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EQUIVALENT CULTURE-ANCHORED UNITS TRANSLATION? THE PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS ISSUE

Abstract

This article examines a question that has been of long-standing interest to linguists working in the fields of cross-linguistic phraseology and the translation of idiosyncratic language units, such as phraseological units (PUs). The challenge of translating PUs, which are understood as "patterns sanctioned by a given culture", involves the translation of culturemes. Therefore, a good translator must be able to assess the importance of the elements containing cultural references in the source language while "moving" them to the target language. When translating PUs, it is desirable that interlingual (cross-linguistic) equivalence be achieved. The fact that translations of a PU can be very different (the translator can paraphrase the text, creatively change it, or simply eliminate the PU) implies that the translational equivalence of PUs must be functional. While a cross-linguistic comparison (and the achievement of translational equivalence) of PUs can be made by omitting the form parameter, it is desirable to preserve the extension and semantic structure, the connotative-pragmatic component, and the phrase combinatorics.

Keywords: phraseological units; cross-linguistic phraseology; equivalence; idiosyncrasy; cultureme

"El asunto de la traducción, a poco que lo persigamos,
nos lleva hasta los arcanos más recónditos del maravilloso fenómeno que es el habla."

José Ortega y Gasset
Miseria y esplendor de la traducción

1 Introduction

The study of idiomaticity in languages has been of long-standing interest to linguists, as phraseological units (from now on PUs) seem to be the key to the understanding of the inner cognitive structure of language users. Sometimes, figurative[1] and non-literal language appears to provide

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[1]Omazić (2005) contemplates the following: "Does phraseological necessarily mean 'figurative' or it can simply mean 'phrasal'? In other words, is it the frequency of occurrence or the figurative meaning that is decisive in classifying an expression as phraseological? Phraseologists with a flair for corpus linguistics favour statistical mutual co-occurrence data as being indicative of phraseological status, whereas the ones who favour the more traditional approach opt for figurativeness as a decisive factor, and dismiss expressions that have only literal reading."

more cognitive information than an elaborated paragraph of a scientific study. Nevertheless, understanding the real 'meaning' of such non-literal utterances, and describing them, remains a challenge for language investigators.

Although phraseology has been studied for several decades, giving an exhaustible definition of it is still a challenge. Indeed, the simplest way is to define phraseology as a discipline that deals with the study of all phraseologisms (or PUs): collocations, phrases, set phrases, sayings, and proverbs. Among researchers, the Spanish-language scholars (such as A. M. Tristá, A. Zuluaga, G. C. Pastor) have studied the linguistic peculiarities of PUs and understand phraseology as follows. For the purpose of this paper their point of view will be adopted:

> "All types of fixed, stable units, whose characteristic is the stability of its elements and the fact that they are not produced at the time of speaking but reproduced, made, and belong to a phraseological system of a given language, should be studied within the framework of phraseology. This means that these units, as well as idioms, proverbial phrases, proverbs and all kinds of fixed formulas, should be studied within the framework of phraseology." (Tristá, 1988, p. 86) [Translation mine]

2   Translating the Untranslatable?

Traditionally, phraseology has been considered to be one of the most idiosyncratic parts of each language. The phraseology competence of the translator, hence, is one of the decisive factors in good translation. The ability or inability to recognize a PU in the source language (henceforth SL), interpret it, and eventually find an equivalent (provided there is one), in the target language (henceforth TL) is a laborious, but at the same time one of the most challenging and exciting, tasks of translation.

Indeed, PUs representing realities and situations not conceptualized in other languages can be found in every language. Zinaida Lvovskaya unites these linguistic peculiarities of each culture under the concept of cultural intertextuality, and understands it as a "phenomenon that occurs often in translation and that requires solutions and even sacrifice" [2]. (Lvovskaya, 1997, p. 50) Lvovskaya believes that the solution to such problems depends on the role that the translated text plays in the target culture. Undoubtedly, a good translator must be able to assess the importance of the elements which contain cultural references in the SL while "moving" them to the TL. The main feature of these PUs is the sociocultural motivation, she claims. Its shape and context are incorporated in the culture in question and therefore it is impossible to find equivalents in the language of another culture, as preserving the connotative values of the PU is almost impossible.

As early as 1611, the Spanish lexicographer Sebastián de Covarrubias, in his *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española*, insisted on the idiosyncratic character of PUs, claiming that "ciertas frases y modos de hablar particulares de la lengua de cada nación, que trasladados en otra no tienen tanta gracia." [3]

Linguists who are engaged in this linguistic field do not all agree on the point of the translatability of PUs. Some of them see PUs as almost unsolvable translational conundrums, i.e. untranslatable units, while others see the concept of untranslatability as a completely wrong ap-

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[2]In Spanish: "Fenómeno que se da a menudo en traducción y que requiere soluciones y hasta "sacrificio".

The concept of 'sacrifice' Lvovskaya is referring to, was already commented on by the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset in his essay *Miseria y esplendor de la traducción* published in 1937: "¿No es traducir, sin remedio, un afán utópico?" The ideas of Ortega y Gasset are taken up again in B. M. Metzger's *Theories of the Translation Process*: "Since not all the nuances in a text can be conveyed into another language, the translator must choose which ones are to be rendered and which are not. For this reason, the cynic speaks of translation as "the art of making the right sacrifice," and the Italians have put the matter succinctly in a proverb, «a translator is a traitor» (*traduttore, traditore*). In short, except on a purely practical level, translation is never entirely successful. There is always what Ortega y Gasset called "the misery and the splendor of the translation process."

[3]"Some phrases and individual ways of speaking in the language of every nation, lack flair when translated into another one." [Translation mine].

proach to the problem.[4] I believe that the translation of these units is a feasible task, albeit sometimes a very complicated one requiring a lot of patience and, above all, a lot of research:
    "Translating PUs remains one of the most difficult tasks for the translator due to their

    a) cross-linguistic definition remaining unclear,
    b) powerful culture-anchored meaning,
    c) stylistic and connotative functions." (Jaskot, 2016)

    At any rate, I am far from agreeing with those who insist on the impossibility of carrying out such translations. We believe that the worst solution would be to leave a blank and prevent the source culture from approaching the target culture, despite the fact that some solutions adopted by translators are sometimes far from optimal.[5] Roberts (1998, pp. 74–75) says on this issue:

    "[...] no matter what the problem involved in translating SL phraseological units, the translator nevertheless has to cope with them, for he obviously cannot leave a blank in his translation."

3   Translating Phraseological Units — Translating Culture[6]

The challenge of translating "patterns sanctioned by a given culture" (Jaskot & Ganoshenko, 2015) — i.e. a whole group of lexical units, starting from clichés in a particular language, through PUs, stylistically marked vocabulary, stereotypes of linguistic consciousness and other units with a strong culture-oriented semantics — involves confronting the translation of culturemes [7]. This is why Micaela Muñoz-Calvo claims that translators need "cultural literacy, communicative language competences and cross-cultural competencies" as well as being able to interpret "socio-cultural

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[4]As for translatability or untranslatability, Zuluaga (2001) is faithful to the positions of Jakobson: all cognitive experience that is expressed in a language can be expressed in each and every one of the existing languages. This process can take place by lexical loans, calques, neologisms, paraphrase, circumlocutions, meaning shifts, etc. According to Zuluaga (2001), the use of PUs, despite their complex form and semantics, guarantees the achievement of communication by minimizing the effort one has to put into expressing themselves. Zuluaga believes that PUs cannot be marked as translatable or untranslatable since each case in the translation act is specific. Referring to words representing a major challenge for every translator, the Spanish scholar says: "PUs are signs (or super-signs, [*supersignos* in Spanish]) with amazing special functional possibilities." (Zuluaga, 2001, p. 71).

[5]A. L. Koralova (1987) gives an interesting example of a misleading translation from English into Russian: "Относительными оказываются соответствия *to hang one's head* и повесить голову. И русская, и английская ФЕ означают один и тот же «жест», но в английском языке он связан с чувством стыда или вины ("this action is a sign of shame or guilt" — LDEI, DAI), а в русском является символом горести и печали. Текстовая дистрибуция, т. е. мотивированность использования этих оборотов в рамках широкого контекста, по-видимому, будет различной. Ср.; «Весь народ повесил голову. Стон стоит по деревням». (Некрасов А. Н., «Коробейники») и "Johnny hung his head when the teacher asked him if he broke the window" (DAI) для перевода английской фразы лучше использовать выражение потупил взгляд или заменить формальное соответствие свободным словосочетанием: виновато опустил голову.".

[6]"[...] in different languages we encounter idioms that cannot be explained via conceptual metaphors based on direct experience, and require rather addressing cultural codes, such as popular beliefs, literature, arts and so on." (Dobrovol'skij & Piirainen, 2005).

[7]The term "cultureme" itself was created outside the boundaries of linguistics, in the cultural theory of S. Lem, and it describes, first of all, the minimal, indivisible units of culture: rituals, values, and stereotypes.
    In modern linguo-cultural research the term "cultureme" is a hotly debated topic and demonstrates various approaches to its content. V. Gak (1998) considers a cultureme "as a sign of culture that also has a linguistic expression". A. Vezhbitskaia (1999) regards a cultureme as "an integrated interlevel unit, the form of which is the unity of a sign and language meaning, while the content — the unity of language meaning and cultural value". The application of various translation techniques creates a special linguistic and translation meaning of a cultureme, based on various relationships of equivalence (Gusarov, 2002): signification (methods of transcription, transliteration, calquing), semantisation (a method of descriptive translation), reference (a method of elimination of national cultural specificity, descriptive translation), syntagmatics (a method of translation periphrasis) and functionality (a method of approximate translation, descriptive translation). (Jaskot & Ganoshenko, 2015)
    According to Luque Durán (Luque Nadal, 2009) culturemes are semiotic units containing cultural ideas which embellish the text. They are also used to build speeches interweaving culturemes with argumentative elements. In principle, the number of culturemes is not easy to quantify, and in any society there exists an unlimited number of culturemes, which continually increase.

meaning in cross-cultural encounters, contributing to the transfer of knowledge across cultures, and to cultural development as well" [8] (Muñoz-Calvo & Buesa-Gomez, 2010, pp. 2–3). Sosnowski (2016) points out some potential traps:

> "Scholars studying phraseology must be prepared to face numerous pitfalls. Idioms that appear strikingly similar may actually carry different, sometimes exactly opposite meanings: Pol. *lekarz z bożej łaski* (= a very bad doctor) / Rus. *милости божьей врач* (= a very good doctor) [lit. doctor of God's grace], *idzie jak krew z nosa* (= very slowly), *кровь из носу* (= immediately) [lit. flows like blood out of a bleeding nose), *owinąć sobie wokół palca kogoś* (= have somebody under one's command), *обвести вокруг пальца* (= lie to someone in a particularly cunning way) [lit. wrap somebody around one's finger]."

Santoyo (2010, p. 14) writes about the 'Holy Grail' of translation, which is the creation of an equivalent text. Therefore, the concept of equivalence when translating culture (indissociable from the language), i.e. "what differentiates and identifies us" (Durdureanu, 2011), becomes a crucial problem[9]. As had already been mentioned, there are thousands of culture-oriented (culture-anchored) terms which the translator has to deal with[10]. In any respect, the challenge facing the translator is to try to produce a PU equivalent to the original in the SL. However, the concept of equivalence applied to PUs is a dubious one, as it is often difficult to determine whether a PU used as equivalent (total or partial if we want to adopt a gradation) in the TL can really be considered equivalent, because as Dmitrii Dobrovol'skij (2000, p. 364) claims:

> "The need to find concrete solutions for each case appears because of the fact that the equivalence provided in dictionaries (TL idioms corresponding at least in some extent to the meaning of a particular phraseologism in SL), in most cases do not meet contextual conditions."

As with separate lexemes, PUs can be synonymic, but their ability to be synonymic largely depends on the given context. For this reason, the translator should pursue not the identity of the words but the identity of the meaning, referring also to the extralinguistic reality.

Undoubtedly, the belief that a good translation must have the same number of PUs in the target text as in the source text is an illusion. There are excellent solutions in which the PU of the SL has not been translated into the TL by a PU, and yet neither the meaning nor the context have been lost: the semantic has been conserved. Jaskot (2016) points out:

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[8]I cannot refrain from quoting Valero-Garcés (1997): "[...] idioms tend to reflect some conventions which often have a metaphorical meaning. When the translator, in order to produce a good translation, may even need to look at its origin as a strategy to convey it against logic. A very good example is given by Lozano (1992), when comparing French and Spanish:

«Los castillos que nosotros hacemos en el aire, para los franceses tienen que estar hechos en España; nos hacemos el sueco o nos despedimos a la francesa y en Francia se largan a la inglesa. Nosotros vemos moros en la costa cuando en Francia desembracan los ingleses; hacemos el indio cuando los franceses hacen el zuavo, y ambos el mameluco.»"

[9]On the other hand, Zhao (2004, p. 181) argues against giving too much importance to the cultural load of words: "As language is created and used in context, it is inevitably to be tinted with the color of cultural idiosyncrasies. 'Culturally loaded word' is a misnomer because all words are culturally loaded, and there is no need to distinguish so-called culturally loaded words from those that are supposedly not".

[10]Jaskot (in press) gives an example: "[...] for example the word *маршрутка* (marshrutka) in Ukrainian and Russian. In both the Polish and the Spanish reality this kind of public transportation is almost nonexistent. (Mini- or microbuses with predetermined fixed routes with a flat rate). The 'marshrutkas' can be compared with the 'peseros' in Mexico City. However, they are strictly related to the post-Soviet reality [...]. Another interesting case is that of the custard apple, an exotic fruit that does have its translations into Polish (*flaszowiec peruwiański, czerymoja, cherymoja*), Ukrainian (*черімоя, шерімоя*) and Russian (*черимоя*), but most users of the three languages mentioned have no idea of its meaning given the impossibility of finding national cherimoyas (!) in Poland, Ukraine and Russia.

> "After all, it is not the form, but the semantic content which is the priority. Here we come back to the main problem that has been already mentioned by A. Luchyk, the issue regarding a word: what are the boundaries of a word? The same question concerns a PU: what are its formal boundaries? Once we determine them (by choosing the form, which is so important for e-databases and corpora) the notion of equivalence appears. The equivalence variables, however, seem to be the key to an effective e-tool for translating PU. A clear description of equivalence variables (pragmatics, language register, inference, cultural background and so on) is a challenge."

These three examples retrieved from the Polish-Bulgarian-Russian corpus elaborated by the team from the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences (ISS PAS), led by prof. Koseska-Toszewa/Roman Roszko (`https://clarin-pl.eu/dspace/handle/11321/308`, show how translators coped with this problem. PUs are marked in bold:

(Polish) Najgorsze, że to, iż jest śmiertelny, okazuje się niespodziewanie, **w tym właśnie sęk!**
(Bulgarian) Лошото е, че той понякога е внезапно смъртен, това е неприятното!
(Russian) Плохо то, что он иногда внезапно смертен, **вот в чем фокус!**

and

(Polish) Matki i wychowawczynie — nie żadne lalkowate ślicznotki ze słodkimi ślepkami.
(Bulgarian) Никакви превзети дамички, **никакво въртене на очи!**
(Russian) Только не сентиментальные дамы, не те, что **строят глазки**.

4 The Equivalence Issue

The study of cross-linguistic equivalence is one of the issues that still, after several decades, continues to be of great interest in both contrastive linguistics and translation studies. Interlingual (cross-linguistic) equivalence, unlike intralinguistic, which is focused on synonyms, is traditionally conceived of as a correspondence of meaning between two lexical items belonging to two different languages. The term 'equivalence' itself is complicated and since the times of Vinay and Darbelnet dozens of different definitions have been given. Before delving into the issue of equivalence in the phraseology field, it is necessary to differentiate, first of all, equivalence at the systemic level (*langue*) of equivalence in the textual plane (*parole*):

> "Some translation theorists then took a closer look at the level of language use (*parole*) rather than at the language system (*langue*). Saussure had actually claimed that there could be no systematic scientific study of *parole*, but theorists like the Swiss Werner Koller (1979) were quite prepared to disregard the warning. If something like equivalence could be demonstrated and analyzed, then there were systems beyond that of *langue*." (Pym, 2007)

The first type refers to the system of language as an abstraction, as a set of signs stored in our mental lexicon. Due to abstraction, systemic equivalence is independent of the deictic coordinates of time and space, contrary to what happens in the textual plane. The context, therefore, cannot influence the determination of systemic equivalence. We mean, thence, a generic equivalence of this type: "How to say the SL X-word in the TL?" The textual equivalence, by contrast, lacks ambiguity and is always linked to a text, it loses its significance outside the given text. The fact that this type of equivalent in a particular TL depends on the configuration of the text makes a term (or PU) a *hapax legomenon*, unrepeatable and not transposable to other textual coordinates because of its originality. The distinction between the two types of equivalence has been reflected in the investigations of scholars devoted to phraseology. The concept of systemic equivalence, used in contrastive linguistics and lexicology, has been contrasted to the textual equivalence used in translation studies (see Dobrovol'skij & Piirainen, 2009). In the spirit of such a division, the

equivalence found in dictionaries has been identified as the systemic one but it does not seem to be the appropriate choice given the particularity of equivalence types. It is significant that at the lexicographical level the functional equivalence and the communicative effect of a PU are important. Nevertheless, the text-anchoring of a PU, the equivalents offered in dictionaries, are not always insertable in all contexts of translation.

5   Functional Equivalence

D. Dobrovol'skij considers the possibility of solving the problem of translation equivalence in a special way. As has already been mentioned, PUs can be viewed in terms of their functions. He sees lexical units that can be used in similar situations in both the SL and the TL as functionally adequate equivalents. Traditional comparative analysis of PUs, in his opinion, is not sufficient to find full equivalents. Often, PUs initially considered to be full equivalents cannot be employed in similar situations. Thus, the question of functional equivalence remains open. (Corpas Pastor, 2000).

Dobrovol'skij identifies three types of PUs:

The first type takes into account the structure of the PU and omits the set of images created by the PU.[11] For example, *дохлый номер* in Russian and the English *dead number*.

When translating PUs of the second type, one needs to be sure that the word of the SL carries the same meaning in the TL. For example, the Russian PU *как баран на новые ворота* ('confused, stare stupidly') and the Spanish *cantar para el carnero* ('to kick the bucket') have the word *баран* and *carnero*, denoting the same animal, but the significance of these PUs is quite different.

The PUs of the third type are called equivalents and are divided into three groups: full equivalents, partial equivalents and no-equivalence units. However, Dobrovol'skij believes that the traditional typology should be replaced by a new one which would avoid functional inadequacy of the translation of PUs. He bases his opinion on the fact that it is sometimes quite difficult to find full equivalents that would match both lexically and functionally.

At the level of phraseology, the difference between systemic and functional equivalence lies in the fact that the equivalence should not be limited to describing pairs of out-of-context PUs (systemic approach), but instead the usage situation should be taken into account (the functional approach). Therefore, as Mellado Blanco (2015) mentions, lexicographical equivalence is obtained by analyzing the behavior of prototypical PUs at discourse level, which enables one to discriminate typical uses from peripheral or unrepresentative ones. Moreover, in the process of establishing lexicographical equivalence, unlike in the case of textual equivalence, there is no need to consider all possible translations of a PU from the SL into the TL. It would be advisable to include in dictionary entries an explication of any restrictions on use, combinatorial issues or differences in the structure of the meaning of the PUs. Besides, bearing in mind that a text as a whole, rather than isolated words, should cater for a viable and successful translation, the PUs used in TL to translate SL PUs should be considered functional equivalents in the lexicographical sense. After all, translations of a PU can be very different: the translator can paraphrase the text, creatively change it or simply eliminate the PU. That is the difference between equivalence found in a text (text equivalence) and the one proposed in dictionaries. (Mellado Blanco, 2015).

Finally, if a text is translated in an appropriate way, we should understand that full equivalence has been reached. Therefore, there is no need to talk about the gradation of equivalence at the text level because we deal in a binary system: a text is translated or it is not. Then, the equivalence must be full, which means that the concept of «zero equivalence» loses its meaning in the textual level as, in general, there can always be a paraphrase, an ad hoc wording or a descriptive form

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[11]When talking about sets of images it is worth quoting Sosnowski (2015): "It is also worth noting that phrasemes in different languages evoke very different associations and mental images, e.g. Bul. *бързата кучка слепи ги ражда* [lit. 'the hasty bitch gives birth to blind pups, Pol. *co nagle to po diable* [lit. 'rush is the devil's thing'], Eng. *haste makes waste*."

used to translate the SL PU into the TL (Hallsteinsdóttir, 2006). In the TL, the SL equivalent need not necessarily be a PU, because at the textual level, for example, the frequency of use or the register can often prove to be more important factors when looking for equivalence criteria than morpho-syntactic factors.

6 Conclusions

As it has been shown, equivalence can be conceived of at three different levels of analysis: systemic, lexicographical and textual. Only in the first of these categories can a gradation of equivalency take place in terms of the compliance with semantic, syntactic and pragmatic parameters. In contrast, both lexicographical and textual equivalence must be functional. Thus, the form is of secondary importance, as equivalence can be achieved by using a simple lexeme and not necessarily a PU (contrary to what we aim to preserve at the systemic level). At the lexicographical level, a cross-linguistic comparison of PUs can be conducted while the form parameter (which is so important at the systemic level of equivalence) is ignored, whereas the semantics, pragmatics and syntagmaticity of a PU do play a role, because in functional equivalence the extension, the semantic structure, the connotative-pragmatic component and the phrase combinatorics are considered as important as at the level of a simple lexeme, which corresponds with the equivalence definition given by Ivanov (2006):

> "[...] functional compliance in a target language, transmitting expression on the similar level (words, collocations) to all relevant components within the given context, or one of the variants of meaning of the original unit in the source language."

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