

**UNIVERSITY OF TARTU
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**CULTURE-SPECIFIC ITEMS FOUND IN THE
ESTONIAN TRANSLATION OF *THE ADVENTURES
OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN* IN 1932**

BA thesis

**MADLI TOOMISTE
SUPERVISOR: KÜLLIKI STEINBERG, MA**

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ABSTRACT

Culture-specific items, which become visible in translations, express cultural as well as historical context. The present thesis analysed the CSIs found in the Estonian translation of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, translated by Marta Sillaots (1887–1969) and published in 1932. Given the intricacy of translating CSIs into other languages, this thesis also aimed to analyse the translation strategies employed by the translator at the time of translating. Moreover, the thesis seeks to provide cultural and historical context regarding translations of American literature into Estonian to give an insight into the translator's decisions regarding the selection of translation strategies.

This thesis consists of two main sections and a conclusion. The first section includes a theoretical background that provides definitions and categorisations of CSIs based on previous research and describes the significance of Anglo-American literature and translations in the Estonian literary scene of the interwar period. The second section consists of an analysis identifying 25 CSIs in the Estonian translation of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. This section of the thesis also analysed the translation strategies used by the translator and the reasons behind the translator's decisions regarding the cultural context of the time of translation.

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INTRODUCTION

In various ways, language can be recognised as an expression of culture. Literary translation is a complex process that inescapably involves two languages and two cultural traditions (Toury 1978: 200) that are scarcely of equal influence but instead continually negotiating their dominance (Aixelá 1996: 52). Every language has a wide range of culturally unique terms, often referred to as culture-specific items (hereinafter CSI). In translation, the CSIs, which are bound to their exporting culture while being visible in the receiving culture, may portray the negotiation for dominance as well as the tensions and conflicts between the source and target culture (Aixelá 1996: 52). Translating CSIs into another language may involve linguistic as well as linguistic-cultural issues relating to the historical and cultural context of the receiving culture at the time of translating. As a result, understanding CSIs is necessary for intercultural communication and reflects cultural inequalities (Aixelá 1996: 54) between exporting and receiving cultures.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is a coming-of-age novel written by Mark Twain in 1884. The novel is set in the middle of the 19th century United States of America and contains various CSIs that reflect the time and the region in which the story takes place. It is a valuable literary work in American literature as it is one of the first novels written in the American vernacular. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* also has an important position in the Estonian literary scene, as it introduces the culture of the Southern United States to a more extensive audience, including young readers. Though the translation of Anglo-American fiction started to gain momentum in the 19th century (Mits 2012: 78), it was during the years of independence in the Republic of Estonia from 1918–1940 that the publication of Anglo-American literature increased significantly (Soosaar 1996: 12).

Marta Sillaots (1887–1969), an Estonian translator, translated *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* into Estonian in 1931, and the translation was published in 1932. Since

American CSIs are unique to a specific culture and may not be easily understood or recognised by individuals from other cultures, they may have caused problems in Estonian translation.

This thesis aims to analyse the CSIs and their translation strategies in the Estonian translation of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, provide historical context regarding translations of American literature into Estonian at the time and explore what the receiving culture can reveal about itself through the exporting culture.

This thesis consists of two main sections. The first part lies in a theoretical overview of translation as a “mix of two cultures” (Aixelá 1996: 52), discussing the translation of CSIs in literature and their historical and cultural context. The latter section presents the ideas and perspectives of several authors on the subject of culture in translations and explores CSIs and their varying translation strategies. The second part of the thesis identifies the CSIs in Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and the translation strategies and methods used to translate the CSIs. Additionally, some cultural and historical context of both the exporting (American) and receiving (Estonian) cultures is provided to explain the translator’s decisions at the time of translating in 1931. The findings are then set against the background of the translation scene of the interwar Republic of Estonia.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Translation as cross-cultural communication between two cultures “implies an unstable balance of power, a balance which will depend to a great extent on the relative weight of exporting culture as it is felt in the receiving culture” (Aixelá 1996: 52), forcing the latter to make decisions on how to translate the source language text into the target language (Aixelá 1996: 52). As translation is a decision-making process (Levý 1967: 148), the decisions the translator makes can be crucial since they may be paving the way for, or, at the very least, modifying the receiving culture’s existing understanding of the exporting culture. Translators can be considered as an essential link between cultures (Venuti 2000: 469), considering that they have the opportunity to expand the receiving part’s knowledge of the seemingly alien culture and increase the “dialogic capability of their culture, and, hence, its capacity for internal variety” (Torop: 2011: 22).

To explore such cultural negotiation in translation, it is possible to use a descriptive method of translation analysis, which in terms of translation history, works most effectively regarding historical context (Lange and Monticelli 2022: 289). According to Torop (2011: 26), there are four aspects of analysing translations in the historical context: achronic, synchronic, evolutionary, and cultural history aspect. The achronic element deals with the translator and the usage of translation strategies (Torop 2000: 45), while the synchronic aspect explores how translations are accepted in the receiving cultures (Torop 2000: 53). Analysing translations from the evolutionary viewpoint reveals how the translation process, particularly the time of translation, affects translations. (Torop 2000: 57). The aspect of cultural history explores the cultural context of the translation further (Torop 2000: 64). The current thesis will primarily be concerned with the achronic, synchronic and cultural history aspects. Additionally, by considering the potential overlap or non-overlap of the historical time (Torop 2000: 58) and the culture time (Torop 2000: 65) of the original and the

translation, the thesis will provide an insight into the evolutionary component of the translation.

In order to understand the balance between the two participating cultures, it is possible to analyse the translation of CSIs, as an indicator of the equality or inequality of the exporting and receiving cultures and the translation strategies used by the translator. This allows for establishing a connection between the translation strategies of the CSIs and the position of the exporting culture in the receiving culture and the knowledgeability of the latter about the former at the time of translating.

1.1. Definition and categories of culture-specific items

CSIs do not exist by themselves and instead are an outcome of a conflict between the exporting and receiving cultures (Aixelá 1996: 57). As CSIs refer to elements that are unique to a particular culture, they may present translation issues in other languages considering that the same item may have a different value in the receiving culture or not exist at all (Aixelá 1996: 57). When referring to CSIs, other authors have used varying terminology, for instance, Aixelá (1996) uses the term ‘culture-specific items’, Nord (2003) uses the term ‘culture markers’ while Hagfors (2003) treats them as ‘culture-bound elements’. The current thesis has opted for using a ‘culture-specific item’ as referred to by Aixelá, which can also be easily abbreviated to CSI.

Considering that CSIs result from the conflict between exporting and receiving cultures, they are generally analysed in a text using systems of classification (Aixelá 1996: 56). Aixelá (1996: 59) divides CSIs into proper nouns and common expressions. According to Aixelá’s classification, the category of proper nouns includes, among others, place names and personal names that are usually adapted by pre-established translation norms (Aixelá 1996: 59). The category of common expressions, however, consists of CSIs such as objects,

institutions, and habits, that are not included in the category of proper nouns (Aixelá 1996: 59).

While Aixelá's classification of CSIs is relatively narrow, Newmark (1998: 95) offers a more elaborate variety that includes five distinct categories: ecology, material culture, social culture, organisations and customs, gestures, and habits. The category of ecology includes geographical features (Newmark 1998: 96), such as aspects of nature, animals, climate, topography, and geography. The category of material culture is quite extensive, consisting of CSIs regarding food, clothes, houses, towns and means of transportation (Newmark 1998: 95). The category of social culture includes aspects of everyday life, such as CSIs relating to work or leisure (Newmark 1998: 98). Organisations and customs make up a category of CSIs that include political as well as historical terms (Newmark 1998: 99). The last category, which is gestures and habits, contains CSIs regarding people's behaviour.

Though Aixelá briefly acknowledges the category of proper nouns, he primarily focuses on their translation strategies. Nord (2003: 184), however, offers a more in-depth characterisation of proper names, treating proper names as CSIs since they serve as cultural identifiers and, in some cases, even reveal which culture the character belongs to. Concerning proper names, Nord (2003: 183) also acknowledges the intricacy of the translation of titles and other forms of address. Additionally, none of the authors referred to above provides a category of CSIs relating to language. However, as language, specifically the use of Southern United States dialects in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, can be considered as a CSI, the analysis part of this thesis will also include the category of dialects.

1.2. Translation strategies

Venuti (2000: 469) offers two broad categorisations of translation strategies: domestication and foreignisation. Hagfors (2003: 125) also recognises the same categories,

according to whom the method of translating known as domestication refers to translating a text to fit the cultural norms of the target language. However, if the translation strategy is foreignisation, the translated CSIs can be used to enlighten readers about foreign cultures and customs (Hagfors 2003:125). Venuti (2000: 487) also considers the foreignisation strategy as an alternative to translations' tendency to integrate foreign works into the values of the receiving culture.

Baker (1992) presents a more comprehensive classification of translation strategies comprising eight categories. According to Baker (1992: 26), the most commonly employed translation strategy involves substituting the foreign element with a more general word, which is effective in nearly all languages. Similar approaches can be included in the translation strategy by a more neutral term and translation by a cultural substitution. Concerning the translation of culture-specific expression, Baker identifies the most common strategy as translation using a loan word accompanied by an explanation (Baker 1992: 34). In certain instances, paraphrasing with a related word is used in translation (Baker 1992: 37), while in others, paraphrasing with an unrelated term is employed (Baker 1992: 38). One of the more extreme strategies of translation includes omission, in which a particular element might be excluded from the translation altogether (Baker 1992: 40). Lastly, in a case where an aspect of the source language lacks an equivalent in the receiving language, the strategy of translation by an illustration can prove to be useful (Baker 1992: 42).

Based on the extent of intercultural manipulation, Aixelá (1996: 60) has divided translation strategies concerning CSIs into two extensive categories: conservation and substitution. The category of conservational translation strategies includes repetition, orthographic adaptation, linguistic translation, extratextual gloss and intratextual gloss (Aixelá 1996: 61). The strategy of repetition involves keeping as much of the original sentence as possible (Aixelá 1996: 61). Consequently, foreignising the CSI whereas

orthographic adaptation consists of techniques such as transcription and transliteration. This method is often employed when the source culture text is written in a different alphabet (Aixelá 1996: 61). The linguistic translation approach involves choosing a relatively similar reference from the receiving, resulting in a literal translation of the reference (Aixelá 1996: 62). Extratextual gloss refers to the combination of translation strategies by adding the explanation or the meaning of the culture-specific item as a footnote, commentary, etc. (Aixelá 1996: 62). Lastly, in a similar manner to the extratextual gloss, the strategy of intratextual gloss also combines translation strategies, as the explanation is added directly into the translation.

The second category of translation strategies, substitution, includes synonymy, limited universalisation, absolute universalisation, naturalisation, deletion, and autonomous creation (Aixelá 1996: 63). Synonymy is related to repetition. A translator uses synonymy or parallel references to avoid repeating the CSI. The strategy of limited universalisation refers to treating CSIs as incomprehensible for the target audience (Aixelá 1996: 63). By using limited universalisation, the CSI is changed into a less specific term. In the absence of a less specific term, the foreign meaning of the CSI might be left out altogether and changed into a completely neutral term as is done in absolute universalisation (Aixelá 1996: 63). The naturalisation approach involves translating a CSI from the source language into a CSI of the target language, allowing the target language audience to comprehend its meaning. However, the strategy of deletion can be applied if a culturally specific aspect is deemed unacceptable for ideological or stylistic reasons. Ultimately the least used translation strategy, according to Aixelá (1996: 64), is autonomous creation, in which translators add new cultural references to the text.

Regarding translation strategies for proper names, Nord (2003: 182) deals with the popular misconception that proper names are never translated. In reality, however, there are

no regulations for translating proper names (Nord 2003: 184). Aixelá (1996: 59) presents that proper names are typically translated regularly using predetermined translation norms. Despite that, it is also essential to acknowledge that this does not imply that proper names are consistently translated by employing the same translation strategies (Aixelá 1996: 59). Though Aixelá describes the concept of translation strategies concerning proper names, he does not include any specific strategies. However, according to Nord (2003: 194), the most common method for translating unique names is adapting cultural names from the source language and replicating names in the target language without changing their form, which fits the framework of Aixelá's translation strategy of naturalisation.

Aixelá (1996: 60) claims that different translation methods can be applied to the translation of CSIs, whereas Hagfors (2003: 115) argues that when a translated text is inconsistent in the use of translation strategies concerning CSIs, it is challenging for the target text readers to comprehend its meanings fully. Nord (2003: 194) also acknowledges that translators use translation strategies inconsistently, making the translation seem incohesive. However, the recent fields in translation research, such as genetic translation studies, have argued that it is widespread for translators to use different translation strategies and not just being faithful to one adopted strategy (Cordingley and Montini 2015: 4). Given the exceedingly broad classification of translation strategies offered by Venuti (2000) and Hagfors (2003), as well as the general classification of translation strategies by Baker (1992), which only considers CSIs in one strategy, this thesis has opted for the classification of translation strategies by Aixelá (1996).

1.3. The role of Anglo-American literature in the interwar Estonian literary scene

The translation of Anglo-American literature into Estonian began at the end of the 18th century (Mits 2012: 70), and it increased considerably at the beginning of the 20th

century (Mits 2012: 78). The first translations of American literature, which included themes related to slavery and Native Americans, were published in the 19th century (Mits 2012: 76) but were mostly adaptations and retellings. However, it was predominantly in the interwar period of 1918 to 1940 that the majority of Anglo-American literary texts were translated into Estonian, establishing the influence of the English language and the Anglo-American cultural impact within the Estonian literary scene (Lange 2009: 151). Although the first translations into Estonian were predominantly clerical texts, the majority of translations were made up of fictional literature (Mits 2012: 70). Fiction, often popular genres such as detective and horror stories, made well-known foreign stories accessible to wider audiences, which allowed the Anglo-American cultural context, such as names and events to enter the Estonian literary scene and culture (Mits 2012: 74).

Throughout history, Estonian culture has developed under the heavy influence of foreign powers (Soosaar 1996: 6). As the Anglo-American culture entered the interwar Estonian literary scene through translations, it began to be perceived as a counterbalance to the one-sided influence of German, and later Russian culture (Soosaar 1996: 7). Since translations possess the opportunity to reshape the receiving culture by presenting the foreign concepts in the target language (Lange 2009: 156), the importance of the English language and culture was acknowledged by both the academics as well as the general public (Lange 2009: 151).

By 1932, Estonian readers were already familiar with Mark Twain since a translation of his work *The Diaries of Adam and Eve* was published already in 1909, as documented by the e-catalogue of Estonian libraries, ESTER. Additionally, it is worth noting that Huckleberry Finn had entered the Estonian literary scene already before 1932, as the e-catalogue includes a book published in 1923 under the Estonian title “Tom Sawyer salauurijana. Huck Finni jutustused”, translated by H. Oras. Nevertheless, it is likely that the

Estonian version of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, published in 1932, was one of the few works of American literature intended for young readers, among other potential readership. The significance of children's literature as a distinct genre requiring special consideration in translation had already been recognised in Estonia at the start of the 20th century (e.g. Eisen 1914: 17). Sillaots demonstrated a strong interest in children and youth literature. Over the years, she expressed her opinions regarding this genre of translation, disapproving of the excessive use of foreign borrowings or any defaults in general (Sillaots 1934: 383).

It is clear that during the interwar period, there was a growing recognition within the Estonian literary and translation scene of English-speaking countries and their literature. However, despite this awareness, it is probable that not all the nuances and particularities of certain regional cultures, such as the Southern areas of the United States depicted in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, were familiar to the Estonian readers.

2. ANALYSIS OF CULTURE-SPECIFIC ITEMS IN THE ESTONIAN TRANSLATION OF *THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN*

The following analysis will identify the CSIs in the Estonian translation of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, determine the translation strategies used by the translator Marta Sillaots and add some cultural and historical context of both the exporting and receiving culture that aims at explaining the translator's choices at the time of translating, in 1931. This analysis consists of sub-sections that include methodology, ecology, material culture, social culture, dialects, proper names, and findings and discussion.

2.1. Methodology

To conduct the analysis, 25 CSIs were selected to illustrate each category and provide a representation of the use of translation strategies concerning these CSIs. Although this corpus does not include all CSIs present in the novel, it allows us to draw conclusions based on the provided examples. The examples of the CSIs found in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* are systematised based on Newmark's (1998) categorisations. However, for the purpose of this thesis, only some aspects of the latter categorisation are relevant. Thus, the categories of organisations and customs, and gestures and habits have been combined into the category of social culture. Additionally, as it is relevant in terms of the novel, this thesis also includes the category of dialects and the category of proper names. Therefore, the 25 CSIs identified in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* have been divided into five categories: ecology, material culture, social culture, dialects, and proper names. The employed translation strategies are analysed based on Aixelá's (1996) approach.

2.2. Ecology

The first category of CSIs focuses on ecology, including elements of climate, nature, and animals. Though basic principles of ecology are universal, aspects of nature and

ecological knowledge may differ among various cultures. For instance, in the source text of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* appears, the term “mosquito” (Twain 1992: 258), which is translated into Estonian as “moskiito” (Twain 1932: 135). Despite using the translation strategy of repetition to preserve the word, the translator deemed it necessary to add an explanation of the term in the form of a footnote that states: “Moskiito = soojamaine sääsk” (Twain 1932: 135). The additional information distinguishes the mosquito found in the Southern United States from its Estonian counterpart by specifying its origin in a warmer climate. Thus, by also employing the strategy of extratextual gloss, the translator indicates that the cultural context of “mosquito” differs in the two countries. Using a combination of translation strategies, the translator employs the CSI to enlighten the target audience about the foreign term.

Another CSI that classifies under the category of ecology appears in a sentence in the target text “Well, the night got grey, ruther thick, which was the next meanest thing next to fog” (Twain 1992: 239), “Noh, öö muutus pimedaks ja õhk paksuks – polnud küll läbipaistmatu udu, aga küllalt tihe siiski” (Twain 1932: 111). The sentence describing the state of the weather was translated into Estonian using the strategy of linguistic translation, resulting in a literal translation of the original sentence. As the reference to the air of the night being thick posed a translation problem and was seen as incomprehensible for the target audience, the translator additionally opted for the use of extratextual gloss by including the footnote that states: “Õhk paksuks” = merimeeste keeles: õhk on sompus, udune” (Twain 1932: 11). The explanation of the phrase “thick air” suggests that it might have more commonly used by sailors rather than the target audience of the translation. Furthermore, the significant variations in climate between Estonia and the southern United States might have also influenced the translator’s decision to include the additional information.

2.3. Material culture

The second category of the CSIs is material culture, divided into sub-sections of food, clothes, and buildings.

2.3.1. Food

One significant example of CSIs is food. Food is an essential element of any culture that can reflect a society's history and social traditions. For example, throughout the novel, there are several references to cured meat, such as bacon, a popular food in the Southern United States in the mid-19th century. The term “bacon” [*peekon*] was probably also used in the cultural context of Estonia, though possibly not as frequently, which is suggested by the translation of “side of bacon” (Twain 1992: 187) into Estonian as “suitsutatud seakülg” (Twain 1932: 38). The choice of translation strategy, in this case, limited universalisation, indicates that as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was primarily intended for young readers and the use of a less specific term in the receiving culture might have been more comprehensible for the intended audience.

Another example of CSIs that relates to food is drinks. For instance, “jug of forty-rod” (Twain 1992: 189) is a dialectal way of describing a low-costing and strong whiskey (Merriam-Webster 2023). Using the approach of naturalisation, the item is translated into “pudel haljast” (Twain 1932: 35), a more commonly used term in Estonian, making it easier for the target audience to understand its meaning. The translation strategy of naturalisation is also evident in the translation of the word “whiskey” (Twain 1992: 187) to “viin” (Twain 1932: 38) in the Estonian version of the novel. Although “whiskey” and “viin” (vodka) represent different types of alcoholic beverages, the substitution was made based on cultural factors.

2.3.2. Clothes

Clothes are an essential part of any culture and thus can also classify as CSIs. In the context of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the clothes worn by the characters signify their social status and reflect history. For example, in an attempt to go undercover as a girl, Huckleberry Finn is described as wearing a “calico dress” (Twain 1992: 206). Calico dresses were made of plain cotton fabric, popular in 18th and 19th-century North America. While the calico material is more widely associated with Northern America, the Estonian translation “kalingurkleit” (Twain 1932: 65) might suggest that “kalingur” had a similar meaning as “calico”. As both terms represent a type of cotton fabric (Eesti keele seletav sõnaraamat 2009), the translator opted for the strategy of limited universalisation, as the CSI is replaced by a less specific term in the receiving culture.

Another CSI that can be included under the category of clothes is “a roll of buckskin” (Twain 1992: 206), translated into Estonian as “rull kuradinahka” (Twain 1932: 66). Though buckskin is a type of leather made from animal skin, the target text version of the term “kuradinahk” means a tough cotton fabric (Eesti keele seletav sõnaraamat 2009). In the past, Native American cultures utilised buckskin for making garments. The term is culturally specific to North America, so it can be considered a CSI. In this instance, the translator has employed a combination of translation strategies. Due to the lack of a more suitable term in Estonian, the translator opted for the approach of limited universalisation. As this strategy acknowledges that certain CSIs are challenging to comprehend for the target audience thoroughly, the term buckskin was replaced by a less specific one in Estonian. To provide further clarity for the target audience, the translator included a note: “Kuradinahk = tugev puuvillriie” (p. 66), thus also employing the translation strategy of extratextual gloss.

2.3.3. Buildings

Buildings can be classified as CSIs as their diverse construction techniques and architectural designs often reflect a society's cultural values and reveal some historical information. In the context of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, an example of buildings as CSI is “wigwam” (Twain 1992: 216), which describes an abode used by Native American cultures (Eesti Entsüklopeedia 2006). As wigwams reflect the social and historical aspects of Native American traditions unique to North American culture, the term may not have direct equivalents in other languages and cultures. In translation, the term might need additional explanation or contextualisation for the target audience to comprehend its significance fully. Hence, in this case, the translator prioritised conservation and employed a combination of two translation strategies. The CSI “wigwam” is first translated using the linguistic translation strategy into Estonian as “vigvam” (Twain 1932: 80). Due to the literal translation, the term is still recognisable as belonging to the source culture. Thus, it appears foreign and incomprehensible to the receiving culture. The term is then supplemented with an explanatory translator's note: “Vigvam = indiaanlaste telk” (Twain 1932: 80). By employing the translation strategy of extratextual gloss, the translation specifies that wigwam is a kind of dwelling characteristic to Native Americans.

2.4. Social culture

The third category of the CSIs is social culture. The CSIs in this category are divided into the following sub-categories: Afro-American items, customs and traditions, and units of measurement.

2.4.1. Afro-American items

Since the story of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* takes place in the mid-19th century Southern United States where slavery was still prominent, it is also portrayed throughout the book. While the novel addresses some aspects of African American culture,

it also reflects the biases and limited perspectives of the time. For instance, the term “mulatter” (Twain 1992: 188), used for describing biracial individuals, exemplifies the CSIs related to Afro-American items. By using the translation strategy of repetition, the translator maintains the original reference and translates the term as “mulatt” (Twain 1932: 40). As this approach consequently also foreignises the CSI, the translator also employed the strategy of extratextual gloss by adding an explanatory footnote that states “Mulatt = Valget tõugu inimene ja neegri segavereline järeltulija” (Twain 1932: 40). This use of extratextual gloss indicates that the social constructs and racial stereotypes were also present in the interwar republic of Estonia, and thus making a clear distinction between two “breeds” of human beings, stating that a mulatter is the descendant of a white human and an African American.

2.4.2. Customs and traditions

The behaviours and worldviews of several characters in the novel are influenced by their superstitious convictions. Superstitions often emerge from cultural practices such as folklore, religious beliefs, or even historical experiences unique to a particular culture (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2023). They can include convictions about luck, misfortune, or signs of something to come. Due to their cultural dependence, translating superstitions into other languages may be challenging. Superstitions are noticeable throughout the novel. For example, in the following passage, Huckleberry Finn describes the beliefs that Jim, Huckleberry Finn’s Afro-American friend, holds and encourages Huck to adopt them as well:

“Some young birds come along, flying a yard or two at a time and lightning. Jim said it was a sign that it was going to rain. He said that it was a sign when young chickens flew that way, and so he reckoned it was the same way when young birds done it. I was going to catch some of them, but Jim wouldn’t let me. He said it was death. He said his father lay mighty sick once, and some of them caught a bird, and his old granny said his father would die, and he did.” (Twain 1992: 202)

In this passage, Huckleberry Finn describes many superstitious convictions. For instance, Jim believes birds may be the sign that it would rain. As superstitions are tied to cultural contexts that may not have direct equivalents in other languages, translating them might be

challenging. In this example, the translator opted for the strategy of repetition that includes preserving the original reference as much as possible:

“Mõned noored linnud tullid eemalt, lendasid sada või kakssada sammu ja laskusid jälle maha. Jim ütles, et see tähendab vihma. Ta ütles, et kui kanapojad nii lendavad, siis tähendab see vihma, ja tema arvates tähendab sedasama, kui noored metslinnud nii lendavad. Tahtsin mõne linnupoja kinnivõtta, aga Jim ei lubanud. Ta ütles, et see tähendab surma. Seletas, et ta isa oli kord kangesti haige olnud ja keegi neist oli linnu kinni võtnud ja elatanud vanaema oli öelnud, et isa sureb, ja isa oligi surnud.” (Twain 1932: 59-60)

By using the approach of repetition, the CSI is foreignised. Thus, it can be used to enlighten the receiving audience about the superstitions of other cultures.

Throughout the novel, the translator employs the strategy of repetition when translating other examples of superstitions, such as in the following example:

“And Jim said you musn’t count the things you are going to cook for dinner, because that would bring bad luck. The same if you shook the table-cloth after sundown. And he said if a man owned a bee-hive, and that man died, the bees must be told before sun-up next morning, or else the bees would all weaken down and quit work and die.” (Twain 1992:202)

As the previous example, this passage depicts superstitious beliefs about luck and misfortune. These superstitions significantly impact Jim and are primarily based on his personal experiences. This reference was also translated into Estonian using the repetition strategy:

“Jim ütles ka, et ei tohi lugeda, mitmest asjast lõuna keedetakse: see toob õnnetust. Niisama see, kui keegi pärast päikeseloojakut laudlina välja raputab. Ja kui kellelgi on mesipuu ja ta sureb, siis ta peab seda mesilastele veel enne päikesetõusu ütleva; muidu jäävad mesilased kõik haigeks ja lakkavad töötamast ja surevad,” (Twain 1932: 60)

Another element of culture belonging to this category of the CSIs is holidays. Holidays are unique traditions that usually include some significant historical, cultural, or religious meaning. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* contains several mentions of holidays, such as in the sentence: “Don’t they give ‘em holidays, the way we do, Christmas and New Year’s week, and Fourth of July?” (Twain 1992: 300). The reference is translated into Estonian by employing the strategy of linguistic translation as “Kas neile ei anta puhkust nagu meil: jõuluks, uueks aastaks ja neljandaks juuliks?” (Twain 1932: 195). While Christmas and New Year’s Week are universal and have the same meaning in the Estonian cultural context, the Fourth of July is specific to the United States as it celebrates its independence. The translator

acknowledges this by using a combination of translation strategies. First, “Fourth of July” is translated by employing the strategy of linguistic translation, as “Neljas juuli”. As this CSI carries historical and cultural context, the translator attempts to ensure its comprehensibility by also including the translation strategy of extratextual gloss in the form of a footnote that states: “Neljas juuli = Ühendriikide iseseisvuspäev” (Twain 1932: 195).

2.4.3. Units of measurement

Throughout history, different cultures and regions have used various systems of measurement. These variations can reflect the specific cultural as well as geographical contexts of a particular country. For instance, the overall measurement system in the United States is the United States customary system. In contrast, Estonia has used the metric system since 1929 (Vaba Eesti Sõna 2019). Consequently, when translating units of measurement, it is essential to acknowledge these cultural disparities. In certain instances, conversion or clarification methods might be required to ensure that the intended audience comprehends the conveyed measurements accurately. For example, given that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is an American novel and employs the United States customary system, the translator used the strategy of naturalisation to translate “four gallons” (Twain 1992: 187) into “viisteist ankrut” (Twain 1932: 38) in Estonian. Instead of using a unit from the metric system, the translator uses the unit of “ankur”, which is an old unit of capacity used in interwar Estonia to measure alcohol, such as vodka or wine (Ränk 1995: 12). By employing this method, the American CSI is replaced by an Estonian CSI to ensure that the target audience would understand its quantity and meaning.

In addition, another unit of measurement, “acre” (Twain: 1992: 334), acts as a CSI, as it is translated into “aakr” (Twain 1932: 240). While the exact Estonian equivalent for "acre" is "aaker," the translator most likely used the translation strategy of linguistic translation, as the translation appears literal and still recognisable as belonging to the source culture.

Furthermore, as the translator also employed the method of extratextual gloss by adding an explanation, “Aakr = inglese pinnamõõt, 2/5 hektaari” (Twain 1932: 240), it may be assumed that the Estonian knowledge of such units of measurement was limited, requiring additional clarification for new concepts.

2.5. Dialects

The fourth category of the CSIs in this analysis is dialects. Dialects are variations of a language found in different regions that include unique vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar specific to those areas. Due to their close association with cultural and historical contexts, translating dialects into other languages may be challenging. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is partly written in a dialect, encompassing grammatical nuances, vocabulary, and pronunciation unique to the Southern United States. While the Southern American dialect has a significant role in the novel’s original version, it is not as notable in the Estonian translation. This is primarily due to the challenge of preserving the distinct characteristics of the Southern American dialect. For instance, the following passage, in which Jim describes the details of his escape, is only one of the many examples of the Southern American dialect:

“I laid dah under de shavins all day. I’uz hungry, but I warn’t afeared; bekase I knowed ole missus en de widder wuz goin’ to start to de campmeetn’ right arter breakfas’ en be gone all day, en dey knows I goes off wid de cattle ‘bout breakfas’, so dey wouldn’ ‘spec to me roun’ de place, en so dey wouldn’ miss me tell arter dark in de evenin’.” (Twain 1992: 201)

The passage illustrates the fusion of the Southern American dialect and the African American vernacular, effectively portraying that period's significant historical and cultural elements. However, as it is almost impossible to translate dialects, the Southern American dialect is less prominently featured in the Estonian translation. The translator acknowledges this translational problem at the novel’s beginning in the translator’s note, in which she describes the language of the book as a “humorous mix of the written language, the language of the uneducated middle class and the African American vernacular” (Twain 1932: 8). The

translator approaches the translation of the Southern American dialect by using the limited universalisation strategy, by which the CSIs regarding dialects are translated using a less specific language. By employing this method, the translator tries to imitate the American colloquialisms and vernacular with spoken language and some grammatical inaccuracies.

For example:

“Lamasin seal prahi sees kogu päeva. Kõht oli tühi, aga hirmu polnud, sest ma teadsin: vana miss ja lesk lähevad kohe pärast hommikusööki vabaõhjumalateenistusele ja jäävad kogu päevaks ära; ja nad teadsid, et ma pidin karjaga vara hommikul ära minema. Seepärast and ei hakkaks mind otsima maja ligidalt ega ootaks mind enne ööpimedat. (Twain 1932: 58)

As illustrated by the passage, the unique characteristics of the Southern American dialect are, nevertheless, lost in the translation process.

2.6. Proper names

The last category of CSIs in this analysis consists of proper names. Proper names often reflect a society's naming customs, traditions, and cultural influences. For instance, as the predominant religion in the United States since the European colonisation has been Christianity (The Pluralism Project 2023), its influence can also be seen in the names in the novel. Several names mentioned in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* have biblical origins, such as Moses (Twain 1992: 169), Adam (Twain 1992: 187), Elexander (Twain 1992: 214), and Peter (1992: 289). While proper names are generally not translated, there are no regulations regarding their translation. Thus, the translator decides whether to preserve or adapt the unique names to the receiving culture. In this case, the translator opted for the strategy of linguistic translation, resulting in the American CSIs being translated as Mooses (Twain 1932: 13), Aadam (Twain 1932: 39), Aleksander (Twain 1932: 76), and Peeter (Twain 1932: 180). While the names are preserved, they are adapted to fit Estonia's cultural and linguistic context.

The CSIs that categorise as proper names include titles that appear jointly with names, such as “Miss Watson” (Twain 1992: 170). Although the Estonian language has an

equivalent term for “miss”, which is “preili”, the translator decided to preserve the term in the translation by employing the strategy of repetition. Maintaining the title “miss” might be connected to demonstrating the importance of manners and class differences in American culture to the receiving culture reader and has a specific foreignising effect. The same strategy is used in the translation of “Miss Susan” (Twain 1992: 312) to “Miss Susan” in Estonian (Twain 1932: 211). However, regarding the translation of “Mr Phelps” (Twain 1992: 330) into Estonian as “härä Phelps” (Twain 1932: 235), the translator opted for the strategy of synonymy, replacing the CSI with a parallel reference in the receiving culture. The same method is also applied in the case of “Mrs Phelps” (Twain 1992: 337) as it is translated as “emand Phelps” (Twain 1932: 244).

Another CSI that classifies under the category of proper names is state names. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is set in mid-19th century America around the Mississippi River, specifically in Missouri, Illinois, Kentucky, and Arkansas. Considering that the receiving culture audience may not be familiar with the states of the United States, the translator decided not to translate the proper name “Arkansas” (Twain 1992: 243) and employ the strategy of extratextual gloss. Thus, the Estonian translation includes the footnote “Arkansas = P. A. Ühendriikide osariik” (Twain 1932: 116), which is then used to enlighten the receiving audience about the cultural concepts of the United States. Interestingly enough, the translator does not include an explanatory footnote regarding the translation of the state “Ohio” (Twain 1992: 188). Instead, the CSI is left unchanged.

2.7. Findings and discussion

This analysis identified a selection of 25 CSIs in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, specifically chosen to illustrate each of the five categories, ecology, material culture, social culture, dialects, and proper names. Among these categories, ecology included two CSIs, while the more extensive categories, material culture and social culture, each included

six CSIs. Despite the significant role of the novel's language, including the Southern American dialect, only one CSI was chosen to illustrate the category of dialects. Nonetheless, this CSI provides a general idea of the category and the translation strategies concerning dialects throughout the novel. The category of proper names contained the highest number of CSIs, including ten CSIs exemplifying personal and place names.

Based on the analysis, the translator used translation strategies inconsistently. The most frequently used translation strategies were repetition, which involved maintaining as much of the original reference as possible, and extratextual gloss, which included explaining the meaning of the CSI as a footnote or other form of commentary. These strategies classify under conservation and thus can also be considered to have foreignising effects. The translation process included preserving the CSIs, possibly to enlighten the Estonian audience about American cultural concepts, such as traditions and vocabulary.

The translator also frequently employed the strategies of limited universalisation, in which a CSI was changed to a less specific term in the receiving culture, and linguistic translation, which uses the literal translation method. As the strategy of limited universalisation is categorised as substitution, it can also be concluded that some American CSIs were deemed incomprehensible for the target audience and thus substituted by terms with similar meanings from the Estonian culture. The least used translation strategies include the strategy of naturalisation and synonymy.

As indicated by recent research in genetic translation studies (Cordingley and Montini 2015: 4), it is evident that translators scarcely adhere to a single translation strategy and employ it consistently throughout the translation. Instead, they use different strategies variably, and Sillaots' translation of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1932) is no different. Though the translator employed different translation strategies regarding the

translation of CSIs, the translated text did not appear incohesive and challenging for the Estonian audience to understand.

The analysis of CSIs and their translation strategies revealed that the translator mainly opted for conservational strategies rather than substitutional ones. As one of the first translations of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* into Estonian, this translation provided an insight into American culture during the mid-19th century. Considering that the original version of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was published in 1884 and translated into Estonian in 1932, there are significant gaps between the historical time of the original and the translation. The culture time of the original, which encompasses the Southern states of the United States with specific cultural features such as slavery, was absent in the Estonian cultural context.

Thus, the translator might have employed the conservational approach to provide the Estonian readers, particularly children, with a more comprehensive understanding of the American culture, thus broadening their perspective and cultural comprehension. As foreignising can be used to integrate foreign works into the values of the receiving culture, the translation of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* contributed to neutralising the cultural dominance of German and Russian culture in the interwar Republic of Estonia.

CONCLUSION

Culture-specific items (CSI) have a valuable role in analysing the translation strategies the translator employs during the translation process. These items not only provide aid in understanding the translator's choice of translation strategies but also offer insights into the characteristics and dynamics of the cultures involved in translations. This allows for a more comprehensive analysis of the balance between exporting and receiving cultures. The present thesis explored the use of CSIs and their translation strategies employed by the translator Marta Sillaots in translating Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* into Estonian in 1932. In addition to analysing the translation strategies, this thesis aimed to provide some cultural context to the translator's choices, thereby offering possible explanations for the latter.

The theoretical background presented the ideas and perspectives of various authors, illustrating the complexity of the translation of CSIs and provided additional insights into the use of translation strategies. The analysis of CSIs revealed that the translator employed different translation strategies for translating the same types of CSIs, indicating a lack of a consistent approach. Based on the extent of intercultural manipulation, the majority of the employed translation strategies are categorised as conservational. However, as some CSIs were viewed as incomprehensible and replaced by less specific terms with similar meanings, the translator also applied the substitutional approach. While previous research holds diverse viewpoints regarding translators blending translation strategies, when it comes to translating *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, this integration was accomplished seamlessly and without compromising the text's coherence. The reasons behind the translation strategies chosen by the translator may be linked to Estonian literary and translation scene of the interwar period, which had been familiar with American cultural specifics to certain extent, but at times needed explanations for the more specific CSIs, especially for young readers.

Overall, this thesis highlighted the intricacy regarding the translation of CSIs and the significance that translations such as the Estonian version of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* encompassed in the interwar Estonian literary scene. The enduring nature of the translation of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1932) is also evident from the multiple reprints, e.g., in the 1950s and in 1970. Though *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has also been translated by Jana Linnart in 1999, the most recent reprint in 2015 features Sillaots' translation. While the later reprints have been edited to some extent, Sillaots' translation preserves both the historical and cultural context of the original, at the same time also offering insights into the dynamics of the historical and cultural context of the interwar Republic of Estonia.

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RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Madli Toomiste

Culture-specific items found in the Estonian translation of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in 1932 / Kultuurispetsiifilised elemendid “Huckleberry Finni seikluste” eesti keelses tõlkes 1932. aastal

Bakalaureusetöö

2023

Lehekülgede arv: 33

Annotatsioon:

Kultuurispetsiifilised elemendid on erinevad igas kultuuris, omades seejuures nii kultuurilist kui ka ajaloolist tähendust. Käesolevas bakalaureusetöös analüüsitakse kultuurispetsiifilisi elemente, mis esinevad Mark Twaini raamatus „Huckleberry Finni seiklused“. Raamatu tõlkis Marta Sillaots (1887-1969) eesti keelde 1932. aastal. Arvestades kultuurispetsiifiliste elementide tõlkimise keerukust, analüüsitakse bakalaureusetöös lisaks ka erinevate tõlkestrateegiate kasutamist. Ühtlasi avatakse seoses Ameerika kirjanduse tõlkimisega eesti keelde sealset kultuurilist ja ajaloolist konteksti.

Bakalaureusetöö jaguneb kaheks peatükiks. Esimene peatükk avab töö teoreetilist tausta, milles esitatakse varasemate uuringute põhjal kultuurispetsiifiliste elementide definitsioone ja kategooriaid ning nende tõlkimise strateegiaid. Ühtlasi vaadeldakse Anglo-Ameerika kirjanduse ja tõlgete olulisust sõdadevahelise Eesti kirjandusmaastikul. Töö teine peatükk koosneb analüüsist, milles tuuakse välja 25 kultuurispetsiifilist elementi, mis leiduvad „Huckleberry Finni seikluste“ eestikeelses tõlkes. Samuti käsitletakse analüüsis tõlkija poolt kasutatud tõlkestrateegiaid ning tõlgetega seonduvat kultuurilist ja ajaloolist tausta.

Analüüsi põhjal järeldub, et kultuurispetsiifiliste elementide tõlkimisel on tõlkija rakendanud erinevaid tõlkestrateegiaid, mis valdavalt säilitavad Ameerika kultuurispetsiifikat. See omakorda viitab tõlkija soovile tutvustada Ameerika lõunaosariikide kultuuri Eesti lugejale, laiendades seejuures nende silmaringi ning teadmisi.

Märksõnad: kultuurispetsiifilised elemendid, tõlked sõdadevahelises Eestis, Marta Sillaots, Mark Twain, ameerika kirjandus.

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