

AMURCON 2020
International Scientific Conference**EXPLICATION OF RUSSIAN REALITY IN WORKS OF
TRANSLINGUAL FICTION IN ENGLISH**

S. M. Pak (a)*

*Corresponding author

(a) Khabarovsk State University of Economics and Law, 134, Tihookeanskaya St., Khabarovsk, Russia,
pak_sm@mail.ru**Abstract**

The article explores the issues of preserving Russian cultural identity in translingual Russian-American verbal art works written in English, and the means of its preservation and rendering as well as those creative possibilities that another culture creates when embodied in the English language. The research is done in the framework of a rapidly developing branch, i.e., contact variation studies of English known in linguistics as ‘World Englishes Paradigm’. In the focus are such means of explicating Russian/Soviet identity as precedent phenomena, the research material being E. Litman’s short stories “The Last Chicken in America”. ‘The Russian world’ depicted by the emigrant writer leaves traces of cultural transfer as signs of Russian English, an important facet of which are Russian precedent language phenomena, i.e., words, statements, and texts that are comprehended and interpreted similarly by most Russian native speakers. For the English native speakers however these units remain unclear and prevent understanding. The author’s objective is to explicate the role of precedent phenomena in translingual literary discourse. The analysis of the material shows that the functions of the units under study described in linguistic literature, namely, nominative, persuasive, ludic, and passwording ones, do not impliment their potential in a comprehensive way and are to be complimented by creative, and identifying functions. Literary, musical, and social reminiscences in the works of emigrant fiction serve consequently as signals of belonging personages to their former motherland and often mark their nostalgia, and/or typical behavior patterns transferred to the new land.

2357-1330 © 2021 Published by European Publisher.

Keywords: Contact/translingual fiction, precedence, precedent phenomena, cultural identity

1. Introduction

The language accumulates, shapes, and communicates cultural knowledge, the picture of the world, as ‘a mirror of culture’. This thesis is the cornerstone of social, cognitive, and psycho-linguistics; in other words, those branches of language studies that from different perspectives and applying various concepts describe interconnection and mutual influence between human beings using the language and the language itself. In M. Heidegger’s words, the language is the house of spirit; another language means a different vision of the world (Proshina, 2017; Sharifian, 2015). The Expanding Circle of the global English language in terms of B. Kachru’s theory has covered the planet. The world speaks English. The question that arises – which picture of the world does it reflect? – is in the focus of the World Englishes Paradigm (Proshina, 2017; Saraceni, 2015), the theory of English language intercultural communication (Kabakchi, 1998), issues of teaching English (Fontiveros-Malana, 2018; McKay & Brown, 2015). While speaking English we reflect our specific local (national, ethnic, regional) cultural identity. ‘Everyone writes the way they breathe’, as B. Okudzhava’s song runs. The language *sui generis* is a natural adaptive system, the tool of meaning interpretation (Ulanovich, 2015; Vishnyakova, 2018). Use of a foreign language is not equivalent to enculturation in the target language culture, is not the sign of identification of the primary and secondary language personalities. The exception here might be cases of natural bilinguals. Bilingualism is actively developing in modern linguistics, psycholinguistics, and cognitive studies (Fairchild & Papafragou, 2020; Hofweber et al., 2020; Morgan-Short, 2020). Most non-native speakers of English, even its active users are limited bilinguals who either inevitably project original content in a foreign (English) form or do it for some reason. In any case we deal with the English language as the secondary means of linguo-cultural identity, communicative alter ego of all non-English speaking peoples (Kabakchi, 1998).

Specific variational nature of English in the ‘expanding circle’ manifests in peculiarities of semantics, various cognitive scripts, speech patterns, and communicative strategies, each facet deserving a separate study.

2. Problem Statement

2.1. The objective of this linguo-cultural research is to find out which language mechanism implements transfer of Russian linguistic and cultural identity in immigrant fiction as well as to elicit the purport of this transfer. Any study of literary discourse created by immigrant writers inevitably draws analysis into the framework of cross-cultural agenda. In the given case contact of cultures manifests in both bicultural language person and in terms of text perception by representatives of one and/or another culture. The degree and depth of displaying one’s own native culture in a text written in a foreign language varies, first, according to the level of different culture mastering, the vivid example being texts of V. Nabokov’s as an absolute bilingual, and second, to the writer’s purport. This study focuses on the means of reserving and transferring Russian linguo-cultural identity in the works of Ellen Litman, Russian-American writer of Jewish ancestry. Referring to the cultural and artistic phenomenon under study, namely, contact fiction it is worth mentioning that in scholastic discourse there exist synonymous names of this type of fiction – bilingual, cross-cultural, multicultural, transcultural, translingual, national-ethnic literature in English, and literature in variants of English (Proshina, 2017).

2.2. It occurs frequently that writers fill English form with Russian content deliberately trying to convey the feelings of former compatriots. Thus, for instance, E. Litman's short stories «The Last Chicken in America» selected for this article as material is devoted to painful process of integrating of Russians into American culture; the narrative is full of reminiscences of by-gone life, frustration and nostalgia, and as a result, Russian content becomes its sense and ideas (Litman, 2007). Of interest in this respect is the interview given to the Jewish on time magazine *Zeek* by another Russian-American writer A. Ulinich. Commenting on Russian-American fiction written in English the writer dwells upon “memory of the language, ...intimate part of mother tongue while remaining in the exile of the Latin alphabet” (Proshina, 2017, p. 125). By this way, there occurs development and spread of the English language: writers keep their cultural identity without yearning for ‘mimicry of communicatively irrelevant conventions of language native speakers’ (Paradowski, 2013).

So, in the focus in this article are issues of preserving national/ethnic/cultural identity through a different language (English), and means of its preserving and conveying as well as those creative possibilities embodied in English language fiction that a different culture creates.

3. Research Questions

3.1. Maintenance of cultural and ethnical identity in translingual fiction occurs through actualization of a number of language mechanisms, explication of which being the issue of this research. The issues of cultural transfer are raised in fiction studies as well as cross-cultural researches based on translingual literature since it provides rich material for researches (Alekseev, 2020). Analysis of E. Litman's texts made it possible to single out the following aspects of translingual transfer: precedent phenomena; borrowings from Russian including loan words, loan set phrases (idioms, and speech clichés); proper names/forms of address/speech etiquette formulas; peculiarities of cognitive basis/various conceptualization of abstract names; definite nominative and communicative strategies (Pak, 2017; Proshina, 2006).

3.2. The dominant research question in this article is the role of precedent phenomena in the system of artistic means. The phenomenon of precedence is explored from linguo-cultural perspective as a factor of national language and mind. Precedent names, statements, and texts are frequently reproduced by bearers of the national linguistic culture and understood with no comments. This is what can be referred to as ‘a living word’, spread in the language community whose milieu is ‘agentless discourse’. For precedent word, phrase, proper name to be enacted, the following conditions are necessary, namely, awareness of the fact of allusion on the part of the speaker/writer, awareness of the fact of allusion on the part of the recipient, pragmatic presupposition of the recipient, i.e., the ability to perceive and interpret this phenomenon appropriately (Slyshkin, 2000). Important properties of precedence are common knowledge and frequent reproducing which turn the original word/text into a fact of culture, an important constituent of the national language picture of the world as well as a significant means of being introduced to the culture.

3.3. An important issue of the article is determining functions of precedent phenomena in the literary context under study. G. Slyshkin singles out the following underlying functions of precedent phenomena: nominative (nomination of fragments of reality), persuasive (appealing to the text possessing cultural

value), ludic (language game), and passwording ones (opposing insiders and outsiders, i.e., drawing distinction between one's own and others' cultures) (Slyshkin, 2000).

In respect with these theoretical provisions, there arise questions about nature of precedence in the analyzed context. Do the precedent phenomena here meet the second and third conditions? Do the functions specified hold true in case these units are incorporated into translingual fiction? Which function prevails?

4. Purpose of the Study

Answers to the questions put above constitute the purpose of the research. The recipient of the analyzed works of verbal art are *inter alia* the English speaking American reader for whom most of intertextual insertions, social and literary metaphors, reminiscences, allusions, phenomena of vertical context – all these notions correlate with the 'umbrella' concept of precedence – remain to various extent beyond comprehension. On the other hand, translingual literature by nature abounds in precedent phenomena of different levels and means. Bilingual/bicultural writers as bearers of the two contacting cultures cannot do without references to the facts of the original culture that are personally important. Many of these references are *sui generis* precedent ones.

It is due to its very content immigrant English language discourse of E. Litman provides rich material for implementing the following objective, namely, to elicit ways, peculiarities, and stylistic role of transferring Russian mentality into English language literary form through the phenomenon of precedence.

5. Research Methods

For the raised questions to be answered the author applies method of philological interpretation of the text as well as method of discourse analysis, and intertextual method. The complex of these research procedures makes it possible to assess the role and functions of the phenomenon of precedence from the perspective of broad interpretation of senses embedded in these units. Methodological basis of the research is the conception of 'dialogue nature' of verbal art elaborated by M. Bakhtin, And J. Kristeva. According to this theory fiction yields to at the least 'double reading' in terms of citations, reminiscences, and allusions found (Kristeva, 2004). The underlying premise of the intertextuality theory which runs that any text is 'reaction' to previous texts takes on a specific aspect in translingual fiction. It inventively explores social and artistic traditions of the contacting cultures and builds up a complex system of transpositions.

6. Findings

6.1. Precedent phenomena constitute the basic part of language community cognitive basis, the latter being defined as "the system of culture bound values and assumptions acquired while getting introduced to the national culture which in its turn conditions speech practice" (Pak, 2004). Basic forms of precedent phenomena in the literary context under study are social, musical, and literary reminiscences.

6.2. Analysis showed that precedent phenomena in translingual fiction fulfil two basic functions: the function of cultural identification and/or that of explicating Russian/Soviet reality; and the function of indicating behavior patterns typical for immigrants.

6.3. As signals of personages' belonging to former motherland, precedent phenomena often mark nostalgic feelings of heroes. The texts of the short stories abound in poetic and/or songs' reminiscences that fulfil the function of disclosing the inner world of the heroes. As analysis shows an important constituent of precedence in the short stories are so called 'musical citation' (Nakhimova, 2007, p. 89). As a rule, these are lines from Soviet and Russian pre-revolutionary songs woven into narrative 'fabric' as well as allusions to musicians, which serve a poetic tool of imagery.

In the episode of daily jogging sessions of Alyosha Kamyshinskiy (*About Kamyshinskiy*) the writer includes an allusion to V. Zoi' song 'White snow, grey ice' without indication of the author of the song, only a part from the lyrics:

"Every morning at eight he goes for a run. He runs long and hard, and his sneakers hit the pavement in a rhythmic, dependable pattern. Lines spin in his head. *White snow, grey ice... A blanket made of rags... City in the noose of a road... Those who live by their own rules... And who will die young...* (Litman, 2007, p. 194). The episode finishes with speculations of the hero:

"Today, he thinks, today he will start living by his own rules" (Litman, 2007, p.194).

The entire episode is beyond understanding of the reader that is unaware of both life and artistic activity of the musician and political situation in Russia at that time. The hero longs for changes, and it echoes with V. Zoi's songs. Both the musician and his lyrics have become precedent phenomena in the modern history of Russia.

In another episode of this short story, the hero is choosing a present for his young girl friend:

"...he is bringing her a slim book of poetry by Igor Severyanin, his guilty pleasure.

Pineapple in champagne! Pineapple in champagne!

So extraordinary delicious, so sparkly and piquant." (Litman, 2007, p.201)

His belated love as 'his guilty pleasure' – hope of renewal, chance of happiness. The metaphor and symbol of this become I. Severyanin's famous lines.

In describing the hero, the writer also includes Russian typical attributes:

"Alyosha Kamyshinskiy is a mild man. In his spare time he likes to look at art, read gentle poetry - a sleigh, a moonlit trail, the melancholy trot of a troika" (Litman, 2007, p.193).

Poetic images of Russian poetry (the road lit with moonlight, a sleigh yoked with a trio of horses, the sound of sleigh-bells) are precedent facts of Russian culture and serve a vivid device of cultural identification of the hero.

The short story *Russian Club* is entirely built on nostalgic feelings of the heroine, a former Muscovite girl, therefore allusion to B.Okudzhava's song "The Sentinels of Love" is only natural. Answering the question about what she mostly misses she draws the picture of Moscow, Pushkin Square, and the poet's monument – all are typical date spots.

"What do you miss the most?" He asked.

I said I missed walking in Moscow, traversing old boulevards, the sidewalks glistening in the night, Pushkin Square, the lovers clutching flowers beneath the poet' statue – *the sentinels of love.*" (Litman, 2007, p. 94-95)

The title of the short story *Peculiarities of the National Driving* is the distorted title of the Russian popular comedy 'Peculiarities of the National Hunting' made by A. Rogozhkin. The short story is plotless:

Masha's father is teaching the heroine to drive; these lessons sharpen the generation conflict as well as her longing for freedom from parents' care and imposition. Meaningful background gets created by allusion to A. Vertinsky's songs. Their neighbor, Joe Berman, a University student of the Russian language and literature, listens to the songs of this legendary Russian singer.

"Some nights, I see him sitting outside in his Tarcel, listening to the songs by Vertinsky: *I am madly afraid of your shimmery shackles*" (Litman, 2007, p. 128).

A. Vertinsky is mentioned four times in the text; the writer provides an explaining description: "...a Russian singer-émigré (tail-coats, top hats, an effete Pierrot with long, tremulous fingers)" (Litman, 2007, p. 131). By the end of the short story, polyphony of the allusion introduces the depth of the idea: A. Vertinsky is the symbol of freedom, his songs for former Russian citizens is the metaphor of a different, free life. This is why Masha's father as her antagonist imprisoning her in this new American reality, does not like Vertinsky's songs:

"We'll sit at the living room table and talk of neutral things: Joe, his Vertinsky tapes. "What's the matter with him?" my dad will say. "Does he have nothing better to listen to?" (Litman, 2007, p. 137).

One of the short stories is entitled *What Do You Dream Of, Cruiser Aurora?* This is a reference to the precedent song of V. Shainsky and M. Matusovsky written in 1973. Semiotic nature of precedent phenomena often manifests in distorting the original text. For example, the "Kommersant" newspaper in its issue 126, of 18.07.2020 runs an article called "What Do You Dream Of, Liner Aurora?" It is devoted to purchasing a share of Aeroflot by the Sakhalin airlines 'Aurora'. The name is played upon arousing associations with the famous song. The very choice of the title of the short story is significant for disclosing the underlying idea of E. Litman's book.

6.4. Precedent phenomena as indicators of behavior patterns transferred into the new American reality is an important element of the writer's discourse.

The hero of the short story *The Trajectory of Frying Pans* compares two girls, Nadya he met in the USA, and Polina, his ex-girlfriend he left in Russia.

"She made me remember Polina. They shared that awkward, long-limbed grace, except that Nadya's had a tinge of glamour, while Polina was a Turgenev girl (Asya or Jemma, *First Love* and *Spring Torrents*), leaning against a birch, hiding a book behind her back as I snapped pictures of her in Sokolniki Park" (Litman, 2007, p.173).

Vivid portraits of the heroines are created. In depicting Polina besides attributive descriptions expressed by adjectives (awkward, long-limbed grace), the name of I. Turgenev is used as a nominative attribute (a Turgenev girl). Then come stereotypical descriptions of the concept "a Turgenev girl" (leaning against a birch hiding a book behind her back). Of interest here is the fact that E. Litman makes a mistake in giving the names of I. Turgenev's personages, falling herself a victim of stereotypes: Asya is not the heroine of the story 'First Love' whereas Jemma is indeed a heroine of 'Spring Torrents'. It is important in terms of the role of precedent names that the hero rejects a Turgenev girl Polina in favor of americanized Nadya.

In another episode, the hero rather sarcastically recollects Polina's readiness to follow him to the US.

“Polina had wanted to come to America. To follow me, she explained, as if America were Siberia, and she, Polina, a Decembrist’s wife or Roskolnikov’s Sonya.” (Litman, 2007, p.182).

The expression ‘a Decembrist’s wife’ and the entire script ‘to follow the one she loves to Siberia like a Decembrist’s wife’ are precedent in Russian culture as representation of the image of a faithful sacrificing wife; the same sense is embodied in the precedent name ‘Sonya’ in combination with ‘Raskolnikov’.

The heroine of the short story *Dancers*, Tanya is getting ready to host a home reception. The events take place in the beginning of January when New Year celebrations are over but Tanya is willing to create a festive mood:

”On her lunch break, she ran to the supermarket. She wanted bright holiday food: a frosty bottle of champagne, chocolates individually wrapped in crinkling foil, an enormous winter basket with ribbons. But the holidays were over, and she wound up instead with a splintery box of wilted tangerines.” (Litman, 2007, p.108).

For Russian natives attributes of the New Year party are champagne, chocolates in foil, tangerines; she transfers these behavior patterns into the USA.

6.5. Analysis of the writer’s individual style enabled the author to elicit the following tendency in functioning precedent phenomena. In contexts that are significant in revealing the idea precedent phenomena are accompanied by explaining descriptions.

In the short story *Among the Lilacs and the Girls* the heroine, Lina, former teacher of literature in a Soviet school who suffers from cancer and as a result is deeply depressed, tortures her husband. The very title of the short story contains the allusion to the underlying idea of the book – nostalgia and hardships of immigration:

“...in the spring the school disappeared into blooming lilac bushes; girls swooned over boys, crammed for the final examinations, looked feverishly for the lucky blossom with five petals. Lina existed there, among the lilacs and the girls, ruling them gently, scolding, consoling.” (Litman, 2007, p.159).

Back in the Soviet Union, ‘among the lilacs and the girls’ Lina flourished; here, in the US. She suffers. Her husband Tolik feels sorry for her and simultaneously cannot stand her heroic self-sacrifice – domestic chores, care about the family.

“He curses Lina under his breath. Who needs this idiotic heroism? If you’re sick, you stay in bed and get better. She has always liked everything heroic: Decembrists and their wives, the pioneer heroes of World war II. The sacrifice and endurance. She taught Children from the Underground by Korolenko in her literature class.” (Litman, 2007, p. 156-157).

Since the allusion to V. Korolenko is important for understanding the image of the heroine the entire paragraph that follows is given for explanation.

“An idealist and fighter for human rights, Korolenko went off to save some peasants in Old Multan. They were accused of ritual killings; it was a famous case. Korolenko’s daughter was ill and dying at the time. He knew if he left, he’d never see her again. But he left anyway.” (Litman, 2007, p.157).

The writer here refers to ‘the Multan case’, the court trial of the late 19th century where a number of peasants from the village called Old Multan were charged with religious human sacrifices as a part of

pagan rituals. V. Korolenko acted in this blood libel trial as the defendants' lawyer. The assessment of the case by the story heroes enabled the writer to infer the essence of the spouses' conflict:

“Lina thought it was noble. Tolik told her it was disgusting. You do not betray one of your own.” (Litman, 2007, p.157).

Speech clichés alluding to verbal art can also be referred to precedent phenomena, for example, the hero speculates on reasons for his split with the girl:

“The love boat crushed against everyday drudgery, wrote Mayakovsky in his suicide note, and I was no Mayakovsky and never owned a revolver.” (Litman, 2007, p.183)

Few know the source and history of the popular phrase “The love boat crushed against everyday drudgery”, however precedent character of it arouses no doubt. As becomes evident from the material signals of possible unawareness on the part of English native speakers may be either extended explanatory definition or explanation of the word through synonyms.

7. Conclusion

Precedent phenomena (names, phrases, and texts) possess considerable symbolic and poetic potential in translingual fiction, and serve a specific ‘bridge’ between contacting cultures as basic means of creating and rendering ‘the spirit’ of the nostalgic soul. The major functions these units implement are those of identification and/or explication of cultural identity of immigrant heroes as well as indication of typical behavior patterns. The analysis of the material made it possible to find out the following tendency of functioning precedent phenomena in translingual fiction. Precedent units that are meaningful for the purport of a piece of verbal art are supplied with comments to make up for lack of background awareness on the part of readers belonging to the target culture of the work.

References

- Alekseev, P. V. (2020). Notes on Russian Orientalism as a Phenomenon of Cultural Transfers. *Vestnik of Tomsk State University. Philology*, (67), 189-204.
- Fairchild, S., & Papafragou, A. (2020). Language and categorization in monolinguals and bilinguals. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 23(3), 618-630.
- Fontiveros-Malana, M. (2018). First Language Interference in Learning the English Language. *The Journal of English as an International Language*, 13(2.2), 32-47.
- Hofweber, J., Marinis, Th., & Treffers-Daller, J. (2020). How different code-switching types modulate bilinguals' executive functions: A dual control mode perspective. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 23(4), 909-925.
- Kabakchi, V. V. (1998). *Osnovy angloyazychnoi mezhkulturnoi kommunikazii [Basics of intercultural communication in English]*. Saint Petersburg: The Publishing House of Saint Petersburg State University named after A. Herzen. [in Russ.].
- Kristeva, J. (2004). *Izbrannye trudy: razrushenie pojetiki [Selected papers: Destruction of Poetics]*. ROSSPAN. [in Russ.].
- Litman, E. (2007). *The Last Chicken in America*. W.W. Norton @ Company
- McKay, S. L., & Brown, J. D. (2015). *Teaching and Assessing EIL in Local Contexts Around the World*. Routledge.
- Morgan-Short, K. (2020). Insights into the neural mechanisms of becoming bilingual: A brief synthesis of second language research with artificial linguistic systems. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 23(1), 87-91.

- Nakhimova, E. A. (2007). *Precedentnye imena v masovoj kommunikacii [Precedent names in mass communication]*. Ural State Pedagogical University of social training. [in Russ.].
- Pak, S. M. (2004). *Imya sobstvennoye v amerikanskom kulturnom prostranstve: Opyt issledovaniya kognitivnykh osnovanii onomasticheskoi leksiki [Proper name in the US cultural space: Research of cognitive basis of onomastic lexis]*. The Publishing House of the Far Eastern University. [in Russ.].
- Pak, S. M. (2017). Sozialnye i psihologicheskiye implikacii russkih i amerikanskih antroponomimov kak chast socialnoj mifologii [Social and psychological implications of Russian and American anthroponomy as a part of social mythology]. *Izvestiya of higher educational establishments. Povolzhsky region. Humanities*, 2(42), 106-115. [in Russ.].
- Paradowski, M. B. (2013). Barbara Seidlhoer: "Understanding English as a Lingua Franca: A Complete Introduction to the Theoretical Nature and Practical Implications of English used as a Lingua Franca" (Review Article). *The Interpreter and translator trainer*, 7(2), 312-320.
- Proshina, Z. G. (2006). Russia English: Status, Attitudes, Problems. *The Journal of ASIA TOEFL*, 3(2), 79-101.
- Proshina, Z. G. (2017). *Kontaktnaya variantologiya angliyskogo yazyka. Problemy teorii [World Englishes. Problems of the theory]*. FLINTA: Nauka. [in Russ.].
- Saraceni, M. (2015). *World Englishes. A Critical Analysis*. Bloomsbury.
- Sharifian, F. (2015). *Cultural Linguistics. The Routledge Handbook of Language and Culture*. Routledge.
- Slyshkin, G. G. (2000). *Lingvokulturnye koncepty precedentsnykh tekstov [Linguocultural concepts of precedent texts]*. Academia. [in Russ.].
- Ulanovich, O. I. (2015). *Ponimanie originala pri perevode: k voprosu o fenomenologii javleniya [Comprehension of the source text in translating: to the issue of phenomenology]*. *Vestnik of Tomsk State University. Philology*, 1(33), 78–87. [in Russ.].
- Vishnyakova, O. D. (2018). Yazyk kak instrument smyslovoj intepretacii (na materiale sovremennogo angliyskogo yazyka) [The Language as the instrument of sense interpretation (on the material of modern English)]. *Vestnik of Moscow State University. Philology*, 19(1), 17-27. [in Russ.].