Este artículo trata sobre las expresiones formuladas en el campo de la traducción. Muestra que la traducción de estas expresiones revela comúnmente las dificultades y diversidad en formas lingüísticas existentes en la comunicación humana. A menudo estas formas son, desde un punto de vista lingüístico, radicalmente diferentes de lengua a lengua y en la mayoría de los casos una traducción literal no sería posible. Además normalmente sólo hay un conjunto limitado de formas para cada tipo de expresión, que puede o no estar disponible en la segunda lengua. En este artículo éstas y otras propiedades de las expresiones formuladas se exploran detalladamente y se discute su tratamiento en traducción. En este análisis se examina críticamente el enfoque del estudio de la traducción basado en la noción de equivalencia y se presentan argumentos en contra de él. Un enfoque alternativo basado en la cognición se discute posteriormente y finalmente se extraen una serie de conclusiones del estudio.

Formulaic Expressions in Translation

This article deals with formulaic expressions in translation. It shows that the translation of these expressions commonly reveals the difficulties and diversity of linguistic forms in human communication. Often these forms are, from a linguistic point of view, radically different from language to language and in most cases literal translation does not work. Normally there only is a limited set of forms for each type of expression, which may or may not be available in the target language. In this article, these and other properties of formulaic expressions are explored in detail and their treatment in translation is discussed. In doing so, the equivalence-based approach to the translation of these expressions is examined critically and arguments against it are presented. An alternative cognitive-based approach is then discussed and some conclusions are drawn.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The translation of formulaic expressions commonly reveals the difficulties and diversity of linguistic forms in human communication. Often these forms are, from a linguistic point of view, radically different from language to language. For example, at the end of a letter the Galician expression *Atentamente* 'attentively' would be translated into English by means of a very different expression such as *Yours sincerely*. This example also illustrates how in most cases literal translation of these expressions does not work (the English expression *Yours sincerely* would not be translated into Galician as *Teu sinceramente* either). Moreover, there normally is a limited set of forms for each type of expression (e.g. in the case in hand, expressions used at the end of letters: *Yours sincerely, Yours faithfully, Best Wishes, Yours*), which may or may not be available in the target language. More importantly though is that these expressions do not have any propositional content, in the sense that they do not convey any truth-conditional meaning (Gutt 1991:148). Their meaning is defined not by their semantic content (e.g. the meaning of the words *Yours* and *sincerely*), but rather by descriptions of their use (e.g. *Yours sincerely* is used as a formal closing of a letter).

There are cognitive reasons as to why this is the case. They have to do with the fact that these expressions are used repeatedly and it is more cost-effective to memorise their interpretation than it is to assemble it every time the expression is encountered. Memorisation is costly, but it is offset by the frequency of use. Moreover, their repeated use in specific types of contexts (e.g. formal letters) fixes the type of interpretation they can give rise to. It is precisely this close relationship with a specific type of context that gives formulaic expressions their meaning.

From a translator's point of view, this implies that they must have available in their memory the description of an expression which will resemble the original in the appropriate respects, not just the semantic equivalent. Furthermore, a translator requires, particularly in the case of formulaic expressions, a more encyclopaedic knowledge of the language and culture in question, than just grammatical knowledge. Since grammatical knowledge alone would not allow him or her to translate successfully.

Many types of communicative form fall within what is termed as formulaic expression: e.g. greetings, proverbs, warnings, notices, etc. In translation, all these expressions tend to be rendered holistically, rather than semantically. Although some modern trends do the opposite, e.g. translation foreignising, where the differences in cultural, encyclopaedic knowledge are exploited to induce effects, which are not meant to be normal but shocking.

In this article, the properties of formulaic expressions are explored further and their treatment in translation discussed. Firstly, the equivalence-based approach will be examined in relation to formulaic expressions. Secondly, arguments against this approach will be presented. Finally, an alternative approach will be discussed and some conclusions will be drawn.

2. EQUIVALENCE APPROACH TO FORMULAIC EXPRESSIONS

One of the current approaches to translation is that of equivalence (Baker 1992). Applied to formulaic expressions, this approach maintains that the translation of a formulaic expression must be made on the basis of an equivalent expression in the target language. In order to see how the approach works, let us look at a simple example. Consider the expression mentioned earlier, where the English translation of the Galician expression (found at the end of letters) would be the idiomatic *Yours sincerely*, rather than the more literal *Attentively*:

(1) *Galician:*
     Atentamente
     English Equivalent:
     Yours sincerely
     Literal Meaning in English:
     Attentively

Why should this translation be carried out along these lines? Equivalence tells us that we must find a translation which has the same effects on the target audience as the original did on its own audience. The translator must therefore find an expression in English which is used in the same type of context as the Galician one, e.g. in formal letters. Indeed, the equivalent English rendering, as opposed to the literal meaning, does have the type of effects required. Both are used to indicate the end of formal letters. The literal meaning here is not equivalent, because it is an expression which is not used in English in this kind of situation. In other words, the latter rendering is not equivalent in the *appropriate* sense.

The same is the case in the following German example, although in this case we have a proverb rather than the type of expression that we have just seen in the Galician example:

(2) *German:*
     Man muss mit den Wölfen heulen
     English Literal Meaning:
     One must howl with the wolves
     English Equivalent:
     When in Rome, do as the Romans do

Again, in this case we have a formulaic expression, here of the proverbial variety, whose English equivalent is not the literal rendering but rather the more idiomatic one. The same reasoning would apply in this case as in the above one. We would choose the idiomatic rendering rather than the literal one, because the former is the *appropriate* equivalent in this case.

In these two cases, we have appealed to equivalence (in the appropriate sense) to find an adequate translation of the original. However, there are several problems with an equivalence-based approach to the translation of formulaic expressions. In what follows these problems are discussed in turn.

3. PROBLEMS WITH EQUIVALENCE APPROACHES

The first problem has to do with the definition of equivalence and its theoretical status. In particular, the difficulties encountered in attempting to define the term. Indeed, Baker (1992) herself, whose book is based fully on the notion of equivalence, acknowledges the shortcomings of this concept: 'The term **equivalence** is adopted [...] for the sake of convenience - because most translators are used to it rather than because it has any theoretical status.' (Baker ibid.:5-6). However, if we want to arrive at an explanatory theory of translation and a theoretically sound approach to translation practice, terminological convenience is not enough. If we use concepts, we must be able to characterise them so that they are theoretically grounded. So, for example, in the case of (1) we must be able to give a reasoned and theoretically sound answer as to why the translation of the Galician expression *Atentamente* is the English *Yours sincerely*.

The second problem with equivalence approaches is their overspecificity. Equivalence judgements can only be made in relation to a specific text and situation, so that what may be equivalent in one context may fail to be so in another context. Baker herself acknowledges this: 'although equivalence can usually be obtained to some extent, it is influenced by a variety of linguistic and cultural factors and is therefore always relative.'(Ibid.). Two issues arise in relations to this. First of all, overspecificity results in a loss of generalisation across

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texts and contexts, and as a result in a loss of predictive power. This is an important point, as both generalisation and prediction should be an essential part of an explanatory theory of translation. The second sub-issue relates to the fact that equivalence approaches lack any way of integrating contextual factors, in a sound and theoretical manner, into the translator's reasoning about the choices made in the process of translation. In other words, we should be able to say how the relativity of the situation is resolved in each case. To say that an expression is equivalent in a context is not enough to explain the pragmatic processes a translator undertakes to make his or her own choices in the translation of a text. For example, the processes involved in the interpretation of (1) and (2) though similar are not the same.

The third problem with the equivalence approach relates to the very value of equivalence. In order to make evaluative comparisons between alternative translations, it is necessary to know the ranking of the features to be compared. However, this ranking or hierarchical ordering of features is outside equivalence as such. That is, value judgement on features precedes equivalence comparisons. Therefore, what produces the evaluation is not the equivalence procedure itself but the value attached to the hierarchies used. This suggests that something other than equivalence is required to explain evaluation judgements. For example, in both (1) and (2) conceptual equivalence is more important than linguistic equivalence. But this value judgement is outside equivalence proper. This brings us to yet another problem associated with equivalence approaches, namely, the criterion for the composition of these hierarchies.

The solutions proposed for the problem of hierarchy composition within equivalence approaches point to ideas such as purpose. That is, the importance and ranking of the features depend on the purpose of the translation. For instance, the purpose of a translation like

(2) could be the conveyance of German meaning into English, the exemplification of German proverbial culture, the learning of the German language, etc. However, the problem here is that purposes are in themselves hierarchically ordered too, and their ordering has to be done prior to equivalence evaluation. So, what was to be a solution is, in reality, only another intermediate step. As was mentioned above, this suggests that some criterion other than equivalence is required to explain the evaluation of translations. So how can we characterise formulaic expressions and approach their translation?

4. WHAT ARE FORMULAIC EXPRESSIONS?

Current theories of meaning (e.g. Sperber and Wilson 1995, chapter 2) propose that concepts are structured, complex, units. Typically concepts comprise three entries: the lexical entry, the logical entry, and the encyclopaedic entry. The concept BACHELOR, for example, could be construed as follows (where the phonetic transcription in the logical entry has been kept in its written form for convenience, this practice is followed throughout):

(3) BACHELOR
Lexical entry: Countable Noun, /b a c h e l o r/
Logical entry: Unmarried man
Encyclopaedic entry: Bachelors are eligible to marry, are fussy, non-committal, etc.

Standard concepts include information under each of these three entries. However, not all concepts show this standard pattern. Formulaic expressions (whether single concepts or complex concepts) deviate from this norm in interesting ways. This sets them apart form other concepts and gives rise to the types of interpretation typically associated with them.

One of the main differences that formulaic expressions show in relation to standard concepts such as BACHELOR is that they crucially lack logical information and their interpretation is based mainly on the information stored under their encyclopaedic entry. Consider a typical case of a formulaic expression such as the word *hello*. This expression does not appear to have logical information, as there do not seem to be truth-conditions associated with it. Our knowledge of this expression seems to fall back on what we know about its use. So, for instance, we know that it is used for greeting people, that it can be used at any time of the day or night, that it is used informally. Hence its conceptual address would look something like the following:

(4) HELLO
Lexical entry: Noun, /h e l l o/
Logical entry: N/A
Encyclopaedic entry: It is used as a greeting, it
is informal, It can be
used at any time of the
day or night, etc.

Thus, when we interpret an expression such as 'hello', we do not get any logical implications as we saw in the case of BACHELOR, but rather we base our interpretation on a description of its use and a set of contextual assumptions we hold about the expression. Consider the following example:

(5)   John (to Susan): Hello.

(6)   *Susan's possible interpretation:*
a. John said 'hello'
b. This expression is used as a greeting
c. John has greeted me
d. If John has greeted me, then he may
   want to talk to me
e. John has greeted me
f. He may want to talk to me

In (6) we have what might be a typical interpretation of a greeting. (6a) is a description of the event, (6b) is a contextual assumption held in the encyclopaedic knowledge, and (6c-f) are contextual effects. Because in formulaic expressions we use encyclopaedic information (rather than logical information) as the basis for the interpretation, there are more possibilities open to the translator to render the original into the target language. Some of those possibilities are listed below in Galician, where, of course, not all would be equally acceptable in all contexts:

(7)   a.   Hola.
            Hello
       b.   Xoán dixo 'hola'.
            John said 'hello'
       c.   Xoán saudoume.
            John greeted me

Translation (7a) would, for instance, be acceptable when no contextual information is required. (7b) when the addressee does not know who spoke. (7c) when knowing the action carried out is important. They are all in their own ways equivalent to (5), but not all are equally acceptable in all contexts.

The fact that in the interpretation of formulaic expressions we rely mainly on the encyclopaedic knowledge we have about each of them, opens up the possibility of having as many different types of interpretation as there are types of encyclopaedic information used in their interpretation. For instance, we normally derive the interpretation of proverbs from our memories (Gutt 1991:148-152). The interpretation of proverbs does not depend mainly on their semantic meaning. Thus, a non-native speaker of German in (2) above may understand the semantic meaning of the individual words and the sense of the utterance as a whole, and yet fail to grasp its intended import as a proverb: i.e. that when in a new place one should conduct oneself as the locals do. We

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may even have several paraphrases indicating various possible interpretations of a single proverb. For example in the case of (2) we could have the following paraphrases:

(8) Man muss mit den Wölfen heulen
    Possible Paraphrase Interpretations:
    a. When one is in a new place, one should conduct oneself as the locals do
    b. Don't draw attention to yourself
    c. When you are in a new place, you should try to assimilate

All of these paraphrases (and more) would be, in the appropriate circumstances, perfectly compatible with the intended proverbial meaning of (2). The difference between formulaic expressions such as 'hello' and proverbs is that normally in the former case we have assumptions about their use, whilst in the latter we have direct paraphrases about their possible intended interpretations.

One interesting consequence of the semantic analysis of formulaic expressions discussed here is that it distinguishes genuine formulas from other expressions, like idioms, that although look similarly formulaic, have in fact semantic content and therefore their interpretation works like any other standard concept. For example, the English expression *to rain cats and dogs* may have, in contrast with e.g. the expression *hello*, a logical entry:

(9) (TO RAIN) CATS AND DOGS
    Lexical entry: Adverb, /k a t s a n d d o g s/
    Logical entry: (It rains) a lot
    Encyclopaedic entry: It is a colloquial
                             expression, it is
                             informal, etc

This means that in translating this expression into another language, say Spanish, we may choose to render the logical meaning rather than the parallel linguistic form, or choose an expression which has the same conceptual structure:

(10) It rains cats and dogs
     a. *Llueve mucho*
        (It rains a lot: logical meaning)
     b. *Llueve a cántaros*
        (It rains pitchers: idiomatic
        expression)

This option is not available with the previous, genuinely formulaic, expressions, which crucially lack a logical entry. So, given these conceptual structures, what are the solutions to the problems raised by the equivalence approach?

5. FORMULAIC EXPRESSIONS: AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH

Equivalence is not a theoretically defined term, because there are more fundamental notions which govern the process of translation. Equivalence is a mere consequence, whenever it exists, of the translation choices made by the translator. What seems to be crucial to a successful translation is to achieve successful communication, whilst maintaining a degree of resemblance between original and target texts. In other words, the translator must produce a target text, which allows the addressee to draw sufficiently relevant interpretation from it, whilst communicating the intentions of the original writer. This means that there would be two expectations on the part of the reader of a translation: (a) that the translation resembles the original interpretively, and (b) that the translation is sufficiently relevant. A sufficiently relevant translation is produced when the addressee draws (a) enough contextual effects and (b) he or she does it without unjustified cognitive effort. When this expectation on the part of the addressee is fulfilled, the translation

would have been successful. For example, the translator who wants to convey in German, in a concise form, the popular wisdom expressed by the forementioned English proverb repeated in (11a) would do well in rendering it as in (11b):

(11) a. When in Rome, do as the Romans do
      b. Man muss mit den Wölfen heulen

This is not because the translation is equivalent to the original, but rather because the translator purports interpretively to resemble the original interpretation by means of his translation, and he must do so relevantly, that is, conveying the original message without giving rise to undue effort on the part of the addressee. If the interpretation intended by the original author was different, then so would too be the translation. For example, if the author was a writer of books on English as a Foreign Language, he would quite possibly want the reader to understand the words in the first instance, and a different translation would be required:

(12) a. When in Rome, do as the Romans do
      b. Wenn in Rom, tu wie die Römer

This translation is not equivalent in conceptual meaning to the original. However, in these circumstances, the translation would be relevant and successful. Crucially, it interpretively resembles the original in the way that the author had intended.

Applying a relevance-based approach to the translation of formulaic expressions also reconciles the contextual dependency of any solution and the theoretical requirements of prediction. From a contextual point of view, the translator must produce a target text which interpretively resembles the original and produce a relevant interpretation. This is crucially dependent on the interpretation intended by the author of the original, which for any given text may be different from context to context. From a theo-retical point of view, we can predict what translations will be successful on the basis of the following expectations:

(13) Successful Translation:
      a. Resembles the original interpretively (i.e. it shares analytical and synthetic implication with the original);
      b. Induces sufficient contextual effects; and
      c. It does so without unnecessary effort.

Interpretive resemblance also plays an important role in determining what elements of an original text are important to translate. The hierarchies required in the equivalence approaches fall naturally from establishing the type and degree of interpretive resemblance. For example, the translator of a Wellerism such as the literary one below should aim to translate it into an expression which gave rise to a resembling interpretation in the target language (for an analysis of Wellerisms, see Orero 1998, where a discussion of the following example is also found):

(14) 'Business first, pleasure afterwards', as the King Richard the Third said when he stabbed the other king in the Tower, before he smothered the babies.
      (From the *Pickwick Papers*, Charles Dickens, quoted in Baer 1983:423)

What is crucial to a successful translation of this except is the realisation that the first, quoted, part is an idiomatic expression and that what follows is a humorous and cynical commentary on it. Thus, the degree of resemblance between the *structure* of original and the target texts must be high, if the translator is to render all the effects communicated by the original in the target text.

However, it is not always obvious to translators that an expression is idiomatic and that it

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plays an important role in the original text. This is exemplified in the translations into Spanish of the idiomatic part of the above example ('Business first, pleasure afterwards'), in which it is either ignored or rendered as follows:

(15) Primero los negocios, los placeres después.

This is a literal translation of the English original and lacks any idiomaticity in Spanish. As a result, the humorous and cynical effects of the original are lost. On the grounds of interpretive resemblance, this translation would be less than fully successful in conveying the intentions expressed in the original. This means that the translator should have used a different expression for the first part of this Wellerism, one that *is* idiomatic, for example (as suggested by Orero 1998):

(16) Lo primero es lo primero.
     What is first is what is first.

In this case, we have an idiomatic expression which, unlike the previous one, can contribute to retrieving the effects intended by the original author. In other cases, where the translation is rendered somewhat literally, foreignising effects can be produced, as the following Wallerism shows in the Spanish target text (example mentioned in Orero 1998):

(18) 'Anything for a quiet life', as the man said ven [sic] took the sitvation [sic] at the lighthouse. (*Pickwick Papers*, Charles Dickens, mentioned in Baer 1983:702)
     'Pero todo por la tranquilidad', como dijo aquel que se colocó de torrero de faros. (Translation by J. de Paso 1945:145)

In this case the translation of the first, idiomatic, part is not by means of another idiomatic expression, but rather by means of

more or less literal expression (i.e. back-translation: but everything for tranquillity). The first consequence of this is the loss of the humorous effects of the Wellerism in Spanish. The second is the foreign feel of the expression in Spanish, which would normally include a verb: i.e. dar todo por algo (to give everything in order to get something). Deliberately used, this type of foreign feel could be said to bring the target text 'closer' to the original and thus foreignise it.

6. CONCLUSION

In this article, the equivalence approach to the translation of formulaic expressions has been discussed in some detail and argued against. It has been argued that the equivalence approach fails on a number of counts, namely, (a) lack of theoretical definition, (b) over-specification and (c) lack of predictive power, as well as (d) problems relating to equivalence value judgments and the attendant composition of value hierarchies.

It was argued that in order to solve these problems, we need to look more closely, first of all, at the conceptual nature of formulaic expressions and, second of all, at the way their interpretation is derived from general pragmatic processes. It was also argued that formulaic expressions characteristically lack one of the conceptual entries associated with standard concepts, namely, the logical entry. Their interpretation is thus based more on the encyclopaedic knowledge we have about the expressions, than on our logical knowledge of their meaning. This is the reason why the translation of these expressions requires more cultural knowledge than the non-formulaic expressions and also why it offers the possibility of foreignising translations. As it is precisely the more encyclopaedic-based expressions that show most differences between cultures.

Finally, an alternative analysis has been sketched based on the notion of interpretative resemblance and relevance. Under this approach, the translation of formulaic expressions works like the translation of other types of linguistic expression, with the difference that in their case it is crucial to access encyclopaedic assumptions about their use, in order to derive the intended interpretations and carry out successful translations. The difference between the various types of formulaic expression lies in the type of encyclopaedic knowledge they require and the way it is stored. Thus, the interpretation and subsequent translation of greetings tend to involve the description of the social act involved in the situation (e.g. a welcome, a farewell, etc.). Proverbs, on the other hand, are based, not on social encounters, but rather on the wisdom drawn from the experience of human situations (e.g. being in a foreign land, encountering a given type of person, etc.). Wallerisms, on their part, are based on humorous and cynical commentaries, for example, on proverbs, thus criticising or challenging popular wisdom.

The way these expressions are interpreted is different from standard lexical items such as *bachelor* and therefore it is crucial for the translator to be aware how his or her interpretation is arrived at, particularly when no similar expression is found in the target language. Otherwise, loss of content may be incurred, as we saw in the case of Wallerisms.

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