

In search of culture non-specific linguistic mechanisms of language adaptation to external cultures

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For citation: Beloglazova, E. V. (2020) In search of culture non-specific linguistic mechanisms of language adaptation to external cultures. *Language Studies and Modern Humanities*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 5–11. DOI: 10.33910/2686-830X-2020-2-1-5-11

Received 12 October 2019;
reviewed 3 November 2019;
accepted 9 November 2019.

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Pedagogical University of Russia.
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Abstract. With English functioning as the global *lingua franca* of the modern world, actively employed to discuss, describe and promote all there is under the heaven, the paper focuses on the linguistic mechanisms of English “re-nationalization”, that is its adaptation to other cultures, originally external to it, which it might be called to describe.

Since the goal of this paper is to illustrate that the secondary cultural orientation of language follows certain general principles and the linguistic mechanisms are the same regardless of the culture being described, we left the culture factor as the only variable (Russian vs. Transoxanian region), restricting the empirical data to texts similar in genre and addressee (culturological research for relatively wide readership) and temporal parameters (time of creation).

The selected empirical data was then analysed on the phono-graphical, lexical and architectonic levels in relation to the way they are affected by the text's secondary cultural orientation.

The conducted comparison of two independent researches dedicated to the Russian and Transoxanian region's cultures revealed some striking similarities, which are by no means coincidental. Rather the results summed up in the present paper confirm our hypothesis that a language adaptation to the task of describing an external culture is based on certain strategies; at that both the scope of these strategies and the factors affecting their choice are universal and show no dependence on the culture being described.

Keywords: linguoculture, culturonym, xenonym, interlinguoculturology, loan, language adaptation.

Introduction

“No one needs to become more like Americans, the British, the Australians, the Canadians or any other English speaker in order to lay claim on the language. <...> English can and should be de-nationalized” (Smith 1976, 39–41), wrote L. E. Smith, the pioneer of the conception of English as an International Auxiliary Language (EIAL), thus recognizing the world's “globanglization” (Kabakchi 2012, 812).

Though the original impetus for the English language globalization resulted from its being used either by or in addressing its native speakers, it is currently non-native speakers of English that contribute even greater to its new status, widely resorting to it as a means of communication in all spheres.

Similar to the situation, described by Cicero in “The Speech for Aulus Licinius Archias”, when

“glory and fame” made users prefer Greek over Latin, today English is likewise to be preferred if one wants to address wider audiences.

At that the advent of English and its penetration into other linguocultures have brought about an anti-globalization sentiment on the part of those viewing globalization as a threat to local languages and cultures.

Thus the real-life intercultural communication found itself between the Scylla of globalization and Charybdis of anti-globalization, having, on the one hand, to admit the important role of English as an auxiliary international language, and, on the other hand, to take care to not only “de-nationalize” it, in L. Smith's terms, but to “re-nationalize” it, should such need arise.

In the present paper we shall focus on the linguistic mechanisms of English “re-nationalization”, that is its adaptation to other cultures, originally external to it, which it might be called to describe.

Theoretical framework

The above noted change in the language situation on the planet has naturally been attracting ample attention and is investigated from a variety of perspectives.

On the one hand, the spread of English and its coming in contact with a multitude of other languages resulted in the emergence of national varieties of English, the object of the “World Englishes” research program. B. Kachru, whose ideas laid the foundation for this research trend, distinguished three qualities of English, corresponding to its functioning in the society as the first language, second language and foreign language, which he represented as a Concentric Circles model (Kachru 1982).

The Inner Circle, placed by Kachru at the center of the model, is associated with the traditional standards of English (UK, USA), from where it started its expansion. The Outer Circle encompasses the nations recognizing English as their official second language. In the Expanding Circle English is not institutionalized and has no official status, yet it is more or less widely used, learned and taught as a preferred foreign language. There are naturally various gradations within these Circles, and the borderlines are by no means distinct.

Both the term itself and the graphic representation of the model emphasize the equality of the existing varieties of English, while also reflecting the origin and the history of the language diffusion.

At that, in contrast to the traditional view of language transfer as it is, held for example by R. Quirk, who understood “African English” as merely English “written in Africa by black Africans” (Quirk 1988, 234), thus denying it any norm of its own, for B. Kachru this transfer of English into a non-English terrain inevitably leads to “Englishization” of local languages and “nativisation” of English itself (Kachru 1994), with the hybrids gradually developing their norms or standards. This, in its turn, may lead to the problem of their comprehensibility by the speakers of other varieties. Z. G. Proshina even raises the question of there being a special kind of intervareietal translation (Proshina 2018). Thus we arrive at the paradox of language-mediator failing its purpose of mediating and requiring a separate variety to fulfill this function. Later models suggested by M. Görlach (Görlach 1988) and T. McArthur (McArthur 1987) both provide for such an additional variety, positioned in the center of their circular diagrams, with national varieties ‘radiating’ from it.

And it is exactly the international, standard variety, yet oriented towards various cultures that are originally external to the English language, that interlinguoculturology, the research program pioneered by V. V. Kabakchi (Kabakchi 1998; Kabakchi 2007), focuses on, since its object is the language of bridging the cultural gap, i. e. making a culture comprehensible to representatives of other cultures through the medium of EIAL.

Without going too deep into the theory of interlinguoculturology, let us briefly outline its main nodes:

- 1) Any language is characterized by functional duality, i. e. it is a means of communicating, but at the same time, being locked onto a particular nation or culture, language is a means of dividing peoples. Yet, this divide is not an insuperable one.
- 2) Language is originally meant to serve one culture, but can be directed to any other culture. I. e. a language can be used in either its primary or secondary cultural orientation.
- 3) In respect to language, all cultures fall into two categories — internal, i. e. the culture of primary orientation (e. g. the Russian culture for the Russian language) and external, i. e. the culture of secondary orientation (e. g. English culture); at that the secondary cultural orientation requires certain adaptation of the language — its enrichment with additional means of expression for cultural phenomena initially alien to it.
- 4) In order to describe unique cultural realia a language uses culturonyms, which are an integral part of its lexicon. Yet, a closer look at the culturonyms nomenclature reveals that they are not a homogeneous stock, but consist of three groups: (a) names for relatively widespread/universal cultural realia, characteristic of many cultures (e. g. ‘house’); (b) names for unique realia of the internal culture (e. g. ‘cottage’ for the Anglophone linguoculture); (c) names for unique realia of an external culture (e. g. ‘chalet’ for the Anglophone linguoculture).
- 5) Names for external culture realia — xenonyms — are a prominent feature of foreign culture oriented discourse. But they can be introduced in a variety of ways, differing in their two most essential parameters: (a) precision of nomination and (b) accessibility.
- 6) Taken that the named parameters are mutually exclusive, i. e. the most precise ways are those least transparent to a representative of another linguoculture, a combination

of means may be employed to make the description meet both requirements. Consider the example: e. g. (1) “There once was a rich Boyar, a Russian nobleman who was very mean” (MacLeod 2012, 3), where the loan ‘Boyar’ is accompanied by a short culturally neutral explanation ‘a Russian nobleman’.

Linguistic peculiarities of external culture oriented texts

Analysis algorithm and method

Foreign-culture-oriented discourse is, on the one hand, a distinct type of discourse, with its specific subject and linguistic features that this subject peculiarity enables; yet, on the other hand, we are dealing with a huge corpus of texts differing in terms of genre, type of addressee, particular culture they are oriented towards, and the degree of its familiarity to the Anglophone readership. The point is, there are many factors that might affect the particular discursive strategies employed by particular authors.

Since the goal of this paper is to illustrate that the secondary cultural orientation of language follows certain general principles and the linguistic mechanisms are the same regardless of the culture being described, we left the culture factor as the only variable (Russian vs. Transoxanian region), restricting the empirical data to texts similar in genre and addressee (culturological research for relatively wide readership) and temporal parameters (time of creation).

The selected empirical data was then analysed on the phono-graphical, lexical and architectonic levels in relation to the way they are affected by the text’s secondary cultural orientation.

Common features and principles of describing external cultures in English

Architectonic features

Peculiarities of the text structural organization are noticeable in certain relatively fixed genres. We shall consider culturological monographs, which are aimed at relatively wide, yet relatively knowledgeable audiences. Their culturological focus requires a certain degree of precision and orderly approach to the information provided. Yet, their authors strive to keep their descriptions as simple as possible, without overloading them with highly specific terms. The stated factors result in a rather peculiar structuring of the text into some predictable parts.

1. Having to deal with source data written in a language with an alphabet of its own, the authors face the problem of transliteration. It is indeed a problem, since there is a multitude of possible approaches (Kabakchi, Yuzefovich 2007a), and none of the existing systems has been universally agreed upon, which cannot but undermine the transparency and convertibility of transliterated culturonyms. Therefore, all descriptions that aspire to reliability contain an explanation of the adopted transliteration method (see example fragments 1, 2).

2. Having to introduce transliterated loans, even though sparingly, inevitably complicates the description for a reader with different cultural background. This motivates the authors to provide various appendices with reference information to explain alien notions. These sections can be structured alphabetically (see example 3), or thematically (see example 4). Sometimes, the two approaches can be combined, as is the case of the famous *Ten Days that Shook the World* by J. Reed.

E. g. (1) Note on transliteration, in (Levin 1996, XXIII)

Sound	Letter(s)	Example
“ch” as in Scottish “loch”	x	<i>baxshi</i> (epic reciter, healer)
	kh	<i>kolkhoz</i> (collective farm) [for Russian words] or Uzbek/Tajik words with conventional English spelling, e. g. <i>khan</i> (ruler)

E. g. (2) Note on transliteration

I have used a modified Library of Congress system for transliteration. Diacritical marks appear in the notes and bibliography, but have been largely omitted from the text so as not to distract the reader. Thus, “Tatiana” in the text becomes “Tat’ana” in the notes. Diacriticals in the text remain in Russian words discussed or given as examples; they are also retained in occasional transliterated passages that serve to clarify my translations. Finally, well-known names are rendered in their familiar transliterated form (for example, Yeltsin rather than El’tsin, and Yabloko rather than Iabloko) (Sperling 1999, IX).

E. g. (3) Reference appendix in: (Levin 1996, 289)

GLOSSARY

<i>abdâl</i>	A friend of God or fool of God; a dervish or ascetic
<i>aivân</i>	Covered porch or freestanding covered platform
<i>aka</i>	Older brother; suffix attached to personal name to show respect
<i>alap</i>	Improvised introductory section of an Indian <i>raga</i>

E. g. (4) Reference appendix in: (Sperling 1999, 281)

APPENDIX

Congress of Soviet Women	Age: “Unfortunately, we have few young people. Maybe 5% are women under 30. About 15% are women between 30 and 40. The rest are 40–60, with about 15% being over 60. Most fall within the age 35–55 range. Professionally, there are more white collar workers and intelligentsia than there are blue collar workers.”
Convention and Women	More than 56% of the women in the organization have a higher education. By profession they are in the defence industry.
Dzhenkub (Klub Delovykh Zhenshchin)	“Average age varies. There are some very young entrepreneurs, some are 23–25, already successfully in business...”

3. Pegging the description of cultural and social phenomena to certain geographical locations, the authors introduce their monographs with geographical maps as an additional means of explaining potentially unfamiliar toponyms. Thus, Moscow and St. Petersburg go without comment, while Tver is explained as “Tver, a city between Moscow and St. Petersburg” (Sperling 1999, 62); Ivanovo is provided with a similar peg “six hours northeast of Moscow (Sperling 1999, 22). The same strategy is employed in the description of Transoxania: “Kagan is about eight miles south of Bukhara” (Levin 1996, 98).

Phono-graphic features

As we have mentioned above, the authors face the problem of switching to another graphic system, employed within the culture being described. A certain mismatch between the alphabets necessitates introduction of polygraphs or diacritical signs, complicating the reading. These difficulties are resolved in the special section explaining the rules followed by the author. Since we are dealing with a written text, the authors usually follow the path of transliteration, i. e. letter-for-letter translation. Although transcription — sound-for-

sound translation — can also be given. Th. Levin takes pains to provide explanations beforehand in the “Note on Transliteration” prefacing the body of the book. Yet, in some cases a transcription is provided within the text itself: “Otanazar Matyakubov (At-a-na-ZAR Mat-ya-KU-bov), whom I shall henceforth call by his initials, OM” (Levin 1999, XIII); “*sâzanda* (pronounced “sazanDA”), the female wedding entertainer” (Levin 1996, 115).

Another aspect of graphic representation of external culture descriptions needs to be highlighted, and that is the specific function of italics and quotation marks, which are employed to distinguish xenonyms of various kinds. Their use is systematic. At that, it seems to require no special explanation, since both of the works analyzed in the present research follow this practice without any particular references or comments. It is easy to see the difference in the function of the graphical means discussed, when they co-occur in one context:

E. g. (5) the revival of the *zhensovety*, even “pocketed” (*karmannye*) or controlled as they were (Sperling 1999, 108).

E. g. (6) the design of the *mehmânxâna*, literally “guest room” (Levin 1996, 9).

E. g. (7) ... the subject of my dissertation, the Bukharan *Shash maqâm* (Persian: “six maqâms”) (Levin 1996, 9).

The fragments given above illustrate that transcribed loans are italicized; while calqued loans are indicated by quotation marks. At that, the source language is of no importance: the same practice is employed for loans from Russian, Uzbek and Persian.

Lexical features

As has probably become evident from the illustrations above, it is the lexical peculiarities that are most characteristic of the foreign-culture-oriented discourse, with all the other features aimed at facilitating the understanding of the newly introduced loans.

With culture as the object of scientific description the question of rendering cultural terms acquires paramount importance. On the one hand, a culture is unique through and through, and this uniqueness can only be revealed by means of corresponding culturonyms. On the other hand, using only the original cultural terms from the described culture will make any description unreadable. At this junction of two linguocultures the authors have to make compromises and work out a combined strategy to generate a description that would be reasonably precise and comprehensible. Thus any foreign culture description is doomed to hybridity — being written in one language and aimed at readership with one cultural background, it will have to introduce certain concepts of another culture coded in the language associated with it, since the language of description will only have means to express the concepts of its own culture, the use of which will merely lead to cultural concepts substitution. Unless spoof is the intended effect, it cannot be accepted as a satisfactory outcome. So loans are unavoidable. Yet, there is a choice of (1) the kind of loan, (2) the strategy of introducing it, and (3) the culturonyms that need to be introduced, while others would allow for approximate or descriptive treatment.

As to the first question, loans can be introduced by means of such techniques as transplantation, transcription, transliteration and calque. The former is of little use, when one deals with Russian or Tajik xenonyms, which, if transplanted, would not be readable to the Anglophone audience. Transcription is resorted to when the pronunciation is the focus of attention and the author wants the reader to be able to pronounce it, while transliteration may turn out to be confusing. So, though having a niche

of its own, transcription (at least in the data considered here) is merely a supplement to transliteration. Similarly, calques, being in general a self-sufficient mechanism of introducing xenonyms (consider such Russisms as “fellow traveller”, “permafrost”) in the texts under study are used to facilitate the understanding of transliterated loans, which only render the form of the original sign and are utterly nontransparent.

In this context let us consider the loan “six maqâms”, which is given as a calqued translation to explain the transliterated *Shash maqâm*. This example illustrates the limits of calqueability: the morphologically elementary culturonym *maqâm* cannot be split into constituent morphemes to be rendered individually, while its conceptual meaning is too culturally specific to allow for substitution by an English equivalent.

As to the second and third questions we have raised, let us once again consider the fragment with *mehmânxâna*, only in a slightly wider context:

E. g. (8) In these neighbourhoods, the Uzbek *nouveaux riches* try to outdo one another in the grandeur of their houses, particularly in the design of the *mehmânxâna*, literally “guest room,” where male guests (or women, if they are foreigners) are entertained (Levin 1996, 9).

The passage describes Uzbek cultural realia, yet there is only one Uzbekism proper — *mehmânxâna*. The concepts of Uzbek *nouveaux riches* and Uzbek houses are given in what is now English (heterogeneous as it is, featuring Gallicisms in abundance), with one notion chosen as the cognitive focus of the passage and introduced by means of a complex strategy, including (a) formal transliteration “*mehmânxâna*”, (b) calque “guest room” revealing the inner form of the culturonym, and (c) explanation of the cultural realia behind the term “where male guests (or women, if they are foreigners) are entertained”.

In the description of the Russian cultural phenomena a similar strategy is employed:

E. g. (9) In the Khrushchev era, miniature women’s councils (*zhensoveti*) <...> were established all over the Soviet Union. <...> Despite that fact, some activists regard the revival of the *zhensoveti*, even “pocketed” (*karmannye*) or controlled as they were, as having been significant, a symbolic movement toward a new phase in women’s organizing (Sperling 1999, 108).

The passage introduces the notion of Soviet “miniature women’s councils”. Initially presented

by means of the explicatory phrase, the author then introduces the xenonym “*zhensovety*”, the importance of which is evident from the fact that in the immediate fragment only it is used five times, and then five more times on the next page. However compact, the explanatory phrase would not tolerate so many repetitions.

Thus we see that the authors carry out a strict selection of culturonyms that are essential for describing a particular aspect of the culture in question. In the book by Levin these are all phenomena pertaining to music (the musical instrument *dutar*, type of performer *baxshi*, oral epic genre *dāstān*), in the book by Sperling — everything pertaining to life of women in the Soviet Russia (the club of business women *Dzhenklub*, women’s councils *zhensovety*, “gender-based policy analysis (*gendernaia ekspertiza*)” etc.).

Apart from these thematically key culturonyms authors may introduce certain other terms for both cognitive and stylistic reasons. Thus the passage (6)

is complicated by yet another xenonymic expression, describing the quality of these *zhensovety* — “pocketed” (*karmannye*). This is, apparently, of interest as featuring a culturally specific metaphor, being thus a key to the foreign mentality.

Conclusion

The conducted comparison of the two independent researches dedicated to different aspects of the Russian and Transoxanian region’s cultures revealed some striking similarities, which are by no means coincidental. Rather, results summed up in the present paper confirm our hypothesis that a language adaptation to the task of describing an external culture is based on certain strategies; at that both the scope of these strategies and the factors affecting their choice are universal and show no dependence either on the culture being described, or, if we can bring forth another hypothesis, on the language of description.

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