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INTRODUCING LEXICAL ELEMENTS OF KOREAN CULTURE (LEXICAL GROUP FOOD) IN THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF HAN KANG’S NOVEL “THE VEGETARIAN”

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Abstract: The Korean government’s policy is to promote Korean culture and literature. The article describes factors that stimulate penetration of Korean cultural elements into British cultural space and, in particular, studies the role of the English translation of a famous novel in introducing Korean lexis to English readership.

Keywords: inter-cultural communication, Korean food lexis, English translation, culture introducing factors

1. Introduction

Intercultural communication always develops based on a certain socio-political situation, which dictates the nature of communication, such as, for example, direct physical contacts, or influence of a more powerful or (economically) developed culture. In the case of British-Korean communication, important is its distant, non-contact character. The two countries are not only geographically remote from each other, but also, there are dissimilar in the type of their culture, language, and race. Objectively speaking, they could easily exist without any communication, which, of course, is hardly possible in the world of globalism. With the predominance of Anglo-Saxon culture and the English

language all over the world, contacts with the Korean side are non-symmetrical: the Korean authorities are actively promoting Korean culture, while the British side needs no special measures for promotion. The present article describes the communication situation and analyzes the role of literary translation in the introduction of Korean linguistic elements in the English-speaking cultural space. The importance of translation in this aspect is stated by N. Boldyrev, “The translation is a cross-cultural interpretation of the original text which aims as conceptual adaptation of described events and their judgements to the recipient culture” (Boldyrev, N.N., 2018: 37).

2. Objectives/Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to acquaint the reader with different factors facilitating the two-culture contact, analyze their transitory effect; explain why the word group “food” is chosen as relevant for the study; identify the methods that the translator chooses in interpreting food-related items in the text; and place the Korean food lexis in the context of English-speaking culture.

3. Methodology and sub headings

This study covers four distinct areas of analysis: 1) Managerial policy of Korean authorities aimed at the spread of Korean literature through translations into English; 2) success of Han Kang’s novel “The Vegetarian” in the English translation of Deborah Smith; the outstanding literary merit of the novel; the plot; 3) the British media laudatory reaction to the novel; 4) the lexical group “food” in the context of the novel; its functional load and the role of the translator in its introduction to English culture.

Each section requires its own methods of investigation: 1) reviewing English and Korean mass media publications; 2) literary critique of the novel’s structure, ideas, characters; 3) discourse analysis of English-language critical reviews of the

novel; 4) contextual and functional analysis of the group of words in the text of the novel.

4. Result/Findings

The complex multi-stage analysis of the translation of the novel “The Vegetarian” shows that cross-cultural impact should be viewed in a wider general context. Linguistic lexical items best of all get into a receiving culture or even borrowed in the receiving language on a welcoming wave, on the strength of supportive preparatory acts and actions. In the case of Korean-into-English introduction of cultural components, effective support comes from: a) the versatile Korean technological advancement in European countries; b) state institutions and funds promoting translation activity from Korean to other languages, mainly English; c) the success of the novel “The Vegetarian” in the English translation as a 2016 Man Booker International Prize winner; d) outstanding literary qualities of the novel; e) a chorus of praise from British literary critics; f) the importance of the “food” word group for the plot of the novel. Each of these factors is already a way of communication from culture to culture; as it is, acting together, they increase the impact.

The ultimate result of cross-cultural effect on the receiving language is borrowing of foreign lexemes into its vocabulary. There are several stages in the borrowing process, too. Now, we witness only initial stages, i.e. introduction of the lexis through the translated text, and introduction of its meaning and value to an English-speaking readership. The final “penetration” phase may or may not come; other extra-linguistic circumstances will have to facilitate it but the starting point is the translator’s representation and interpretation of the word group under study.

The translator had several translation methods in rendering and interpreting food words at her disposal and she has used each of them in varying degrees. Transliteration, naturally expected in a text like this, is used very carefully, for a good reason: a long list of unknown names of foreign dishes might produce an effect

of a menu in a Korean restaurant. Instead, the translator, Deborah Smith prefers giving a description and explanation of the dish or merely an English dictionary equivalent. In the context of the novel, it is important to give an impression of abundance of meat food opposed to scarcity of vegetarian food, which the translator manages to convey.

5. Discussion

5.1. Promotional state policy

Technological development of South Korea has long been accepted in the world, but the humanitarian aspect came into focus only in the late 1990s, cf. K-pop, K-drama or K-beauty. Korean president Kim Dae-jung, a Nobel Peace Prize recipient, a democratizer of his country saw a future economic potential of his country in the promotion of culture; he ordered to pay special attention to all industries of culture, which has drastically changed the cultural climate. On the initiative of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism the Korean Literature Translation Institute (LTI Korea) was founded in 2001. LTI Korea today is the most active agent in popularizing and promoting translation of Korean literature and disseminating literary translations in foreign, mostly English-speaking, countries (LTI Korea, 2016). The LTI Korea program includes various activities for authors, translators and publishers engaged in bringing Korean literary production to foreign markets. Also, LTI Korea organized educational programs, such as Translation Academy (2008), which had prepared over a thousand of literary translators by the end of 2017 (LTI Korea, 2018). However, the most important and fruitful LTI Korea project is offering grants to translators, who have a contract with a foreign publisher to translate a Korean book into world languages, preferably English (LTI Korea, 2016). The success of the project is difficult to overestimate.

5.2. Man Booker International Prize for Han Kang’s “The Vegetarian”, translated by Deborah Smith – a serious promotional factor

In 2014 South Korea was announced The London Book Fair Market Focus; popular media lists Korean authors worth reading; Korean names appear in important literary prize short-lists. To top all this, the collective effort of the translator Deborah Smith and the writer Han Kang in the form of the English translation of the novel “The Vegetarian” gets the 2016 Man Booker International Prize. This is a fact of paramount importance in the propaganda of Korean literature as contemporary, serious, and intellectual. When published, the book was met with rapturous acclaim (Yun, C., 2017). The success of “The Vegetarian” is, in part, a credit for LTI Korea, at least in the aspect of attracting attention to Korean literature. In fact, the translator Deborah Smith attributes her interest and the Korean turn in her translation carrier to some functions of LTI Korea; in press interviews, she mentions scholarships, grants, invitations to the committee of The London Book Fair (Lee, Y., 2015).

The novel consists of three parts, “The Vegetarian”, “Mongolian Monk”, “Flaming Trees”, initially published as separate stories in three South Korean literary magazines. Each story, different in style, has different narrators and a different emphasis. This paper, however, is concerned with the first part, “The Vegetarian”, since it is focused very much on the theme related to the lexical group “food”. The plot goes as follows: an ordinary, plain-looking very reserved young woman is married to an ordinary and rather unpleasant man. They live an ordinary well-organized routine life, which satisfies him [the narrator] perfectly as she is a good cook and housewife. Then, one day she tells him that she will not eat meat and will be a vegetarian because she “had a dream”. She never tells him what was in the dream but she is quite adamant. She empties their fridge of all food reserves of meat or fish or seafood. Once, at a restaurant, where her husband’s boss invited the couple to dinner together with other

guests and twelve magnificent dishes were served, she ate nothing but salad and a little bit of pumpkin porridge, causing uneasiness at the table. After that incident, the husband told his in-laws that his wife had stopped eating meat, hoping they would persuade her to change her eating habits. The whole family is ashamed of the woman. The husband takes her to visit her parents in the hope they might affect her but when her father hits her to force her to swallow some pork she snatches a fruit knife and cuts her wrist open. She is taken to hospital with her wrist wound, and her mother brings her meat broth lying that it is herbal medicine and persuades her to sip it. After she swallows a bit, she vomits. Eventually, she escapes from her ward and the husband finds her sitting near a lake on a bench half-naked, with her breasts exposed.

The narration runs slowly, in a matter-of-fact way, without much emphasis or emotion, which makes the psychological effect upon the reader even stronger. The main idea is – the woman follows her line unyielding to all kinds of pressure, even if her life is getting more and more the life of a demented person. It is evident that in the context of the narration the theme of food is of paramount importance, which explains the topic of the present study.

5.3. British public media reaction to the novel

The Man Booker International Prize is valuable in itself but its paramount significance is publicity, advertising and, thus, promotion. Of most importance are literary reviews that flooded after the publication of the book in English. The edition this study is based upon is accompanied by a great number of blurbs and review quotations to prepare the readers and make them enthusiastic about the book. We learn that the novel is “ferocious”, “astonishing”, “provocative”, “compelling”, “elegant-yet-twisted”, “gracefully written”, “beguiling”, “precise”, “spare” and “devastating”. British playwright and novelist Deborah Levy notes that “[the text] is written in cool, still, poetic but matter-of-

fact short sentences, translated luminously by Deborah Smith, who is obviously a genius” (Han K., Smith D., 2016).

Literary reviews, on the other hand, give critical comments on the quality of translation, accusing the translator of inaccuracy in rendering everyday realia of Korean life (Parks, T., 2016), paying tribute, at the same time, to the true spirit of the book and even some enhancement of it. “If Han’s sentences are like delicate lines scored with a cutting knife, Smith carves out deeper grooves with a chisel”. (Yun, C., 2017).

As a result of controversial opinions of critics, the book has attracted more readers and has got even higher acclaim of the public.

5.4. Translation methods

For the purpose of this study, we have compared the English translation of the book with its Korean original (Han, K., 2017). The Korean alphabet is very unusual for the Western perception, therefore various systems of transcription, or Romanization, were created, including the Revised Romanization of Korean, which is limited to the 26 basic letters of the Latin alphabet. Thus, we may use it for our convenience instead of the Korean writing system.

English dictionary equivalents

The majority of the food-related lexis in “The Vegetarian” is translated using direct English dictionary equivalents. The group of words involves simple names of the food (e.g. “milk”, “garlic”, “lettuce”, “ginger”, etc.), more complex names (e.g. types of meat, meat stock, consistencies (e.g. “powder”), etc.), compound names (e.g. Kor. *miyeok-guk*: *miyeok* – a type of seaweed, *guk* – a type of soup, trans. “seaweed soup”; kor. *sogogi-bokkeum*: *sogogi* – beef, *bokkeum* – stir-fry, trans. “stir-fried beef”) or other (names for the daily meals, utensils, etc.).

Transliteration and context

In the first part of the novel Smith rarely employs this method: we can only find four instances where the Romanized

Korean names for dishes were used. The majority of the names may arguably be considered known for an average foreign reader. The first of which is “kimchi”, the most basic traditional side dish made of fermented vegetables, which is eaten with every meal. Smith does not explain it and the reader has to rely on the context to understand these characteristics of the dish: it is mentioned several times throughout the text that the main character would eat nothing but rice and kimchi. The second term is “bulgogi”, or broiled meat. From the context, in which she recollects the time when she was chopping the meat, followed by her husband “sitting down for a meal of bulgogi”, the audience is also able to understand the nature of the dish, regardless of the way it is prepared. The third dish is “bibimbap” – a bowl of rice topped with sautéed vegetables, sauce and sometimes meat and egg. In this instance, Han herself describes the dish and lists some of the ingredients used for it – bean sprouts, meat, rice – therefore it is easy to understand for a foreign reader. The last name, “yuk hwe” (*yukhoe* – Kor.), conceivably the most obscure for the readers, although given by Smith transliterated, is followed by an explanation, “a kind of beef tartar”, which is not present in the Korean text. The heroine’s ignorant, very conservative father likes this dish most of all. This makes the name, which Western readers may perceive as “exotic” and somewhat odd and ethnic, sound ordinary.

Descriptive method

Some of the names for the food items in “The Vegetarian” do not have a direct equivalent in the English language. Smith describes such dishes without using too many words not to interfere with cohesion and readability of the text, which results in the translation that conveys overall meaning, albeit sometimes inaccurately. Usually, Korean names for the dishes translated by Smith using descriptive method have foreign (mostly Chinese) origins, and therefore are difficult to translate directly. For example, she translates Korean *tangsuyuk* as “sweet and sour pork”, or *kkanpunggi* as “chicken in a chili and garlic sauce”, both fairly

accurate descriptions of the dishes. Smith also implements descriptive translation if the words do not hold the same meaning when translated directly into English. In this case, Smith uses simplified translations commonly found in encyclopedias or on the Internet, like “stir-fried glass noodles” for *japchae*, “soybean paste” for *doenjang*, “seasoned vegetable side dishes” for *namul*.

Mistakes in translation

We have discovered, however, some instances, where mistranslations or poor choice of words result in a slight confusion for a reader. Smith confuses Korean *misu* powder (Kor. *misugaru* translated as “miso powder”) – a combination of rice and other grains which is added to water or milk, often with sugar, to make a drink – with Japanese *miso* – a salty savoury paste of fermented soybeans. In some instances, Smith’s translation conveys a meaning differing in English and Korean cultures: the word *jeon*, which she translates simply as “pancake”, in Korean is used to describe a variety of fried dishes usually made of seasoned meat, fish, seafood or vegetables with flour and egg wash. Although it is not uncommon to classify *jeon* as a pancake, this kind of translation evokes dissimilar association among English speakers. Another example of confusing mistranslation presents a description of the dish mentioned in a depiction of the important dinner at a high-class restaurant: “an exquisite dish of mung-bean jelly, dressed with thin slivers of green-pea jelly, mushrooms and beef”. The Korean *tangpyung-chaе*, translated by Smith as “mung-bean jelly”, is, in fact, a salad, part of the royal court cuisine, made with julienned mung-bean jelly, beef and greens. In this case, the dish loses its qualification as “exquisite” and rare. This detail is likely to mean nothing to an English reader, however, in terms of correct cultural introduction of the lexis this may be considered a misrepresentation.

“The approach to translation as an interpretive commitment is based on a theory of linguistic interpretation. It implies, among other things, the following theoretical assumptions: 1) verbal communication is, largely, an interpretive process and the lan-

guage performs cognitive and communicative as well as interpretive functions; 2) translation, as a means of cross-cultural communication, seriously depends upon the conceptual system of the translator, his encyclopedic competence, including cross-cultural differences” (Boldyrev N.N., 2018: 35). Although Smith’s translation may be flawed in some ways, she achieved one of the most important goals: producing a text full of distant cultural elements enjoyable and comprehensible for the English speaking audience. She did not overwhelm the readers with unfamiliar difficult-to-read words, nor explanations for unknown terms, yet managed to create a sense of something foreign by using some Korean names in her translation; and regardless of the methods she employed, clearly depicted the opposition between two sides of the conflict between the main character of the novel and her family, the rest of Korean society, in the form of meat food and vegetarian food. We may say that the translator’s cross-cultural competence has contributed to the success of the novel.

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“CAUCASIAN MOUNTAIN MAN / SCOTTISH HIGHLANDER”: CORRELATION BETWEEN SEMANTICS AND CULTURE

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Abstract: The research focuses on Russian and English concepts ‘Caucasian mountain man’ and ‘Scottish Highlander’; The comparative-contrastive analysis of the vocabulary definitions of the concepts under consideration is conducted, which makes it possible to build the lexical-semantic fields of both lexical items in Russian and English. This stage of research helps to turn to the linguistic-cultural fields of these concepts construction. All collected data are systematized in schemes reflecting the linguocultural differences and common areas.

Keywords: concept, lexeme, lexical item, lexical-semantic field, linguistic-cultural field

1. Introduction

Language is a system each level of which is characterized by an integrity and a specific organization of its homogeneous and interdependent elements. Basing on the works by N.N. Amosova, M.L. Apazheva, I.V. Arnold, Sh. Bally, L. Weisgerber, L.M. Vasilieva, V.V. Vinogradov, L.V. Shcherba, in this article, the lexical system is understood as *an ordered set of lexical units, correlated and / or opposed in their meaning and structure*. Particular attention is paid to such a characteristic feature of the lexical system as its correlation to particular extralinguistic factors (Apresyan, Yu.D., 1995).