

CHALLENGES IN TRANSLATION OF IDIOMS AS CULTURAL UNITS

Mihaela PÎNZARU

Free International University of Moldova

Abstract: Translation is very important in every day life, because it helps to maintain connections between nations, to find out more information about other country's life and to observe the differences between cultures which make a nation unique. Although, the translation become really difficult when it is connected with two divergent cultures. In that case, the translator must think very well how to render a text into another language in order to be understood by everyone. Another problem that the translators face is the translation of idioms, because sometimes there is no equivalent of such expression in your target language, for this instance there are some ways of translating idiomatic expressions which you may use in different situations. So, the profession of translators is an arduous one, like any others but if you really like what do you do you will certainly overcome all problems and you will have a billiand future in this field.

Key words: translation, language, idioms, issues, culture, differences.

Translation is an art that help us to create bridges between countries, nations, mentalities; the translator is an artist that introduces the multitude of miracles that surrounds us. These miracles are considered to be the cultures that every nation have as a treasure keeping them alive for thousands of years and making them unique. But before passing to the theme itself, let's discuss the question:

What is culture? This term does not have a specific definition; people understand it differently, for some it is just a word denoting the differences between countries, for others it is a hope for a eternal life, because culture may last forever if you take care of it. The real thing is that this word derives from French term which in turn derives from Latin *colere* which means to tend to the earth and grow or cultivation and nurture. Culture represents the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people, encompassing: language, communication, courtesies, rituals, roles costumes, relationships, practices, expected behaviors, values, thoughts, manners of interacting etc. In other words, culture is what defines us as a nation; for example: Moldavian people are characterized by hospitality and welcoming nature, just like Russians; at the other side, British people are more reserved in manners and speech; French are known to be well mannered; Italians are famous for their helpful, friendly and emotive nature. As you see every nation has its own culture and every culture is very different, because of this, there are cultural issues in translation; these are connected with the problem of understanding the texts to be translated, because in many cases the translator is not necessary a member of the same culture. Without any cultural or factual pre-knowledge, the translator will not understand a piece of information even if it is presented to him/her in the most logical way. In other words, for a suitable translation, the translator must work not only with two different languages, but also with two different cultures; it means that in order to succeed he/she must think at the same time in two different ways.

The translation of idioms is another problem the translators deals with. An idiom is an expressions that doesn't exactly mean what the words say; for example: when you say that you *have cold feet*, it doesn't mean that your feet are cold, it denotes that you are very nervous about something; when somebody says: *It's written all over your face*, it doesn't mean that there are letters on the face, it signifies that everybody can tell how are you feeling by looking on your face; *to cry over the spilt milk* doesn't means that you feel pity about the milk, it represents to get upset about something that has already happened.

Every culture has its specific idioms and because of that the translator may face some difficulties in translating them as: the absence of an equivalent idiom in the target language; the existence of a similar idiom with different usage; the existence of cultural- specific idioms; the presence of job-specific idioms; the usage of an idiom in both figurative and literal meanings.

Before we translate an idiom we must think if there is an equivalent in the target language. We cannot always apply word-for-word translation because sometimes we can create confusion or a misunderstanding; for example we cannot literally translate the specific and famous English expression *It's raining cats and dogs* in any language, in that case we must either paraphrase it, explain the meaning or even avoid it.

Further will follow some examples of translating idioms from English language into Romanian and French in order to observe the different ways of translation in three dissimilar languages

- *Sitting on the top of the world* means to have the feeling that your life is excellent. In Romanian it is translated as *a petrece ca găina la moară*, while in French is *vivre comme un coq en pâte*.

- *To be over the moon* signifies to be extremely happy; in Romanian it would be *a fi în culmea fericirii* and French version is *être aux anges*.
- *Speak of the devil* denotes that the person we were just talking about showed up; Romanian version can be *vorbești de lup și lupu-i la ușă* and French version- “*quand on parle du loup on en voit la queue*”.
- *Barking up the wrong tree* suggests to be mistaken, to be looking for solutions in the wrong place, in Romanian it would sound as *a fi indus în eroare* and in French *faire fausse route*.
- *It's a piece of cake* means that it's easy; in Romanian it would have another image *floare la ureche* French also has another version *c'est un jeu d'enfant*.
- *Cat got your tongue?* Is used when someone has nothing to say; Romanians would ask “*Ți-ai înghițit limba?*” while the French would have a question like “*T'as perdu ta langue?*”
- *Every cloud has a silver lining* suggests that good things come after bad things, in the Romanian language we will translate “*Tot răul e spre bine*” and in French “*Après la pluie, le beau temps*”.
- *To hit the nail on the head* means to get something exactly right; Romanian version would be *a pune punctul pe i* and French version is *mettre le doigt dessus*.

As we can observe, some idioms change their image being translated in different languages, although some of them remain the same that is because there are different ways of translating idioms. Further 5 strategies in translating idiomatic expressions are given:

1. Using an idiom of approximately similar meaning and form. For example in English we say “break someone's heart”, Romanian version is similar *a frânge inima cuiva*, the same we translate into French *briser le coeur de quelqu'un*.
2. Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form. For example an English expression is “one good turn deserves another”, in the Romanian language this sentence has another image, although it has a similar meaning *după faptă și răsplată*, the same is with French *c'est un prêt pour un rendu*.
3. Translation by paraphrase. English people would say *You mark my words*, Romanians would tell you *ține minte ce-ți spun*, while French people declare- *tu peux me croire*.
4. Translation by omission. Sometimes, idioms may be omitted from the target text. The reason for this may be that they cannot be easily paraphrased, they do not have a close match in the target language, or because of stylistic considerations.
5. Litteral (word-for-word) translation. An English idiom is *better late than never*, in Romanian we translate it literally *mai bine târziu decât niciodată* and the same is with French *Mieux vaut tard que jamais*.

The conclusion is that translating idioms is the most complex and problematic task for translators, because there are many people on the Earth with different cultures and languages, but translating becomes easier with a deeper knowledge of the languages and cultures the translators are working. A translation needs to be culturally appropriate for the target language, especially a translation of idioms, so the translator must analyze the words in their context and find a suitable meaning.

Bibliography:

1. Mc Carthy M.; O'Del F. *English Idioms in Use*. Cambridge: CUP, 2002.
2. Soanes C., Stevenson A. *Oxford Dictionary of English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003
3. Kelly W.A.. *Cambridge Idioms Dictionary* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
4. Zimmermann K. A.. *What is culture/ Definition of culture*. Available at: <https://www.livescience.com/21478-what-is-culture-definition-of-culture.html> [Accessed March 27, 2019]