

FEATURES AND DIFFICULTIES OF TRANSLATING EUPHEMISMS

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Abstract

The media, in particular, the press today is the main source of information about the situation in the world, about ongoing events, which often include "negative" news. In order to mitigate or disguise the presented information of a negative nature or its individual elements, the press uses indirect renaming - euphemisms. Euphemism as a multidimensional and very dynamic phenomenon is studied in some detail within the framework of different approaches: classifications and methods for the formation of euphemisms are developed, the spheres of euphemization in different languages are considered. Despite the fact that the press is full of all sorts of euphemisms, scientific works rarely set a purely applied goal of identifying and adequately conveying such units by means of a translating language; for if the euphemism is not recognized, a negative tone can be introduced into the text of the translation, the attitude of the writer to the transmitted event is distorted, etc.

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Introduction

Thinking about language, thinkers of different times and peoples often compared its power with a weapon: cf. "The word is man's most powerful weapon" (Aristotle) or "Sword and fire are less destructive than a garrulous tongue". Speech as an action, as an act (the main postulate of modern pragmatics) was realized already in antiquity, when speakers learned to clothe different content in clear and elegant forms, impressing listeners. The content could not always be pleasant, decent or appropriate in society, so it was necessary to look for other, indirect and softer forms for its expression - what are called euphemisms in linguistics today.

Euphemism as a phenomenon has been studied for a long time: the first mention of the term in 1656 is usually associated with the name of the English lexicographer Thomas Blount, although euphemisms have been actively studied over the past hundred years within the framework of different approaches. Classifications of euphemisms, methods of their formation are developed in detail, the spheres of euphemization in different languages and cultures are considered. However, studies focusing on the actual translation aspect are still fragmentary. Meanwhile, the modern press, with all its "negative" news and "uncomfortable" topics, is replete with euphemistic formations of various kinds, which cannot

be ignored in translation. It is important, firstly, to recognize the euphemism, and, secondly, to be able to adequately convey it; otherwise, there is a high probability that a negative tone will be introduced into the translation text, the attitude of the writer to the transmitted event may be distorted, etc. Thus, the relevance of our study is determined by the need to identify euphemism in press texts and adequately convey it in the target language.

Of course, the translator will be assisted by explanatory dictionaries of euphemisms, however, it should be remembered that euphemization is a rather mobile phenomenon: euphemisms can be erased, ceasing to be perceived as softened renaming; different units are marked by different degree of euphemization. The creation of bilingual dictionaries of euphemisms is all the more unnecessary, apparently, precisely because of the complexity and dynamism of the euphemization process. All these considerations prompted us to turn to the study of euphemisms in the modern British press with the ultimate goal of identifying the difficulties of their translation into Russian.

Research results and discussion

The source of the material for this study was the news articles of the online publication BBC News (UK) for 2013–2018, as well as articles with official translations published in the online publication of the Internet project InoSMIRU. The material of lexicographic sources. As a result of the selection of lexical units used in the required meaning in BBC News news articles, a corpus was assembled that includes 50 euphemisms.

When translating euphemisms, difficulties often arise due to the need to convey not only the denotative meaning, but also to preserve their main function of veiling, which is not always possible due to differences in the lexical composition of the original language and the target language, as well as cultural differences. However, this does not mean that translation is impossible in principle: the translator makes a decision regarding each specific use of euphemism and depending on the purpose of the translation and the culture of the target language. In the course of our observations, some features and difficulties of translating euphemisms were formulated. We assume that they are, in general, universal, regardless of the language pair, so they can be taken into account by translators working with other languages.

1. The identification of a euphemism in the text and its understanding is one of the main difficulties in translating euphemisms. Thus, the following example uses the euphemistic expression day of action ‘a politically motivated strike’, which literally translates as ‘a day of action’:

The march was one of 12 rallies across the UK as part of what organizers claimed would be “the largest ever pro-European day of action” (BBC, 2018).

A literal translation in this context is generally possible: cf. in the national press, for example, *Международный день действий против ядерных испытаний / плотин, Всемирный день действий «За достойный труд!»* etc.; although the phrase “day of action” is hardly euphemistic in Russian. Usually in such contexts it means a protest action, a strike or a rally. However, in our opinion, in the case of a literal translation, the inherent euphemism is lost, especially since the quotation within the fragment under consideration clearly emphasizes the scope and positive significance of the action (the article is devoted to a rally in Edinburgh in protest against the UK's exit from the EU). We would suggest the Russian word event as a variant correspondence. In the explanatory dictionary S.I. Ozhegov, we find the following definition of ‘what happened, this or that significant phenomenon, a fact of public, personal life’. This meaning corresponds to one of the meanings of the word action ‘a thing done; an act’ (Oxford dictionary). Thus, this sentence can be translated as follows:

Этот марш стал одним из двенадцати митингов по всему Соединённому Королевству, являясь частью того, что организаторы объявили как «самое большое проевропейское событие».

Misunderstanding of the euphemistic essence of a word or expression can also occur in the case of units that are used as euphemisms for so long that they are no longer perceived as true euphemisms, which, however, does not deprive them of their euphemistic function, and sometimes, on the contrary, enhances it, because the reader does not pay much attention to the usual wording, only “running” over it with his eyes.

- The next feature that we would like to draw attention to is connected with the spheres of euphemization that are universal for many cultures. Thus, the word adult in the meaning of ‘pornographic’ in the following fragment is easily translated into Russian using an equivalent lexical correspondence:

Tech platforms like the Apple App store and Google Play won't approve adult content, whether explicitly adult or simply erotic (BBC, 2018).

Хранилища мобильных приложений Apple App Store и Google Play не принимают к распространению продукцию для взрослых, будь она откровенно порнографической или просто эротической.

The meaning of the word adult in the dictionary edited by S.A. Kuznetsova is defined as 1) mature, full of maturity; 2) intended for such people. Like English adult it is used as a euphemism for pornographic.

As is known, the Latin language is the source of origin of many words in European languages in general, and therefore both in English and in Russian there are units similar in form and meaning. When translating such units that come from Latin, the best solution is usually to choose a word with a Latin origin.

- The ideal way of translation would be, in which the euphemistic unit is transmitted by a similar in the way of formation and meaning of the euphemistic unit of the target language. However, not always the euphemism recorded in the dictionary can be an adequate substitute. Consider the following passage, which uses the euphemism come to the attention of the police with the euphemistic meaning ‘to be a habitual criminal’:

HM Inspectorate of Probation operates 152 youth offending teams in England and Wales, and supervises young people between the ages of 10 and 18 who have come to the attention of the police, or have been sentenced by a court (BBC, 2017)

In the dictionary of euphemisms of the Russian language, we find the following units describing a close denotative situation: “Social risk group - vm. juvenile delinquents”; “Delinquent - vm. criminal, rebel”. However, neither one nor the other designation can convey the euphemism of the original, since the delinquent does not quite fit in the meaning and is an outdated euphemism, and the phrase social risk group is used, as analysis of the contexts of the NKR, in relation not only to criminals, but also to the needy segments of the population, the disabled, etc. If we proceed from the closest Russian correspondence to the English habitual criminal contained in the definition of euphemism, namely the phrase “hardened criminal”, this and this option will be incorrect, since the euphemistic function is completely lost: negative information is not smoothed out, but, on the contrary, only intensifies.

- Euphemisms-terms deserve special attention. First of all, it is necessary to find out from which sphere the given term came, then to determine its euphemistic meaning and, finally, to select the appropriate term in the target language. Often the formation of terms is based on tracing, for them in the Russian language there are already equivalent lexical correspondences; in such cases, the translation of euphemisms-terms does not cause any special difficulties. Thus, the euphemism circular error probability with the meaning ‘the extent to which ordnance will miss the target’ in a special translation dictionary is translated as circular probable deviation (CEP), which can be used, so the translation of the entire fragment can be as follows:

Typically US “precision” bombs have a circular error probable (the radius around the aiming point in which 50% or more will fall) of eight-to-12 meters (BBC, 2015).

Обычно американские «точные» бомбы характеризуются круговым вероятным отклонением (радиус вокруг цели, в который попадёт 50 или более процентов зарядов) в 8-12 метров.

Conclusion

So, the analysis of the use of euphemisms in the modern British press and their translation into Russian allows us to draw the following conclusions.

1. Difficulties in translating a euphemism can arise at different stages: both when identifying it in the text and determining the meaning (established euphemisms that are not perceived as units of a softened name; euphemisms, the realities whose meaning is not motivated by their lexical composition), and at the stage of choosing the right one for meaning and style of correspondence. As regards the latter, there may be no equivalent euphemism in the target language; if there is a correspondence, it may not be suitable for this particular context or may not fully fulfill the function of veiling. Difficulties can cause metaphors and terms.
2. There were no regularities in the choice of the method of translation depending on the method of formation of the initial euphemism. The only exceptions are euphemistic units borrowed from professional fields, the translation of which uses tracing and translation transcription/transliteration. When translating established euphemisms, the most correct solution would be to select a well-established (politically) correct word or expression.

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