

Challenges in Translating Phraseological Units

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Abstract—The article investigates the challenges in translating phraseological units. It states that phraseology has been in the centre of attention of linguists since the beginning of the 20th century. The works regarding phraseology by foreign and Azerbaijani linguists such as V.V.Vinogradov's, A.Hajiyeva's, N.Ch.Valiyeva's and others have been studied by the author and the methods of translating phraseological units suggested by them have been thoroughly considered. The author mentions proverbs, sayings and idioms as branches of phraseological units. They are considered to be the product of a nation's intelligence. The author also writes about the importance of the context while translating phraseological units. She claims that depending on the context the translation of the same phraseological units may differ. The author also explains the differences between proverbs and idioms using various linguistic sources. She comes to the conclusion that the above-mentioned methods are very important while translating phraseological units. The importance of phraseological units, namely proverbs and idioms in the communication process has been stated in the article as well.

Index Terms—phraseology, unit, proverb, sayings, context, method, translation, dictionary

I. INTRODUCTION

Phraseology is the study of proverbs, sayings and set-expressions. It has been in the limelight of linguistics as of the 20th century. The Russian linguist Vinogradov published his first article on "Basic Notions of Russian Phraseology"; following this was the article titled "Main Types of Russian Phraseological Units" which was published in 1947. Further to these two articles there emerged a growing interest for this discipline of linguistics in the Soviet Union. The above-mentioned articles by Vinogradov drew linguists' attention by the complexity and significance of the posed issues. Vinogradov's work opened new horizons for studying phraseology of various languages intensively (Vinogradov 1977, p. 6). Moreover, a number of bilingual phraseological dictionaries were compiled under the scholar's direct guidance.

II. METHODOLOGY

Every language has peculiar phraseological dictionaries of its own. Nevertheless, it is not possible to freely state that all of them meet the core requirements. Bilingual phraseological dictionaries either don't maintain required standards or don't exist at all. This issue has been solved in the Azerbaijani language. There are some linguists having compiled phraseological dictionaries in Azerbaijani. The names of A.Hajiyeva, N.Ch.Valiyeva could be mentioned in this regard. Particularly, the Azerbaijani - English - Russian dictionary by N.Valiyeva should be emphasized. The following methods of translation have been utilized in the dictionary:

1. Equivalent method. The meaning and figurativeness of the phraseological units used while translation must coincide. For instance:

Be as busy as a bee - arı kimi məşğul olmaq, arı kimi çalışqan olmaq;

Be as strong as a horse - at kimi mähkəm olmaq, at kimi güclü olmaq;

2. Analogue method. Despite retaining the meaning and context of the translated phraseological units in the original and target languages, the figurativeness is modified by applying this method. For example:

a drop in the bucket - dəryada bir damla

birds of fine feather flock together - Su axar, quxurunu tapar.

Queen Ann is dead - Sənin gətirdiyin xəbər kəhnəlib.

3. Descriptive method. It is extremely challenging to find any equivalent or analogue for some phraseological units. In this case it is important to find out the description of the translated phraseological unit. For example:

To cross the floor of the house - bir siyasi partiyadan digərinə keçmək

To accept the Chiltern Hundreds - Parlament üzvü səlahiyyətini üzərindən götürmək

To fiddle while Rome burns - ölkənin ağır günündə lazım olmayan işlərlə məşğul olmaq

4. Antonym method. This method encompasses presenting a negative unit in the original language as positive and vice versa:

Don't count your chickens before they are hatched - Cücəni payızda sayarlar.

Let sleeping dogs lie - Yatan iti oyatmazlar.

5. Calque method. It is important to retain the figurativeness of phraseological unit using this method.

The owner of the honey is the bee - Balın sahibi arıdır.

An egg today is better than a hen tomorrow - Bugünkü yumurta sabahkı toyuqdan yaxşıdır;

A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush - Soğan olsun, nəğd olsun.

Wisdom is not sold for money - Ağıl para ilə satılmaz.

6. Combination method. This method is usually applied when either an analogue in the target language cannot fully convey the meaning of the one in the target language or an image of a different time and space is created. In this case calque translation, then descriptive translation is utilized, for comparison - the analogue in the target language is presented (Valiyeva 2010, p. 21). For instance:

To carry coal to Newcastle - Nyukasla k ömür aparmaq. It implies carrying coal to the place where there is plenty of it. There exists a similar expression in Azerbaijani: *Naxçıvana duz aparmaq.*

III. ANALYSIS

Any of the above-mentioned methods can be employed save upon the literal translation since the literal translation either perverts the meaning of the phraseological unit or does not correspond the normative aspects of the original language.

It is relevant to give the translation of the expression *G öxim səndən su i qnir* based upon the context. It is important to note that the role of the context is also particularly significant alongside with the above mentioned methods. There might be some cases in which the translation of one and the same phraseological unit differs according to the context. For instance, *Rome was not built in a day - Roma bir gündə tikilməyib.* This phraseological unit is not only used to encourage someone experiencing difficulties in challenging work, but also can be used to convey that the construction work cannot be finalized soon.

Sometimes it is extremely challenging to find an equivalent for a word existing in the original language. The words that do not have any correspondence are termed as non-equivalent lexis. Besides this, there are some polysemantic words that have a number of referents or meanings. As a rule, while translating, polysemy is eliminated by referring to the context or situation. Newmark differentiates among syntactic, phrasal, situational, cultural and personal idiolectal types of the context (Newmark 1988, p. 215). In all of these contexts the word is considered to be a main source and in order to understand the meaning of the word used in the context it is essential to understand the meaning of the context itself.

In traditional translation theory narrow (microcontext) and broad (macrocontext) contexts are differentiated. Narrow context denotes the narrow linguistic surrounding of a word, i.e. a phrase or a sentence. The meaning of a phrase or a sentence is defined and treated as a basic reference for translation. The following proverbs clearly illustrate it:

Don't cast pearls before swine - Eşşək nə bilir zəfəran-plov nədir.

To cut pearls before swine.

Don't put the cart before the horse - İşi tərşinə, baş-ayaq g örmə.

To put the cart before the horse.

Unlike narrow (microcontext) meaning, a word used in broad (macrocontext) context goes beyond the meaning of a sentence and accordingly possesses textual meaning. The meaning of a word used in such a context is clarified within the text or discourse. It is impossible to identify the limits of broad context; in this end, a whole paragraph, several sentences or an entire text must be text. It should be emphasized that in a few cases lexico-semantic context does not allow to select an equivalent word in the process of translation.

IV. DISCUSSIONS

It is noteworthy to mention that a large portion of phraseological units consist of proverbs, sayings and idioms. Proverbs, sayings and idioms are the product of a nation's intelligence. Proverbs and sayings cover immensely vast subjects such as life, welfare and economy. As a rule, they emerge due to experience obtained throughout life. All of them reflect lifestyle and standards of a nation.

One should be particularly careful while translating proverbs and sayings. Nearly all proverbs are related with life events and as the time passes their meaning becomes more abstract since the connection with original meaning is gradually lost. A special attention should be paid not only to the structure difference, but also the meaning difference should also be considered as proverbs incorporate double meaning. Let's study the instances below:

As you sow you will mow - Nə əkərsən, onu da bi çərsən.

Truth is always bitter - Həqiqət həmişə acı olur.

Set a beggar on horseback and he will ride to the devil. - Donuzu masanın araxasına oturt, o ayaqlarını masanın üstünə qoyar.

The main points in the translation of proverbs can be observed in the translation of Dada Gorgud into various languages. The following examples are noteworthy to study:

Allah-allah diməyincə işlər onmaz.

Qadir tənri verməyincə ər bayımaz.

Əzəldən yazılmasa, qul başına qəza gəlməz.

Əcəl vədə irməyincə kimsə ölməz.

The translation into English by Faruk Sumer:

Among his wise sayings were those which follow:

Nothing goes well without mentioning the name of Allah.

No one can prosper without the will of Almighty Allah.

Nothing happens if it was not already written down in the beginning.

As it is seen, if we don't mention the source of the presented abstracts, each of them can freely be used as proverb in any different contexts.

Fedorov writes about the rules to be followed while translating proverbs: " Proverbs incorporate a full meaning and are formed similar to sentences with regards to the structure, while being different from the sentence system not only in terms of structure, but of meaning as well. Proverbs have double meaning: on one hand, they have concrete meaning, on the other hand, there exists abstract meaning which is usually termed as figurative meaning not fitting the literal meaning of the constituent words." (Fedorov 1969, p. 81)

Proverbs have been named differently by researchers of the English language. Amosova terms them "phraseological units with predicative structure" (Amosova 1963, p.135). Coonin uses the term "predicative phraseologisms" (Coonin 1972, p.122). Furthermore, he has employed a second term to describe them -"communicative phraseological units".

Vinogradov and his followers claim that proverbs must be studied together with phraseological units (Vinogradov 1977, p. 89). The other groups of linguists such as Amosova and others are of the opinion that since proverbs and sayings carry out a communicative function, they must be treated as independent units. The Azerbaijani linguist Bayramov regards proverbs as a subject of folkloristics (1978, p. 36).

The words forming idioms lose their meanings and form a new meaning in the units. For instance, *I could eat a horse.* – Dəhşətli dərəcədə acam. (Acından ölürəm; Acından bir qoyun da yeyə bilərəm.); *Money doesn't grow on trees.* (Pulun qədrini bilmək lazımdır. (məc. Pul yerdən yığılmır; Pul özünə hərmət istər.); *We are all at sixes and sevens.* (Biz tamamilə çəş-baş qalmışıq; məc. Başımızı itirmişik. Nə edəcəyimizi bilmirik.); *I got there in the nick of time.* (Mən ora ən son anda çatdım; məc. Mən ora bir göz qırpmında çatdım).

Most words forming idioms have figurative meanings. In modern English the figurative meanings of words are used more than their literary meanings. For instance, the word *to catch* is often used figuratively. The following examples can illustrate them:

Literary meaning	Figurative meaning
I have been fishing, but caught absolutely nothing. (Mən balıq tuturdum, amma tamamilə he çənə tuta bilmədim.)	1. Yesterday I caught the bus. (Dünən avtobusa çatdım.) 2. Try to catch his eye. (Çalış onunla göz-gözə gələsən.) 3. You'll catch your death of cold. (Soyuqlayacaqsan.) 4. Wait while I catch my breathe. (Nəfəsimi dərənə kimi gəzlə.)

There are some words in the dictionaries that have already lost their literary meanings, and can only be used as figuratively. For example, the verb *to plough* (əkmək, bi qmək). This verb is mostly observed in the idioms. For example,

1. *He had to plough hundreds of pages of American history to get ready for his test.* (O, Amerika tarixindən testi vermək üçün yorulmadan çalışıb; O, Amerika tarixindən testi vermək üçün kağızların arasında itib-batmışdı.).

2. *You can plough money into a business.* (Sən bu işə sərmayə yatıra bilərsən; Sən bu işə pul buraxa bilərsən.).

3. *Profits can be ploughed back.* (Qoyulan sərmayə qazanc gətirə bilər.).

Similarly, the verb *to rack* is also used figuratively much. For example,

He racked his brain to remember his last. (O, keçmişini xatırlamaq üçün beyinini qurdaladı.) (Mustafayeva 2012, p.36).

Whether a unit is an idiom or not is a matter of degree. Sometimes the meaning of a word or a sequence of words is too difficult to translate. For instance, *kick the bucket, red herring*, etc., are considered to be idioms as we cannot directly translate them into our language. If we translate them word by word (*kick-təpik; bucket-vedrə*) in Azerbaijani, the meaning will be lost.

Likewise phraseological units, idioms also require a special treatment in the process of translation. Idioms cannot be translated literally. If they were translated in this way, the meaning would be perverted and they would even sound strange and ridiculous. Unlike idioms, there exist a number of proverbs that coincide both in meaning and figurativeness as well as lexical composition. The examples below illustrate it:

You must reap what you have sown. - Nə əkərsən, onu da bi çərsən.

No flying from the fate. - Tələdən qa qmaq olmaz.

We can live without our friends, but not our neighbours – Dostsuz yaşamaq olar, qonşusuz yox.

He that has a tongue in his head may find his way anywhere - Ağzında dili olan hər kəs hər yerdə öz ünə yol tapar.

Man may meet but mountains never - Dağ dağa rast gəlməz, insan insana rast gələr.

As you sow you will mow - Nə əkərsən, onu da bi çərsən

To be a scientist is easy, but to be a man is difficult - Alim olmaq asandır, insan olmaq çətin.

Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise. - Tez yatan və tez duran insanda can sağlığı, dövlət və ağıl olar (Mustafayeva 2012, p.82).

The following notes should be taken into account while translating idioms:

(1) Idioms should be used in the same way as they are in the vocabularies.

(2) The words forming idioms can be used literally as well as figuratively.

(3) Idioms have a fixed grammatical structure.

Therefore, the problem of idioms is involved with much wider issue of word formation. New and more complex lexemes can be formed from simpler ones. There are such expressions such as public house, whose meaning is “inn”. This word cannot be considered to be a total like idiom because the meaning can in part be related to public and house. But from the words themselves the existence of the compound cannot be certainly predicted.

The meaning of the phraseological units can also be predicted from the meaning of the individual words. Some phraseological units may involve some association with the ideas. For instance, *to kick the bucket* – to die, *to fly off the handle* – to become very angry, *to spill the beans* – to tell somebody something that should be kept secret and private, *red herring* – an important fact, idea, event, etc. that takes people’s attention away from the important ones, etc. As we see the meanings of some of these idioms are not related to the meaning of the individual words, though some are nearer to the meaning of a single word such as *to kick the bucket* equals *todie*. It is necessary to mention that the phraseological unit, namely an idiom may be used as a single word, but it cannot function like one. Therefore, we cannot add the suffix *-ed* to the end of the last word in *kick the bucket* (*kick the bucketed*). It can only function as a normal sequence of grammatical words, so that the past tense form is *kicked the bucket*. For example, He kicked the bucket last year, didn’t he? Though the verbs in the idioms may function as a normal sequence of grammatical words, the number of the nouns can never be changed. We can use *spilled the beans*, but not *spill the bean*. Equally there is no: *fly off handles*, *kick the buckets*, *put on good faces*, *blow one’s tops*, etc. Though the noun in the idiom *red herring* may be plural, but the adjective cannot be comparative (the *-er* form). We may use *red herrings* but not *redder herring* (Palmer 1976, p. 82).

There are also a lot of syntactic restrictions in the phraseological units. Some have passive forms, but others do not. For example, *to lay down*, *to spill the beans*, etc., can be used in the passive as *The law was laid down*; *The beans will be spilled*, etc. But we cannot say: *The bucket was kicked*. The restrictions vary from idiom to idiom. Some are more restricted or “frozen” than others.

The words like *make up*, *give in*, *put down*, etc. are a very common type of phraseological units in the English language. This type of phraseological units is called the phrasal verb. They have the combination of the verb plus the adverb. The meaning of these combinations cannot be predicted from the individual verb and adverb. There is a single verb with the same or a very close meaning such as *to make up* – *to invent*, *to give in* – *to yield*, *to put down* – *to quell*, etc. It is necessary to mention that not all combinations of this kind are idiomatic. For instance, *to put down* has also a literal sense. There are also many others that are both idiomatic and not. For instance, *The speaker took the audience in*, *The woman took the homeless children in*.

The phrasal verbs may not only consist of the verb plus the adverb. There are also sequences of verb plus preposition, such as *to look after* and *to go for*. The sequences of the verb, adverb and preposition, such as *to put up with* (“tolerate”) or *to do away with* (“kill”), etc. These phrasal verbs may be idiomatic too.

Partial idioms are the kind of idioms which one of the words retains their usual meaning, but the other has a meaning that is peculiar to the particular sequence. For example, if we use *red hair*, it doesn’t mean that we consider the *hair* that is *red* in colour. The other example of this kind that is often used by comedians *to make a bed* in the meaning of *a set of carpenter’s tools*. *White coffee*, *white wine*, *white people* can be considered to be idiomatic only if we define the term as “with the lightest of the colours normally associated with the entity”. It is important to mention that colour words in English are not always in the ways that correspond to their scientific definition. For instance, *white* is brown when relating to coffee, yellow when referring to wine and pink as applied to people.

But *black* is used as its opposite for coffee and and people, since it is not used for *wine*. So, it means that partial idioms can be a matter of degree and may be in some cases be little more than a matter of collocational restriction.

In this case we want to draw attention to the fact that words may have specific meanings in particular collocations. For instance, we can say *abnormal* or *exceptional weather* if the weather is too hot in December, but *an exceptional child* doesn’t equal *an abnormal child*. *Exceptional* means greater than usual ability; *abnormal* is used for some kind of defect. It is noteworthy to state that collocation is not just a matter of association of ideas. For instance, though *milk* is white, we shouldn’t say *white milk*. But *white paint* is quite possible to say. In this case the importance of context shouldn’t be forgotten. Depending on the context different meanings of words can be distinguished. For example, Nida gives examples using the word *chair* in various contexts (Nida 1964, p.98):

- (1) sit in a chair – (stulda oturmaq)
- (2) the baby’s high chair – (körpənin hündür stulu)
- (3) the chair of philosophy – (fəlsəfə kafedrası)
- (4) has accepted a University chair (universitetin fakültəsinə qəbul olmuşdur)
- (5) the chairman of the meeting (iclasın aparıcısı)
- (6) will chair the meeting (iclasa rəhbərlik edəcək)
- (7) the elect chair (seçki bürosu)
- (8) condemned to the chair (ölümə məhküm edilmiş).

Though collocations can be determined by meaning, but sometimes they are fairly idiosyncratic and cannot be predicted in the terms of the meaning of the associated words. For example, *a blond door* or *a blond dress* cannot be used, though the color is the same as in *blond hair*.

As it is known, proverbs don't absolutely overlap with idioms. Therefore, while translating them a number of factors should be taken into account. In this regard, semantic and structural features as well as the function carried out by them should be taken into consideration. Simply put, unlike idioms, proverbs always have the structure of a sentence (a statement, interrogative or imperative). Nonetheless, idioms consist of at least two constituents and don't possess any characteristics of a sentence. Idiom is defined as a main and elementary unit; a sentence might be formed based on it. For instance, the idiom "to go to the whole hog" (öz bildiyini heçkimə verməmək, öz bildiyi kimi hərəkət etmək) do not express a completed thought. It should be used in a sentence in order to convey a completed meaning. For example, *When she takes a thing in her head, she goes the whole hog.* - Ağlına bir şey gəldisə, o, öz bildiyini heçkimə verməz.

Proverbs usually form one part of composite complex sentence. They either serve as a principal or a subordinate clause. For example:

The cat shuts its eyes, while it steals cream. - Tülkü başını soxur kola, quyruğundan xəbəri yoxdur. İnsanlar öz günahlarına göz yumurlar.

As thief passes for a gentleman when stealing has made him rich. - Oğurluqla varlanmaq olsaydı, siçan hamıdan dövlətli olardı.

Idioms consist of two or more words and function as a part of a thought in the process of communication.

While idioms perform the nominative function in a sentence, proverbs fulfil the communicative function and can be observed in different types of the sentence.

Proverbs are idioms having multiple components with regards to context. The main differentiating feature between idioms and proverbs is the fact that idioms can be separated neither syntactically nor lexically, while proverbs can be separated and used as a phraseological unit or an idiom. To illustrate this, let's consider the example:

The idiom *to catch a straw* (saman çöpündən yapışmaq) has been derived from the proverb *A drowning man will catch a straw* – Suda boğulan saman çöpündən yapışar.

An early bird catches the worm – Tez oyanan həmişə qalib gəlir; tez yatanla tez duran uduzmaz. Qurdu erkən duran quş tutar. In this proverb the idiom *an early bird* (erkən duran, tez oyanan) is used.

While polysemy might be observed in idiomatic expressions, all proverbs are monosemic.

V. CONCLUSION

Phraseological units such as idioms, idiomatic expressions, proverbs, etc. have long been investigated by various scientists, but the challenges in translation are still observed. While translating phraseological units the above mentioned methods should be followed; at the same time, peculiar characteristics of both target and original languages have to be considered. Moreover, since both idioms and proverbs have a certain purpose in the process of communication, a translator should be particularly careful about retaining original contextual meaning as well as literal and figurative meanings. Besides, as the idiomaticity depends on precisely what is meant by the term, the degree of idiomaticity should also be taken into account while translating phraseological units.

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