



NATIONAL IDENTITY AS A TRANSLATION PROBLEM IN THE PROSE OF RUSSIAN AUTHORS OF THE LATE 20TH – EARLY 21ST CENTURIES

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Abstract

National identity in the prose of Russian authors of the late 20th – early 21st centuries serves as a key component determining the specificity of the text and its cultural value. In translation, this element creates significant difficulties related to conveying culturally specific meanings, realia, concepts, and the author's idiosyncrasy. The study identified the main problems of translating nationally marked units, trends toward semantic simplification and cultural adaptation, and demonstrated that preservation of identity is possible through flexible strategies balancing fidelity to the original and accessibility for the target-language reader.

Keywords: National identity, literary translation, Russian prose, culturally marked units, realia, ethnocultural concepts, translation strategies, domestication, foreignization, linguoculturology.

Introduction

In the context of rapidly expanding globalization, which encompasses virtually all spheres of human activity, the intensification of intercultural interaction, and the increasingly intensive and multi-channel exchange of information, cultural values, traditions, and, in particular, literary texts, the problem of adequately, fully, and accurately conveying national identity in literary translation has acquired an exceptionally high degree of relevance, scholarly significance, and practical importance. The modern world is characterized by the fact that national literatures have long ceased to exist in relative isolation or seclusion: they are actively and inevitably entering the global cultural space, where they face the need to be not simply read, but understood and adequately perceived by readers



belonging to entirely different linguacultural communities, possessing a different historical experience, a different set of cultural codes, symbols, and ways of understanding reality. In this broad context, particular attention is drawn to the fiction of Russian authors of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, which is distinguished by a noticeable, conscious, and deeply motivated increase in interest in issues of national and cultural specificity, the preservation and critical understanding of historical memory, the peculiarities of the Russian mentality in its historical and contemporary dynamics, as well as the deep, often hidden layers of linguistic consciousness, the linguistic picture of the world, and a specific national worldview. It is precisely these clearly expressed features that make this period of Russian literature a particularly complex, multifaceted object for translation work, requiring increased attention, since the translator must solve here not simply linguistic or stylistic problems, but above all the most complex cultural-anthropological, ideological, value-based, and identification problems associated with the transfer of culturally specific content to a different cultural environment [**Bassnett , Moscow, 2003, p. 41**]

National identity in a literary text is not limited to individual, easily identifiable references, descriptions, or exotic details, but is manifested through a complex, multi-level, deeply integrated, and interconnected system of culturally marked linguistic and substantive units of varying nature and level. These units include, in particular, realia (specific objects of material culture, phenomena of everyday life, customs, rites, rituals, historical events, toponyms, anthroponyms, and other elements specific to a given culture and often lacking direct equivalents in another culture), symbols (images, motifs, and signs possessing deep national-cultural subtext and emotional-value saturation), ethnocultural concepts (key, basic concepts and categories in which the specificity of national consciousness, worldview, value orientations, and methods of categorizing experience are crystallized), as well as the individual author's idiosyncrasy, in which national identity is refracted, transformed, and given unique artistic embodiment through the personal creative vision, linguistic manner, and ideological position of a particular writer. All of these elements form an inseparable, organic unity that ensures the genuine uniqueness, originality, depth, and cultural richness of the original text. When attempting to translate such culturally marked units into another linguistic and cultural environment, a serious, often critical, risk



inevitably arises: the substantial loss, significant impoverishment, or serious distortion of the original cultural meanings and connotations. This process can result in a noticeable impoverishment of the text's semantic and pragmatic potential, a significant reduction in its artistic expressiveness, a weakening of its emotional and aesthetic impact on the foreign-language reader, and a partial or even complete loss of that very national-cultural identity that constitutes one of the primary values, meaning-forming, and identifying characteristics of the original work [Karasik, Moscow, 2004, p. 96].

Translating nationally marked elements of literary texts is becoming one of the most complex, multifaceted, and fundamentally significant translation problems, requiring not only an exceptionally high level of proficiency in two languages at all levels (lexical, grammatical, stylistic, and pragmatic), but also a deep, almost encyclopedic understanding of two cultures in their historical development, value orientations, symbolic systems, ways of conceptualizing the world, collective memory, and the specifics of national identity. Underestimating or insufficient attention to these aspects means that a translation, even if formally accurate, grammatically flawless, and stylistically accurate, can lose its adequacy in a cultural and artistic sense: a reader of a foreign language receives a text that only superficially resembles the original, but is deprived of its profound national flavor, mental specificity, ideological richness, and the emotional and cultural aura that makes the original work vibrant and authentic in the eyes of native speakers of the source culture.

The purpose of this article is to provide a comprehensive, detailed, and systematic analysis of national identity as one of the central, most complex, and pressing translation issues, using specific material from Russian literary works of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The study focuses on the key challenges, patterns, and typical difficulties encountered when conveying elements of national identity in foreign-language translation, as well as identifying and characterizing the most common strategies, techniques, and solutions used by translators in an attempt to either preserve and convey these elements as fully as possible or, conversely, to consciously or involuntarily simplify, omit, or adapt them. This approach allows us not only to describe and classify existing problems and losses but also to identify possible theoretical and practical ways to minimize or overcome them in



the context of modern translation theory, methodology, and actual translation practice.

RESEARCH METHODS

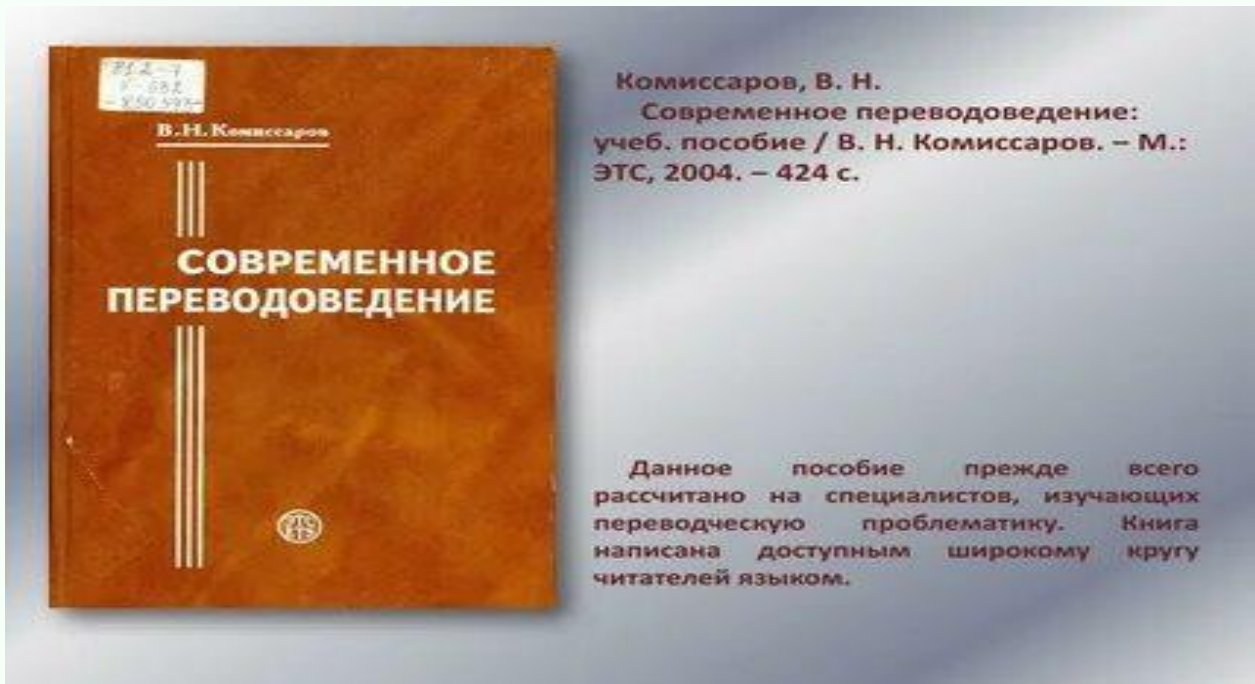
In this study, a set of complementary methods was applied to achieve the stated goal and address the objectives. These methods were designed to comprehensively examine the problem of conveying national identity in literary translation. The methodology was based on a comparative analysis of the original and translated texts, which allowed for a detailed, element-by-element comparison of the source text in Russian and its translation into the target language(s). This method involves consistently identifying correspondences and discrepancies at all levels—lexical, phraseological, stylistic, pragmatic, and cultural-semantic—with an emphasis on those segments of the text where national and cultural specificity is evident. Furthermore, contextual analysis was employed, which involves examining culturally marked units not in isolation, but in close connection with the immediate and broader context of the work. This approach made it possible to determine the functional significance of each element of national identity in a specific literary context, identify its role in creating the overall meaning, emotional impact, and ideological atmosphere of the text, and assess the extent to which translation preserves or alters this role depending on contextual conditions. Furthermore, the study utilized elements of the linguacultural approach, which focuses on the study of language as a vehicle of culture and allows for the examination of culturally marked units (realia, concepts, symbols, allusions) as phenomena that embody a specific national worldview. This approach facilitated a deeper understanding of how the national-cultural component is embedded in the structure of the text and why its translation presents particular challenges.

Elements of the translation studies approach, which focuses on the patterns and strategies of translation, were also employed. Within this approach, particular attention was paid to the classification and analysis of translation transformations (lexical, grammatical, stylistic, and pragmatic) used by translators when working with culturally marked elements. Both standard and authorial techniques used to compensate for cultural gaps, adapt, or preserve national character were examined. The study focused on works of contemporary Russian prose from the



late 20th and early 21st centuries, in which the national-cultural component plays not a peripheral but a system-forming role, defining the specifics of the author's idiosyncrasy, the overall poetics of the work, and its ideological orientation. Specifically, the analysis included texts by Viktor Pelevin, Lyudmila Ulitskaya, Zakhar Prilepin, and a number of other authors whose works are distinguished by a high degree of saturation with realities, ethnocultural concepts, symbols, and linguistic means reflecting the Russian mentality, historical memory, and cultural specificity. These authors were chosen because in their work, national identity functions not as a backdrop or decoration, but as an active, meaning-forming element of the narrative. Particular attention was paid during the study to a thorough analysis of the translation transformations used by translators when conveying culturally marked elements. Such types of transformations as generalization, concretization, modulation, explication, compensation, omission, addition, calquing, transcription, transliteration, and others were examined in order to determine which of them are most frequently used in specific cases and how they influence the preservation or loss of national and cultural meanings. Moreover, special emphasis was placed on identifying the common strategies translators choose in relation to the national identity of the text: strategies of domestication (approaching the host culture, neutralizing foreignness), foreignization (preserving and emphasizing foreignness, emphasizing national character), as well as mixed or compromise strategies. An analysis of these strategies made it possible to determine the extent to which they contribute to the preservation of the original cultural identity or, conversely, lead to its neutralization, adaptation, or significant distortion [Komissarov, Moscow, 1999, p. 78].

The application of the specified set of methods in their logical sequence and interrelation provided a systematic, objective and comprehensive approach to the study of the problem, allowing not only to describe the existing difficulties, but also to identify typical patterns of translation behavior when working with the national-cultural component in modern Russian prose.



RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The analysis conducted within the framework of this study showed that national identity in the fiction of Russian authors of the late 20th – early 21st centuries is realized through a complex, multi-level and deeply structured system of diverse linguistic means that are organically woven into the fabric of the narrative and ensure the transmission of cultural and national identity. At the lexical level, this is manifested in the targeted and systematic use of realia (objects, phenomena, customs specific to Russian culture), ethnonyms (names of peoples, ethnic groups and associated characteristics), historicisms (obsolete words and expressions reflecting the historical context), as well as colloquial and vernacular vocabulary, which fully reflects the national character, mentality, social environment of the characters and their everyday life, making the text more authentic and closer to the real linguistic consciousness [Vlahov, Florin, Moscow, 2006, p. 112].

At the level of artistic discourse, which represents a broader and more complex category, an important role is played by such elements as cultural allusions (references to well-known cultural phenomena, works of art, historical events), precedent texts (quotes, reminiscences from classical literature or folklore that have a common cultural resonance) and nationally significant concepts (key concepts such as “home”, “road”, “homeland”, “memory”, which carry a deep



symbolic and value-based meaning within the framework of Russian culture), which are difficult to directly, literally translate without additional interpretative efforts, explanations or adaptations on the part of the translator, since they require taking into account the cultural background and associative series [Maslova, Moscow, 2001, p. 154].

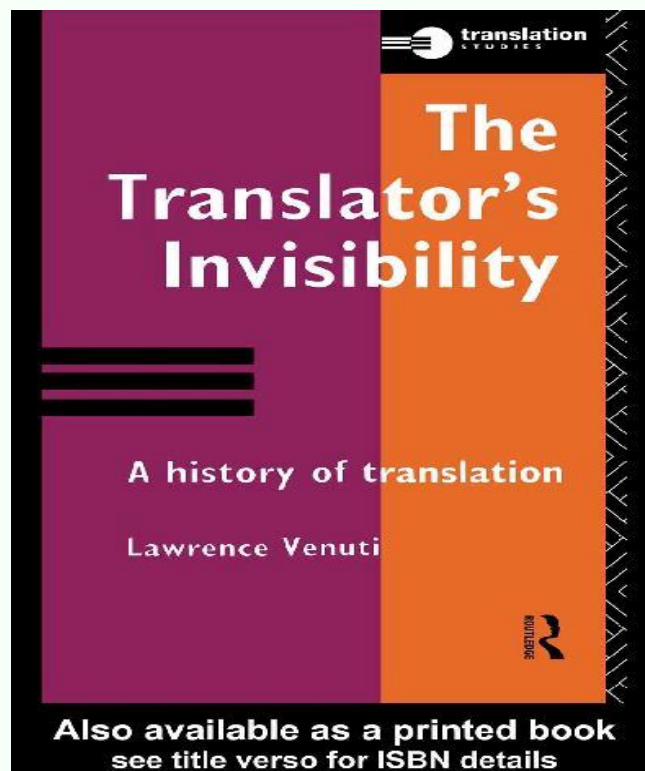
Translations of literary texts of this type often exhibit a characteristic tendency toward semantic simplification (reducing or coarsening the original meanings) or cultural adaptation (approximating the norms and expectations of the host culture), which inevitably leads to a partial, and sometimes significant, loss of the text's national-identifying potential, its unique cultural aura, and depth. Particularly vulnerable in this process are elements of the author's idiosyncrasy, which are closely linked to the national linguistic worldview, its specific categories, metaphors, and modes of expression, since their transmission requires not only linguistic accuracy but also the preservation of cultural and ideological integrity [Lotman, St. Petersburg, 2000, p. 67].

DISCUSSION

The results obtained during the study convincingly confirm and allow us to formulate a more general conclusion: national identity in contemporary fiction (particularly in the works of Russian authors of the late 20th and early 21st centuries) represents one of the most complex, multifaceted, and fundamentally significant translation problems. This complexity is due not only to the linguistic differences between the source and target languages, but above all to the profound cultural and anthropological divergence between the two linguacultural communities. During the process, the translator constantly finds himself in a situation of inevitable and often painful choice: on the one hand, it is necessary to maximally preserve and convey the cultural specificity of the original, its national flavor, mental uniqueness, and ideological richness; on the other hand, it is necessary to ensure sufficient comprehensibility, accessibility and communicative effectiveness of the text for a foreign language reader who does not have the same cultural background, associative series and historical experience as the bearer of the original culture [Naida, Moscow, 2000, p. 89].

On the one hand, excessive domestication of a text (that is, a complete or near-complete approximation to the norms, expectations, and cultural codes of the host

culture) inevitably leads to a gradual erosion of national character, the loss or significant weakening of the very cultural specificity that constitutes one of the primary values of the original work. As a result of this approach, the author's position is diminished, the uniqueness of the writer's idiosyncrasy is eroded, the depth of national and cultural meanings is lost, and the text begins to be perceived as "one's own," while simultaneously losing its authenticity and the unique atmosphere that makes it uniquely Russian in spirit and worldview. Domestication in extreme forms can turn a translation into an adaptation, where cultural differences are deliberately smoothed over and national identity is sacrificed for the sake of ease of perception.



On the other hand, excessive foreignization (that is, maximally preserving and emphasizing the foreignness of the original, refusing to adapt, and striving to leave the text as "foreign" as possible) also carries serious risks. This approach can significantly hinder perception. A foreign-language reader: the text becomes overloaded with unfamiliar realities, allusions, and concepts that remain incomprehensible without extensive commentary or footnotes. As a result, the communicative effectiveness of the translation is reduced, the emotional impact



is weakened, interest in reading is lost, and the work itself risks remaining an "exotic artifact" rather than a living literary text capable of truly touching the reader and conveying the author's intent. The reader may feel alienated rather than immersed in the world of the original [**Venuti , Moscow, 2004, p. 102**].

A successful, adequate, and artistically complete conveyance of national identity in translation requires from the translator not simply a good command of two languages, but truly high linguacultural competence, which includes a deep knowledge of the historical, sociocultural, and ideological contexts of both cultures, an understanding of the mechanisms of national consciousness formation, the characteristics of symbolic systems, and ways of conceptualizing the world in the source and host cultures. A translator must be able to interpret a literary text not only as a linguistic structure, but above all as a bearer of complex cultural meanings, values, and identity markers. Only with such competence is it possible to find the optimal balance between preserving cultural specificity and ensuring comprehensibility, between fidelity to the original and concern for the target language reader. This presupposes a creative, rather than mechanical, approach to translation: the selection of hybrid strategies, the use of compensatory techniques, the measured introduction of explanations, a subtle handling of connotations and pragmatics, and a constant awareness that translation is always an act of intercultural communication in which national identity acts not as an obstacle, but as the central object of transmission [**Fedorov, Moscow, 2002, p. 134**]. Ultimately, a discussion of the obtained results emphasizes that the problem of conveying national identity in literary translation does not have a universal, once-and-for-all solution. Each specific text, each author, and each target language require an individual approach, careful analysis, and a creative search for the optimal strategy. It is precisely in this search for a balance between "one's own" and "theirs," between preservation and adaptation, that the translator's supreme skill is revealed and the relevance of further research in the fields of linguacultural studies and translation studies is revealed.

CONCLUSION

National identity in Russian fiction of the late 20th and early 21st centuries represents more than just a background or decorative element, but one of the most significant, system-forming artistic and cultural components, decisively defining



the author's text's unique character, its inimitable poetics, ideological depth, and emotional and axiological richness. It is through national and cultural markers—realities, concepts, symbols, allusions, and idiostyle—that writers of this period convey the uniqueness of the Russian mentality, historical memory, linguistic consciousness, and way of understanding the world, making their works deeply authentic and culturally rich. During translation, this component becomes a source of serious, often fundamental, difficulties associated with conveying culturally conditioned meanings, national worldviews, associative sequences, and that elusive "aura" of the original that makes the text vibrant and recognizable within the framework of Russian culture. The study demonstrated that full or near-full preservation of national identity in foreign-language translation is possible through the use of flexible, context-sensitive translation strategies that strike an optimal balance between maximizing the accuracy of conveying original cultural meanings while ensuring sufficient accessibility and comprehensibility for readers of a different linguistic and cultural background. Such strategies avoid extremes such as excessive domestication, which leads to a loss of national character, and excessive foreignization, which can discourage readers with incomprehensibility and overload. Instead, a combination of approaches proves effective: the measured preservation of key cultural markers, the use of compensation at other levels of the text, the introduction of minimal explanations (in footnotes or in the text itself), the creative adaptation of connotations and pragmatic effects, and careful consideration of the functional role of each element of national identity in the specific context of the work. Prospects for further research in this area lie primarily in a more detailed, in-depth, and differentiated analysis of specific translation decisions made in actual translations of prose from this period into various languages. Of particular interest is a comparative study of how the same culturally marked units are conveyed in translations into different languages and cultures, which strategies predominate in different translation traditions, and how these decisions influence the perception of the text by foreign-language readers. Furthermore, a relevant area is the development of methodological recommendations and practical guides for translating culturally marked prose that could take into account the specifics of contemporary Russian literature, the particularities of national identity in the post-Soviet period, and the demands of the global literary market. Such developments could significantly



improve the quality of literary translations and facilitate the full integration of Russian literature into the global cultural space.

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