

**Ana Sentov**<sup>1</sup>

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## TRANSLATING CULTURE-BOUND ELEMENTS IN JAMES SHAPIRO'S *1606: SHAKESPEARE AND THE YEAR OF LEAR*

**ABSTRACT:** This paper deals with translating culture-bound elements in the prologue chapter of James Shapiro's biography of Shakespeare *1606: Shakespeare and the Year of Lear* (2015). Shapiro's book abounds with historical, cultural and literary references, which will pose a particular challenge for any translator attempting to identify and understand these elements and then convey them into the target language/ target culture (TL/TC). In most cases, additional explanations in footnotes or parentheses would need to be provided for the TC readers. Even if TL equivalents exist, modern readers may not be familiar with the concept in either SC or TC. The translator would also need to pay special attention to translating temporal dialect words and phrases, since they are used in accordance with the historical period in question. The analysis that follows will attempt to identify and discuss some of these culture-related elements, with the hope that it may help the future translators.

**KEY WORDS:** culture-bound elements, translation, James Shapiro, William Shakespeare, *1606: Shakespeare and the Year of Lear*

### 1. Introduction

The year 2016 was dedicated to commemorating 400 years since Shakespeare's death, and was filled with numerous tributes to his life and works, as well as adaptations of his works – on stage, on television,

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<sup>1</sup> Assistant professor, Faculty of Law and Business Studies dr Lazar Vrkić, Novi Sad, Union University, Belgrade

in cinema, in documentaries and feature films, conferences and via both scientific and popular publications. One of these publications is a biography dealing with a significant year in Shakespeare's life by James Shapiro, a Shakespearean scholar and Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Columbia, who has published widely on Shakespeare and Elizabethan culture.

His latest book, *The Year of Lear: Shakespeare in 1606*, published in October 2015, offers a glimpse into a turbulent year in the life of a yet-to-be-born British nation, reluctantly emerging through a temporary union of Scotland and England under King James, a Scottish monarch who had inherited the English throne. The previous year, 1605, was marked by the failed "Gunpowder Plot", whose fallout continued into the following months: the anti-Catholic hysteria resulting in anti-Catholic legislation, the imprisonment, trial and execution of the plotters; a loyalty oath instituted in response to the perceived Catholic threat. 1606 was also the year of the investigation of demonic possession, instigated by King James, the year when the plague returned to London, when the new British flag was designed and first flown, and when ships sailed from London's docks to found the first colony in America, at Jamestown.

This turbulent year was a creative one for Shakespeare: he finished writing *King Lear* early in 1606, and by the end of it wrote *Macbeth* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. In each of these plays, he powerfully reflected on the social and political upheavals of the day: they deal with regicide, rebellion against monarchs, civil strife, and descent into violence and anarchy. Although the facts about Shakespeare's life at the turn of the 17th century are few, Shapiro draws on the existing historical data and Shakespeare's plays to speculate how the events may have influenced the author's life, and consequently, his works.

Unsurprisingly, Shapiro's biography of Shakespeare abounds with historical, cultural and literary references, which will pose a particular challenge for the translator to identify them and then adequately convey them into the target language/target culture (TL/TC). The analysis that follows will attempt to identify and discuss some of these culture-related elements, with the hope that it may help the future translators of this fascinating biography.

## 2. Translating Culture-Bound Elements

In an increasingly multicultural world, there is a growing awareness of the role of culture in translations, as well as of the role of translators as active mediators between the source culture (SC) and the target culture (TC). It has long been acknowledged that the meaning a text carries depends on how knowledgeable a translator is about both the SC and TC (Ceramella 2008: 16).

Indeed, the importance of translators being knowledgeable about both the SC and TC is demonstrated in the very title of the book *The Year of Lear*. The author does not need to cite the original title of Shakespeare's tragedy, since he can be fairly certain that the SC readers will understand the reference. The translator, however, would need to reference the play's title in full: *The Year of Lear = Godina „Kralja Lira“*. The translator would have to modify the title in order to increase comprehensibility, since it is unlikely that all TC readers will understand the reference by the proper name "Lear" only. Regrettably, the clever rhyming of the original title is lost in its Serbian translation, which demonstrates the compromises translators have to make in order to communicate the desired message into the TL/TC.

Many translation theorists have stressed that the concept of culture is essential for understanding the importance of culture-specific items in translation (Larson 1984, Newmark 1998, Gambier 2004). Culture has been defined as a way of life and a complex system of beliefs, values, attitudes and rules which a group of people share (Larson 1984). Culture encompasses language, history, social structure, religion, tradition and daily life of a group, and is reflected in culture-specific features and items in the language (Newmark 1998: 95). In order to be able to translate such items adequately into the TL/TC, the translator not only has to be proficient in the SL, but also profoundly knowledgeable about the SC.

Some scholars (Shuttleworth and Cowie 1997, Nida and Taber 1982) introduced the concept of "cultural translation" as a type of translation in which the content of the message is changed to conform to the TC audience, and/or in which information not linguistically explicit in the original is included. To put it more simply, cultural translation often

includes additions which are there to provide the necessary background information for the TC audience.

Whether they are called “cultural words” (Newmark 1988), “culture-specific items” (Baker 1992), “culturemes” (Nord 1997), “culture-specific references” (Gambier 2004), “culture-bound concepts” (Ceramella 2008), or “culture-related elements” (Novakov 2016), scholars agree that these items reflect the SC, and that a successful translation often depends on the translator’s ability to use the cultural approach and think of translation as a process of communication between cultures, as well as between languages.

The cultural approach involves identifying and understanding culture-bound elements in the SL, and then integrating them in the TL translation using the translator’s extra-linguistic knowledge. This approach also involves the translators doing research of their own, using printed and online sources, in a quest for the most adequate translation for the TC audience (Novakov, 2016). The importance of the cultural approach cannot be overestimated: through adequate translation and the translators’ remarks and explanations readers are able to understand the communicative purpose of the text, and become familiar with some aspects of the SC and, more often than not, of their own culture.

For the purposes of this paper, the introductory chapter *Prologue: 5 January 1606* has been analyzed, and the culture-bound elements have been classified into four groups: proper names, historical references, literary references, and period-specific items (temporal dialect). Examples (a) are cited from the original text, and the proposed translations (b) are given below.

## **2.1 Proper Names**

This group has been divided into two subgroups:

### **2.1.1 Proper names referring to people**

This group is comprised of phrases pertaining to people, most frequently involving titles or sobriquets which are closely related to the Elizabethan/Jacobean/early modern periods in England. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that equivalent titles would exist in Serbian, and the

translator would be dealing with nonequivalence at the lexical level (Ceramella 2008: 19). The translator would be advised to either employ the closest equivalent concept in the TC, or to use superordinates, i.e., more general words as explanations.

- (1) a) while the Lord Chamberlain, white staff in hand, ensured....(1)  
b) dok je Lord komornik, s belom palicom u ruci, pazio...

Lord Chamberlain = Lord komornik is a rare example of equivalence at a lexical level, although this concept may bear additional explanation in the form of a footnote (e.g. the official in charge of a royal household in the UK, formerly the licenser of plays<sup>2</sup> = visoki službenik na britanskom dvoru, zadužen za kraljevsko domaćinstvo, nekada izdavao dozvole za izvođenje pozorišnih komada).

- (2) a) an increasing nostalgia for the late Queen Bess... (12)  
b) sve veća nostalgija za pokojnom kraljicom Bes...

The SC readership is likely to be familiar with this nickname for Queen Elizabeth I, as well as the one in the next example.

- (3) a) try imagining a version of *Shakespeare in Love* that ends with a cameo appearance of the Scottish king rather than the Virgin Queen... (14)  
b) probajte da zamislite „Zaljubljenog Šekspira“ u kome se na kraju pojavljuje škotski kralj, a ne Kraljica-devica...

However, these nicknames will have to be explained for the TC readers in the footnote, or in parentheses.

- (4) a) the last decade of his career was spent as a King's Man under James .... (13)

b) poslednju deceniju svoje karijere proveo je kao član Kraljeve glumačke družine, pod pokroviteljstvom kralja Džejmisa ....

In this example, the common noun “man” has a specific meaning in the phrase “a King’s Man” that will have to be rendered in Serbian by paraphrasing it as „član Kraljeve glumačke družine (trupe)“.

- (5) a) his official role as a Groom of the Chamber .... (16)  
b) njegova zvanična uloga dvorskog službenika ....

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<sup>2</sup> Oxford Living Dictionary, en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/lord\_chamberlain

“Groom of the Chamber“ is a culture-bound concept closely linked to Tudor/Elizabethan/Jacobean court life. It refers to a title that Shakespeare and his fellow actors were given as King’s Men, and meant that they had a position in the King’s household, and were paid for it. This title, having no close Serbian equivalent, was in Veselin Kostić’s book *Šekspirov život i svet* rendered as “dvorski službenik“ (Kostić, 2006: 222), which is close enough for the TL/TC readers.

### 2.1.2 Proper names referring to locations/objects

(1) a) to the Banqueting House at Whitehall Palace ... (1)

b) do Gozbenog paviljona u palati Vajthol ...

The TC readers would benefit from an additional explanation relating that Whitehall Palace was the main residence of the English monarchs in London from 1530 until 1698, until most of its structures were destroyed by fire. The Banqueting House was the only remaining structure of the former Whitehall Palace, used for banquets (large meals), but also for having tea parties.

(2) a) leading past Charing Cross ... (1)

b) koji je vodio preko raskršća Čering Kros ...

Charing Cross, the junction of streets in central London (the Strand, Whitehall and Cockspur Street), named after the cross that used to stand on the site, should be preceded by a superordinate „raskršće“.

(3) a) the year in which the Union Jack was first flown ... (13)

b) te godine se prvi put zavijorila britanska zastava ...

“Union Jack“ is one example of culture-bound elements that are culturally untranslatable (Ceramella, 2008: 20). The translator could leave it out altogether and resort to a superordinate “britanska zastava” combined with an explanation in a footnote that the UK flag was first designed as a combination of England’s and Scotland’s flags (e.g., “britanska zastava je nastala kombinovanjem dizajna engleske i škotske zastave”). The other option would be to include the transcribed name “Junion Džek” along with the explanation.

## 2.2 Historical References

The source text abounds with historical references to both Jacobean and Elizabethan society and culture. In most cases, additional explanations in footnotes or parentheses would need to be provided for TC readers. Even if TL equivalents exist, modern readers may not be familiar with the concept in either the SC or TC. These words and phrases refer to events and concepts of the original period and are therefore no longer in use. A good example is the concept of “court masque” = “maskerata,” a form of festive court entertainment that flourished in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe, which involved music and dancing, singing and acting, as well as elaborate stage designs and extravagant costumes. In Zorica Bečanović-Nikolić's *U Traganju za Šekspirom*, “maskerata” is explained as “komadi ispunjeni simboličnim i alegorijskim prizorima iz antičke mitologije, bez naročito razvijenog zapleta” (Bečanović-Nikolić, 2013: 102).

(1) a) a master of those satiric citizen comedies... (5)

b) majstor za one satirične građanske komedije...

TC readers (and maybe some SC readers as well) would certainly need an additional explanation relating that “citizen comedies” were an early 17<sup>th</sup> century trend in English drama, markedly different from the earlier Elizabethan comedies as their setting was most often London, not exotic locations, and the characters belonged to the middle classes rather than to the aristocracy. The most prominent authors of citizen comedies were Ben Jonson and Thomas Middleton.

(2) a) a version of that play published in the 1623 folio... (5)

b) verzija te drame objavljena u Prvom foliju iz 1623. godine...

For an educated SC reader, the reference to “the 1623 folio” could be enough, but here the TC readers would need an explanation as to what “Prvi folio” actually refers to, which might be provided in a footnote (e.g. “prvo izdanje Šekspirovih sabranih dela iz 1623. godine, objavljeno u “folio” formatu, odnosno formatu većem od uobičajenog, dobijenom jednim presavijanjem štamparskog tabaka”).

(3) a) a heightened anxiety over Jesuitical equivocation... (9)

b) Jeziuitska dvosmislenost u govoru izazivala je sve veću zebnju...

“Jesuitical equivocation“ is a term related to the prosecution of Catholics as one of the consequences of the Gunpowder Plot, a failed plot to blow up the Parliament, kill the king and the country’s political leadership, and to reverse the process of Protestant Reformation. Allegedly, the Jesuit priests, who were helping the conspirators, advised them to use words with multiple meanings if captured by the authorities, so as to avoid lying (which was a sin) and at the same time deceive them as to their intentions and actions in supporting the Catholics in England. One of the characters in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* mockingly refers to Catholic priests and their alleged practice of equivocation. As Shapiro explains, the word at first had a neutral meaning, synonymous with “ambiguity“. However, in the Jacobean era, “it was taken to mean concealing the truth by saying one thing while deceptively thinking another“, and had a decidedly negative, anti-Catholic association. (Shapiro 2015: 155-156). The distinction between “equivocation“ and “ambiguity“ may be too subtle to render into the TL/TC, or we may argue that it is not pivotal to understanding the meaning. The translator may choose to render it simply as „dvosmislenost u govoru“, or to use the term „ekvivokacija“. In both cases, however, additional explanation of the term should be provided.

(4) a) the government agreed not to “make windows into men’s souls”... (9)

b) kada je vlada pristala da ne zaviruje u ljudske duše ...

“Make windows into men’s souls“ refers to the speech of Queen Elizabeth I (“I have no desire to make windows into men’s souls” = “Ne želim da zavirujem u ljudske duše”). The translator would need to recognize this quote in order to understand it and adequately translate it into the TL. Elizabeth I wanted to continue the religious reform and impose a common prayer book upon all of her subjects, yet leave the interpretation of its words to the individual. She aimed to reconcile the divided English nation, where many of her subjects felt that the reform had not gone far enough, while others refused to abandon their Catholic faith. During her reign, the tensions between the two lessened consid-



erably, as the authorities insisted merely upon formally observing the official Anglican faith. Today, her words are usually taken to mean that no government should intrude into the conscience of the citizen<sup>3</sup>.

(5) a) a Star Chamber investigation of faked demonic possession... (10)

b) istraga o lažnoj posednutosti zlim duhovima koju je sproveo Zvezdani sud...

For the benefit of the TC readers, the translator should provide an additional explanation relating that the Star Chamber was a judicial body whose members were usually royal councilors or judges drawn from the courts of the common law. Under the Stuarts, the Star Chamber's power grew considerably, and it was used (and often abused) to examine cases which the monarch perceived as a threat to royal policies. The court was named for the star pattern painted on the ceiling of the room at Westminster Palace where its meetings were held<sup>4</sup>. The proposed TL translation is „Zvezdani sud“, followed by a footnote (e.g. „vrhovni sud, sastavljen od članova kraljevskog saveta, koji je razmatrao predmete koje je kralj smatrao politički osetljivim ili važnim“).

### 2.3 Literary References

As could be expected, the text abounds with literary references, which can prove to be a challenge for the translator. One instance is a famous quote from the Chorus to *Henry the Fifth*:

(1) a) “princes to act

And monarchs to behold the swelling scene“

b) „kneževi su glumci,

A monarsi nek posmatraju scenu“<sup>5</sup>

(1.0.3-4)

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<sup>3</sup> [www.americamagazine.org/content/good-word/windows-mens-souls](http://www.americamagazine.org/content/good-word/windows-mens-souls)

<sup>4</sup> [www.tudorplace.com.ar/Documents/the\\_court\\_of\\_star\\_chamber.htm](http://www.tudorplace.com.ar/Documents/the_court_of_star_chamber.htm)

<sup>5</sup> *Henri peti* (1963). *Celokupna dela Viljema Šekspira*. Preveli Živojin Simić i Trifun Đukić. Beograd: Kultura

Shapiro uses this quote to imply that as a King's Man, Shakespeare could have had his wish expressed in the Chorus: if he had had the inclination to write court masques in the spirit of the time, he would have had noblemen and noblewomen as actors, and King James himself in the audience.

Another example, even more challenging, is a quote from an authentic letter of a young nobleman staying in France, to his uncle in England. The young man, describing the excitement and drama of the hunt, remembers Shakespeare's dramatic language and attempts to emulate it, using the rhythm of blankverse:

(2) a) "We for to pass the winter's bitter cold, so with a javelin chase the bristled boar, and sometimes, mounted on a foaming curtal, do rend the woods to hound the furious bull." (Shapiro, 2015: 7)

The four lines contain an example of temporal dialect (Ceramella, 2008: 14), i.e., words and phrases that were used in a certain historical period, and have since fallen out of use, or are used with a different meaning. "Curtal" (an animal, here a horse, with a docked tail) is now obsolete, and therefore the translator translating the text to Serbian would have to find an equivalent archaic word referring to a horse in the TL. "Hound" is a word more often used as a noun than as a verb, while "mounted," i.e., "on horseback," the translator may recognize from the phrase "mounted police." The word order and syntax are also archaic, typical of Shakespearean language, so the translator should attempt to render the feel of poetic, archaic language into the TL. However, it would be difficult to be completely faithful to the original, and this is not essential to the meaning. Blank verse relies on meter, not rhyme, so the translator need not render the rhyming couplet. In this case, it is enough to use the appropriate lexemes and syntax to help the reader associate the target text with poetic, archaic language.

In Serbian it might sound like this:

b) Da nam brže prođe ova hladna zima,  
Jurimo kopljem čekinjavog vepra,  
A katkad, jašući besnog ata,  
Šumama tutnjimo prateći jarosnog bika.

A similar example is the first stanza of Ben Johnson's poem written as a tribute to Shakespeare in 1623:

(3) a) Sweet swan of Avon! What a sight it were  
To see thee in our waters yet appear,  
And make those flights upon the banks of Thames,  
That so did take Eliza, and our James!

b) Divni labude s Ejevona! Kakav prizor beše ti  
Kad se u našim vodama pojavi,  
I uzlete nad obalama Temze,  
Na radost Džejmsa, i naše Elize!

The translator would again have the obligation of transferring the poetic and archaic lexemes and syntax (e.g., "thee," "that so did take," etc.). This time, however, the poem makes use of the rhyming scheme **aa bb**, which would have to be transferred in the TL.

## 2.4 Temporal Dialect (Period-specific Items)

Inevitably, temporal dialect does not appear only in excerpts from historical records or literary works, but also in Shapiro's original text. The translator would need to pay special attention to translate these words and phrases accurately, since they are used in accordance with the historical period in question. These words and phrases have either changed their meaning over time and are now used in a different sense, or have become obsolete.

(1) a) all ten of the plays Shakespeare's company performed at court... (3)

b) svih deset komada koje je Šekspirova glumačka družina izvela na dvoru...

"Company" is in the source text always used to mean "an acting/playing company", and the translator translating to Serbian should amplify the meaning by using the modifier such as „glumačka“, to increase comprehensibility (cf. Ceramella, 2008: 18). In later instances, using only „družina“ or „trupa“ would likely suffice.

(2) a) But James couldn't simply restore them all to favor... (4)

b) Ali Džejs nije mogao da ih sve tek tako vrati u milost...

Used in this sense, "favor" means the condition of being regarded with approval or good will by a monarch (which usually entailed being given money, offices and lands as a warrant of loyalty). (Shapiro 2015: 4) Therefore, the best possible equivalent in the TC is „biti u milosti“ ili „vratiti se u milost“.

(3) a) marrying off Essex's son, now a ward of the state, to Frances Howard... (4)

b) kako bi Eseksovog sina, sada štićenika krune, oženio sa Franses Hauard...

The legal status of "the ward of the state" today refers to a person placed under the protection of court. In the source text, however, the legal guardian in question would be the monarch as the head of state. Therefore, translating it as „štićenik dvora / krune“ seems the most adequate.

(4) a) their further exclusion from power and patronage under James... (5)

b) jer su im pod Džejsomovom vladavinom moć i povlastice i dalje bile nedostupne...

"Patronage" refers to the support, privilege or financial aid that an organization or an individual gives to another. In this context, it refers to the protection and privileges that a monarch bestows upon his courtiers, usually entailing gifts of money, offices or lands. Therefore, it seems most adequate to translate "patronage" into Serbian as „povlastice“.

(5) a) his recently acquired status as a gentleman would die with him... (8)

b) a odnedavno stečena titula plemića nestaće s njim...

"Gentleman" in its original meaning refers to the lowest rank of the English gentry. In Shakespeare's day, it came to signify a man with an income derived from property or legacy, who therefore did not need to work. The title could be bought, and when acquired, the gentleman

could carry a sword and have heralds make him a coat of arms. This title approximately corresponds approximately to the title „plemeniti“ acquired under similar conditions by wealthy men from the middle class in 18th and 19th century Serbia, and thus this Serbian equivalent would likely suffice in such a context.

### **3. Conclusion**

In an increasingly multicultural world, translation and translators have gained importance as mediators between the source and the target culture. The meaning of the text, or indeed any message, depends on how knowledgeable a translator is about both the SC and the TC. Employing the cultural approach to the source text (ST) is often the only way to properly understand it and adequately encode it as a target text (TT). The cultural approach involves the translator identifying and understanding culture-bound elements in the SL, and then integrating them into the TT using the translator's extra-linguistic knowledge. Both an adequate translation and translators' remarks and explanations enable the readers to understand the communicative purpose of the text, and become familiar with some aspects of the SC and, more often than not, of their own culture.

The introductory chapter of Shapiro's biography of Shakespeare has here been analyzed, the culture-bound elements identified, and the most adequate translations proposed. The ST abounds with historical, cultural and literary references, which pose a particular challenge for any translator attempting to grasp and adequately render them into the TL/TC. In most cases, additional explanations in the form of footnotes or parentheses would need to be provided for the TC readers. Even if TL equivalents exist, modern readers may not be familiar with the concepts in either the SC or TC. The translator would also need to pay special attention in translating temporal dialect words and phrases accurately, since these elements are used in accordance with the historical period in question. These words and phrases have either changed their meaning over time and are now used in a different sense, or have become obsolete.

The examples listed above illustrate some of the techniques a translator of this text would be likely to employ; from transcribing prop-

er names, to using more general words to increase comprehensibility, to researching and analyzing meanings in order to choose the most adequate translation for the respective TC audience. The translator's role is essential to the process; the translator's mind becomes a prism through which the message is refracted before being encoded in the TL (Novakov, 2016: 118). Clearly, Shapiro's biography of Shakespeare in 1606 calls for a translator well-versed in English history, culture, and literature, especially in regard to Shakespeare's works and the Jacobean age and culture.

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## PREVOĐENJE KULTUROLOŠKIH POJMOVA U BIOGRAFSKOJ STUDIJI

***1606: SHAKESPEARE AND THE YEAR OF LEAR* DŽEJMSA ŠAPIRA**

**REZIME:** Tema ovog rada je prevođenje kulturoloških pojmova u prologu Šekspirove biografije *1606: Shakespeare and the Year of Lear* (2016) Džejmsa Šapira, uglednog šekspirologa i profesora na Univerzitetu Kolumbija. S obzirom da se radi o biografskoj studiji koja se bavi jednom značajnom godinom u Šekspirovom stvaralaštvu, neminovno je da tekst sadrži veliki broj kulturoloških pojmova, kao i istorijskih i literarnih referenci koje prevodilac mora da uoči, razume, a zatim adekvatno prevede na ciljni jezik, odnosno prenese u ciljnu kulturu. U većini slučajeva, trebalo bi navesti dodatna objašnjenja kulturoloških pojmova u fusnoti ili u zagradi. Čak i ako postoje ekvivalenti pojmova u ciljnom jeziku, čitaocima ovi pojmovi mogu biti nepoznati kako u izvornoj, tako i u ciljnoj kulturi. U radu će se detaljno diskutovati o mogućim prevodima kulturološko-istorijskih pojmova, kao i prevodima dijalektoloških reči i fraza, i načinima na koji se ovi pojmovi mogu prevesti tako da budu shvatljivi savremenom čitaocu. Cilj rada je da ova analiza bude od pomoći budućem prevodiocu (prevodiocima) ove biografske studije.

**KLJUČNE REČI:** kulturološki pojmovi, prevođenje, Vilijam Šekspir, Džejms Šapiro, *1606: Shakespeare and the Year of Lear*