CULTURAL AND TEMPORAL SPECIFICS OF LEXIS IN RUSSIAN FICTION:
ASPECTS OF ENGLISH TRANSLATION (IN CASE OF ‘A COUNTRY DOCTOR’S
NOTEBOOK’ BY M.A. BULGAKOV)

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Abstract. The article researches specifics of temporal and cultural markers of Russian work
of literature ‘A Country Doctor’s Notebook’ by M.A. Bulgakov and its’ English translation. Elic-
ited lexical units fall into thematic groups: person, artifact, actions, diseases and place. The
part-of-speech classification followed and revealed prevailing nouns. Further stage involved the
study of immediate context of the units.

Keywords: cultural marker, temporal marker, medical discourse, Bulgakov, corpora, modif-
ier.

The subject of our research were the words
and phrases which are marked with cultural
and temporal specifics in the English transla-
tion of the cycle of short stories ‘A Country
Doctor’s Notebook’[1] by Mikhail
Afanasyevich Bulgakov (1925-26) performed
by Michael Glenny [2] (1975). The aim is to
study and justify the use of borrowings, idi-
oms to explain the plot of the work. The goal
defines the objectives of the study: 1) to s-
lect the words in Russian text and their tran-
slation in English; 2) to perform etymological
classification of the units under study; 3) to
classify the units under study into thematic
groups; 4) to find synonyms for the lexis with
cultural and temporal specifics; 5) to analyze
the frequency of synonyms; 6) to determine
which parts of speech are most often bor-
rowed.

At the first stage (I) of our work, 20 words
and expressions were selected from M.
Bulgakov’s original work and their transla-
tions were found in an adaptation by Michael
Glenny (1975). For example, feldsher-
feldschner, mustard plaster-горчичник, fel-
low-голубчик, speckled rash-звездная сыпь,
mottled chest-мраморная грудь, foot-
cloths-портянки, flannel shawl-байковый
платок, lived under a Sword of Damocles-
mеч повис над головой, clerk-конторщик,
local town-уездный город, washtub-
корошт, sheepskin-шуба, driver-возница,
gave a gold metal-озолотить, rouble-
целковые, sexton-дьячок, wretched outcast-
выброшен за борт, mattress-сенник, sam-
ovar-самовар, corn-chandler’s store-лабаз.

The second stage (II) involved the etymo-
logical analysis of words. In the course of
which were identified 11 words of the Middle
English, 2 Old English words, 3 words of
Russian origin. For example, feldsher, the
medical or surgical practitioner without full
professional qualifications or status in Russia.
The word from German Feldscher- ‘field’
which means an expanse of open or cleared
ground + ’to shear’ with meaning to remove
by or as if by cutting or clipping with a sharp
instrument; rouble, the basic monetary unit of
Russia. Old Russian rublĭ literally, but over
time there was a reduction in the word; sam-
ovar-a metal urn, used especially by Russians for h
eating water for making tea. Word consists of
two components ‘samo-’ self (or same) + ‘-
var’, noun derivative of varĭ to cook, boil),
and 1 word originally from Persia, 2 Russian
and 1 idiom of both Russian and English.

The third stage (III) included the selection
of the words and phrases, which are marked
with cultural and temporal specifications.
Cultural markers were determined in 4 words
(feldsher, footcloths, samovar, corn-
chandler’s store) and temporally marked –
that is, out of use 2 words (washtub,
tselkovyh).
The next stage (IV) was marked by the selection of synonyms for the lexis under study [3, 4, 5, 6, 7]. For each word or expression were selected words that could replace them in the context of the translation. As for example, the word ‘feldscher’ can be replaced by medical assistant; paramedic; medical orderly; first-aid man, which are more familiar to the English-speaking readers.

The fifth stage (V) was based on the identification of the frequency of words in the translation of Michael Glenny and synonyms, found at stage IV. By using the tool https://books.google.com/ngrams, the analysis of the use of all the above words was carried out (see Figure 1) and revealed that since 1970 and nowadays the word ‘paramedic’ is the most common. At the same time, it should be noted that the term ‘medical assistant’, comes second in the application frequency, has been known since 1775, so its use in this context would look more harmonious. Each word and its synonym were analyzed in this program. The table (Table 1) shows in bold italics the most frequently used word in literary works.

![Figure 1. The frequency of synonyms to the word «feldscher»](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. The synonyms for the lexical units marked with cultural and temporal features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lexical unit</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feldsher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mustard plaster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The speckled rash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mottled chest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foot-cloths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flannel shawl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She lived under a Sword of Damocles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nearby town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washub</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheepskin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gave a gold metal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rouble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wretched outcast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mattress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samovar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corn-chandler’s store</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Since 1840, the popularity of the idiom ‘Sword of Damocles’ increases every year, but all its synonyms ‘danger’, ‘risk’, ‘hazard’ are used much more often. The term ‘clerk’ is used more often than its synonyms ‘office man’, ‘office worker’. ‘Sheepskin’ and its synonym ‘fur coat’ in the literature occur with the same frequency, in contrast to the word ‘fur’, which is the leader in frequency of use. The word ‘driver’ compared with its synonyms (charioteer, teamster) is found several times more often and every year it is only gaining popularity. The idiom ‘gave a gold metal’ is rarely used in works; it is replaced with the phrase ‘get rich’.

The use of the word ‘rouble’ in literature is many times more frequent than its synonym ‘tselkovyh’. At the time of writing and translating the book, the word ‘sexton’ was used more often than ‘sacristan’ and ‘lector’. The translation of the Russian idiom ‘wretched outcast’ is less used than its synonyms such as ‘irrelevance’, ‘uselessness’. At the same time, other borrowing ‘samovar’ almost not used in the literature, replaced by ‘container’, ‘jar’, ‘vase’. ‘Corn-chandler’s store’ is virtually non-existent in literature, with the word ‘shed’ usually appearing in its place.

The sixth stage (VI) of the research has focused on part-of-speech classification [8], in which there have been three expressions (lived under a Sword of Damocles, gave a gold metal, wretched outcast), 4 adjectives (mustard, speckled) and 13 nouns (feldsher, fellow, corn-chandler’s store).

During the seventh stage (VII), modifiers were considered before the words of cultural and temporal coloring [9, 10]. For comparison, fragments of the book and the site https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/ [11], which highlights the search word in newspapers, magazines and books, were used.

In Glenn’s translation, a book most often has possessive pronoun or no modifier in front of it. In the case of the corpora adjectives are most often used.

Table 2. The modifiers in pre-position to culturally and temporally labeled words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lexical unit</th>
<th>The corpora</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural labeled words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feldsher</td>
<td>1. Possessive pronoun My feldsher was called Demyan Lukich, the midwives were Pelagea Ivanovna and Anna Nikolaevna.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. ‘Yes …’ the feldsher pronounced softly and that was all he said.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Numerical It had a Medical Superintendent, three interns (beside myself), several feldshers, midwives, nurses, a dispensary and a laboratory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>foot-cloths</td>
<td>1. Possessive pronoun I can clearly picture him unwrapping his foot-cloths and looking for sympathy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>corn-chandler’s store</td>
<td>1. Adjective we were at the last corn-chandler’s store on the outskirts of the remarkable town of Grachyovka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporal labeled words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>washtub</td>
<td>1. - I was sitting naked in the washtub with a lathered head.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. - I sat down again in the washtub and opened the letter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>roubles</td>
<td>1. Numeral Twenty roubles a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Preposition its staff had been paid in roubles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Numeral more than ten billion roubles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the course of the study of the translation of the work the conclusions were made:
1. Words that are difficult to translate into English were not only truly Russian, there were also words originally from Germany and Persia.
2. The use of the words chosen by the translator Glenny is less than their synonyms we have chosen in literary sources. This may be due to the desire to give the translation feeling of the last century.
3. For the 6 found culturally and temporally colored words, a search for modifiers was conducted, which revealed the prevalence of pronouns and adjectives.

References
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7. Merriam-Webster dictionary URL: https://www.merriam-webster.com/