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THE CHALLENGES OF TRANSLATING LACUNAE ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE MYTHOLOGICAL CREATURES OF BELARUSIAN FOLKLORE

Part of the communicative competence is the socio-cultural competence. By presenting our native culture with dignity and at the same time showing respect for others we build the dialogue of cultures. Part of any nation's culture is comprised by folklore: myths, legends and fairy-tales as well as folk songs and lullabies, rituals and beliefs. Even with the passage of time and historical changes they find their reflection in customs and traditions, literature and films, music and fine arts. This makes this research **topical**.

The aim of this research is the popularization of Belarusian culture. In order to achieve this aim it is essential to complete the following **objectives**:

1. to outline the concept of lacunae;
2. to review the common ways of translating lacunae;
3. to compile an English guide to the world of Belarusian mythological creatures.

The object of the research is the names of Belarusian mythological creatures.

The subject of the work is the translation of the names of mythological creatures from Belarusian into English.

The work is based on the book “The Magic World. From Belarusian myths, legends and fairy tales”. The book in its turn is based on the materials of the publishing house “Belarusian Encyclopaedia named after Pyatrus Brouka” as well as the articles of the Belarusian folklore researchers Yaugen Adamovich and Uladzimir Vasilevich. The methodological base of the work is the research of E. A. Misuno, T.A. Kazakova, O.V. Petrova and A.F. Shapovalova.

The principal **methods** used in this research are analytical, comparative and descriptive methods.

1 Theoretical Part

1.1 The concept of the lacunae

The term lacunae, with a reference to languages, was first introduced by the Russian linguist Y.S. Stepanov. He referred to them as gaps or “white spots on the semantic map of the language”. Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture gives the following definition: “An empty space where something is missing”. There is a range of reasons for the appearance of lacunae:

- 1) the presence in the original culture of objects or phenomena that are absent from the culture of the reader of the translation;
- 2) the differences in denoting similar concepts in different languages;
- 3) the differences in the systems of word-building in different languages.

1.2 The most common ways of translating lacunae

There are several common ways of translating lacunae:

- 1) transcription and transliteration;
- 2) footnotes.
- 3) loan translation;
- 4) approximate translation;
- 5) descriptive translation.

Some linguists also suggest using semantic transformations for rendering lacunae as well as using direct inclusion.

All these ways have certain drawbacks and their use is limited by both linguistic and extralinguistic factors.

1.3 The challenges of translating proper names

The translation of proper names presents particular challenges. They are determined by the following factors:

- 1) The necessity to take into account both the meaning and the context;
- 2) The lack of agreement in the linguistic community on the issue of rendering proper names.

Quite often in works of fiction, we come across charactonyms. Collins Dictionary defines a charactonym as “a name given to a literary character that is descriptive of a quality or trait of the character”.

The rules of rendering English proper names into Russian are presented in a range of textbooks, reference books and other sources. But converting names from Russian into English is more complicated as some combinations of letters make the graphic images of some words too bulky. Since the aim of this research is creating an English guide to Belarusian mythological creatures the task is even more challenging. In the 20th century, in the Soviet Union there was a state standard for converting Cyrillic symbols into Latin ones. In Belarus as well as some other parts of the former USSR, it was later replaced by a renewed standard which offers two tables: one relying on diacritical signs and one employing letter combinations.

In 2023, the Instruction for rendering geographical names from Belarusian and Russian into other languages by means of the Latin alphabet was issued.

2 Practical Part

2.1 A classification of Belarusian mythological creatures

Researchers studying folklore usually divide the characters of myths and legends into several categories: wood dwellers, field dwellers, water creatures, those who inhabit the air and those who live in people's homes and near them.

Though the proper names in this research are not geographical names, it is deemed appropriate to use The Instruction for rendering geographical names from Belarusian and Russian into other languages by means of the Latin alphabet.

2.2 An English-speaking guide to Belarusian mythological creatures

2.2.1 Creatures inhabiting houses

Damavik or *Hatnik* and his wife *Damavuha* lived in the house. The Belarusian for ‘house’ is ‘дом’ and ‘хата’. *Baj* probably got his name from the word ‘баіць’ which means ‘to tell stories’. *Apivien* got his name from the words ‘апойваць’, ‘апаіць’. *Badziulia* comes from the word ‘бадзяцца’ which means ‘to be a vagrant’. *Valasien* was all covered with thick and long dark hair.

2.2.2 Creatures inhabiting household buildings

Gumiennik lived in the barn called ‘гумно’. *Jewnik* looked after ‘еўня’. *Laznik* or *Bannik* lived in the ‘лазня’ or ‘баня’. *Pavietnik* lived in ‘павець’ which was the place for keeping chopped wood. *Vazila* had other names like *Hliewnik* and *Tabunnik*. The name *Vazila* resembles the word ‘вазіць’ which means ‘take

somewhere' or 'drive somewhere'. 'Хлеў' is the place where horses and cows are kept. 'Табын' is a herd of horses. *Zlydni* were evil spirits that brought all sorts of misfortunes to people. The word *Zlydzien* is derived from the word 'злы' which means 'evil'.

2.2.3 Inhabitants of farm fields and gardens

Zhycien, the spirit of fields and crops, got his name from the word 'zhyta' which means 'rye'. *Ciocia*, the deity of summer, had the same name as 'aunty'.

2.2.4 Inhabitants of the woods

Bialun looked like an old man with a long white beard, wearing a long white outfit and carrying a long white staff – that's why he got the name 'Bialun' derived from the word 'white'. *Ziuzia* is the deity of winter and cold. The name comes from the verb 'зюзець' which means 'to feel cold', 'to freeze'. *Liasun* (*Liasny Dzied*, *Liesavik*, *Lieshy*) was the owner of the forest ('лес'). *Zmiainy Tsar* was the ruler of all snakes. *Vuzhalki* were the daughters of the Snake King, *Zmiainy Tsar*. *Gajun* (*Gajovy Dzied*) looked after the wood ('гай'). *Gajowki* were *Gajun*'s granddaughters. *Zazowka* got her name came from the word 'зазываць' which means 'to lure'.

2.2.5 Spirits inhabiting bodies of water

Vadzianik (*Vadziany*) got his name from 'вада' ('water'). Each body of water had its own *Vadzianik*. *Balamucien* got his name from the words 'баламут' ('naughty person') or 'баламуціць' ('make confusion'). *Balotnik* was a creature living in the swamp ('балота') and it was the most unpleasant of all the swamp dwellers. Fat and ugly, he lived not far from his brother *Bagnik* ('багна' is the Belarusian for 'mire'). *Lazavik* lived on the marshes in the 'лаза' which means 'withe'. *Arzhavien* lived in rusty spots of the bogs called 'аржавенне'.

Vadzianicy got their name from water ('вада') and they were kin to mermaids. Women who drowned turned into them. *Aziarnicy* were also kin to mermaids.

2.2.6 Dark spirits that could be found in different places

Garcuks got their name from the word 'гарцаваць' which means 'run and jump in a playful way'. *Hapun* got his name from the words 'хапаць', 'схапіць' which mean 'to catch'. *Mara* came at night and tortured people in their sleep. *Vawkalak* is the Belarusian version of werewolf. The word 'wolf' ('воўк') is also present in the name.

While applying the transliteration method the same guidelines that are recommended for rendering geographical names from Belarusian into other languages were used. The exception was made for the word *Tsar* (in the name of *Zmiainy Tsar*) as this word has historically been adopted into the English language in this form.

A concise guide has been compiled. It contains the illustrations and some descriptive information. Also the guide contains sound files with the names of the mythological creatures.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that translating is a very complex matter and requires a deep understanding of the cultural background of the original text. There are various layers of lacunae and proper names present the greatest challenges for translation. Many of the characters of myths, legends and fairy-tales have names that reflect their origin or their personality. Rendering their meaning by the way of producing full substitutions will take away the national specificity of the texts. Yet preserving their original forms creates psychological difficulties for the recipient of the information.

The combination of transcription and description used in this research allows the recipient to get the feeling of the culture of the source language and get the meaning of the message.

The material of this work can be used both in class and for extracurricular activities when studying the culture of Belarus, discussing cultural tourism and ethno-tourism. It can also be used for presenting Belarusian culture to foreigners.