DO ASSERTIONS, QUESTIONS OR WISHES MAKE A 'THICK' TRANSLATION?

Anca-Mariana PEGULESCU
Romanian Ministry of Education and Scientific Research

Abstract: Linguists and linguistic theories conveyed the idea that utterance meanings are the ones associated with the conventions that rule our daily existence. The meaning which has to do with understanding is subjected to another mechanism where metaphors in proverbs may mean something else.
Beginning with the literal meaning of words, phrases or sentences, proverbs can offer a perfect image of a literary translation. I have adopted a pragmatic functional approach within the analysis I have undertaken and I targeted the ethnofields of 'joy' and 'life'.

Keywords: contextualization, meaning, intention, language pattern, transfer.

1.Between literal and literary translation, the theory of meaning can lead to philosophical semantics: words and phrases or simple sentences which convey in one language a certain message that can be the same as what has been conveyed in the other language. A different situation is also possible: the message is conveyed but the words, phrases or the simple sentence do not display the same terms in the two languages.

In the case of *proverbs* the approach can be even more challenging. As *proverbs* are considered utterances, they hide in their deep structure, actions. Actions are said to be undertaken for reasons and they are meant to express a certain attitude or a specific thought. I have focused on assertions, even if *proverbs* offer a much richer display of language patterns (conditionals, imperatives, wishes). Assertions may be differently displayed, the message is nevertheless understood as a conclusion, a life lesson:

E: Art is long, **life** is short.

R: **Viaţa**-i scurtă, învăţătura-i lungă.

(the above paremic pair is, in fact, a comparison between 'life' as human existence and

'art' which can include 'learning' and 'craft'. The two languages, English and Romanian do

not keep the same word order and the language transfer is not operated between the same

terms)

Romanian paremiology flourished during the last two decades of the 20th century, when modern ideas were published both in Romania and abroad. Names like I.C. Chiţimia, G. Muntean, Cezar Tabarcea or. C. Negreanu (to mention only some of the devoted researchers of this domain) proved the multidisciplinary character of the Romanian *proverbs* analysis. I do agree to I.V. Dedu's conclusion [Dedu: 2014:497] that 'proverbs can be approached from various angles' but I strongly believe that C. Negreanu's concept of the *ethnofield* is still prevailing. Such a working technique is not only meant to bring more order in everything that is empirical research, but gives also the opportunity to make comparisons and draw conclusions taken from the examples displayed.

I have chosen the *ethnofields* 'life' and 'joy' and their Romanian counterparts 'viaţă' and 'bucurie' (with double versions in Romanian and English) as they match in their epistemiological content and vary in their expression.

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2. According to Grice the speaker's thoughts are communicated with a very clear aim: to encourage others to draw inferences that go beyond the meaning of the words they hear or utter.

In proverbs, which have a special statute as independent texts, the message should be understood according to the conventions associated with the intentions included in the literal meanings of words and phrases. The literal meanings are doubled by literal intentions. There is, on the other hand, the difference between utterance meaning and speaker-meaning or between what is directly conveyed and what is indirectly suggested.

When the speaker utters:

E: Bread is the staff of **life**.
R: Pâinea înseamnă **viaţă.**

he knows that the hearer knows the truth of his uttering but he can also infer that the hearer is aware of 'the stuff' which is not translated as such in Romanian.

If we deal with a different pattern – I would call it 'hidden conditional' – in the following example:

E: An ill **life**, an ill end.
R:**Viaţă** rea, moarte rea.

the literal intentions are more active than a simple assertion.

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis regarding the influence of the mother tongue when translating, is perhaps too much illustrated in proverbs where an element of the whole can replace that entity:

E: There is one way to enter this **life** but gates of death without number.
R: În **viaţă** intri pe o singură uşă, dar există zeci de căi cate te duc la moarte.

2.1 If translation is an exercise of finding in a language something that means the same of what has been said in another:

E: Such a **life**, such a death.
R: Cum ai **trăit**, aşa mori.
(almost word by word translation, except the fact that English uses nouns and Romanian
verbs of the same word family)

Change can occur in the terms that are used:

a) different patterns and antonyms in the two languages:

E: Take away my good name and take away my **life**.
(imperative)
R:Decât să-ţi iasă nume rău, mai bine ochii din cap.
(concession)

b) different terms and inclusion:

E: A handful of good **life** is better than a bushel of learning.

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R: Mintea e bună dacă e soră cu **norocul.**

(a 'bushel of learning' is the equivalent of the Romanian 'mintea', while Romanian sees 'life' as 'luck')

c) different literal intentions:

R: Pe om în **viaţă** păţaniile-l învaţă.

E: Experience is the mother of **wisdom**.

(while Romanian focuses on 'man' as a central term, English underlines the term

'experience' and makes possible the comparison between 'experience' and possible life Adventures rendered in Romanian by the word 'păţaniile')

2.2 Grice's four maxims{Grice,H.P:1975:45-47] – quantity, quality, relevance and manner – can be applied to proverbs, regarding, again, the specificity of Romanian paremic pattern as compared to the English one:

a) quantity:

E: A cat has nine **lives**.

R: Pisica are şapte **vieţi.**

(the difference between 'nine' and 'seven' is obviously connected with the Romanian popular saying that 'seven' is a lucky number and makes possible an identity marker, linking individuals to their native language)

b) quality:

E: **Life** is not all beer and skittles.

R: **Viaţa** nu e numai praznici şi plăceri

(English makes use of very common and well known everyday life 'ingredients' – drinks and sweets – Romanian uses general words implying life past time)

c) relevance:

E: In **life** you loved me not, in death you bewail me.

R: Pe cel ce nu l-ai iubit în **viaţă,** îl preţuieşti după ce moare.

Omul după ce **moare** atunci darul i se cunoaşte.

(Romanian is richer in versions as it stresses the idea of a late recognition and of how important competence may be – 'darul i se cunoaşte')

d) manner:

E:Two things doth prolong thy **life:** a quiet heart and a loving wife

R: Două lucruri lungesc **viaţa** bărbatului: inima uşoară şi nevasta iubitoare.

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(almost identical as structures, the English version addresses a universal 'thy' which is explained in the second part of the paremic unit, while the Romanian version addresses the specific noun gender - 'bărbatului', that is 'to man')

3. When analyzing *proverbs* the concept of 'thick translation' due to contectualization appears as a consequence of cancelled intentions.

The same idea can be expressed by different versions within the same target language:

(i) the classical pattern where the 'word by word' translation renderd very clearly the desired message:

R: După întristare vine **bucurie.**
E :After sorrow comes some **joy**.

while the:

(ii) the pattern changes the order of the terms in Romanian which is the source language – SL:

R: După **bucurie** vine întristare.

and the English version develops the contrast between the 'laughing' and 'weeping' which in fact leads to the difference between 'joy' and 'sorrow':

E: He that laughs in the morning, weeps at night.

The literary translation has, even in the case of such texts as *proverbs*, the goal of producing a set of parallels preserving the cultural conventions. The following *proverb* preserves the meaning as message but the pattern is reversed in English as compared to Romanian:

E: The life of the wolf, the death of the lamb.
R: Moartea lupului e sănătatea oilor.

Meeting all the constraints of the Gricean meaning seems to be in very many proverbs' versions the image of the perfect translation.Still, there are, on the other hand, new texts:

R: Schimbarea domnuilor, bucuria nebunilor.
E: Only fools exault when Governments change.
(the idea of ' change' is preserved but 'fools' are not always 'mad' and the possible
'upper-class' is not always represented by the Government)

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4. Conclusions

Whether I do agree or not to the idea of a 'thick translation' [Appiak, K.A:2002:417-429] made possible by certain English proverbs and their Romanian versions, I have to admit that:

- contextualization plays a very important role in any proverb analysis;
- translation mechanisms can turn the expressions of one language(the source language – SL)- into the expressions of another language (the target language – TL) but sometimes the translator has to choose between the literal expression and the literary one;
- any paremiological meta-commentary cannot ignore language attitudes, language identity as group identity or universal language;
- assertions seem to be predominant in proverbs structures both in English and Romanian but there are here and there questions and wishes that can be felt as such:

E: [Who doth spend more than he is worth?] he makes a rope his life to end
R: [I wish] There is aye life for a living man.

Studying proverbs from a pragmatic perspective and applying Grice's mechanism, what is really important is understanding the message. That can be done through a 'thick translation' as well, if we really believe that:

R: Lucru lungeşte **viaţa,** iar lenea o scurtează.
E: Better to wear out than to rust out.

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