

On the Study of Idioms and the Problem of Their Equivalence

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It comes as no surprise that in translating idioms, translators run into difficulties that may seem insurmountable. The major problem they face is the lack of equivalence i.e. finding idioms in the target language possessing the same form and meaning as those in the source language, in the meantime, literal translations of idioms are inevitably pregnant with stylistic and semantic errors. Idioms are especially hard to translate in case they are culture bound. In that event, translators should proceed with patience and delve into the culture of a certain country to demystify and bring out the cultural peculiarities strongly reflected in the language system. With the aim of transferring idioms of a source language into a target language, one should adopt the most appropriate strategies, most importantly, gain insight into the characteristics of idioms in both languages. Linguists have classified idioms according to various criteria. The most remarkable classification is based upon the varying degrees of idiomaticity [2]. In other words, from the point of view of intelligibility idioms can conventionally be categorized into 2 groups: *transparent idioms*, that is, we can easily see the link between the idiom and its meaning and *opaque idioms*, that is, the meaning of an idiom is not at all that of the sum of the literal meanings of its constituents. The aim of the present article is to find out some techniques, which will help overcome the potential difficulties in translating idioms.

Having investigated the basic strategies proposed by various linguistic, self-evidently the techniques put forth by Mona Baker seem the most streamlined and easy to follow. The in-depth investigation of the strategies recommended by Mona Baker's is presented below:

1) Translation by using an idiom *similar in meaning and form*

"*Bite one's tongue*" meaning "to struggle not to say something that you really want to say", is "*sich auf die Zunge beißen*" [4] in German, "*se mordre la langue*" [5] in French and "[U+053C] [U+0565] [U+0566] [U+0578] [U+0582] [U+0576] [U+056F] [U+056E] [U+0565] [U+056C]" in Armenian. These are absolute equivalents without any difference in form or meaning.

2) Translation by using an idiom *similar in meaning but dissimilar in form*

"*Keep a stiff upper lip!*" or "*keep your chin up*" implying to remain cheerful despite difficulties, may be translated into German as "*Halt die Ohren steif*" literally "*keep your ears stiff*". Some of the constituents of the German equivalent are different. An interesting analogy can be drawn between the mentioned German idiom and English "keep a stiff upper lip". In both idioms the word "stiff" connotes "courage" "persistence" as in "stiff-necked" meaning "proud and refusing to change"-as Oxford Dictionary says. The German idiom originates from the animal kingdom, as some animals prick up their ears when they are alert while they hang them when they are exhausted and weak. The same is implied through the English "stiff upper lip" since one who has a stiff upper lip displays fortitude in the face of adversity whereas the trembling of the upper lip is a sign of weakness.

As to the French "*Garde la tête haute!*" and Armenian "[U+0533] [U+056C] [U+056D] [U+0578] [U+0562] [U+0561] [U+0580] [U+0571] [U+0580] [U+057A] [U+0561] [U+0570] [U+056B] [U+055B]" here the upright position of the head is meant to denote ignorance and perseverance. In addition,

the English idioms unlike their foreign counterparts are prepositional.

3) Translation by *paraphrasing*

The English idiomatic expression "*had a good innings*" is rather culture-specific and it is almost beyond the capacity of translators to find a proper equivalent. First, the word "innings", as Wikipedia explains, is a period of time in a game, most notably baseball and cricket during which a team or a single player is batting. By extension, this term is used in British English for almost any activity which takes a period of time. Nowadays, the mentioned expression is used figuratively in reference to someone who has died at a reasonably old age or lived a rich and rewarding life. Thus, the only way of translating this idiomatic expression is to figure it out and merely paraphrase in the target language through lack of equivalence.

4) Translation by *omission*

In this case the idiom may be omitted altogether. According to Baker [1] omission is allowed only when there is no close equivalent in the target language or it is difficult to paraphrase as well as an idiom may be omitted for stylistic reasons.

Thus, idioms being very culture-specific and grammatically peculiar speech forms have always been at the center of attention of both foreign language learners and translators. The meaning of idioms is deemed the main cause for confusion and failure to attain the accurate and appropriate translation. Nonetheless, it is up to the language learners to cultivate their language skills to such an extent and achieve such a level that will allow breaking all the language barriers and open a whole world of metaphorically used expressions which will make the communication far more exciting and enjoyable.

Источники и литература

- 1) Baker M. In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation. London: Routledge, 1992.
- 2) Cowie A.P. Phraseology: Theory, Analysis and Applications. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- 3) Vinogradov, V. V. Fundamentals of General Linguistics. Moscow: Moscow Higher School Publishing House, 1977.
- 4) Redensarten-Index: <http://www.redensarten-index.de>
- 5) Multitran Electronic Dictionaries: <http://www.multitran.ru/c/m.exe?a=1&SHL=2>