



THE PROBLEM OF EQUIVALENCE IN THE TRANSLATION OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS

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Abstract: This article examines the problem of equivalence in translating phraseological units.

Keywords: phraseology, translation, equivalence, semantics

Аннотация : В статье рассматриваются проблемы эквивалентности при переводе фразеологических единиц.

Ключевые слова: фразеология, перевод, эквивалентность, язык

The translation of phraseological units is considered one of the most complex and pressing issues in modern translation studies. Phraseologisms are linguistic units that possess figurative meanings and embody cultural and historical components, making their complete and accurate transfer into another language a continuous challenge. For this reason, the problem of equivalence occupies a central place in the process of translating phraseological units (1. Newmark P., 1988. 112).

This complexity is further intensified by the structurally bound nature of idiomatic expressions, where the overall meaning cannot be deduced from the literal definitions of their individual constituents. Consequently, when a translator encounters these tightly integrated lexical items, the traditional word-for-word paradigm fails, necessitates a shift toward conceptual and communicative paradigms. This demands not just a mapping of lexical items, but an advanced decoding of the source text's stylistic nuances and socio-historical background.

Furthermore, achieving equivalence within this domain requires a systematic evaluation of the pragmatic impact on the target audience. The translator must gauge



whether a closely aligned semantic substitute will evoke the same emotional resonance, cognitive response, and aesthetic appreciation in the target culture as the original expression did within its native environment. Thus, negotiating equivalence becomes an act of cross-cultural mediation, balancing linguistic fidelity with communicative dynamics to prevent semantic distortion.

The concept of equivalence in translation signifies the semantic and functional correspondence between the source text and the target text. In the case of phraseological units, ensuring this correspondence becomes even more complicated because they frequently possess national-cultural characteristics. Therefore, when translating phraseologisms, it is essential to apply functional equivalence rather than literal translation (2. Baker M., 1992. 74).

There are several primary strategies in the translation of phraseological units. One of them is the method of finding a complete equivalent. In this case, a unit that is synonymous and functionally corresponding to the phraseologism in the source language exists in the target language. However, such instances do not always occur (3. Cowie A.P., 1998. 203). When a complete equivalent is unavailable, translators must navigate the delicate balance between structural preservation and semantic clarity. This often forces a choice between introducing a foreign cultural metaphor into the target language through calque (literal translation) or replacing it entirely with a localized idiom that shares the same functional value. The selection of either strategy heavily relies on the genre of the text and the degree to which the target audience can tolerate cultural foreignness without losing the thread of the narrative.

Moreover, the search for equivalence is frequently obstructed by the existence of phraseological lacunae—instances where a specific cultural concept wrapped in an idiom has no conceptual counterpart in the target language. In these scenarios, the translator is compelled to abandon idiomatic correspondence altogether in favor of descriptive or contextual interpretation. While this ensures that the core



informative message is accurately conveyed, it inevitably diminishes the stylistic vividness and rhetorical force that the original phraseological unit possessed.

The second strategy is the utilization of partial equivalence. In this method, the general meaning of the phraseologism is preserved, but its figurative component is partially altered. This serves to ensure the comprehensibility of the translated text (2. Baker M., 1992. 91). The third approach is descriptive translation. In this case, the meaning of the phraseological unit is explained using ordinary words. This method is particularly applied when a corresponding phraseologism does not exist in the target language. However, the figurativeness of the phraseologism may be lost through this method (1. Newmark P., 1988. 125).

Cultural factors play a critical role in the translation of phraseological units. Behind every phraseologism lies a specific cultural context, and this context must be taken into account during translation. Otherwise, the translation risks being misinterpreted (4. Fernando C., 1996. 178).

Furthermore, pragmatic correspondence is essential in the translation of phraseological units. The translation must be adequate not only semantically but also from the perspective of its communicative purpose. This demands a high level of both linguistic and cultural proficiency from the translator (5. Nida E., 1964. 159).

Another crucial aspect of translating phraseological units is their context-dependent nature. The same phraseologism can acquire different meanings across various texts. For this reason, the translator must perform an in-depth analysis of the context in each specific case.

Additionally, phraseological units carry particular significance in literary texts. They express the author's individual style and level of imagery. Consequently, maintaining stylistic correspondence during their translation is of vital importance (3. Cowie A.P., 1998. 215).

Errors committed in the translation of phraseological units are frequently



associated with their misinterpretation. This, in turn, exerts a negative impact on the quality of the translation. Therefore, it is imperative for the translator to possess a profound understanding of the semantic and pragmatic characteristics of phraseological units.

In modern translation studies, the issue of translating phraseological units is being investigated based on fresh approaches. In particular, functional and communicative approaches are yielding effective results in this regard.

Overall, translating phraseological units is a complex yet crucial process, serving as a bridge between language and culture.

In conclusion, ensuring equivalence in the translation of phraseological units stands as one of the primary responsibilities of a translator. This process inherently demands comprehensive linguistic and cultural knowledge. Ultimately, this multifaceted process underscores that a translator does not merely operate as a linguistic technician, but rather functions as a cultural diplomat. Achieving true equivalence requires going beyond surface-level structural alignment to decipher the cognitive and conceptual matrices that generate idiomatic language. As modern translation paradigms shift toward more dynamic and communicative models, the ability to successfully bridge these distinct phraseological landscapes remains the benchmark of high-quality translation.

Looking forward, the study of phraseological equivalence must continue to integrate insights from cognitive linguistics and cultural anthropology to address evolving global communication needs. By systematizing these translation strategies, researchers and practitioners can better preserve the expressive richness of the source text while ensuring maximum clarity for the target audience. This dual commitment to fidelity and accessibility is what ultimately safeguards the integrity of cross-cultural discourse in an increasingly interconnected academic and literary world.



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