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FORMULEMES AS A TRANSLATION ISSUE: A CASE STUDY OF ENGLISH AND UKRAINIAN

Abstract

The present article focuses on exploring formulemes in English and Ukrainian from a translational perspective. The multiword units under study constitute a specific type of clichés alongside nickname clichés, termemes and sentencemes. The distinctive characteristic of this class of phrasemes is that they designate a ritualized speech act which correlates with an internal state of the speaker, a moment of time, or a specific event or state of affairs. Formulemes are to be regarded as a hyponym of formulaic sequences and formulas viewed, in turn, as multiword units. Depending on whether the source language formuleme's formal and/or semantic constituents are fully or partially retained in the target language, formulemes may be rendered literally or using translation shifts. If the target language formuleme's form and meaning are identical to those of its source language counterpart, word-for-word translation is used, which, however, proves to be an infrequent occurrence in English-to-Ukrainian and Ukrainian-to-English translation. Far more common are cases when the target language formuleme's form and/or meaning are non-identical to those of its source language counterpart, and so a translation shift takes place. The three basic shifts employed in rendering formulemes are found to be metaphoric transformation, explicitation and antonymic translation. In addition to the three techniques mentioned, contextual translation of formulemes is occasionally possible when conditioned by the pragmatics of the speech act.

Keywords: formuleme, literal translation, translation shift, metaphoric transformation, explicitation, antonymic translation.

Анотація

Стаття присвячена проблемі дослідження формулем в англійській та українській мовах у перекладознавчому ракурсі. Аналізовані полівербальні одиниці становлять окремий тип кліше поруч із прізвиськами-кліше, термемами та сентенсемами. Характерною ознакою цього класу фразем є позначення ними ритуалізованих мовленнєвих актів, які співвідносяться із внутрішнім станом мовця, часовим відрізком чи специфічною подією або станом речей. Формулеми слід розглядати як гіпоніми щодо формульних послідовностей та формул як англійських понять, що, зі свого боку, трактуються як полівербальні одиниці. Залежно від того, чи формальні та/або семантичні складники формулеми мови оригіналу повністю або частково зберігаються в мові перекладу, формулеми можна передавати буквально або застосовуючи перекладацькі трансформації. Дослівний переклад використовується, якщо форма і значення одиниці в мові перекладу ідентичні її формі і значенню в мові оригіналу, що, однак, є нечастим явищем при перекладі з англійської на українську та з української на англійську. Частіше трапляються випадки, коли форма і/або значення одиниці в мові перекладу не ідентичні її формі і/або значенню в мові оригіналу, і, відтак, актуалізуються перекладацькі трансформації. Формулеми можуть відтворюватися за допомогою трьох основних трансформацій: метафоричного перетворення, описового перекладу та антонімічного перекладу. Окрім трьох вказаних способів, подекуди допускається також контекстуальний переклад формулем, що зумовлено прагматикою мовленнєвого акту.

Ключові слова: формулема, буквальный переклад, перекладацька трансформація, метафоричне перетворення, описовий переклад, антонімічний переклад.

1. Introduction

The 21st century has seen an unprecedented increase in the specialization and diversification of science. What was once construed and approached as a whole has become fragmented and

multidivisional inasmuch that each of its aspects either has already evolved or is still evolving into a separate fully-fledged branch with its attributes as well as further ramification. Translation studies are no exception to the rule. No sooner had the nascent discipline been isolated both theoretically and methodologically from linguistics and literary studies in the mid-20th c. than a multitude of its branches emerged. The two basic dimensions of translation studies outlined by Holmes (1972/1988) back in 1972 include "pure" and "applied" translation studies. The former were subdivided into theoretical and descriptive. In turn, theoretical translation studies were further fragmented into general and partial, the latter being split into area-, medium-, problem-, rank-, text-type-, and time-restricted. Thus, it is within problem-restricted partial theoretical "pure" translation studies that translation of phrasemes and, more specifically, *formulemes* falls.

Translation of phrasemes addresses a number of issues, such as rendering multiword units in correlation with 1) the text type; 2) their contextual function; 3) their referential, temporal and local features; 4) the linguistic and literary traditions of the source and/or target cultures; 5) the cultural and linguistic prescriptions of the source and/or target cultures; 6) the acceptability/unacceptability of certain phrasemes by specific cultures; 7) the effect produced on the target culture readership and the source culture readership. It follows from the above that rendition of phrasemes does not boil down to using their dictionary equivalents. Conversely, it is when the dictionary equivalent is unlikely to convey the adequate sense and produce the desired effect upon the reader in the given circumstances that phrasemes shift from the focus area of lexicographers to that of translation theorists.

At present, rendition of phrasemes faces two major problems.

Firstly, there exists a disproportion in the translational and lexicographic coverage of phrasemes by scholars, with a marked trend to view bound word-combinations as presenting limited interest on an interlingual scale to anyone other than dictionary compilers. Yet, in reality, bilingual dictionaries offer only out-of-context equivalents or analogues, which prove crucial in making the source language sense explicit to the translator but may fail to produce the desired effect upon the reader from a given cultural, ethnic, historical, political, social, etc. background. In such cases, the phraseme may be replaced with a contextual analogue, compensated, explained, or even removed from the target text. Occasionally, idiomatic language is also expected to be translated literally, which results in it sounding unnatural but, at the same time, fully complying with the style requirements, as in the brilliant example of Soviet bureaucratic jargon provided by Newmark: "To put it figuratively, foreign trade has become an important artery in the blood circulation of the Soviet Union's economic organism" (1988, p. 26).

Secondly, phrasemes constitute a rather heterogeneous class. Linguistic tradition has it that, according to different approaches, phrasemes may include idioms, collocations, binomials, euphemisms, phrasal verbs, clichés, proverbs and sayings, maxims, adages, etc. However, various types of bound word-combinations have their distinct structural, semantic, stylistic and pragmatic characteristics which may overlap in some contexts and diverge in others. This, in turn, presupposes the need for their discrete analysis by translation theorists in diverse text types, functional styles, communicative situations, cultural backgrounds and *linguoecological* landscapes.

And it is within this miscellaneous and translational under-studied class of phrasemes that *formulemes* as the focus of the present research fall.

2. Critical literature review

Theoretical studies of phrasemes in translation are relatively sparse. It is an infrequent occurrence that phrasemes are addressed as separate subject matter. Awwad (1990, p. 66) relies on a combination of structural and functional approaches, and identifies four correspondence categories idioms can fall into: 1) idioms with correspondence between functions and expressions; 2) idioms with corresponding functions but with slightly different expressions; 3) idioms with corresponding functions but with

completely different expressions; 4) idioms with no corresponding expressions and functions. A comparable, although cognitively-centered, typology is proposed by Charteris-Black (2003, pp. 130-135), who creates the conceptual metaphor AN IDIOM IS A HUMAN and thus delimits "Close Family Members" (idioms with an identical conceptual basis and identical surface lexis), "Ordinary Family Members" (idioms with an identical conceptual basis and similar surface lexis), "False Friends" (idioms with a different conceptual basis and similar surface lexis), "Friends" (idioms with a similar conceptual basis and different surface lexis), and "Strangers" (idioms with a different conceptual basis and different surface lexis). Korunets (Корунець, 2003, сс. 182-195) categorizes idioms and proverbs indiscretely from a perspective of an "equivalence – non-equivalence" continuum realized as the pentad "absolute equivalence – near equivalence – genuine analogy – approximate analogy – description". Retsker (Рецкер, 2007, сс. 143-165) offers a comparable view on translation of phrasemes but from a different – source language – perspective, delimiting figurative and non-figurative phrasemes, the former being conveyed with the full source language image preservation, partial source language image alteration, full source language image substitution and source language image elimination. In a similar vein, Proshina (Прошина, 2008, сс. 135-141) analyzes phrasemes according to their metaphoric/non-metaphoric nature and lists the shifts (known as transformations in the Soviet and post-Soviet translational traditions) employed in their rendition. Shifts in translation of phrasemes are also addressed, although under different names, by van der Merwe (2001, pp. 80-81) – as methods, by Zitawi (2003, p. 244) – as techniques, and by Strakšienė (2009, p. 14) – as strategies.

Theoretical accounts on binomials (also known as conjoint phrases of near-synonyms (Toury, 2012, p. 131)), collocations, phrasal verbs, metaphors in phrasemes (Прошина, 2008; Newmark, 1988; Toury, 2012) are equally found in translation studies. Bound word-combinations are also addressed as a supplementary factor influencing the naturalness of translation (Newmark, 1988, pp. 24-29).

Empirical research into phrasemes as a translation issue, although more extensive, remains predominantly restricted to specific literary works (Байкова & Скипина, 2021; Барбазюк, 2019; Коршунова, 2021; Renchin & Amgalan, 2021).

However, none of the studies discussed contains any mention of formulemes, which are frequently used in everyday communication, rarely have absolute equivalents when translated and yet remain an uncharted path in the 21st c. translation theory.

3. Aim and objectives

The aim of the present article is to investigate formulemes as a translation issue upon English and Ukrainian language material. Therefore, the two key research objectives include delimiting the term *formuleme* from its seeming counterparts (given the multivariance and incompatibility of modern phraseological terminology) as well as identifying the translation techniques and, more specifically, shifts involved in rendering this class of phrasemes from English into Ukrainian and vice versa.

4. Research methodology

The study falls within the scope of the structuralist paradigm and, thus, construes formulemes as operational units deriving both their existence and value from interaction with and interdependence on other elements of language system. The main method underlying the present research is the comparative translation analysis, which is premised on the juxtaposition of the form-and-meaning unity of the source language formuleme with that of the target language formuleme. The resulting correlation allows for delimiting the translation shifts actuated, i.e. all that appears as new with respect to the original, or fails to appear where it might have been expected (Popovič, 1970, p. 79). In addition, the paper contains elements of pragmatic analysis, the use of which is substantiated by the main distinctive feature of formulemes – their relevance to a specific range of speech acts. Therefore, the pragmatic values conveyed by the translated unit must equally be analyzed in the source language and the target language.

5. Research results and discussion

The present research relies on the phraseological terminology employed by Mel'čuk (2015). According to his conception of phrasemes, *formulemes* constitute a separate class of compositional semantic-lexemic phrasemes, i.e. clichés. The meaning of the latter is comprised of the semantic components carried by the cliché's lexemic components and is constrained with respect to the cliché's representation of its referent. Depending on whether the constraining referent is concrete or abstract and specific or generic, four classes of clichés can be singled out:

1) nicknames (whose referent is concrete and specific, i.e. an individual, an object, an event, etc., as in **Eng** *brown plague* – **Ukr** *коричнева чума*);

2) termemes (whose referent is concrete and generic, i.e. a class of individuals, objects, events, etc., as in **Eng** *German shepherd* – **Ukr** *німецька вівчарка*);

3) formulemes (whose referent is abstract and specific, i.e. a ritualized speech act concerning a particular situation, as in **Eng** *you don't say* – **Ukr** *і не кажи/кажіть*);

4) sentencemes (whose referent is abstract and generic, i.e. a general statement concerning a class of situations, as in **Eng** *nothing ventured, nothing gained* – **Ukr** *вовків бояться – в ліс не ходити*) (ibid., сс. 69-70).

Therefore, a *formuleme* is a cliché that has a specific abstract referent, i.e. a particular given situation. This situation can designate:

1) an internal state of the speaker, namely:

a) a conviction, e.g.:

Eng *all men are created equal* – **Ukr** *усі люди – рівні*

Ukr *вік – це тільки цифра в паспорті* – **Eng** *age is just a number*

b) a question, e.g.:

Eng *how are things with you?* – **Ukr** *як у тебе справи?*

Ukr *у якому плані/розумінні?* – **Eng** *how do you mean?*

c) a statement, e.g.:

Eng *mustn't complain* – **Ukr** *не скаржуся*

Ukr *буває й гірше* – **Eng** *could be worse*

d) a wish, e.g.:

Eng *break a leg!* – **Ukr** *ні пуху ні пера!*

Ukr *швидкого одужання!* – **Eng** *speedy recovery!*

2) a moment of time, e.g.:

Eng *what time do you make it? (BrE) / what time do you have? (AmE)* – **Ukr** *котра зараз година?*

Ukr *час закінчився!* – **Eng** *time's up!*

3) a specific event or state of affairs, e.g.:

Eng *will you marry me?* – **Ukr** *ти вийдеш за мене?*

Ukr *курсив автора* – **Eng** *italics mine*

The term *formuleme* is not to be confused with the seemingly synonymous *formulaic sequence*, which designates "a sequence, continuous or discontinuous, of words or other elements, which is, or appears to be, prefabricated: that is, stored and retrieved whole from memory at the time of use, rather than being subject to generation or analysis by the language grammar" (Wray, 2002, p. 9), and *formula*, which designates "a string of formulaic language with idiosyncratic conditions of use" (Schmitt & Carter, 2004, p. 4). Relying on the definitions provided, both may be regarded as umbrella terms which encompass formulemes and are roughly congruent with what Mel'čuk conceives as phrasemes. Yet, given the multitude of diverse denominations of the latter in various linguistic traditions, paradigms and conceptions, it is crucial to always proceed from a specific linguistic framework (sometimes adopted by as few as one scholar) endowed with its own terminology and concept hierarchy.

Although formulemes are not numerous in English and Ukrainian, they are extensively used in both writing and oral speech. This class of phrasemes is generally intelligible to non-native speakers possessing an intermediate knowledge of the foreign language. However, formulemes have a conventional structure which cannot be altered at the speaker's discretion. For instance, translating **Ukr** *пані та панове!* literally as **Eng** *Misters and Mistresses!* instead of the conventional **Eng** *ladies and gentlemen!* would sound comprehensible but utterly unnatural to native speakers of English.

Depending on whether the source language formuleme's formal and/or semantic constituents are fully or partially retained in the target language, *literal translation* or *translation shifts* are respectively employed.

If the target language form and meaning is identical to the source language form and meaning, the translation is *literal*, i.e. word-for-word:

Eng *the customer is always right* – **Ukr** *клієнт завжди має рацію*

Eng *it's just a matter of time* – **Ukr** *це тільки справа часу*

Eng *one for all, and all for one* – **Ukr** *один за всіх, і всі за одного*

Ukr – *Христос воскрес!* – *Воістину воскрес!* – **Eng** – *Christ is risen!* – *Truly/Indeed, He is risen!*

Ukr – *Христос рождається!* – *Славимо Його!* – **Eng** – *Christ is born!* – *Glorify Him!*

Ukr – *Христос хрещиться!* – *В ріці Йордані!* – **Eng** – *Christ is baptized!* – *In the River Jordan!*

In practice, such absolute equivalents prove to be a rare occurrence. Although literal translation is performed by rendering each word separately, certain divergences are permissible as long as they do not alter the semantics of any of the lexical constituents of a formuleme. Structural incompatibilities may include, amongst others, omission of a personal pronoun or a linking verb (which is conventional in Ukrainian but generally unacceptable in standard English), or even rendering one of the constituents with the help of a hypercorrect phraseme (as in *має рацію* that has supplanted the no longer considered prescriptive *правий* above).

If the target language form and/or meaning are non-identical to the source language form and/or meaning, a translation shift takes place. A *translation shift* (or a *translation transformation*) constitutes "any grammatical or lexical deviation in the target text from the formal linguistic structure of the source text" (Laver & Mason, 2018, p. 121). In this study, three basic translation shifts employed in rendering formulemes are identified: *metaphoric transformation*, *explicatory translation* and *antonymic translation*.

Metaphoric transformation presupposes a transference of the phrasemic meaning based on the similarity of the notions designated (Прошина, 2008, с. 43). The correspondence types thus established include *near equivalence*, *genuine analogy* and *approximate analogy* (using the terminology proposed by Korunets (Корунець, 2003, сс. 182-195)).

Near equivalence is the type of correspondence between the source language phraseme and the target language phraseme in which their forms are partly identical but their meanings are fully identical, as in:

Eng *have a nice day!* – **Ukr** *гарного дня!*

Eng *it has to be somewhere* – **Ukr** *десь воно тут було*

Eng *let's just kiss and make up!* – **Ukr** *а тепер помирилися!*

Eng *this too shall pass* – **Ukr** *і це мине*

Ukr *живи кожною хвилиною / цінуй кожну мить* – **Eng** *live each moment like it's your last*

Ukr *іди за своїм щастям* – **Eng** *follow your bliss*

Ukr *ти жартуєш!* – **Eng** *you must be joking! / you are kidding me!*

Ukr *як тобі таке, Лоне Маску?* – **Eng** *how do you like it, Elon Musk?*

Similar to absolute equivalents found in literal translation, near equivalents are also characterized by certain discrepancies in the form, but the latter prove to be conditioned by factors (cultural, historical, pragmatic, social, stylistic, etc.) other than language structure per se.

Genuine analogy is the type of correspondence between the source language phraseme and the target language phraseme in which their forms are non-identical but their meanings are fully identical, as in:

Eng *forgive and forget* – **Ukr** *що було, те загуло*

Eng *have you got the time?* (BrE) / *do you have the time?* (AmE) – **Ukr** *не підкажете, котра (зараз) година?*

Ukr *маємо те, що маємо* – **Eng** *it is what it is / we are where we are*

Ukr *що поробиш* – **Eng** *so it goes*

Approximate analogy is the type of correspondence between the source language phraseme and the target language phraseme in which their forms are non-identical but the meanings are partly identical, as in:

Eng *God has a plan* – **Ukr** *чоловік мислить, а Бог креслить/рядить*

(the English formuleme is translated as the Ukrainian sentenceme (proverb))

Eng *it will all look better in the morning* – **Ukr** *ніч прижсене, і ніч віджсене*

(the English formuleme is translated as the Ukrainian sentenceme (proverb))

Ukr *думки матеріальні* – **Eng** *what the mind can conceive, it can achieve*

(the Ukrainian formuleme is translated as the English sentenceme (proverb); besides, the Ukrainian formuleme may be used as a precaution)

Ukr *і я там був, мед-пиво тив, по бороді текло, а в рот не попало* – **Eng** *so there's a little tale for you, and for me some rolls and some honey too*

(the English explicitation is provided by Myrkovich (Миркович, 2017, с. 88); however, the analogue is unattested in authentic English texts)

Explicitation consists in making the information that is implicit in the source text explicit in the target text (Прошина, 2008, с. 44). This shift is generally used when the source language phraseme cannot be translated as a unit of the same rank (phraseme) and type (bound [phraseme]) in the target language, because there exists no equivalent or analogue, as in:

Eng *flattery will get you nowhere* – **Ukr** *не підлабузньоїся/підлецуїся*

Ukr *ось і казочці кінець, а хто слухав – молодець* – **Eng** *and this is the end of our fairy tale*

The distinctive feature of explicitation of formulemes and phrasemes, in general, is their deidiomization, i.e. the replacement of a phraseme with a non-phraseme, namely a word, a free word-combination, or a sentence.

Antonymic translation involves the transformation of an affirmative structure into a negative one or of a negative structure into a positive one (Бархударов, 1975, сс. 215-218). The shift may be realized at the level of words, phrases and sentences. The latter case is found in the formulemes below:

Eng *let's not reinvent the wheel* – **Ukr** *навіщо придумувати колесо?*

Ukr *"Я" – остання літера алфавіту* – **Eng** *there is no "I" in "team"*

It is noteworthy that, apart from the three translation shifts discussed, formulemes may occasionally be translated differently depending on their context. For instance, the English farewell formula *see you later, alligator!* can be rendered out of context as the Ukrainian *чао-какао!* Yet, if it is followed by the answer *in a while, crocodile!* or *after while, crocodile!*, the translator should focus on selecting or creating a pragmatic equivalent conveying not only the same message but equally similar expressive connotations. The new translation situation may be rendered into Ukrainian as follows:

Eng – *See you later, alligator!* – *In a while, crocodile!* – **Ukr** – *Бувай, крокодиле!* – *Чао, гамадриле!*

6. Conclusions and implications for further research

Ontologically, formulemes constitute a specific type of clichés alongside nickname clichés, termemes and sentencemes. The distinctive characteristic of this class of phrasemes is that they designate a ritualized speech act which can correlate with an internal state of the speaker, a moment of time, or a specific event or state of affairs. Hierarchically, formulemes are to be regarded as a

hyponym of formulaic sequences and formulas viewed, in turn, as multiword units. Translatologically, depending on whether the source language formuleme's formal and/or semantic constituents are fully or partially retained in the target language, formulemes may be rendered literally or using translation shifts. If the target language form and meaning is identical to the source language form and meaning, word-for-word translation is used, which, however, proves to be an infrequent occurrence in English-to-Ukrainian and Ukrainian-to-English translation. Far more common are cases when the target language form and/or meaning are non-identical to the source language form and/or meaning, and so a translation shift takes place. The three basic shifts employed in rendering formulemes are found to be metaphoric transformation, explicatory translation and antonymic translation. In addition to the techniques discussed, contextual translation of formulemes is occasionally possible too when conditioned by the pragmatics of the speech act.

Further research focusing on the rendition of other types of phrasemes as well as on formulemes in languages other than English and Ukrainian will need to be undertaken to enhance our understanding of the status, functions and correspondence of multiword units in translation.

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List of abbreviations


Eng – English

Ukr – Ukrainian

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