KEY CULTURAL TEXTS AND TRANSLATION AS A CREATIVE ACT OF CULTURAL MEDIATION

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Abstract: The project aimed to underscore the role of language, rhetoric, and semiotics in both textual and non-textual communication, examining these concepts in their "initial expressions" and through their translations and reinterpretations across different languages and mediums. Translating cultural texts is among the most challenging tasks for a translator, as it involves navigating numerous cultural nuances and differences. Poetry, in particular, is the most challenging genre to translate. This research focuses on Antanas Baranauskas's lyrical Romantic poem *Anykščių Šilelis* (Eng. *The Forest of Anykščiai*), chosen because (1) it is a key cultural text written in East High Lithuanian dialect that portrays the former beauty of a pine grove near Baranauskas's village and its destruction under the Russian rule, symbolising Lithuania's struggles under the Tsarist regime and, (2) it is one of the most frequently translated Lithuanian works, with versions in 19 languages. The study delves into two English translations by Nadas Rastenis (1956) and Peter Tempest (1985), highlighting the different strategies each translator employed. The results of the study demonstrate that translation is never neutral; each decision made by the translator reflects both the original culture and the target audience's culture, resulting in a text that serves as a conduit for understanding across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Keywords: key-cultural texts; poetry translation; culture-specific realia; diminutives; dialect; metaphors

1. Introduction

Key cultural texts are works that hold significant cultural, historical, or social value within a particular community, often reflecting its core beliefs, values, traditions, and identity. These texts may include literary works, religious texts, historical documents, folklore, and other forms of artistic or written expression that are essential to understanding the culture's worldview and heritage. These texts serve not only as artistic or literary achievements but also as a means of preserving and sharing cultural legacy across generations and borders. These texts have to be fully understood and

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accurately translated to convey as much of the original idea, along with its intellectual and emotional connotations, as possible. It is easier to understand words and their meaning, than to fully grasp the culture from an inside perspective. A translator should be familiar with the customs of the country where the target text was written to avoid making mistakes during translation.

Furthermore, translating poetry demands extensive knowledge and high degree of creativity. Other genres such as drama, novel or fiction have their own structure. They have their own methods and clear ideas while poetry may have deeper meanings. The real emotion of the poetic text may not be clearly expressed as in other genres. The translator must balance fidelity to the literal meaning with preserving the emotional impact, aesthetic qualities, and stylistic nuances.

This study focuses on *Anykščų Šilelis* by Antanas Baranauskas, an exceptional 19th century Lithuanian poem, known for its unique style and fluent language, and regarded as a key cultural text. The poem is translated into nineteen languages including English, German and Italian. The poem consists of 342 lines, which is a difficult task to translate because of plenty of stylistic devices. There are two translations of *Anykščų Šilelis* (Eng. *The Forest of Anykščiai*) one by Nadas Rastenis (1956) and another by Peter Tempest (1985). These two translations were chosen to discuss strategies employed by the translators in their attempts to convey the true beauty of Baranauskas poetry in English.

2. The (Un)Translatability of Culture

A translator is the 'first reader' of the other culture as is shown in the foreign language text and, consequently, has to present *the other* in a primary process. The interest in culture and translation alongside with the attempts to discover (im)possible to find answers has been growing since in the publications by Susan Bassnett & Andre Lefevere (1998), Mona Baker (1998/2011/2018), Peter Newmark (1998), Albrecht Neubert (2000), Michael Cronin (2003), Anna Ginter (2005), Theo Hermans (2007), David Bellos (2008), Marina Tymoczko (2010), Anna Wierzbicka (2016), Susan Bassnett (2018), and Lawrence Venuti (2012 and 2018). These works witness the significance of and 'vulnerability' of the translation of culturally marked lexical items and attention to the semantic translation of culture specific aspects and cultural realia.

Though Bassnett claims that equivalence in translation should not be approached as a search for sameness, since sameness cannot even exist between TL versions of the same text (Bassnett 1980/1991/2002: 29), it becomes clear that it is very difficult to achieve equivalence or sameness between two languages. Some scholars, however, do not treat non-equivalence as a problem. For example, Annie Brisset (1996: 344) states that "although the target language cannot always provide equivalents of the source language, the absence of a target language, the language into which one translates, is not usually cited as a formal translation problem." The translators should find a solution how to convey the source text meaning to the target audience with no loss of meaning or stylistic or emotional effect when the target language lacks the equivalent for the original reference.

Thus, even though Newmark described fourteen methods for translating CSIs — transference, naturalisation, cultural equivalent, functional equivalent, descriptive equivalent, componential analysis, synonymy, through-translation, shift, modulation, accepted standard translation, compensation, paraphrase, couplet and finally notes — this study shows that the translator sometimes cannot find a completely corresponding equivalent for them in the TT. This is related to Roman Jakobson's (1959/2000: 114) idea that in translation "there is ordinarily no full equivalence between code- units." Jakobson (2000: 139) asserts that "all cognitive experience and its classification is conveyable in any existing language," but there is "ordinarily no full equivalence between code units." According to Jakobson (2000) the translator therefore works mostly in messages, not single code units.

Discussing the contexts of situation and culture with regard to translation David Katan (1999: 72 ff) refers to culture-bound meaning. He relies on Edward Sapir's statement that language has a setting and it does not exist apart from culture. Katan continues to discuss the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis in its strong and weak versions. According to the strong version, language dictates thought. This view, however, has been strongly criticised by Katan (1999: 74f) who expresses his doubts by arguing that if this were true, individuals, including translators, would be prisoners of their native language and unable to grasp concepts not present in it [their native language]. Contenders of the weak version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis find that language is a factor that influences our perception of reality, but is not the determining factor. One such way in which language can influence our perception of reality is in the lexica. Lexical and conceptual gaps are also not uncommon in translation. Katan (1999: 81) suggests in this case the following options: "The language can either borrow the language label, do without the concept, or invent its own label." Bilinguals often rely on code-switching in order to fill the conceptual gaps of one language with lexica of another. According to Katan, "…a translation will always be possible. Often circumlocutions or glosses will be necessary." Aside from the connection between culture and lexica, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis mentions grammar and patterns of language which are culturally bound.

Katan's (1999: 86) insight—that language's capacity to convey meaning is closely tied to culture, and that individuals (including translators) may not realise how their perceptions are limited by their own cultural lens—serves as a foundational perspective for exploring culture in translation.

3. Key Cultural Texts in Translation: the Lyrical Romantic Poem *Anykščių Šilelis* and Its Two English Translations

In early 19th-century Lithuania, literature was written in both Lithuanian and Polish, with Polish traditionally regarded as the primary written language. Gradually, however, more authors began to choose Lithuanian. In Lithuanian culture, Romanticism emphasised national concerns over purely aesthetic ideas. Key features of national Romanticism included a focus on the heroic past, folk creativity, the glorification of the native language, and patriotic ideals. These themes were especially prominent in the works of Maironis, Daukantas, and Baranauskas.

Baranauskas was a mid-19th century Lithuanian Romantic poet who studied in Europe, attending universities in Munich, Innsbruck, Leuven, and Rome. He was also a priest, bishop, linguist, translator and mathematician. Baranauskas aimed to prove that the Lithuanian language is also suitable for poetry. In the summers of 1858 - 1859, a hymn to Lithuanian nature was composed - a lyrical romantic poem titled *Anykščių šilelis*.

The poem draws attention by its unique and peaceful countryside views and beautiful nature. Nevertheless, the poem has incomparable names for the nouns which are laborious tasks for the translator. In addition, the poem has an enormous variety of diminutives, symbols, metaphors and dialectical variations which could have more than one translation.

In an attempt to compare the source text and the target text we may see that there are left gaps between two cultures. It is difficult to preserve the original meaning of the text, as diminutives are rarely used in the English language. The translator may not be able to express the folk sayings in a stylistically accurate way, but he strives to preserve Lithuania's national values, including its dialect, metaphors, and diminutives.

Diminutives are frequently used in Baranauskas' poem to evoke the vivid scenery of nature. However, translating the abundance of Lithuanian diminutives into English is a challenging task.

This is illustrated in the following example:

Table 1

ST	TT (Tempest)	TT (Rastenis)
Kur jūsų paukščiai, **paukšteliai[1], paukštytės**, Katrų čiulbančių taip ramu klausytis? Kur jūsų žvėrys, gyvuliai, **žvėreliai**? Kur žvėrių olos, laužai ir **urveliai?**	Where are your **birds and nestlings** to be found Whose chirping such contentment spread all round? Where are your **living creatures large and small**, The burrows and the **lairs that housed them all**?	Where are **the birds**, that built their nests here, Whose happy warbling was sweet to hear? Where are the **beasts and animals** brave: Where are their lairs – cavern and **cave**?

Source: A. Baranauskas (1859: 14) *Anykščių šilelis*; P. Tempest (1985: 1) *The Forest of Anykščiai;* N. Rastenis *The Forest of Anykščiai* (1956: 11).

From the Lithuanian perspective the source text is filled with diminutives to soften the tone, but this effect cannot be achieved in the same way in English. The first line of the ST gives synonyms of the word '*paukščiai*' (Eng. Birds). In the source text synonyms correspond with one another, to express the gender of the birds, but in the target text, this distinction cannot be preserved. Therefore Tempest uses one word '*nestlings*' which in Lithuanian means '*jaunikliai*.' This solution was quite close to the source text and the context in English did not change. According to Newmark's (1988: 84) translation processes, this line reflects a *synonymy* act of translation, as the synonym '*nestlings*' is the closest equivalent in the target text. Moreover, Rastenis uses a concrete word 'the birds,' which has a general meaning in Lithuanian 'paukščiai.'

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[1] Here and in other examples the emphasis is mine, L. H.

Appealing to Newmark's (1988: 84) processes of translation, Rastenis uses *functional equivalent* procedure, because his version is generalised leaving the line without any diminutives to soften the text. Looking into another line of the source text "*kur jūsų žvėrys, gyvuliai, žvėreliai*" we may notice that in the target text the diminutives were translated by the help of the adjectives "*living creatures large and small.*" Tempest tries to stay as close to the source text as possible. Tempest does not use any diminutives in his target text, yet he still preserves the main meaning. Even in the last line of this example he manages to maintain the essence of the original text "*kur žvėrių olos, laužai ir urveliai*" in English: "the burrows and the lairs that housed them all."

In accordance with Newmark's (1988: 91) translation procedures, the last two lines are rendered through *paraphrase*. In the second line the word '*žvėreliai*' is explained into target text as "*living creatures large and small.*" The last line also is rendered through paraphrase, as the word '*urveliai*' in the target text is explained as "*the lairs that housed them all.*" *Paraphrasing* provides a more detailed explanation of the source text, helping readers better understand its meaning.

Rastenis in his translation uses more general expression for the words "*žvėrys, gyvuliai, žvėreliai.*" He abandons the diminutive meaning and leaves only generalised names for the animals, while Tempest strives to remain as faithful to the source text as possible. In the last line Rastenis replaces the diminutive with a more general word. For the word 'urveliai' which is in plural, Rastenis choses only a generalised singular version of it - 'cave.' Referring to Newmark (1988: 83) Rastenis applies the *functional equivalent* procedure in the last two lines by replacing diminutives with generalised terms.

Dialect is another literary device frequently used in this key cultural text.

Table 2 shows that in the source text, given dialectical words such as noun 'mendrės' and adjective 'drūtos' are translated into Tempest version by switching lines with each another.

Table 2

ST	TT (Tempest)	TT (Rastenis)
Liekni augę kaip **mendrės**, žaliavę kaip rūtos, Šaknys, liemenys, šakos ir viršūnės **drūtos**. Švęsti Lietuvos medžiai nejautę **nuogalio Rausvasai** žiemos lapas sulaukdavęs žalio.	With mighty roots and branches, trunk and crest The grace of **reeds** and rue's green they possessed. Lithuania's hallowed oaks **no bareness knew:** **Brown leaves** they bore till spring when green ones grew.	When sturdy, **reed-like**, green as a rue, **Strong-rooted**, hardly young saplings grew: Lithuania's sacred oaks rose serene, **The autumn's red leaf** met springtime's green.

Source: A. Baranauskas (1859: 23) *Anykščių šilelis*; P. Tempest (1985: 18) *The Forest of Anyksciai;* N. Rastenis *The Forest of Anykščiai* (1956: 27).

The dialectical expression here is changed with the help of a functional *equivalent* (Newmark 1988: 83), because the word 'mendrės' is translated as a general noun 'nendrės' (Eng. reeds). The adjective '*drūtos*' is replaced by using the same translational method by Newmark (1988: 82) a *cultural equivalent.* In order to

represent the strength of the trees Tempest changes the adjective with its equivalent in target language '*mighty*.'

Rastenis in his translation applies a *cultural equivalent* strategy (Newmark 1988: 82) for the source text's dialectical noun '*mendrės*' and adjective '*drūtos*.' The translator replaces them with their equivalents in the target text, such as 'reed-like' and 'strong-rooted.' These expressions maintain the meaning of the source text, allowing the reader to feel the real strength of the trees. The last line describes the trees that grow in Lithuania, capable of retaining their red leaves through the winter till spring. Here Tempest uses *paraphrase* (Newmark 1988: 91) as a translation strategy, providing a more detailed explanation for the target audience "brown leaves they bore till spring when green ones grew." Furthermore, Rastenis employs the same translational strategy as Tempest in this case. Therefore, he preserves the original description of the leaf colour "*the autumn's red leaf*," whereas in the Tempest version the colour red found in ST is changed into "*brown leaves*" in the TT. Certainly, the translators retained the main idea of the source text, highlighting the immense power of the Lithuanian forest, which provided strength and peace to our ancestors over the years, although they excluded all dialectical expressions.

Meanwhile metaphors often require a balance between fidelity to the original and adaptation to the target language's cultural and linguistic context, making them a challenging aspect of translation. To employ Venuti's formulation (1995: 61), metaphors are "analogy of translation as clothing in which the foreign author is dressed, or the translated text as the body animated by the foreign writer's soul." In this comparison we may say that translating metaphors requires background knowledge. Translator has to *dress up* in accordance to convey the real meaning of that metaphor in a particular period of time, because all the usage of metaphors is temporal. After some period of time metaphors could be forgotten, therefore the translator has a difficulty while finding the best solution in target text.

Consider the following example:

Table 3

ST	TT (Tempest)	TT (Rastenis)
Miškan, būdavo, eini – tai net **akį veria**; Vat taip **linksmina dūšią, užu širdies tveria**, Kad net, **širdžiai apsalus**, ne kartą dūmojai.	Once walking here you found your **eyes would ache**: The forest would your **soul so merry make**, Your **heart so glad** you wondered in surprise.	Viewing this wood **the eye was appalled, The heart and soul were gaily** enthralled; The mind, awakened, moved to surmise.

Source: A. Baranauskas (1859: 14) *Anykščių šilelis*; P. Tempest (1985: 2) *The Forest of Anyksciai;* N. Rastenis *The Forest of Anykščiai* (1956: 11).

This example shows us how the source text could be translated into target culture using *synonymy* (Newmark 1988: 84) act of translation. Nevertheless, metaphors could be differently conceived in each culture because of different understanding. Metaphors should be translated by using their cultural equivalent in the target language to preserve the original meaning. For example, the first line "miškan, būdavo, eini – tai net akį

veria" and its translation show that Tempest found a perfect equivalent in the target text: "once walking here you found your eyes would ache." Misunderstandings could arise if the translation were word-for-word, as the target audience might not fully grasp the author's intended message, and it could sound nonsensical. Rastenis translated the first line differently from Tempest. In Rastenis' translation the metaphor is expressed as "viewing this wood the eye was appalled." In Lithuanian the word 'appall' has a negative connotation, which may suggest that the forest is a negative place. However, the source text portrays the forest as a beautiful and peaceful place for the viewer.

In the next line the metaphor "linksmina dūšią, užu širdies tveria" was clearly altered to a phrase with a similar meaning, making it easier for the target audience to understand. The target audience may not understand the meaning of the phrase "širdžiai apsalus." Thus, Tempest found an equivalent into the target language. The translator perfectly chose a metaphor with a similar meaning "soul so merry make" and "your heart so glad." Conforming to Newmark's (1988: 82) translation strategies, examples were rendered into English employing *cultural equivalent* procedure. The first line "tai net akį veria" is replaced with its equivalent in the target text as "your eyes would ache." Another example "užu širdies tveria" is also translated by a *cultural equivalent* metaphor as "soul so merry make." In this example the Lithuanian word 'heart' is converted into 'soul' for the target readers to understand. The last line "širdžiai apsalus" also is translated according to a *cultural equivalent* strategy as "heart so glad."

Ultimately, in analysing Rastenis' translation, the metaphor in the second and third lines were translated using the *compensation* (Newmark 1988: 90) method. However, Rastenis changes the order of the metaphors and *omits* the phrase "širdžiai apsalus." *Compensation* allows the translator to adjust by merging metaphors into one line and continuing them in another.

The translation by Tempest is closer to the original idea of the poem than Rastenis' variation. Rastenis prefers to leave more general expressions than Tempest does. Unlike Tempest, Rastenis attempts to avoid cultural differences by using more common expressions in his translation, but he adds an additional nineteen lines.

4.   Conclusion

Key cultural texts are works that encapsulate the essential values, beliefs and traditions of a culture, such as national poetry, historical narratives and foundational literary works. Translating these texts is not merely a linguistic exercise; it is an act of cultural interpretation and transformation. When approaching these texts translators engage into a process of creative cultural mediation. The role of translator as intercultural mediator has received greater attention in translation studies since the 'cultural turn' of the 1990s. However, some theorists, such as Nabokov (1955/2021) and Jakobson (1959 in Venuti 2000), argue that poetic translation is inherently impossible. They contend that it is not feasible to account for all the nuanced factors and convey every feature of the original text in a way that aligns with the language, form, and cultural traditions of the target audience.

This article attempted to highlight problems of poetry translation, focussing on culture-bound concepts, found in key cultural texts, with particular attention to Lithuanian Romantic poetry and its English translations. The corpus of a larger study comprised over 165 cases, from which culture-bound elements — such as diminutives, dialects and metaphors — were selected for this article.

The analysis of the two English translations of *Anykčių šilelis* by Baranauskas (Eng. *The Forest of Anyksciai)* demonstrated that most frequently employed strategies of translation by Tempest are: *synonymy, paraphrase, functional equivalent, cultural equivalent.* Meanwhile Rastenis is in favour of *functional equivalent, synonymy, transference, reduction & expansion, paraphrase, compensation, cultural equivalent.*

In attempting to compare the source and target texts, we can see the gaps between the two cultures. It is challenging to preserve the original meaning, as the English language rarely uses diminutives. The translators struggle to convey folk expressions in a stylistically accurate way but strives to retain Lithuania's cultural values, including dialect, metaphors, and diminutives.

The main strategies used by Tempest and Rastenis while translating diminutives were *functional equivalent* and *synonymy.* Meanwhile in metaphor translation the main translational strategy used by Tempest was *cultural equivalent.* Nevertheless, Rastenis here was more general and used *synonymy* act of translation. The dialects and examples discussed in the study were mostly translated using *synonymy* and *cultural equivalent* in Tempest's translations, while Ratenis employed *functional equivalent* or *paraphrase* in his translational procedures.

The results of the study demonstrate that translation is never neutral; each decision made by the translator reflects both the original culture and the target audience's culture, resulting in a text that serves as a conduit for understanding across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Acknowledgements

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