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Exotic Cuisine in a Translatological Context

Egzotyczna kuchnia w kontekście translatologicznym

Summary: The aim of this article is to provide the reader with very specific customs in national cuisines, especially Afghan and Iranian. The food is an essential part of the Muslim culture. As novels from exotic environments have appeared on our book market, it is necessary to think of possible translatological solutions of so-called culture-motivated expressions. We have chosen two novels for our analysis. Both novels are originally written in English and set in the Muslim countries.

Keywords: food; exoticism; translation; culture-motivated expressions; Muslim culture

INTRODUCTION

Despite the refugee crisis in Europe and its influence on Europeans' lives, the Muslim world is still far distant, unknown and mysterious for Europeans. Understanding "otherness" of cultures varies as the countries are recognized throughout their "image" or so-called cultural stereotypes. They can be understood as a culturally-based belief (e.g. one referring to attributes of culture, including race, ethnicity, religion, sometimes also sexual orientation or appearance)

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that everybody who is a member of a certain group tends to behave in some fixed pattern traditionally (and often falsely) attributed to that group[1]. There are people who are able to understand mentality of other nations. They usually have the ability to speak foreign language(s), have learned or studied history, religion, traditions or even have lived in an exotic country. For those who are curious about the life in the Muslim world and do not have opportunity to travel and explore personally, can learn a lot from reading. Literature and translations from national literatures can provide better orientation in understanding specific cultures, religions and philosophies. In addition, reading literary works can enrich our minds and souls.

Translating books from an exotic environment requires a skilled translator. Nowadays, such a translator has to be a universal and versatile professional who is not only linguistically competent but understands both cultures – source and target ones. In our translatological context we are interested in stories set in an exotic environment that include so-called culture-motivated expressions. There are several options of translatological solutions for these kinds of expressions. We suggest keeping authenticity, colour and exoticism of original work so we propose using internal explanatory notes that are related to the effort to preserve the equivalent specification[2]. Intertextual explications function as subtle parenthesis and carry new cultural information.

For our analysis we have chosen two novels from the Muslim environment. Both novels provide insights into the national cultures with all their customs, gastronomy, which is the subject of our interest, included. Expressions of various kinds of meals, herbs and spices, side dishes and vegetables mean a big challenge for a translator.

CULTURE-MOTIVATED EXPRESSIONS

Culture-motivated expressions represent wide scale of translatological solutions. These kinds of expressions mean connection between language and culture and can be defined as: "the linguistic and extra-linguistic unity that is the unity of the form of the linguistic sign, its content and ethno-cultural meaning through which we reveal the deep meaning, namely the ethno-cultural context and the connotations of the studied language units"[3]. These expressions are closely connected

[1] J. Javorčíková, M.E. Dove, *Exploration in American Life and Culture*, Banská Bystrica 2014, p. 58.

[2] J. Levý, *Umění překladu*, Praha 2012, p. 114.

[3] J. Sipko, *Teoretické a sociálno-komunikačné východiská lingvokulturológie*, Prešov 2011, p. 16.

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to source culture by its otherness and uniqueness. Therefore, translating such expressions can be difficult if suitable equivalents do not exist in a target culture. But for a skilled translator this can be challenging as one of his/her roles is to enrich national language with various exoticisms. However, a Slovak translator Alojz Keníž, famous for his attitude to translate as many foreign expressions as possible, claims that professional translator's dignity should lead him/her to their intention to translate all foreign words that appear in the text into mother tongue[4]. Otherwise, the result can be a language that is "enriched" mainly with various exoticisms, calques and misunderstood phraseological units[5]. In connection to translation of culture-motivated expressions, we talk about words that depict phenomena, respectively elements typical for source culture and its language. These are rooted in linguistic experience of human beings, but in the context of a target culture they might not exist or be known. And thus the target language might not have any lexical units that can be equivalents of them.

Since translation as such is in these cases tough, a translator has to find a way how to deal with it. In the translation theories we can find several options that differ one from another in the way and level of adaption of a foreign expression to a target language. Considering translation, we can talk about usage of various methods, strategies or techniques. In our translatological analysis we will focus on techniques applied to translation of selected culture-motivated expression such as calque, borrowing, substitution, description, generalization, explaining translation, adaptation and generally valid equivalent. From the point of view of the difference between the source and target cultural codes, it is the oscillation on the axis of foreignization and domestication.

Foreignization prefers elements typical of the source culture, which are often new and unknown to the target recipient. Sometimes the translator uses foreign elements within the text intentionally, in order to get closer to the original, respectively tries to evoke the atmosphere as it is in the original. On the contrary, the intentional wiping of the edges creates conditions for domestication. This translation moves away from the source and the foreign elements are replaced by the domestic ones. In this case, the translator tries to gain the best understanding in the mother culture, however at the expense of mediating contemporary, national and cultural specifics. For a translator, it is necessary in the process of translation, to become familiar with the facts of the environment and culture from which the source text is translated. If a translator wants to translate novels from the exotic environment, we agree with Alojz Keníž, they have to be skilful

[4] A. Keníž, *Preklad ako hra na invariant a ekvivalenciu*, Bratislava 2008, p. 39.
[5] *Ibidem*, p. 44.

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not only at foreign language and mother tongue, but the most important is knowledge of both cultural environments – foreign and domestic ones[6]. The role of a skilled translator is not only translating texts adequately, but what is more important, is to interpret the way of thinking in a particular culture.

As Anton Popovič already mentioned, the tension between the source text and its translation increases not only the time difference between the original and the translation, but also the difference between the two cultures, between the culture of the original environment and the culture of the receiving environment[7]. Thus, when confronting two cultures, there is a tension of "we" – "they", "our" – "their". The elements that the reader of the translation identifies as "his/hers", connected to his/her home culture and the environment, are understood as an expression of the cultural "we", while the foreign elements, associated with the original culture, identifies as "they"[8]. Typologically we can distinguish:

- foreign elements prevail over domestic ones – foreignization,
- domestic elements prevail over foreign ones – domestication,
- domestic and foreign elements are in balance – creolisation[9].

Following this typology, Braňo Hochel, from the time-space point of view, speaks of leaving (foreignization, historization) and replacing (domestication, modernization) translational methods[10]. There are often changes in translation that occur because of tension between two cultures. Creolisation seems to be the ideal translatological solution of culture-motivated expressions because it mixes domestic and foreign elements in a way to provide the right level of understandable exotics.

EXOTIC CUISINE IN THE STORIES FROM THE MUSLIM ENVIRONMENT

Hospitability is one of the most characteristic features of Muslims. Home has always been a place of careful preparation of meals, and cooking is definitely a female duty expected from a woman by society. It is not only a typical action concerning cooking, but it also frequently has a form of a home celebration, involving all its inhabitants[11]. Slovak educated Emíre Khidayer, a diplomat in the

6 *Ibidem*, p. 39.
7 A. Popovič, *Teória umeleckého prekladu*, Bratislava 1975, p. 186.
8 J. Vilikovský, *Preklad ako tvorba*, Bratislava 1984, p. 131.
9 *Ibidem*.
10 B. Hochel, *Preklad ako komunikácia*, Bratislava 1990, p. 33.
11 A. Buda, *Food As the Representation of Idyllic Landscape of Victorian World in the Novels by Thomas Hardy*, www.degruyter.com/downloadpdf/j/clear.2016.3.issue-1/clear-2016-0005/clear-2016-0005.pdf [access: 18.06.2017].

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Muslim countries such as Egypt, Kuwait and Iran, explains in her book *Život po arabsky* (*Life in Arabic*, published in 2010) differences in the Muslim's gastronomy. There are certain rules when dining with Muslims such as not using left hand for eating as it is considered to be a so-called "dirty hand"[12]. It is necessary to learn what is allowed and what is forbidden at the table. Muslims do not eat pork, blood and rarely drink alcohol[13]. The nation's culinary specialities usually reflect its ethnic and geographic diversity. Dining together with family or friends, presented in both selected stories should be an indication of idyll. However, both novels are far distant from an idyll.

CULTURE-MOTIVATED EXPRESSION FROM AFGHAN CUISINE

Afghan cuisine is mostly influenced by Iranian (Persian), Indian and Mongolian herbs and spices, ingredients and food. India brought chillies, saffron, garam masala (mixture of cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, cumin, bay leaf and nutmeg) and pepper to Afghanistan. Iranians contributed with coriander, mint and *sabzi* (green vegetables such as spinach and green herbs). And Mongolian influence is in dumplings and noodles. But Afghan cuisine has its own style based on country's main crops such as wheat, corn and rice. In addition, fat and meat, especially lamb and mutton, play an important role as they are important fuel for the people who live in harsh Afghan countryside[14]. Moreover, various kinds of bread, vegetables and dairy products, especially yogurt are essentials of Afghan cuisine. Yogurts are used for dressings and also to soften spicy meals. Typical for Afghan gastronomy is *dogh*, salty yogurt drink prepared with cucumber and mint. *Dogh* is mentioned in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*: "making carafes of *dogh*"[15]. The author rarely explains these kinds of expressions but in the text they are highlighted in italics. However, in the Slovak translation, the reader can learn what *dogh* is as the translator used the intertextual explication.

Meals are usually eaten with hands, especially with the right hand, with the usage of bread as a scoop[16]. Bread is served with every single meal. In Afghan cuisine they have two basic kinds of bread. First is a large round, flat bread called

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[12] E. Khidayer, *Život po arabsky*, Bratislava 2010, p. 150.

[13] T. Borec, *Manažéri na cudzom parkete. Ako prekonať nástrahy interkultúrnej komunikácie*, Bratislava 2009, pp. 131–132.

[14] *About Afghan Food*, www.sbs.com.au/food/article/2013/02/14/about-afghan-food [access: 18.06.2017].

[15] K. Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, London 2008, p. 162.

[16] *About Afghan Food*, www.sbs.com.au/food/article/2013/02/14/about-afghan-food [access: 18.06.2017].

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lawash and the second one is a *naan*-style bread baked in the tandoor oven. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, when Mariam got married, she started to live with her husband Rasheed and her responsibility was to take care of their household, and baking bread was one of her duties that she learned while living with her mother: "Nana showed her how to knead dough, how to kindle the tandoor"[17]. It is not unusual for Afghan people that they bake bread in public ovens: "put on a *hijab*, and set out for the communal tandoor"[18]. *Tandoor* is a ceramic, cylindrical-shaped oven used in Asian cuisines for baking bread and making various kinds of dishes. The word *tandoor* was in the Slovak translation unnecessarily adapted to word *tandúr*. We would rather prefer explaining translation instead of borrowing and use expression "tandoor oven". The translator could have used intertextual or footnote explanation or list of culture-motivated expressions with their descriptions at the end of the book.

A Thousand Splendid Suns is a story of unjust status of women in a society. Furthermore, it is a historical chronicle of Afghanistan for the last thirty years and a touching story about family, friendship, power of love and sacrifice as well. This novel also provides insight into the Afghan culture with all its customs, gastronomy included. Expressions of various kinds of meals, herbs and spices, side dishes and vegetables mean a big challenge for a translator, for example: "Nana taught her to sew too, and to cook rice and all the different toppings *shalqam* stew with turnip, spinach *sabzi*, cauliflower with ginger"[19]. In the Slovak translation, *shalqam* was explained intertextually with the attribute turnip, however *shalqam* is a kind of stew made of turnip and *sabzi* was left without any specification. We appreciate that the translator left culture-motivated expressions unchanged but did not explain them or even in some cases misled the reader, for example: "She sliced eggplants for *borani*, and cooked leeks and ground beef for *aushak*".[20] The word *borani* was explained as a salad. However, it is rather a paste made of spinach, yogurt and walnuts served as an appetizer. *Aushak* was correctly explained as filled pasta and again translatological solution used in this case was a borrowing.

Inseparable part of an exotic cuisine is *daal*, rice and *kichiri*. *Daal* comes from India and it is a kind of stew of usually red lentils but also beans and peas. *Kichiri* is an Indian food made of rice and lentils with various kinds of herbs and spices such as coriander, garlic, ginger, etc. As we have already mentioned, Mariam in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* spends time cooking for her husband:

[17] K. Hosseini, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
[18] *Ibidem*, p. 64.
[19] *Ibidem*, p. 15.
[20] *Ibidem*, p. 87.

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> But he did look pleased that she had already set his dinner plate, on a clean *sofrah* spread on the living-room floor.
> "I made *daal*," Mariam said.
> She poured water for him from the *aftawa* to wash his hands with. As he dried with a towel, she put before him a steaming bowl of *daal* and a plate of fluffy white rice[21].

And again, *daal*, *aftawa* (a water pitcher) and *sofrah* (a table cloth) were not explained to a reader in the Slovak translation. Nearly all food-connected expressions are not specified so a reader does not know what the characters were cooking or eating, for example: "I'm making *shorwa*"[22] or "The *qurmas* were always too salty or too bland for his taste"[23] or "carried out bowls of *qurma*, platters of *mastawa*, loaves of bread, and arranged it all on the *sofrah* spread on the living-room floor"[24]. *Shorwa* is a traditional Afghan soup. It is a simple dish but it takes a longer time to get it cooked. The main ingredients for *shorwa* are potatoes, meat (mostly mutton, beef or chicken) and beans. *Qurma* or *korma* is a dish originally from India and consists of meat and vegetables stew with yogurt and, of course, with various exotic herbs and spices.

The author and the translator keep the text too exotic, however, in the Slovak translation there are some exceptions such as: "*aush* soup with kidney beans and dried dill, *kofta*, steaming hot *mantu* drenched with fresh yogurt and topped with mint"[25]. *Aush* soup was correctly described as a soup with red beans and dried dill, *kofta* was explained intertextually with the attribute meatballs and *mantu* – as steamed dumplings.

However, sometimes the whole text is difficult to read. A curious reader has to search for information in other sources if he/she wants to have an idea about Afghan culture and its customs. The author made it difficult for a translator as he left typical Afghan expressions without any explanations. These expressions are only highlighted in italics, but not all of them such as *tandoor*, probably they are considered to be well-known. Thus, the novel, even in original, which was written in English, can be for non-Muslims or people who are not familiar with the Muslim culture, tough to read. If the author's intention was to make readers think and find more information about Afghanistan in other sources, he

[21] *Ibidem*, p. 68.
[22] *Ibidem*, p. 127.
[23] *Ibidem*, p. 99.
[24] *Ibidem*, p. 164.
[25] *Ibidem*, p. 159.

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really did a great job as the novel leads us to stop and imagine the life in harsh Afghan conditions where good food can help to survive. Nevertheless, for more pleasant and uninterrupted reading we would suggest keeping culture-motivated expressions unchanged but explained intertextually or using footnotes.

CULTURE-MOTIVATED EXPRESSIONS FROM IRANIAN CUISINE

Iranian cuisine is also known as Persian cuisine and includes exotic spices, flavours but also cooking methods, food serving and traditions of this country. As Iranian culture with its national cuisine is gaining popularity in multicultural society, it is necessary to understand not only history, traditions but also eating customs of Iranian people. Typical Iranian dishes are combinations of rice, vegetables with meat, mostly lamb, mutton, chicken or fish. It is a country where oil is a sign of wealth, even cooking one[26]. In the novel *Not Without My Daughter*, the main heroine Betty was not able to adapt to the Iranian lifestyle despite she was trying hard. She was always watched by other members of Moody's family, mainly his older sister Ameh Bozorg. When Betty decided to please his family and cooked beef, Ameh's reaction was as follows:

> "Our stomach cannot tolerate beef," she said to Moody. "We will not have beef in this house anymore." In Iran beef is considered a lower-class meat. What Ameh Bozorg was really saying was that the meal I had prepared was beneath her dignity[27].

If we compare *A Thousand Splendid Suns* with *Not Without My Daughter*, a story from Iranian society through the eyes of an American woman, we can observe the author's different approach of writing. Betty Mahmoody's style is rather explanatory and helpful for a translator. Nearly all culture-motivated expressions were directly explained by her. She precisely specified Iranian cuisine that is also famous for usage of saffron and *sabzi* (fresh green herbs and green vegetables). She portrayed Iranian society with detailed descriptions of various cultural or religious customs, women conditions in the Muslim society and provided insight into Iranian gastronomy and food serving as follows:

> Women carried in food and placed it on the *sofrays* spread over the carpet. There was plate after plate of salads garnished with radishes cut into lovely roses and

[26] B. Mahmoody, *Not Without My Daughter*, London 1989, p. 27.
[27] *Ibidem*, p. 80.

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> carrots fanned out to resemble pine trees. There were wide bowls filled with yogurt, platters of thin, flattened bread, stabs of acrid cheese, and trays piled high with fresh fruit were spaced around the floor. *Sabzi* (trays of fresh basil, mint, and the greens of leeks) was added to complete a brilliant panorama of color[28].

> Two huge pots of rice – one filled with regular white rice and one of "green" rice, cooked with *sabzi* and large beans resembling limas – were prepared in the Iranian style that Moody had taught me long ago, first boiled, then glazed with oil and steamed so that a brown crust form on the bottom. This staple of the Iranian diet is then topped with a wide variety of sauces, called *khoreshe*, prepared from vegetables and spices and often small bits of meat[29].

On the contrary to *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the author and also the translator explained all culture-motivated expressions. The Slovak translator used borrowings as a translatological solution in cases of *khoreshe* and *sofrays* (decorative, oilcloths imprinted with bright flower patterns). Preparing Iranian dishes is often a time-consuming and slow-cooked affair. As in the above mentioned quotation, we can see that dishes are served on the carpets that are covered with *sofrays.* So the Muslim hygiene is different and surprising for a "westerner" as we can observe from Betty's description of Ameh Bozorg's kitchen:

> The walls were coated with the accumulated grease of decades. Large tin cupboards, similar to those in a commercial American kitchen, were rusting away. There was a double sink of stainless steel, heaped with dirty dishes. Pots and pans of every description were stacked on the counter and on a small square table. With no counter space available, Ameh Bozorg simply used the kitchen floor as a work space. The floor was tan-colored marble, partially covered by a slab of red and black carpet. Scraps of food, gummy residue from spattered oil, and mysterious trails of sugar covered the floor. I was surprised to see a GE side-by-side refrigerator-freezer, complete with icemaker. A peek inside revealed a jumble of additional dishes, uncovered, the serving spoons still in place. The kitchen also featured a front-loading Italian-made washing machine and the household's single telephone. The biggest surprise came when Moody boasted to me that Ameh Bozorg had cleaned the house completely in honor of our arrival. I wondered what the house was like when it was dirty[30].

[28] *Ibidem*, p. 25.
[29] *Ibidem*.
[30] *Ibidem*, pp. 31–32.

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It is common to eat on the floor so not only dirt can appear on one's plate and "it is not polite to leave a morsel of food on your plate so, unwilling to offend, Moody ate the bugs"[31]. When reading the story, both in original or its Slovak translation, you can really feel the odour of the sticky dirt. The author's descriptions are authentic as she spent nearly two years living in Iran. As she was married to an Iranian, she accepted some Iranian customs, cooking Iranian meals included: "Moody taught me Islamic cooking, which featured lamb, rice laden with exotic sauces, and lots of fresh vegetable and fruits. My sons, my friends, and I readily acquired a taste for the food"[32].

Inseparable part of Iranian cuisine is bread. During the peace, baking bread in Iran is the masculine task, however, during the war: "the men to fight; the women to cook and also to take over the masculine task of baking bread"[33]. Except *lavash*, which we have already mentioned in Afghan cuisine, in Iran they also have "*barbari*, a leavened bread baked in oval-shaped slabs about two feet long. When eaten fresh and hot it is delicious, far more palatable than the more common *lavash*"[34]. To distinguish and translate correctly various kinds of bread was rather a difficult task for the Slovak translator as the novel was published in 1991. We guess that the translator had limited options to find proper descriptions of each kind of bread as it was the period just two years after the Velvet Revolution (1989), the time when free access to information was only in its beginning. However, we consider using borrowings as the convenient translatological solution. When reading this novel in both versions, original and translated, we can claim that the translator provided the same reading experience. And this is what we considered to be one of the key roles of a good translator.

CONCLUSIONS

Creating a text in the target language is not only the language but these days also purely cultural matter. The translator has to take into account in addition to linguistic-stylistic also pragmatic and semantic-cultural context in the perspective of source language and culture with the perspective of the target language and target culture[35]. A translator is a mediator between language and cultural communities, while recognizing the similarities and differences in the percep-

[31] *Ibidem*, p. 40.
[32] *Ibidem*, p. 71.
[33] *Ibidem*, p. 38.
[34] *Ibidem*, p. 200.
[35] J. Rakšányiová, *Preklad ako interkultúrna komunikácia*, Bratislava 2005, pp. 10–11.

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tion of information in two or more socio-cultural environments that reflects and transfers[36]. To translate texts from the exotic environment, a translator has to be interculturally competent, it means that he/she understands the ways of perceiving, thinking, feeling and acting of the members of other cultures with whom he/she finds themselves in intercultural interaction, and these adequately transfers into the target language in the target culture[37]. In modern translation thinking, the translator is considered not only as a mediator between two languages, but mainly as a mediator between two cultures and thus the so-called cultural or intercultural mediator[38]. The biggest challenge for a translator is to translate so-called culture-motivated expressions. For illustration we have chosen those of national cuisines, especially Afghan and Iranian.

For our analysis, we have selected examples from two novels set in the Muslim environment, which were originally written in English and translated into the Slovak language. The first novel *Not Without My Daughter* (Slovak translation by Martina Zrubáková, 1991) by Betty Mahmoody was published in 1987. The second novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (translated to Slovak in 2009 by Mária Galádová) by an Afghan-American doctor Khaled Hosseini was published in 2007. Both writers deal with topics such as human dignity, mostly woman's dignity, ability to survive, making decisions and keeping responsibility for them. Despite the fact that one heroine is American and another two are Afghans, they display with similar abilities, tell about their lives experience and provide insights into far distant customs of the Muslim world. The translation of the first novel can be described as explanatory, as the author herself explains nearly all culture-motivated expressions, thereby makes the translation work easier. The translation of the second novel is rather exotic, even for some translatological solutions unnecessarily.

As we have already mentioned, a key role of a skilled translator is not only correct linguistic interpretation, but also identifying and interpreting the way of thinking in a particular culture. This is achieved not only with language skills, but above all, with knowledge and awareness of own culture and studying, understanding and respecting other cultures[39]. In connection to translation of culture-motivated expressions, we suggest using borrowings and explain them

[36] *Ibidem*, pp. 9–10.

[37] J. Lauková, *Interkultúrna dimenzia translácie*, [in:] *Preklad a tlmočenie 11. Má translatológia dnes ešte čo ponúknuť? Reciprocity a tenzie v translatologickom výskume*, Banská Bystrica 2014, p. 64.

[38] E. Gromová, *Medzikultúrny faktor v preklade a jeho reflexia v translatologickom výskume*, [in:] *Letná škola prekladu 4. Medzikultúrny a medzipriestorový faktor v preklade*, Bratislava 2006, p. 47.

[39] J. Lauková, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

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intertextually or use footnotes. To provide the same experience for a reader of a translated version, the balance between foreignization and domestication seems to be the best solution. Thus, creolisation can be considered the ideal translatological solution of culture-motivated expressions.

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Streszczenie: Celem artykułu było przedstawienie czytelnikowi określonych zwyczajów w kuchniach narodowych, zwłaszcza afgańskich i irańskich. Jedzenie jest istotną częścią kultury muzułmańskiej. Ponieważ na współczesnym rynku wydawniczym pojawiło się dużo książek opisujących egzotyczny świat dla szeroko pojętego Zachodu, należy pomyśleć o możliwych rozwiązaniach translatologicznych tzw. wyrażeń motywowanych kulturą. Do analizy w niniejszym opracowaniu wybrano dwie powieści. Obie zostały napisane w języku angielskim, lecz ich akcja rozgrywa się w krajach muzułmańskich.

Słowa kluczowe: żywność; egzotyka; tłumaczenie; wyrażenia motywowane kulturą; kultura muzułmańska