

TRANSCULTURALITY OF A LITERARY REPORTAGE AND THE TRANSLATOR'S IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

The paper deals with the specifics of the translation of the literary reportage, which is characterized by the syncretism of the factual and subjective, fictionalized processing of objective reality, and at the same time it represents the mediation of another culture, the language of the reporter, or the perspective of their own culture. The particularity of translation of this genre results, in particular, from the two-level nature of the translational complex of the fictionalized reportage text. Its first element is realized at the level of the author - the reporter (the mediator between the culture they write about and their own culture), the second at the level of the translator (the mediator between the two cultures, variously represented in the text). On the basis of the analysis of the Slovak translations of the works *The Emperor*, *Shah of Shahs* and *Imperium* written by Ryszard Kapuściński, the most prominent and best-known representative of the Polish school of reportage, we are looking for answers to the following questions:

1. What forms can transculturality acquire in translations of reportages?
2. Which of the cultures coming "into play" the translator chooses as determinative?
3. How is the translator identified in relation to these cultures?

KEYWORDS

Polish literary reportage, culture, translation

Literary reportage as a focal point of interest has become a phenomenon in Slovakia in the recent years, gaining increasing popularity among readers. The credit for this development can mostly be assigned to the Absynt Publishing House and its edition entitled *Prekliati reportéri/Cursed Reporters* (since 2017 also in a Czech version, *Prokletí reportéri*), which focuses specifically on this genre. Since 2015, the publishing house enriched the Slovak literary market with more than 50 translations of reportage by authors from Sweden, Belarus (5 books; all were written by Svetlana Alexievich, a Nobel Prize laureate in Literature), Austria, Norway, USA, Scotland, France, Russia, Great Britain and 2 works by Slovak reporters (Andrej Bán and Irena Brežná). Polish literary reportage holds a special

position in the selection of books included in Absynt's editorial plan. Mostly the younger generation is represented in more than 20 books, which can be considered natural, since the Polish School of Reportage (1) built the genre foundations and influenced its development not only in Poland, but worldwide.

However, the popularity of the genre among readers can also be traced elsewhere. In this case, publishing success overlaps with the attractiveness of the genre, which is, in our opinion, based on two factors: 1) topic selection (often taboo, culturally and spatially remote, heavy or difficult to conceive, yet at the same time, deeply affecting people's lives in different parts of the world); 2) artistic representation of reality, which allows the reader to move from acknowledging facts to getting an insight and experiencing the situation or circumstances through the eyes of a member of a different culture.

The study focuses specifically on the transcultural aspect of a specific literary reportage. The way this aspect reflects in the traditional chain of translation and communication (author – original – translator – translation – recipient) will be demonstrated using Ryszard Kapuściński's works and their translations. Although only a single author will be analysed, certain conclusions can be generalised since Ryszard Kapuściński (1932) is regarded as the father of the Polish School of Reportage; he largely influenced the genre's constitution in its current form.

Literary reportage

Literary reportage or true fiction is a specific, syncretic literary form, which brings together documentary elements, literary strategies and artistic means of expression (Benešová, Rusin Dybalska, Zakopalová et al. 2016, 11). It builds on a description of true stories and provides factual information (hence its close relation to journalism), but the author's factual insight reaches deeper. Based on the contact with the people – representatives of a different culture – and broad knowledge, the reporter tries to understand the context of the events, place, historical and social background as well as the cultural identity of their protagonists, which determines their actions. They paint a plastic image and trigger an emotional response in the reader to drag them deep inside an unknown cultural spacetime and reveal the aspects pertaining to the described events that usually remain hidden from an impartial observer's sight (at this point, the reportage turns into an artistic expression).

Author – reporter

Achieving the above defined objective often requires the author to undergo a detailed, often several years long preparation (e.g. R. Kapuściński's *Cesarz* (2) took 15 years to complete. See: Kapuściński 2008, 5). The text creation itself is merely the final stage of the process. Before proceeding to this stage, the reporter thoroughly studies materials about the country visited or to be visited including its history and culture. Subsequently, the reporter directly enters the respective environment, often repeatedly after certain pauses, to observe its development in a dynamic perspective. They confront and touch the environment by getting into contact with

particular people whose life situations they began to deeply feel. Importantly, they perceive these people through the filter of their own knowledge, life experience, and cultural identity.

R. Kapuściński discusses the way it influences the creation of another culture's image in an interview that can be found in *Parabola władzy* (2008), a book by Hans Magnus Enzensberger, where he presents the background of *Cesarz* (first published in 1978), a work suggestively describing the fall of the Ethiopian monarchy as well as autocracy mechanisms: "I had to look at it through the eyes of a person who experienced the

disproportion [between the need for modernisation in Ethiopia and the anachronous nature of autocracy] on their own skin. Surely, it is not an accident I, as a Polish person, got to tackle the topic." (2008, 8) Kapuściński emphasizes the importance of the reporter's own identity and deeply ingrained similar experience.

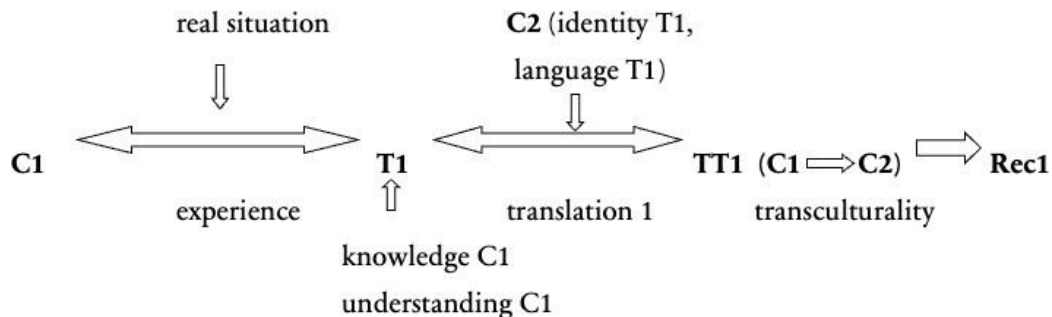
Transculturality in R. Kapuściński's reportage

The "Polishness" of Kapuściński in his work is present in three ways: – hidden – 1) in the model of thinking and on the axiological level; transparently – 2) selection of topics (3), but mainly, 3) in his linguistic expression, since the language is one of the basic components pertaining to the human identity; it forms it and simultaneously serves as the means of its expression. The reporter therefore mediates the foreign culture through the elements of their own culture, often linguoculturemes, filtered through the reporter's identity.

In the creative process, R. Kapuściński assumes the role of a translator. "Usually, I would define my profession like this: I am a translator. However, instead of translating languages, I translate cultures" (2006, 21). Magdalena Horodecka compares this "reportage translation" to anthropological research. Both activities focus on humanity, require direct contact with and participation in the culture, and both employ similar methods – comparison of cultures, dialogue, observation, and careful listening (2012, 283–301). In case of literary reportage, the author constantly faces the question of how to present the deeply experienced, complicated reality and alien culture seen from the inside in terms of the author's cultural identity. R. Kapuściński states: "[...] the standard language of journalism was absolutely unable to express what I was trying to convey. What I was facing, could be called translation work" (2008, 8). Elsewhere, he specifies how his "reportage translation" is born:

Along the road, the material is collected and the author must submerge into the literary language, the word – and translate their way of thinking, perception, and feeling. On the road, one speaks different languages and listens to them; however, when one focuses on collecting material, one tunes in to something different. Here, if you want to write a text in Polish, you have to submerge into [...] the beautiful Polish prose, which returns you into the world of our images and our vocabulary [...] (2006, 46).

Overlapping cultures (4) in the process of literary reportage creation and its outcome can be, in our point of view, showed using the following scheme:



Picture 1. Translation level 1 (5)

The description of events or storytelling anchored in the source culture (C1) is specified in terms of time and space, and factually determined. The reportage author – the culture translator (T1) – directly participates in the events; they are interacting (usually long-term or repeatedly) with C1 and its representatives. Immediate experience together with knowledge allows them to understand the events, their participants and cultural specifics. Based on their knowledge and understanding, the author selects elements by means of which they describe the events/C1 – they create a model and strive for the best style of artistic expression – they translate C1. At this moment, the reporter’s culture (C2) enters the process; their identity (6) is rooted in this culture; this is where they draw linguistic expression, intertextuality, culturemes, etc. from. The outcome of this process is the transcultural reportage text (TT1) whose recipient (Rec1) is a member of C2.

A literary reportage understood as a cultural translation could be ascribed the transculturality attribute, which according to Viera Gažová “presents a cultural relationship in terms of connection and overlapping, yet it is possible to avoid the risk of homogenisation or uniformisation” (Gažová 2011 [Huťková – Bohušová 2016, 15]) – this is extremely important for R. Kapuściński. In his works, the image of an alien culture is presented to the reader not only through the specific manner of text construction (e. g. mosaic in *Cisár*), universal means of artistic expression, barbarisms (e. g. fetasza, burnus, komandir), but also specific polonising elements: allusions, similes, intertextual binding – citing Polish classics (e.g. Sienkiewicz, Chmielowski), referring to historical events or personalities, or using marked figures of language. However, it should be noted that according to M. Horodecka, this approach can be identified mostly in Kapuściński’s early works (2012, 290). These elements gradually recede in his struggle to achieve the universality of expression. It could be stated that the author moves from transculturality towards the hybridity of expression and universalism of thought. This change can be traced to the following sources: 1) while living in multiple cultures throughout his life, the author’s identity has been changing. He views himself as uprooted and destined for

never- ending wandering; 2) he wants to leave a message to all Europeans, not only the Poles: “My main ambition is to show the Europeans that our mentality is significantly Europocentric, but Europe [...] is not the only place in the world. Europe is surrounded by a huge, ever- growing variety of cultures, societies, religions, and civilisations” (2006, 13).

The way the reporter incorporates their own culture/identity into the event description and source culture can be illustrated using the following examples extracted from three works – *Cesarz* (2003; Slovak translation: *Cisár* 2017), *Szachinszach* (epub 2011; Slovak translation: *Šachinšach* 2016c) and *Imperium* (epub 2018; Slovak translation: *Impérium* 2016b) (7).

1) In *Cesarz*, sometimes regarded as an analogy to the Communist Poland in literary science, Kapuściński shows the moral decline of the emperor’s court, its anachronism, the monstrous hierarchisation of the society and the humiliation and impoverishment of Ethiopians, using archaic Polish of 15th to 17th centuries (typically: frequent enumerations of nouns and adjectives, literary and archaic expressions as well as a rich repertoire of ways to address a person pertaining to the era of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth) and neologisms to name the courtier functions. He also provides the text with significant rhythmicity.

Examples:

a) noun chains, lexical archaism: *podarku*, archaic dual: *rękoma*

Nikt nie chce odejść z pustymi *rękoma*, odejść bez *podarku*, bez koperty, bez nadania, bez pobrania. (48)

Nikto nechcel odísť s prázdnyimi *rukami*, odísť bez *daru*, bez obálky, bez prídelu, bez uchmatnutia. (46)

In the Slovak translation, the noun chain has been preserved, however, archaisation and rhythmicity disappeared.

b) verb chains, rhyming, significant text rhythmicity

A roboty przy odkręcaniu zawsze huk! Więc odkręcają i odkręcają, potem się oblewają, nerwy sobie targają, tu biegają, tam łatają, a w tym zapędzeniu, zarobieniu, zawirowaniu fantazje powoli z gorących głów wyparowują. (53) A práce je pri takomto napravovaní vždy množstvo! A tak naprávajú a naprávajú, potia sa, napínajú si nervy, behajú raz sem, raz tam, a v tom zhone, v tej zaneprázdnenosti a zmätku sa fantázie z ich hláv pomaly vyparujú. (51)

The text rhythmicity achieved by rhyming and marked syntax has been preserved only partially in the Slovak translation.

c) a rich repertoire of the ways to address the emperor (often archaic) (8)

cesarz/cisár, pan/pán, dostojny pan/vznešený pán, czcigodny pan/vznešený pán, nieodżałowany pan/láskavý pán, dobrotliwy pan/láskavý pán, Król Królów/Král' král'ov, najosobliwszy pan/najdôstojnejší pán, przezacny pan/vzácnny pán etc.

In terms of expressive, archaic or rare ways of addressing, the Slovak and Polish languages are relatively close; the Slovak translator has a broad range of alternatives to choose from. However, the ways of addressing the emperor are less variable in the Slovak translation.

d) neologisms referring to functions in the bureaucratic system of the emperor's court

lokaj trzech drzwi/lokaj troch dverí, minister pióra/minister pera, poduszkowy/podkladač podušky, woreczkowy/mešcovník, strażnik kasy/strážca pokladnice atd'.

Translators into English (K. Mroczkowska-Brand and W. Brand) substitute the complicated, theatrical Polish pertaining to the Old Polish period – as a dominant element of textual creation – by an imaginary language based on literary texts pertaining to 16th – 19th centuries (Dudko 2007, 34 – 35). As the examples show, in the Slovak translation by Patrik Orišek, the current language, literary expressions and marked syntax have been used, but some dominant elements of the original language have disappeared.

2) In *Szachinszach* (first published in 1982), fragments comparing the attitude of Iranians and Poles towards the emperor's death can be found.

Example:

Mówię mu, nigdy nie zrozumiemy tych rzeczy, ponieważ dzieli nas głęboka różnica tradycji. Poczet naszych królów składał się w większości z ludzi, którzy nie łaknęli rwi i pozostawili po sobie dobrą pamięć. Jeden z królów polskich zastał kraj drewniany, a zostawił murowany, inny głosił zasadę tolerancji i nie pozwalał rozpalać stosów, jeszcze inny obronił nas przed zalewem barbarzyństwa. Mieliśmy króla, który nagradzał uczonych i takiego, który przyjaźnił się z poetami. (36 – 37) Hovorím mu, že tieto veci nikdy nepochopíme, pretože nás oddel'ujú hlboké rozdiely v tradíciách. Mnohí z našich král'ov boli väčšinou ľudia, ktorí netúžili po krvi, a národ na nich spomínal v dobrom. Jeden z poľských král'ov zdedil krajinu vybudovanú z dreva, a zanechal ju celú murovanú, ďalší hlásal zásadu tolerancie a nepripustil, aby sa upa'ovalo na hraniciach, iný nás ubránil pred príchodom barbarov. Mali sme kráľa, ktorý odmeňoval učencov, aj takého,

čo sa priatelil s básnikmi. (42)

Apart from the Slovak translation, the English one leaves out the passage in which a foreign cultural phenomenon is explained using an example from the Polish history to avoid misleading the reader (Horodecka 2012, 290–291).

3) In the polyphonically created message of the rise and the fall of the Soviet Empire in *Imperium* (first published in 1993), Kapuściński incorporates citations from Russian and other world classics (Turgenev, Exupéry), but also Henryk Sienkiewicz's *Quo vadis* (in the part of the book discussing the churches destroyed by the Communists).

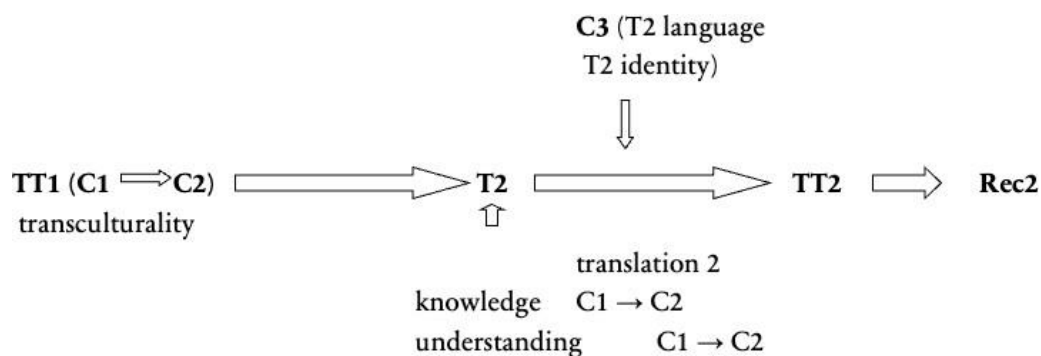
Example:

Ściemniało się tymczasem zupełnie, że zaś księżyc jeszcze nie wszedł, więc drogę trudno przyszloby im znaleźć, gdyby nie to, że jak przewidział Chilo, wskazywali ją sami chrześcijanie. Jakoż na prawo, na lewo i na przodzie widać było ciemne postaci, zdążające ostrożnie ku piaszczystym wądołom. Niektórzy z owych ludzi nieśli latarki, okrywając je jednak ile możliwości płaszczami, inni, znający lepiej drogę, szli po ciemku. (39)

Medzitým sa úplne zotmelo, a keďže mesiac ešte nevyšiel, ťažko by im bolo nájsť cestu, keby nie to, že, ako predvídal Chilo, im ju ukazovali sami kresťania. Vpravo, vľavo i vpredu bolo totiž vidieť tmavé postavy, opatrne smerujúce k piesočným úžľabinám. Niektorí z tých ľudí niesli lampáše, ale zakrývali ich podľa možnosti plášťami, iní, ktorí poznali cestu lepšie, išli potme. (128)

Translation of a literary reportage

Of course, the genre specificities and transculturality of the literary reportage are influenced also by the translation process. Excessive domestication of the source culture (C1) in the literary reportage, which can be seen in Kapuściński's early works, may complicate the reception of the translation in different cultures. Two new participants enter the chain of communication outlined above: the reportage translator and the reader of the translation, both equipped with their own cultural backgrounds and identities (C3), and means of expression. The translator's task is to mediate the image of the events in the source culture (C1) to the recipient of the translation (Rec2) through the eyes of the reporter, a member of another culture (C2), whilst both cultures are perceived as alien by the recipient. Apart from a translator of "pure" artistic expression (fiction), anchored in a single cultural space, here, the translator enters two cultural spaces; they should be familiar with both of them, albeit to different extents, and understand them. They have to comprehend the mechanisms and transculturality functions in the original text and be able to consider to what extent C2 and C3 should be exposed in order to make the target text (TT2) comprehensible.



Picture 2. Translation level 2 (9)

The translator has three options:

1) to preserve the original form of transculturality without exposing their own culture or manifesting their identity. In this case, it results in a translation focusing on the original (C1 → C2). Here, the translator risks that the reader will not be able to decipher the meanings encompassed in the transcultural elements of the original. The original culture and events will not be understood.

2) To preserve the original form of transculturality, partially exposing their own culture or manifesting their identity. Such translation could be defined as extensive [(C1 → C2) + C3].

An example of this approach can be observed in the translation of *Imperium* into

Slovak. The translator, Jozef Marušiak, does not resign from the original form of transculturality since he is aware of the Slovak recipient's ability to decipher it, however, he adds notes directly into the text using a language similar to the author's one to update the work on the factual level – the translation has been published 23 years after the original book.

Examples:

1) Z tohto miesta ho v roku 1987 odstavil Gorbačov. (Ukázalo sa však, že to nebol koniec jeho kariéry. Po komplikovaných peripetiách politického vývinu v Azerbajdžane sa Alijev stal opäť prvým mužom v krajine, tentoraz ako prezident samostatnej republiky. – Translator's note) (2016, 138).

2) Iniciátorom celej akcie bol prvý tajomník ÚV azerbajdžanskej komunistckej strany Ajaz Mutalibov. (Mutalibov bol v čase písania tohto textu prezidentom Azerbajdžanu. Už ním dávno nie je, ale pozícia Baku sa fakticky nezmenila, aj keď problém Karabachu zostáva už dlhší čas akoby zmrazený – východisko však nevidí nikto. – Translator's note) (2016, 241).

These extracts are an example that the facts constituting the documentary level of the reportage can become outdated. In this context, it is important to realize that

a literary reportage, apart from the journalist one, carries a message independent from space and time. The factual level is merely a foundation for drawing universal conclusions, therefore, the literary reportage authors specifically select events that can be potentially generalised

(10). The question is whether updating the documentary level during translation is of any use.

In the context of the whole work, it can be stated that Jozef Marušiak's notes are not self-serving. They carefully enrich the work at the level of meaning in which the author strives to identify the exact thing that resisted changes for such a long time and influenced the people's mentality in the history of the Soviet Union, and later independent countries that had belonged to it.

In yet another case, the translator's note responds to a passage on demolishing the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, one of the Russian and Moscovian symbols, as ordered by

J. V. Stalin; here, Kapuściński shows the indifference of people towards barbarism committed against their own culture – even participating in it by stealing from the ruins:

Example:

(Translator's note: Podľa správ z Moskvy sa chrám Krista Spasiteľa obnovuje na pôvodnom mieste a mal by byť dokončený v dohl'adnom čase. Aj keď asi nebude vybavený takým bohatstvom a nádherou ako jeho predchodca – čo by vzhľadom na súčasný stav Ruska bolo vari aj dosť netaktné –, predsa len bude dôkazom, že námaha Hérostratov v dejinách je vždy márna: vracajú sa zničené chrámy, ožívajú štáty vymazané z máp, dvíhajú hlavy utláčané či vyst'ahované národy. Možno je to dôvod na istý dejinný optimizmus.) (2016, 109). The translator not only updates the facts, but also explicitly expresses his attitude towards the described events.

It should be added that Jozef Marušiak was a great expert on Russia and its culture. He translated both Polish and Russian literature. That may be the reason why he decided to enter into the text himself while translating *Impérium*. In his translation of another Kapuściński work entitled *Heban* (Slovak translation *Eben*, 2016), which focuses on Africa, no such notes can be found.

3) To transform the original form of transculturality – attenuate C2 and expose C3 with(out) manifesting their own identity. In such case, the translation would be recognised as domesticated (11).

(C1 → C3^{C2}). Examples of this approach can be found in the English and German translations of R. Kapuściński's *Cesarz*, and the English translation of *Szachinszach*. Kapuściński considered this approach the most appropriate: "I am really grateful to my German translator, Martin Pollack – for he chose the harder way and found an equivalent for the specific language. Had he been satisfied with a translation into the current language, it would be lost for the German reader." (2008, 9)

The author himself intervened in the translation of *Szachinszach*, asking the

translator

to leave out the passages with Polonising similes in order to achieve greater universality of the message and its readability in any culture: “The goal of my corrections is to make *Szachinszach* a more artistic and timeless book by removing the journalistic and outdated fragments” (Kapuściński’s letter to K. Mroczkowska-Brand [Horodecka 2012, 291]).

Summary

Literary reportage, as a syncretic literary form bordering on both journalism and literariness, enjoys popularity all around the world. It offers a specific, emotional combination of facts and deep understanding of a culture presented through the eyes of another culture. The universal message, attractive topics (often perceived as exotic by Europeans), and emotional form predestines the genre for translation. As it was demonstrated on R. Kapuściński’s works, this transfer can have a specific, two-fold nature. The translation process can result in a transcultural text containing not only the elements of the source culture represented by the reality described – it can also use elements drawn from the reporter’s and, in turn, translator’s cultural context, thus reflecting both their identities. The clash of three cultures represents a challenge for any translator as it challenges their knowledge, creativity, and professional mastery.

Endnotes

(1) Polish literary reportage has been addressed in detail not only in Poland, but also in the Czech Republic. Mainly the monograph entitled *Fenomén: Polská literární reportáž* (Benešová, Rusin Dybalska, Zakopalová et al., 2016) deserves attention. It emerged from a convention where Czech and Polish literary theorists, reporters, and publishers met. In this book, M. Piechota assigns the Polish School of Reportage with: “[...] a cultural nature, because it also points out the historical and social conditions in which the School was formed [...]. This name also refers to the evaluative nature of the concept, prompting the recipient to expect quality: interesting topic, way of its presentation, image of the world, ability to freely utilize the genre conventions, style, but also humanisation of the message. [...] In a few generations, the representatives of the Polish reportage managed to create a self-sufficient communication habitat, a shared communication space, in which the genre started serving cultural identification and communication competences pertaining to the members of a culturally determined society.” (109–111)

(2) *Cesarz* (1978) was translated by Patrik Orišek and published in 2017.

(3) R. Kapuściński is particularly interested in the countries governed by tyrants destroying their own nations, e. g. Haile Selassie in Etiopia, Reza Pahlavi in Iran, J. V. Stalin in the Soviet Union. Neal Ascherson points out the specificity of Kapuściński’s topic selection in his book entitled *Cesarz. Postscriptum* (2008, 34–35).

(4) The term identity is hereby understood as the author’s personal (individual)

identity,

i. e. as a multidimensional, diversified and dynamic mental construct. It is not invariable as it changes throughout one's life under the influence of different biological, social, and cultural factors. This approach draws from M. Nemčková and K. Žiaková's definition of identity as "specific, compact, non-interchangeable uniqueness distinguishing human individuals from each other [...] the sense of uniqueness can only be created through confrontation in the context of biological and social differentiation, in the unity of biological preconditions and social conditions. [...] Personal identity and its conscious reflection come into existence in the expanding process of socialisation. Increasingly more differentiated gender, ethnic, intra- and intercultural factors are affecting the person through norms, values, and patterns of behaviour.

(5) The creation of the original text can be understood as the translation level 1 – translation between two cultures. This scheme is based on Popovič's model of literary communication adapted to translation (Popovič 1971, 27–40). The author of this paper expanded Popovič's basic communication scheme by adding the elements relevant for literary reportages and their translation.

(6) The term culture is hereby used in the anthropological sense, i. e. as „a system of shared meanings that are passed from generation to generation through symbols that allow human beings to communicate, maintain, and develop an approach and understanding of life” (Sorrells 2013, 4). First, the original text is cited, subsequently the Slovak translation follows. Page numbers listed after the citations apply to the aforementioned book editions and translations.

(7) The selected examples of the addressing ways and their Slovak equivalents occur in the texts repeatedly, therefore precise bibliographical references have not been listed.

(8) Translation level 2 represents the translation of the original text – interlingual translation.

(9) This attribute of literary reportage has been pointed out by E. Żyrek-Horodyska. In her overview study focused on the theory of literary reportage, she has claimed: “As it seems, literary reportage aspires to convey certain universal truths and address the events usually represented from the viewpoint of individual experience from a broader perspective (Żyrek-Horodyska 2017, 129).

(10) Domestication is hereby understood in accordance with D. Ďurišin's concept introduced in *Čo je svetová literatúra* (1992), i.e. as a manifestation of the environment into which the translation, as a foreign work, enters.

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Accessible summary

The paper deals with literary reportage, which has been gaining popularity in Slovakia recently. This syncretic genre is defined by combining factual accounts with subjective fictionalisation of the objective reality. It mediates selected cultural phenomena through

the reporter's language, i.e. the viewpoint of their own culture. This paper deals with Ryszard Kapuściński, the father of the Polish School of Reportage. Selected extracts from his works are analysed to demonstrate the specific features of the translation of this genre resulting from the transcultural nature of a fictionalised reportage text. The paper aims to answer the following questions:

What form can transculturality take in the translated reportages?

Which culture in play does the translator select as the determinative one? How does the translator identify themselves in relation to these cultures?