

Typology, semantics and pragmatics of French lexis in modern English travelogue

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The representation of a foreign culture (often in the form of the opposition “we”/“native” vs “they, others”/“alien, foreign, strange”) in the texts that can be referred to the genre of travel *writing* (or *travelogue*) appears to be most interesting with regard to the study of literature from the viewpoint of culture.

Travelogues in modern literary discourse can be found in quite a number of different genre forms and text-types, such as diaries, travel notes, essays, memoirs, etc. The interest in travel writing undergoes a noticeable revival nowadays [Рижкова 2004]: there appear works devoted to the analysis of the language and functional evolution of the genre. Furthermore, the study of travelogues has become most topical due to the development of the culturological trend in linguistics (J. Buzard, M. Cocker, T. Döring). It is owing to this new intercultural approach to the literary representation of the traveler’s experience that modern travelogue is being in the process of revival and renewal [Borm 2007]. This genre enables authors and readers to gain a deeper insight into a different, alien social, cultural and language environment [ibid.]. This is only one of many reasons for its being so popular with both writers and readers. In other words, the traditional model/scenario of travel writings, i.e. the generation and reception of the information following the scheme “here” and “there”, “at home” and “abroad”, is being transformed, modified, broken, since authors often address the multicultural audience [ibid.]. So we witness the change of the focus from the domination of the traveler’s self-presentation in a strange cultural environment to the tangible accent on the representation of this environment, as well as on the detailed depiction of unfamiliar characters, social and cultural realia. All of this has led to some qualitative changes in the genre, lingual and stylistic features of such text-types. As Redmond O’Hanlon states, “the perfect travel book should be as true as fiction and use the methods of fiction. It should be beautifully structured, many-layered, full of interlocking stories, resonant knowledge, compressed dialogue, narrative force. Its descriptions of the look and feel of a country, a landscape, should be far more vivid than any film could ever be” [quoted from Borm 2007: 11]. Thus, the artistic qualities, on the one hand, and the genre and compositional syncretism, on the other, can be singled out as the main characteristics of modern literary travelogue that combines fiction and fact.

The documentary basis of the genre is, actually, a specific realization of its intertextual connections on the level “text - language” [Рижкова 2004]. The obligatory presence of this factual element manifests itself, among other features, in the use of a great number of foreign lexical items, including barbarisms, late borrowings, exotisms, so called “ethnographisms”, i.e. words denoting various local realia. Here belong anthroponyms, toponyms, zoonyms, phytonyms, chrematonyms, etc.

As is known, the main functions of foreign elements in a text are the creation of “local color”, the representation of the unique features of a different culture, the achievement of the

so-called “presence effect”. Barbarisms and exotic lexis denote something which has no name in the writer’s language, thus serving as means of characterization of his personages and adding a specific coloring to the narrative. According to M. G. Shadrina, the informative pragmatics of the texts of travelogues is traced in its being closely intertwined with the author’s intention to choose some definite facts of reality for description and his subjective attitude to them [Шадрина 2003]. Furthermore, the author’s immersion in a foreign environment makes it possible for him, sometimes unintentionally as it seems, to position himself in this culture not from outside, as an onlooker, but from inside, as a participant, as someone who belongs to the whole multicultural audience. Besides, from the point of view of ethnopsycholinguistics, the switch onto a different language code transforms to some extent the recipient’s comprehension and perception of reality – he starts to feel and look afresh at the world around.

The aim of this article is to study the functioning of various foreign elements in the text of P. Mayle’s famous travelogue “*A Year in Provence*” (1989) [Mayle 1991].

A British subject, Peter Mayle has chosen Provence as his other, second home. With a sincere interest and great desire he started to learn how to become its true, fully-fledged citizen. *A Year in Provence* is a book for those who are willing to get acquainted with the culture of Southern France. This book (it has been awarded the *Best Travel Book* prize) is traditionally referred by literary critics to the genre of *travel writing*, but this is not a mere documentary story, but a gripping, witty and touching autobiography and an investigation of various customs and traditions of the people of the South of France. It may also be qualified as a detailed guidebook to Provence and its culture for tourists as well as house-owners and gourmets. Not all books of this kind have gained the status of true literature and started to be appreciated for their artistic value. Peter Mayle is among those authors who have managed to win the hearts of both critics and readers all over the world. What is the secret of his success? Obviously, the main reason is the writer’s specific vision – the nature, culture and mode of life of the inhabitants of Provence are depicted by him with admiration and love. One more reason is his inimitable humor, narrative talent and stylistic mastery. Humor, irony and self-irony create an unusual coloring – a mixture of serious and amusing themes and topics. The unusual humorous and ironic implication is also conveyed by means of the author’s choice of objects for depiction as well as the way and manner of their representation and description. This type of syncretism underlies the paradoxical popularity of “*A Year in Provence*”.

The analysis has shown that the genre aspects of the book account for the general language and speech peculiarities of the text, which can be characterized as certain typological markers. The author creates his vivid images that convey the unique national-cultural coloring of French southern provinces with the help of the specific use of tropes and a lot of other stylistic means (among the devices that add to the atmosphere of the story and its humorous/ironic modality are metaphor, epithet, syllepsis, zeugma, oxymoron, simile, hyperbole, gradation, parallelism, pun, antanaclasis, graphon, etc.). The use of foreign verbal components (in both nominative and allusive functions) can also be regarded as those belonging to the dominant genre-textual features of the book.

The volume of the article will make it possible to discuss and focus only on some of the lexical groups of the French vocabulary inserted into the English text of the book. We shall concentrate on some typological, semantic and functional-pragmatic aspects of their analysis in the context of the travelogue. One of the reasons why P. Mayle’s book has been chosen for analysis is a very high frequency index of the units under study: there are about 398 French words and phrases for 207 pages of the text. These items are printed in italics as a sign of their belonging to a different language system.

The typology of French (and not only French) elements used in *A Year in Provence* is varied. With a view to illustrating the abundance of such items in the text let us take only one

randomly chosen page and analyze the quantitative and qualitative distribution of barbarisms, French lexis proper (or ‘foreignisms’) and other lexemes denoting various types of national and cultural realia. Thus, for example, page 117 [Mayle 1991] contains almost all of the above-mentioned types of lexis (which constitute about 5 % of the overall amount of words used here - 350). These are the toponyms *Côte d’Azur*, *Sainte-Maxime*, *Lubéron*, *Provence*, *Ramatuelle*, *Saint-Tropéz*, *Nice* (7 items); barbarisms and some other borrowings that have preserved the transparent or less distinct French spelling (*autoroute*, *Provençal*, *souvenirs*, *franc* – 4 items); lexis denoting culture-specific realia (the trade mark *Ambre Solaire* - 1 word-combination, 2 items); proper foreignisms that are italicized in the text (*pommes frites* – 1 word-combination, 2 items). A simple calculation will show that the usage frequency of foreign lexis (which turns out to comprise the most numerous group, apart from toponyms) is 1.9, i.e. approximately 2 French elements (a word/phrase or a sentence) on a page. This is a very high index for the informative-entertaining genre. However, the foreign words that are chosen by the writer are often familiar to the reader and are decoded very easily, as a rule. Conversely, they may be accompanied by an English explanation or equivalent. They are employed by the author - without a noticeable bias – not only in the personages’ discourse (which is quite typical of descriptive contexts in travel writing), but also in the author’s narrative.

The foreign lexis performs in the text of the book two main functions: these lexemes create and convey the national coloring and local overtones. They also indicate that all the dialogues between the author-narrator and his personages – the people of Provence (his neighbors, builders, officials, restaurateurs, traders and mere strangers) - are conducted exclusively in French. Among the peculiarities of foreign lexis found in the text of the story we can note the use of graphons, i.e. the word-forms that graphically imitate the authentic pronunciation in the Provençal dialect (e.g.: “*Bieng. Je revienng demaing*” [Mayle 1991: 175]).

A separate group of lexis comprises the items that have already entered the system of the English language. There are about 50 of them used in the text. They are not numerous, as we can see, but they have a similar pragmatic load. Apart from the generally-known words (*champagne*, *café*), the author uses most intensively the French lexemes that have been partially assimilated by the English language. In the latter case they have preserved their French spelling and/or sounding. Such words are registered in English language dictionaries as assimilated borrowings or as barbarisms, for example: *bric-à-brac*, *gourmet*, *boutique*, *coiffure*, *croissant*, *mayonnaise*, *foie gras*, etc. As a rule, barbarisms have synonyms in the English language. So the author’s choice of this type of lexis does not seem to be incidental; on the contrary, it appears to be intentional, since in some barbarisms P. Mayle often restores the use of diacritics (‘, ’), i.e. the authentic, original French spelling of the words: *attaché case*, *rendezvous*, *baguette*, *gâteau*, *rôle*, *patois*, *pâté*, *séance*, *fête*, *chaises longues*, *élan*, *soufflés*, *entourage*, *discotheque* (OALD) :: *discothèque* (“*A Year in Provence*”). This results in the French local color being felt and “shining through” the text typography, which contributes to the general atmosphere of the story and helps the reader to “immerse” into the linguocultural environment of Provence, reproduced and represented on the pages of this famous autobiographical story.

Foreignisms (nominative and in the form of quotations), barbarisms and all kinds of exotic lexis (*Madame*, *Monsieur*, *gendarme*, *Grand Prix*, *Mistral*, *Citroën*, *Tour de France*) sometimes acquire semantic-functional properties which are characteristic of allusions. Hence they may also be regarded as intertextual elements. This happens because the content component of P. Mayle’s text is generated by means of a specific dialogue - an inter-text and inter-language dialogue, and also through the interaction and intertwining of British and French discourses and cultures in general. The intertextual qualities, and in some certain

contexts also the properties of precedent text elements, can be traced in numerous French and non-French onyms (123 in total) found in the text, for example: the toponyms *Nice*, *Saint-Tropéz*, “*Le Chicago de Provence*” (about the town of *Cavaillon*), the anthroponyms *André Courrèges*, *Cardin*, *Brigitte Bardot*, the phytonyms *vine*, *vineyard*, *truffe*, *the almond tree* and the chrematonyms (names of political, economic, commercial or cultural institutions or things) *Châteauneuf-du-Pape*, a *Peugeot*, a *Gauloise*, *Ruger*. *44 Magnum*, a *Citroën*, *le Globule*, *Vogue*. They may be considered precedent text components because of their potential autonomy on the content-conceptual plane, their clearly expressed nature-specific connotations and their functioning in the text as means of actualization of some important information by way of appealing to the reader’s “cultural memory” (in fact, the multinational and multilingual reader). Such text elements not only fulfill their “direct” functions – as markers of cognitive-documentary pragmatics of any travelogue, but they also serve as one of the most effective means of creating a culturally-saturated text.

We should single out one more voluminous category of lexical items employed by the writer. These are “culinary” lexemes: names of dishes, their ingredients, wines/wine brands, restaurants, and cafés. To prove his thesis that food takes a special (if not central) place in the life of Frenchmen, the author describes in his book the whole catalogue of various dishes, the majority of which are peculiar only to Provençal cuisine. The names of some dishes may be linguistically qualified as foreignisms and exotisms simultaneously, as, for example, the word *tapenade* – a Provençal dish with capers, olives and anchovies. They can also be regarded as transparent linguocultural elements performing the corresponding functions in the text.

Thus, Provence and its people, nature, home customs and various traditions are depicted most vividly by Peter Mayle. He delineates the picturesque countryside and the climate of the South of France in such a way that the potential reader can clearly observe the everyday life and vicariously feel the atmosphere of the place. This is also achieved with the help of the use of numerous French discourse markers (interjections, adverbs and adjectives, colloquial phrases and idioms) which abound in dialogues: *Voilà*, *Bon*, *Formidable*, *Normalement*, *Naturellement*, *Merde!*, *Par contre*, *Bonjour*, *C’est logique*, *Comme d’habitude*, *J’arrive!*, *Allez!*, *Evidement*, *C’est normal*, *C’est vrai*, *Non*, *Mais oui*, *C’est la vie*, *Courage!*, *Attention!*, *Chut!*, etc. Their use enables the reader to hear, as it were, and feel the melody of the French speech in general (e.g.: *I knew what his first words would be*. “*Oh là là*” [Mayle 1991: 202]) and the peculiarities and uniqueness of the extremely fast, exuberantly verbose and lively conversation of the people of Provence in particular. The reader, quickly and readily, starts to get used to the sound of the local speech variety, to the realia of the rural life in the region, to the local food and entertainment. He “dives” into the local space and even the local time, which is quite peculiar. The following is an example of Mayle’s humorous and slightly ironic description of the way the Provençal inhabitants perceive time, and how it passes in this part of the world: *We learned that time in Provence is a very elastic commodity /.../. Un petit quart d’heure means sometime today. Demain means sometime this week. And the most elastic time segment of all, une quinzaine can mean three weeks, two months, or next year, but never, ever does it mean fifteen days* [Mayle 1991: 14].

It has been already mentioned that apart from the efficient use of the analyzed types of foreign lexis, the original pragmatics of this book (that underlies to a great extent its worldwide popularity) is created by means of such stylistic constituents of its artistic structure as humor and irony. P. Mayle’s inimitable humor is closely interwoven with irony and self-irony, especially conspicuous in his numerous descriptive contexts. The most picturesque are descriptions of human foibles, drawbacks and eccentricities (e.g.: a passion for excellent food and substantial meals, various whims and idiosyncrasies, specific professional habits of local inhabitants). The key device here is ironic innuendo, as well as hyperbole combined with metaphor and special types of metaphoric transference – personification and animism. To

exemplify this statement, let us analyze the way P. Mayle depicts the above-mentioned speech habits of the people of Provence. The following paragraph is characterized by stylistic convergence (the use of metaphor, epithets, similes, hyperbole, antithesis, repetition) supported by the use of French words (or words of French origin) and graphons: *The language spoken was French, but it was not the French we had studied in textbooks and heard on cassettes; it was a rich, soupy patois [...] Half-familiar sounds could be dimly recognized as words through the swirls and eddies of Provençal: demain became demang, vin became vang, maison became mesong. That by itself would not have been a problem had the words been spoken at normal conversational speed and without further embroidery, but they were delivered like bullets from a machine gun, often with extra vowel tacked on to the end for good luck* [Mayle 1991: 6]. Yet the author's irony is not taunting or bitter, it has a soft tonality and a humorous implication, which is often generated by means of punning /wordplay realized at all the levels, including the interlingual level: *There was a crack, and the truck tilted backwards. A pungent and unmistakable smell filled the air. The driver got out to inspect the damage and said, with unconscious accuracy, the single most appropriate word for the occasion. "Merde!" He had parked in the septic tank* [Mayle 1991: 81]. The decoding of the double meaning of this French vulgarism is only possible due to the English explanation that precedes and follows the interjection.

Since one of the key topics of this autobiographic book (and simultaneously the linguocultural guide) is food and the culture of cooking and eating food in France and Provence, which is described here as a sort of national passion, for his puns and metaphors the author often chooses – intentionally or just intuitively – the lexis (including exotisms) with **gastronomic** semantic components: *The Michelin* [a guide book to restaurants] /.../ *is confined to the bare bones of prices and grades and specialties. Gault-Millau gives you the flesh as well. It will tell you about the chef...* [Mayle 1991: 39].

To conclude, the informative-culturological components of the overall pragmatics of Peter Mayle's book account for the presence of a great number of French lexis and words borrowed from French. They have a definite linguocultural functional load in the text of the story. On getting acquainted with the book and its characters, the reader can confidently state that he too, together with the writer, has undergone the same kind of adaptation, got attached and started to understand the Provençal people and Provence with its unique climate, history, culture and language. The general humorous stylistics of the text and the author's skillful and most appropriate use of foreign lexis (including words with national and cultural connotations) make a notable contribution to the specific perception and general appreciation of this popular travelogue and "documentary fiction".

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Аннотация

В статье рассматриваются типология и культурологический функциональный потенциал иноязычных элементов в книге британца Питера Мейла «A Year in Provence». Проводится анализ разнообразных лексических ресурсов французского языка, мастерски используемых писателем для создания живописных и колоритных образов жителей южной провинции Франции, которые калейдоскопически складываются в целостный образ Прованса как своеобразной геофизической и самодостаточной культурно-исторической и языковой общности.