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PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS AND THE CHALLENGES OF LITERAL TRANSLATION

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ABOUT ARTICLE

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Abstract: This article investigates the challenges associated with translating culturally embedded phraseological units through a comparative analysis of Utkir Hoshimov's "Dunyoning ishlari". By examining select excerpts in Uzbek alongside their English and Russian translations, the study reveals the inadequacies of literal translation in capturing cultural nuances. The analysis demonstrates that adaptive strategies often yield more accurate and culturally resonant renderings.

Introduction

Phraseological units—idioms, sayings, and fixed expressions—pose significant challenges in translation, especially when they are deeply embedded in a specific cultural or linguistic context. In literary translation, the task becomes more complex as the translator must balance fidelity to the original with accessibility to the target audience. This paper explores these challenges through a comparative analysis of selected passages from O'tkir Hoshimov's "Dunyoning Ishlari", focusing on their translations into English by Mark Reese and into Russian by A. Ganina.

Literature analysis and methods

Phraseology refers to language-specific fixed expressions whose meanings are not directly derived from the literal meanings of their individual components. Due to their idiomotic nature, these phraseological units often can not to be translated word-for-word without a loss of meaning, which frequently leads to challenges in both translation and interpretation. Nevertheless, such expressions enrich the language by adding vivid emotional and stylistic nuance. Translation, particularly literary translation, is never a neutral act—it is always a negotiation between languages, worldviews, and value systems. Language encodes a culture's assumptions, metaphors, and social norms, which makes the translator's job both linguistically and culturally sensitive. The translation of culturally-bound phrases—a subset of idiomatic language—presents perhaps the greatest challenge, as these expressions often embody layers of historical, emotional, and philosophical meaning. [1.1]

If phraseological units could be translated literally, the issue of phraseology in translation would not arise. In the context of literary translation, the rendering of phraseological expressions can be approached in several ways:

1. Replacing the original phraseological unit with its direct equivalent in the target language;
2. Translating the original expression using functionally and contextually appropriate variants in the target language;
3. Rendering the original phraseological unit through a literal translation.

Analysis and results

One passage from O'tkir Hoshimov's "Dunyoning Ishlari" demonstrates the complexities of translating culturally embedded phraseological units. In this excerpt, the narrator reflects:

"Oyim negadir ko'proq meni avaylaydi. O'rnimga o'zim bilan bir ko'rpada tepishib yotadigan Abduvohid degan o'rtog'immi, akammi turib ketadi. Ba'zan dadamning jahli chiqadi. «Nima, buningni boshida shoxi bormi, ishlasin-da», deydi..."[2.12]

In Mark Reese's English translation, this passage appears as:

"For reasons unknown to me, my mother would lovingly comfort me. She permitted me to stay in bed, while she enlisted a friend of mine, Abduvohid, or my brother to help her. My father would always grow furious. "What, does he have a pair of horns on his head? He should work," he said." [3.13]

In the Russian version by A.Ganina, the same section is rendered as:

"А мама всегда верила и вместо меня брала с собой моего друга по имени Абдувахид, который частенько ночевал у нас, или старшего брата. Иногда папа очень

сердился. «Что он, лучше всех, что ли? Пускай тоже работает», – говорил он про меня.»[4.8]

The Uzbek idiom “boshida shoxi bormi” is frequently used to question why someone is being treated with privilege compared to others. The phrase conveys the implication that the individual is being undeservedly favored.[5.624] While the Russian translator captures the implied meaning—“Что он, лучше всех, что ли?” (Is he better than everyone else?)—the English version by Reese opts for a literal rendering, “does he have a pair of horns?”, which fails to communicate the intended connotation to a non-Uzbek reader. A more effective translation could have been “What, is he some kind of special person?” or “Is he somehow special?”, as these would better preserve the idiomatic meaning for an English-speaking audience. The term “special” functions as an adjective, typically denoting something or someone that is not usual or ordinary, important for some reasons [6.663]. In the context of the given sentence, it refers specifically to an individual who stands out from others and holds particular importance, thereby emphasizing uniqueness and value.

Knowledge of the language cannot be achieved without studying its phraseological system. Knowing phraseology makes it easy to read both publicist and artistic literature. Use of consciousness in phraseological units gives a sense of idiom. The aesthetic appearance of the tongue is enhanced by the use of phraseological terms that are not translated, but rather refined. The study is a complex study of modern English language phraseological units, collected from fiction. This aspect of the Phraseology study is important because not only in English but also in other languages, most of the phraseological units are derived from fiction [7.69].

Another example is found in the passage:

”Bo’pti, borasan. Aytgan ishlarimizni hammasini qilsang, oboramiz. Shu kuni nima yumush buyurishsa, oyog’im olti, qo’lim yetti bo’lib yugurib yurdim.”

Reese translates this as:

“Ok, you shall. We will take you only if you do all the tasks we assign you.” That whole day I did whatever my brothers ordered, feeling like I was on cloud nine.”

The Russian version is rendered as:

“Ладно, пойдешь. Только сперва сделаешь все, что тебе скажут. В тот день я с удвоенной энергией исполнял все, что мне поручалось.”

The Uzbek idiom “oyog’i olti, qo’li yetti” is defined in the aforementioned dictionary as referring to someone acting swiftly and energetically, often due to excitement or urgency. The

English version, however, uses the phrase “on cloud nine”, which merely conveys emotional happiness rather than the energetic physicality emphasized in the original. A more semantically accurate alternative would be “I was running around like crazy,” which better captures the dynamism of the narrator’s activity. This interpretation aligns with the definition of “like crazy” as “fast, actively” in “McGraw-Hill’s Dictionary of American Idioms and Phrasal Verbs” [8.404].

Finally, the passage:

”Bilmayman. – Bilmaysanmi? – O’qituvchi qahr bilan ovozi balandlatdi. – Bolmasa, Pushkin tosh otdimi?” is translated by Reese as:

“I don’t know.” “So you don’t know, do you?” the teacher said, raising his voice, his wrath building. “So, Pushkin must have thrown the stone, eh?”

The Russian version renders this as:

”Не знаю. – Не знаешь? – Учитель рассердился не на шутку и повысил голос: – А кто, по твоему, должен знать?”

The Uzbek phrase “Pushkin tosh otdimi?” is a culturally rooted sarcastic expression used to humorously or critically suggest the improbability of someone else committing an action. It implies: “Who else would have done it—Pushkin?” referring to the renowned Russian poet, as a symbol of absurdity. Reese’s literal translation fails to convey this cultural nuance. An idiomatic English equivalent such as “Who else? Santa Claus?” would more effectively communicate the sarcastic tone to the target audience. The Russian translator successfully captures the pragmatic intent of the statement with “А кто, по твоему, должен знать?” (Then who do you think should know?)

Scholars have expressed varying opinions regarding the translation of phraseological units. For instance, G’aybulla-As-Salom states: “In translation, phraseological units play a significant role in conveying the author’s individual style. The study of problems related to phraseology and idiomatic expressions within the framework of translation theory provides valuable material for lexicology. Through literary translation, the phraseological richness of a language is enhanced. Phraseology plays a crucial role in reflecting the national spirit expressed in the language of a literary work. However, distorting the meaning of proverbs, sayings, and idioms during undermines the artistic value of the work.”[9.240]

Conclusion

The examples analyzed above vividly illustrate the inherent limitations and challenges posed by literal translation when dealing with culturally-bound idiomatic expressions. Idioms are deeply rooted in the socio-cultural and linguistic fabric of a particular speech community,

and their meanings often extend far beyond the literal definitions of their constituent words. As such, translating them verbatim can lead to semantic distortion, cultural misinterpretation, or even complete loss of communicative intent. The comparative analysis of the English and Russian translations of O'tkir Hoshimov's *Dunyoning Ishlari* demonstrates that while the Russian version frequently succeeds in capturing the idiomatic essence and underlying cultural pragmatics of the original Uzbek expressions, the English translation, in several instances, resorts to direct or overly literal renderings. These literal translations, though lexically accurate, often fail to resonate with the target audience due to their unfamiliarity with the source culture's metaphorical frameworks.

This observation underscores the critical importance of employing adaptive and culturally sensitive translation strategies—such as dynamic equivalence, functional equivalence, and cultural substitution—that go beyond mere lexical fidelity. Effective translation should aim not only to convey the surface meaning of the source text but also to preserve its stylistic nuance, cultural specificity, and communicative effect. Especially in literary translation, where the aesthetic and emotional dimensions of language are paramount, maintaining idiomatic integrity is essential to preserving the original work's artistic and cultural resonance.

In sum, the successful translation of culturally-bound idioms demands a deep understanding of both source and target cultures, as well as a high level of linguistic and interpretative skill. By prioritizing semantic and cultural equivalence over rigid word-for-word correspondence, translators can more effectively bridge linguistic gaps and deliver translations that are both faithful to the original and accessible to the intended readership.

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