SOME ASPECTS OF ENGLISH IDIOM IN TRADITIONAL MEDIA CLASSIFICATION AND THE PROBLEM OF TRANSLATION INTO LITHUANIAN

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The current research addresses the role of idiomatic expressions in communication. Effective interaction requires sufficient knowledge of these lexical units to enable the communication parties to understand each other and cooperate. Since the 21st century is the age of information, individuals and societies are surrounded by an infinite number of messages specifically from the media as its primary source. However, they often fail in interpreting those lexical items which seem familiar to them but carry a different meaning. Therefore, the present paper aims at categorizing media idiomatic expressions according to their grammatical/syntactic function in the text, as well as raising the problem of English idiom translation into Lithuanian, and determining the most prevailing translation strategy. The syntactic structure analysis helped to identify five categories of idiomatic expressions based on the function the expression performs in the sentence.

Keywords: idiomatic expression, media idiom, idiom classification, idiom translation, equivalence problems.

Introduction

Idioms are characteristic of almost any language in the world and are frequently used on a daily basis. They are an important part of any language and culture, thus learning any language also includes learning idioms used in the target language. In the course of time, a need of classification of English idiomatic expressions has occurred in order to "control" extensive portions of the language and to practically incorporate them into English language teaching. Though idiomatic expressions still take up a rather remote part in any curriculum, and learners perceive them both as elusive lexical items and compulsory ones to pass English language examinations, they are strongly connected with everyday language. To generate a more positive learner attitude towards these complex in nature elements of language and prompt their successful acquisition, the uncovering of grammar, specifically syntactic structure of English idioms, could be a step forward to clarify their perception and usage (Pinnavaia 2002: 53–54).

Idiomatic expressions are of different origins and can be of sociocultural, political, and historical background. The use and meaning of idioms and idiomatic expressions is strongly influenced by culture and history of nations using these lexical items. As Pinnavaia maintains: *"Idiomatic expressions are, after all, the patrimony of a culture and tradition; they represent centuries of life in a determined sociolinguistic context and geographical setting and*

are therefore the heart and soul of a linguistic community" (Pinnavaia 2002: 54–55). Although certain studies have shown that English idioms are rather scarce in spoken and written texts, the majority of native speakers are typically aware of these lexical units. Idiomatic expressions are part of a community's cultural and linguistic heritage what makes them even more unmanageable for foreign learners to clearly recognize their syntactic pattern. Respectively, if it causes problems to intuitively identify the pattern of an idiom, learners must be taught the structure of idioms and their analysis as an inherent aspect of one's further linguistic development, but not learn them by heart only for exam purposes.

Since idioms are considered the hardest part of the language, as they are considered to be frozen in both form and meaning that is hardly, if at all, understandable from the components constituting them, idioms and idiomatic expressions often cause problems of understanding and translation, not talking about the selection of an appropriate equivalent, which simply may not exist in another language.

The object of the research is English idiomatic expressions in the media discourse, i.e. Press (newspapers, magazines, books), Radio and Television, and their Lithuanian equivalents.

The aim of the research is to review the idiomatic expressions in the media discourse, provide the most correct equivalents for these lexical units in Lithuanian, determine the most prevalent translation strategy, and suggest the classification of these items in two languages based on the syntactic structure.

The material for the analysis is the corpus of 50 idioms used in the traditional media taken on the basis of random sampling from special and general dictionaries, coursebooks, electronic sources and texts related to the traditional media, TV programmes (talk shows, news broadcasts, etc.), radio shows, newspapers and magazines.

The methods of the research are the analytical-critical method and the comparative method. The analytical-critical method comprises the analysis of the international scientific literature on the field and aims to provide the perspective on English idiomatic expressions in the traditional media classification and choice of an appropriate equivalent, if any, in Lithuanian. The comparative method has been used to compare the syntactic structure of English idiomatic expressions in the media discourse and their Lithuanian translation.

Theoretical background

According to Collins Cobuild Dictionary of Idioms (2003), idiom is *"a kind of special phrase. It is a group of words which has a different meaning when used together from the one it would have if meaning of each word were taken individually"*. In his work, Barkema states that the most commonly used definition of the term "idiom" is that of Henry Sweet (1889), whereas the essence of the later definitions *"boil[s] down to the same two things: (a) idioms are expressions which contain at least two lexical items and (b) the meaning of an idiom is not the combinatorial result of the meaning of the lexical items in the expression"* (Barkema 1996: 127).

In her article, Pinnavaia maintains that in the last few decades the researchers turned their attention to phraseology producing works, which resulted in certain categorization of English idiomatic expressions. According to the scholar, the modern linguistic research has a *"new vision of language consisting of 'multi-word chunks' whose patterns should be clearly expounded"* and this is the idea *"to 'control' greater and greater portions of the language, and of phraseology especially"* (Pinnavaia 2002: 53).

According to Pinnavaia, the fixed and inflexible nature of idioms, as many linguists claim, is no more than a *"myth"*. The scholar maintains that *"while some idioms cannot normally admit any type of variation (e.g. a red herring), others can accept variations both of lexical kind <...> and of the grammatical kind <...>"* to meet the stylistic or humorous effects, which is clearly seen in journalistic genre and prose that *"rely*

more and more on manipulated idiomatic expressions in order to express clear, to-the-point notions and opinions" (Pinnavaia 2002: 57).

There are different criteria according to which researchers try to classify idioms: transparency of meaning, degrees of formality, semantic meaning, grammatical structure, keywords, etc.

In Fernando's view, idioms fall into the following sub-categories: pure idioms, which are *"a type of conventionalized, non literal multi-word expressions"* the meaning of which is non literal; semi-idioms, with one ore more constituents used in their literal meaning, while other constituents are used with non literal meaning; and literal idioms, which are transparent in meaning as their meaning can be inferred from the combination of their constituents (Fernando 1996: 35–36).

In her article, Pannavaia (2002: 58) draws the following classification of idioms according to their function in the text. The scholar distinguishes six idiom subcategories: formal idioms, polite idioms, derogatory idioms, general English idiomatic expressions, and special English idiomatic expressions.

In their book, McCarthy and O'Dell (2008: 6) provide the following classification of idioms types based on the grammatical/syntactic structure:

1. Verb + object/complement (and/or adverbial) (kill two birds with one stone).

2. Prepositional phrase (in the blink of an eye).

3. Compound (a bone of contention).

4. Simile (as + adjective + as, or like + noun) (as dry as a bone).

5. Binominal (word + and + word) (rough and ready).

6. Trinominal (word + word + and + word) (cool, calm and collected).

7. Whole clause or sentence (to cut a long story short).

In the current analysis of the idioms used in the media we will adhere to the grammatical/syntactic structure of idioms classification proposed by McCarthy and O'Dell, and suggest the classification based on the parts of speech the function of which the idiom performs in the context.

Discussion and results

21st century represents the information age which brought out rapid global communication and shaped modern society. To be up-to-date with the latest news, trends and recent events and be knowledgeable of the world around is a challenge nowadays. Communities and individuals are continually receiving innumerable messages from various sources including newspapers, TV, radio, and the Internet, to name a few, which notably conduct people's lives. However, the information is not always readily comprehensible to an average person. According to some research findings, idioms are particularly abundant in the media outlets, i.e. newspaper articles, news reports, announcements, public speeches, and the knowledge of the source and the lexical area apparently facilitates learners' task to decode the meaning of an idiom and draw up interrelations between target and native languages. Since idioms have a very strong communicative force and help achieve certain stylistic effects (Pinnavaia 2002: 58), to correctly understand and interpret the incoming data, certain linguistic knowledge, i.e. knowledge of lexical elements, and recognition of grammatical structures are required to avoid possible difficulties or misunderstandings. Learners' perception of idioms should start by recognizing their textual and syntactic functions first, and then distinguishing between formal and informal, polite and derogatory, general English or special English idiomatic expressions in order to fully understand the text in which they appear.

Media idiomatic expressions do not only encompass the items directly related to the press, TV and radio. These can also be the expressions generally indicating the process and ways of information dispersion or release. Thus, the idiomatic lexical items used in the media discourse were classified according to their grammatical function in the text, i.e. nominal, verbal, adjectival, adverbial and sentence idioms, and a grammatical pattern of each item was indicated. In the absence of adequate translation

of an English expression, translation recommendation was made based on the analysis of the English definition and the examples from British National Corpus.

Media idiomatic expressions classification

The analysis of the collected material allowed to classify idiomatic expressions into 5 distinct subcategories according to their grammatical/syntactic function in the text:

1. Nominal idioms.
2. Verbal idioms.
3. Adjectival idioms.
4. Adverbial idioms.
5. Sentence idioms (or clauses).

The nucleus of the idioms in the nominal group is the Noun and the whole expression performs the function of the noun in the sentence. The most typical grammatical/syntactic patterns of this goup are: Adj+N, N+conj+N, N+conj+N+N, N+N, N+prep+N.

Idiomatic expressions of the verbal idioms group are basically phrasal verbs and other phrases the center of which is the Verb. The most common grammatical/syntactic patterns of this group of expressions are: V+N, V+prep, V+prep+N, V+N+prep, V+prep+Past Part, V+Pr+prep+N, V+Adj+N, V+Adv+N.

Adjectival idioms comprise the expressions that act as the Adjective in the sentence. However, it should be noted that the constituent parts of Adjectival idioms might not necessarily be Adjectives. The grammatical/syntactic patterns of the analyzed idiomatic expressions that act as Adjectives in the sentence are of two types: prep+N, and Adj+prep+N.

The group of Adverbial idioms basically consists of prepositional phrases that perform the function of both the Adjectives and Adverbs in the sentence. The typical patterns of these idioms are: prep+Adj, prep+N, Adv+prep+N+N.

1. *Nominal idiomatic expressions*

The group of idiomatic expressions that perform the function of the Noun in the sentence comprises the following items: *inside information* (Adj+N) = vidaus informacija; *loose talk* (Adj+N) = (no English-Lithuanian dictionary entry) (translation recommendation) palaidos šnekos/kalbos; *hot news* (Adj+N) = (no English-Lithuanian dictionary entry) (translation recommendation) karštos naujienos, šviežios/naujausios naujienos; *yellow journalism* (Adj+N) = geltonoji spauda; *bad/strong language* (Adj+N) = keiksmai, keiksmažodžiai; *prunes and prisms* (N+conj+N) = manieringa kalbėsena, kalbos manieringumas; *chapter and verse* (N+conj+N) = visos smulkmenos/ tikslus nurodymas, kur rasti informacijos; *cock and bull story* (N+conj+N+N) = nebūti dalykai, pasakos; *chequebook journalism* (N+N) = prastos kokybės sensacinė spauda (brangiai mokanti už išskirtinę teisę skelbti medžiagą); *megaphone diplomacy* (N+N) = (no English-Lithuanian dictionary entry) (translation recommendation) tarpininkavimas (pasitelkiant žiniasklaidą); *talk of the town* (N+prep+N) = (no English-Lithuanian dictionary entry) (translation recommendation) apkalbų objektas.

This group consists of 11 items that mostly are binominal compounds according to McCarthy and O'Dell's classification and present the following patterns: N+N, Adj+N, N+conj+N, N+prep+N. One idiom in the group is trinominal and follows the pattern of N+conj+N+N. The remaining English idioms are translated following different syntactic structure patterns, the most prevalent of which is N+N, where the first noun is used in the Genitive case. These items lose their idiomaticity when translated into Lithuanian and the meaning becomes neutral.

Although three of the presented English idioms (*loose talk, hot news, yellow journalism*) have equivalents in colloquial Lithuanian according to their syntactic structure (the pattern of Adj+N) and degree of idiomaticity (*palaidos kalbos, karštos žinios, geltonoji spauda*), two of

the expressions (*loose talk* and *hot news*) have no entry in English-Lithuanian dictionary.

2. *Verbal idiomatic expressions*

Idioms verbal in nature present the largest group from the analyzed items that consists of 25 units: *to break the news* (V+N) = atsargiai pranešti blogą žinią; *to make the news* (V+N) = atsidurti žiniasklaidos dėmesio centre; *to speak/tell volumes* (V+N) = daug ką pasakyti/(iš)reikšti; iškalbingai byloti; *to get/give the low-down* (V+N) = gauti/perduoti slaptas žinias, slaptą informaciją, sužinoti paslaptis; *to prune a book/thesis/story* (V+N) = sutrumpinti knygą/tezę/pasakojimą, pašalinti (tai, kas nereikalinga; ppr. prune down); *to water down* (V+prep) = sušvelninti, susilpninti, padaryti ne tokį ryškų; *to thumb through (the pages of a book)* (V+prep) = vartyti, sklaidyti, perversti, peržiūrėti (knygą, žurnalą); *to hold back* (V+prep) = sulaikyti (informaciją); *to read between the lines* (V+prep+N) = skaityti tarp eilučių; *to be in the news* (V+prep+N) = patekti į laikraščių puslapius; *to go to press* (V+prep+N) = būti spausdinamam; *to be in the know* (V+prep+N) = gerai žinoti reikalą/padėtį, būti (gerai) informuotam; *to leaf through a book* (V+prep+N) = sklaidyti (knygą, žurnalą); *to fish for information* (V+prep+N) = ieškoti informacijos; *to worm out information* (V+prep+N) = išgauti informacijos, sužinoti; *to cast an eye over* (V+N+prep) = užmesti akį, peržvelgti; *to keep someone posted* (V+Pr+Past Part) = nuolatos ką informuoti; *to put someone in the picture* (V+Pr+prep+N) = informuoti ką (apie situaciją); *to have a good/bad press* (V+Adj+N) = turėti/gauti gerų/blogų spaudos atsiliepimų; *to spread like wildfire* (V+Adv+N) = žaibiškai plisti/sklisti; *to hit the headlines* (V+N) = patekti į pirmuosius laikraščių puslapius, liūdnai išgarsėti (translation recommendation); *to hit the airwaves* (V+N) = (translation recommendation) patekti į eterį; *to cap a story* (V+N) = (translation recommendation) užbaigti kieno nors pasakojimą; *to kill a story/novel* (V+N) =

(translation recommendation) sukritikuoti straipsnį/romaną; atsisakyti publikuoti/viešinti; *to rubber-neck* (V+N) = (translation recommendation) prilindus žiūrėti.

The most frequently recurring pattern in the Verbal idiomatic expressions group is that of V+N and presents the total of 10 idiomatic expressions. Other 15 idiomatic expressions follow different syntactic patterns: V+prep+N (7 items), V+Pr+Past Part (1 item), V+prep (2 items), V+N+prep (1 item), V+Adj+N (1 item), V+Adv+N (1 item), V+Pr+prep+N (1 item).

This group has a number of syntactically equivalent expressions in both languages: *to read between the lines – skaityti tarp eilučių, to be in the news – patekti į laikraščių puslapius, to cast an eye – užmesti akį, to prune a book – sutrumpintį knygą, to kill a story – sukritikuoti straipsnį*. Two English expressions are translated into Lithuanian using idiomatic expressions that are congruent in both syntactic structure and idiomatic meaning: *to read between the lines – skaityti tarp eilučių, to cast an eye – užmesti akį*. Other idiomatic English expressions are translated mainly by paraphrasing and lose their idiomatic meaning in Lithuanian.

3. *Adjectival idiomatic expressions*

The group of idioms that perform adjectival function in the sentence consists of 6 expressions: *off the air* (prep+N) = netransliuojamas (per radiją, per televiziją); *on the air* (prep+N) = transliuojamas (per radiją, per televiziją); *off the record* (prep+N) = neskelbtinas (spaudoje), neoficialus; *on the record* (prep+N) = oficialus; *in press* (prep+N) = spausdinamas; *hot off the press* (Adj+prep+N) = (translation recommendation) paskutinė karščiausia sensacija/naujiena.

The most frequent syntactic pattern is prep+N (5 items). One idiomatic expression in the group follows the pattern of Adj+prep+N. All of the items are translated into Lithuanian as Adjectives, although in most cases the English lexical units that make the idioms are not Adjectives in general.

4. *Adverbial idiomatic expressions*

The group of idioms that function as adverbs in the sentence consists of four items and makes one of the smallest groups in the current study. During the analysis of the sampled lexical items the following idiomatic expressions that perform as Adverbs in the sentence were identified: *by word-of-mouth* (prep+Adj) = žodžiu; *through the grapevine* (prep+N) = sakė, kad.../ girdėjau, (translation recommendation) bobutė pasakė/ paukštelis pačiulbėjo; *on the airwaves* (prep+N) = radijo bangomis, per radiją; *straight from the horse's mouth* (Adv+prep+N+N) = iš pirmų lūpų, iš pirmųjų šaltinių.

Most of English idiomatic expressions in this group follow the pattern prep+N (2 items), while the remaining two expressions follow the prep+Adj and Adv+prep+N+N patterns. Although one of the analyzed items in this group, i.e. *through the grapevine,* has an entry in English-Lithuanian dictionary and the Lithuanian translation is neutral – *sakė, kad.../ girdėjau* – it should be noticed that at least two similar in meaning idioms exist in Lithuanian – *bobutė pasakė/ paukštelis pačiulbėjo.*

5. *Sentence (clause) idioms*

The group of sentence/clause idioms consists of four expressions: *to have sharp ears for any gossip* = (translation recommendation) gaudyti paskalas; *to have one's lips sealed* = užčiaupti burną, privalėjimas tylėti; *music to one's ears* = malonu tai girdėti; *with a sting in its tail* = pats nemaloniausias dalykas (pasakojimo ir pan.) pabaigoje. Although the translation of *to have sharp ears for any gossip* retains certain degree of idiomaticity, it is only a translation recommendation and it requires further linguistic consideration.

As it can be seen from the analyzed corpus of idioms, 12 of English idiomatic expressions used in the traditional media have no entry in English-Lithuanian dictionary or the entry is not precise. The problem of idiom translation into other languages is broadly discussed in

Mona Barker's (1992) book, in which the author points out the following issues of idiom translation:

1. "An idiom or fixed expression may have no equivalent in the target language" (p. 68).

2. "An idiom or fixed expression may have a similar counterpart in the target language, but its context of use may be different" (p. 69).

3. "An idiomatic expression may be used in the source text in both its literal and idiomatic senses at the same time" (p. 69) "...the play on idiom can't be successfully reproduced in the target text" (p. 69).

4. "The very convention of using idioms in written discourse, the context in which they can be used, and their frequency of use may be different in the source and target languages" (p. 70).

In the current study the issue of idiom equivalence in English and Lithuanian has been dealt with employing the strategies of idiom translation proposed by Barker (1992), who suggests translating idioms:

1. "using an idiom of similar meaning and form" (p. 72) – same meaning is conveyed by equivalent lexical items;

2. "using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form" (p. 74) – meaning is similar, but it is conveyed by different lexical items;

3. using translation by paraphrase (p. 74), or

4. omitting the idiom, which according to Barker (p. 77) is done on sentence/paragraph level due to lack of equivalent, or for other stylistic purposes.

The following translation recommendations based on Mona Barker's idiom translation strategies were suggested for the idiomatic expressions that have either no entry in English–Lithuanian dictionary or the dictionary entry for which is not precise: *loose talk – palaida kalba (strategy 1), hot news – karštos naujienos (strategy 1), megaphone diplomacy – tarpininkavimas pasitelkiant žiniasklaidą (strategy 3), talk of the town – apkalbų objektas (strategy 3), to hit the headlines – patekti į pirmuosius laikraščių puslapius, liūdnai išgarsėti (strategy 3), to hit the airwaves – patekti į eterį (strategy 3), to cap a story – užbaigti kieno nors pasakojimą (strategy*

3), to kill a story/novel – *sukritikuoti straipsnį/romaną; atsisakyti publikuoti/viešinti (strategy 3), to rubber-neck – prilindus žiūrėti (strategy 3), hot off the press – paskutinė karščiausia sensacija/naujiena (strategy 3), through the grapevine – bobutė pasakė/ paukštelis pačiulbėjo (strategy 2), to have sharp ears for any gossip – gaudyti paskalas (strategy 2)*. As it can be seen, the most prevailing strategy for translating idioms was *paraphrase* (8 units out of 12), what points out the preference of the authors to stay as close to the original expression as possible to transfer its original meaning.

Conclusions

1. Almost any language is rich in idioms and an individual with only a superficial knowledge of these lexical units will find themselves at a serious disadvantage in discussions, debates, or casual conversations. Thus, understanding the processes of the formation and translation of idioms are essential, since the meaning of these expressions in most cases cannot be directly inferred from their constituent parts and this can cause certain difficulties and misunderstandings. Besides, the meaning of idioms can be more effortlessly learned through a contrastive analysis with the learners' mother-tongue by comparing the same linguistic aspects in the two languages.

2. There are several classifications of idioms provided by linguists, yet the one chosen in this analysis according to the grammatical/syntactic function in the text discloses numerous patterns which do not necessarily comprise the corresponding lexical item what can be misleading for an average user.

3. The analysis has shown that, although English and Lithuanian are completely different languages, 5 English idiomatic expressions out of 50 have absolute equivalents in Lithuanian according to their syntactic structure and meaning, and 3 items coincide with the syntactic structure in two languages. The following numbers indicate the problematicity and topicality of equivalence on the idiom level and the need for proper knowledge of the strategies of idiom translation. It can also be encouraging for learners to see that Lithuanian and English idiomatic equivalents can have fully or partially congruent syntactic structures, and can help them raise their learners' confidence to deal with such elements.

4. At the time of carrying out this study, a considerable portion (24%) of English media idiomatic expressions either had no Lithuanian equivalents or the entry of the corresponding expressions in the English-Lithuanian dictionary was not precise. Thereby, possible translation of the expressions was suggested. Giving an equivalent translation of an idiomatic expression where possible is an effective method to communicate the full meaning.

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KAI KURIE ANGLIŠKŲ TRADICINĖS ŽINIASKLAIDOS IDIOMŲ KLASIFIKACIJOS ASPEKTAI IR VERTIMO Į LIETUVIŲ KALBĄ PROBLEMA

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Straipsnyje nagrinėjamas idiomų vaidmuo komunikacijos procese. Sklandžiam bendravimui reikalingos tam tikros žinios apie šiuos leksinius vienetus. Kadangi XXI a. laikomas informacijos amžiumi, individai ir visuomenė gauna daugybę naujienų, kurių pagrindinis šaltinis yra žiniasklaida. Vis dėlto žmonės dažnai neteisingai suvokia idiomatinių posakių reikšmę, kadangi jie turi visiškai kitokią reikšmę nei jų sudedamosios dalys. Todėl šiame straipsnyje bandoma suklasifikuoti idiomas pagal gramatines ir sintaksines funkcijas, kurias šie posakiai atlieka sakinyje. Taip pat akcentuojama idiomų vertimo į lietuvių kalbą problema ir bandoma nustatyti labiausiai dominuojančią vertimo strategiją. Nagrinėjamų angliškų idiomų sintaksinių struktūrų analizė padėjo nustatyti penkis idiomų tipus pagal jų funkciją sakinyje. Tyrimo rezultatai rodo, kad angliškos idiomos turi mažai atitikmenų lietuvių kalboje, o išverstos į lietuvių kalbą idiomos praranda savo idiomatiškumą.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: idiomatinis posakis, žiniasklaidos idioma, idiomų klasifikacija, idiomos vertimas, ekvivalentiškumo problema.