

Alien reality in source text and its reflection in translation

Georgiy Khukhuni^{1,*}, Svetlana Vekovishcheva¹, Elena Pugina¹, Tatyana Kholstinina¹

¹Moscow Region State University, 10A, Radio str., 105005, Moscow, Russia

Abstract. The present paper considers and analyzes one of the most controversial problems of theory and practice of literary translation. This problem is associated with the use and representation in a target text of lexical and phraseological units designating concepts or phenomena that are alien to a particular language and/or culture, within the framework of which the text is composed. Special attention is paid to the issue of the so-called foreignness of a concept for a primary and secondary audience, which stems from the difference in background knowledge of members of each audience in regard to the reality described in a book. The material for the study were fiction works of British writers of the 19th – the first half of the 20th centuries, as well as of Indian authors who either initially wrote in English or translated their own works into English, which was conditioned by the following aspects: 1. The existence of a plethora of colonies, people's life in which attracted the attention of a significant number of English writers; 2. The diverse nature of the lexical and phraseological layer loaned from other languages; 3. The existence of author's translations into English of those pieces of writing that were initially written in languages of colonized peoples, as well as of original books initially written in English by local authors. 4. A long-term practice of translating such texts into Russian that increases the relevance of the research into means and methods applied for conveying such culture specific concepts. The paper uses methods of philological analysis of an original text and its translation, as well as methods of their comparative study. These methods allow estimating the appropriateness and equivalence of cross-lingual communication.

1 Introduction

Issues related to the cross-lingual conveyance of culture-specific words and phraseological units, which are called realias in the Russian practice, are among the most frequently discussed issues in both Russian and foreign professional literature [1-5]. However, firstly, it was often remarked that this name is inaccurate, as far as realias in a strict sense are not linguistic units, but the elements of reality, while a translator deals with text units. Therefore, it would have been more appropriate to speak of words-realias, although it was acceptable to use the term “realia” as a conditional and simplified one [6]. Later, the above-noted semantic shift was firmly entrenched in Russian practice, so that the

* Corresponding author: taniasemina@gmail.com

term given became an inherent part of linguistics as well (“Realias are those words or phrases that denote objects, concepts, situations that do not exist in practical experience of people speaking another language” [7]). By this day, the well-known monograph of Bulgarian authors Sergey Vlahov and Sider Florin has remained the classical Russian language work dedicated to the set of issues related to the aspect under consideration [2]. This monograph is rightfully worth to be considered an encyclopedic work, covering various aspects of the aforementioned area. However, taking into account the specifics of various realias and related peculiarities of their representation when translating certain pieces of writing, a number of aspects that relate to the cross-lingual conveyance of the specified lexical and phraseological layer require further research. Among those aspects there is an issue of the so-called alien realias, which was partly addressed in the monograph, as well as in other studies, yet still cannot be considered fully covered.

2 Methods

Since the most frequently and in the most significant amounts realias are represented in fiction writings (it should be specified that we use the term “fiction” just to characterize a genre of a text under translation, not to make any evaluation), the main methods used in this article are philological analysis of both a source text (first of all, detection of units to be considered) and a target text (or texts if there are several versions in a target language) and their comparison. The latter allows determining whether the fact of communication of a culture specific concept is presented in a target text (its absence is qualified as zero translation), identify the way this communication was accomplished, the reasonability of applying a particular method of representation, and the role played by resolution of this issue in the general characteristic of the appropriateness and equivalence of a target text to a source one (for differences between these concepts, see [1, 7,8] and other works).

3 Materials and result of research

An author usually has to deal with alien culture specific concepts (as far as this refers to a source text), when he or she being a part of a certain culture and using a certain language, addresses topics related to the life and activities of people belonging to another culture and using a different language. It should be emphasized that, since despite their close interconnection language and culture are not equal, the following question seems controversial: does the relative unity of a language entail the possibility of existence of a common culture shared by groups of people using it? (this possibility is described, in particular, in [9]). However, this question is not the subject of this paper. On the other hand, the “domestic/alien” opposition may be deemed having a relative nature: locally, Scottish is often opposed to English (particularly, in terms of the presence of culturally marked vocabulary and phraseology), while in relation to, for instance, continental Europe they speak of realias of the British life, which are also reflected in the language. Moreover, the degree of “alienness” itself concedes a certain gradation: realias presented in Indian idioms are alien to both English and Russian. However, in most cases, an average Briton (the concept is apparently conditional) has heard of them more than a Russian reader of approximately the same educational level, i.e. who is not an expert in Indian culture [10], while, realias of the North Caucasus peoples are more familiar to Russians than to Britons. Since we consider cases where English is the source language and Russian is the target language, we addressed the works of British authors of the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries, as well as of Indian authors who initially wrote in English or translated their works into it, which was conditioned by the following aspects: 1. The existence of a

plethora of colonies, people's life in which attracted the attention of a significant number of English writers; 2. The diverse nature of the lexical and phraseological layer loaned from other languages; 3. The existence of author's translations into English of those pieces of writing that were initially written in languages of colonized peoples, as well as the presence of original books initially written in English by local authors. 4. A long-term practice of translating such texts into Russian that increases the relevance of the research into means and methods applied for communication of such culture specific concepts. As long as, first, India was the most important and the best-known British colony among readers (which was noted by Edward Said in his famous, yet highly controversial work [11]) and, second, a significant share of works devoted to a reality, which was exotic for a British reader, accounted for this land, therefore Indian pieces of writing appear to be the most favorable material for our study.

4 Discussion

4.1 Alien and mastered realia

When considering the issue of essence of an "alien realia" concept in the context of writings under consideration, a number of quite complicated aspects have to be taken into account. First of all, there is a question of how the situation with so-called "mastered realias" is. When studying "Indian" texts written by British authors (which implies that these texts contained some amounts of Indian realias), one should not ignore, on the one hand, a phenomenon existed in colonized India and known as the Anglo-Indian Dialect, which encompassed a number of idioms that had certain features distinguishing them both from the mother country's language and from each other. This phenomenon is sometimes defined as *an umbrella term* (see [12, 13]). On the other hand, one should consider the fact that many of lexical units used (which were mainly realias) that had been mastered by authors, whose biography and creativity were closely linked to India, and therefore were no longer "alien" for them (Rudyard Kipling is the first of such authors to mention) could require explanations (sometimes very detailed) for those residents of the British Isles who did not have such experience. This is evidenced, in particular, by the existence of a copious Anglo-Indian dictionary, which was first published in 1886 and since then has been several times reissued [14].

4.2 Common Indian and local realias

Speaking of lexical and phraseological means used in English books about India, the following fact should be taken into account. As was noted by many authors, the corpus of words and (less often) set phrases attributed to "Indian realities" largely consists of units that etymologically do not refer to Indian idioms themselves, but to loanwords from different languages: Arabic, Persian, Portuguese and others. In other words, this term is used in the linguacultural meaning rather than in the linguistic one. At the same time, since authors who wrote in English used realias from different languages (Hindi, Bengali, Telugu, Tamil, etc.) depending on a location described in a particular book and on characters' ethnicity, it is also advisable to consider the layer of realias that are inherent in a certain locality and ethnolinguistic community and indicate certain local specifics rather than common Indian specifics. To indicate such realias, it seems appropriate to use the term "localism", which has been used for a long time, yet still has not got a clear definition (see below for more details).

4.3 The place and role of Indian realias in writings of British authors and communication of them in translation

As noted above, realias that reflect life and activities of peoples of India are widely represented in English literature of the period under consideration. However, it is obvious that they perform functions of different significance in the corpus of texts that we have selected. We have conventionally distinguished the following groups:

1. Texts written by those authors who were strongly connected to India at a certain period of their life (sometimes from the moment of their birth), worked in this country and were familiar with life they described (which, however, did not ensure objectivity of covering this life). The first name coming to mind in this regard is Rudyard Kipling with a plethora of his writings (novel *Kim* and a number of his short stories). They obviously contain quite large amounts of realias, and their adequate representation within interlanguage communication is considered one of the most important components of assessing the degree of a translation's equivalence and general correspondence to a source text. However, as far as this issue was monographically investigated by one of the authors of the present paper in their candidate thesis [15], we decided not to consider it thoroughly in this work.

2. Books written by those authors who became acquainted with India having been already adult, treated this land warmly and as previous authors had experience of interaction with local people, yet to a lesser extent. The example is Edward Morgan Forster, whose most famous novel *A Passage to India*, unlike Kipling's works, deservedly acquired an anticolonial fame (he also wrote an unfinished novel *The Hill of Devi* (about it, see [16]), but we do not have any information about its translation into Russian). Nevertheless, despite the ideological antagonism, one can speak of a certain similarity of the lexical and phraseological means they used to create local flavor. Moreover, just like Kipling in his books, Forster often introduced them without any additional explanations on the expectation of relevant background knowledge possessed by his (i.e. British) audience, which, as we already know, was quite reasonable. It should be noted that while Rudyard Kipling, despite his reputation of a "bard of British imperialism", was published in the USSR quite often, a soviet reader's knowledge of the "anti-colonial" novel of Edward Morgan Forster was limited to two translations published in 1926 and in 1937 respectively ([17,18]). Given the then-people's level of acquaintance with eastern countries in general and India in particular, it should probably be admitted that those translations met readers' needs. However, in some cases, the lack of a translator's knowledge about realias – elements of life – badly affected the communication of those realias – linguistic units designating them. One of the most characteristic cases is the example with the phrase *cut the tazia short*, which in one of translations is represented as "подрежем дерево" (cut a tree short) [17], while in the other as "подрезать тацию" (cut the tazia short) [18]. Since this text section refers to a religious mystery performed in commemoration of the death of the Shiite imam al-Husayn (for details, see [19]), and the lexeme *tazia* may denote both the procession and the structure symbolizing the tomb of the murdered grandchildren of the prophet Muhammad (which is mentioned above in the source text – *tomb of the grandson of the Prophet*, and in both target texts – "могила внука Пророка"), then the considered phrase probably means that the procession should be shortened in order to avoid possible incidents.

3. Texts which were seasoned with India-related details, since their authors wanted to add some "exotic zest" into English reality. Here the following ironic remark of Ilya Ehrenburg may be recalled: "Indians love spicy food, especially curry sauce: it is made from bitter capsicum, saffron, cardamom and other spices. English food, as you know, is extremely tasteless, but sometimes the English having eaten a virtuous oatmeal porridge and cabbage pudding eat hot curry. For many Europeans, India was just such a spicy sauce"

[12]. Probably, to some extent, India-related inclusions played the same role in some books of sir Arthur Conan Doyle. For the present research, we will focus on his story *The Sign of Four* – the most famous of such books of his. [20] Although the scene is laid in London, the plot is about the struggle for treasures of an Indian raja. There is also a story about the preceding events, particularly about the famous revolt of sepoys in 1857 - 1859, which was told by one of the book characters – convict Jonathan Small, and which takes a significant part of the book. On the other hand, when describing the house where Mr. Sholto, the son of a man whom Jonathan considers guilty of his misfortunes, lives, the author plentifully describes Indian décor: from the surrounding stuff to Small's servants. Within a process of cross-lingual conveyance of such a text, a question of reflecting such décor in the translation obviously arises (in this case, it is assumed that at the level of comprehension there would be no misunderstandings unlike in the previous example).

It is commonly considered that omission of a realia (zero translation) or its inaccurate communication using either a functional analogue or a hypernym, i.e. generalization in translation (opposite cases of replacing a generic concept with a specific one are less common and are not considered in this paper, as it was multiply noted [1]), can occlude keeping national and cultural specificity of a source text and its literary stylistics. However, a case when a target text is congested with exotic words that sometimes require long explanations and clarifications is also traditionally considered a negative phenomenon, since it adversely affects a reader's perception. Perhaps, this fact predetermined the attitude of a translator to the translation of the word *khitmutgar*, which is encountered several times in the description of Mr. Sholto's household. The word is twice translated into Russian as “слуга-индус” (Hindu servant): (taking the old *khitmutgar* / взяв с собой старого слугу-индуса; his sons and *khitmutgar* / его сыновья и слуга-индус); but in the third fragment this lexical unit is just omitted (Show them to me, *khitmutgar* / Проводите их ко мне) [28, 24]. Such a generalization seems inaccurate, since the word *индус* (*Hindu*) has been long meaning a citizen of India practicing Hinduism. However, at the beginning of the 20th century the word was often considered as an ethnonym that does not refer to religious affiliation, which is reflected in the above-mentioned book of Ilya Ehrenburg, who recalls precisely this era: “When I was a child, I read about the unrest in India and always thought: could it be that the Indians, or, as we then called them, the Hindu, would not achieve their liberation” [21].

The translator's refusal of “exotization” of the text in the following case: at the bottom of a steep nullah / На дне глубокого овара [20,22] – is also quite understandable. Of course, this word sounds quite natural if said by a Briton who stayed in India for a long time, but in the Russian text it would sound like an intentional easternization (although in terms of equivalence, it would be more accurate to refer to the bottom of a dried riverbed).

The situation is deemed slightly different when the translator applied this kind of “derealization” in relation to the nickname *Pandy* used in Small's story (cleared the Pandies away / выгнали из города всех мятежников) [20,22], because this lexical unit contemptuously designated rebellious sepoys, since among them there were many representatives of this type of brahman varna [23]. Such a use of words is rather peculiar for verbal characterization of a person who participated in the combat against them, so the elimination of it smooths out the ethno-cultural and temporal zest of the book.

4.4 "Domestic and alien" in English-language texts of Indian authors

As noted above, besides the British authors, who somehow described Indian life in their works, many Indian writers (of different ethnicity) used and go on using the English language. It should be said that Russian writers who occasionally addressed this topic (especially during the Soviet period) deemed such Anglophilia exclusively a relic of the

colonial era. Ilya Ehrenburg, who visited India in the mid-50s, said the words that considered featuring: “There are also writers who are still forced to write in English, although it is understood only by one hundredth of the population; in their novels, Punjabi peasants or Calcutta weavers speak the language of Oxford students, in which the words Bengali or Urdu are inserted” [21]. It is unlikely that “forced” is an appropriate word in this case, since neither during the colonial years, nor after India gained independence anyone ordered them to use the English language in their writings. Oppositely, such major writers as Rajiv Rao (who, by the way, took part in the anticolonial struggle) and, in the second half of the 20th century, Salman Rushdie advocated the feasibility of using English as an instrument of creation (about this, see [24]). The Indian literature of the considered era experienced author’s translations as well. In this regard, let us recall the English version of *The Wreck*, a novel, the original version of which was written in the Bengali language. In both cases, a certain conflict arose between, on the one side, the cultural background represented in the book and, on the other, its linguistic form, and it is notable that it could be resolved in different ways. Speaking of the original writings, the problem of ethno-cultural affiliation of literary works written by Indians in English, as well as of the Indian writers themselves (see the above-mentioned opinion of Rajiv Rao, who drew parallels between the English language and Sanskrit and Persian that had been used earlier [24]), and of the researchers investigating the ethno-cultural affiliation, who proposed to use the term *Indo-Anglian* [25] instead of *Anglo-Indian*, is almost unambiguously resolved in favor of their attribution to the national Indian literature. The situation concerning author’s translations is more complicated. On the one hand, they were largely oriented towards a British (more broadly: western) audience, since for the domestic one original texts had already existed. On the other hand, given the multilingualism inherent in India, a text written, for instance, in Bengali, was not always perceivable for native speakers of any of the Dravidian languages. In this regard, the English version of a text could be addressed to a domestic, Indian reader belonging to a different ethnic group.

4.5 Tamilized English in works of R.K. Narayan and its reflection in translation

Characterizing the work of R.K. Narayana, the attention is usually payed to two distinguishing aspects. On the one hand, he left a significant oeuvre, which was completely written in English. On the other hand, his writings are so rich of details of Tamil life (often without taking into account English readers being unacquainted with them), that one of the researchers deems them the main instrument of “Indianization” of English turning the language of this writer into a wonderful example of representing life, culture and psychology of the country where English is a foreign language [26].

The aforesaid brings us back to the problem of the correlation of common Indian and local realias, which was raised in clause 4.2, since it is clear that the latter ones could not be reflected in any form on the pages of their writings. For an Indian reader (not only a Tamil-speaking one), the identification of both types of realias probably will not cause any particular difficulties: having met the word *dhobi* (a member of the caste whose representatives wash clothes) in the text, they will not see any specific Tamil localism in it, while, for instance, the words *pyol school* or *jutka* will be perceived by them precisely as Tamil localisms. The situation is different if speaking of a Russian, as well as, perhaps, any other reader, who does not have relevant background knowledge, and this fact surely should be taken into account when translating.

For example, in the middle of the 20th century, when translating *The Guide* – one of the most famous novels of R.K. Narayan [14] (published in Russian in the early 60s with the title “Святой Раджу” (Saint Raju) [27]), Nina Demurova adequately translated the

“common Indian” realias presented in the book, using widely diverse methods. For instance, to represent the lexical unit *dhobi*, she used transcription / transliteration *дохоби* supplemented by the comment; the translation of the unit *jaggery* was performed using descriptive translation *пальмовый сахар* (palm sugar); for *mohur tree* the equivalent *райское дерево* (paradise tree) was chosen, etc. Essentially, the above-mentioned lexical units that have the Tamil ethno-cultural component were also translated by means of descriptive translation and generalization: It was what is called a *pyol school* / Она относилась к числу так называемых галерейных школ; he <...> haggled with the one-horse *jutka* / он <...> спешит рядиться с владельцем одинокой повозки. These fragments clearly do not have any local specificity for a Russian reader; however, it is unlikely that keeping these localisms would contribute to the adequacy of the translation.

4.6 Rabindranath Tagore: author and translator of his own writings

Rabindranath Tagore’s autotranslations, especially of the poetic writings, take a big part in his diverse activities. This point has been stated many times in the professional literature, where the main reason of those incentivized him to translate his own writings is called the desire to acquaint foreign readers with his oeuvre. He is also known for his theoretical statements about translation (their analysis is presented in [28]). However, the particular interest for the purposes of our work is attracted by his experience of translating his novel *The Wreck* [29,30].

Characterizing the result obtained, the researchers who investigated this issue mentioned two conflicting points. On the one hand, a translator is traditionally obligated to achieve the adequacy of translation to a source text (such concepts as dynamic equivalence or scopus theory, where the latter is interpreted differently, are not the subject of this paper). On the other hand, since in such a case the literary copyright belongs to a translator, then they, at least formally, can convey their text as they see fit, without fear of being blamed for “distorting the idea of the original text” and “distorting the language and style of the writer”. Since the classic Indian writer did not tend to overestimate background knowledge about Indian culture of readers not related to his country, then, as it was mentioned by experts, the English version of his book turned out to be largely, sort of, neutralized in terms of Indian realias: *zamindars* turned into *landowners*, *shasters* into *scriptures*, etc. As a result, a paradoxical situation occurred: when this book was translated into Bulgarian in the middle of the twentieth century (as far as there were no experts in the Bengali language, it was the English version that was used as a source text), Sider Florin, the translator, straightened out “Europeanized” elements, i.e. “Bengalized” the text according to the Russian translation, having preferred the foreign version to the author’s one [4].

5 Conclusion

The analysis performed allows drawing up the following conclusions. Speaking of alien (Indian) realias, that were used in English-language literary writings of the 19th – the first half of the 20th century, it is necessary to take into account, on the one hand, the significant number of mastered realias among them (primarily, since this refers to idioms covered by the concept of Anglo-Indian Dialect), on the other hand, the use of the English language both by British writers and by representatives of the peoples of India, who used it both when writing their original literary works and, as for the latter ones, when translating their own works from their native languages. Speaking of the first group of writers, one can distinguish among them those who was closely related to India (Rudyard Kipling), and those who became acquainted with the country in their adulthood (Edward Morgan

Forster), as well as those who introduced such lexical units as exoticisms into their texts that were quite shallowly connected to India (Arthur Conan Doyle). When referring to the oeuvre of Indian writers, one can observe, on the one hand, the tendency to fill texts with such words, that are part of not only a “common Indian”, but also local vocabulary (Tamil elements in writings of R.K. Narayan), and on the other hand, the desire to smooth out the ethno-cultural zest and make text more understandable for an average European reader, which might be considered quite controversial (Rabindranath Tagore’s autotranslations).

References

1. V.S. Vinogradov, *Vvedeniye v perevodovedeniye* (M., Izdatel'stvo instituta obshchego i srednego obrazovaniya RAO, 2001)
2. S. Vlachov, S. Florin, *Neperevodimoye v perevode* (M., Vysshaya shkola, 1986)
3. N.K. Garbovskiy, *Teoriya perevoda: Uchebnik* (M., Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 2004)
4. S. Florin, *Muki perevodcheskiye* (M., Vysshaya shkola, 1983)
5. D. Bellos, *Is That a Fish in your Ear? Translation and the Meaning of Everything* (London, Penguin Books, 2011)
6. A.V. Fedorov, *Osnovy obshchey teorii perevoda* (M., Vysshaya shkola, 1983)
7. L.L. Nelyubin, *Tolkovyy perevodovedcheskiy slovar'* (M. Flinta, Nauka, 2003)
8. V.N. Komissarov, *Sovremennoye perevodovedeniye. Kurs lektsiy* (M., ETS, 2000)
9. *Velikobritaniya. Lingvostranovedcheskiy slovar'* (M., OOO «Izdatel'stvo Astrel'», 2001)
10. V.S. Modestov, *Khudozhestvennyy perevod: istoriya, teoriya, praktika* (M., Izdatel'stvo Literaturnogo instituta im. A.M. Gor'kogo, 2006)
11. E. Said, *Orientalism. Pantheon Books XIV*, 370 (1978)
12. B. Kachru Braj, *Asian Englishes: Beyond the Cannon* (Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 2005)
13. J. Spencer, *The Anglo-Indians and their Speech. A Socio-Linguistic Essay. Lingua 16* (North-Holland Publishing Co. Amsterdam, 1966)
14. Tagore Rabindranath, *The Wreck* (Rupa Publications, 2003)
15. Ye.Y. Pugina, *Indiyskiye realii v angloyazychnom khudozhestvennom tekste i problema ikh peredachi na russkiy yazyk: Na materiale tvorchestva R. Kiplinga* (M., 2005)
16. Roy Ashish, *Criticism* **36(2)**, 265 (1994)
17. E.M. Forster, *Poyezdka v Indiyu: Roman* (L., Goslitizdat, 1937)
18. Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes* (New-York, Penguin Books, 1983)
19. *Islam Entsiklopedicheskiy slovar'* (M., Nauka. Glavnaya redaktsiya vostochnoy literatury, 1991)
20. R.K. Narayyan, *Svyatoy Radzhu* (M., Goslitiizdat, 1961)
21. I.G. Erenburg, *Indiyskiye vpechatleniya*, <http://nippon-history.ru/books/item/f00/s00/z0000016/st002.shtml>
22. M.A. Forster Edward, *Passage to India*, https://bookscafe.net/read/forster_edward-a_passage_to_india-198299.html#p1
23. A. Konan Doyl', *Znak chetyrekh. Sobr. soch. v 8 tomakh* (M., Pravda, 1966)

24. D. Crystal, *English as a Global Language* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010)
25. *Indian English Literature* (Rai Technological University) http://164.100.133.129:81/econtent/Uploads/Indian_english_literature.pdf
26. Ejaz Alam, *Indian fiction in English. Roots and Blossoms* (2007)
27. E.M. Forster, *Poyezdka v Indiyu (Istoriya odnogo prestupleniya): Roman* (M., M. i S. Sabashnikovy, 1926)
28. H. Yule, A.C. Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson. The Anglo-Indian Dictionary* (Ware, Hertfordshire, Wordsworth Edition. LTd, 1996)
29. Subhas Chandra Dasgupta, *Rabindranath Tagore and Translation Studies. Translation Journal* (2018) <https://translationjournal.net/October-2018/rabindranath-tagore-and-translation-studies.html>
30. Narayan Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer, *The Guide. Indian Thought Publications* (London, Mysore Methuen&Company LTd, 1958)