

A CASE STUDY OF RUSSIAN STUDENTS TRANSLATING IDIOMS FROM GERMAN HOROSCOPES

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Abstract: This article describes and analyzes the results of an experiment aimed at exploring difficulties that L2 learners face when translating idioms in context. Twenty students took part in the experiment. The instrument used in the experiment was a compilation of four phraseologically rich extracts (horoscopes) which the students had to translate from German (L2) into Russian (L1). The experiment showed that poorly developed identification skills caused failure to translate phraseological units. Adequacy of translation mostly depended on whether an idiom was opaque or transparent. The students applied such inadequate translation strategies as literal translation, omission and, mostly, the choice of an incorrect counterpart when translating opaque or semi-opaque idioms from German into Russian. The students translated idioms adequately if the latter are transparent or have equivalents in the Russian language. The results of the experiment demonstrated that more attention should be paid to identification and translation strategies in the classroom; especially, when translating contextually modified phraseological units.

Key words: Context, German as a Foreign Language, Horoscope, Phraseological Unit, Phraseology, Press, Russian Language

1 Introduction

Numerous linguists and educators recognize the importance of teaching and learning idioms, as they pose a challenge to second language learners (e.g. Granger, Meunier, 2008; Naciscione, 2001). Translation of phraseological units (PUs) in context can be even more daunting for students. As Baker (1992: 65) observes 'the main problems that idiomatic and fixed expressions pose in translation relate to two main areas: the ability to recognize and interpret an idiom correctly and the difficulties in rendering various aspects of meaning that an idiom or a fixed expression conveys into the target language'. And it seems reasonable to assume that the bigger the gap between the source language and the target language is, the more difficult the transfer of idiomatic meaning can be.

This article seeks to determine how German-learning students translate PUs from German (the source language) to Russian (the target language) in context. Comparative studies have shown that most of German PUs do not find phraseological equivalents in Russian (e.g. Yusupova, 2011; Zimina, 2007). This confirms the statement that translation of PUs may cause serious problems for students.

M. Baker (1992) offers four problem-solving strategies when translating idioms: 1) using an idiom of similar meaning and form; 2) using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form; 3) paraphrasing; 4) omitting of an idiom.

After the study of various translation quality assessment methods (Ayupova, Dullieva, Kulkova, 2016; House, 1997) we have come to conclusion that in the present study we will consider M. Baker's first three strategies of translating idioms as adequate; however, omission is excluded. According to M. Baker (1992), this technique is used when a particular idiom plays a little role in the development of the source text. In our study, we focus on contextually modified PUs, which, on the contrary, play an important role in a context (Naciscione, 2001; Safina, Varlamova, Tulusina, 2015).

According to A. Naciscione, PUs in discourse can appear either in their most common form and meaning ('core use') or 'a

particular instance of a unique stylistic application of a PU in discourse', called 'instantial use' (2001: 235). Instantial use creates significant changes in form and meaning. It is more sophisticated than core use and requires greater awareness from a translator.

For example:

1. *"Durch den Brexit hat sich die Welt leider grundlegend verändert", sagte Grube und verwies auf die Abwertung des britischen Pfunds. "Wir würden also Geld aus dem Fenster werfen - und ein solches Handeln wäre töricht."* (<http://www.tagesspiegel.de/wirtschaft/staatsbeteiligungen-bund-verschont-die-bahn-und-kauft-bei-telekom-nach/14797108.html>)

2. *Wenn staatliche Organe und Entscheidungsträger das Geld mehr, als fahrlässig, oft wissentlich, aus dem Fenster werfen, dann ist das kriminell und eine m. E. eine strafbare Handlung im Amt!* (<http://www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/sozial/es/steuerhinterziehung-wird-durch-abkommen-endgueltig-kriminell-a-999594.html>)

In the first context the PU *Geld aus dem Fenster werfen* (lit. to throw money out of the window) is used in its most common form and meaning without acquiring any additional stylistic features in discourse.

In the second context the PU undergoes a structural change. The instantial components '*mehr, als fahrlässig, oft wissentlich*' (lit. more than negligently, often knowingly) are inserted to specify the phraseological meaning of the PU. This type of transformation is called insertion of a component(s).

In this article we will deploy the following terms denoting different types of PU modifications (Fernando, 1996; Naciscione, 2001):

1. replacement of a component: a base component of a PU is substituted by one or several instantial components;
2. addition of an instantial component(s) to the beginning/end of a PU;
3. insertion of an instantial component(s) into the body of a PU;
4. cleft use: instantial components split up a PU;
5. permutation: rearranging of the words of a PU;
6. ellipsis: deletion of a PU component(s);
7. phraseological reiteration: repetition of the whole PU, its parts or isolated components;
8. phraseological saturation: interfusion of several PUs which are modified in one stretch of text, blending and intermingling;
9. phraseological pun: the interplay of idiomatic and literal meanings of a PU;
10. extended phraseological metaphor: a pattern which involves a string of sub-images of a PU creating a cohesive network of associative metaphorical bonds;
11. contamination: blending of two PUs.

Although theoretical studies point at the inherent stylistic potential of PU modifications, empirical studies on translating instantial patterns in a classroom are scarce (Malysheva, 2008). We present a study that at least partially attempts to fill that void in research. We investigated the relationships between PU

modifications and their translation by L2 learners. The research questions were:

- 1) Is the translation of modified PUs more difficult to L2 learners than the translation of non-modified PUs?
- 2) Do the strategies of translation depend on the type of modification?

2 Methods

The experiment was conducted at Kazan Federal University (Russia) in 2016-2017. The participants were 20 students of the third and fourth year of University studying German Language. The participation in the experiment was voluntary and anonymous.

The instrument used in the experiment was a compilation of four horoscopes selected from a magazine *Brigitte* (<http://www.brigitte.de/>). The choice of horoscopes is conditioned by the fact that they are 'extraordinarily rich natural source of idioms' (Mccarthy, Carter, 2014: 113). The participants were asked to translate horoscopes into Russian. Focus on idioms was not mentioned. The participants were given 30 minutes to carry out this work. The students could not use a dictionary.

The horoscopes contained twelve PUs in their core use:

1. viel kostet (cost a lot)
2. Beklemmungen kriegen (feel oppressed)
3. ins Spiel kommen (come into play)
4. jm etwas ans Herz legen (recommend smth warmly)
5. zur Herausforderung werden (be a challenge)
6. Herz über Verstand (heart over mind)
7. mal hier, mal dort (here and there)
8. mit Sinn und Verstand (do smth sensibly)
9. Reise zu neuen Ufern (journey to new shores)
10. Achterbahn fahren (ride a rollercoaster).
11. etwas zur Ruhe bringen (bring smth to rest)
12. die Suche nach Sündenböcken (search for scapegoats)

Eight PUs from the horoscopes were deployed in their instancial stylistic use:

1. ...ziehen alle Kraft überwiegend aus sich selbst ziehen...

The instancial component *überwiegend* (lit. mostly) is introduced into the base form of the PU *Kraft aus etwas ziehen* (lit. to draw strength from smth). As we can see, insertion affects both structure and meaning of the PU, specifying the latter.

2. ...eine Schulter zum Anlehnen (ersehen)...

The instancial component *ersehen* (lit. to desire) is added to the end of the base form of the PU *eine Schulter zum Anlehnen* (lit. a shoulder to lean on). Addition leads to the intensification of meaning because the verb 'ersehen' is expressive.

3. ...ins Leben reden...

This PU usage is a rare example of contamination, an instancial pattern involving blending of two PUs. In our case, they are *Ins*

Leben rufen (lit. to bring into life) and *Ins Gewissen reden* (lit. to appeal to conscience). The beginning of the first PU mingles with the ending of the second PU.

4. ...das Einzelkämpfertum aufzugeben...

This example illustrates replacement. The component 'kampf' of the PU *den Kampf aufgeben* (lit. to give up the fight) is replaced by the instancial component 'Einzelkämpfertum' (lit. individual fight) with an expressive suffix '-tum'.

5. ...die großen Auftritte hinzulegen...

Here is another example of insertion. The instancial component *großen* (lit. great) is introduced into the base form of the PU *den Auftritt hinlegen* (lit. to make a dramatic entrance), intensifying the phraseological meaning of the PU.

6. ...aus der Balance bringen (könnten)...

Here is another example of addition. The instancial component, represented by a modal verb *könnten* (lit. can), is added to the end of the base form of the PU *aus der Balance bringen* (lit. to bring out of balance).

7. ...hungern Sie nicht nur nach geistigem Futter...

In this example the instancial component *nicht nur* (lit. not only) is introduced into the base form of the PU *nach geistigem Futter hungern* (lit. to go hungry for spiritual food) modifying its meaning.

8. ...viel zu kurz zu kommen...

This is an example of addition where the instancial component *viel* (lit. too) is added to the beginning of the PU *jm zu kurz kommen* (lit. to come too shortly) in order to intensify its meaning.

3 Results

Having analyzed the students' variants of translation, we come to the following results:

1) the highest percentage of adequate translation of non-modified PUs is recorded for the idioms *ins Spiel kommen* (85%) and *viel kostet* (70%), while the lowest score is for the idioms *mal hier, mal dort* (15%) and *Beklemmungen kriegen* (20%) (see Table 1);

2) the highest percentage of adequate translation of modified PUs is recorded for the idioms *aus der Balance bringen* (70%) and *nach geistigem Futter hunger* (70%), while the lowest score is for the idioms *den (grossen) Auftritt hinlegen* (0%) and *jm zu kurz kommen* (0%) (see Table 2);

3) inadequate translation of both non-modified PUs and modified PUs is represented by literal translation (18% and 15% respectively), omission (20% and 25% respectively) and, mostly, by the choice of an incorrect counterpart with a different meaning (62% and 60% respectively) (see Figure 1).

The results of our experiment are provided in numbers and visualized in tables and figures:

Table 1 Percentage of Students' Adequate and Inadequate Translation of Non-modified PUs

№	Idioms in their Core Use	Adequate translation (%)	Inadequate translation (%)
1	viel kostet	70	30
2	Beklemmungen kriegen	20	80
3	ins Spiel kommen	85	15
4	jm etwas ans Herz legen	20	80
5	zur Herausforderung werden	30	70

6	Herz über Verstand	30	70
7	mal hier, mal dort	15	85
8	mit Sinn und Verstand	55	45
9	Reise zu neuen Ufern	45	55
10	Achterbahn fahren	65	35
11	etwas zur Ruhe bringen	50	50
12	die Suche nach Sündenböcken	30	70

Table 2 Percentage of Students' Adequate and Inadequate Translation of Modified PUs

№	Idioms in their Instantial Use	Adequate Translation (%)		Inadequate translation (%)
		Instantial pattern is transferred into L2	Instantial pattern is not transferred into L2	
1	ziehen alle Kraft <u>überwiegend</u> aus sich selbst ziehen	5	20	75
2	eine Schulter zum Anlehnen (<u>ersehen</u>)	50	15	35
3	<u>ins Leben reden</u>	20	5	75
4	das <u>Einzelkämpfertum</u> aufzugeben	25	5	70
5	die <u>großen</u> Auftritte hinzulegen	0	0	100
6	aus der Balance bringen (<u>könnten</u>)	50	20	30
7	hungern Sie <u>nicht nur</u> nach geistigem Futter	65	5	30
8	<u>viel zu kurz</u> zu kommen	0	0	100

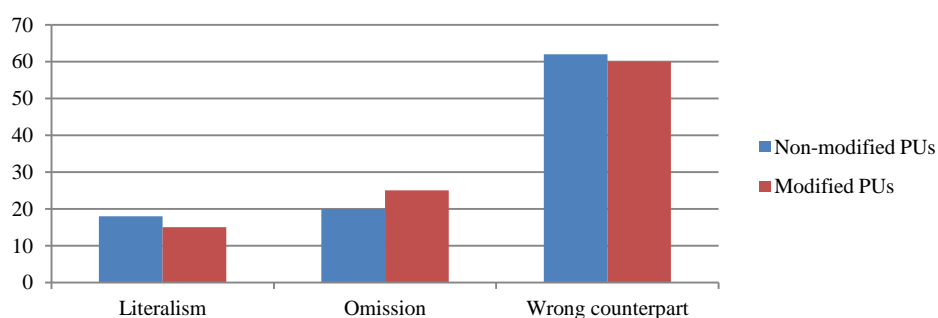


Figure 1 Percentage of Types of Inadequate Translation of Non-modified and Modified PUs

4 Discussion

Table 1 reveals that the PUs *viel kostet* and *ins Spiel kommen* turned out to be the easiest idioms for translation. We presume that the majority of the students (70 and 85% respectively) translated them correctly because these idioms have equivalents in Russian; they are free word combinations with the same lexical components as the German PUs (Rus. 'дорого стоить' and 'вступать в игру'). The familiarity with the component 'Achterbahn' (lit. rollercoaster) might have helped the students to grasp the meaning of the PU *Achterbahn fahren*. 65% of the students translated it adequately.

As regards modified PUs, Table 2 shows that most of the students (65%) had no difficulty in translating the PU *hungern Sie nicht nur nach geistigem Futter* into Russian and preserving its modification. Again, we believe that it happened due to the fact that there is a collocation in Russian with a similar imagery (Rus. 'духовная пища' which literally means 'spiritual food'); moreover, the insertion of a negative component 'nicht nur' does not obscure the meaning of the PU. The modified PUs *eine Schulter zum Anlehnen (ersehen)* and *aus der Balance bringen (könnten)* were translated by half of the students; addition of the components was preserved. The transparency of the second PU enabled the students to understand its phraseological meaning by only knowing the meaning of its constituents. Addition of the modal verb was easy to interpret too. The first PU is also transparent; still, less students managed to transfer its modification into Russian. It might have happened because the students were not familiar with the verb 'ersehen' (lit. to desire, long for smth).

More than half of the students translated PUs with the help of a wrong counterpart. For example, the main component of the German PU *ans Herz legen* (to recommend smth warmly) is 'herz' (lit. heart). The students erroneously translated this PU with the help of the Russian PUs with the same component 'heart' or 'soul' overlooking the fact that these PUs have a different meaning; for example, the students employed the PU *западать в сердце/душу* which has a different meaning ('to be engraved upon smb's heart'). This confirms S. Vlahov and S. Florin's (2009) statement that translators might be hypnotized by one constituent of an idiom.

In rare cases, the students gave a word-for-word translation of a PU which did not convey the meaning of the German PU and did not make any sense in the Russian language; for example, the PU *den großen Auftritte hinzulegen* was translated as *большое выступление ложиться*, which literally means 'a big performance lies'. It must be mentioned that we distinguish between appropriate word-for-word translation and inappropriate word-for-word translation, called 'literalism' (Rus. буквализм). Literalisms slavishly copy the construction of a source PU and distort its meaning (Kunin, 1972).

Omission is viewed as inadequate translation in our study because all of the PUs under analysis played a big role in the development of the source text; it means that if the students omitted a PU, the meaning of the text altered. Mostly, the students omitted the modified PUs *ins Leben reden* and *viel zu kurz zu kommen*. These semi-opaque and opaque PUs were not understood by the students of German. As M. Mezmaž states, an opaque idiom is hardly possible to guess unless it is already learned (2009).

Overall, if the PU is modified, there is a lower rate of successful translation (see Figure 2). The strategies of translation of modified PUs depend on the type of transformation; addition and insertion of instancial components show a higher rate of adequate

translation in comparison with contamination or replacement of a component (see Table 2). Still, adequacy of translation mostly depended on whether an idiom was opaque or transparent.

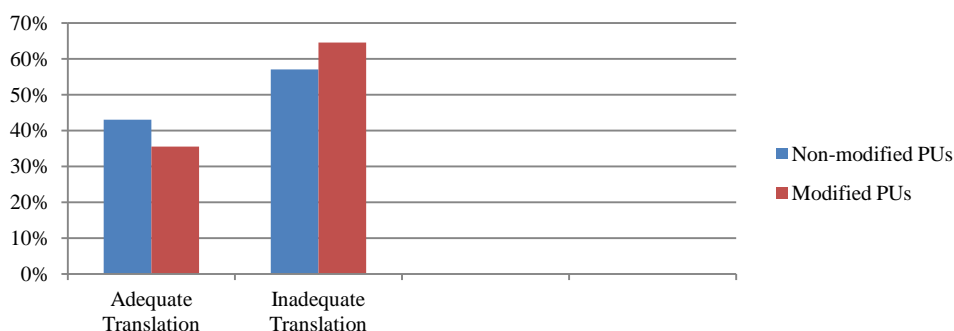


Figure 2 Difference in Percentage of Adequate and Inadequate Translation between Non-modified and Modified PUs

5 Conclusion

The results of this case study may inform students, educators and translators of the major stumbling blocks to reaching adequate translation of PUs, both non-modified and modified. Further research involving students' perspectives on the process of translating idioms in context should be undertaken. Suggesting solutions that may help to limit or avoid inaccuracies is vital.

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