ANALYSIS OF THE USE OF ENGLISH SET PHRASES AND THEIR ALBANIAN EQUIVALENTS

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Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to analyze the use of different types of set phrases (idiomatic or non-idiomatic) in English and Albanian. The paper is divided into two main parts; one reveals some theoretical background information about set phrases in both languages, and the other is more analytical by trying to collect concrete examples. It is based on the novel *The Fifth Child* (2001) by Doris Lessing and its Albanian variant *Fëmija i pestë* (2007) translated by Etleva Pushi. The main strategy for translating set phrases from English into Albanian is that of paraphrase. The others include idiom to idiom translation (similar in meaning and form or similar in meaning, but dissimilar in form) and omission. This is the best way to contrast these units and discover similarities and differences that exist among them.

Keywords:

Set phrases, English, Albanian, translation, contrast.

Introduction

Set phrases (either idiomatic or non-idiomatic) are part of every language. All people do communicate by collocating words together instead of just using individual words. The meaning of these phrases is usually difficult to be processed because it is not equivalent to the meaning of the words they consist of, for the most part. As a result, it is difficult to understand and interpret them. Translating them from one language to another is also a very challenging task.

The process of translating different kinds of set phrases from the source language to the target one requires great efforts because a translator must have good knowledge on both languages and their cultures as well. At the same time, s/he should be capable of finding an appropriate variant for the pairs of set phrases (especially the idiomatic ones). Speakers of different

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languages use different expressions to convey similar meanings. A certain expression might be simple for speakers of a language, whereas the same set of words or expressions might seem unclear and sometimes even meaningless to the speakers of another language. This happens because every language has some specific culture-based items which are totally distinct from the corresponding items of another language. Despite of these, there are also some other distinctive factors such as religion, geographical position, different ideologies or social classes and societies which make the process of understanding and translating of idiomatic phrases very challenging. There are two crucial issues that should be dealt with: how to interpret the set phrases of a language and, how to reproduce the same (or similar) phrases from the source language to the target one so that we can transmit exactly the same ideas in both languages.

The object of the research is to identify the main strategies that a translator can use in the processes of interpreting and translating set phrases (either idiomatic or non-idiomatic) from English to Albanian by providing plenty of examples.

The aim of the present paper is to review the main strategies used in translating set phrases in fiction. By contrasting the variants in both languages we can also notice several similarities and differences among these phrases.

The material for the analysis has been taken from the novel *The Fifth Child* by Doris Lessing (2001) and its Albanian variant *Fëmija i pestë* translated by Etleva Pushi (2007).

1. Set phrases (a theoretical approach)

There exist a lot of languages in the world today and each of them is specific in many aspects. Peoples of different nations have different ideologies and every society perceives the world in different ways, as a result, these ideologies have a great impact on the language itself and the way how different meanings are expressed. They are used in everyday communication, either in speaking or writing. They can be found and used in poetry, literature, the language of Shakespeare and Bible as well. We can say that set phrases have their own features in different languages which, in most cases, are peculiar. Both languages English and Albanian are very rich in set phrases (either idiomatic or non-idiomatic). Some linguistic research was made to provide some theoretical background to the problem. The research was based on the theory of terminology and some of the main features of set phrases as syntactic and lexical units.

Some word-groups, for example, **at least, point of view, by means, to take place,** etc. seem to be functionally and semantically inseparable. They

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are usually described as **set phrases, word-equivalents, idioms** or **phraseological** units…[1] According to Ginzburg:

"Phraseological units are comparatively stable and semantically inseparable. Between the extremes of complete motivation combined with complete stability of the lexical components and grammatical structure on the other hand, there are innumerable border-line cases…. The term ***set-phrase*** *implies that the basic criterion of differentiation is stability of the lexical components and grammatical structure of word-groups. The term* ***idiom*** *generally implies that the essential feature of the linguistic units under consideration is idiomaticity or lack of motivation. … The term* ***word-equivalent*** *stresses not only the semantic but also the functional inseparability of certain word-groups and their aptness to function as single words."*[2]

He also gives this definition: "*Phraselogical units are habitually defined as non-motivated word-groups that cannot be freely made up in speech, but are reproduced as ready-made units."*[3]

Jani Thomai, an Albanian lexicographer, describes the following features for the phraseological units:[4] a) they enter the speech as ready-made units, created earlier, b) they are fixed in structure, c) they convey a single concept and are non-compositional, d) the words they consist of, have lost their sense independence, in some way. His definition is very clear and inclusive:

"Phraseological units are linguistic meaningful units, made up of two or more words, with a set structure, being historically created and used for a long time, which is equal to a single word, being reproduced in speech as ready-made and having the role of an indivisible unit."[5]

By providing this short theoretical background we can notice that set phrases (idiomatic or non-idiomatic) in English and Albanian share a lot of common characteristics despite of the differences which are usually culturally-based. In order to have a better idea on these similarities and differences we have analyzed the examples of set phrases in English and how they are translated into Albanian.

2. The main difficulties in translating set phrases and the strategies used

[1] Stefanllari, A course in English lexicology, 2011, p. 140
[2] Ginzburg (et al), A Course in Modern English Lexicology, 1979, p. 74 .
[3] Ginzburg (et al), A Course in Modern English Lexicology, 1979, p. 74
[4] Thomai, Leksikologjia e Gjuhës Shqipe, 1999, p. 183-187
[5] Ibid. p. 210-211

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It is very important to notice some of the main difficulties a translator may encounter when trying to translate set phrases (especially idiomatic ones) from English to another language. According to Mona Baker, the main difficulties involved in translating idioms may be summarized as follows:[6]

(a) An idiom or fixed expression may have no equivalent in the target language. Like single words, idioms or fixed expressions may be culture-specific. … these items are not necessarily untranslatable. It is not the specific items an expression contains but rather the meaning it conveys and its association with culture-specific contexts which can make it untranslatable or difficult to translate.

(b) *An idiom or fixed expression may have a similar counterpart in the target language, but its context of use may be different; the two expressions may have different connotations, for instance, or they may not be pragmatically transferable*.[7]

(c) *An idiom may be used in the source text in both its literal and idiomatic senses at the same time. Unless the target-language idiom corresponds to the source-language idiom both in form and in meaning, the play on idiom cannot be successfully reproduced in the target text.*[8] She brings the following example: *He had sufficient influence to be able to* ***poke his nose into*** *the private affairs of others where less aristocratic* ***noses*** *might have been speedily bloodied.*[9]

So, she brings the idiom 'to poke one's nose' which is used in both senses (literal and idiomatic). To translate such an idiom, the translator should provide its equivalent in the target language. In Albanian, there exists such an idiom which is identical in form and meaning 'të futësh hundët'. (d) *The very convention of using idioms in written discourse, the contexts in which they can be used, and their frequency of use may be different in the source and target languages.*[10]

Eugene A. Nida (et al.)[11] states that: "*Obviously in any translation there will be a type of "loss" of semantic content, but the process should be*

[6] Baker, In Other Words, 1992, p. 68
[7] Ibid. p. 69
[8] Ibidim
[9] Ibid. p. 70
[10] Ibid. p. 70
[11] Eugene A. Nida and Charles R. Taber, The Theory and Practice of Translation, (1982), p. 106

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so designed as to keep this to a minimum." He also mentions that among the commonest problems of content transfer one of them is that of idioms.

In our paper, we will focus on how to translate these units from English to Albanian. By providing several examples from the books that we have analyzed, we can discover some of these difficulties.

2.1 *The strategies used in translation*

Mona Baker proposes the following strategies in translating idioms or fixed expressions: 1) using an idiom of similar meaning and form, 2) using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form, 3) translation by paraphrase, and 4) translation by omission.[12] We are going to discuss them one by one and bring examples from the books we have analyzed in both English and Albanian variants.

2.1.1 *Using an idiom of similar meaning and form*

This strategy involves using an idiom in the target language which conveys roughly the same meaning as that of the source-language idiom and, in addition, consists of equivalent lexical items. This kind of match can only occasionally be achieved.[13]

1. 'David,' she said quickly, *to break the spell,* his arm tightened around her…[14]

2. - … David! – tha ajo me të shpejtë, si për *të prishur magjinë,* por ndjeu shtrëngimin e krahut të tij rreth vetes...[15]

3. …she could not finally *give up her dreams* of the old life coming back.[16]

4. …ajo nuk *hiqte dorë nga ëndrra* e saj e jetës së dikurshme. [17]

5. … that she was *breaking the rules* of some contract between them.[18]

6. … atij iu duk se ajo *po i shkelte rregullat* e asaj marrëveshjeje mes tyre…[19]

7. If so, this was a window into a Ben concealed from them, and it *broke one' heart – broke Harriet's heart*.[20]

8. Po të ishte kështu, kjo duhet të ishte një dritare ku Beni fshihej nëse *i thyente zemrën ndokujt* – Harietës, më saktë.[21]

[12] Baker, In Other Words, (1992), p. 72-78
[13] Ibid. p. 72
[14] Lessing, The Fifth Child, (2001), p. 16
[15] Pushi, Fëmija i pestë, (2007), p. 15
[16] Lessing, 2001, p. 144
[17] Pushi, 2007, p. 144
[18] Lessing, 2001, p. 45
[19] Pushi, 2007, p. 45
[20] Lessing, 2001, p. 117

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Not only do the idiomatic set phrases consist of the same lexical units, but have the same structure as well (verb + noun) in both languages.

2.1.2 *Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form*

It is often possible to find an idiom or fixed expression in the target language which has a meaning similar to that of the source idiom or expression, but which consists of different lexical items.[22]

1. Non-academic but '*none the worse* for that', as Dorothy insisted.[23]
2. S'ishte nxënëse shumë e mirë në shkollë, por "*punë e madhe*", këmbëngulte Dorotia.[24]
3. She *was the scapegoat* – Harriet, the destroyer of the family.[25]
4. Ja ç'qe, *kokë turku*! Shkatërrimtarja e familjes.[26]

The lexical units that these phrases consist of are different in both variants, but the meaning is the same. Even their syntactic structure is not the same.

2.1.3 *Translation by paraphrase*

This is by far the most common way of translating idioms when a match cannot be found in the target language or when it seems inappropriate to use idiomatic language in the target text because of differences in stylistic preferences of the source and target languages.[27]

1. …she had been drained of some ingredient that everyone *took for granted*, which was like a layer of fat but was not material.[28]
2. …asaj i kishte humbur ajo 144ubstance e padukshme, i ishte tharë ai lëngu që të gjithë *e marrin si për të mirëqënë*, ai lëngu që ishte si një shtresë dhjami, por jo material.[29]
3. *It went without saying* that David had gone to private schools.[30]
4. *Kuptohej* që vetë Davidi kishte ndjekur shkolla private.[31]
5. Here the four young men laughed, for of course they *had played truant*, as all their sort did. [32]

[21] Pushi, 2007, p. 118
[22] Baker, 1992, p. 74
[23] Lessing, 2001, p. 143
[24] Pushi, 2007, p. 143
[25] Lessing, 2001, p. 141
[26] Pushi, 2007, p. 141
[27] Baker, 1992, p. 74-75
[28] Lessing, 2001, p. 155
[29] Pushi, 2007, p. 155
[30] Lessing, 2001, p. 38
[31] Pushi, 2007, p. 37
[32] Lessing, 2001, p. 118

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6. Atë çast të katër djemtë nuk e mbajtën dot të qeshurën, sepse ata, sigurisht, *nuk kishin shkuar në shkollë,* siç bënte gjithë soji i tyre. [33]

In these examples, the Albanian variants of the set phrases are not translated by phrases at all. They just explain the meaning of the English set phrases because there is no Albanian equivalent for them.

2.1.4 *Translation by omission*

As with single words, an idiom may sometimes be omitted altogether in the target text. This may be because it has no close match in the target language, its meaning cannot be easily paraphrased, or for stylistic reasons.[34]

1. 'That was us,' said Derek, *giving himself thumbs-up* approval, and Elvis looked sharp and knowing.[35]

2. –Ne, ne ishim, - tha Dereku, (?) kurse Elvisi, si finok që ishte, nuk u ndie.[36]

3. When she leaned forward, she could see herself in the gleam – dully, but enough to make her lean back again, *out of sight*.[37]

4. Kur përkulej mbi të, ajo mund të shihte veten në shkëlqimin e saj – jo dhe aq qartë, por gjithsesi aq sa mjaftonte që ajo të bënte mbrapsht (?).[38]

The translator has omitted these phrases, but their omission does not influence the content. There are few examples as such in the whole text.

Nida (et al.) proposes almost the same strategies as Baker:

"Idioms are some of the most obvious candidates for semantic adjustment, for the very fact that they are idioms means it is unlikely that the same type of distinctive form will have the same meaning in another language. The adjustments are quite understandably of three types: (a) from idioms to nonidioms, (b) from idioms to idioms, and (c) from nonidioms to idioms."[39]

But he also mentions that:

"Whereas one inevitably loses many idioms in the process of translation, one also stands to gain a number of idioms. Such idiomatic renderings do much to make the translation come alive, for it is by means of such distinctive expressions that the message can speak meaningfully to people in terms of their own lives and behavior."[40]

[33] Pushi, 2007, p. 119
[34] Baker, 1992, p. 77
[35] Lessing, 2001, p. 152
[36] Pushi, 2007, p. 153
[37] Lessing, 2001, p. 155
[38] Pushi, 2007, p. 155
[39] Nida et al., 1982, p.106
[40] Ibidim

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We have noticed a lot of examples like these, which means, several single words in the English variant are translated by idiomatic set phrases in Albanian:

1. … but then that contemplative gaze of his made itself felt and they *desisted*. (p.8) / … por pasta jai shikimi i tij këmbëngulës sikur i shponte, e kështu ato *hiqnin dorë.* (p. 7)

2. 'I do believe *you imagine* you are going to put the clock back, starting with me!' (p. 9) / "Mendoj se *ty të gënjen mendja* se mund ta kthesh orën prapa, duke filluar me mua." (p.7)

3. This home of his was a large bedroom at the back of the house overlooking a *neglected* garden… (p. 12) / Kjo strehë e tij, ishte një dhomë e madhe gjumi në pjesën e pasme të shtëpisë, nga e cila dukej një kopsht i *lënë pas dore*. (p. 11)

4. … his eyes gleamed with thoughts she could not *guess* at. (p. 16) / Por sytë i shkëlqenin nga ca mendime që ajo nuk mund t'i *merrte me mend*. (p. 15)

5. 'Anyway, we can *afford* it.' (p. 20) / … por për fat, *na e mban xhepi*, thuaj. (p. 19)

6. 'How many children are you *intending* to have?' (p. 18) / - Sa fëmijë *keni ndër mend* të bëni? (p. 17)

7. It occurred to neither Harriet nor David to *think*, or say… (p. 20) / As Harietës dhe as Davidit (nuk) u kishte *shkuar në mendje* e as kishin thënë ndonjëherë… (p. 19)

8. And look, they had been right to *insist* on guarding that stubborn individuality of theirs… (p. 29) / Por, shih tani, kishin bërë mirë që kishin *ngulur këmbë* ta ruanin atë individualitetin e tyre kokëfortë… (p. 28)

9. These days, Harriet would not *dream* of walking at night by herself… (p. 30) / Tashmë Harieta as që e *çonte ndër mend* të ecte vetëm natën… (p. 29)

We have provided some examples for illustration, but we have to mention that there are plenty of other examples as such, which make the translation very interesting and attractive.

3. Analysis of the data

The analytical part of the paper is based on the novel *The Fifth Child* by Doris Lessing (2001) and its translated variant in Albanian *Fëmija i pestë* (2007) translated by Etleva Pushi. Being based on the definitions cited earlier and their features, we can say that we found 143 set phrases (either idiomatic or non-idiomatic). It should be mentioned that this is not an exact number because some of the phrases are used more than once: *take for granted, side by side, it (that) goes without saying, at a loss, burst into tears,*

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as far as I'm concerned, have given birth to, etc. Moreover, any of them might have not been found (of course, unintentionally).

The analysis of the translated variant *Fëmija i pestë* by Etleva Pushi includes the same strategies as those proposed by Baker (1992): *using an idiom of similar meaning and form, using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form, by paraphrase,* and *by omission.*

Table 1. The strategies used in translating *The Fifth Child* (2001)

Strategies	Target language (*Fëmija i pestë) (2007)*	%
Using an idiom of similar meaning and form	28	19
Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form	34	24
Paraphrase	73	51
Omission	8	6
Total	143	100

Table 1 attempts to show the total number of the collected set phrases from the source book and, also, shows how many phrases are translated applying the four main strategies that are used to translate them into the target language and their percentage. From the data collected and represented into the table, we can assert that the majority of the English set phrases are translated into Albanian by paraphrase (51 %). In spite of the fact that the translator applied mostly paraphrasing strategy for translating the set phrases, however, there are many other examples of the use of the other strategies. Furthermore, Pushi has tried to avoid translation by omission and has used the other strategies. Translation by omission includes only 8 % of the total. She has also applied other strategies as using an idiom of similar meaning and form (28 %) and using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form (34 %).

Before finishing this brief overview of the main strategies used, there are two final remarks that can be made. Firstly, paraphrase was the prevailing strategy for translating the set phrases in the English novel. Secondly, Pushi has made great efforts to stick to the original text as much as possible. The examples that we have provided and plenty of others, not cited, show her effort to get closer to the reader, to transmit the original meaning of the text.

4. Conclusion

The main aim of this paper was to analyze the translation of English set phrases (either idiomatic or non-idiomatic) found in the novel of Doris

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Lessing *The Fifth Child* (2001) translated into Albanian by Etleva Pushi (2007). The research showed that the translator applied four main strategies: *using an idiom of similar meaning and form, using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form, by paraphrase,* and *by omission.* We tried to collect all the examples very carefully so that we could discuss the preferences of the translator.

As a result, we can conclude that *translation by paraphrase* is the most common strategy. By comparing and contrasting all the examples we can have a better idea on the similarities and differences that exist between different types of set phrases in English and Albanian, that is to say, their definition, their function as single lexical units, their structure as fixed units, etc. We noticed that, despite of the diverse views about their status, Albanian set phrases (especially the idiomatic ones, which are referred to, traditionally, as phraseological units) are properly defined and classified. When it comes to English set phrases, on the other hand, there are a lot of diverse views, among different scholars, on how to define and classify them.

To conclude, we can say that by making use of different types of set phrases (idiomatic or non-idiomatic) we can express the uniqueness of the language and culture in which they are originated. They make our communication more interesting and aesthetic. Using them in the proper way and in the right context, but, above all, translating them from one language to another needs deep knowledge of the source and target languages and cultures.

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