

Dealing with Proper Names in Translation: a case-study on Federico García Lorca's *Tragicomedy of Don Cristóbal and Miss Rosita*

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Abstract: The translation of culturemes is one of the most challenging tasks, since it requires the knowledge of two languages, as well as of two cultures. There is a variety of culturemes, which can be approached in several ways in the process of translation, and proper names represent one of the most interesting categories. While the trend of translating proper names is no longer acceptable nowadays, there are certain situations where the translator is forced to make decisions about keeping them, translating/ adapting them or simply eliminating them completely. Our paper analyzes the proper names in Federico García Lorca's play *The Tragicomedy of Don Cristóbal and Miss Rosita* and our own challenges in the process of translating the Spanish text into Romanian.

Keywords: *culturemes, translation, proper names, Andalusia, Lorca.*

o. Translating culturemes is a challenging task for any translator since the balance between producing an accessible text and preserving the peculiarities of a foreign language and a foreign culture is easily shifted one way or another by the insufficient knowledge of the linguistic and cultural background.

The question of translating culturemes is one of the main issues of modern traductology: earlier translations used to represent an adaptation of the text to another culture, whereas modern translations aim at preserving, if possible, the local "flavor" of the source language in order to disseminate certain cultural aspects towards the grasp of the readers that belong to a different culture, so that the *unity in diversity* goal of the Western world is achieved. Since cultural elements may vary from similar to completely non-existent or barely similar in the target culture, the task of translating their linguistic counterparts is a permanent oscillation between the introduction of new culturemes to a language and the compromise of eliminating all differences by using a term that designates a local cultureme.

Our paper tries to focus on the difficulties we have encountered in the translation of Lorca's *Tragicomedy of Don Cristóbal and Miss Rosita* into Romanian and the solutions we hold as the most satisfying according to their balance between the two tendencies stated above. We have succeeded in translating Lorca's play, for the first time in Romanian, in the summer of 2020,

at the request of the local theater, and the version we submitted then was published in a critical edition in 2022 at a Spanish publishing house (Lorca 2022). The play was first staged in Suceava on the 18th of July, 2020, with an adapted script fairly based on our work.

The Romanian translation, *Tragicomedia lui don Cristóbal și a duzii Rosita*, follows the posthumous version published by Juan Guerrero Zamora in the Spanish journal *Raíz. Cuadernos de literatura de la Facultad de Letras*, Madrid, 1948. It was constantly republished, over the years, as part of Lorca's complete works; the history of this version starts with a copy held by actor José Franco, who played Don Cristóbal on the opening night in 1937, at the Teatro de Zarzuela in Madrid. The copy included Lorca's suggestions, amendments and changes, since he supervised the staging until his tragic execution in August 1936.

That was the last variant during the author's life, so it became the canonic version of the play; besides, it came with numerous indications regarding scenography and especially music (Cerrillo & Sánchez 2006: 141), which makes Lorca's play to be almost a *musical*.

Other than that, the source text contains a vast and variate collection of culturemes, elements that belong to a culture in opposition with another and have a symbolic value and a certain notoriety amongst the members of a community. Translation provides the perfect environment for the study of culturemes, since they require the context of an exchange or a transfer between two cultures (Molina Martínez 2006: 78-79).

Translators deal with culturemes in a variety of ways, according to the requirements of the particular context, such as literal translation, functional equivalence (adaptation), near-synonymy, under- or overspecification, distortion, explanation or change of category (Nicolae 2015: 220).

Following the classification that we proposed in a previous paper (Seiciuc 2019: 232-235), we noticed that the majority of the culturemes in Lorca's text (Lorca 1998) belongs to the category of diatopic culturemes, so they will constitute the object of this analysis; given the limited extension of this paper, we chose to focus only on the treatment of the proper names in translation from one language to another and from one culture to another.

The practice of translating or adapting proper names is no longer an option for contemporary translators, unless it is necessary for some reason, for example, when said name has a specific meaning in the source language and is relevant for the course of action, so it functions more like a nickname than a proper name or, on the contrary, it has an inappropriate meaning in the target language. This happened to the toponym *Laputa* in Swift *Gulliver's Travels*: in the early Spanish translations, it was replaced by euphemistic adaptations, such as *Lapuda*, *Lapuntu*, *Lupata* or *Laput*.

1. Toponyms

Toponyms, whether they stand alone or are part of a collocation, are the quintessential diatopic culturemes. Unless they belong to one of the categories we mentioned above, they are not usually translated, with the exception of those international toponyms that are lexicalized in different variants in different

languages (s. a. continents, countries, capitals, oceans, certain mountains or rivers, etc.).

In Lorca's text there are several Andalusian toponyms, both as derivatives modifying nouns or as circumstantial complements. Some of them designate places that are unknown to the Romanian public. Such is the case of the adjective *calañés* ("from, or referring to, Calañas", a small village in the province of Huelva, in southwestern Andalusia); we chose not to eliminate the geographical reference from the translation, so we kept the toponym as a noun adjunct in the collocation: Sp. *sombrerillo calañés* – Rom. *pălăriuță de Calañas* ("Calañas hat") and provided an explanation of the collocation in a footnote.

There are also a few toponyms that the Romanian public is familiar with; nevertheless, due to their Romanian spelling, they are mispronounced: for example, *Málaga* or *Córdoba* are proparoxytone in Spanish and paroxytone in the lexicalized Romanian pronunciation; *Cádiz* is paroxytone in Spanish and oxytone in the lexicalized Romanian pronunciation. We purposely chose to maintain the diacritical accent, which does not exist in Romanian orthography, so that more Romanians would be able to identify the stressed vowel and pronounce these toponyms properly.

Toponyms may sometimes appear in idiomatic expressions; this is the third case where the necessity of translation occurs with toponyms (Seiciuc 2016). One example in the text is the idiom *por los cerros de Úbeda*, which in English would translate to *around the bush*. Evidently, the toponym Úbeda, designating a small town in the province of Jaén, in eastern Andalusia, has no relevance at this point, since it is part of an opaque idiomatic structure, so it does not appear in the target text; in the Romanian version we used the idiom *în doi peri*, which we found most appropriate for the actual meaning as results from the context.

2. Characters in the play

In Lorca's play, the names of the characters were not chosen randomly; they have meaning, they are symbolic, they are relevant in the construction of the cultural context and of the characters *per se* or in relationship to one another.

The choice in the names of the eponym characters is quite subtle, but there is an obvious cultural component in both of them. First of all, *Rosita* is a diminutive from *Rosa* („rose”) and alludes to the delicate beauty of the flower, but also to the implicit sensuality or duality given by the thorns, which clashes with the traditional portrait of the *ingénue*. From a social perspective, *Rosa* is quite a common name in Spanish, so it suggests that the character belongs to the middle rather than the upper class.

As for the other main character, the exact name *Cristóbal* appears few times in the play, usually in Lorca's stage directions; instead, all the characters prefer the diminutive *Cristobita*, which, far from being an affectionate term, is mostly pejorative, as expected in relation to the villain in the play. The choice for this name is a cultural reference, as *Cristóbal* (*Cristobita* or *Cristobica*) is the name of one of the traditional characters in the Spanish puppetry (Alcantud 2016: 104), an approximate counterpart of the upper-class variant of *Pulcinella*

in the Italian *commedia dell'arte*. Both Cristobita and the traditional Italian puppet share several characteristics: they are both depicted as repulsively ugly opportunists, they are vile, rude and cruel and they arrogantly dispose of everyone else.

Translating these two names in the title, the way translators did in the 1800's, was never an option for us; instead, we preserved the original spelling, accent included. Nevertheless, the names of the supporting characters are far more transparent. Rosita's two callers, *Cocoliche* and *Currito*, are not the typical stock characters, but rather a mix of rake and hero. Still, their names point to two different typologies. The former, *Cocoliche*, is Rosita's main love interest; he is the prototype for the simple country boy, limited by the circumstances of his life and the lack of a profession, but he is charming and attractive as most artists are. His name comes from Argentinian Spanish: the word *cocoliche* is a disrespectful designation for the Italian immigrants in Rio de la Plata, whom the locals perceive as lazy and untrustworthy, as they carry on their traditional philosophy of the *dolce far' niente*. The other beau, *Currito*, has a different history: he has opened his horizon while travelling and seeing the world, and he returns to his native Andalusia with nostalgia and a little contempt. He appears in the list of characters as *Currito, el del Puerto* ("Currito from the Harbor"), which suggests a restless and adventurous nature confirmed by the ups and downs in his relationship to Rosita. His name *Curro*, a hypocoristic of *Francisco*, is sometimes used as an adjective or common noun meaning, metaphorically, "elegant, put together, fancy etc.", and it is also a generic exonym for Andalusian men. The symbolic and metaphorical meanings of these two names are too culturally specific and too rich in denotations and connotations to allow a translation, since any attempt to find a Romanian equivalent would deprive them of all their semantic ramifications.

The barber's name, *Figaro*, does not require any further investigation, since it is an intertextual reference to the Sevillian character in the theater of Beaumarchais, which the librettos of certain famous composers such as Mozart and Rossini would later take over. Since Figaro is a name the Romanian public is well acquainted to, there was no point in trying to translate it, though we decided to include a brief footnote about the history of the character in European literature and music.

On the other hand, *Cansa-Almas* and *Espantanublos* sound more like nicknames than actual names – or 'speaking' names, in the words of some critics (Katona 2012: 75), and that is why we hesitated about the decision to keep their original form or to translate them. Concretely, *Cansa-Almas* is a compound noun of the verb *cansar*, "to tire", and the noun *alma*, "soul"; the meaning of this compound is "nosy, gossipy person who spends their life checking someone else's business". *Espantanublos* is also a derivative, formed with the verb *espantar*, "to scare", and the noun *nublo*, "tempest cloud"; in the Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy, the noun *espantanublados* has two registered meanings, out of which we signal the one that designates an inopportune person, someone who likes to be in the center of gossip and scandal. After pondering the benefits and the shortcomings, we decided upon

keeping the original Spanish version, so that the Romanian public could better experience the immersion into the Spanish cultural environment, but only after providing detailed information and suggestions in the footnotes, so that any director could opt for the adaptation into Romanian of the foreign names in the process of staging the play in a Romanian theater. We feel that any translator of theater should take into account the very conditions of the staging, i. e. the audience is deprived of the possibility of reading the footnotes in the translation or of looking for the information online, on the available search engines.

3. Western historical figures and fictional characters

Among the culturemes in Lorca's text, there are a few that required a special attention; concretely, we are pointing to certain cultural elements that are well-known in Western Europe, but are unfamiliar in the Romanian environment. We cannot ignore the fact that Western Europe constituted a constant and permanent cultural continuum since the times of the Roman Empire, thanks to the cohesion represented, in the beginning, by the Roman administration, and later by the Catholic Church (through the circulation of religious texts or through the Crusades, for example) and by the migrations of the lay population attracted by the commercial opportunities represented by fairs, tournaments or pilgrimages. The circulation of cultural and historical information, at the level of the minor culture, took place orally, both through personal human interactions and through the artistic performances of troubadours, bards, actors and puppeteers.

An interesting reference to common western European culture is the name of *Don Pantalón*, a humorous adaptation of the Spanish version, *Don Pantaleón*. This name, invoked by the character Don Cristóbal as an alleged proof of his cultural background, refers to *Pantalone*, a stock character in the *Commedia dell'Arte*, representing both the nobility class and the close connection with the pecuniary side of life; obviously, Lorca's intention is to provide the Spanish reader or viewer with a key to understanding the character of Cristóbal, who exhibits a superiority complex with tendencies toward megalomania and mythomania. We had no choice but to keep the proper name of the fictional character as it is, since the Romanian public is not familiar with the characters in western medieval theatre.

Another fictional character invoked by Cristóbal is Don Juan Tenorio, a character in Spanish literature created, probably, by Tirso de Molina in his comedy *El burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra*, published at the beginning of the 17th century. Don Juan, the archetype of the unscrupulous seducer, was later the source of inspiration for various authors in universal literature, such as Molière, Byron, Goldoni, Zorrilla, Merimée or Dumas, who reconfigured its portrait according to their own visions. The name *Don Juan* is known to the Romanian public and it is also used in the Romanian language as a common name meaning "womanizer", so no translation or adaptation was necessary. Nevertheless, since the last name *Tenorio* is not familiar to most Romanians, we opted for the introduction of an explanatory footnote.

Lorca's play also contains references to historical figures that are not easily understood in Eastern Europe. Among the medieval legends that fueled the imagination of Western Europe is that of Genevieve of Brabant, the wife of a German count who was wrongly accused of adultery, which is a recurring theme in medieval folklore. Apparently, this fictional character was possibly inspired by the life and death of Maria of Brabant, Duchess of Bavaria (1226–1256). Given that the Romanian territory is not in the way of the established routes of the medieval troubadours, this kind of legend is non-existent in the Romanian folklore, therefore the only solution we could offer to this reference was to insert a footnote with some relevant, albeit brief explanations for that context.

4. Religious anthroponyms

As a consequence of the almost eight centuries of Arab occupation, the Iberian Peninsula became, from an early age, a bastion of Western Christianity. Christian religion evolved into a form of opposition against the Islamic invaders during the *Reconquista* wars; after the liberation of the Peninsula, the Catholic Church imposed its authority on the organization of the Hispanic society, especially after the creation of the Inquisition. Certainly, this cultural environment left a relevant mark on the social and cultural life of the population; this mark is visible in various cultural references in Lorca's play and required further explanations in the footnotes of the translated version.

Along with the invocation of God in seven instances, a cultural reference related to the Virgin Mary appears in the text. Marian apparitions are a cultural landmark in Spanish Catholicism (and beyond), and they usually receive names depending on where or how they were observed by the "seers" (*La Virgen del Espino/ del Pilar/ del Rocío/ del Prado/ de Guadalupe/ de Montserrat/ de Lourdes*, etc.). Cocoliche invokes the *Virgen del Espino* after his vision or dream about Rosita's mourning. He probably alludes to the last apparition in 1906, in Chauchina, Granada, when the Virgin Mary, wearing mourning clothes, supposedly appeared in front of an old woman and healed her wounds. Obviously, since this reference is completely opaque to the Romanian public, mostly Orthodox, we had to find a more accessible solution, so we opted for replacing the Spanish structure with *Sfintă Fecioară!* (lit. "Holy Virgin!"), which is similar enough and does not threaten the understanding of the context.

Furthermore, the names of Catholic Saints are probably unknown to most Romanians; in Rosita's house there is a portrait of Saint Rose of Lima, the first person in the West Indies to be canonized by the Catholic Church and designated to be the patroness of the New World; the people consider her to be the patroness of women, seamstresses and florists. Obviously, she is four times the patroness of Rosita, since the latter shares the same name, is a woman, spends her time embroidering and is named after a flower, so it is not surprising that she invokes her patroness in the most difficult moments of her existence. We included some explanations in a footnote to the first mention in the text (the name of St. Rose will further be invoked three more times), but we chose not to translate or adapt her name into Romanian, for we considered that it contributes to the creation of the specific atmosphere of the play.

5. Conclusions

Following the analysis of the corpus in Lorca's play, we notice that proper names may fall into four main categories with regard to their behavior in translation:

- a. Names that remain as such; in contemporary traductology, the practice of translating proper names is obsolete, so any time the translation, adaptation or omission is not necessary (for either reason stated above), the proper names should be incorporated as such in the target text.
- b. Names that need to be translated or adapted; sometimes it is necessary to adapt or translate proper names for a variety of reasons. For example, there are proper names that have an inappropriate meaning in the target language, including obscenities or blasphemies, so, according to the level of censorship in the target culture, they may require an adaptation.
- c. Names that need to be removed completely from the target text; such is the case with proper names that participate in the construction of idiomatic structures in the source language, but are absent in the target language.
- d. Names that allow translation or adaptation, according to the particularities of the context; the translator is the one who decides if the target text will benefit from the presence of the foreign name, if it is redundant or disposable or if it prevents the reader from understanding the context correctly.

Besides a good knowledge of the source and target languages and cultures, the translation of cultural references requires a solid and thorough documentation regarding all diatopic, diachronic, diastratic and diaphasic aspects, so that the target text is easily accessible to the target audience, without losing sight of the cultural and linguistic elements specific to the source text, especially if it is a manifesto, a tool for promoting the particularities of a culture, as are all the works of Federico García Lorca.

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