

Analysis of Idiom Translation Strategies from English into Russian

Margarita Strakšienė

Abstract. The difficulties that the translator meets while translating English idioms into Russian language will be analyzed in this article. The aim of the article is to present the problem of equivalence in the target language, to look through main translation strategies used in translation of idioms and examine the choice of translation strategies used by V. Kotkina. The theoretical part is mostly based on Shansky's, Vinogradov's, Senina's and Recker's theories. There is a short review of English idioms, which were discussed in the previous article, based on Baker's, Toury's and other English scholars' theories. The analytical part is based on A. Christie's novel *4.50 from Paddington* and its translation made by V. Kotkina from English into Russian. Analysis provides a general overview of the most prevailing translation solutions used in the translation from English into Russian. The research has shown that even though there are a number of exact equivalents in the target language, still there is a lack of equivalent idioms in Russian language. In addition, the most prevailing translation strategy turned out to be translation by description according to Vinogradov, also there were examples of translation by applying exact equivalents and partial equivalents in the target language.

Key words: *idioms, phraseologisms, translation strategies, idiom translation, phraseological units, equivalence, phrases.*

Introduction

Phraseological units represent quite a large part of linguistics. Very often they reflect the peculiarities of the culture of the language they belong to; moreover they reflect history of that nation, their attitude towards world, stereotypes they believe in, etc. Furthermore, phraseological units usually are formed from national sayings, prejudices, and cultural traditions. Russian language as well as English is very rich of phraseologisms. They are used in various styles of language such as literature, colloquial style and publicistic style.

The purposes of the article are to overview Russian phraseologisms and analyze translation peculiarities from English into Russian language as there is a lack of information on translation problems from idiomatic point of view. This research may help other translators cope with arising problems of equivalence in the target language and encourage them to look more closely at various translation strategies suggested for translation of idioms.

The theoretical part of the article will present a brief overview of Russian phraseologisms and translation possibilities. The analytical part will show examples of various translation strategies used by Russian translator while translating English idioms into Russian language.

Theoretical Overview of Russian Phraseologisms

Russian phraseologisms are very similar to English idioms. They as well are classified into several groups, have the feature of reproducibility and perform nominative and communicative functions as English idioms. Shansky (1969) in his book defines phraseologisms as

‘frozen patterns of language that consist of two or more components and allow little or no variation in form, structure or meaning’ (Shansky, 1969, p.28).

Another linguist, Senina, in her book defines phraseological units as a semantically bound set of words

that are not produced at the moment of conversation but are reproduced as a rigid lexico-grammatical units with a firm semantical background (Senina, 2010, p.201).

Furthermore, Senina distinguishes three types of phraseologisms according to their stylistically expressive function: interstylistic, bookish and colloquial phraseological units. Interstylistic phraseological units are rigid phrases that have absolutely non expressive feature and can be used in all styles of speech. For example: *от всего сердца* (sincerely, from all heart), *под открытым небом* (under open sky). Another type that is distinguished by Senina is bookish phraseological units. Such units have high emotional-expressive features and are used in *publicistic* style and literature, for example: *в мгновение ока* (immediately), *стереть с лица земли* (to destroy). The last type is colloquial phraseological units. It is probably the largest group out of these three types of phraseologisms. For example: *ни кола ни двора, кожа да кости* (very thin). Phraseologisms of this type not only label some kind of present event but also indicate the relation between the speaker and the event, in other words contains in it irony, mocking, etc. For example: *пустить слезу* (start to cry), *наломать дров* (to get into trouble) (Senina, 2010, p.211).

According to Shansky, phraseology of contemporary Russian language carries a very specific Russian manner and features. Most of the Russian phraseologisms do not have equivalents in other languages; therefore, it is very overwhelming for the translators to transfer the meaning of Russian idioms into another language. The translator has to search for idioms with similar meaning or form, or just has to paraphrase. In order to analyze phraseologisms of contemporary Russian language it is important to take the character of lexical structure of phraseologisms into consideration. According to this fact, Russian phraseologisms similar to English and Lithuanian idioms can be classified into two large groups. The first group

consists of phraseologisms that contain words which are independent with its meaning and can stand alone in the sentence, for example: *как снег на голову* (suddenly), *через час по чайной ложке* (slowly), *бросить взгляд* (to look). Words in these phraseologisms are bound with each other according to the grammar rules of contemporary Russian language. Meanwhile, another group of phraseologisms consists of such words that have rigid usage and old fashioned lexico-semantic factors, such as: *мурашки бегают* (shiver), *елико возможно* (as possible), etc. Words in these phraseologisms can perform as archaic in contemporary language (Shansky, 1969, p.89).

The linguist distinguishes one main feature of Russian phraseologisms – *reproducibility*. Phraseologisms are not produced at the moment of communication, but are reproduced as one undividable unit, for example: *за ридевать земель* (far away), *след ростыл* (there is nothing or nobody). Phraseologisms act as one single unit even if semantically each constituent of phraseologisms has its individual meaning, for example: *на данном этапе* (at the present moment). He states that from the semantic point of view phraseologisms can be distinguished into four types: *phraseological adhesion, units, phrases and expressions*. First two types comprise semantically undividable phraseologisms. They are equivalent from the point of view of their meaning to one word or group of words. Third and fourth types present themselves as semantically dividable units (Shansky, 1969, p.76).

Phraseological adhesion involve undividable phraseologisms, which meaning is different from the meaning of each word taken separately. Meaning of such phraseological units is unmotivated and completely conditional, for example: *бить баклуши* (to be lazy). Therefore, *phraseological adhesion* involves such phraseologisms that carry the meaning of the whole phrase and each word separately does not correspond to the meaning of the whole phraseologism, for example: *неровен час* (may be). The meaning of the phrase does not correspond with the meaning of each separate word *неровен* (uneven) and *час* (hour). However, sometimes such phraseologisms as *перемывать косточки* (to gossip) can carry both idiomatic meaning and literal meaning. For example in such sentence as *косточки ископаемой птицы пришлось перемывать несколько раз* (the bones of fossilized bird have been washed several times) the same words that together comprise a phraseologism have literal nominative meaning (Shansky, 1969, p.80).

The second type of Russian phraseologisms is *phraseological units*. They are such units that similar to phraseological adhesion are semantically stable and undividable, however their semantic origin is already motivational on the basis of the meaning of separate words that comprise phraseologism. For example, phraseological units *закинуть удочку*, *мелко плавает*, *положить зубы на полку*, etc. consist of separate words that have derivative, motivational meaning. Comparing to phraseological adhesion, phraseological units are not so frozen patterns of language; parts of words that comprise up an idiom can be separated from each other by insertion of other words. This feature of phraseological units separates them from phraseological phrases and

expressions. Opposite to phraseological adhesion and units (*собаку съел*, *стереть в порошок*) are phraseological expressions and phrases which are not semantically undividable, but present themselves as semantically segmented idioms and which meaning completely corresponds with the meaning of separate words that comprise an idiom, for example: *заклятый враг*, *борьба за мир*, *жизнь прожить – не поле перейти* (Shansky, 1969, p.82).

The third type is *phraseological phrases*. They are such phrases which words have independent and bound usage. For example, the phraseologism *закадычный друг* (bosom friend) consists of two words where one of them *друг* (friend) has independent meaning and can be used with the buns hog other words, while word *закадычный* (sincere) is completely bound to the word *друг* (friend) and can not be used with any other words. Shansky distinguishes that a consistent word of a phraseologism that is phraseologically dependant can be replaced by synonyms, for example: *скоростная смерть – внезапная смерть* (instant death – sudden death). The last type is *phraseological expressions*. They are rigid in forms and usage. They are not only semantically segmented but also consist of words with independent meaning such as *любви все возрасты покоры*, *волков бояться в лес неходить*. Phraseological expressions differ from the *phraseological phrases* in the way that their constituents can not be replaced by synonyms. For example, phraseological phrase that consists of two words and one of them is dependant from another word and one can be replaced by synonymic word: *разинуть рот – раскрыть рот* (to open a mouth when wonder) (Shansky, 1969, p.85).

The author defines the main characteristic feature of *phraseological expressions* that distinguishes them from word combinations is that phraseological expression are not formed by the speaker but are reproduced as already existing units with rigid meaning and form. For example, *любви все возрасты покоры* (age is not important for love) and *стихи покоряли читателей своей искренностью* (poems win reader hearts by sincerity) the first example is an existing already formed expression, while the second example is made by the speaker at the moment of speaking according to Russian grammar rules. According to Shansky, *phraseological expressions* can be divided into two large groups: communicative expressions and nominative expressions. The first group of expressions present themselves as predicative word combinations which equals a sentence, for example: *без труда не вытащишь и рыбки из пруда* (without an effort will not get a fish out of a pond) (Shansky, 1969, p.85). The second group of *phraseological expressions* is such word combination that is equivalent only to a part of the sentence and perform a nominative function, for example: *трудовые успехи* (work success), *на данном этапе* (at the present moment).

Another linguist Vinogradov states that phraseologisms can be divided into three large groups: lexical phraseologisms, predicative and comparative phraseologisms (Vinogradov, 2004, p.183).

Moving on to English idioms, it is important to notice that English language is very rich of idioms, there many theorists who analyze and defines English idioms, and one of them is Mona Baker. Baker in her book *In Other Words* distinguishes idiom from collocation by the transparency of meaning and flexibility patterning. According to Baker, idioms are

“frozen patterns of language which allow little or no variation in form and often carry meanings which can not be deduced from their individual components” (Baker, 1992, p.63).

For more about English idioms see Strakšienė (2009, pp.13-19).

Translation Possibilities in the Russian Language

In order to make a good translation from English into Russian it is important to know both about Russian and about English idioms and their translation peculiarities. According to Vinogradov, if the form of the idiom is not essential in the context then the translator does not have to preserve the internal shape of the idiom. It is important to transfer the emotional, stylistic and functional information of the original idiom. Of course, the translator must always try to translate phraseologism by phraseologism, however it is not always possible as not always there is an equivalent in the target language or there is an equivalent but it is not suitable according to its stylistic features. Therefore, Vinogradov distinguishes the following translation strategies: *translation by one word*, *translation by description* and *carbon paper translation*. Translation *by one word* is possible when there is no equivalent in the target language or there is an equivalent but it is not suitable according to its emotional, stylistic and expressive function. Translation *by description*, in other words the translator translates an idiom by describing or paraphrasing the meaning of the idiom using free set of words. The last translation strategy distinguished by Vinogradov is *carbon paper translation*. It is used very seldom as word for word translation of an idiom sounds very foreign in the target language. Carbon paper translation may be useful when it is important to transfer play of words of the original idiom (Vinogradov, 2004, p.190).

According to Recker (1974), there are four main translation possibilities for transferring the meaning of idioms from English into Russian language:

- 1) completely preserving the meaning, expressivity and form of the original idiom,
- 2) partly preserving the meaning, expressivity and form of the original idiom,
- 3) changing the expressivity of the original idiom,
- 4) completely eliminating expressivity of the original idiom (Recker, 1974, p.161).

To the first translation strategy belong such idioms that have international features and can be transferred by using

idioms with the same meaning but different form in the target language, for example: the lion's share – *львиная доля*, to play with fire – *играть с огнем*. Examples above illustrate translation that preserves the meaning of the original without any change in it. The second translation strategy preserve expressivity of phraseological units, however with some change of it's lexical or grammatical features. Expressive components of the phrase can be changed by other expressive or meaningful components and some components are just changed by other components in the target language. For example: in broad daylight – *среди бела дня* (in the middle of the daylight), in the dead of night – *глубокой ночью* (in the deep night). The third translation strategy is applied when it is necessary to exchange the expressivity of the phraseologisms. For example: to take somebody for a ride – *высмеять* (to laugh at).

The last translation strategy is a complete elimination of expressivity of the original idiom. It is not the best solution for the translation as the expressive function is lost in the translation, for example: a skeleton in the cupboard – *семейная тайна* (family secrete) or *неприятность* (trouble) (Recker, 1974, p.164).

General Overview of the Strategies Used by V. Kotkina in Translation of the Book *4.50 from Paddington* (2005)

Great part of idioms was collected from the book *4.50 from Paddington*. This book was translated into Russian language in 1991 by V. Kotkina. The discussion of the peculiarities of translation will concentrate on the strategies most frequently used in the translations of the novel *4.50 from Paddington* (2005).

To start with, the first two examples of the analysis intend to show the cases of *carbon paper* translation that were found only in this book.

Example 1 illustrates the case of literal translation where Russian translator have transferred the English idiom into Russian by translating each word of it in other words using carbon paper translation. ‘Had been putting the cat among the pigeons’ is old British idiom that is used to refer to someone who is likely to do something that would cause a trouble. In this example, the idiom indicates that Inspector Credock seems to be that kind of person. While in Russian language there is no such idiom, but the translator decided to translate it literally as *поместили кошку среди голубей* in this way more or less rendering the meaning of the original idiom, however, producing the sense of foreignness of the translation. The English idiom in the **Example 2** is used to refer to people ‘who hide their feelings, plans, etc.’ (ODI, 2001, p.77) in this way reflecting the personality of one of the main characters in the novel. However, Kotkina decides to translate it literally as *темная лошадка* producing an image that is not familiar to Russian readers and signal its foreignness.

	Source text	Target text 1(1991)
Ex. 1	I somehow got the impression that you had been putting the cat among the pigeons , Inspector Credock. (Christie, 2005, p.224)	Вы поместили кошку среди голубей . (Kotkina, 1991, p.111)
Ex. 2	She is rather a dark horse , old Ema. (Christie, 2005, p.293)	И довольно ‘ темная лошадка ’ наша старина Эмма. (Kotkina, 1991, p.146)

	Source text	Target text 1(1991)
Ex. 3	Oh, poking her nose into things. (Christie, 201, p.38)	Да всюду совать свой нос. (Kotkina, 1991, p.18)
Ex. 4	You won't get me out of here until you take me out feet first . (Christie, 201, p.56)	Отсюда меня вынесут только ногами вперед. (Kotkina, 1991, p.28)
Ex. 5	I always like to have something up my sleeve in the early stages. (Christie, 2005, p.126)	Я не люблю сразу раскрывать свои карты. (Kotkina, 1991, p.62)
Ex. 6	But who on earth –oh, you mean Martine? (Christie, 2005, p.154)	Но кто она, черт возми. (Kotkina, 1991, p.76)
Ex. 7	Hard as nails, they say, and never forgot an injury. (Christie, 2005, p.73)	Он тверд был, говорят, как скала. (Kotkina, 1991, p.36)
Ex. 8	That throws rather a light on things. (Christie, 2005, p.216)	Теперь становится кое что ясно. (Kotkina, 1991, p.108)
Ex. 9	I got a flea in the ear. (Christie, 2005, p.235)	Он сделал мне выговор. (Kotkina, 1991, p.117):

The second group of idioms found in the translation by Kotkina was translated by *completely preserving the meaning, expressivity and form of the original idiom*, in this way completely preserving the expressivity and function of the original idiom.

The idiom 'poke her nose' in the **Example 3** is used to characterize Mrs. Marpl's character as she is very interested in other peoples lives and affairs. According to the definition collected from ODI it is used to describe people who 'interfere in the affairs or business of other people' (ODI, 2001, p.257). The meaning as well as the emotional tone in the translation is conveyed by both the identical in its semantic composition as well as meaning idiom which in Russian has an implication of 'inquisitiveness and intrusion' (LFŽ, 2001, p.460).

The idiom in the **Example 4** means to be 'dead' (ODI, 2001, p.118). As it can be seen, Kotkina has used the equivalent Russian idiom *ногами в перед*, which consists of the similar form, expressivity and has an identical meaning. The translator preserves the tone and structure of the source text idiom.

As a contrast to the discussion above, there appeared to be idioms which were translated by *partly preserving the meaning, expressivity and form of the original idiom*, in other words partly preserving the meaning of the original. **Example 5** contains idiom 'have something up my sleeve' which carries the meaning of keeping some having some information and keeping it in secret in order to use it later (ODI, 2001, p.358). It was translated into Russian as *раскрывать свои карты* what in Russian means to act or speak openly without hiding anything (Stašaitienė, Paulauskas, 1985, p.158), which seems to have slightly different meaning then the English one, however the negative word at the beginning of the Russian sentence *Я не люблю сразу* what in back translation means 'I don not like at the beginning' makes Russian idiom similar to English idiom in its meaning and expressivity, but not in form. **Example 6** 'who on earth' is an informal idiom that is used to show person's surprise or anger (ODI, 2001, p.97). In this case it reflects both astonishment and anger on characters speech. Kotkina has identically tranfered the mood and the meaning into the target language. Russian idiom *черт возми* is a swear expression that is considered to be exact equivalent in its meaning and expressivity, but different in form.

The last and most frequently used strategy is *translation by description* according to Vinogradov (2004, p.187). The greatest amount of idioms in the *4.50 from Paddington* (2005) was translated applying this strategy. In order to prove it, it is necessary to analyze the examples 7, 8 and 9.

Example 7 'hard as nail' which according to ODI means 'not sensitive or sympathetic' was transferred into Russian applying figurative comparison *тверд как скала* which in back translation means 'be as hard as the rock'. On the one hand, it renders the meaning of the original speaking about emotions, but, on the other hand it, also, carries slightly different meaning as the image of being 'hard as rock' in Russian it can be understood as being 'very strong in health' whiles here it is more appealed to the emotional hardness. Idiom in the **Example 8** 'throws a light on things' is defined as 'to make a problem easier to understand' (OALD, 2001, p.744). Here Kotkina's paraphrase as *становится ясно* what in back translation means 'becomes clearer' produce smooth and natural translation. According to LDEI the idiom 'got flea in the ear' **Example 9** means 'a sharp scolding that makes a person go away feeling very foolish' (Long, 1991, p.116), while according to ODI it means 'to refuse somebody's request very angrily' (ODI, 2001, p.126). This leads to an assumption that Kotkina has paraphrased the idiom not in a very accurate way, as *сделал мне выговор* in back translation means 'objurgation', does not reflect the exact meaning of the source idiom.

In addition, the discussion of all the cases of the use of the translation strategies in Kotkina's translation has showed that most often used strategies remain the same through out all the analyzed book, it just depends on the kind of idiom found in the original books. Moreover, it showed that the most popular strategy among both translators was *translation by description*. Even though, there were quite many idioms translated by *completely preserving the meaning, expressivity and form of the original idiom*, also by *partly preserving the meaning, expressivity and form of the original idiom*. In generally, it is really hard to find the equivalent in Russian exactly matching the English idiom as the two languages are very different and belong to different language roots. Finally, it is very encouraging to notice that there were found no cases of translation by *omission* or complete elimination of the expressivity of the original idiom in the translation of this book.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to analyze the translation of idioms collected from A. Christie's novel *4.50 from Paddington* (2005) translated into Russian by V. Kotkina in 1991. The main focus was to analyze translator's preferences for strategies used for translating idioms and to compare the level of equivalence in the target language. The analysis has showed that Kotkina's translation of idioms involved three basic translation strategies: **translation by description**, **idiom to idiom translation**, which involves both translation by *completely and partly preserving the meaning, expressivity and form of the original idiom* and **literal translation** or **carbon-paper translation**. The examples of idioms translated by applying various strategies were selected from the book in order to show the different kinds of examples. The analysis of particular samples was intended to illustrate the choices of particular strategies in Kotkina's translation. It was noticed that such idioms as *poke nose into things*, *take out feet first*, etc. have established equivalents in Russian and were translated by applying an exact equivalent in the target language. The analysis of the translation of idioms in the A. Christie's novel has revealed certain tendencies concerning equivalence in translations. Kotkina in her translation frequently tried to stick to the original text and was trying to apply existing equivalents. She opted for *descriptive* translation strategy when there was no appropriate equivalent in Russian language or even if there were an equivalent, but it was not suitable in the context according to its expressive, emotional and stylistic function. As a result, firstly, she was translating idioms by using idiom of similar form and meaning, or idiom of similar meaning and dissimilar form in this way preserving the effect and meaning of the original idiom. Secondly, her descriptive translation often contained the structure of the original idioms which cause an effect of interference of another language. Thirdly, in some places she used literal or carbon paper translation which also caused an effect of foreignization.

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Idiomų vertimo iš anglų į rusų kalbą analizė

Santrauka

Straipsnyje analizuojamos vertimo strategijos verčiant iš anglų į rusų kalbą bei nagrinėjamos vertimo problemos, su kuriomis susiduria vertėjas, versdamas frazeologizmus. Straipsnio tikslas yra bendrai palyginti angliškus ir rusiškus frazeologizmus, apžvelgti atitikmenų trūkumą vertimo kalboje bei pagrindines frazeologizmų vertimo strategijas, kuriomis rėmėsi vertėja, perteikdama angliškus frazeologizmų reikšmę į rusų kalbą. Teorinė dalis paremta Seninos, Vinogradovo, Reckerio bei Šanskio teorijomis. Analizei buvo pasirinktas A. Kristi romanas *4.50 iš Padingtono* (2005) bei jo vertimas į rusų kalbą. Straipsnyje pateikta tik labiausiai dominuojančių vertimo strategijų šioje knygoje apžvalga. Tyrimas parodė, kad yra labai nedaug idiomų rusų kalboje atitinkančių anglų kalbos idiomų savo forma, išraiškingumu bei reikšme. Nors buvo rasta pavyzdžių, kuriuose anglų kalbos idiomų struktūra ir reikšmė buvo identiška vertimui į rusų kalbą, tyrimas parodė, kad jų yra nedaug. Dominuojanti vertimo strategija šiame vertime pasirodė esanti apibūdinanti strategija, remiantis Vinogradovu, ar parafrazavimo strategija, remiantis Niumarko ir Tori teorijomis.

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This analysis of the translation of idioms in A. Christie's novel *4.50 from Paddington* (2005) has shown that translating idioms from this novel required a lot of knowledge about idioms and their translation problems on the part of the translators. On the whole, the use of different strategies in translation of idioms in literary translation illustrates the diverse ways of treatment of this interesting, peculiar and difficult part of language. However, idioms express the uniqueness of the language and culture in which they are originated and, therefore, the strategies for their translation need careful consideration and the translators need deep knowledge of the source and target languages and cultures.

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