

Intertextuality in Cyberspace Media Discourse: Patching Cultural Gaps in Translation

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Abstract — The article analyzes some effective tools to overcome cultural barriers in cyberspace media discourse. The main aim of the analysis is to explain the nature of cyberspace media discourse as a mighty communicative device. The goal is achieved through the study of approaches for translating fragments of cyberspace media discourse containing vivid examples of intertextuality that can be an unbridgeable gap in communication. The effectiveness of translating techniques is manifested through the scrupulous analysis of linguistic phenomena known as precedent units. The diversity of these language items inspires a translator to search for adequate methods to save the essence of a “media active” phrase. As precedent units range from global to nationally significant or individually meaningful ones, the translator is forced to decide whether and how to keep the content and the form of the original source for both may be of an invaluable importance.

Keywords — translation, cyberspace media discourse, intertextuality, irony, precedent units, cultural adequacy, adaptation

I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of interactive applications on the Internet and mobile communication networks has boosted the emergence and evolution of cyberspace where individuals can easily and effectively interact with each other. The cyber discourse is a new interaction paradigm. It has significantly influenced people's daily life, work, and social development and has become literally omnipresent [1].

The current trend in approaches to media texts seems to be a turning away from proper text-internal readings when readers just decode the meaning; it has transformed into a highly dynamic process, where meanings are created by actively participating readers. Media texts are meant to be a kind of a dialogue, where much depends on the receivers and the situation. Thus, the receivers of information interpret and understand it in their own specific subjective ways.

Media texts are supposed to be based on intertextual relations where quotes or indirect references add particular meanings that can be both decontextualizing and recontextualizing ones. Media thus construct multiplication of meanings in the society.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the study, there is an attempt to link media text and reception. The most prominent research focus is on discourse analysis of media texts rather than applying pure linguistic approaches.

The main aim of the study is to emphasize the importance of the context, the social and historical situativity of the text, and the intertextual dimension. Thus, the claim is to apply procedures of discourse analysis to identify and analyze argumentation models and means of their verbalization, mainly based on intertextuality. What seems appropriate is a multimethod approach combining different levels of analysis and thus different tools. The aim is to make the interconnection between the cohesion and coherence dimensions apparent.

The corpus of analyzed material includes fragments of Russian media texts (television programmes). The original examples (supported with official translation into English) were extracted from the media projects “A Conversation with Vladimir Putin” (December, 16, 2010; December, 15, 2011) and V. Putin's Press Conference in Yalta, November, 20, 2009.

III. NATURE OF CYBERSPACE MEDIA DISCOURSE

There have been debates on the nature of cyberspace language, on the relationships among language, technology and culture, on the meaning and significance of literacy, and on the literacy demands for cyber media.

Galvin describes what he calls the “discourse of technoculture”, and attempts to locate it in various social and political contexts [2]. Gibbs explores a range of factors that affected the Internet style and content, and the phenomenon of cyberlanguage [3]. Jacobson examines the structure of contexts and interaction in cyberspace [4]. Macfadyen, Roche and Doff consider the implications of English-language dominating in cyberspace and cyberculture [5].

Galichkina defines inherent features of the cyberspace discourse:

- 1) electronic signal turns into a communication channel;
- 2) virtual reality;
- 3) asynchrony in space and time;
- 4) mediation;
- 5) high degree of personal interaction;

- 6) hypertext;
- 7) creolized texts;
- 8) equality of participants;
- 9) use of emoticons for expressing emotions and facial expressions;
- 10) integration of different discourse types;
- 11) specific net ethics (netiquette) [6].

New media may accelerate the trend of globalization in human society. Through their unique nature, the new media have shifted human interaction and society to the level that is highly interconnected and complex, but at the same time, it challenges the very existence of human communication in the traditional sense. New media may shape information content, that affects how people understand each other when communicating, especially those who belong to different cultural or ethnic groups [7].

Dobrosklonskaya states that the concept of a media text goes beyond the formal boundaries of the verbal sign system; and the concept approaches its semiotic interpretation, when a “text” refers to any type of signs, not necessarily verbal [8].

Kazak describes the media text as ‘an integrative multi-level sign that combines different semiotic codes (verbal, non-verbal, media) into a single communicative whole and demonstrates the fundamental openness of the text at semantic, compositional, structural and symbolic levels’ [9].

According to Aleksandrova and Slavkin the media text is a form of culture reflecting the linguistic norms accepted in the society, and the author of such a text should try to foresee how it may be perceived by the audience [10]. The media text is an intersection of media makers’ and media audiences’ mentalities. It acts as a stimulus to produce meanings. The main aim of media texts is to engage and challenge the audience.

Media qualities and characteristics of a communication channel add new aspects of meaning to the text concept. Thus, media texts on television and the web are not a verbal manifestation only. They may be comprised of a verbal text, visual and audio components, which include all possible effects perceived by ear ranging from voice qualities to music. Texts on the radio and in the print media are also characterized by a certain combination of a verbal level with a set of special media qualities, depending on the peculiarities of this or that media channel, like sound effects on radio or newspaper design and colorful illustrations in press. Therefore, we may assume that media texts can be regarded as multilevel and poly-dimensional phenomena.

Dobrosklonskaya states that the central concept of a media text is supported by a stable system of parameters, which allow describing and classifying all texts functioning in mass media in terms of their production, distribution, verbal and media characteristics:

- 1) Authorship (the text could be produced either by an individual or by a collective).
- 2) Production type (oral – written).
- 3) Presentation type (oral – written).
- 4) Media channel used for transmitting: the print and the electronic media, Internet.

5) Functional type or text genre: news, comment and analysis, features, advertising etc.

6) Topical affiliation (politics, business, culture, education, sport, and other universal media topics, forming the content structure of everyday information flow) [8].

Media texts get people involved, convey information, and cause reactions in their audiences thus justifying further production of new texts. Media texts are meant to disturb people’s minds. What we call ‘the text’ is not a given thing with given meanings. This phenomenon may convey different meanings to different people with different time-space roots.

Media texts vary in form both within media (print newspapers or magazines) and across media (the front page of a website to the titles of a TV programme). Tolson dwells upon the ‘reader’ of texts and the process of making sense of them:

Meanings are derived from meaning systems to which everyone in our culture has access. The text itself works to structure these meanings, but also the reader comes to the text with all sorts of prior knowledge and expectations... The modern consumer of the media is a reader of many different kinds of text, which inter-relate and feed off one another [11].

A media text is a part of media corpus that is the media discourse. Readers may be aware of some of those “other” texts and use them to make sense of the text.

The culture in which the individual socializes also determines how they will communicate. The effect of media does not come from its content only. Each element of the text contributes to the interaction while the content is being transferred. Mass media plays the key role in intercultural sustainable communication and contributes to intercultural adaptation. The goal of intercultural adaptation is to minimize the probability of misunderstanding. The content in a particular language is devised for the national audience and is to be tailored for an audience totally different in culture and language [12].

Our communication is a merge of discourses that shape the way we understand the world, deal with others and make sense of life. Dense communication makes it obligatory to search for convenient tools of mediation and cultural adaptation. It is evident that the latest technology trends are boosting the growth of new media which construct the frame of the world’s cyberspace. But how to overcome the cultural barriers which are still spoiling the fruitful interaction?

IV. TRANSLATION DRIVERS TO CULTURAL ADEQUACY: INTERTEXUALITY AND IRONY

When dealing with fragments of cyberspace media discourse a translator should keep in mind the idea, which is fundamental for today’s communication: a modern human being could be literally called “an **ironically speaking person**”. Casual conversations to friends and colleagues, mass media content, VIPs’ public speeches are all steeped in irony. Irony has become a kind of a protective response which helps to hide our real emotions, e.g. joy, fear, worry, indignation, the emotions that can reveal “me” with all weaknesses. This communicative strategy is vividly reflected in cyberspace

media discourse. Some scholars believe that ‘modal dominants of modern media texts are negative emotions and ironicalness’ [13].

Irony, a language device, either in spoken or written form in which the real meaning is concealed or contradicted by the literal meanings of the words, is ‘often used to emphasize the multilayered, contradictory nature of modern (and postmodern) experience’ [14]. The main trouble for translators can be ironical statements based on intertextuality.

The Bulgarian linguist Julia Kristeva in her *Word, Dialogue and Novel* first used intertextuality as a term and for more than 50 years this phenomenon has been discussed in many linguistic works [15]. In fact, a researcher can use different notions to describe the idea of intertextuality: intertexteme (intertext); precedent phenomenon (precedent name, precedent cultural symbol); historical (social, political) or literary (theatrical) metaphor; text reminiscence; logoepisteme; antonomasia and allusion as varieties of rhetorical figures of speech [16–18]. The above-mentioned terms reflect different points of view on the relevant phenomena which belong to mental, linguistic, cultural or conceptual fields. All these terms are used in peculiar scientific paradigms reflecting the framework distinctive for this very paradigm.

Intertextuality reveals through different «precedent units», combining both linguistic and extralinguistic aspects, and the corpus of these units is not homogeneous. Multi-method research enables to distinguish and define a great variety of precedent units: precedent names, precedent texts, precedent phrases (quotations, aphorisms), precedent situations [19, 20]. This fact explains the diversity of translation approaches and techniques used when converting such texts into other languages and adapting them to a different culture.

Arranging a precedent unit in translation is usually a demanding, multi-level process and sometimes it becomes even more difficult, when the author of an utterance tried to create a humorous/ironical effect. These are the criteria which specify translator’s main steps to reproduce an ironical utterance that contains a precedent unit:

1. to define “the level” of the cultural context the precedent unit comes from (such units may denote global (world-known), nationally specific, or individually significant things);
2. to define “the nature” of the precedent unit (such units may belong to basically linguistic/literary sphere (a name of a character, citation, reference to a plot of a literary work, etc.) or have some non-textual reference, e.g. to a historical event, situation);
3. if a precedent unit is a kind of a literary allusion, to focus on the genre peculiarities (at least, whether it is a piece of prose or poetry).

Detecting the peculiarities of a certain precedent unit (a quotation from a world-known literary work or a reference to the world’s history event vs. a phrase from a nationally specific

anecdote) will help a translator make a decision whether to keep the precedent unit (and how to do it) or to eliminate it.

The corpus of analyzed media fragments includes speeches of Russia’s President V. Putin who is famous for his fine sense of humor. The original examples (supported with official translation into English) were extracted from the media projects “A Conversation with Vladimir Putin” (December 16, 2010; December 15, 2011) and V. Putin’s Press Conference in Yalta, November 20, 2009.

Case 1

At the media project “A Conversation with Vladimir Putin” (December 4, 2011) there was a talk between V. Putin and a famous Russian musician Valery Gergiev about some very quick and radical changes in public’s opinion. The main metaphor was constructed on mentioning Sergei Prokofiev’s ballet *Romeo and Juliet* that was not professionally accepted at first, but very quickly, it turned out to be a great success. Russia’s President was very grateful:

Thank you for your assessment and support, Valery Abisalovich. We have known each other for a long time. You just mentioned Prokofiev and his music for the ballet Romeo and Juliet. This is a very good example of how quickly things and assessments change. You probably remember when this music was presented to the audience, some very well-known and authoritative people said: “Never was a tale of greater woe than Prokofiev’s music to Romeo”. So many things have changed since then, and the assessments have changed as well.¹

The source of the transformed quotation is absolutely clear: these are the final lines of William Shakespeare’s tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*. The main task for a translator was to preserve the format of the Shakespeare’s text, inserting the new fragment into it. Here we deal with the official translation. The fruitful effort to translate V. Putin’s speech, is commendable. They managed to preserve the “recognition” of the classic Shakespearean phrase: **For never was a story of more woe // Than this of Juliet and her Romeo.**

This fragment of media discourse reveals a bundle of socially significant ideas: V. Gergiev, a world-known maestro, compares V. Putin’s work as a politician with the brilliant Prokofiev’s work. The phrase based on a quotation from the classics of the world literature, which was used by the politician himself, implicitly expands the significance of the comparative series.

The basic conclusion is quite obvious: the current government can be criticized, rejected, but *the true values are immortal*. The translator’s successful work will broadcast this “message” outside Russia.

Case 2

At the joint press conference of Russia’s PM Vladimir Putin and Ukraine’s PM Yulia Tymoshenko (November, 2009, Yalta, Ukraine) there was a part where Putin was asked about his being aware of Georgian ex-President M. Saakashvili meeting Ukraine’s President V. Yushchenko. V. Putin declaimed a line

¹ <http://archive.premier.gov.ru/eng/events/news/17409/Television networks Rossiya 1, Rossiya 24, RTR-Planet and radio stations Mayak, Vesti FM, and Radio Rossii>

completed broadcasting the live Q&A session, A Conversation with Vladimir Putin. December 15, 2011

from Russian well-known A. Pushkin's poem "The Song of Prophetic Oleg", which was transformed into an coarse joke: *They talk of the days long ago in the past; The battles they fought in right up to the last → The fighters reminisced about past days and battles that they have lost together* (the non-rhyming translation was used by UK's *The Telegraph* in the article "Putin Derides Tie-chewing Georgian Leader")²

Getting back to the main aim of the research – how to fight for saving the essence of the "media active" phrase – it should be pointed out that poetic translation (or rather a rhyming phrase) of this excerpt from V. Putin's answer was never used by English-speaking mass media. The main reason is quite obvious: the original poem is unknown to an average English-speaking person and the style of the rhyming, joke is rather nasty, it can seriously hurt the Western public as a kind of a highly professional propaganda. Thus, the pragmatic effect of this sarcastic phrase is lost when transmitted into non-Russian cyberspace media discourse. Consequently, the main function of the text becomes an informative one, rather than influencing.

Case 3

The previous cases refer to precedent unit based on classical literature. The primary task for a translator is to decide whether to preserve the format of the source text when converting such a precedent unit or to give a mere reference to the original text, saving the content, not the form. The answer to this question is the level of recognition of the source text.

A special category of precedent units contains reminiscences on pop culture pieces (including songs, anecdotes, films), which are deeply rooted in a particular culture, they are vernacular to this very culture. We have to admit that translating such units often leads to significant losses in allegoric meaning.

At the media project "A Conversation with Vladimir Putin" (December 4, 2011):

The host (reads out the question asked by e-mail): "Is it true that the regions that did not support the ruling party will be excluded from the social development programs of the Russian Federation?" And, as a consequence, the question that occurs most often: "Isn't it time to return to the direct gubernatorial elections?"

V. Putin: This is an important question. As for the fact that someone will be excluded by the results of the voting, it is a complete nonsense. It's, you know, like "if you don't come to the elections, we will cut off your power and block your sewage pipes". Of course, this is nonsense, and no common-sense government can ever do it, and our government will never do it.³

For Russians it is absolutely clear that in this fragment the politician makes a reference to the famous phrase from the highly popular L. Gaidai's comedy film "The Diamond Arm": *And if they don't take <lottery tickets> — we will cut off the*

gas! It is not a coincidence that in the official translation the fragment is quoted.

In the context of the film the phrase is perceived by the audience in two ways, there is a clash of "the given and the due": the intended meaning is a clear threat, the perceived meaning is an absurdity ("if you will not buy a lottery ticket, they will cut off the gas"). That is the way the film makers managed to create a completely comic context. The similar phrase used by the powerful politician "imprints" in the audience the idea that the assumption is a complete nonsense.

The translator gives the phrase as: *Just imagine: "If you don't vote we will cut off your power and block your sewage pipes"*. It appears that in terms of meaning the translator manages to preserve the situation of absurdity. However, for an English-speaking recipient the fundamental lack of background knowledge about the popular Soviet film makes the phrase rather tough despite the obvious absurdity of the idea of "blocked sewage pipes" for refusing to come to the elections. The discrepancy is seen from the introductory phrase, to the citation itself:

- the original: *It's, you know, like...* (the politician appeals to the KNOWLEDGE of the recipient)
- the translation: *Just imagine...* (the translator appeals to the IMAGINATION of the recipient).

However, nowadays even within a national culture there is a phenomenon of increasing "diversification" of information consumed by different population groups. The multiplicity of ways to obtain information began to split the society into "interest groups". The core of national cultural identity seems to be getting fragmented [21].

It should be emphasized how important it is to focus today's students, future translators and interpreters, on seeing, feeling the citation, on searching and checking the origin of citation, on understanding the essence of the text reminiscence. Russian-speaking students appear to miss a significant part of their parent's knowledge tied to the Soviet era. It is vital that a certain part of practical training in translation include materials with precedent units of this kind.

Case 4

Another source field for precedent units, which, no doubt, is a tough stuff for translators, even for many successful professionals, is popular anecdotes.

²<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/expat/6614585/Putin-derides-tie-chewing-Georgian-leader.html>

³ <http://archive.premier.gov.ru/eng/events/news/17409/Television networks Rossiya 1, Rossiya 24, RTR-Planet and radio stations Mayak, Vesti FM, and Radio Rossii completed broadcasting the live Q&A session, A Conversation with Vladimir Putin. December 15, 2011.>

TABLE I. EXAMPLES OF ORIGINAL PRECEDENT UNITS USED IN V. PUTIN'S SPEECHES AND THEIR TRANSLATION INTO ENGLISH (CASES 1,2)

Original (Russian)	Translation (English)
CASE 1. World-known Poetry	
SOURCE SPHERE <i>W. Shakespeare's play "Romeo and Juliet" (originally in English)</i> For never was a story of more woe. Than this of Juliet and her Romeo.⁴	
<p>(RHYMING) В. Путин: Вот Вы сейчас сказали про Прокофьева, про его музыку к балету «Ромео и Джульетта». Это очень хороший пример того, как все быстро меняется и оценки меняются. Вы помните, наверное, когда эта музыка была представлена зрителю, то некоторые очень известные и очень авторитетные люди в этом мире сказали: «<i>Нет повести печальнее на свете, чем музыка Прокофьева в балете</i>».⁵</p>	<p>(RHYMING) V. PUTIN: You just mentioned Prokofiev and his music for the ballet Romeo and Juliet. This is a very good example of how quickly things and assessments change. You probably remember when this music was presented to the audience, some very well-known and authoritative people said: «<i>Never was a tale of greater woe than Prokofiev's music to Romeo</i>». So many things have changed since then, and the assessments have changed as well.⁶</p>
CASE 2. Nationally specific Poetry	
SOURCE SPHERE <i>A. Pushkin's poem "The Song of Prophetic Oleg" (originally in Russian)⁷</i>	
<p>Пириут с дружиною вещий Олег При звоне веселом стакана. И кудри их белы, как утренний снег Над славной главою кургана... Они поминают минувшие дни И битвы, где вместе рубились они... *** (possible translation into English) They talk of the days long ago in the past; The battles they fought in right up to the last.</p>	<p>(NON-RHYMING) V. Putin mused: The fighters reminisced about past days and battles that they have lost together.⁸</p>

At the media project “A Conversation with Vladimir Putin” (December, 16, 2010):

V. Putin: Local authorities underfinance this sphere [housing and communal services]. They do not raise the rates in time. They want to be **white and furry** to their local community, city or village. They do not do this in time. Then we

⁴ <http://www.william-shakespeare.info/script-text-romeo-and-juliet.htm>

⁵ <https://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=661862> “Разговор с Владимиром Путиным”, 15/12/2011

⁶ <http://archive.premier.gov.ru/eng/events/news/17409> Television networks Rossiya 1, Rossiya 24, RTR-Planet and radio stations Mayak, Vesti FM, and Radio Rossii completed broadcasting the live Q&A session, A Conversation with Vladimir Putin. December 15, 2011

⁷ <https://maceochilanguagelearning.wordpress.com/>

⁸ <https://www.newsru.com/world/20nov2009/putin.html20/1/2009>

⁹ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/expat/6614585/Putin-derides-tie-chewing-Georgian-leader.html> November 22, 2009

end up being at a deadlock and they are forced to raise the rates. Networks are collapsing, the system is underfinanced.¹⁰

The source of the quote is a popular Russian anecdote about a frog that is “*slick and slimy*” only because it is sick, but usually it is “*white and furry*”.

TABLE II. EXAMPLES OF ORIGINAL PRECEDENT UNITS USED IN V. PUTIN'S SPEECHES AND THEIR TRANSLATION INTO ENGLISH (CASES 3,4)

<p>CASE 3. Nationally specific Prose</p> <p>SOURCE SPHERE <i>L. Gaidai's film “The Diamond Arm” (originally in Russian)</i> А если не будут брать <лотерейные билеты> — отключим газ! *** (possible translation into English) And if they don't take <lottery tickets> — we will cut off the gas!</p>	<p>V. ПУТИН: Это, знаете как, «не придет на выборы — мы вам свет отключим и канализацию закроем».¹¹</p>	<p>V. PUTIN: If you don't vote we will cut off your power and block your sewage pipes.¹²</p>
CASE 4. Nationally specific Prose		
<i>A popular anecdote (originally in Russian)</i>		
<p>Сидит на берегу лягушка, а мимо проплыvaet крокодил и спрашивает: — А что это ты, лягушка, такая скользкая, липкая, противная? А лягушка ему отвечает: — Я просто болею, а на самом деле я белая и пушистая. *** (possible translation into English) A frog is sitting on the riverside and a crocodile swimming by asks: Hey, frog, why are you so slick and slimy? The frog answers: I'm just sick, but in fact I'm white and furry cherubic nice and sweet warm and fuzzy warm and cuddly squeaky clean lily white whiter than white all smiles and sunshine.</p>		
<p>B. ПУТИН: Местные власти недофинансируют эту сферу . Своевременно не повышают тарифы. Им хочется быть белыми и пушистыми перед своим микрорайоном, городом, поселком. Вовремя не делают. Потом загоняют в тупик, и вынуждены резко повышать.¹³</p>	<p>The local authorities underfinance this sector, do not raise the rates as scheduled because they want to appear all white and furry before their local community, city or village¹⁴</p>	

It is quite evident that the translators of V. Putin's speech offers a reasonable variant: a person familiar with this anecdote finds the idea of a “white and furry” FROG very funny. A frog cannot be like that. It is always GREEN and HAIRLESS. Based

¹⁰ <http://archive.premier.gov.ru/eng/events/news/13427> December, 16, 2010

¹¹ <https://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=661862> “Разговор с Владимиром Путиным”, 15/12/2011

¹² <http://archive.premier.gov.ru/eng/events/news/17409> Television networks Rossiya 1, Rossiya 24, RTR-Planet and radio stations Mayak, Vesti FM, and Radio Rossii completed broadcasting the live Q&A session, A Conversation with Vladimir Putin. December 15, 2011

¹³ <https://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=414412&tid=8637316/12/2010>

¹⁴ <http://archive.premier.gov.ru/eng/events/news/13427> December, 16, 2010

on these elements of the concept, the translator offers a literal translation “white” and “furry”.

However, we are not dealing with the translation of the anecdote itself, but with the translation of the politician’s speech, where he speaks quite harshly about the failures in the government’s effort, quoting a well-known phrase. The context expands the semantic field of the phrase. Here the “difficulties in translation” start.

While analyzing the linguistic material it is advisable that a translator should discuss some challenging language items with colleagues. Then many interesting variants with different semantic precision may emerge from professional discussion. It is apparent that a translator’s task in Case 4 is to convey the main meaning of the phrase – “nice and pleasant”, while the attempt to preserve the “recognition” of the text, probably, does not have any serious pragmatic potential, since the quoted text is not widely used in other cultures. Thus, such variants as **“white and furry | cherubic | nice and sweet | warm and fuzzy | warm and cuddly | squeaky clean | lily white | whiter than white | all smiles and sunshine”** are also more than acceptable in non-Russian cyberspace media discourse.

Fig. 1 visualizes the “content | form” approach. The scheme illustrates a translator’s dilemma whether/how to keep the content and the form of the original source.

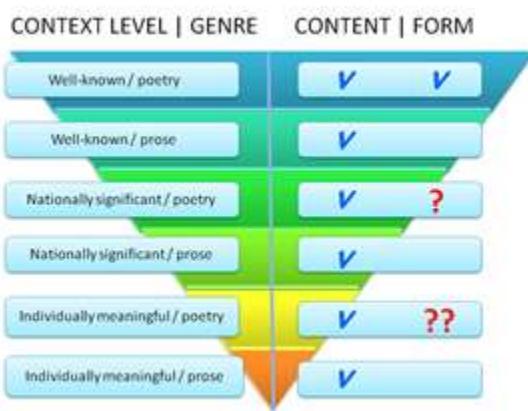


Fig. 1. Gradation of translator’s contribution to preserve “content | form” elements in precedent units

The gradation shows that translation of precedent units originating from well-known poetry seems most challenging as it is crucial to preserve both content and form. The least strive, perhaps, is invested into individually meaningful prose. Decision making about nationally significant and individually meaningful poetry is likely to be a controversial compromise.

CONCLUSION

Cyberspace media discourse has significantly influenced the matter and means of culture perception. Culture is now equally processed and translated as the words are. The initially sophisticated network of cyber communication has become a battleground for eliminating cultural barriers. Mediation and

language adaptation are then a powerful tool to win cultural adequacy warfare.

Summing up, we emphasize that working with media texts, a translator should bear in mind: these texts are made to manipulate. Thus, a translator works not only with WHAT is said, but also with HOW it is said. Both the CONTENT and the FORM of the text matter in this battle for human minds.

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