

**PRECEDENT NAMES AND CULTURAL REALIA IN THE
RUSSIAN TRANSLATION OF DAN BROWN'S NOVEL «THE DA
VINCI CODE»**

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Abstract. The article examines the rendering of precedent names and cultural realia in the Russian translation of Dan Brown's novel «The Da Vinci Code» made by N.V. Rein. The material comprises the prefatory «Fact» page, the prologue and the first two chapters of the original and of the translation, from which 58 aligned units were extracted, namely 30 proper names and 28 culture-specific items. The techniques were classified on the basis of the typologies of S. Vlahov and S. Florin, D.I. Yermolovich and J.F. Aixelá. Traditional equivalents (27.6%), calques (25.9%) and transcription (24.1%) prevail, so the translation preserves the form of most names. Culture-specific items behave differently. Almost a third of them (32.1%) are generalised, substituted or described, among them the cilice, the numeraries of Opus Dei, the keystone and Harris tweed, while only six footnotes support the reader. The findings can be used in translation criticism and in teaching literary translation.

Keywords. precedent name, realia, culture-specific item, proper name, literary translation, Dan Brown, «The Da Vinci Code», translation technique.

INTRODUCTION

Dan Brown's novels belong to the type of intellectual thriller in which the plot depends on the reader's recognition of real names. Painters, scientists, churches, museums, secret societies and religious organisations are not decorative details but clues. The author underlines this function himself. The novel opens with a page entitled «Fact», which states that all descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents and secret rituals in the book are accurate [9]. For the translator this declaration turns every proper name and every culture-specific item into a unit that must be both recognisable and precise.

Russian linguistics offers two complementary frameworks for such units. The theory of precedence, which goes back to the notion of precedent texts introduced by Yu.N. Karaulov [6], treats a precedent name as an individual name connected with a widely known text or situation and functioning as a sign of certain qualities [4]. The theory of realia describes words that denote objects specific to the life and culture of a community and have no direct equivalents in other languages [3]. Both categories confront the translator with a choice between preserving the foreign form and adapting the unit to the target culture [5; 12].

Translation studies have developed several typologies of solutions. S. Vlahov and S. Florin distinguish transcription, calque, assimilation, approximate and descriptive translation [3]. D.I. Yermolovich treats transcription, transliteration, traditional correspondences and calquing as the main ways of transferring proper names [5]. J.F. Aixelá opposes conservation and substitution strategies for culture-specific items [8, p. 52-78], and E.E. Davies adds globalisation, localisation, omission and creation to this list [10,

p. 65-100]. P. Newmark discusses the same problem in terms of cultural words and transference [11], while L. Venuti relates the choice to the broader opposition of foreignising and domesticating translation [12].

The Russian translation of «The Da Vinci Code» by N.V. Rein was published by AST in 2004 and has been reprinted many times, so it has shaped the Russian reception of the novel. Its treatment of names and realia deserves a systematic description. The aim of the present study is to identify the techniques used for precedent names and cultural realia in this translation and to evaluate their effect on the referential and cultural information of the text.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The original was taken from the first edition [9] and checked against the excerpt published on the author's official website. The translation was taken from the electronic edition of N.V. Rein's text distributed by LitRes [2]. The analysis covers the part of the novel available in both sources, namely the «Fact» page, the prologue and chapters 1 and 2, which amount to approximately 4,000 words of the original.

All proper names and culture-specific items of this span were extracted manually and aligned with their Russian counterparts, and repeated occurrences were counted once. The final list contains 58 units. Thirty of them are proper names, including names of real persons (Newton, Caravaggio, Harrison Ford), characters, places, institutions and titles of works. Twenty-eight are cultural realia in the sense of S. Vlahov and S. Florin [3], such as religious practices and objects, brands and social institutions. Common words and foreign phrases without cultural content were excluded.

Each unit was assigned to one of seven techniques combining the classifications of S. Vlahov and S. Florin [3], D.I. Yermolovich [5] and J.F. Aixelá [8]. These are the traditional equivalent, transcription or transliteration,

calque including partial calque, descriptive translation, generalisation including the omission of a specific feature, substitution by a unit with a different referent, and retention of the foreign form with a footnote. Notes of the translator and the editor were counted separately. For units rendered by descriptive translation, generalisation and substitution the effect on referential and cultural information was assessed. Following V.N. Komissarov, a rendering was considered adequate if it preserved the referent and the cultural status of the unit, and inadequate if it lost or distorted either of them [7]. The alignment of each unit was checked twice against both texts.

RESULTS

3.1 Distribution of techniques

Table 1 shows that the three form-oriented techniques dominate. Traditional equivalents account for 16 units (27.6%), calques for 15 (25.9%) and transcription for 14 (24.1%), which together cover 77.6% of the material. Techniques that change the content of a unit, namely substitution, descriptive translation and generalisation, account for 11 units (19.0%). The foreign form with a footnote is used twice. The two classes of units differ sharply. Among proper names only two of 30 units (6.7%) are rendered with a change of content, whereas among realia the share reaches nine of 28 (32.1%).

Table 1. Techniques of rendering proper names and realia

Technique	Proper names (n = 30)	Realia (n = 28)	Total (n = 58)	%
Traditional equivalent	11	5	16	27.6

Transcription, transliteration	11	3	14	24.1
Calque	6	9	15	25.9
Descriptive translation	1	3	4	6.9
Generalisation	0	3	3	5.2
Substitution	1	3	4	6.9
Foreign form with footnote	0	2	2	3.4
Total	30	28	58	100.0

3.2 Precedent names and other proper names

Names of real persons are rendered by traditional equivalents without exception, as in *сэр Исаак Ньютон*, *Виктор Гюго*, *Караваджо*, *Людовик XVI* or *Гаррисон Форд*. Names of characters are transcribed (*Жак Соньер*, *Роберт Лэнгдон*, *Жером Колле*, *Моник*). One case breaks the pattern in a significant way. The name *Silas* is transcribed as *Сайлас*, although the Russian Synodal Bible renders the name of the companion of the apostle Paul as *Сила*. Since the novel later motivates the name by the Acts of the Apostles, the transcription weakens a biblical allusion that the English reader perceives at once.

Place names show more variation. Paris addresses are transcribed together with the French generic word, as in *рю Лабрюйер*, and the church is called *Эглиз де Сен-Сюльпис*, although Russian usage prefers the hybrid form «церковь Сен-Сюльпис». *Chartres Cathedral* becomes the descriptive *собор в Шартре* instead of the established «Шартрский собор». The name *Pavillon Dauphine* is partly translated as «Павильон дофина», where the

masculine *дофин* replaces the feminine *Dauphine*. The address 243 *Lexington Avenue* is adapted to Russian word order as *Лексингтон-авеню, 243*.

3.3 Institutions and titles of works

Names of institutions and titles are rendered mainly by calques, as in «Секретные досье», *Американский университет Парижа* and *Центральное управление судебной полиции*. Some calques are accompanied by explication. The «Vatican prelature» becomes *Личная прелатура Ватикана*, which specifies the canonical status of Opus Dei, and the *Bibliothèque Nationale* becomes *Парижская национальная библиотека*. Two inaccuracies are visible in this group. The abbreviation printed for the police agency is *ЦУСЛ*, which does not match the initial letters of the Russian full name. The editorial footnote to *Приорат Сиона* explains the word through the government of medieval city communes and through Masonic priories, although neither sense corresponds to the secret society described in the novel.

The titles of Langdon's books show the most notable change. Three titles of the original are reduced to two, since «The Art of the Illuminati» and «The Lost Language of Ideograms» are merged into one title, «Искусство интеллектуалов: утраченный язык идеограмм». The word *Illuminati* is replaced by *интеллектуалы*, and Langdon's role in «last year's Vatican conclave» becomes participation in a «совещание в Ватикане». Both changes erase allusions to the events of «Angels and Demons», the previous novel about Langdon.

3.4 Religious and everyday realia

Religious realia connected with Opus Dei form the most vulnerable zone. The name of the organisation is transcribed as «Опус Деи» without commentary, and *corporal mortification* receives the traditional church term

«умерщвление плоти». Specific objects and ranks, however, are generalised or described. The *cilice* is rendered as «подвязка с шипами, сплетенная из человеческих волос», which adds the feature of human hair absent from the original. The *numeraries*, a category of Opus Dei membership, become simply *товарищи*. The *Discipline*, the name of a flagellation rope, turns into the descriptive «канат в мелких узелках». The keystone, glossed in the original by the French *clef de voûte*, is rendered as *краеугольный камень*, that is a cornerstone, although Russian has the exact architectural term «замковый камень». *Grand Master* is calqued as *Белый мастер* rather than rendered by the traditional «великий магистр» used for heads of orders.

Everyday realia show similar tendencies. Brand names are transcribed (*Берберу*, «Полароид», «Ритц»), but *Harris tweed* is interpreted as the product of a designer, «твид от Гарриса», whereas Harris Tweed is a cloth named after the Isle of Harris. The *savonniere carpet* loses its specific feature and becomes a «толстый пушистый ковер», the *Guest Relations Handbook* becomes an *ежедневник для гостей отеля*, and the American *brownstone residence* becomes an «особняк красного кирпича». Of the eleven units rendered with a change of content, five lose part of their cultural or intertextual information, five acquire features absent from the original or refer to a different object, and one (*собор в Шармпе*) merely departs from the established form. Table 2 summarises these and other problematic renderings.

Table 2. Problematic renderings of names and realia

Original	Russian translation	Technique	Effect
<i>Silas</i>	<i>Сайлас</i>	Transcription	Biblical allusion (<i>Сила</i>) weakened

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<i>The Art of the Illuminati</i>	«Искусство интеллектуалов...»	Substitution, merger	Link to the previous novel lost
<i>Vatican conclave</i>	<i>совещание в Ватикане</i>	Generalisation	Event of the previous novel lost
<i>DCPJ</i>	<i>ЦУСЛ</i>	Calque	Abbreviation inconsistent
<i>cilice</i>	<i>подвязка с шипами, сплетенная из человеческих волос</i>	Descriptive translation	Feature added
<i>numeraries</i>	<i>товарищи</i>	Generalisation	Membership category lost
<i>The Discipline</i>	<i>канат в мелких узелках</i>	Descriptive translation	Term lost
<i>keystone</i>	<i>краеугольный камень</i>	Substitution	Different architectural element
<i>Grand Master</i>	<i>Великий мастер</i>	Calque	Traditional term not used
<i>Harris tweed</i>	<i>твид от Гарриса</i>	Substitution	Toponym read as a designer's name
<i>savonniere carpet</i>	<i>толстый пушистый ковер</i>	Generalisation	Specific type lost

<i>brownstone residence</i>	<i>особняк красного кирпича</i>	Descriptive translation	Building material changed
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The analysed span of the translation contains six footnotes. One editorial note explains *Прюпам*, and five glosses translate foreign phrases, namely *sénéchaux*, *Mais*, *monsieur*, *curriculum vitae*, *déjà vu* and *Castigo corpus meum*. None of them concerns *Opus Dei*, the *cilice* or other religious realia. The gloss to *sénéchaux*, «старые слуги, прислужники», also bypasses the traditional Russian equivalent *сенешаль*.

DISCUSSION

The results show two different strategies operating in one text. For proper names the translator follows the foreignising line described by L. Venuti [12]. Names keep their foreign form, and established Russian equivalents are used wherever they exist. This agrees with the norms formulated by D.I. Yermolovich [5] and keeps the precedent names of European culture recognisable to the Russian reader.

For culture-specific items, especially those of the Catholic and *Opus Dei* sphere, the strategy shifts towards neutralisation. In the terms of J.F. Aixelá, conservation gives way to substitution and universalisation [8]. In the terms of E.E. Davies, globalisation and transformation prevail [10]. The shift is understandable, since words such as *numery* or *cilice* are unfamiliar to most Russian readers. Yet it contradicts the pragmatics of the novel. The «Fact» page promises accurate descriptions of rituals, and generalised renderings deprive the reader of the documentary detail on which this promise rests.

Several changes result not from a deliberate strategy but from misreading of the source unit. The reading of Harris tweed as a designer's name, the replacement of the keystone by a cornerstone and the conversion of «10:46 P.M.» into «21.46» instead of 22.46 belong to the type of errors that L.S.

Barkhudarov and V.N. Komissarov associate with an incorrect interpretation of the original [1; 7]. The keystone case is especially consequential, since this object drives the plot of the whole novel.

The changes in the titles of Langdon's books and the generalisation of the conclave reveal another kind of loss. They cut the intertextual links between «The Da Vinci Code» and «Angels and Demons», which are part of the serial poetics of the Langdon novels. Here the precedent function of names operates within the author's own series, and the translation does not preserve it.

The material also allows concrete suggestions for a revised edition. The name of the albino monk could be rendered by the biblical form *Сила* or supplied with a note on its origin. For *numeraries* the Russian term of *Opus Dei*, *нумерарии*, can be used together with a brief explanation inside the text, a solution that J.F. Aixelá calls intratextual gloss [8]. The *keystone* requires the architectural term «замковый камень», which also matches the French *clef de voûte* retained in the text. *Harris tweed* has the form «харрис-твид» used in Russian trade, and *Grand Master* the traditional «великий магистр». Restoring the third title of Langdon's books, «Искусство иллюминатов», and the word «конклав» would return the intertextual links to the series. These solutions keep the foreignising strategy that the translator already applies to proper names and extend it to realia.

The study is limited to the opening of the novel. Later chapters contain the central precedent names of the plot, such as the «Mona Lisa», «The Last Supper», Rosslyn Chapel and the Temple Church, and their analysis will show whether the tendencies identified here hold for the whole text.

CONCLUSION

The analysis leads to four conclusions. First, in N.V. Rein's translation of «The Da Vinci Code» proper names and precedent names are rendered predominantly by traditional equivalents, transcription and calques, which preserve their form and recognisability. Second, culture-specific items are treated differently, and almost a third of them are generalised, substituted or described with partial loss or distortion of meaning. Third, the most vulnerable units are the religious realia of Opus Dei and the names that carry allusions to the previous novel of the series. Fourth, the commentary apparatus explains foreign-language inserts but not culture-specific items. The results can be used in translation criticism, in the preparation of new editions and in teaching literary translation.

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