

## Practical trends and theoretical issues in mediating Greek culture to English

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### 1. Introduction

It is generally admitted that translation is a process of approaching the *other* and reconsidering the *same*. From time immemorial, translating activity constitutes one of the essential means of intercultural communication, one of the major modes of bridging cultures, even bringing them closer. But is this always the case when it concerns the transfer from a *peripheral* culture to a *central* one?<sup>1</sup>

This paper aims at exploring the practices applied by English translators as regards the transfer of lexical items denoting Greek cultural specificities. In the first part I will attempt to draw up a typology of the adopted translational techniques and, in the second part to identify the inherent factors and reasons that guide translators in their choices. The goal here is not to establish an evaluation of the quality of the final product, but to throw light on the main practices as well as on the principal theoretical issues arising from the proposed translations. As for the data, these were gathered from various novels and a collection of short prose pieces and essays translated from Greek to English.

### 2. Cultural specificities and Translation

The issue of the transference of the *other* as well as the interaction between translation and culture occupies nowadays a particular place in translation-based thinking. The emergence of the cultural dimension of the translation phenomenon contributed to the radical renewal of the translation speech and in recent decades led scholars to redefine the very nature of the translation phenomenon (cf. Basnett & Lefevere 1990, Toury

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<sup>1</sup> The terms *central* and *peripheral* culture are proposed by S. Susam-Serajeva (2002).

1995). Thus, translation is not considered any more as a simple business of words or structures but rather as a human activity combining social, historical, and political factors. In addition, the translated text is viewed as the result of a society's behavior and ideological orientation: in other words, the translation phenomenon, apart from being a creative and intellectual process, is also a human activity which is subject to conventions, which are finally reflected in the target text.

This move from the analysis of translation from a purely linguistic angle to a cultural and political one, known as “the cultural turn” in Translation Studies, established the basic profile of the field after the eighties. Both translation as an activity and translation as a result of this activity are inextricably linked to the concept of culture: translation is a vehicle of culture and at the same time culture redefines various aspects of the translation act. Historically, translation has played –and continues to play– a global key role in cultural change, by redefining and revitalizing cultures (Delisle & Woodsworth 1995: 25-100). According to Venuti (1998: 68) translation participates in the innovation process of a culture. As Torop (2002: 593) also notes “culture operates largely through translational activity, since only by the inclusion of new texts into culture can the culture undergo innovation as well as perceive its specificity”. On the other hand, culture intervenes in a regulating way through the codes, canons, and ideological values which are promoted –and sometimes imposed– by an organized society, and sets the context within which a translation has to be realized (Lefevere : 1992, Toury, 1995 : 26, Venuti, 2004 : 25).

Following Nord (1995: 283) a culture could be defined as “a group or community characterized by common forms of behaviour”. Consequently, cultural specificities can be reflected in a text both on macro-structural and micro-structural level (Schreier

2007: 186).<sup>2</sup> The macro-structural level concerns, inter alia, cultural translation problems that may occur either on intralinguistic and pragmatic level (e.g. connotations, implicit messages, idioms, expressions, speech acts, etc) or as a result of the particular habits of textualization and writing conventions which are linked to recurrent actions of communications by specific language communities (e.g. various kinds of text variety: letters, scientific papers, literary texts, etc.).

The micro-structural level focuses mainly on extra-linguistic factors expressed through a particular vocabulary. It includes isolated terms which can vary from natural elements to human creatures and reveal the characteristics and peculiarities of a given culture, as legal and political foundations, social institutions, objects or events of everyday life (clothing, food, etc.). The above units are denoted by various terms such as: *realia* (Reiss in Floros 2005, Leppihalme 2007, Schreiber 2007), *culturemes* (Vermeer 1983), *cultural words* (Newmark 1988, Robinson 1997), *culture-specific items* or CSI (Aixelá 1996), *cultural referents* (Wecksteen 2005), *elements related to culture* or ELC (Regattin 2007), *cultural markers* (Grammenidis 2009a). Leppihalme (2007: 382) considers these lexical items as “things that are ‘real’ in an extralinguistic sense in a particular culture, but which may be unknown or unfamiliar in another.” From a translation point of view, Aixelá (1996: 58) defines them as:

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 intertextual status in the cultural system of the readers of the target text.

Furthermore, he distinguishes two basic categories: proper nouns which can be divided into conventional names and loaded proper names and common expressions, “for want

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<sup>2</sup> For the different methodological approaches see Leppihalme (1997) & Floros (2005).

of a better term to cover the world of objects, institutions, habits and opinions restricted to each culture and that cannot be included in the field of proper names". (Aixelá (1996: 59). In the same vein, Ballard (2005) makes a distinction between proper and common names.

Considering the above definitions, we could say that *cultural markers* are linguistic items detected on micro-structural level, that reflect the collective uniqueness; thus the knowledge of the source language is not enough for their comprehension, but the knowledge of the source culture is also required. In other words, they could be considered as lexical units or combinations of lexical units denoting typical objects and concepts of a particular organized social or national community which are unknown to the rest of the world. Consequently, one of the main difficulties encountered during the translation process is their transfer to another language. The difficulty in rendering cultural markers to another language is that, as these lexical units are inextricably linked to the source culture, the target culture sometimes does not have similar objects or similar concepts. Furthermore, there are cases that, though some elements or objects are recorded in different cultures, they don't always have the same connotations (Grammenidis, 2009a: 111).

Cultural markers may appear in all types of texts, but they accomplish a different function according to the text type. In informative texts (reference works, reports, touristic brochures, operating instructions etc.) and operative texts (sermons, electoral speeches, advertisements etc), according to the text typology proposed by Reiss (1971/2002), cultural marker items acquire a narrow instrumental character, they become a medium and they operate as a vehicle of data or information (Grammenidis: 2008). On the other hand, in expressive texts, such as poems, novels, plays, biographies etc., their use is subsidiary and it contributes to the author's attempt to recreate or to

imitate the reality as well as to define the context in which a plot takes place. In fact, a literary text can exceed the time, the place and the language and helps readers to learn about a person or a group of people whose stories, although realized for a specific purpose and in a certain context, bring out universal feelings, thoughts, and values. In addition, as literature constitutes one of the main ways of experiencing cultural diversity, a literary text allows the reader to experience the *other* (Abdallah-Preteuille & Porcher 2001: 151). Given that the principal aim of this type of texts is to create an aesthetic result, language operates as an expressive tool. Style coincides very often with intertextual games or wordplays, the musicality and allusions of the language. There are no restrictions on the syntax and texts are full of idioms and metaphors. Moreover, the importance of the cultural markers for the plot, for the evolution of the events, and for sketching characters, may finally play a decisive role in choosing the translation method to be adopted.

### **3. Translation techniques**

References to the source culture are commonly used in a literary text and as it is not always possible to find an accurate equivalent for the cultural peculiarities that belong exclusively to the target-culture; this fact often constitutes a very strong barrier for the translator to overcome. Consequently, the translator is most definitely confronted with the problems of non-equivalence. For the study of the different translation techniques used by English translators for the transfer of lexical items denoting Greek cultural specificities, we can, at first, distinguish between the cases when there is an equivalent and the cases when there is no equivalence in the target language-culture.

### 3.1. *When there is an equivalent*

In the case when an equivalent cultural reality exists in the target language-culture, the technique of literal translation is adopted:

(1) ...αλλά ο πατέρας μου βάλθηκε κάποτε να με μορφώσει και μου αγόραζε όλα τα «**Κλασσικά Εικονογραφημένα**».

[Π. Μάρκαρης, *To Νυχτερινό Δελτίο*: 74]

...but my father once tried to educate me and bought me the “**Illustrated Classics**”.

[P. Markaris, *The Late-Night News*: 50]

(2) Ξυπνάω με το κεφάλι μολύβι. Φτιάχνω έναν καφέ και καταπίνω δυο **ασπιρίνες**.

[Π. Μάρκαρης, *To Νυχτερινό Δελτίο*:367]

I woke up with a heavy head. I made a coffee and swallowed two **aspirins**.

[P. Markaris, *The Late-Night News*: 275]

(3) Φάγαμε τη **γαλοπούλα**, σαχλαμαρίσαμε, ....

[Π. Μάρκαρης, *To Νυχτερινό Δελτίο*:359]

We had eaten our **turkey**, had a jolly time and...

[P. Markaris, *The Late-Night News*: 269]

Literal translation is based on the interlinguistic synonymy and is applied mainly on the word level. It is the basic translation technique (Newmark 1988: 70), but it presupposes that the involved cultures converge to a certain point. We can notice that in the above examples there are no changes, because the cultural markers of the original (*Κλασσικά Εικονογραφημένα*, *ασπιρίνες*, *γαλοπούλα*) refer to realities that also exist in the target language (*Illustrated Classics*, *aspirins*, *turkey*). It has to be noted, however, that the

same denotative meaning does not always imply equivalence at the level of cultural connotations:

(4) ...μια ασιάτισσα, απ' αυτές που μας έβαλαν να αντικαταστήσουμε **τη φασολάδα** με σόγια...

[Π. Μάρκαρης, *Άμυνα Ζώνης*: 58]

An Asian girl, one of those that got us to swap **bean soup** for soya...

[P. Markaris, *Zone Defense*: 36]

As shown in example 4, *φασολάδα* is one of the most characteristic traditional dishes of Greek cuisine, it is even considered as the national dish of Greece since Metaxas' dictatorship, and it connotes nowadays the abject poverty in which most of Greeks lived through until the sixties and their incapacity to buy meat often. *Fasolada* is made by simmering beans with tomatoes and other vegetables such as carrots, onion, parsley, celery, and bay leaf. For the preparation of the *soup bean*, on the contrary, a ham bone, cubed ham or bacon is often used.

### 3.2. *When there is no equivalent*

When there are no equivalents in the target language-culture, the act of translating has to deal, among other things, with specific concepts, with semantically complicated words of the source-language as well as with concepts which are not lexicalized in the target language. In order to resolve this problem and to bring the texts closer to their potential users, one of the following strategies is applied.

#### 3.2.1 *Cultural substitution*

This technique implies the replacement of a cultural marker with a target culture marker that, although bears no relation to the item of the target culture, could eventually have a

similar impact on the reader. Baker notes (1992: 31) that, the main advantage of using this strategy is to give “the reader a concept with which s/he can identify, something familiar and appealing”. It could be also claimed that, in the case of literary texts, this technique allows the process of reading not to be interrupted. However, with this technique the foreigner is assimilated to target codes, values, and norms.

(5) ...διότι τα τσόκαρα δια κυρίας εζύγιζαν κάπου **δύο οκάδες** το ένα.

[Π. Μάτεσης, *Η μητέρα του σκόλου*: 35]

...those women’s clogs weighted a good **five pounds** each.

[P. Matesis, *The Daughter*: 24]

(6) Σε σύγκριση με έξω, το μέσα θυμίζει σε μέγεθος κήπο **προσφυγικής συνοικίας**...

[Π. Μάρκαρης, *Άμυνα Ζώνης*: 58]

In contrast to the outside, the inside resembled in size a **neighborhood allotment**...

[P. Markaris, *Zone Defense*: 36]

(7) Δεν ξέρω, αν την κουβεντιάζει, ή αν της τραγουδάει το «**Πέφτουν της Βροχής οι στάλες**», ...

[Π. Μάρκαρης, *Το Νυχτερινό Δελτίο*: 111]

I couldn’t tell whether she was chatting with it or singing “**Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head**” to it...

[P. Markaris, *The Late-Night News*: 79]

In 5, the Ottoman unit of weight for solid and liquid products *okka* is converted to *pounds*, the unit of mass used in the United Kingdom, the United States and many countries of the Commonwealth of Nations. As one *okka* is standardized at 1.282 kg and one pound at 0.45359243 kg, the reader of the translation gets an idea about the real

weight of the *clogs* mentioned in the text. In 7, the famous song of Vassilis Tsitsanis “*Πέφτουν της Βροχής οι στάλες*”, composed in 1947, is replaced by the popular song of the seventies “*Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head*”. Nevertheless, it has to be noted that the lyrics of the former are very sad whereas the latter is known as a very happy, optimistic song.

### 3.2.2 *Explicitation*

Explicitation involves the description of cultural markers without mentioning their name. Thus, it could be claimed that the specific technique is centered on the reader’s hermeneutic abilities:

(8) Εκείνη μαυροφόρεσε, μάλιστα επί Κατοχής, μια φορά που οικονόμησε στάρι, του έκανε και **κόλλυβα**, (...), μας έστειλε ένα πιάτο και τρώγαμε δυο μέρες.

[Π. Μάτεσης, *Η μητέρα του σκύλου*: 19]

Granny wore black the whole Occupation: one day she managed to lay hands on some wheat, so **she boiled it up as an offering for the deceased**, sent us over a plate and for two days we had food to eat.

[P. Matesis, *The Daughter*: 10]

(9) Εκείνη δα δεν είχε ποτέ της κατέβει σε **κουτούκι**.

[Μ. Κουμανταρέας, *Η κυρία Κούλα*: 29]

To be sure, she had never been to **a working-class tavern** in a basement before.

[Μ. Koumandareas, *Koula*: 26]

(10) ...το Λύκειο της γειτονίας έβγαλε, με κανένα **φροντιστήριο** από δίπλα, κι αυτό μόνο στην Τρίτη Λυκείου πριν από τις **Πανελλαδικές**.)

[Π. Μάρκαρης, *Το Νυχτερινό Δελτίο*: 150]

...she'd attended the local high school and had had **a few lessons on the side**, and that only in the last year before the **university entrance exams**.

[P. Markaris, *The Late-Night News*: 110]

### 3.2.3 Transliteration

Transliteration occurs when the translator transcribes the source language characters or sounds in the target language. In other words this technique refers to the conversion of foreign letters into the letters of the target language. It is often viewed as a technique that brings into the target language unbelievable phoneme combinations, incomprehensible – and sometimes ludicrous – terms (Papadima 2002). Thus, the target language is deformed and the reader, while using his/her own linguistic system, is made to pronounce, in his/her own code, peculiar sounds forming words unrelated to any norm; words that are not only unfamiliar, but also bizarre. On the other hand, it can be considered as a translation technique constructing “a bridge between two languages, between two worlds, their geographies, temporalities and metaphysics” (Messick 2003: 180), because the alien elements are explicitly acknowledged as such.

(11) ...με πήρε σπίτι της και μου προβάρισε μια **φουστανέλα**.

[Π. Μάτεσης, *Η μητέρα του σκύλου*: 105]

...she brought me over to her place and fitted me in a **fustanella**.

[P. Matesis, *The Daughter*: 87]

(12) Η σακούλα περιέχει (...), ένα **μπιφτέκι**-απ' όλα, (...), και μια μερίδα τηγανιτές πατάτες...

[Π. Μάρκαρης, *Το Νυχτερινό Δελτίο*: 336]

The bag contained (...), a **bifteki** with all the trimmings, (...), and a portion of chips...

[P. Markaris, *The Late-Night News*: 251]

(13) Η μάνα θα μου πλάσει και μία **αβδοκούλα**.

[E. Φακίνου. *Αστραδενή*: 225]

Mother 'll also make me an *avdokoula*.

[E. Fakinou, *Astradeni*: 208]

### 3.2.4 Transliteration followed by explicitation

In this case, the transliteration is followed by a description – sometimes very detailed – of the cultural-specific item, reducing to a certain extent the strangeness of the terms introduced in the target language. In fact, this could be considered as a very effective and competent technique, because it offers the double advantage of bringing the readers closer to the source culture, and at the same time of taking into account their cognitive faculties.<sup>3</sup> The explanatory phrase can be integrated to the text, as in the examples 14, 15 and 16:

(14) **Μαγειρίτσα** δεν κάναμε φέτος.

[E. Φακίνου. *Αστραδενή*: 232]

This year we weren't having the traditional *mayritsa* soup **made with the offal of the Easter lamb**.

[E. Fakinou, *Astradeni*: 215]

(15) Γι' αυτό διάβαζε εντατικά την ***Ερόικα***, τη ***Δασκάλα με τα χρυσά μάτια και την Αργώ***.

[M. Δούκα, *Η αρχαία Σκουριά*: 22]

She had her way furiously through ***Eroica***, ***The Schoolmistress with the Golden Eyes***, ***Argo***, the classic Greek novels of the thirties...

[M. Douka, *Fool's Gold*: 23]

(16) ...την ανατολική μεριά, το πολύ ως την περιοχή της **Αχειροποίητος** ...

<sup>3</sup> Following McAlester (1992: 294), a competent translation is one that “transmits the intended message in a language which is clear and sufficiently correct not to contain unintended comic effect or strain the reader’s patience unduly”.

[Γ. Ιωάννου, *Η πρωτεύουσα των Προσφύγων*: 19]

...the eastern side of the city, reaching as far downtown as **the Church of the Acheiropoietos**...

[Υ. Ιοαννου, *Refugee Capital*: 34]

There are also cases in which the transliterated terms are explained either by a footnote or by an endnote, giving readers the choice to interrupt, or not, their reading in order to check the meaning of a particular cultural marker:

(17) Θυμούμαι χρονογράφημα του **Βάρναλη** στο «**Ριζοσπάστη**», με τον ειρωνικό τίτλο...

[Γ. Ιωάννου, *Η πρωτεύουσα των Προσφύγων*: 170]

I remember a column by **Varnalis\*** in “**Rizospastis**”\*\* under the ironic headline...

[Υ. Ιοαννου, *Refugee Capital*: 83]

\*Kostas Varnalis (1884-1974), the eminent poet and essayist, was member of the Communist Party. (p. 287)

\*\* Rizospastis (Ριζοσπάστης, “The Radical”), the official organ of the Greek Communist Party. (p. 58)

(18) Αμέσως μετά το **Πολυτεχνείο**, παραιτήθηκε από την YENEΔ, ....

[Π. Μάρκαρης, *Το Νυχτερινό Δελτίο*: 379]

After that she disappeared. Immediately after the **Polytechnic School events\***, she resigned from the Armed Forces Channel...

[P. Markaris, *The Late-Night News*: 285]

\*The students revolved against the Junta. The police were unwilling to go in so the Junta sent the army. Tanks were used to drive the students from school. This was the most significant resistance that the Junta had faced.

Μεσημεράκι θα 'τανε. Που χτύπαγε η καμπάνα για τον **Επιτάφιο**.

[Ε. Φακίνου. *Αστραδενή*: 193]

(19) It was around midday on Good Friday, when the church bells were ringing mournfully for the *Epithaphios*\*

[Ε. Fakinou, *Astradeni*: 179]

\**Epitaphios*, canopied bier decked with flowers, symbolically containing the body of Christ in Greek churches on Good Friday.

This technique fulfills the criteria of functionality and loyalty because the final product does not leave one in doubt about the cultural marker mentioned and, at the same time, familiarizes the reader with the habits of the *other*. In fact, according to Nord (1991a, 1991b, 1992, 1997), apart from its functional role, a translation should also be loyal. That is to say, the translator should not only produce a functional target text which conforms to the requirements of the communicational function defined by the commissioner (its *skopos*), but it should also respect the legitimate interests both of the author of the source text and the audience of the target text.

### 3.2.5 Translation by a hypernym

According to Baker (1992: 26), this technique is one of the most common for dealing with many types of non-equivalence. It uses a word with a more general meaning that indicates, in a given semantic field, a wider category than the one to which the word of the original belongs. In that way, the absence of a specific hyponym or of a cultural concept is remedied in the target language.

(20) «Στο **Τσοτίλι**, βρε, θα σε κλείσω, να γίνεις άνθρωπος. Στο **Τσοτίλι**...»

[Ε. Φακίνου. *Αστραδενή*: 65]

“I’ll send you to a **reformatory** to make a decent human being of you, to a **reformatory**...”

[E. Fakinou, *Astradeni*: 61]

(21) ...αν και στο **Αρσάκειο** ως πρωθυπουργό (...) μας τον δίδασκαν.

[M. Δούκα, *Η αρχαία Σκουριά*: 27]

...although at my **exclusive school** we were taught about him as...

[M. Douka, *Fool’s Gold*: 29]

(22) Στο κομοδίνο υπάρχει ένα ξυπνητήρι, ένα ραδιοφωνάκι μπαταρίας κι ένα κουτί **χάπια «Υπνοστεντόν»**.

[Π. Μάρκαρης, *Το Νυχτερινό Δελτίο*: 153]

On the bedside table was an alarm clock, a battery-operated radio and a box of **sleeping pills**.

[P. Markaris, *The Late-Night News*: 112]

In the above examples, the historical boarding school of *Tsotili*, famous for its severity and rigidity, the well known *Arsakeio* school of Athens, and the very popular sleeping pills *Υπνοστεντόν* are translated by superordinate terms (*reformatory*, *exclusive school*, *sleeping pills*).

### 3.2.6 Omission

The last translation technique recorded is omission. In this case, the cultural markers figuring in the source text are not transferred to the target text, because it is difficult to find an equivalent term. According to Toury (1995: 82), omission is a translation technique like all the others, whilst Leppihalme (1994: 33, 1997: 121) notes that translators probably opt for this technique either because no other technique could be appropriate or because they do not wish to do a research on something that they are

unaware of or even when too much detail is thought to be irrelevant from the target reader's point of view (Leppihalme 2007: 383).

(23) Δεν θα τις φάμε μείς τις πατάτες, ρε άτιμε., πατάει η Κανέλλω τη φωνή, αλλά ούτε και συ θα τις κάνεις μαύρη αγορά! **Μαυραγορίτη!**

[Π. Μάτεσης, *Η μητέρα του σκύλου*: 65]

“Maybe we won't be eating your stinking potatoes, you son of a bitch” shouted Kanello, “but you won't be selling them on the black market either!”.

[P. Matesis, *The Daughter*: 51]

(24) ...όπως την εποχή της δεκαετίας του '30 και την εποχή του «**Κοχλία**», μια νέα πνευματική αίσθηση.

[Γ. Ιωάννου, *Η πρωτεύουσα των Προσφύγων*: 51]

...they may again exist, as in the '30s, a new, creative flowering.

[Υ. Ιοαννου, *Refugee Capital*: 76]

(25) ...και συνήθιζε να απαγγέλει ένα τετράστιχο για τον Μεταξά που το είχε πρωτοαπαγγείλει ο **Αιμίλιος Βεάκης**...

[Μ. Δούκα, *Η αρχαία Σκουριά*: 57]

...and it was his habit to declaim a stanza composed in the thirties about the dictator Metaxas...

[M. Douka, *Fool's Gold*: 63]

#### 4. Theoretical remarks

Following our inventory of the translation techniques recorded for the transfer of cultural markers denoting aspects of the Greek culture, it can be noted that translators resort to a wide range of techniques, some of which introduce minor changes (*literal translation*) and others being particularly interventionist (*cultural substitution*,

*explicitation*). In the first case, translators' choices are imposed either by the existence of an equivalent marker in the target language-culture or by the acceptance of cultural diversity, allowing the readers to familiarize themselves with the *other* (*transliteration, transliteration followed by explicitation*). In the second case, on the contrary, the adopted translation behavior is a consequence of the desire to remove the cultural distance between the involved cultures and aims at the domestication of the *foreignness*.

Considering these facts, the first question to be addressed is to what degree the target texts efficiently fulfill the meditative role of translation. If we look at the frequency of using each of these techniques, we see the considerable predominance of *cultural adaptation* and *explicitation* (50% and 20% respectively, in our data). Hence it could be assumed that, finally, English translators are mainly concerned about the intelligibility of the text –in other words, the easy, enjoyable and uninterrupted reading of the text– and not about the promotion of the otherness. There is a tendency to adapt any alien element and to reduce any trace of difference to nil. In most cases cultural connotations and foreign customs are replaced by equivalents of the target culture. Translators provide their readers with knowledge of another world trying to minimize the distance between the two cultures. Their reference point is their own origins when approaching the source culture. Thus, the literary text does no more constitute a vehicle to meet or to discover the foreigner. In addition, as translators adopt practices that abolish the dialectic relation between the *same* and the *other*, their role as a cultural mediator who promotes cultural decentering and merges different mentalities vanishes.

A second point to be examined concerns the reasons of this attitude. Is it an individual attitude or a collective one, reflecting the values of the target culture?

Given that translation, like any other human activity, takes place in a specific socio-cultural context that informs and structures, it is obvious that translators are not acting

as neutral operators but as members of a given cultural community that they try to appeal to. Their actions finally reflect the conceptions as well as the perceptions of a given community about otherness. Consequently, their behavior provides us subject for a more comprehensive thought, which exceeds personal preferences and tries to explore the socio-cultural and ideological parameters governing the translating act in a given culture (Lefevere 1992, Venuti 1995). The transfer from one language to another creates indisputably a great number of difficulties to be solved and numerous decisions to be taken. When translators produce a text, a vast number of factors influence their translation: as their task is to recreate a text in another language, they are confronted not only with the linguistic, pragmatic and cultural peculiarities of the source text but also with the norms, habits, value judgments, classification systems, etc. of the target language-culture. According to Toury (1995: 53 – 69) linguistic and cultural norms determine not only the selection of foreign texts for translation, but also the techniques and strategies devised to translate them as well as the relations of equivalence established between the foreign and the translated texts. In fact, it seems probable that English translators do not adopt an integrationist way of translating arbitrarily. This ethnocentric attitude of acculturation could largely be due to the fact that we have the transfer from a language-culture with lack of authority into a hegemonic language-culture, known for its supremacy, in other words a transfer from a peripheral to a central culture. As Jacquemond (1992: 155) notes there are two opposed translation attitude paradigms: the *servile mediation*, in the case of translation from a hegemonic-language culture into a dominated one and the *authoritative mediation*, in the case of translation from a dominated language-culture into a hegemonic one.<sup>4</sup> From a similar perspective, Cronin (1998: 148) notes also that translating from less spoken or read languages to

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<sup>4</sup> For a further discussion, cf. Grammenidis 2009a, Grammenidis 2009b.

more powerful major languages implies *translation-as-assimilation*, while in the opposite case the method of *translation-as-diversification* is adopted.

In spite of the importance of the collective translation habits mentioned above, it is also worth stressing the impact of the requirements imposed by the client or the institution who commissioned the translations. In fact, the material we have surveyed for this research was selected from translated texts published by Greek and British publishers. If we compare the different techniques which are used, we notice that the number of *transliterations followed by explicitation* is considerably bigger in the books translated for a Greek publishing company.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, in novels where the plot takes place in a given historical context, an analytical historical note compiled by the Greek editor, appears at the end of the book (*Achilles' Fiancée, Fool's Gold*). This tendency could be considered as a consequence of the intention of the Greek editor to familiarize foreign readers with some aspects and habits of the Greek culture. It could also be conceived as the result of the application of the Greek translation paradigm, which is much more open and respectful to otherness (Grammenidis, 2009). As our data is not sufficient for the time being, further research is required on this subject.

Moreover, it should be noted that the number of footnotes is very limited in detective fiction books, which usually target a wide readership, while in the collection of prose pieces and essays, likely to appeal to aware readers, it is considerably bigger (1 footnote in *The latest-night News* - 58 footnotes in *Refugee Capital*). It is true that very often the detailed notes about the source culture could be annoying and interest very few readers after all. The majority of readers of literary texts read for the pleasure of the act of reading itself. Thus, it is often claimed that the translation choices should guarantee the pleasure of reading and they should not distract readers by imposing the source culture

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<sup>5</sup> The translation costs have been covered in this case by the Greek Ministry of Culture.

at any price, because it is impossible for the reader to assimilate it easily. However, following Lederer (2004: 75), we should also ask if the argument of the ignorance of the *other*, which finally leads up to the domestication of the alien culture, is still relevant nowadays as it used to be. Or is it finally a myth, maintained voluntarily? In fact, in the globalizing world we live in, cultures are increasingly getting closer. We must also admit that readers today are much better prepared than in the past to accommodate the *other*, since all kind of media plunge us every day into other cultural worlds. Those who read a translated literary novel, are, by definition, open to the different, ready to be exposed to the unknown and to reconcile with it.

## **5. Conclusion**

From the present state of the transfer of lexical items denoting Greek cultural specificities by English translators it appears that the adopted translation techniques usually lead to a transparent target text and to the ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target language cultural values. The unknown is reduced to known and the different to familiar. Consequently, in most cases, the translated texts do not contribute to the reconciliation or the recognition of cultural difference. In sum, otherness is denied and transformed.

Furthermore, it must be noted that the way cultural markers are translated reflects the domesticating - imperialist attitude adopted by hegemonic cultures. In sum, translation choices are never ideologically and politically innocent. As translating is an intended action (Venuti 2004: 28), translators are guided by the norms, literary canons, translation tradition prevailing in the socio-cultural territory to which they belong. In addition, their choices are determined by the rules imposed by the commissioning institution.

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## Abstract

This study examines the practices applied by English translators as regards the transfer of lexical items denoting Greek cultural specificities. The data were gathered from various novels and a collection of short prose pieces and essays translated from Greek to English. After some general remarks on the cultural dimension of translation, I draw up a list of the translation techniques used and I try to identify the inherent factors and reasons that guide translators in their choices. Various theoretical approaches have shown that translation is not a simple business of words or structures but rather a human activity integrating social, historical and political factors. Thus, translator's approach is not limited to personal preferences; it is a comprehensive process including social and ideological parameters governing the translating act. In fact, the paper argues that the adopted translation techniques usually lead to a transparent target text and to the ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target language cultural values. The unknown is reduced to known and the different to familiar. In sum, the way cultural markers are translated reflects the domesticating - imperialist attitude adopted by hegemonic cultures.

Keywords: translation, culture, cultural marker, translational techniques.