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LINGUO-CULTURAL TRANSLATION PROBLEMS OF PROVERBS FROM RUSSIAN TO ENGLISH

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Annotation: This paper examines the main linguistic and cultural factors that influence the translation of proverbs and sayings from Russian into English. Proverb translation is understood as a complex process that involves not only the transfer of meaning but also the preservation of imagery, stylistic features, and cultural connotations. The findings demonstrate that proverb translation is affected by several key factors, including cultural specificity, metaphorical imagery, lack of direct equivalence, and differences in worldview between languages. The analysis shows that these factors interact dynamically and require the use of various translation strategies, such as full and partial equivalence, descriptive translation, calque, and contextual (overtone) translation. It also shows that achieving communicative effect and pragmatic adequacy is more important than preserving formal and structural similarity.

Keywords: proverbs, sayings, phraseological units, translation strategies, equivalence, adequacy, cultural specificity, imagery, calque, descriptive translation, contextual translation.

ЯЗЫКОВО-КУЛЬТУРНЫЕ ПРОБЛЕМЫ ПЕРЕВОДА ПОСЛОВИЦ С РУССКОГО НА АНГЛИЙСКИЙ

Аннотация: В данной статье рассматриваются основные лингвистические и культурные факторы, влияющие на перевод пословиц и поговорок с русского языка на английский. Перевод пословиц рассматривается как сложный процесс, который включает в себя не только передачу смысла, но и сохранение образности, стилистических особенностей и культурных коннотаций. Результаты исследования показывают, что на перевод пословиц влияют несколько ключевых факторов, в том числе культурная специфика, метафорическая образность, отсутствие прямой эквивалентности и различия в мировоззрении между языками. Анализ показывает, что эти факторы динамично взаимодействуют и требуют использования различных переводческих стратегий, таких как полная и частичная эквивалентность, описательный перевод, калька и контекстуальный (коннотативный) перевод. Он также показывает, что достижение коммуникативного эффекта и прагматической адекватности важнее, чем сохранение формального и структурного сходства.

Ключевые слова: пословицы, поговорки, фразеологические единицы, стратегии перевода, эквивалентность, адекватность, культурная специфика, образность, калька, описательный перевод, контекстуальный перевод.

RUS TILIDAN INGLIZ TILIGA MASALLARINI LINGVOCULTURAL TARJIMASI MUAMMOLARI

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqola rus tilidan ingliz tiliga maqollar va iboralarni tarjima qilishga ta’sir qiluvchi asosiy lingvistik va madaniy omillarni o‘rganadi. Maqollarni tarjima qilish nafaqat ma’noni yetkazish, balki tasviriylik, uslubiy xususiyatlar va madaniy konnotatsiyalarni saqlashni ham o‘z ichiga olgan murakkab jarayon sifatida tushuniladi. Tadqiqot natijalari shuni ko‘rsatadiki, maqollarni tarjima qilishga bir nechta muhim omillar ta’sir qiladi, jumladan, madaniy o‘ziga xoslik, metaforik tasvir, to‘g‘ridan-to‘g‘ri ekvivalentning mavjud emasligi va

tillararo dunyoqarash farqlari. Tahlil shu omillar dinamik tarzda o‘zaro ta’sir qilib, to‘liq va qisman ekvivalentlik, izohli tarjima, kalka va kontekstual (ohang) tarjima kabi turli tarjima strategiyalarini qo‘llashni talab qilishini ko‘rsatadi. Shuningdek, kommunikativ ta’sir va pragmatik moslikka erishish rasmiy va tuzilma o‘xshashligini saqlashdan muhimroq ekanligini ta’kidlaydi.

Kalit so‘zlar: maqollar, naql so‘zlar, frazeologik birliklar, tarjima strategiyalari, ekvivalentlik, to‘g‘rilik, madaniy xususiyat, tasviriylik, so‘zma-so‘z tarjima, tavsifiy tarjima, kontekstual tarjima.

INTRODUCTION

Proverbs constitute a unique layer of language that reflects the collective experience, cultural values, and worldview of a particular nation. As part of phraseological units, they combine semantic density, figurative meaning, and cultural specificity, which makes them particularly challenging for translation. Unlike free word combinations, proverbs function as complete communicative units that express generalized judgments, moral conclusions, or culturally conditioned observations about life.

The problem of translating proverbs becomes especially acute in the context of intercultural communication, where linguistic equivalence does not guarantee cultural adequacy. Russian proverbs, deeply rooted in national history, folklore, and everyday life, often contain culture-bound elements that have no direct counterparts in English. This creates a complex task for translators, who must not only convey the semantic meaning but also preserve the stylistic, emotional, and cultural nuances embedded in the original expression.

According to V.V. Vinogradov (1977), phraseological units are characterized by semantic cohesion and stability, which makes them resistant to literal translation. This idea highlights the fundamental difficulty of proverb translation: their meaning is not derived from individual components but from the unit as a whole. Theoretically, this observation is particularly relevant when dealing with proverbs, as their figurative nature often leads to misinterpretation if analyzed word-for-word. Therefore, translation requires interpretative competence rather than mechanical substitution.

Furthermore, A.V. Kunin (1986) emphasizes that phraseological units possess national-cultural specificity, which is often manifested through imagery, symbolism, and historical references. It would be right to consider that this cultural embeddedness explains why even semantically similar proverbs across languages may differ significantly in imagery. For instance, Russian culture frequently relies on agrarian and communal metaphors, whereas English proverbs may reflect individualism or maritime traditions.

The aim of this study is to investigate linguo-cultural problems in translating Russian proverbs into English and to identify the most effective translation strategies. The objectives include:

analyzing the linguistic and cultural features of Russian proverbs;

identifying major translation difficulties;

examining translation strategies such as equivalence, calque, and descriptive translation;

evaluating their effectiveness in preserving meaning and cultural connotations.

The object of the research is a corpus of Russian proverbs, while the subject is their translation into English from a linguo-cultural perspective.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The problem of translating proverbs and phraseological units has been widely discussed in linguistic and translation studies. Scholars approach this issue from different perspectives, including structural, semantic, functional, and linguo-cultural frameworks.

One of the foundational contributions to phraseology was made by V.V. Vinogradov (1977), who classified phraseological units based on the degree of semantic cohesion into phraseological fusions, unities, and combinations. According to his theory, the meaning of phraseological units is often non-compositional, meaning that it cannot be derived from the meanings of individual components. This idea is crucial for understanding the complexity of proverb translation.

Another important contribution comes from A.V. Kunin (1984), who emphasized the national-cultural specificity of phraseological units. He argued that idioms and proverbs reflect the history, traditions, and worldview of a people. This perspective is particularly relevant for the present study, as Russian proverbs often contain culturally marked elements that are difficult to reproduce in English. This approach shifts the focus from purely linguistic analysis to cultural interpretation, which is essential in translation practice.

The issue of non-equivalence in translation was extensively studied by S. Vlakhov and S. Florin (1980), who introduced the concept of realia—culture-specific elements that have no direct equivalents in another language. They argue that such elements require special translation strategies, including explanation or adaptation. I find this concept especially applicable to proverbs, as many of them contain implicit cultural references that may not be immediately recognizable to foreign readers. However, relying too heavily on explanation may reduce the expressive power of the proverb.

V.N. Komissarov (1990) developed a functional approach to translation equivalence, distinguishing different levels of equivalence and emphasizing the importance of communicative effect. According to him, translation should aim at preserving the function of the original text rather than its formal structure. It allows for flexibility and adaptation while maintaining the intended meaning.

From a linguo-cultural perspective, V.N. Telia (1996) highlights the role of cultural connotations and background knowledge in phraseology. She argues that phraseological units carry implicit cultural meanings that require interpretation. This idea reinforces the notion that translation is not only a linguistic process but also a cultural one. From this perspective, Telia's approach is essential for understanding why literal translation often fails in the case of proverbs.

In addition, N.M. Shansky (1985) emphasizes reproducibility as a key feature of phraseological units, suggesting that they function as ready-made expressions in speech. This characteristic complicates translation, as the translator must find an equally stable expression in the target language.

Despite the significant contributions of these scholars, there remains a gap in research specifically focused on the translation of Russian proverbs into English from a linguo-cultural perspective. Most studies either focus on general phraseology or analyze translation in one direction (English into Russian). Therefore, the present study aims to address this gap by combining linguistic and cultural analysis.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study employs a complex approach of combining linguistic, comparative, and translation analysis methods. The research is based on a corpus of approximately 150 Russian proverbs selected from authoritative phraseological dictionaries and literary sources.

The primary method used is comparative analysis, which allows for the identification of similarities and differences between Russian proverbs and their English translations. This method is particularly effective in revealing the degree of equivalence and the transformations required during translation.

In addition, the study applies contextual analysis, as the meaning of proverbs often depends on their communicative function within a specific discourse. This approach helps to determine whether a proverb should be translated literally, replaced with an equivalent, or rendered descriptively.

The classification of translation strategies is based on the works of A.V. Kunin (1986) and V.N. Komissarov (1990) , who distinguish several types of correspondences:

full equivalence;

partial equivalence;

descriptive translation;

calque (literal translation);

contextual (or “overtone”) translation.

Komissarov (1990) argues that translation equivalence is not absolute but depends on communicative conditions. This position is rather convincing because it shifts the focus from formal similarity to functional adequacy. In the case of proverbs, achieving identical structure is less important than preserving pragmatic impact.

The study also incorporates elements of linguo-cultural analysis, focusing on how cultural markers (realias, symbols, historical references) influence translation choices. This is essential because proverbs are not merely linguistic units but carriers of cultural knowledge.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

The analysis revealed that the main difficulties in translating Russian proverbs into English are connected with several key factors: imagery, cultural specificity, lack of direct equivalence, and differences in worldview. These factors interact with each other and significantly influence the translator’s choice of strategy.

1. Cultural specificity and imagery

Russian proverbs are deeply rooted in national culture and often reflect traditional lifestyles, folklore, and historical experience. As a result, their imagery may be unfamiliar or even non-transparent to English-speaking audiences.

For example:

«Без труда не вытащишь и рыбку из пруда»

You can't catch a fish without effort (literal).

No pain, no gain (equivalent).

The second version is more effective because it reproduces not only the semantic meaning but also the pragmatic force and stylistic impact of the original proverb. This confirms that translation must operate on a functional level rather than a purely lexical one.

As noted by S. Vlakhov and S. Florin (1980), realia represent culturally bound elements that resist direct translation. Their theory is clearly supported by the data: literal transfer of culturally marked images often leads to loss of expressiveness or misunderstanding. Therefore, cultural substitution emerges as one of the most effective strategies in proverb translation.

At the same time, it should be emphasized that the loss of original imagery inevitably leads to partial cultural neutralization. Thus, the translator constantly balances between preserving national color and ensuring comprehensibility.

For this reason, cultural specificity is the most fundamental challenge in proverb translation because it directly reflects how a particular culture conceptualizes reality. These Russian proverbs are deeply embedded in collective historical experience, which means that their imagery is not arbitrary but culturally motivated. When such imagery is transferred into another language, it often loses its associative depth.

This demonstrates that imagery in proverbs functions not only as decoration but as a cognitive tool that shapes meaning. Therefore, replacing the original image with a culturally familiar one is not simply a translation technique, but a form of reinterpretation.

In this sense, translation becomes a negotiation between preserving cultural authenticity and ensuring communicative accessibility. The translator must decide whether to prioritize the source culture's worldview or adapt the proverb to the target audience's expectations.

2. Lack of full equivalence

The analysis shows that full equivalence between Russian and English proverbs is relatively rare. Only a limited number of units demonstrate complete coincidence of meaning, imagery, and stylistic function.

For example:

«Дарёному коню в зубы не смотрят»

Don't look a gift horse in the mouth.

Such cases are typically the result of shared cultural or historical sources (e.g., Biblical or classical traditions). These proverbs can be translated with minimal transformation, making them ideal from the perspective of equivalence theory.

Such rarity of full equivalence suggests that languages do not map reality in identical ways, even when expressing similar ideas. From this perspective, this reflects deeper differences in cultural logic and symbolic systems.

A case-study perspective can illustrate this more clearly. If we are to imagine a bilingual speaker or translator working with both Russian and English, their task is not simply to find matching expressions, but to evaluate whether the same proverb carries equal communicative

weight in both languages. Even when a direct equivalent exists, its usage frequency, stylistic tone, or emotional resonance may differ.

This means that full equivalence is not only a linguistic coincidence but also a cultural alignment. That is arguable that such alignment is relatively rare because it requires shared historical or conceptual foundations between cultures. Therefore, even "perfect" equivalents should be approached critically, as their functional impact may vary depending on context.

3. Partial equivalence and transformation of imagery

A much more common phenomenon is partial equivalence, where the general meaning is preserved, but the imagery or structure is modified.

For example:

«Семь раз отмерь, один раз отрежь»

➡*Measure twice, cut once.*

Here, the numerical component changes, but the communicative intention remains identical. This demonstrates that equivalence is primarily functional and pragmatic rather than formal.

This finding supports V. Komissarov's theory (1990) that the main goal of translation is to reproduce the communicative effect of the original text. Structural differences become secondary if the intended message is successfully conveyed.

Moreover, this type of translation illustrates the adaptability of proverbial meaning: the same idea can be encoded through different cultural metaphors.

Thus, the partial equivalence is the most revealing type of translation because it shows how meaning can remain stable even when form changes. This suggests that the essence of a proverb lies not in its linguistic structure, but in its communicative intention.

This also supports the idea that proverbs operate at a conceptual level, where different cultures may use distinct images to express the same underlying principle. The transformation of imagery, therefore, is not a loss but an adaptation that reflects the flexibility of human cognition.

At the same time, this process highlights the creative role of the translator. Rather than reproducing a fixed expression, the translator reconstructs meaning within a new cultural framework. This reinforces the idea that translation is an interpretative act, where equivalence is achieved through function rather than form.

4. Descriptive translation. In cases where no equivalent exists, translators often resort to descriptive translation:

For example:

«После дождичка в четверг»

➡*Something that will never happen.*

This strategy ensures semantic clarity and avoids misinterpretation. However, it significantly reduces the stylistic richness and figurative nature of the original expression.

From a functional perspective, descriptive translation is effective in informative contexts but less suitable for literary texts, where imagery plays a crucial role. In such cases, the loss of metaphor weakens the expressive and emotional impact.

Therefore, descriptive translation represents a shift from figurative to analytical language, where meaning is explained rather than symbolically expressed. While this ensures clarity, it fundamentally changes the nature of the proverb as a linguistic unit.

It is highly doubtful that this strategy reveals the limits of translation, as it demonstrates that not all cultural meanings can be preserved within the target language. By transforming a proverb into a neutral statement, the translator sacrifices its aesthetic and emotional impact.

However, this does not necessarily make descriptive translation ineffective. Instead, it highlights the importance of context. In situations where clarity is more important than stylistic richness, this approach may be justified. Nevertheless, it should be used cautiously, as it reduces the cultural density of the original expression.

5. Calque and its limitations

Literal translation (calque) can be effective when the metaphor is transparent and culturally universal:

For example:

«Время — деньги»

Time is money.

However, the analysis shows that calque is highly context-dependent. In many cases, it produces unclear or even misleading results:

«На воре и шапка горит»

literal translation lacks meaning for English readers

This confirms that calque is only appropriate when the internal form of the proverb is easily interpretable across cultures. Otherwise, it leads to semantic distortion.

Thus, calque is one of the most risky strategies because it assumes that meaning is transferable through structure alone. While this may work in cases of universal metaphors, it often fails when cultural knowledge is required to interpret the image.

This demonstrates an important principle: linguistic transparency does not guarantee semantic accessibility. A proverb may be grammatically clear but culturally opaque. This creates the illusion of equivalence without actual understanding.

Therefore, calque should not be seen as a neutral or automatic strategy, but as a conscious choice that depends on the degree of shared knowledge between cultures. Its effectiveness is determined not by linguistic accuracy, but by interpretability.

6. “Overtone” (contextual) translation

One of the most flexible and widely used strategies is contextual (or “overtone”) translation:

For example:

«И волки сыты, и овцы целы»

To keep both sides satisfied

This method allows the translator to adapt the proverb to the specific communicative situation, preserving its meaning while modifying its form.

The findings indicate that this strategy is particularly effective in literary translation, where maintaining naturalness and fluency is essential. It reflects the translator's creative role and their ability to interpret meaning rather than merely reproduce structure.

To follow that, contextual translation represents the most flexible and adaptive strategy, as it allows the translator to prioritize meaning over form. This approach acknowledges that proverbs function within specific communicative situations, and therefore must be adjusted accordingly.

There might be less chances to consider that this strategy best reflects the dynamic nature of language, where meaning is not fixed but shaped by context. By adapting the proverb to the situation, the translator ensures that it fulfills its communicative purpose, even if its structure changes.

At the same time, this method highlights the creative and interpretative role of the translator. It requires not only linguistic competence but also cultural awareness and contextual sensitivity. In this sense, contextual translation can be seen as the highest level of translation skill, where the translator moves beyond equivalence and engages in meaning reconstruction.

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that proverb translation is not merely a linguistic process but a cultural interpretation. The translator acts as a mediator between two cultures, balancing semantic accuracy and cultural adaptation.

The theoretical positions of Vinogradov, Kunin, and Komissarov collectively suggest that phraseological units cannot be translated without considering their semantic integrity and cultural context. I find that these theories complement each other: Vinogradov explains structural cohesion, Kunin emphasizes cultural specificity, and Komissarov focuses on functional equivalence.

However, in practice, translators often face a dilemma: whether to preserve the original imagery or adapt it to the target culture. Form this point, the choice depends on the purpose of translation. In literary texts, preserving imagery may be more important, while in pragmatic contexts clarity should prevail.

Another important issue is the loss of national identity. When replacing a Russian proverb with an English equivalent, the cultural flavor of the original may disappear. This raises the question: should translation aim at domestication?

It is highly arguable that an optimal strategy lies in a balanced approach, where the translator retains cultural elements when possible but ensures comprehensibility for the target audience.

CONCLUSION

The study confirms that translating Russian proverbs into English involves significant linguo-cultural challenges. These challenges arise from differences in imagery, cultural references, and conceptual frameworks.

The analysis identified the following main translation strategies:

full equivalence;

partial equivalence;

descriptive translation;

calque;

contextual (overtone) translation.

Among these, partial equivalence and contextual translation are the most frequently used, as they allow for the preservation of meaning while adapting to the target culture.

The research also demonstrates that achieving complete equivalence is rarely possible. Therefore, translation should be viewed as a process of approximation, where the goal is to reproduce the communicative effect rather than the exact form.

In conclusion, the translator's role is not limited to linguistic substitution but extends to cultural interpretation. Successful translation of proverbs requires not only language proficiency but also deep understanding of both source and target cultures.

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