

Lingua-Cultural Identity in Translation: 'We' vs 'I' Cultures

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The influence of culture on translation has been a prominent feature of translation studies in recent decades. The place of cultural knowledge in the formation and development of a translator's cultural competence, however, remains debatable. This paper argues that, in addition to general knowledge of a target culture (history, geography, literature, traditions, artefacts, etc.), it is crucial to be aware of the most important components of its deep culture, i.e., its social organization and worldview, which in turn have a major impact on identity. The study further develops the notion of I-culture vs We-culture and their respective identities. We suggest that an awareness of such cultural factors should form part of translators' essential knowledge about language and their professional training.

Purpose: The study aims to reveal linguistic and discursive manifestations of lingua-cultural identity in translating a Russian text into English. We explore nuances in the use of the pronouns *we*, *our* vs. *I*, *my* as well as some other markers of we-identity vs I-identity in the original Russian text of Vladimir Putin's speech at the Valdai discussion club meeting (2021), and how these were translated into English in the translation text.

Method: Selection of a text containing sufficient examples; close reading to identify lexicogrammatical features; comparison of source text and translation; analysis of examples; drawing conclusions. The texts were subjected to contrastive lexicogrammatical, pragmatic, and discourse analysis. Sociolinguistic and cultural studies were used to interpret the results.

Results: The findings suggest that a Russian text could express a more collective mindset than its English translation, which shows traces of what may appear a more personal/subjective focus. The study highlights the role of deep culture in discursive practices and demonstrates the relevance and effectiveness of an interdisciplinary approach to translation studies.

Conclusion: The study confirms the fact that manifestation of lingua-cultural identity can be observed at all levels of language, as well as in communicative strategies, and discursive practices. The task of how to accurately render these nuances in translation is a taxing one that requires a comprehensive understanding of the role of deep culture in discursive practices.

KEYWORDS

lingua-cultural identity, worldview, discursive practice, translation, multidisciplinary

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INTRODUCTION

One dimension of the philosophy of language focuses on the relations between language, its users, and the human social world, which includes translation and cultural nuances involved in interpretation across languages and cultures (Venuti 2021). As Wierzbicka (2003) states, "every language is a self-contained system and, in a sense, no words or constructions of one language can have absolute equivalents in another" (Wierzbicka, 2003, p.10). Since it was realized that, in translation,

it is not only languages that clash but also cultures, translation studies has undergone significant changes. The paradigm of equivalence absorbed a new paradigm, that of the "cultural turn" focused on sociocultural aspects of translation studies (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990; Bassnett, 2002; Doorslaer & Flynn, 2013; Gambier, 2019; Lisheng, 2010; Sdobnikov, 2019; Snell-Hornby, 2006; Yan & Huang, 2014, among many others). As Gambier points out, "meaning is no longer considered as a mere invariant in the source text, but rather as culturally embedded,

with a need to be interpreted" (Gambier, 2019, p. 357). Since Bassnett & Lefevere (1990), the influence of culture on translation has become the focus of extensive literature (e.g., Cranmer, 2015; Koskinen, 2015; Nida, 1993; Pym et al., 2006; among many others). The emphasis on linguistic 'equivalence' to the original of the translated text was questioned in skopos theory (Vermeer, 1978, Suo, 2015), which focused instead on functional aspects, and raised the question of cultural equivalence.

The question of the cultural knowledge necessary for the formation and development of a translator's cultural competence (e.g., Koskinen, 2015; Malyuga et al., 2018), however, remains debatable. This study argues that it is not enough to have general knowledge of a target culture (history, geography, literature, traditions, cultural artefacts, etc.). As Koskinen (2015) notes, the focus needs to shift away from discussions of how source texts represent their cultural origins, and of how target texts need to be made adaptable to theirs, rather "we need to learn to read more carefully the individual text we are dealing with, and to recognise and to value the unique network of cultural affiliations it develops, and to grasp the intended and equally unique affiliations" (Koskinen, 2015, pp. 179-180).

For that purpose, we find it crucial for translation training to support awareness of the most important components of the so-called 'deep culture' (Guirdham, 1999; Shaules 2007), i.e., social organization and worldview, which in turn has a major impact on identity (Bilá et al., 2020; Eslami et al. 2023; Sperckels & Kotthoff, 2009). The concept of linguistic worldview, according to Głaz (2021) suggests the idea that "languages, in their lexicogrammatical structures and patterns of usage, encode interpretations of reality that symbolize, shape, and construct speaker's cultural experience". This cultural experience includes, among other things, social relationships, patterns of social interaction with other individuals and groups. As Jenkins (2004) points out, humans routinely relate to each other, both on an individual and collective level, and in order to do that meaningfully and consistently, they resort to a repertoire of identification. Linguistic means of identification indicate how the speaker perceives herself, and how she relates to others. A key distinction here is whether identity is based in the social network/s to which one belongs, or if it is based in the individual. Hence, in this study the notion of I-culture vs We-culture (see Author1 et al., 2017a) is further developed. We propose these terms instead of traditional terminological designations "individualist" and "collectivist", in an attempt to move away from past geo-political landscapes with their potential ideological connotations, where "collectivist" might imply "socialist" and "individualist", "capitalist" (Author1 & Author2, 2016, p. 59).

Through the comparison of a Russian source text and its English translation, we aim to reveal a number of linguistic manifestations of lingua-cultural identity embedded in language, and the ways they are translated. We explore nuanc-

es in the use of the pronouns *we, our* vs. *I, my* as well as some other markers of we-identity vs I-identity. The research question emerges from two observations: firstly, that there are cultural differences between Russian and British society in the areas of interpersonal relations, lifestyle preferences, patterns of communication, and the like. Secondly, that this may pose translation issues, because the lexico-grammars of the Russian and English languages are best-suited to the expression of the cultural aspects of their own national groups. Such features may be observed in translation, and revealed in the preferences of communication patterns, as well as in the lexico-grammars of the Russian and English languages which are best-suited to the expression of the cultural aspects of their own national groups.

The paper consists of 5 sections. The introduction highlights the research problem, aims and research question/s of the study. Section 2 discusses an interdisciplinary approach in translation studies, and gives a brief explanation of the notions 'I' vs. 'We' cultures, focusing on Britain and Russia. The methodology section includes the aim, data, research questions, methods and tools. The research findings are provided and commented on in Section 4, followed by a discussion of the findings and concluding remarks.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

An Interdisciplinary Approach in Translation Studies

Translators have always been aware of the peculiar challenges associated with the translation of cultural factors (Bassnett, 2002; Nida, 1993; Katan 2016). Bermann and Porter (2014) describe the 'cultural turn' in translation studies, in the 1980s and 90s, which led to the inclusion of insights from literary theory, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, and information technology. According to Bednárová-Gibová (2018), more recent avenues of research in contemporary translation studies can be organized along cognitive, sociological, anthropological, technological, and economic lines. Scholars point to interdisciplinarity, multidisciplinary, polidisciplinarity, and even transdisciplinarity as main trends in translation studies (see, e.g., Bednárová-Gibová, 2021; Massey, 2021; Sdobnikov, 2019).

The challenges of translating cultural features mainly depend on the fact that languages are not simply alternative codifications of a unitary, homogenous reality; rather, they arise from local specifics pertaining to distinct groups of people, and reflect long-standing social values, traditions, identities and the like, rooted in diversity and pluralism rather than in uniformity (Koerner, 1992; Lee 1996; Hussein 2012). As Wierzbicka (2008, p. 7) says, "the meaning of words provides the best evidence for the reality of cultures as ways of speaking, thinking and living."

The notion of equivalence plays a central role in most theories of accurate translation (Steiner & Yallop, 2001; House, 2006), and this must not simply operate at a lexico-semantic level, but must also reflect cultural distinctions. As House (2006, p. 344) says, equivalence

is determined by the socio-historical conditions in which the translation act is embedded, and by the range of often irreconcilable linguistic and contextual factors, among them at least the following: source and target languages with their specific structural constraints; the extra-linguistic world and the way it is 'cut up' by the two languages resulting in a different representation of reality.

One current theorisation of translating cultural material relates to finding equivalents at a lexical level across source and target language; between, in Jakobson's terminology, "one verbal sign and another" (Albachten, 2014, p. 575). Bassnett (2002) refers to this as "linguistic equivalence". In those cases where the item to be translated has a counterpart in the target language, for example *cloud, sun, building, air, person*, etc., this is straightforward, and a high degree of "translational correspondence" (Teich, 2001, p. 210) may be obtained. Culture-specific terms are another matter, and ingenuity may even be required in intralingual translation, as Albachten explains in her discussion of a Harry Potter book, where British words like 'biscuits,' 'football,' 'Mummy,' 'rounders,' and 'sherbet lemons' in the original become 'cookies,' 'soccer,' 'Mommy,' 'baseball,' and 'lemon drops' in the American version (Albachten op. cit: 577). In the Russian context, terms like *матрешка* 'Russian doll', *валенки* 'felt boots', *уха* 'fish soup' would present similar issues.

The crux of our paper, however, does not regard such lexico-cultural items, which belong to "surface culture", but rather the abstract ideas of "deep culture" concerning worldview and social organization (Guirdham 1999, p. 48-50). These may manifest both at the lexical and grammatical levels, and especially at the level of language functioning. Personal pronouns are a case in point, that illustrate cultural nuances embedded in language and its use (see e.g. Kashima, Kashima 1998; Kim 2003; Markasova, Tian Wantziuan, 2014; Ngo, 2006, among many others). They may indicate the value of solidarity vs individuality in a culture, types of relationships, understandings of politeness and other sociopragmatic characteristics. In other words, they provide evidence that "culture and pronouns are deeply intertwined" (Na, Choi, 2009, p.1492).

Analysis of the frequency of personal pronouns in communication, which allows us to determine the preference for the pronouns 'I' and 'we' in a culture, involves taking into account a phenomenon like 'pro-drop' (Chomsky 1981, Ramat, 1987), i.e. the omission of pronouns in languages where this is possible. Russian has been identified as a partial pro-drop language, or one where the pronoun may be omitted under

certain conditions (Bizzarri, 2015; Kasevich 2014). Pro-drop is an intrinsic feature of the general system of language that regulates the possibility of omitting actors in certain contexts, thus expanding the range of semantic and pragmatic options. Another relevant factor is culture, and scholars have suggested that the pronoun "I" is dropped whenever possible by speakers of so-called we-cultures, or those that discourage individualism, in contrast to I-cultures (for more details, see (Kasevich 1996/2004). Kashima and Kashima (1998) report that the ease which pronouns may be dropped in a language is an important indicator of individualism and collectivism. They claim that pronouns are dropped more easily and often in the languages of collectivistic cultures than in those of individualistic cultures. As Jakobson (1959, p. 149, our emphasis) observes, "languages differ in what they must convey and not in what they may convey". This is a relevant perspective, since it is not normally possible to omit the pronoun in English in declarative sentences.

The translator between Russian and English is thus faced with the question of how to render the grammar-dependent cultural nuances in each case. Jakobson's discussion of the meanings inherent in grammatical features (ibid., p. 236), exemplifies the terrain covered here. One of his examples refers to the English sentence 'I hired a worker', which, to be translated accurately into Russian, would require supplementary information: amongst other things, the gender would need to be indicated. In the English original this detail is left tacit, omitted both for grammatical reasons (the noun is gender-neutral; gender can only be signalled by pre-modification) and for cultural reasons, connected to social issues of gender equality or difference. Put briefly, the English sentence carries with it a pre-supposition that readers/hearers will recognise, since it is encoded in the culture – a 'worker' tend to be male. The pragmatic implications of this, in cross-cultural terms, may be appreciated by considering how greatly the meaning/s of the sentence would be altered by pre-modification: "I hired a male/female worker", where the focus on the worker's gender, from both the speaker's and the hearers' perspectives, would probably be unwarranted.¹ For an English-speaking politician, there is no option that suppresses the 'we' in, for example, "We shall fight them on the beaches". In Russian there is, and our paper ponders the pragmatic significance of these phenomena in Russian political discourse, as well as cross-cultural nuances in the way they are translated into English.

'I' vs 'We' Cultures: The Cases of Britain and Russia

Though British culture is often placed towards the 'individualistic' end of Hofstede's individualistic/collective cline (Hofstede et al. 2010), from an anthropological perspective it is possible to overstate the implications of such a result.

¹ In English the additional information concerning gender flouts Grice's communicative maxim of Quantity (give as much information as is needed, and no more. In Russian, however, it is a grammatical necessity.

As Bond (2002, p. 74) points out, Hofstede's categories are not without problematic aspects (see also Venaik & Brewer, 2013), and his use of the term 'collective', in particular, appears to conflict with the general sense of the word. In reality, his well-known definition of these terms is not sufficiently broad to embrace many aspects of social life that regard 'individual' or 'collective' behaviour:

Individualism stands for a society in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family only. Its opposite, collectivism, stands for a society in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 92).

On the basis of such a definition, the identification of Britain as an individualistic society might appear to be curious. There are many 'strong, cohesive in-groups' in British contexts (e.g. boy scouts, golf/tennis clubs, churches, trade unions, the women's institute, political parties, masonic lodges, etc.), all of which may not provide lifetime support networks, but which do stress a collective note in a supposedly individualistic social set-up. Britain also has a rich tradition of games, such team games, that emphasise the team over the individual (football, rugby, cricket, etc.), which reflect and reinforce patterns of collective behaviour that, in the workplace context, play a crucial role within free-market capitalism (Cudd, 2007).

Recent social moves, however, have brought an individualistic element to the fore. These include the country's post-Thatcher embrace of neo-liberal ideology (Mullen et al. 2013), and the affirmation in media, and social media, of what has been called the 'Me generation' (Twenge, 2014). According to Featherstone (2009), the evolution of British sport, and in particular of football, can also be viewed as emblematic of wider, Thatcherite social trends that stress the individual at the expense of community, in its traditional sense. If Britain, then, may be regarded as a nation where traditional collective values are increasingly under strain the same, only more so, may be said of Russia.

Russia is identified by Hofstede and others as a typical collective culture, a country that, moreover, was "the dominant proponent of a Communist ideology, in which the goals of the state outweigh individual interests" (Tower, Kelly, and Richards 1997). In an empirical cross-cultural study of Anglo-Russian social attitudes, Tower et al. (ibid. p. 338) note that, for Russian participants, the preservation of 'in-group harmony' and following 'group goals' are key values, compared to the 'personal goals' identified as more important for Britons. The collapse of the Soviet Union, in the early nineties, led to the progressive opening up to capitalist practices of whole populations who had lived with a collective mindset for generations. It is too early to say whether

Russia's greater role in the global marketplace will see the erosion of collective values as Russians adapt, en masse, to marketplace logic (Linz 2000). Though Russian culture is becoming more individualistic (Naumov & Puffer, 2000), and modern Russian society combines both ideologies (Mamonov et al., 2014), traditional Russian values such as solidarity and group-orientation are arguably still dominant (Author1 et al., 2017b). Linguistic research provides many examples (see Author1 & Author2, 2016; Author1 et al., 2017a), and the we-orientation of Russian culture can be observed at lexico-phraseological, morpho-syntactic and stylistic levels of language structure, in different types of discourse such as interpersonal, public, professional, academic. This feature of the Russian language is especially pronounced when compared with English, as in the following examples, where the crucial distinction is in the Russian use of the pronoun 'we'. In the examples below, from Author1 et al. (2017a) the Russian pronoun 'we' unites the Speaker and the Hearer (1), or the Speaker and the third person (2), while the English language emphasises the individuality of each:

(23) Rus.: *My znakomy?* (lit. 'Are we acquainted?')

Eng: *Do I know you?*

(2) Rus.: *My s drugom khodili vchera v kino.* (lit. 'We with a friend went to the cinema yesterday.')

Eng:

My friend and I went to the cinema yesterday.

In this study, we explore the manifestation of these aspects of We- vs. I-identity in the translation of political discourse.

Hypothesis

Our hypothesis is that comparing an original text with its translated version/s, while not providing conclusive 'proof' of any large-scale intercultural hypothesis, may nevertheless reveal some lingua-cultural differences in terms of We/I identity. As Author1 (2015, p. 204) says, summing up the essence of the above reflections on language, culture, and nuances in translation impact of culture on the style of communication:

Communicative ethno-style can be defined as a historically, culturally and traditionally predetermined type of communicative behaviour, the choice and preference of certain strategies and means of communication

This does not necessarily concern large-scale socio-cultural or ontological distinctions between nations or peoples, such as those implied by the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. Such micro analysis might rather be suggestive of subtly different value orientations that guide thought and behaviour in the two countries, and may thus confirm the value of such research for translators or others who need to understand nuances of this kind.

METHOD

Data Collection

The data were taken from Putin's speech given at the four-day Valdai discussion club meeting on 21 October 2021, in Sochi, which was published on the site "President of Russia" in Russian and English. Two texts were analysed, the original Russian text (4271 words) and its English translation text (5267 words). In selecting the Russian leader's discourse for the purposes of analysis, we follow a tradition within discourse studies that probes intercultural issues affecting national groups via the analysis of discourse produced by elite figures and national leaders (De Cillia, Reisigl, and Wodak 1999, Wodak, 2009, Flowerdew, 2012). This is, of course, not to suggest that whatever lingua-cultural conclusions we may draw from the president's discourse may be taken as representative of Russians en masse. Yet, it does inevitably reflect features of Russian communicative style which, as will be seen, are not easily conveyed into English. Unfortunately, we do not know whether the translator was a native speaker of English or Russian or a bilingual, which is important as the background of the translator could have influenced her translation decision. This could be seen as a limitation of the study. However, the translation was published on the official website of the President of Russia, and it is thus safe to assume that the anonymous translator has high levels of lingua-cultural knowledge. Our analysis shows that s/he does not make the translation literal, but rather seamlessly adapts it to the ethno-style of the English language.

Data Analysis

The study aims to reveal some linguistic manifestations of linguacultural identity in the original text, and how these are translated into English. On the basis of the above discussion of the dominant 'we-orientation' in Russian culture, and the 'I-orientation' that prevails in English, we expected to find numerous manifestations of we-identity in the Russian text and some inconsistencies in their translation into English.

We first of all focused on the personal pronouns *я* – *мы* and *И* – *we* used in the Russian and English texts (both in Nominative and other cases), and the corresponding possessive pronouns *мой* – *my* and *наш* – *our*. To compare their frequency, we conducted quantitative analysis. We also considered the indefinite pronoun *все* (all) as a possible marker of community, and analyzed its translations into English. Some lexical and stylistic differences of Russian and English texts, and their influence on communicative styles, were also considered.

RESULTS

The Pronouns *WE /OUR* vs *I / MY* in Russian and English Texts

Our study explores nuances in pronoun use and its translation, especially instances where the Russian permits elision and this option is not taken up by the speaker; in other words, where they have the option to omit the pronoun and choose instead to use it.

Some results of the quantitative analysis are surprising (Table 1). We expected to see a more frequent use of *мы* (we) in the Russian text than in English, a result which the above discussion of Russian 'we-identity' would suggest as more probable. However, we found 44 instances of the pronoun *мы* (we) in the Russian text and 60 in its English translation. Equally surprisingly, the pronoun *our* was also used more frequently in English than in Russian. The results of *я* – *I* appeared in line with expectations: 14 to 48 in the Russian and English texts, respectively. The possessive pronouns *мой* and *my* were not common, but were more frequent (by 7 to 3) in the English texts. Some of these findings are arguably due to grammatical differences, e.g. more frequent use of possessive pronouns in English than in Russian and need further analysis.

There were, however, some findings that do support the idea of we- vs I-identity, and thus conform with our main hypothesis. Results show that, in the Russian text, the personal plural pronoun *мы* (we) was used much more frequently than the personal singular pronoun *И* (44 times to 14) (see Table 1, below). It is also noteworthy that the ratio of *we* markers and *I* markers in the Russian text is 4 to 1, while in the English text it is 1.6 to 1.

Omission of the First-Person Singular Pronoun "I" in the Russian Text and its Presence in English

In our data, we notice Putin's tendency to avoid using the first-person singular pronoun 'I', regularly supplied in the translated version. As mentioned above, in Russian, as in other Slavic or Romance languages, the inflexion of verb endings makes pronoun omission possible; following the norms of English grammar, the translator automatically adds the personal pronoun back into the verbal group. In (1), for example, Putin omits the personal pronoun, which the translator adds; in (2) there is a single explicit use of *я* (I) in the Russian text, while the English text has three:

Table 1.
Markers of We-Identity vs I-Identity

Russian				English			
We-markers		I – markers		We -markers		I – markers	
Мы (we)	444	Я	114	We	660	I	48
Мы (we) (Nominative case)	335	Я (Nom)	112				
У нас (Gen.case)	77	Мне (Dative)	22				
Нам (Dative case)	22						
Наш-а-и (our)	225	на мой взгляд мой/по-моему	3 3	Our	330	My (remarks, views, colleagues, opinion)	7
Total	669		117		990		56

(1) *Повторю*: безопасность – один из главных императивов.

I repeat, safety is one of our main imperatives.

(2) И еще раз скажу: я позволю себе высказать те мысли, которые считаю близкими.

And *I will say* this again: *I will allow myself* to express a few thoughts that *I subscribe to*.

Though Russian grammar permits the speaker a choice whether to use the pronoun or not, Putin consistently evinces a preference for elision. He uses the first person pronoun only in limited situations, mostly when he intends to clarify points of his speech or underline that what is being said is his own personal opinion: *я думаю / я имею в виду / я хочу отметить / я уже говорил / я уже сказал* (lit. ‘I think’ / ‘I mean’ / ‘I want to note’ / ‘I have already mentioned’ / ‘I said’):

(3) Вы знаете, я уже как-то говорил, хочу еще раз это сформулировать

You know, *I said* it before and *I will say* it again

In this latter example (3), it is noticeable that Putin’s use of ‘я’ (*I*) occurs only once and extends over both verbal groups; in the English translation it is repeated at the start of both.

There are other syntactic constructions where the speaker’s *I* in Russian is not expressed morphologically. In (4) and (5), we see the verbs in past tense *упоминал* and *отмечал*, which are both translated as *I (have) mentioned*. Grammatically, these Russian forms only indicate singular masculine and could refer to the first, second or third person (*I, you, he*):

(4) Уже упоминал о проблемах международных институтов.

I have already mentioned the challenges international institutions are facing.

(5) Отмечал этот серьезнейший вызов и в своем выступлении на Давосском форуме.

I mentioned this formidable challenge in my remarks at the Davos forum.

Something similar can be noted in Russian constructions involving participles *убежден* (convinced) or *уверен* (sure), where the person is also omitted (6-7). Again, in Russian these adjectival participles indicate singular masculine but can refer to *I, you* or *he*:

(6) При этом убежден, что за подлинные ценности нужно побороться

I am convinced that it is necessary to fight for real values

(7) Уверен вы об этом много говорили на площадках этого дискуссионного клуба.

I am sure you have talked a lot about this in this discussion club.

Some other manifestations of the dominant first-person perspective in English can be seen in (8) and (9), where the translator changes an impersonal Russian construction to a personal English one through use of the first person pronoun (8), or the addition of a phrase which specifically anchors the observation in the subjectivity of its author (9):

(8) Важно отметить и другое (lit. It is important to point out one more thing).

I have another important point to make.

(9) Наконец, еще один тезис (lit. Finally, one more thesis)

Finally, there is one more point *I want to make*.

As we can see in the above examples, the English translation consistently construes the subjectivity of the speaker, even when the first person pronoun singular *я* (*I*) is not present in the original. We suggest that there are not only linguistic but also cultural reasons that account for translation solutions that personalise the message rather than, for example, using the impersonal versions in these last instances.

Moreover, in the translated text, the first person singular pronoun *I* is also supplemented by the possessive pronoun *my*, frequently absent in the original Russian text (10-11):

(10) Не раз обращался к нему, если вы обратили внимание, и в этом выступлении.

You may have noticed that *I have referred* to it several times in the course of *my remarks*.

Here, the translator personalises Putin's objectivised phrase 'в этом выступлении' (lit. 'in this speech'), and in (11), below, again adds the personal pronoun back in:

(11) ...специально *попросил* коллег вчера подобрать эту цитату (lit. 'specifically asked colleagues yesterday to find this quote')

I specifically asked my colleagues to find the following quote

In (10-11), we see the combination of *I* and *my* in the English text and their absence in the Russian original. In these examples there is a double expression of the 'I perspective' in English, construed through the pronouns *I* + *my*, where there is no indication of the first person in the Russian text.

We (Мы), Our Country (наша страна) vs Russian People, Russia

The data in this section gives clear indications of what has been suggested concerning the Russian mentality and we-identification, once more illustrating the issues involved in translation.

In (12), we find the manifestation of we-identity 3 times in the original text and none in the translation. *Мы видим* ('we see') as well as *у нас* and *в России* have been omitted in the translation text. *У нас*, as an indicator of We-identity, requires some explanation. It consists of the preposition 'у' which signals belonging, and the pronoun 'мы' (we) in Genitive case. Depending on the context, *у нас* can mean 'in our (my) family / school / office / house / region / town / country', etc. In other words, it indicates the speaker's sense of belonging to a group, or a place.

In example (12), *у нас* is additionally specified by *в России* ('in Russia'), an optional clarification. Another we-identification is *наши граждане* ('our citizens'), which is translated as 'Russian people'.

(12) Но что-то там все по-другому как-то сейчас, *мы видим* ('we see' – omitted in translation), происходит. Кстати, *у нас, в России* (omitted in translation), *нашим гражданам* в абсолютном большинстве все равно, какого цвета у человека кожа, он или она – тоже не так важно. Каждый из нас – человек, вот что главное.

Table 2

Individuality/Community in Translations of Все (All)

	Russian		English				
Community (group marker)	'Individuality'		'Community'		'Individuality'		
Все (all)	9	Каждый из нас (each of us)	1	All	0	Each of us	2
		Каждый (everyone)	1	All of us	3	Everyone	6
Total	9		2		3		8

However, things are turning out differently there. By the way, the absolute majority of *Russian people* do not think that the colour of a person's skin or their gender is an important matter. Each of us is a human being.

Similar translation solutions can be observed in (13 and 14) where *мы в России* ('we in Russia'), and *Россия, наша страна* ('Russia, our country') are both translated as 'Russia'. At times, then, the 'we-identity' element present in the Russian source text is elided in translation:

(13) ... все это, может быть, кому-то покажется неожиданным – *мы в России* уже проходили, *у нас* это уже было [lit. ...we in Russia have already gone through this, it has already been ours].

It may come as a surprise to some people, but *Russia* has been there already.

(14) Перемены, о которых сегодня говорилось и до меня, и ваш покорный слуга их упоминал, затрагивают все страны и народы, и Россия, конечно, *наша страна*, – не исключение.

The changes mentioned here prior to me, as well as by yours truly, are relevant to all countries and peoples. *Russia*, of course, is not an exception.

All (Все) vs Everyone (Каждый)

Another manifestation of we-identity in Russian and I-identity in English is the use of *все* ('all') in the Russian text and its translation counterpart *everyone* (i.e. every person, every individual instead of the indefinite pronoun *all*) in the translation. According to our findings, *все* ('all') is used 9 times (Table 2):

The Russian term *все* (all) has been translated as *all of us* only twice (15-16):

(15) ...реагировать на последствия придется *всем* вне зависимости от политического устройства, экономического состояния или преобладающей идеологии.

All of us will have to deal with the consequences regardless of our political systems, economic condition or prevailing ideology

(16) ...общемировой вызов – это вызов *всем* вместе и каждому в отдельности.

... a global challenge is a challenge for *all of us* together, and to each of us in particular

Five times *все* (all) has been substituted in English translation by *everyone* which, we will suggest below, emphasizes individuality instead of community (17-20):

(17) *Все (All)* говорят о том, что существующая модель капитализма – а это сегодня основа общественного устройства в подавляющем большинстве стран – исчерпала себя.

Everyone is saying that the current model of capitalism which underlies the social structure in the overwhelming majority of countries, has run its course

(18) *Все (all)* все видят и все (all) все прекрасно понимают.

Everyone sees everything and *everyone* understands everything perfectly well.

(19) *Мы, как и все*, ищем ответы на самые острые вызовы времени. (WE – 2 times)

Just like everyone else, we are searching for answers to the most urgent challenges of our time²

(20) Кроме того, эта международная структура является носителем не только норм, но и самого духа нормотворчества, причем основанного на принципах равенства и максимального учета *мнения всех* (opinion of all).

In addition, this international body promotes not only international norms, but also the rule-making spirit, which is based on the principles of equality and maximum consideration for *everyone's opinions*.

In two cases *все* (all) has been omitted in translation.

(21) ...масштаб перемен заставляет *нас всех* (us all) быть особенно осторожными хотя бы из чувства самосохранения.

...the scale of change that forces *us* to act extremely cautiously, if only for reasons of self-preservation.

(22) Но главный международный институт – Организация Объединенных Наций – остается *для всех* (for all) непреходящей ценностью, во всяком случае сегодня.

However, the United Nations as the central international institution retains its enduring value, at least for now.

DISCUSSION

Our study confirms the value of cultural knowledge in the training of translators, since knowledge of the intricacies of language use, of patterns of lexico-semantic equivalence and cultural nuances will be vital to their professional activities. Cultural knowledge is an essential part of applied linguistics, which addresses such practical, language-related questions across a variety of domains and registers. Our findings lend tentative support to the above description

of cultural distinctions between the two nations and their languages, especially to the importance of 'we-identity' in Russian. They also underscore the usefulness, in such comparative studies, of individualism / collectivism and their values (Hofstede, 2013; Hofstede et al., 2010; Triandis, 1995), as well as the relevance of these perspectives to the practise of translation. Such cultural and communicative nuances will always need to be taken into account by translators and interpreters, and solving the problems they pose is key in providing a reliable translation.

An overuse of the first-person pronoun 'I' does not look favourably in the Russian culture (Author1 et al., 2017a, p. 120) as it has an arrogant sound. There are, then, cultural reasons that determine the speaker's occasional or habitual omission of the pronoun, exemplified by Putin in this address. For the translator towards English this phenomenon may be easily dealt with: when a speaker omits a pronoun, the missing element will simply be added back into the emergent text. From the perspective of 'equivalence' it is plain that, to translate *скажу*, to take an example from our data, as 'I will say' is perfectly satisfactory, at the level of denotational meaning. However, if it is accepted that any Russian speaker exercises a choice over whether to omit the pronoun, and that choice depends on a nuanced awareness of cultural factors, then the question is not so simple. The speaker might feel, in a particular instance, that to use the pronoun would be to place an unnecessary accent on their own subjectivity; to suppress it would express the meaning together with the right degree of culturally harmonious self-effacement. This proposal is in line with the opinion of Kashima and Kashima (1998), who argued that people in collectivistic cultures often drop pronouns in conversation to reduce tension and maintain interpersonal harmony. As we have said, an important aspect of Russian culture is its stress on the 'we' factor above the 'I'; thus, a tendency to suppress the first-person singular pronoun could arguably be accounted for in these terms. However, the task for the translator becomes a severe challenge, since the grammar of the target language (English) requires them to highlight the subject performing any action, at least in formal speech of the kind dealt with here.³

As a further example of this trend, consider the translation of Putin's characterisation of future catastrophes and the measures necessary to face them. The Russian text is followed by the literal meaning, then by the actual translation:

(23)

Text:

Чтобы повысить шанс на выживание в условиях катаклизмов, нужно будет переосмыслить, как организована наша жизнь, как устроено жилище, как развиваются или должны развиваться города, каковы приоритеты хозяйственного развития целых государств.

2 Here the Russian original has a literal meaning of 'we like all', in English rendered as 'Like everyone else'.

3 In informal speech, subject omission is quite possible ('think it's time to go to bed', etc.).

Lit:

In order to increase the chance of survival in conditions of cataclysms, it will be necessary to rethink how our life is organized, how housing is arranged, how cities develop or should develop, what the priorities for the economic development of entire states are.

Translation:

To increase our chance of survival in the face of cataclysms, we absolutely need to rethink how we go about our lives, how we run our households, how cities develop or how they should develop; we need to reconsider economic development priorities of entire states.

In the literal version, which reflects the Russian original, we notice an avoidance of subjectivity through passivation ('how our life is organised', 'how housing is arranged'), through impersonalisation ('it will be necessary', 'what the priorities are'), and through the general avoidance of pronouns and possessive adjectives. The English translation inserts these features: the subject 'we' appears, performing diverse actions that, in the literal version, were impersonal, construed via the infinitive – 'to rethink, to go about our lives, to run our households, to reconsider'. The presence of pronouns and possessive adjectives is also immediately apparent. On the basis of this fragment, it appears that the cultural preference for the Russian original is to represent reality in terms of abstract processes, while the English translation prefers to view it in terms of the deeds of social actors. Possibly the translator's choice is determined by knowledge that, to the Anglo ear, such impersonal prose has a tedious quality, remedied to a degree by the use of pronouns that remind the listener that 'we' actually need to do something.

CONCLUSION

In this study we aimed to reveal linguistic and discursive manifestations of lingua-cultural identity in translating a Russian text into English. Our findings suggest that specific features of English and Russian grammar, and speakers' discursive preferences may respond to underlying identity cues: we-identity in Russian, and I-identity in English (Author1 et al. 2017a) appear to be involved. While there seems to be a cultural preference in Russian communicative style for an avoidance of overt individualism – as we have seen, representations frequently feature objectivising formulae, pronoun elision and other such devices – in English it is often simply not possible to render such nuances. From our study, a view of English emerges which suggests that the preferred style for representing events is to include explicit reference to the actors performing them, a style which, as we have seen, the grammar at times imposes.

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The study once again confirms the fact that manifestation of lingua-cultural identity can be observed at all levels of language, as well as in communicative strategies, and discursive practices (e.g. Bilá & Ivanova 2020, Eslami et al. 2023, among many others). The task of how to accurately render these nuances in translation is a taxing one that requires a comprehensive understanding of the role of deep culture in discursive practices. Our paper is thus a tentative attempt to demonstrate, in this Anglo-Russian case study, the relevance and effectiveness of an interdisciplinary approach to translation studies.

There is also, finally, a rhetorical dimension to the questions raised by our study, since the use of the first person plural pronoun is often identified as key in the discursive construction of consensus and legitimacy; it might be that this is more common in societies where a collectivist ideology dominates. This perspective might provide a topic for further research.

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None declared.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Douglas Ponton: Conceptualization; Data curation; Formal analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Project administration; Resources; Supervision; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing.

Vladimir Ozyumenko: Conceptualization; Data curation; Formal analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Project administration; Resources; Supervision; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing.

Tatiana Larina: Conceptualization; Data curation; Formal analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Project administration; Resources; Supervision; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing.

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INTERNET RESOURCES

- Zasedanie diskussionnogo kluba «Valdai» [Valdai Discussion Club meeting] 21.10. 2021 <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66975>
- Valdai Discussion Club meeting, October 21, 2021. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66975>