

TRANSLATING FRENCH CULTURE-SPECIFIC ITEMS IN JULIAN BARNES'S *FLAUBERT'S PARROT*

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Abstract. *This paper discusses the process of translating what are probably the most challenging elements of any text for translation – culture-specific items. It focuses on Flaubert's Parrot, the breakthrough novel of the contemporary British writer Julian Barnes, and its translation into Serbian. This novel will be in our focus because of its particular cultural specificity – the dominant elements of culture in the novel are of French origin. In the close reading of the source and target texts of Flaubert's Parrot we will identify the French culture-specific items using a dynamic definition of culture-specific items based on work of the Translation Studies scholar H.F. Aixela. We will also seek to describe the procedures used for the translation of such identified culture specific items, classifying them in two groups – procedures for preserving cultural specificity and those for substituting it. In the end we will try to check whether or not the translated French culture-specific items retained their cultural specificity in the target text.*

Palabras clave: *Julian Barnes, Flaubert's Parrot, French culture, translation, culture-specific items*

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the frequently discussed features of Julian Barnes's fiction is its deep immersion in British culture, which he uses not only as a setting to paint characters and plots, but also as one of his themes. This is probably most obvious in his novel *England, England*, which deals with the issue of "Englishness" - "*explores, parodies and deconstructs those "invented traditions" known as "Englishness"*" as Vera Nunning put it, noting that Barnes self-consciously explores "*the question of how established versions of Englishness have come to be invented and upheld*" (Nunning 2001: 61).

It is not only British culture that Julian Barnes explores. Some of his short stories are placed in different backgrounds and deal with the cultures of Finland, Sweden and Russia, parts of his novels and short stories deal with American culture, and he has also

written a novel about the post-communist world, set in Bulgaria, and dealing with the typical issues all post-communist countries are faced with.

But, as many scholars have noted, there is one culture, besides British, that has a particular place in Barnes's fiction – the French culture. One of Barnes's first biographers and critics, Merit Mosley, for example, claims that one of the most persistent themes in Barnes's fiction is "*France and the English in contact with that nearby but ultimately very different culture*" (Moseley 1997:16), and that France "*and especially the relationship of English people to the land and the culture, have remained among the constants of Barnes's work*" (Moseley 1997:77). Along the same lines, Jason Cowly wrote that "*France, it seems, is the idealised Other against which he (Barnes) measures all other countries, including England, and finds them, by contrast, a perplexing disappointment*" (Cowly 2005: 4)". The novel in which this is most obvious is Barnes's breakthrough novel, *Flaubert's Parrot*, which Moseley described as "*a book entirely about France, set in France, except when it delves lovingly into the details of an Englishman's going to and coming back from France*" (Moseley 1997: 77)".

2. FLAUBERT'S PARROT

Flaubert's Parrot is an unusual biography of one of the greatest French writers, Gustave Flaubert, narrated by an Englishman who travels to France to establish the truth about the original stuffed parrot that Flaubert kept on his desk when he was writing his short story *Un coeur simple*. Several layers of the plot are set in France, giving us the story of Flaubert's life and the story of the quest for the parrot, and therefore it is not surprising that elements of French culture dominate the novel. Elements of culture, whatever their origin, have always been particularly challenging for translators and this paper seeks to explore what happened to the elements of French culture, as particularly important culture specific elements in *Flaubert's Parrot*, in the process of translating this novel into Serbian.

3. A WORD ABOUT METHODOLOGY

As we have already noted, elements of culture, or culture-specific items (CSI), as we will call them here, are among the most challenging elements for translation in any text. The same can be said about attempts to analyze them, mostly because it is not easy to define an exact unit for analysis, which one needs to have in order to obtain any measurable results.

In this paper we will start from the dynamic definition of CSI¹ provided by the Translation Studies scholar, Javier Franco Aixela (Aixela 1996:58) and define the CSIs in *Flaubert's Parrot* as those **items that can be identified in *Flaubert's Parrot*, by close reading of the novel and its translation, whenever they pose a problem due to the nonexistence of the referred item or of its different inter-textual status in the cultural system of the readers of the target text.**

¹ "textually actualized items whose function and connotations in a source text involve a translation problem in their transference to a target text, whenever this problem is a product of the nonexistence of the referred item or of its different inter-textual status in the cultural system of the readers of the target text"

In close reading of *Flaubert's Parrot* and its translation into Serbian provided by Nebojsa Palić, we will identify French CSIs in the novel and describe the procedures used for their translation. On the basis of the existing taxonomies of procedures for translating CSIs² we have developed our own taxonomy dividing the procedures in two broad categories – those for preserving cultural specificity and those for substituting it – the approaches most frequently labeled in Translation Studies as "foreignization" and "domestication" – the terms used by Lawrence Venuti (Venuti 1995). The procedures for preserving CSIs include repetition; transcription; non-cultural translation and inter-textual/extra-textual gloss, while the procedures for substitution of CSIs include synonymy; partial universalization; absolute universalization; naturalization; deletion and autonomous creation.

We will also try to describe the cultural specificity of the French CSIs in the target text – to see if they retained any French cultural specificity, became neutral or universal, or obtained a Serbian cultural specificity.

4. TRANSLATION OF FRENCH CULTURE-SPECIFIC ITEMS IN *FLAUBERT'S PARROT*

The application of the above methodology to *Flaubert's Parrot* and its translation to Serbian has provided us with some very interesting results, most notably the fact that although this novel is British, and written in English, the largest number of CSIs identified in it are of French origin. They are, in fact, three times more numerous than the British ones, and the reason for that lies in the fact that most of the novel's plot is set in France or related to France.

4.1. Personal and Geographic Names

Broader research into the translation of CSIs in the fiction of Julian Barnes³ shows that personal and geographic names are among the most frequent CSIs in his work. *Flaubert's Parrot* is no exception to that rule. It is abundant with personal and geographic names which are most frequently of French origin. Since the boundaries between fact and fiction are often quite blurred in this novel, it is no wonder that most French personal names belong to real persons, commonly writers (*Baudelarie, Rimbaud, Gautier, Victor Hugo, George Sand...*), historians (*Camille Rousset, Michelet*), artists (*Manet, Boudin, Ingres, Camille Rogier ...*), literary critics (*Sainte-Beuve, Alphonse Karr ...*) and persons from Flaubert's life – his sister, brother, niece and others (*Achille-Cleophas Flaubert, Anne-Justine-Caroline Flaubert, nee Fleuriot, Caroline Flaubert, Emile-Cleophas Flaubert, Jules Alfred Flaubert...*).

In the translation of personal names the most frequently used procedure is transcription. Thus, *Achille-Cleophas Flaubert* was transcribed in translation to *Ašil-Kleofas*

² See: **Aixela**, Javier Franco (1996), "Culture-specific Items in Translation" in **Translation, Power, Subversion** ed. Alvarez Roman and Vidal, M. Carmen-Africa, Multilingual Matters Ltd **Newmark**, Peter (1988) **A Textbook of Translation**, New York, Prentice Hall, p. 103; **Baker**, Mona (1996), **In other Words**, London and New York, Routledge, str 28; **Davis**, Eirlys E. (2003), "The Treatment of Culture-specific References in Translations of Harry Potter Books" in **The Translator**, Volume 9, Number 1, str.70; **Jovanović**, Mladen (1991), **Tehnika prevodenja, Praktični deo, Priručnik za engleski jezik**, Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, Beograd

³ This paper presents part of the results obtained while working on the doctoral dissertation entitled Translation of Culture-specific Items in the Fiction of Julian Barnes.

Flober, Maxime du Camp to Maksim di Kan, and Ernest Chevalier to Ernest Ševalje. There are certain deviations from this approach in the chapter *Braithwaite's Dictionary of Accepted Ideas* (Barnes 1985: 182 – 203), where the narrator lists the dictionary entries in alphabetical order and the translator, in order to keep the same order of entries, gives the names in the original first (the procedure of repetition) and then transcribed in brackets. Thus the entries: *Flaubert, Gustave; Jean-Paul Sartre; and Sand, George* are translated as *Flaubert, Gustave (Flober, Gistav); Jean-Pol Sartre (Žan Pol Sartr); and Sand, George (Sand, Žorž)* (Barns 1997: 161-168). In the translation of several dictionary entries in this chapter, the translator felt the need to become visible and to provide the audience with an explanation either in the text itself (intratextual gloss) or in a footnote (extratextual gloss). Thus, the reference to *Goncourts* in *Braithwaite's Dictionary of Accepted Ideas* is translated by a combination of the procedure of transcription and intertextual gloss as "*braća Gonkur*" ("*brothers Goncour*"). Combining the procedure of transcription and extratextual gloss, the reference to *Boudin* (Barns 1985: 94) was translated as *Bouden* and explained in the footnote as "*Eugene Louis Bouden (1825-1904), francuski slikar*" (Barns 1997: 87) (Eugene Louis Bouden (1825-1904, French painter).

Flaubert's *Parrot* also contains a large number of geographic names – of different regions of France (*Brittany*), villages and towns (*Graye-sur-Mer, Courseulles-sur-Mer, Ver-sur-Mer, Asnelles, Rouen, Mantes ...*) and streets and squares (*Place des Carmes, Champs-Elysees, Grande Rue, Place de la Republique ...*). Most of them are transcribed, but the translator also used some other procedures. In the *Braithwaite's Dictionary of Accepted Ideas*, for the same reasons as mentioned above, *Yvetot* (Barnes 1985:89) is translated as *Yvetot (Iveto)* (Barns 1997: 167), by a combination of the procedures of repetition and transcription. In the case of the geographic name *Ruddier of Chatillonsous-Bagneux* (Barnes 1985:2), the procedure of transcription is combined with intratextual gloss and thus the translation is *Livnica Rudije iz Šatijon-su-Banjoa* (the foundry Ruddier from Chatillonsous-Bagneux) (Barns 1997:8). Using the procedure of partial universalisation, the translator translated *Champs-Elysees* (Barnes 1985:56) and *Rue de Lourdines* (Barnes 1985:223) as *Jelisejska polja* (Barns 1997:56) and *Luinska ulica* (Barns 1997: 196), by naming them in Serbian and not in French as Barnes did. Nevertheless, these names still retain their French cultural specificity. On the other hand, *Grande Rue* (Barnes 1985:100) and *Place de la Republique* (Barnes 1985:128) are translated by absolute universalisation as *Glavna ulica* (High Street) (Barns 1997: 92) and *Trg Republike* (The Square of the Republic) (Barns 1997: 115) thus losing their French cultural specificity in translation.

4.2. CSIs Related to Cultural Concepts

These CSIs can be defined as elements of the text that are connected to certain concepts in the foreign culture (history, art, literature) which might be unknown to the readers of the target text. They are quite numerous in *Flaubert's Parrot* and they are all translated by the procedure of non-cultural translation, where the translator offers an accurate linguistic translation of the CSI but a full understanding depends on how much each individual reader is familiar with the source culture. Thus, *Capture of Mantes* (Barnes 1985:124) and *A plot on the life of Louis Philippe* (Barnes 1985:206) are translated as *Osvajanje Mantesa* (conquering Mantes) (Barns 1997:112), and *Atentat na kralja Luja Filipa* (assassination of Louis Philippe) (Barns 1997:181), which present faithful translations of the words, but the readers have to know a fair bit about French

history to really understand them. The same goes for the translation of the CSI related to a literary concept "*A fine example of the Flaubertian grotesque: it cannot help being serious and comic at the same time*" (Barnes 1985:55) as "*Lep primer floberovske groteske: ona ne može a da istovremeno ne bude i ozbiljna i smešna*" (a faithful translation of the words) (Barnes 1997: 55).

There are some occasions, though, in which the translator felt the need to make himself visible and provide his target audience with an explanation – gloss. Thus, for example, "*If you were a French academic, you might say that he was un symbole du Logos. Being English, I hasten back to the corporeal*" (Barnes 1985:10) was translated, using a non-cultural translation, as "*Da sam francuski akademik, rekao bih da je papagaj un symbole du Logos. Kako sam ja Englez, vraćam se žurno materijalnoj strani.*" (a faithful translation of the words) and added an extratextual gloss in the footnote: *un symbole du Logos: simbol reči* (the symbol of word) (Barnes 1997: 15).

4.3. Humour

We cannot say that *Flaubert's Parrot* is rich in verbal humour (puns and jokes), which is partly a consequence of the nature of its narrator – an elderly, serious doctor of medicine, quite unhappy because of a broken marriage and the suicide of his wife. However, those rare occasions where we can find verbal humor are rather specific and worthy of deeper analysis. Barnes sometimes skillfully combines English and French to produce absolutely untranslatable puns. He combines, for example, the word *ours* which means *bear* in French with the word *bear* in English and in the translation of sentences like:

Once you catch your bear, says the Macedonian proverb, it will dance for you. Gustave didn't dance; Flaubear was nobody's bear. (How would you fiddle that into French? Gourstave, perhaps.) (Barnes 1985:49)

The translator used the procedure of non-cultural translation and produced

Jednom kad uloviš svog medveda, veli makedonska poslovice, medved će ti plesati. Gistav nije plesao; Flobear nije bio ničiji medved. (Kako bi to izveli na francuskom? Gourstav, možda?)*

But he had to add an extratextual gloss in the footnote: **neprevodiva igra reči (engleska reč bear, kao i francuska ours znači – medved) – untranslatable pun (the English word bear, just like the French word ours means – bear).* (Barnes 1997:50)

He used the same procedure in translating the example of "*Rogier was calling him Crazy Bear*" (Barnes 1985: 213) as "*Rožije ga je nazvao ludi medved**" with the external gloss: **francusko prezime Folber zvuči na engleskom kao ludi medved* (the French surname Flaubert sounds like a «crazy bear» in English) (Barnes 1997: 188).

4.4. Parts of the text written in French

The most numerous French CSIs in *Flaubert's Parrot* are the parts of the text written directly in French. These are sometimes just isolated words inserted into English sentences like in:

"Flaubert found London scaring; it was so unhealthy city, he declared, where it was impossible to find a pot-au-feu. (Barnes 1985: 115)"

Or in:

"We are too impertinent with the past, counting on it in this way for a reliable frisson." (Barnes 1997: 129)

There is also a large number of titles of magazines, journals and literary works that Barnes gives in their original form – in French, like the magazines *Revue de Paris*, *L'Opinion nationale*, *Liberation* and *Le Presse* (Barnes 1985: 85, 59, 110, 213), and a huge number of titles of literary pieces (mostly Flaubert's) like (*Madame Bovary*, *Un cœur simple*, *L'Education sentimentale*, *Salamambo...*) (Barnes 1985: 11, 7, 4, 77), and other authors (*Les Fleurs du mal*, *Tentation de saint Antoine*, *Souvenirs littéraires...*) (Barnes 1985: 72, 171, 88).

Sometimes whole sentences are written in French without any explanation or translation into English, for instance, when he quotes the words of the parrot - '*As-tu dejeune, Jako?*'; '*Cocu, mon petit cocu*' and '*J'ai du bon tabac*', (Barnes 1985:10) or, Flaubert's words '*Madame Bovary, c'est moi*' (Barnes 1985: 95) and railway signs such as "*Ne jetez pas l'energie par les fenetres en les ouvrant en periode de chauffage*" (Barnes 1985: 128)

In translating the parts of the text written in French, the translator in several cases used the procedure of absolute universalisation, and as a result deleted the French cultural specificity in the target text. Thus he translated *cul-de-sac* (Barnes 1985: 133) as *slepa ulica* (*dead end street*) (Barnes 1997: 119), *chateaux* (Barnes 1985: 168) as *zamkovi* (*castles*) (Barnes 1997: 148), and *Rue de la Cigogne* (Barnes 1985: 95) as *Ciganska ulica* (*Gipsy Street*) (Barnes 1997: 146), which all became neutral from the aspect of cultural specificity.

However, in all other instances, the translator chose the procedures for preserving the cultural specificity of the source text. Very frequently, translating the CSIs written in French, the translator opted for the procedure of repetition. In doing so he put the readers of the translated text in the same position as the readers of the source text since they are not provided with any translation of such elements of the text in English either and their understanding depends on the level of knowledge of each individual reader.

However, there are numerous occasions where the translator felt that the repeated CSIs needed to be clarified and where he decided to add intratextual or extratextual gloss. Thus, *Tentation de saint Antoine* (Barnes 1985: 177) is translated by the combination of repetition and intratextual gloss as "*roman Tentation de saint Antoine*" (*novel Tentation de saint Antoine*) (Barnes 1997: 156), and "in his *L'Homme-Femme*" (Barnes 1985: 194) as "*u svojoj knjizi L'Homme-Femme*" (in his book *L'Homme-Femme*) (Barnes 1997: 171). In the same way "*clipped from L'Opinion nationale*" (Barnes 1985: 59) became "*isečena iz časopisa L'Opinion nationale*" (*clipped from the magazine L'Opinion nationale*) (Barnes 1997: 58) and "*He was working hard on his Bovary*" (Barnes 1985: 176) is translated as "*naporno radio na romanu Madam Bovary*" (Barnes 1997: 155) (he was working hard on the novel *Madam Bovary*), while "*Les Fleurs du mal*" (Barnes 1985: 85) is repeated and explained as "*Bodlerova zbirka Les Fleurs du mal*" (Baudler's collection Les Fleurs du mal) (Barnes 1997: 80).

It is quite understandable that intratextual gloss is not a procedure that can be used too frequently and that it does not provide enough space for any detailed explanation. That is why in the majority of cases the translator opted for extratextual gloss, as in the following examples:

Source text (Flaubert's Parrot)	Target text (Floberov papagaj)
<i>Un ceur simple</i> (7)	<i>Un ceur simple</i> (13) (footnote: siroto srce – poor heart)
' <i>As-tu dejeune, Jako?</i> ' and ' <i>Cocu, mon petit coco</i> ' (10)	' <i>As-tu dejeune, Jako?</i> ' and ' <i>Cocu, mon petit coco</i> '(15) (footnote: „Da li si ručao, Jako?" i „Rogonjo, čedo moje malo." – translation of sentences into Serbian)
' <i>J'ai du bon tabac.</i> ' (10)	„ <i>J'ai du bon tabac.</i> " (15) (translation of sentences into Serbian)
<i>Baccalaureat</i> (18)	<i>Baccalaureat</i> (22) (footnote: matura - graduation)
<i>Success de scandale</i> (19)	<i>Success de scandale</i> (23) (footnote: uspeh izazvan skandalom – success achieved through scandal)
<i>Monsieur Lheureux</i> (67)	<i>Monsieur Lheureux</i> (65) (footnote: <i>Gospodin Srečko – Mr. Lucky</i>)
<i>Ce terrible et sanglant steeplechase</i> (83)	<i>Ce terrible et sanglant steeplechase</i> (78) (footnote: <i>ta užasna i krvava trka sa preponama – that horrible and bloody hurdle race</i>)

The instances in which the translator used extratextual gloss in this novel are so numerous that it is hard not to draw the conclusion that by using them he puts the readers of the translation in a different position in comparison with the readers of the source text, since he provided explanations – translations into their native language – which the readers of the source text did not get. In this way, the translator has made it possible for quite a broad audience to have a better understanding of the novel without needing to find a French dictionary to check the meanings of certain CSIs.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion we can say that Barnes's novel *Flaubert's Parrot* is very specific due to the fact that, although it was written in English by a British writer, the most numerous and absolutely dominant culture-specific items in it are of French origin. These CSIs in the novel belong to a number of different groups. There are personal names, geographic names, cultural concepts, instances of humour and parts of the text (from one word to whole sentences) written directly in French without any explanation or translation into English. As with all CSIs, the French CSIs in this novel do present a serious challenge for translation. The translator in this case met this challenge by using different translation procedures (transcription, repetition, partial universalization, absolute universalization, non-cultural translation). The seriousness of the translation task is most obviously reflected in the fact that in many cases the translator could not do anything else but make himself visible in translation by providing intra-textual or extra-textual gloss, the latter being dominant. It is also worth mentioning that the huge majority of French CSIs preserved their cultural specificity in translation, which means that the target audience of the translation read a novel bearing the same cultural specificity as the source text.

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**PREVOĐENJE FRANCUSKIH KULTUROLOŠKO-SPECIFIČNIH
ELEMENATA U ROMANU *FLOBEROV PAPAGAJ*
DŽULIJANA BARNSA**

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Ovaj rad bavi se procesom prevođenja kulturološki-specifičnih elemenata u romanu Floberov papagaj koji predstavlja prekretnicu u karijeri savremenog britanskog pisca Džulijana Barnsa. Ovaj roman biće predmet naše pažnje zbog svoje kulturološke specifičnosti – dominantni elementi kulture u ovom romanu su, naime francuskog porijekla. Paralelnim čitanjem i upoređivanjem teksta izvora i teksta cilja – prevoda Floberovog papagaja na srpski jezik identifikovaćemo francuske kulturološki specifične elemente u ovom romanu i pokušati da opišemo postupke koji su korišćeni u njihovom prevođenju svrstavajući ih u dvije grupe – postupke za zadržavanje i za zamjenu kulturološki-specifičnih elemenata. Na kraju ćemo pokušati i da opišemo da li su prevedeni obrasci zadržali kulturološku specifičnost koju su imali ili su postali neutralni, ili kulturološki specifični za jezik cilja.

Ključne reči: *Julian Barnes, Floberov papagaj, francuska kultura, prevođenje, kulturološki-specifični elementi*