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TRANSLATION POSSIBILITIES OF OCCASIONAL
CONTEXTUAL MODIFICATIONS OF
PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS

Abstract: The article is devoted to the problem of translation of modified phraseological units including proverbs. A short review of works of European scientists concerning the difficulties that translators face is presented. Some interesting examples of modified idioms and proverbs taken from the novels “The Moonstone” and “The Woman in White” by W. Collins serve as good illustrations of the challenge that translators have to accept. The training algorithm is put forward that beginners should follow in order to avoid typical mistakes while translating modified idioms and proverbs.

Keywords: phraseological units, proverbs, occasional modifications or transformations, context, translation, training algorithm.

The problem of interlanguage counterparts of phraseological units (PUs) is analyzed in the majority of comparative works. At the same time when used in context some phraseological units are subjected to different types of reorganizations, or, using the terminology of some researchers, transformations or modifications, which in its turn may cause some difficulties in their translation.

In W. Mieder’s “International Bibliography of Paremiology and Phraseology”, published in 2009 and containing a short description of more than 10 000 works of researchers from Europe, North and South America, Asia, Africa and Australia including New Zealand, we find an extremely limited number of works devoted to this problem (Mieder 2009), among them the articles of P. Mrazović, S. Mohr-Elfadl, I. Tanović and E. Rechtsiegel (Mrazović 1998; Mohr-Elfadl 2004; Tanović 2007; Rechtsiegel 1990).

In the article “Phraseologismen als Übersetzungsproblem in literarischen Texten” P. Mrazović speaks about three groups of German writers, with the division being based on the peculiarities of using phraseological units in their literary works. The first

group of writers (H. Böll, F. Kafka) avoids using such units as they consider them to be ready-made clichés and, consequently, unsuitable for the author's individual style. The second group of writers (B. Brecht, H. Kant) successfully uses stable expressions in the description of their characters. And only the third group of writers (T. Mann, G. Grass) modify them in the creative way, thus producing nearly unsolvable problems for translators.

The author of the article, while examining several examples of the authors' modifications of phraseological units in the works of T. Mann, B. Brecht and G. Grass, namely, phraseological pun, contamination and phraseological reiteration, comes to the conclusion that there are substantial losses in rendering them from one language into another. In fact, as P. Mrazović points out, modified PUs remain the stumbling block for interpreters and translators ninety-nine times out of a hundred.

The article of S. Mohr-Elfadl is devoted to the analysis of irony created by modified phrasemes in literary texts (Mohr-Elfadl 2004). The author also comes to the conclusion that there is a great difficulty in rendering all components of phraseological meaning (denotational and connotational) of French stable expressions into English. Sabine Mohr-Elfadl is quite sure that some types of authors' modifications of phrasemes create very complicated difficulties in translation.

Even the title of the article of I. Tanović "Hard Difficulties in Translation of Phraseological Units (based on the translation of Ivo Andrić's works into Russian)" is again a good witness of the importance of this problem (Tanović 2007). While analyzing some cases of semantic and stylistic equivalence of phraseological unit translation into Russian, I. Tanović points out the occasional author's usage of a number of PUs. "Andrić in his works uses different types of modified phraseological expressions, based on semantic and structural transformations of PUs: separability, figurativeness, different levels of transformations' transference of meaning of the components of phraseological units" (Tanović 2007:554-555)*.

The stylistic effect of transformations is based on the change of the lexical structure of PUs by means of contamination, enlargement or reduction of PU components and their paraphrasing. The conclusion is made that incorrect translation (dephraseologi-

sation of phraseological units) is the direct result of incorrect phraseme identification in the original language. To prove this conclusion I. Tanović resorts to S. Vlahov and S. Florin's words that the cause of PU unsuccessful translation can often be their "non-recognition by sight" (Tanović 2007:555). Unfortunately there are no examples of translation of modified phraseological units into Russian.

In the article "Individuelle Modifikationen fester phraseologischer Verbindungen in der Translation" E. Rechtsiegel presents five types of occasional variants (occasional modifications) of phraseological units: morphological and syntactic change of separate components, substitution of some component, quantitative changes of componential structure (enlargement, reduction), contamination, combination of different modifications (Rechtsiegel 1990). The author gives some examples of nominative group addition, change of PU Plural number into Singular, substitution of components, contamination, and the ways of translation of these PU modifications from Polish into German. At the end of the article E. Rechtsiegel speaks about the decoding possibility of these transformations in translation if we take into account five translation possibilities: purposeful language imitation of the initial language transformation, purposeful individual language transformation of the PU equivalent which serves as the basis of modification, descriptive translation with the help of separate lexical elements of the original text, translation without due regard for author's transformation, word for word translation.

The researchers from the so-called Kazan linguistic school (Russia), the founder of which was a well-known Professor of Kazan university Boduen de Courtene, are also engaged in the investigation of this problem.

The third chapter of R. Ayupova's dissertation is devoted to the translation of transformed phraseological units in W. Shakespeare's works into Tatar (Аюпова 2001). The author found out that only 14 units under analysis were subjected to different types of the author's transformations: insertion, addition, deletion, substitution or replacement of PU component/components, phraseological pun and some intermediate complicated cases.

Nearly all transformed Shakespearean phraseological units were recognized by Tatar translators, only 2 units out of 14 were not rendered into Tatar. Four out of fourteen PUs were translated

with the help of Tatar phraseological counterparts, seven – with the help of descriptive translation, and one – with the help of translation-loan. R. Ayupova considers that the wide popularity of the descriptive way of translation is dictated by the fact that contextual PU transformation enlarges its complicated phraseological meaning and makes it unable to use the lexical way of translation.

It is stated that both translators, G. Shamukov and N. Isanbet, not only preserved all types of phraseological unit transformations in translation but were also able to transfer the function of these transformations in each case.

In the majority of cases the influence of Russian as the mediator language was felt rather vividly. On the whole, such influence is characterized as a positive one as it helped Tatar translators to discern all the subtleties of Shakespeare's PU transformations and to choose the best way of their rendering into Tatar. At the same time such influence may become negative in case when Tatar translators were blindly copying Russian descriptive translation and neglecting existing Tatar phraseological equivalents.

The fact that the creative essence of poetry as regards phraseological units is best revealed when poets use such transformations as extended metaphor, ellipsis, substitution and reduction of a component/components, allusion, contamination, PU distribution violation, complicated transformation, etc. is stressed in the dissertation of Yu. Medvedev (Медведев 2007).

It was found out that in the majority of cases translators resorted to contextual means of rendering transformed phraseological units from English into Russian. Two main principally different types of contextual translation were singled out: in the first case the sense which the PU acquired in the original text was rendered without distortion, in the second case the construction in the translated text developed some additional, contextually stipulated senses as a result of compression of the original text units in the process of translation. In such a case the main aim of the translator wasn't the exact reproduction of the author's transformation but the aspiration for rendering the idea expressed in the original text with the help of such transformation.

The analysis of several works of researchers indicates the great significance of this problem in the theoretical aspect and the necessity of finding the most adequate ways of translation of PU

occasional modifications (using another term, transformations) for practical purposes. Unfortunately, we haven't found separate works devoted to the problem of translation of modified proverbs. On the other hand, we are inclined to think that the same way of translation typical of modified phraseological units may be applied in case of modified proverbs.

In this article we demonstrate the difficulty of translating contextually transformed phraseological units by comparing phraseological units (including proverbs) taken from Wilkie Collins's novels *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone* and their functional equivalents in the Russian translation.

We studied the whole novels in the original and put down every phraseological unit which was contextually transformed by the author.

The choice of the novels was not random. Both novels have a unique structure. In the preface to the first edition of *The Woman in White*, Wilkie Collins focuses on his decision to play with multiple narrative: "An experiment is attempted in this novel, which has not (so far as I know) been hitherto tried in fiction. The story of the book is told throughout by the characters of the book. They are all placed in different positions along the chain of events; and they all take the chain up in turn, and carry it on to the end" (Collins 2006:618). This type of narrative is called polyphonic (the concept was introduced by M. Bakhtin).

The Woman in White is narrated by eleven people, while *The Moonstone* by nine. The narrators have different social, cultural, educational and religious background. We listen to doctors, solicitors, sergeants, housemaids, cooks, etc. This polyphonic narrative caused the diversity of phraseological units used in the novels.

Stylistically they range from neutral literary expressions (e.g. *at first hand*) to jargon ones (e.g. *it is all over with smb.*). Bookish expressions (e.g. *bring smb back to the fold*) and obsolete phraseological units (e.g. *say smb nay*) are also present. The divergence in terminological characterization is clearly seen: the author skillfully uses legal (e.g. *travel out of the record*) and parliamentary terminology (e.g. *private bill*). Even the territorial origin of the phraseological units is different, for example, among dominating English expressions there is an Irish saying *you might as well be whistling jigs to a milestone*.

Some narrators seldom use phraseological units, some do it very often.

One of the narrators of *The Moonstone* is Gabriel Betteredge, a faithful steward, or “not an interesting object” and “a sleepy old man” as he introduces himself, loves enriching his speech with proverbs:

- It’s an ill bird that fouls its own nest.
- When things are at the worst, they’re sure to mend.
- Many men, many opinions.

Also, Gabriel Betteredge enthusiastically quotes Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe, for instance:

- Today we love what tomorrow we hate.
- Fear of danger is ten thousand times more terrifying than danger itself.

And, he readily shares with the reader his own words of wisdom, for example:

- A drop of tea is to a woman’s tongue what a drop of oil is to a wasting lamp.
- Whatever happens in a house, robbery or murder, it doesn’t matter, you must have your breakfast.
- Every human institution (Justice included) will stretch a little, if you only pull it the right way.

Unfortunately, a number of Betteredge’s proverbs were not translated at all since the translator of the novel omitted some parts of the text for unknown reasons.

Some narrators eagerly play with the form and meaning of PUs.

We found 235 contextually transformed phraseological units in the novels.

Then we turned our attention to the Russian translation and picked out functional equivalents of the selected phraseological units. To our surprise approximately 60 % of functional equivalents turned out to be of non-phraseological origin, i.e. phraseological units were translated with the help of words or phrases. More-

over, in almost 30% of cases contextual transformations were omitted (neglected or simply overlooked).

Among the most difficult (from a translator's point of view) patterns of instantial stylistic use of phraseological units in discourse we find phraseological pun, extended metaphor, ellipsis, and phraseological saturation.

However, we singled out one more uncommon pattern that should be mentioned.

Professor Pesca, the hero of *The Woman in White*, is one of those caricatures of foreigners in fiction, who often misuse idioms or overuse them. From the novel we learn that he left Italy "for political reasons". He is obsessed with the idea to show gratitude to Great Britain for affording him "an asylum". Therefore he starts to turn himself into an Englishman, e. g. having picked up some colloquial English expressions, "he scattered them about over his conversation whenever they happened to occur to him, turning them, in his high relish for their sound and his general ignorance of their sense, into compound words and repetitions of his own, and always running them into each other, as if they consisted of one long syllable" (Collins 2006:56).

For example:

- Now mind! I teach the sublime Dante to the young Misses, and ah!—**my-soul-bless-my-soul!**—it is not in human language to say how the sublime Dante puzzles the pretty heads of all three! (*Part I, The Story Begun by Walter Hartright, Ch.3*)
- **My-soul-bless-my-soul!** when I heard the golden Papa say those words, if I had been big enough to reach up to him, I should have put my arms round his neck, and pressed him to my bosom in a long and grateful hug! (*Part I, The Story Begun by Walter Hartright, Ch.3*)
- Can your friend produce testimonials—letters that speak to his character?' I wave my hand negligently. 'Letters?' I say. 'Ha! **my-soul-bless-my-soul!** I should think so, indeed!' (*Part I, The Story Begun by Walter Hartright, Ch.3*)
- Is four golden guineas a week nothing? **My-soul-bless-my-soul!** only give it to me—and my boots shall creak like the golden Papa's, with a sense of the overpowering

richness of the man who walks in them! (*Part I, The Story Begun by Walter Hartright, Ch.3*)

- “**My-soul-bless-my-soul!**” cried the Professor, in a state of the extremest bewilderment. (*Part III, The Story Begun by Walter Hartright, Ch.5*)

and:

- Ha! my good dears, I am closer than you think for to the business, now. Have you been patient so far? or have you said to yourselves, ‘**Deuce-what-the-deuce!** Pesca is long-winded to-night?’ (*Part I, The Story Begun by Walter Hartright, Ch.3*)
- <...> Walter, my dear good friend—**deuce-what-the-deuce!**—for the first time in my life I have not eyes enough in my head to look, and wonder at you! (*Part I, The Story Begun by Walter Hartright, Ch.3*)
- ‘**Deuce-what-the-deuce!** how can I help you, Walter, when I don’t know the man?’ (*Part III, Walter Hartright’s Narrative Continued, Ch.5*)

We deal with phraseological reiteration, i.e. the repetition of the whole phraseological unit. However, this technique doesn’t come isolated. It is intertwined with a set of techniques. The base forms of the phraseological units are **bless my soul** and **what the deuce**. In the instantial form we observe (a) reduplication of one (two) component(s) of the phraseological unit, (b) hyphenation of the components.

This kind of instantial stylistic use of phraseological units has not been reflected in any works on idioms in discourse yet. Though, it can be foreseen because the transformation of the phraseological units **bless my soul** and **what the deuce** goes against existing English rules of word building.

A similar type of instantial stylistic use was mentioned by Chitra Fernando in the book *Idioms and Idiomaticity*. The author introduces the term ‘permutation’ and sees it as a change of a phraseological unit into a compound word, e.g. break the ice > ice-breaker, open smb’s eyes > eye-opener (after the analogy of turning a free word combination with the structure Verb + Object into

a compound word, e.g. write a letter > letter-writer) (Fernando 1996).

The uniqueness of this transformation causes the uniqueness of Pesca's speech. It is obvious that the overuse of incorrect PUs produces humorous effect. It is doubtless that the translation of them is a challenge to a translator's skills.

According to Anita Naciscione there are three major elements, which serve as preconditions to producing a novel instantial form of a phraseological unit. These are: (1) knowledge of phraseology and stylistic patterns, (2) stylistic discursal skills, (3) a certain element of imagination and creativity (Naciscione 2001).

Then, a translator (like author) is supposed to fit these preconditions as well but in a target language.

Unfortunately, the Russian translator didn't manage to render Pesca's beloved expressions properly.

Russian translation of the expression **My-soul-bless-my-soul!** (which appears five times in one and the same form) is always different. Moreover, the translator uses base forms of synonymic PUs:

- Я преподаю дочкам язык божественного Данте. И, **помилуй меня господь**, нет слов, чтобы передать, как труден божественный Данте для этих трёх хорошеньких головок!
- **Клянусь честью!** Когда я услышал эти слова, я был готов броситься к нему на шею, если бы мог до неё достать, чтобы прижать его к сердцу!
- «Может ли ваш друг представить рекомендации?» Я небрежно помахал рукой. «Рекомендации?! – говорю я. – **Господи боже**, ну конечно.
- Разве четыре гиней в неделю не деньги? **Господи боже ты мой!** Дайте их мне, и мои сапоги будут скрипеть так же, как у Золотого папы, который подавляет всех своим богатством.
- **О святой боже!** – вскричал профессор, крайне озадаченный. – В чем дело?

The expression **Deuce-what-the deuce!** (which was used three times) is translated with the help of different PUs in their base forms as well:

- А вы, наверно, уже сказали про себя: «**Громы небесные!** Песка никогда не кончит!»
- Ну, Уолтер, дружище, **черт побери**, впервые в жизни мои глаза так и лезут на лоб от удивления!
- **Черт возьми!** Чем я могу помочь, Уолтер, когда я даже не знаю этого человека?

As a result, the author's intention to make Pesca's speech sound unusual was not perceived by the translators.

Another peculiarity of Pesca's speech is that he usually introduces his English expressions by exclamations like "English phrase", "English phrase again—ha!", or "English proverb", for instance:

- "Go, my friend! **When your sun shines in Cumberland (English proverb), in the name of heaven make your hay**". (*Part I, The Story Begun by Walter Hartright, Ch.3*)

In this very example (1) two parts of the original proverb, i.e. "make hay" and "while the sun shines", appear in the inverted order, (2) three extra components are inserted into the proverb structure: 'in Cumberland', 'English proverb', and 'in the name of heaven' (the latter is a PU itself).

The translation of the extract contains new components 'in Cumberland' (в Кумберленде) and 'in the name of heaven' (**ради создателя**); however, the exclamation 'English proverb' and the inverted order of the proverb were neglected:

- Поезжайте, дружище, **ради создателя!** Куйте железо, пока в Кумберленде горячо!

The indifference towards the exclusivity of Pesca's speech made a well-depicted image of the Italian professor rather flat.

Having analyzed the mistakes made by the translators we classify them into three types:

mistakes on the semantic level, i.e. failure to identify the PU (as well as proverb) and its meaning, which can lead to: (a) translation of the PU as if it were a free word combination and vice versa, (b) omission of the PU, (c) distortion of the PU's meaning, etc. (see Влахов 1980: 179-181; Nacisone 2001: 189-199).

mistakes on the stylistic level, i.e. failure to identify instantial use that leads to the reduction of the stylistic potential of the PU.

mistakes on the pragmatic level, i.e. failure to understand that small changes in the surface structure of the PU can modify the message of the context and sometimes of the text itself.

In conclusion, we put forward the algorithm that beginners should follow in order to avoid typical mistakes.

First, scan the text thoroughly in order to identify PUs (including proverbs). Use a dictionary or several dictionaries. Check whether you deal with a PU or a free word combination (sentence).

Second, compare the form of the PU used in the context and the base form fixed in the dictionary.

Third, if the PU appears in the form that is different from the base form try to figure out why the author uses this very instantial form of the PU. The change in structure should not be neglected. Identify its role.

Fourth, if you do not see any changes in the structure, the author can play with the meaning of the PU (proverb). Be aware of phraseological pun.

Fifth, and the last, translate the PU (proverb) and, please, be creative.

Notes

* The citation was translated by the authors of the article themselves.

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