: Didier, 1979).

<sup>15</sup> Gerardo Vázquez Ayora, *Introducción a la traductología* (Washington: Georgetown U. Press, 1977).

<sup>16</sup> Eugene Nida and Charles R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (Leiden: Brill, 1982); Jean Claude Margot, *Traduire sans trahir* (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1979).

<sup>17</sup> Amparo Hurtado Albir, ed., *Enseñar a Traducir. Metodología en la formación de traductores e intérpretes. Teoría y fichas prácticas* (Madrid: Edelsa, 1999), 36.

and comparing them is definitely necessary to produce an adequate translation. As Malone indicates, such techniques or procedures “will serve either as tools for the study of completed translation (the analytic mode), or as helpmates in the act of translation (the operative mode)”<sup>18</sup>. One of the leading taxonomies, and certainly the best known, is that of Vinay and Dalbernet. They propose seven basic translation procedures: adaptation, calque, equivalence, modulation, borrowing, literal translation and transposition; although they also refer to compensation, expansion and contraction. Other authors have reformulated and added new procedures, or broken down the aforementioned ones into distinct subcategories. Among the well known reformulations we should mention the one proposed by Vázquez Ayora, for example, who distinguishes between (i) oblique translation procedures (adaptation, amplification, compensation, equivalence, explicitation, modulation, omission and transposition) and (ii) direct methods (calque, loan and literal translation). Hurtado expands the list with strategies that account for solutions of textual nature: extension, amplification, compression, discursive creation, description, generalisation, particularisation, reduction, paralinguistic or linguistic substitution, and variation<sup>19</sup>.

Among all the prescriptive approaches, Newmark’s<sup>20</sup>, which specifically addresses the translation of cultural elements, remains one of the most representative ones. Newmark proposes the procedures of literal translation, transference, naturalization, cultural equivalent, functional equivalent, descriptive equivalent, componential analysis, synonymy, through-translation, shifts or transpositions, modulation, recognized translation, compensation, and paraphrase. He also includes couplets (combination of two or more different procedures), and refers to the importance of notes in order to account for differences between SL and TL cultures.

Graedler<sup>21</sup>, for her part, lists four main procedures for translating cultural terms: (i) making up a new word, (ii) explaining the meaning of the SL expression in lieu of translating it, (iii) preserving the SL term intact, and (iv) replacing it using any term in the TL that has the same “relevance” as the SL term. Harvey<sup>22</sup> also proposes four ways out: (i) functional equivalence, using a term with the same “function”, (ii) formal or linguistic equivalence, or word by word translation, (iii) transcription or borrowing, which may include notes, and (iv) descriptive or self-explanatory translation. Mur Dueñas<sup>23</sup> labelled her translation procedures as (1) TL cultural cognate; (2) SL cultural and linguistic borrowing; (3) SL cultural borrowing plus explanation; (4) replacement of SL cultural referent by explanation; (5) TL cultural referent suppression; and (6) literal translation of TL cultural referent. Marco Borillo<sup>24</sup>, considering the intervention of the

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Malone, *The Science of Linguistics in the Art of Translation: Some tools from linguistics for the analysis and practice of translation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 2.

<sup>19</sup> Amparo Hurtado Albir, *Traducción y Traductología. Introducción a la Traductología* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2001), 268-271.

<sup>20</sup> Newmark, *A Textbook of Translation*, 81-91.

<sup>21</sup> Anne Graedler, “Cultural Shock,” *Oslo Studies in English on the Net - Translation course* (University of Oslo, 2000), 3.

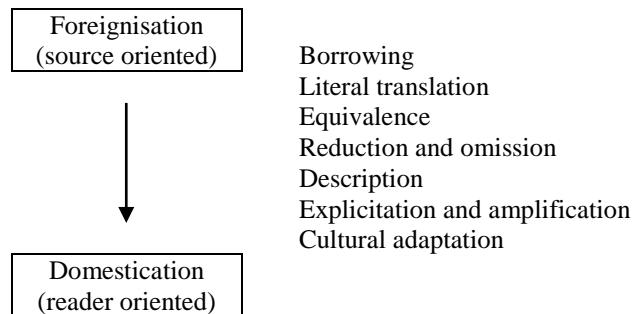
<sup>22</sup> Malcolm Harvey, “A Beginner’s Course in Legal Translation: the Case of Culture-Bound Terms,” 2003, 2-6.

<sup>23</sup> Mª Pilar Mur Dueñas, “Translating Culture-Specific References into Spanish: *The Best a Man can Get*,” *Trans* 7 (2003), 74-79.

<sup>24</sup> Joseph Marco Borillo, “Les tècniques de traducció (dels referents culturals): retorn per a quedar-nos-hi.” *Quaderns. Revista de traducció* XI (2004), 138.

translator and his approach to the TC as a continuum, proposes the following six procedures: (i) pure or naturalised loan, (ii) literal translation, (iii) neutralisation (description, generalisation or particularisation), (iv) amplification or compression, (v) intracultural adaptation, and (vi) intercultural adaptation.

For the purpose of this study, a taxonomy including seven of the aforementioned procedures has been established, ranging from those procedures that focus more on the SC to those that try to adapt the translation to TC readers. These are represented in *Figure 1* and will be shortly described and illustrated.



*Figure 1. Procedures to translate cultural terms.*

(i) Borrowing a term is taking a word or expression straight from another language: "... mot qu'une langue emprunte à une autre sans le traduire"<sup>25</sup>. The procedure is normally used when a term does not exist in the TC, or when the translator tries to get some stylistic or exotic effect. It can be "pure", if there is no change whatsoever in the foreign term (*broker*, *chip*, *stop*, etc. in Spanish), or "naturalized", if the word has some change in the spelling, and perhaps some morphological or phonetic adaptation (as in Spanish: *diskette* → 'disquete', *indent* → 'indentar', *reset* → 'resetear', etc.). Some authors prefer the terms foreign word, foreignism, Anglicism, Germanism, ... when referring to pure borrowings (that have not been fully assimilated into the TL system), and use borrowings or loan words when the words are naturalised in the TL<sup>26</sup>. In any case, borrowings are one of the main ways of enriching a language, though the translation of texts with a large amount of cultural terms should be done cautiously<sup>27</sup>.

(ii) Literal translation, or word by word, occurs when a SL word or phrase is translated into a TL word or phrase, without worrying about style, but adapting the text to the TL syntactic rules, with minimal adjustments, so that it sounds both correct and idiomatic (word order, functional words, etc.): "La traduction littérale ou mot à mot désigne le passage de LD à LA aboutissant à un texte à la fois correct et idiomatique sans que le traducteur ait eu à se soucier d'autre chose que des servitudes idiomatiques"<sup>28</sup>. An example of literal translation into Spanish could be *John loves Mary* → 'Juan ama a María', in which the preposition 'a' has been added because it is a requirement for direct objects denoting persons.

<sup>25</sup> Vinay and Dalbernet, *Stylistique comparée*, 8.

<sup>26</sup> Esteban Torre, *Teoría de la traducción literaria* (Madrid: Síntesis, 1994), 94.

<sup>27</sup> Valentín García Yebra, *Teoría y práctica de la Traducción* (Madrid: Gredos, 1982), 340.

<sup>28</sup> Vinay and Dalbernet, *Stylistique comparée*, 48.

(iii) As regards equivalence, according to Vinay and Darbelnet, it tries to convey “... une même situation en mettant en œuvre des moyens stylistiques et structuraux entièrement différents”<sup>29</sup>. It basically means that the translator uses a term or expression recognised as an established equivalent in the TL. It is similar to adaptation and to modulation, in that it expresses the same situation in a different way<sup>30</sup>, mainly in cases of idioms and formulaic language, as in English into Spanish *God bless you* → ‘¡Salud!', *Holy cow!* → ‘¡Madre mía!', *Only the good die young* → ‘Mala hierba nunca muere'.

(iv) Reduction and omission are understood as procedures in which the translator either synthesizes or suppresses a SL information item in the TL text, mainly when that information is considered unnecessary<sup>31</sup> and the translator may consider that the cultural reference does not perform a relevant function or might even mislead the reader. These terms are opposed to explicitation and amplification (described below), and similar terms have been used to describe this reduction of information, such as compression, condensation or suppression.

(v) In descriptions, as the term itself indicates, a term or expression is replaced by a description of its form or function. It could, thus, be regarded as a sort of paraphrase, or even as an amplification or explanation of a SL term, as in the Spanish translation of *He's a Cockney* → ‘Es de la parte este (or ‘Es de la parte más pobre') de Londres'.

(vi) Explicitation and amplification are in opposition to reduction and omission. Explicitation means that we express in the TL something that is implicit in the context of the SL<sup>32</sup>, or that we introduce details that are not expressed in the SL, such as more information, translator's notes, or explicative paraphrasing, as in *IRA* → ‘La organización terrorista IRA'. In the cases of amplification, sometimes labelled as ‘expansion’<sup>33</sup> and ‘diffusion’<sup>34</sup>, the translator uses, in the TL, more words than in the SL to express the same idea. Examples of these procedures are the following translations into Spanish: *Coffee break* → ‘descanso para tomar café’, or *The man next door* → ‘el hombre que vive en la puerta de al lado’.

(vii) Cultural adaptation, finally, refers to a SL cultural element that is replaced by another term in the TC. This would apply, for example, to *Christmas pudding*, and its possible translation into Spanish as ‘turrón’ or ‘roscón de reyes’, which are traditional Christmas desserts in the Spanish culture. Other authors have called this cultural, dynamic or functional equivalence. In Vinay and Darbelnet's terms, adaptation “... s'applique à des cas où la situation à laquelle le message se réfère n'existe pas dans LA, et doit être créée par rapport à une autre situation, que l'on juge équivalente. C'est donc ici un cas particulier de l'équivalence, une équivalence de situation”<sup>35</sup>. There are situations in which adaptation seems, to some extent, necessary: in advertising slogans, or children's stories, for example. In other cases there are certain conventions, more or less generalized, as regards adapted translations of foreign cultural elements in the TL.

<sup>29</sup> Vinay and Darbelnet, *Stylistique comparée*, 52.

<sup>30</sup> Vázquez Ayora, *Introducción a la traductología*, 322.

<sup>31</sup> Vázquez Ayora, *Introducción a la traductología*, 359.

<sup>32</sup> Vázquez Ayora, *Introducción a la traductología*, 349.

<sup>33</sup> Vinay and Darbelnet, *Stylistique comparée*, 184.

<sup>34</sup> Malone, *The Science*, 45.

<sup>35</sup> Vinay and Darbelnet, *Stylistique comparée*, 52-53.

This applies, for instance, to weights and measures, musical notation, generally accepted titles of literary works or geographical names, etc. The basic goal of the translator when trying to ‘adapt’ the translation is to get a similar effect on the TL readers, ‘domesticating’, in a way, the culture-bound terms.

## Differences in the Translation of Cultural Terms by Professional and Non-Professional Translators

The present section shows the results of a study carried out to analyse the procedures employed by four professional translators and by four students when translating cultural elements from English into Spanish and vice versa. This is a follow up study of a previous research in which ninety-six students also translated similar texts and all the procedures employed were analysed. The aim of comparing now these translations carried out by professional and non-professional translators is to assess studies that focus on possible differences between both groups, either when trying to produce a TL text that fulfils its specified function for a specific audience —stating, as a rule, that novice translations will be very much ST oriented in their different elements<sup>36</sup>—, and studies carried out in order to value important issues when acquiring translation competence<sup>37</sup>.

Three of the professional translators were Spanish colleagues with more than ten years of experience working as freelance translators and a British academic and translator with considerable experience in the field. The students who participated in this study were taking a module on ‘English-Spanish translation’ and they were in their third year of a degree in English Studies at the Universitat Jaume I of Castellón (Spain). Two of them were British Erasmus students staying in Spain for one semester. The other two were Spanish and their level of English was certainly an advanced one; they had also stayed in the UK as Erasmus students for at least one semester, so that one can indeed assume they were sufficiently familiar with the cultural referents used for this study. The basis of this study was the translation of four texts (two in Spanish and two in English) that contained a great amount of cultural referents. All the participants were asked to translate the texts having in mind a target audience that did not know (or was not familiar with) the SL and the SC. Presumably, knowing the potential TL receivers and what they expect from the text could affect the way they view the translation task and the decisions taken during the translation process. In each of the four texts, a total of ten cultural terms were selected, accounting for a total of forty cultural terms, which are outlined below.

<sup>36</sup> Hans G. Höning, “Sagen, was man nicht weiß – wissen, was man nicht sagt. Überlegungen zur übersetzerischen Intuition,” in *Übersetzungswissenschaft. Ergebnisse und Perspektiven. Festschrift für Wolfram Wilss zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. by R. Arntz and G. Thome (übingen: Narr, 1990), 152-161; Riitta Jääskeläinen, “Investigating Translation Strategies,” in *Recent Trends in Empirical Translation Research*, ed. by Sonja Tirkkonen-Condit and John Laffling (Joensuu: University of Joensuu, 1993), 99-120; Sonja Tirkkonen-Condit, “The Interaction of World Knowledge and Linguistic Knowledge in the Processes of Translation,” in *Translation and Meaning, Part 2*, ed. by Barbara Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk and Marcel Thelen (Maastricht: Rijkhogeschool Maastricht, 1992), 433-440.

<sup>37</sup> Susanne Göpferich, *Translationsprozessforschung: Stand – Methoden – Perspektiven*. (Tübingen: Narr, 2008); PACTE, “Acquiring Translation Competence: Hypotheses and Methodological Problems in a Research Project,” in *Investigating Translation: Papers from the 4th International Congress on Translation, Barcelona, 1998*, ed. by A. Beeby et al. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2000), 99-106; etc.

The first text was “British food and drink”, published by the British-German Association<sup>38</sup>. It deals with British eating and drinking habits, popular food and times to eat. The ten cultural referents selected were: (i) *fish and chips*, (ii) *take-aways*, (iii) *Britons*, (iv) *a pint (of beer)*, (v) *beer without a head*, (vi) *We are having our tea*, (vii) *meat and “two veg”*, (viii) *Roast Dinner*, (ix) *Yorkshire pudding*, and (x) *Indian restaurants and Balti houses*. The second one was “Guy Fawkes’ Night”, written by Dianne Davies<sup>39</sup> in a website in which a selection of British holidays, festivals and customs are described. The main cultural referents identified were: (i) *Bonfire Night*, (ii) *House of Lords*, (iii) *the Tower of London*, (iv) *the Sheriff of Worcester*, (v) *the Civil War*, (vi) *children construct these “guys” out of old clothes*, (vii) *A penny*, (viii) *traditional Bonfire treats include Parkin*, (ix) *Mischief Night, the British equivalent of “trick-or-treating”*, and (x) *knock-on-ginger*.

The following two texts were extracted from the magazine *Paradores*, which includes SL texts in Spanish and a translation into English (which was, of course, not given to the participants in this study). The third text, “De ¡viva San Fermín! a ¡Pobre de mí!”<sup>40</sup>, written by F. Erbiti Zabalza, describes the main annual festivity in Pamplona, in which bulls are run along the streets. The whole text is full of culture-bound terms, though only ten phrases were chosen: (i) *El chupinazo del 6 de julio...*, (ii) *el inicio de los sanfermines, el ‘Pobre de mí’*, (iii) *de ahí que muchos pamploneses, al ritmo de ‘Uno de enero, dos de febrero...’*, (iv) *la Casa Consistorial*, (v) *al paso de la procesión de San Fermín*, (vi) *mientras algún txistulari o jotero dedica alguna pieza al santo*, (vii) *Sin música no habría sanfermines y sin Manuel Turrillas alguien tendría que inventarla de nuevo*, (viii) *también suenan el txistu, la gaita, las fanfarres y multitud de grupos*, (ix) *acudir diariamente a la corrida*, and (x) *encierro*. The forth one, “El tapeo”<sup>41</sup>, by J.A. Garmendia, also includes a great amount of terms that could have been analysed, since *tapas* and all they involve are an important part of Spanish lifestyle, but only these referents were picked out: (i) *El tapeo o tapiñeo*, (ii) *ir a comer de tapas*, (iii) *ensaladilla rusa*, (iv) *a partir de los cien gramos la tapa adquiere rango de “ración”*, (v) *un almuerzo normal*, (vi) *un menú sevillánísimo*, (vii) *salpicón de marisco*, (viii) *el buen tapeante*, (ix) *la vieja costumbre del tapeo recitado*, and (x) *el popular barrio de Triana*.

The different procedures (described in the previous section) used in each of the four texts—both by professional translators and by students—to translate these cultural referents were analysed. *Table 1* shows the results obtained in the translations by the professional translators for those cultural terms.

<i>Procedure</i>	<i>T1</i>	<i>T2</i>	<i>T3</i>	<i>T4</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>(%)</i>
Borrowing	1	2	6	6	15	(9.37%)
Literal translation	9	8	6	7	30	(18.75%)

<sup>38</sup> Extracted from “British food and drink,” British-German Association, accessed October 27, 2012, <http://www.britishgermanassociation.org/special.php?pageno=28>.

<sup>39</sup> Extracted from Dianne Davies, “Guy Fawkes’ Night,” accessed October 27, 2012, <http://traditions-uk.freeservers.com/bonfire.html>.

<sup>40</sup> F. Erbiti Zabalza, “De ¡viva San Fermín! a ¡Pobre de mí!” accessed October 27, 2012, [www2.parador.es/paradoresdeturismo/ondemand/revistas/207210533\\_3182007101023.pdf](http://www2.parador.es/paradoresdeturismo/ondemand/revistas/207210533_3182007101023.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> J.A. Garmendia, “El tapeo,” accessed October 27, 2012, [www2.parador.es/paradoresdeturismo/ondemand/revistas/1924199068\\_3082007151532.pdf](http://www2.parador.es/paradoresdeturismo/ondemand/revistas/1924199068_3082007151532.pdf).

Equivalence	8	6	4	6	24	(15.00%)
Reduction/omission	3	1	2	2	8	(5.00%)
Description	5	9	8	10	32	(20.00%)
Explication/amplification	9	10	11	5	35	(21.87%)
Cultural adaptation	4	3	3	4	14	(8.75%)
Other procedures	1	1	0	0	2	(1.25%)
Total	40	40	40	40	160	

Table 1. Procedures used by professional translators.

As can be noticed, the translators used the procedures of explication and/or amplification (21.87%) and description (20%) much more often than the rest. In these cases, the translators have decided to provide more information so that the text becomes more coherent and natural for its readers. This can be illustrated in the following translations:

- (1) a. Traditional Bonfire treats include Parkin → una de las delicias típicas de la noche de las hogueras es el bizcocho típico Parkin  
El ‘Pobre de mí’ → the closing song ‘Poor me’
- b. Roast dinner → carne al horno con verduras  
Ensaladilla rusa → Spanish potato salad

In (1a) the translators have used some sort of explication to “fill the gaps in the reader’s knowledge”<sup>42</sup>, in order to make the cultural references (*Parkin*, *Pobre de mí?*) more explicit. And in the examples reproduced in (1b) the translator has replaced the SL cultural term by its description, paraphrasing the meaning of the cultural linguistic expression, probably having in mind to produce a TL text that reads more fluently.

Amplification and description are followed, in the percentage of usage, by literal translation (18.75%) and equivalence (15%). One has to state clearly, though, that in the translations performed by professionals —contrary to what we found in those performed by the students—, all cultural referents that were translated literally, as well as those in which equivalent TL terms were used, were translated consistently, so that the end product seemed coherent for the reader, as can be seen in (2a) and (2b).

- (2) a. A pint of beer → una pinta de cerveza  
Un menú sevillanísimo → A very typical Sevillian menu
- b. At the local pubs or take-aways → en los bares de la zona o establecimientos con comida para llevar  
A partir de los cien gramos, la tapa adquiere rango de “ración” → Beyond one hundred grams, the tapa becomes quite a portion

There were also several instances of borrowings (9.37%), cultural adaptations (8.75%) and reductions or omissions (5%), though their use was not as frequent as the procedures that have just been mentioned. An example of each of these three procedures is provided below:

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<sup>42</sup> Baker, *In Other Words*, 250.

- (3) a. En sanfermines también suenan el *txistu*, la gaita, las fanfarres y multitud de grupos  
→ During sanfermines we can also hear the *txistu*, the bagpipes, *fanfarres* and a multitude of groups
- b. Casa Consistorial → Town Hall
- c. You can find Indian restaurants and Balti houses, Mediterranean cuisine... → hay restaurantes indios, cocina mediterranea, ...

In the case of *txistu* and *fanfarres* (3a) the translator has left the lexical items in Spanish, either because he preferred to adopt the SL term instead of using a complex explanation of the meaning or because he thought that the reader already had enough contextual information so as to deduce the meaning. For Hickey<sup>43</sup>, who has referred to borrowings as ‘incorporation’, this procedure could also be considered as “an attempt on the translator’s part to entice the readers to enter imaginatively into the world of the source text”. In the case of cultural adaptation (3b), the translators have opted for a referent in the TL whose function is similar to that of the SL referent, adapting the term to the TC, as in *Casa Consistorial*, for instance, in which the term ‘Town Hall’ was used because it is a similar building for the local government. Reductions and omissions have only been used in eight occasions (out of the total of one hundred and sixty cultural terms analysed in the four translations). The omission of *Balti houses*, in (3c), illustrates the translator’s concern with avoiding the use of a term which is not relevant and can even mislead TL readers.

Finally, professional translators resorted to other procedures only in two occasions. One of them is the case of *A penny for the Guy, mister?*, which was translated using a generalisation (‘Señor, ¿me da algo para el muñeco?’) instead of translating *penny* literally (‘penique’) or adapting it to the Spanish monetary system (‘un céntimo [de euro], for instance).

*Table 2* shows the procedures used by the students in the translation of the same forty cultural referents.

Procedure	T1	T2	T3	T4	Total (%)
Borrowing	8	8	15	8	39 (24.37%)
Literal translation	12	15	10	18	55 (34.37%)
Equivalence	5	2	3	0	10 (6.25%)
Reduction/omission	5	2	2	5	14 (8.75%)
Description	1	3	2	5	11 (6.87%)
Explication/amplification	6	6	8	3	23 (14.37%)
Cultural adaptation	3	4	0	1	8 (5.00%)
Other procedures	0	0	0	0	0 (0%)
Total	40	40	40	40	160

*Table 2. Procedures used by non-professional translators.*

One can immediately appreciate an overuse of literal translations (accounting for almost 35% of the cases) and —contrary to what one could appreciate in professional translations—, in many of these, the text did not appear to be as fluent as it should. In fact, when reading some of them, TL readers ignorant of the SC might be puzzled, since both the original effect and actual meaning may not be perceived or can sound senseless. The examples reproduced in (4) could be taken as representative:

<sup>43</sup> Leo Hickey, “Literary Translation within a Pragmatic Framework,” in *The Other Within*, ed. by Eliza Kitis (Thessaloniki: Athanasios A. Altintzis, 2001), 56.

- (4) Indian restaurants and Balti houses → restaurantes indios y casas Balti  
 The British equivalent of "trick-or-treating" → el equivalente británico a "broma o trato"  
 Casa Consistorial → Consistorial House  
 Ensaladilla rusa → Russian salad

Borrowings also had a high rate of occurrence (24.37%), though in some occasions the procedure does not seem appropriate at all, as in the examples copied below in (5), in which *Britons* should have been translated as 'británicos', *knock-on-ginger* has no sense at all for TL reader, *chupinazo* could have also been amplified or described as 'burst of fireworks', and *buen tapeante* could have been translated using other options, such as 'experienced *tapa* eater' or 'real *tapa* connoisseur'.

- (5) For some hard working Britons → para algunos *Britons* trabajadores  
 Called, for some reason, "knock-on-ginger" → Llamado, por alguna razón, "knock-on-ginger"  
 El chupinazo del 6 de julio → 'The *chupinazo* of the 6th July'.  
 El buen tapeante desdeña la mesa → the *buen tapeante* despairs the table

As in the case of professional translators, students were also prone to resort to explicitations (14.37%), including an explanation of the ST term, as in (6a) below; and, to a lesser extent, they described the term without translating or using the SL linguistic element (6.87%), as can be observed in (6b). It seems that, when facing culture-specific terms, students do really know what they imply or denote, but cannot always find an equivalent term in the TL, so they tend to describe it.

- (6) a. Yorkshire pudding → el Yorkshire pudding, que es una masa horneada que se sirve tradicionalmente con el rosbif  
 Otros tienden a emocionarse al paso de la procesión de San Fermín → Others tend to get emotional as they see the procession of San Fermín, in which some platforms of the Saint are carried through the streets
- b. Mischief Night → la noche en la que los niños van a casas de vecinos y hacen travesuras  
 Salpicón de marisco → chopped seafood with onion, tomato and peppers

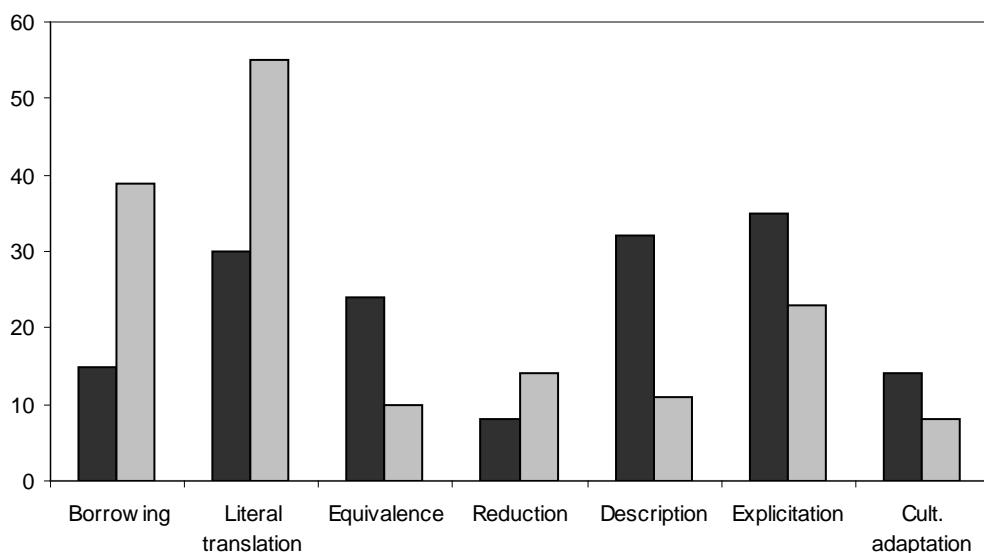
More than half of the descriptions and explicitations used by the students, however, were in footnotes or translator's notes, as can be appreciated in (7). Footnotes can indeed help readers to understand the SC but, when the translation is sprinkled with many footnotes, the end product may not appeal to the common reader:

- (7) a. Note on *trick-or-treating*: frase con la cual en la noche de Halloween los niños amenazan con una juguete si no les dan caramelos.  
 b. Note on *encierro*: Encierro refers to running of bulls through the streets until they are taken to the bullring.

Instances of reduction or omission (8.75%), equivalence (6.25%) and cultural adaptation (5%) were rather scarce. Omissions were normally used to eliminate elements that were problematic, thus, the terms remained untranslated (as in *también suenan el txistu, la gaita, las fanfarres y multitud de grupos* → 'you will also hear music groups of all types'). Equivalent terms were usually recognised as an established

equivalent in the TL, either by dictionaries or language in use (*House of Lords* → ‘Cámara Alta’). And, when using cultural equivalents, students replaced the SL cultural element with one from the TC that seemed to them as typical in the TC as the original term seemed in the SC (*you can find Indian restaurants and Balti houses* → ‘se pueden encontrar restaurantes chinos y kebabs’).

A summary and comparison of the procedures followed by professional translators and students is presented in *Figure 2*. The black columns indicate the procedures used by professional translators and the values specified in the shadowed columns correspond to students’ translations.



*Figure 2. Overall results of the procedures used by professional and non-professional translators.*

Although some procedures do not reveal significant quantitative differences between professional and non-professional translators—in reductions, explicitations and cultural adaptations, for example—, numerous differences between both groups can be detected in the frequency and distribution of borrowings, literal translations, equivalents and descriptions. Students too often had recourse to literal translation and borrowings (though there were also cases in which they took risks and adapted the terms to the TC), which means that most of them take a predominantly source-oriented approach to the translation of these cultural elements. Literal translations can also be found in the translations performed by professional translators, but overall their end products are evidently a bit more oriented towards the TC readers.

It is worth noting—that it does not follow directly from the quantitative results presented in the previous paragraphs—that both professional and non-professional translators reported to have spent about the same amount of time in performing their tasks. Whereas it would be expected that professional translators have more experience and, thus, can re-express thoughts in another language in an easier and faster way, the fact that it took them the same amount of time students took seems to evince that professional translators were more concerned with good results. As regards variations between direct translations and back translations no visible differences were perceived

in the type of procedures, despite the fact that translators find, as a rule, more difficulties involved in back translation. Finally, it is worth mentioning that in many occasions, there was not much coherence in the translation method used by the students: they translated several cultural terms having recourse, in the same text, to adaptations or cultural equivalents, as well as borrowings, thus combining indiscriminately a foreignising and a domesticating approach. In some other occasions, one could also discern that students seemed to focus only on translation problems (the cultural terms that had no equivalent in the TL), and neglected the coherence of text as a whole. Furthermore, in some occasions they did not seem to worry about syntactic correctness, which could also be interpreted as a symptom of their lack of competence in either the SL or the TL. Professional translators, on the contrary, seemed to focus on the text as a whole, producing a consistent text, that reads fluently, and seemed to check their TL texts with regard to their stylistic and text-type adequacy.

## Conclusion

As we have seen, translating texts that display features which are deeply bounded in a specific culture and a specific place is indeed an extremely challenging task which often poses insurmountable difficulties for the translator. Despite the fact that translators have been carrying out their task for more than two thousand years, scholars<sup>44</sup> continue to argue over the “impossibility” of translation. This is unquestionably the case when one faces texts that are strongly grounded in cultural references. Certainly, cultural differences often seem to resist translation. Yet, as discussed in this study, in order to tackle the difficulties and problems that cultural elements pose, a wide range of procedures are available to the translators. Pivotal as they may be in the process of teaching and training translators, these procedures are not the universal panacea. Studies on translation strategies have been questioned by authors<sup>45</sup> who suspect the nature of these procedures indicating that borrowings and calques, for instance, are not really translation “procedures”, while others (especially adaptation) are beyond the limits of translation, or simply claiming that there is no clear boundary between these procedures. Likewise, studies of this kind have also been criticised on the basis of their not being useful for the translator since, after all, they conform to the production of mere labels used to designate what translators reach intuitively<sup>46</sup>. Understanding and knowing when to apply such procedures, however, can be very helpful for students and, in fact, not only part of a translator’s competence but also a useful methodology<sup>47</sup>.

The results of the study show that in the case of professional translators there is a clear preference for the procedures of explicitations and/or amplifications, as well as

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<sup>44</sup> Julio César Santoyo, *Teoría y crítica de la traducción: Antología* (Bellaterrra: Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, 1987); Valentín García Yebra, *Traducción: historia y teoría* (Madrid: Gredos, 1994); or Suna Yifeng, “(Un)translatability and cross-cultural readability,” *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology* 20 (2012), 231-247; amongst other scholars.

<sup>45</sup> Hélène Chuquet and Michel Paillard, *Approche linguistique des problèmes de la traduction: anglais-français* (Paris: Ophrys, 1987), 10; Louis Kelly, *The True Interpreter. A History of Translation Theory and Practice in the West* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), 133; Robert Larose, *Théories contemporaines de la traduction* (Québec: Presses de l’Université de Québec, 1989), 18 ; etc.

<sup>46</sup> Kelly, *The True Interpreter*, 155.

<sup>47</sup> Hurtado, *Enseñar a Traducir*, 43-44.

descriptions, whereas in the case of the students there is a clear preference for borrowings and literal translations. One cannot, of course, extrapolate the results obtained here. This assertion seems both typical and topical; but it is true since, with all probability, results would have been different if we had analysed a larger number of translations, a larger number of informers, a larger variety of texts, or even if more languages had been involved. What seems clear is that whereas the translation of different “places” involves, in general, many challenges and problems for the translator there are still two main tendencies when approaching the translation of cultural elements such as the ones explored in the study, mainly local festivities and gastronomy. Undoubtedly, more studies need to be carried out in order to analyse specific instances and also specific choices made by professional and non-professional translators as they are challenged by cultural referents in their attempts to appropriately come to terms with the complexities of the translation of “place”.

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## Când depăşim granițele: traducerea referenților culturali în engleză și în spaniolă

Dat fiind că limbile se află în strânsă legătură cu trăsăturile specifice ale unui anumit „loc”, traducătorii sunt confruntați permanent cu problema depășirii granițelor lingvistice și culturale atunci când au de-a face cu particularitățile implicate ale unui text sursă. Dificultățile cele mai mari apar atunci când referințe specifice, strict anorate într-un anumit loc, fac aproape imposibilă redarea lor în limba și în cultura ţintă. Discutând tipologiile și clasificările termenilor specifici unei anumite culturi, articolul de față reflectează asupra principalelor procedee de traducere care pot fi folosite pentru a rezolva problemele ce apar la translatarea diferențelor dintre culturi. Concluziile se bazează pe un studiu despre alegerile lingvistice diferite pe care le-a făcut un grup de traducători profesioniști și neprofesioniști atunci când aceștia s-au confruntat cu texte caracterizate de prezența unui număr mare de referințe specifice unei anumite culturi.