IDENTITY LANDMARKS IN ENGLISH AND ROMANIAN PROVERBS – TRANSLATION ISSUES

Bianca DABU[*]

Abstract*: Proverbs express the collective wisdom of the people, reflecting their thinking, values and behaviours and may be included in the category of culturemes as they represent cultural values of a nation not only in rural but also in urban areas. They are figurative and motivating, and can be used in different contexts, on the one hand, and they are highly frequent and have symbolic complexity, on the other. They provide a sense of unity to a certain culture and a specific trait among other cultures. Some of them are based on certain national traditions and values others are integrated in a globalizing vison about world and life common to all cultures.*

Keywords*: culture, cultureme, proverbs, translation, equivalence.*

It is obvious that for human interaction communicating culture is essential in the process of establishing identities. Every people has its own baggage of items that are esential for identity-based development as they are needed "to elicit the required understanding motivation and passion to change" (Malunga, James 2004:2).

Individuals are organized in many potentially different ways in a population, by many different (and cross-cutting) criteria: for example, by kinship into families or clans; by language, race, or creed into ethnic groups; by socio-economic characteristics into social classes; by geographical region into political interest groups; and by occupation or institutional memberships into unions, bureaucracies, industries, political parties, and militaries (Avruch 1998: 17–18).

Within these groups, culture manifests itself at the levels of artifacts, values and underlying assumptions (Schein, 1990:111). The first two are bahaviour patterns that define an environment and rely on principle that are not directly observable or descipherable that involve a great level of awareness, the underlying assumptions determine how members of a group perceive, think and feel inducing pre-concious or invisible ideas or principles of life that ca be taken for granted. Groups become, thus, "containers of culture" (Avruch 1998:18) complying with the features of different levels of culture (Hofstede, 1991:10) because people belong to various groups simultaneously. Hofstede identifies several levels that may co-exist for the members of certain groups: national level for those belonging to a certain territory; regional, ethnic or religious level as nations are made of various such groups identifiable through language affiliation, as well; gender level considering a person natural gender; age or generation level that separates elders from youngsters; role category which defines the role of the people within the society; social class level associated with educational opportunities and with a person's occupation or profession; employment level affiliating people to various work organizations. According to these criteria it is obvious that culture has a social distribution and it is relevant for different people in different proportion according to their degree of understanding the culture.

[*] University of Pitesti, biancadabu@yahoo.com

BDD-A24570 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 17:00:16 UTC)

The process of learning culture according to Ferraro (1998:16-25) is never ending as people have predisposition to communicate culturally and learn how to deal with cultural differences. He insists on the idea of cultural borrowing – that he calls *cultural diffusion* – as a reversible process between two cultures that come into contact and exchange values. But most of the cultural pattens are not the same in the rural and urban societies (Hofstede, *supra*) and the transfer from one type of society to another is not easily accepted.

An example of transferable element that preserves the same importance and significance in rural and urban societies is the proverb as marker of cultural identity.

Fernando Poyatos developed the microanalytic method for systematic analysis of a culture, coining the term cultureme defined as "any portion of cultural activity sensorially or intellectually apprehended in signs of symbolic value which can be divded up into smaller units or amalgamated into larger ones" (Poyatos, 1976:266)

Petrova (2014:257) introduces the cultureme theory in the study of proverbs suggesting the usage the so-called culturematic method: "A cultureme is axiologically marked, verbalised content, explicated through a semantic trnasformation of the question-answer kind and represented by a noun or noun phrase. Simple examples of culturemes are *knowledge* (+) for the proverb *Knowledge is power* and *haste* (-) for *Haste makes waste*."

Proverbs express the collective wisdom of the people, reflecting their thinking, values and behaviours. Definitions of proverbs have been brought into attention, analysed and modified for a long time. Mieder (2004:3) states that: "A proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals and traditional views in a methaporical, fixed and memorizable form and which is handed down from generation to generation. " at the same time, proverbs are indirect speech acts

Fergusson's (1983:V) practical and analytical definition of a proverb is that a proverb is a brief and memorable statement that contains advice (*First thrive and wive*), a warning or prediction (*Marry in haste and repent at leisure.*), or analytical observation (*A maid marries to please her parents, a widow to please herself*). Finnegan, (1970:390) argues that, "the figurative quality of proverbs is essentially striking. According to her, one of the most noticeable characteristics of proverbs is their allusive wording, usually in metaphorical form. Their content deeply rooted in the cultural history of a people sa an expression of its thinking reflect in a special manner the spirit of the language. Due to their imagery, Norrick thinks (2014:7) that proverbs provide evidence of stereotypes and cultural metaphors.

Translating proverbs is a various levels work due to the fact hat proverbs entail different approaches. Jackobson's points out (1959/2000:114) that 'there is ordinarily no full equivalence between code-units' referring to equivalence in meaning between words in different languages. For Jakobson, cross-linguistic differences centre around obligatory grammatical and lexical forms: 'Languages differ essentially in what they *must* convey and not in what they *may* convey' (p. 116). English and Romanian having different lexical and grammatical background will have to deal with some difficulties in translating process related to the level of gender, aspect or semantic fields apart from the cultural ones. But at the same time, the extra-linguistic knowledge is absolutely necessary in order to render as accurately as possible the concepts in question. Thus, the translation act is a complex approach in which the translator has to find not only a linguistic equivalent but at the same time the cultural conotation of the culturemes as Marianne Lederer (2001:20) has pointed: „l'on fait toujours appel à des connaissances

BDD-A24570 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 17:00:16 UTC)

extra-linguistiques pour comprendre un énoncé linguistique". For example, the proverb: *Penny wise, pound foolish.* can be correctly rendered from English to Romanian only after using an extra-linguitic reference related to English and Romanian money: *Cine nu cruță paraua, nici de galben nu-i e milă.*

Newmark's cultural categories *cultural categories* (1988:95) cover a wide range of semantic fields from geography and traditions to institutions and technologies and can be easily identified in proverbs:

1. ecology (such as: flora, fauna, winds, plains, hills);

After clouds clear weather. (L.A.,2006:103) (M. et al. 1992:115)

După furtună, vine și vreme bună. (M:128)

A swallow does not make the summer./ One swallow does not make the summer. (M. et al. 2007:215) (W.,1977:425) (Ra.,2011:404) (G.,1998:138)

Cu o rândunică nu se face primăvara.(B-H:16)

It is a sad house where the hen crows louder than the cock. (M. et al., 1992:117) (M. et al., 2007:147) (L.A.,2006:277) (G.,1998:112)

Vai de casa unde cotcodăcesc găinile iar cocoşul tace. (M:293)

2.material culture (artefacts such as: food, clothes, houses and towns, transport)

Clothes don't make the man. (M. et al., 2007:44) (S.,S.,2009) (M. et al., 1992:113) (Ra.,2011:129) (St.,2006:69)

Haina nu face pe om, [da omul pe haină.] (B-H:114)

Eat at pleasure, drink by measure. (St.,2006:121) (M. et al., 1992:253) (G.,1998:50) (L.A., 2006:166)

La mâncare să ai cumpătare și la băutură să fii cu măsură. (DEX) (B-H:232)

3. social culture (work and leisure)

The labourer is worthy of his hire. (W.,1977:249) (M. et al., 2007:162) (L.A, 2006:322) (S.,S., 2009)

Vrednic este muncitorul de plata sa. (B-H:61)

4. organizations, customs, activities, procedures, concepts (political, administrative, religious and artistic)

The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. (M. et al., 2007:176) (W.,1977:178)

Dumnezeu dă, Dumnezeu ia. (B-H:161) (M:126) (DEX)

Justice is blind. (M. et al., 2007:158) (W.,1977:242) (M. et al., 1992:571)

Justiția e oarbă. (B-H:139)

5. gestures and habits.

If you want a thing done well do it yourself. (M. et al., 2007:139) (L.A.,2006:616) (Ra.,2011:411) (S.,S.,2009)

Ce poți face singur nu aștepta să-ți facă alții. (M:69)

As languages and cultures are closely linked to one another, the translator must focus on how to convey the same meaning from the SL into the TL. He should also try to discover the dissimilarities between two cultural perspectives. Therefore, some of the cultural concepts will be translable – are they are common to many cultures through difussion – while other remain specific to one culture and thus, become untranslatable. Nida (2001:118) draws attention on the functional identity or functional equivalence: "In general it is best to speak of functional equivalence in terms of a range of adequacy since no translation is ever completely equivalent." Complete equivalence may refer to the rendering from the SL into the TL of all components that construct a proverb: form-meaning aspects, lexical-grammatical balance, stylistic-prosodical elements.

BDD-A24570 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 17:00:16 UTC)

In point of form and structure the proverbs have the following aspects that should be considered (Norrick, 2014:10-12) when translating proverbs from English to Romanian:

- traditionality (items of folklore knowledge - universally recognized thinking patterns that belong to the people that came into contact during history):
Don't put the cart before the horse. (M. et al., 2007:63) (Ra.,2011:330) (W.,1989:93)
Nu pune carul înaintea boilor. (DEX)
First think and then speak./Think first and speak afterwards. (M. et al., 2007:270) (L.A., 2006:573) (G.,1998:78)
Gândește întâi, apoi vorbește. (DEX)
- didactic content (prescribed rules or general observations – wisdom, truths, morals, traditional views according to Mieder (1996:4)):

Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me. (M. et al., 2007:92) (M. et al., 1992:353)
Dacă m-ai păcălit o dată, să-ţi fie ruşine; dacă m-ai păcălit a doua oară, să-mi fie mie ruşine. (B-H:198)
Four eyes see more than two.(M. et al., 2007:94)
Patru ochi văd mai bine decât doi. (M:227)
- fixed form (strongly coded units recognizible by the listeners although there are lexical and grammatical variations):

God makes the back to the burden./ God fits the back to its burden./ God makes the back to fit the burden.
(W.,1989:259) (M. et al., 2007:103) (St.,2006:51) (M. et al., 1992:409) (S.,S.,2009)
Să nu dea rele Domnul, cât poate suferi omul. (H:143)
All that glitters is not gold./ All is not gold that glitters.
(M. et al. 2007:7) (L.A.,2005:17) (M. et al. 1992:411) (W.,1977:181)
Nu e aur tot ce strălucește. (B-H:23)
- metaphoricity (a matter of proverb use rather than internal semantic property):

It never rains but it pours. (M. et al., 2007:734) (S.,S.,2009) (L.A.,2006:481) (St.,2006:352) (W.,1989:523) (G.,1998:3) (M. et al., 1992:145)
Un necaz de-abia îl trece și vin în locul lui zece. (DEX)

There are situations when the translation from the SL into the TL is involves a literal translation as there is a certain level of cultural identity. For example, in the English proverb: *In the country of the blind, the one-eyed man is king.* (M. et al., 2007:143) (L.A.,2006:114) (St.,2006:40) (S.,S.,2009) has a Romanian equivalent: *În ţara orbilor, chiorul e împărat.* (L:64) (M:162) (DEX). But the same English proverb can be transposed as: *Între orbi chiorul împărățește.* (H:98) or *În țara orbilor cel cu un ochi este împărat*. (H:98)

Norrick (1985:46-47) describes the elements of prosody in proverbs concluding that prosody helps render a statement more memorable.

- Rhyme occur most of the times at the end of the phrase breaks.the translation of such a proverb is sometimes difficult as, for the sake of preserving the rhyme in the TL the translator has to transpose and modulate the target proverb:

Birds of a <u>feather</u> flock <u>together.</u> (L.A.,2006:55) (W.,1977:32) (M. et al. 2007:29) (St.,2006:37)
Boul la bou rage, prostul la prost trage. (B-H:30)

BDD-A24570 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 17:00:16 UTC)

Cioară lângă cioară trage, alte păsări nu-i sunt drage. (H:60)
Cine se aseamănă se adună. (L:32)
A stitch in time saves nine. (M. et al. 2007:253) (W.,1977:415)
Cine nu cârpeşte spărtura mică, are necaz să dreagă borta mare. (B-H:113)
- Alliteration is identifiable in proverbs but not easy to preserve in translation. A proverb that is alliterative in the SL may be translated in a rhyming version in the TL:,

A friend's frown is better than a foe's smile. (M. et al. 1992:368) (L.A., 2006:222)
Mai bine să te dojenească decât să te linguşească prietenul tau. (DEX)
Beauty is but a blossom. (M. et al. 2007:18) (L.A.,2006:39)
Frumuseţea la om, ca floarea la pom. (B-H:60)
- Assonance is the pattern in which the same vowel is repeated though the consonants are different. In translation the pattern is difficult cu preserve, it can be rendered by a rhyme.
(a) Bleating sheep loses a bite. (M. et al. 2007:29) (S.,S.,2009) (St.,2006:266) (Ra.,2011:316) (K.,1999:872)
Cel care dă din gură, rămâne fără-mbucătură.
Gură multă, treabă puțină. (B-H:53)
Fair feathers make fair fowl. (M. et al., 2007:354) (M. et al., 1992:292) (L.A., 2006:188) (G.,1998:14)
Haina face pe om. (B-H:114)
Straiele împodobesc pe om. (DEX)

Conclusion

The issue of equivalence in translating proverbs is of outmost importance. Dynamic equivalence is defined as a translation principle according to which a translator seeks to translate the meaning of the original in such a way that the TL wording will trigger the same impact on the TC audience as the original wording did upon the ST audience. They argue that 'Frequently, the form of the original text is changed; but as long as the change follows the rules of back transformation in the source language, of contextual consistency in the transfer, and of transformation in the receptor language, the message is preserved and the translation is faithful' (Nida and Taber, 1982:200).

Bibliography

Avruch, K. 1998, *Culture and Conflict Resolution*. Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press
Fergusson, R., 1983, *The Facts on File Dictionary of Proverbs*. New York: Facts on File; also with the title *The Penguin Dictionary of Proverbs*.New York: Penguin Books.
Ferraro, G., 1998, *The Cultural Dimension of International Business. 3rd Edition*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
Finnegan, R., 1970, Oral Literature in Africa, Oxford, Clarendon Press
Hofstede, G., 1991/1994, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. London: HarperCollinsBusiness.
Jackobson, R.,1959/2000, 'On Linguistic Aspects of Translation', in R. A. Brower (ed.) *On Translation*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, pp. 232-39.
Lederer, M., 2001, *Interpreter pour traduire*, Paris, Didier Erudition, pp.264-272
Malunga, C., James, R., 2004 *Using African Proverbs in Organizaional Capacity Building*, INTRAC, Praxis note.6
Mieder, W., 2004, *Proverbs, A Handbook*, Greenwood Press
Newmark, P.,1988, *A Textbook of Translation*, New York: Prentice Hall International

BDD-A24570 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 17:00:16 UTC)

Nida, E A., 2001. *Language, Culture, and Translating*, Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press,
Nida, E.A. and C. R. Taber, 1982, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.
Norrick, N., 1985, *Trends in Linguistics. Studies and Monographs. How proverbs Mean, Semantic Studies in English Proverbs*, De Gruyer &Co., Berlin Mouton
Norrick, N., 2014, Subject Area, Terminology, Proverb Definitions, Proverb Features, in *Introduction to Paremiology: A Comprehensive Guide to Proverb Studies*, H.Hrisztova-Gotthardt, M. A. Varga (Ed.), De Gruyer Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, pp.7-25
Petrova, R 2014, *Introduction to Paremiology: A Comprehensive Guide to Proverb Studies*, H.Hrisztova-Gotthardt, M. A. Varga (Ed.), De Gruyer Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG,pp. 243-260
Poyatos, F., 1976, Analysis of a Culture through Its Culturemes: Theory and Method in *The Mutual Interaction of People and their Built Environment*, (Rapoport ed.), De Gruyer, Mouton &Co. Amsterdam
Risager, K., 2006, Language and Culture: Global Flows and Local Complexity, Multilingual Matters Ltd.,
Schein, E. 1990, *Organizational culture*. *American Psychologist* 45(2): 109–119.

Dictionaries:

Gratian, Vas, 1998, *Grammar Matters: Proverbs*, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., ISBN 81-207-2019-9 ISBN 978-81-207-2019-0 (G.,1998)
Knowles, Elisabeth (ed.), Partington Angela, *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, Oxford University Press, ISBN 0-19-860173-5 (K.,1999)
Latimer Apperson, George, revised by Martin Manser and Stephen Curtis, 2006, *Dictionary of Proverbs*, Wordsworth Editions Limited ISBN 1 84022 311 1 (L.A.,2006)
Manser Martin, Rosalind Ferguson, David Pickering, *2007, Dictionary* of Proverbs, The Facts on File Inc., N.Y. ISBN o-8160-6673-6 (M.et al., 2007)
Mieder, Wolfgang (ed.), Stewart A. Kingbury, Kelsie B. Harder, 1992, *A Dictionary of American Proverbs*, Oxford University press Inc., ISBN 0-19-505399-0 (M.et al., 1992)
Ratcliffe Susan (ed.), 2011, *Oxford Treasury of Proverbs and Quotations*, Oxford University Press Inc., ISBN 978-0-19- 960912-3 (Ra.,2011)
Simpson, John, Jennifer, Speake (ed.), 2009, *The Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*, Oxford University Press, eISBN 9780191727740
http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199539536.001.0001/acref-9780199539536?hide=true&pageSize=100&sort=titlesort&source=%2F10.1093%2Facref%2F9780199539536.001.0001%2Facref-9780199539536 (S.,S., 2009)
Stone, Jon R., 2006, *The Routledge Book of World Proverbs*, Routledge,Taylor & Francis group, N.Y. ISBN 10:0-415-97423-2, ISBN 13:978-0-415-97423-3 (St., 2006)
Whiting, Bartlet Jere, 1977, *Early American Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases*, Harvard University Press, ISBN 0-674-21981-3 (W.,1977)
Whiting, Bartlet Jere, 1989, *Modern Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases*, Harvard University Press, ISBN 0-674-58053-2, ISBN 978-0-674-58053-4 (W.,1989)
Romanian Proverbs Dictionaries:
Botezatu Grigore, Andei Hîncu, *Dicţionar de proverbe şi zicători româneşti*, alcătuire, prefață, Editura Litera Internațional, Bucureşti-Chişinău, 2001 (B-H)
Hințescu, I.C., *Proverbele Românilor*, ediție îngrijită de Constantin Negreanu şi Ion Bratu, Editura Facla, Timişoara, 1985 (H)
Lefter, Virgil, *Dicționar de proverbe român-englez*, Editura Ştiintifică şi Enciclopedică, Bucureşti, 1984 (L)
Muntean, George, *Proverbe Româneşti* – Antologie, text stabilit, glosar, indice tematic, postfață şi bibliografie, Editura Minerva, Bucureşti, 1984 (M)
DexX – Dicționar de proverbe sub egida Institutului de Filologie Română „A.Philippide" al Academiei Române, Filiala Iași, (DEX) http://www.dexx.ro/index.php?a=term&d=Dictionar+de+proverbe&t=FAPT%C4%82

BDD-A24570 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 17:00:16 UTC)