

THE ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH AND LITHUANIAN IDIOMS AND THE PROBLEMS OF THEIR TRANSLATION

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The paper considers the problems associated with comprehension and translation of idioms within the framework of the theory of linguistic relativity and the translation theories. The main statements of these theories used for explaining the difficulties of idioms' translation from/into the English or Lithuanian language are presented. The considered problems are analysed from various perspectives. Case studies, demonstrating different nomination principles used in English and Lithuanian due to different approaches of the native speakers of these languages to the same objects or 'pieces' of reality are provided. The comparative analysis of English and Lithuanian idioms as the most interesting and peculiar expressions of a language, showing its unique character, is performed and the arising difficulties and the available techniques of idioms' translation are demonstrated, taking into account the main statements of the theories of linguistic relativity and translation. Special attention is paid to idioms, whose main ideas are expressed differently in the considered languages and, therefore, present many difficulties to non-native speakers. The influence of traditions, culture, the environment and other factors on the form and contents of the idioms in each of the considered languages is also shown. The analysis performed demonstrates the effectiveness of the theory of linguistic relativity in explaining the nature and causes of the arising comprehension and translation problems, as well as its possibilities to give a translator a native speaker's insight and help him/her avoid some typical errors. The recommendations of how to make a translation of idioms more accurate and authentic by using the appropriate translation techniques are also given.

Keywords: theory of linguistic relativity, translation theories, idiom, idiomaticity, translation problems, translation techniques, equivalence, adjustment technique.

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Introduction

We live in the era of globalization, at the age of the increasing communication and relations between the people of different countries. Globalization as any other process has its advantages and disadvantages. The rapid development of information technologies and mass media facilitates the communication, but it also helps to smooth the differences between the traditions, lifestyles, views and attitudes of various people, as well as their cultures and

languages. However, people want to preserve their individuality and their languages. **The aim** of the present investigation is to analyse English and Lithuanian idioms in the frameworks of the theories of linguistic relativity and translation and to reveal their differences and similarities in expressing the same ideas, which would help to choose the techniques in their translation to/from English. Special attention is paid to the analysis of idioms having no equivalents in

another language. These idioms are of peculiar and unique character and, therefore, they are most difficult to understand and to translate for non-native speakers. **The methods of the research** used in the present work include structural-semantic analysis as well as the fundamentals of the theories of linguistic relativity and translation. **The significance of the research.** The work demonstrates the differences and similarities of idiomatic expressions created by speakers of different languages, as well as revealing the complicated processes related to the linguistic cognition of the world and the surrounding reality. Demonstration of different approaches to naming objects and phenomena reflected in idioms, as well as different associations underlying the idiomatic expressions allows us to understand the way of thought and different approaches to naming the pieces of reality by the speakers of different languages. It also gives the possibility to get the insight of the native speaker. The awareness of these different approaches to naming things helps to develop more flexible thinking, stimulates creativity and enriches the speakers of different languages, by providing useful knowledge of the nature of the linguistic phenomena and their relation to reality. This knowledge also helps them to develop and enhance the linguistic guess, which, in turn, facilitates the comprehension and translation of words and expressions of a foreign language.

Theoretical background

Let us briefly consider the theories used in the present work to explain the difficulties faced by non-native speakers in understanding and translating words and expressions of foreign languages. Linguistic relativity used in the analysis presented in the paper is a multilevel and multidimensional phenomenon associated with the relations of language to thought, culture and reality as well as to the specific ways of encoding the reality by different languages. It states that various languages differently segment the reality and classify the objects. Therefore,

various languages have various patterns of speaking, but these differences are not absolute. In fact, various languages have similar and different patterns of expressing the reality. The ideas of linguistic relativity developed in the USA by Boas (1966: 21–22, 67), E. Sapir (1964: 17) and B. L. Whorf (1979: 152) in the first half of the 20-th century were little known to the linguists of the former USSR. Then, the access to the works of foreign linguists was very limited. The only survey of the theory of linguistic relativity of that time (Leontjevas 1972) was mainly based on the works of B. L. Whorf and contained severe criticism of his ideas because they did not conform with the dominating ideological dogmas. Now, the situation has changed and the main concepts of the theory of linguistic relativity are analysed in Lithuanian papers. The most significant contribution was made by Marina, Suchanova (2001); Marina, Snuiškienė (2005), and Marina (2008), who thoroughly analysed various problems of using, understanding and translating English words and collocations from the perspective of linguistic relativity. In the West, this theory was further investigated and developed (Lucy 1992; Baker 2011). Anthropologists and structuralists also built on this theory. It should be also noted that the researchers developing the translation theories cite the works of Sapir and Whorf. They recognize the importance of the statements of the theory of linguistic relativity, emphasizing the significance of cultural factors and sociolinguistic characteristics, determining, to a varying extent, the way information is expressed in each language (Munday 2008: 196; Katan 2009: 77–79; Pym 2010). Some authors also emphasize the importance of developing collocational competence of English learners based on the knowledge of specific word compatibility in a foreign language (which strongly depends on the choices and preferences of the native speakers) (Rosina 2001: 101; Gile 2009).

A number of Lithuanian researchers analysed the problems of comprehension and translation of idioms, which are most specific language units. Thus, M. Strakšienė (2010) ana-

lysed idiom translation strategies from English into Russian, Selmistraitis and Rinkauskaitė (2011) considered zoomorphic idioms expressing unhappiness in English and Lithuanian, Baranovskaja and Skorupa (2013), Skorupa and Baranovskaja (2012) studied the translation problems of media idioms into Lithuanian and suggested their solutions. The latter works are particularly relevant because they provide Lithuanians with the translation of highly idiomatic expressions in a very important and rapidly developing area of media. The authors analysed the idioms of a specific area, while in the present investigation, the efforts are made to reveal the specific character of commonly used English and Lithuanian idioms and difficulties faced by the non-native speakers in their comprehension and translation.

Now, let us define the fundamental concepts of the translation theory.

The Oxford Dictionary of English gives the following definition of translation: a written or spoken rendering of the meaning of a word, speech, book, or other text, in another language [...].

The role of translation in our life has been growing rapidly because, as some scholars claim, “translation is communication”, which is crucial in the time of globalization. On the theoretical level, various theories of translation have been and are being developed.

Let us consider some definitions of translation suggested by the theorists investigating the process and renderings of translation:

Translating consists of reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message (Nida and Taber 1969: 12 in Munday 2008: 27).

Interlingual translation can be defined as the replacement of elements of one language ... by equivalent elements of another language (Oettinger 1960: 160 in Munday 2008: 185).

[Translation] leads from a source-language text to a target-language text which is as close an equivalent as possible and presupposes an understanding of the content and style of the original (Wilss 1982: 62 in Pym 2010: 27).

We can see that in all three definitions provided by various researchers the words ‘equivalent’, ‘equivalence’ are used. This is because equivalence is a key concept in modern translation theory. It defines the translation connection between an ST (source text) and a TT (target text) in terms of the degree of correspondence between the text units.

The concept of equivalence is one of the most debated issues in translation studies, where scholars disagree on its validity and usefulness. Some reject the notion, others see it as a helpful tool in translation theory and teaching and there are those who argue that without it translation would not be possible (e.g. Nida and Taber 1969, 1974; Koller 1989, 1995 in Munday 2008: 27, 185). We share the latter assumption. Equivalence does not say that languages are the same, but it just says that values can be the same. The term roughly assumes that, on some level, a source text and a translation can share the same value (‘equi-valence’ means ‘equal value’) (Pym 2010: 6).

Nida (1964) suggested a translation technique which he called adjustment as a means of creating equivalence in translation. This technique includes such subtypes as addition (information that is not specified in the ST is inserted into the TT), subtraction (information in the TL exhibit different semantic and grammatical structures) (Munday 2008: 167). It is evident that the translation of idioms, which are the most specific expressions of a language, requires the use of these techniques for obtaining the adequate results.

Idioms and their translation

An idiom is a special kind of phrase. According to the definition in Collins Cobuild Dictionary, an ‘idiom is a group of words, which have a different meaning when used together from the one they would have, if they took the meaning of each word separately.’

Idioms mainly convey evaluations rather than factual information. They are used to ex-

press approval and admiration, or disapproval and criticism. Idioms make language seem more lively and interesting, as well as friendlier and more informal, though they are used in formal contexts as well. Their meaning is metaphorical (Collins Cobuild Dictionary of English idioms 2008, preface).

In idioms, the creative approaches to nomination based on associative thinking, imagination, fancy, emotions are used. Idioms reflect people's attitudes, feelings, judgments, mood, sense of humour, irony, sentiments, etc. It is evident that the considered issues may differ for people belonging to different cultures and speaking different languages (the more so, as these differences can be observed between various social groups of people speaking the same language and even between different people).

The idioms analysed in the present work were taken mainly from dictionaries (Oxford, Collins Cobuild, Hornby) and do not belong to any specific usage area. The considered idioms were divided into 5 groups, depending on their composition and meaning. The description of these groups with the examples of idioms referring to each of them is presented in the table.

In translating idioms, which do not have the equivalent (or partly equivalent) idiomatic expressions in the TL, the arising problem refers not only to the way of conveying their proper meaning using the words of the target language, but is related to the loss of the metaphoric meaning of the translation idiom in the TL. This problem is particularly acute in translating literary works (e.g. books of fiction). If a character of a book often uses idioms in his speech, it is a part of his image, but if his manner of speaking has changed because of the inadequate translation, where metaphoric phrases are translated by ordinary expressions, the effect on the target readers will be quite different. It is like offering your guests an exotic dish cooked without spices or showing a dull black-white copy of a colourful animated film to children.

Therefore, we think that to preserve the desired effect, some idioms may be literary translated, with the explanations given in

brackets. This will give non-native speakers a possibility to get acquainted with the 'exotic' patterns of expression used in another language and show the creative power of the speakers of this language. It is even possible that some of such idioms will be later copied and used by non-native speakers. Whatever the solution, the problem still remains, and this explains why, in machine translation, the translation of idioms is considered problematic.

According to the translation theories, translations can be either foreignizing or domesticating. Thus, Friedrich Schleiermacher famously describes the two possible movements as follows: "Either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader toward the author, or the translator leaves the reader in peace as much as possible, and moves the author towards the reader" (cited from *Exploring Translation Theories* by Anthony Pym (2010: 31)). The author himself supported the foreignizing approach and the solution suggested above is also within this frame. Both approaches ultimately allow the translator to decide, and the decision does not depend on the source text.

Thus, we can say that various techniques are available for the translator, and they assume that reasonable changes in translation are legitimate.

Now, let us consider the idioms presented in the Table 1 provided in this article and discuss the possible ways of their translation.

According to the definition of the type of English and Lithuanian idioms included in Group 1, it is clear that they allow word-for-word translation because of their complete equivalence. Some of them may be calques (translation loan expressions), e.g. money laundering – pinigų plovimas. The fact that this idiom has been loaned by the Lithuanian language is confirmed by the fact that, in English, this pattern is firmly established and wider used (we think that data laundering will soon be borrowed by Lithuanian as well. This idiom where dog is 'buried' has a parallel idiomatic expression in Lithuanian (*kur šuo pakastas*), but in English, the same idea is also expressed in the

idiom 'where the shoe pinches', where another metaphor is used. In fact, the translation of the idioms of this group consists of substituting an idiom of the TL for the equivalent idiom of the SL.

The same applies to the idioms in Group 2, expressing the same idea by phrases differing only in some words: e.g. English – sea dog, Lithuanian – sea wolf. They are, actually, interchangeable.

In the idioms of Group 3, the image used differs considerably, but the message conveyed is the same. In this case, the translators may choose between two approaches described above: domestication or foreignization. If they literally translate an original idiom, it will be understood by non-native speakers, but the foreignness of the expression will be felt. For example, the literally translated English idiom *to fall into the same trap* – *patekti į tuos pačius spąstus*, will be easily understood by Lithuanians, though the same idea is expressed in Lithuanian as *to step on the same rake* (Lithuanian *užlipti ant tų pačių grėblių*). Some idioms are very vivid and expressive (e.g. English *like a fish needs a bicycle*, corresponding to Lithuanian *kaip šuniui penkta koja* (like a dog needs the fifth leg)), and their literal translation could be interesting to the speakers of other languages and enrich their associative thinking.

The idioms presented in Group 4 have no equivalent idiomatic expressions in another language (English or Lithuanian) and, therefore, their translation is not possible by using the substitution (or transposition) technique, and, therefore, causes difficulties for translators. In such cases, the translator should try to disambiguate the idiom by analysing the context or some words of an idiom that may give a clue to its meaning. For example, in the English idiom *'a motor mouth'*, the word 'motor' may evoke the association with the intensive and uninterrupted work, while the context may reveal that 'mouth' really means 'man' and thus one can guess that the idiom speaks about a person who talks incessantly and is called *kalbovas*, *šnekutis* in Lithuanian.

The examples of Lithuanian idioms, having no equivalent idiomatic expressions in English, are *'piktas pinigais'*, literary, *angry money*, or more exactly, *money unit*) which means a troublesome person, annoying other people, and *palikti ant ledo* has the meaning "fail to support or help someone as they had hoped or expected". In English, this meaning may be conveyed by a phrasal verb *'to let somebody down'* (but phrasal verbs are not considered here). We can also see that, in Lithuanian, this idea is expressed very vividly.

If the translator would like to preserve the effect produced by the considered Lithuanian idioms, he could translate them literally or paraphrase them, but some explanations would still be required. It is clear that idioms having no equivalent metaphorical expressions are more difficult to understand and to translate for non-native speakers.

The most interesting and specific though rare idioms are presented in Group 5 because they differ only in the metaphoric meaning (which is more specific), matching each other in all other aspects. Therefore, they may be compared to the so-called 'false friends' which can mislead non-native speakers.

Take, for example, the English idiom *'to lead somebody by the nose'* (Lithuanian *vedžioti ką nors už nosies*) found in both languages. In English it means 'to control someone completely', while, in Lithuanian, its meaning is 'to deceive someone'. Justifying the Lithuanian meaning, this expression really deceives people (the translators). The English idiom with the meaning 'to deceive someone' is *'to lead someone a pretty dance'*, which could hardly be properly translated into Lithuanian without the help of a dictionary.

We can see that the comparison of English and Lithuanian idioms often reveals different ways of thought of the native speakers of these languages and their different approaches to naming things and expressing the same ideas. This causes difficulties in translation, which may be explained in the framework of the theory of linguistic relativity, emphasizing the

Table 1. Idioms differentiation into groups

GROUP 1	GROUP 2	GROUP 3	GROUP 4	GROUP 5
English and Lithuanian idioms based on the same patterns or models of expression, which have the same meaning and consist of the equivalent words	English and Lithuanian idioms based on the same patterns or models of expression, which have the same meaning, but include some different words (often from the same semantic field), which do not change the general meaning of the idiom	English and Lithuanian idioms, having the same meaning, but expressing the same idea by completely different words	The specific English and Lithuanian idioms, not having idiomatic equivalents in the target language.	The English and Lithuanian idioms, consisting of the same words and having the same literal meaning, but possessing different metaphorical meaning

EXAMPLES OF IDIOMS OF DIFFERENT TYPES

English (E). To put a foot in – Lithuanian (L.) <i>koją kaišioti</i> ; E. angry as a dog – L. <i>Piktas kaip šuo</i> ; E. a wolf in the sheep's skin – L. <i>vilkas avies kailius</i> ; E. money laundering – L. <i>pinigų plovimas</i> (Piesarskas 2000); E. to turn up one's beard (to die) – L. <i>užriesti barzdą</i> , etc.	E. to buy a pig in a poke – L. <i>pirkti katę maiše</i> (to buy a cat in a bag); E. sea dog – L. <i>jūros vilkas</i> (sea wolf); E. kill two birds with one stone – L. <i>du zuikius vienu šuviu nušauti</i> (to kill two hares with one shot); E. to skate on thin ice – L. <i>vaikščioti plonu ledu</i> (to walk on thin ice); E. drunk as lord – L. <i>prisigėręs kaip šliurė</i> (drunk as a slipper) or <i>prisigėręs iki žemės graibymo</i> (so drunk that grabs at the ground).	E. to fall into the same trap – L. <i>užlipti ant tų pačių grėblių</i> (to step on the same rake); E. like a fish needs a bicycle – L. <i>kaip šuniui penktą koją</i> (like a dog needs the 5th leg); E. Chinese whispers – L. <i>sudegęs telefonas</i> (a broken telephone); E. bent as nine bob note (a dishonest person) – L. <i>suktas žmogus</i> (a 'twisted' person), etc.	E. motor mouth (someone who talks incessantly); E. one over the eight (someone who has had one over the eight is very drunk indeed. It refers to the standard eight pints that most people drink and feel it is enough); E. do time (to spend time in prison); E. on the never-never (if you buy something on the never-never, you buy it on long-term credit); L. <i>palikti and ledo</i> (to leave on ice) – fail to support or help someone as they had hoped or expected; L. <i>piktas pinigas</i> (angry money or, more exactly, monetary unit, banknote) a troublesome or an annoying person, it is difficult to get rid of him.	E. To lead someone by the nose (to control someone completely) – L. <i>vedžioti ką už nosies</i> (to deceive someone); E. a wolf in a sheep's skin. In English, it can also denote a good person pretending to be bad, probably, to look stronger than he is). In Lithuanian, it has only the traditional meaning (a bad person, pretending to be good). In this meaning, the idiom is included into Group 1).
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existence of various 'patterns of speaking' in various languages along similar patterns.

The differences are caused by different approaches of different languages to naming the 'same pieces of reality'. In the case of idioms, these different approaches may be explained by different attitudes and views as well as by different associations, fancy, sense of humour, cultural and social background of the speakers of various languages.

As an example of a culturally-specific idiom, the expression '*drunk as a lord*' may be considered. It is evident that this idiom could be created only in the country, where such a noble rank exists. By the way, the Lithuanian idiom with the same meaning is '*girtas kaip šliurė*' (English *drunk as a slipper*), where the comparison is made at a much lower level.

In translating idioms, such translation techniques as alteration, subtraction and addition, generally called adjustment, may be used to convey the required meaning to the native speakers. The more unusual and specific is the metaphor used in the idiom, the more difficult is to understand and translate this idiom into another language.

In the case of very specific idioms, whose literal translation is senseless, the translator should refer to a special dictionary, find the respective definitions, and using them as a basis or a point of departure, provide adequate translation.

Conclusion

1. In the present work, the English and Lithuanian idioms taken from English and Lithuanian dictionaries were analysed. According to their composition and content, they were classified into 5 groups. The similarities and differences of English and Lithuanian idioms expressing the same ideas were determined, and some unique idioms, which had no equivalent idiomatic expressions in another language were analysed to demonstrate their specific character and difficulties they present

to translators. The idioms, their differences and ways of translation were analysed in the frameworks of the theories of linguistic relativity and translation, whose main principles were described. The recommendations as to choosing the proper translation technique, depending on the type of idioms, were also given.

2. This allows us to believe that the presented work may be of theoretical and practical value to the translators, teachers delivering the courses of translation and lexicology and learners of English.

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ANGLŲ IR LIETUVIŲ KALBŲ IDIOMŲ ANALIZĖ IR JŲ VERTIMO PROBLEMOS

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Straipsnyje nagrinėjamos idiomų supratimo ir vertimo problemos kalbų reliatyvumo ir vertimo teorijų kontekste. Pateikiami šių teorijų pagrindai, kuriais remiantis paaiškinami vertimo į (iš) anglų kalbą sunkumai. Straipsnyje parodyta tradicijų, kultūros, aplinkos bei kitų veiksnių įtaka idiomų formai ir turiniui kiekvienoje iš šių kalbų. Problemos nagrinėjamos remiantis įvairiais principais. Analizuojami konkretūs pavyzdžiai, rodantys dėl skirtingų nominacijos principų atsirandančius kalbų skirtumus. Šie principai atspindi skirtingus įvairiomis kalbomis kalbančių asmenų požiūrius į tuos pačius realybės objektus, reiškinius ir situacijas. Analizė paremta konkrečių anglų ir lietuvių idiomų nagrinėjimu. Parodytas svarstomų teorijų efektyvumas, aiškinant kylančių problemų priežastis ir mažinant supratimo bei vertimo klaidų kiekį. Taip pat pateikiamos rekomendacijos, kaip tiksliai ir autentiškai vertinti idiomias.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: kalbos reliatyvumo teorija, vertimo teorijos, idioma, idiomatiškumas, vertimo technikos, sunkumai, ekvivalentiškumas.

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