

AN INVESTIGATION OF RUSSIAN PROVERBS ACCORDING TO THEIR TRANSLATION INTO ENGLISH

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Rezumat: *În acest articol sunt abordate proverbele în limba rusă ca parte a vieții umane și a frazeologiei. Articolul începe cu o analizare a definițiilor existente ale proverbului urmată de o investigație a proverbelor în plan comparativ privind traducerea proverbelor din limba rusă în limba engleză. Se subliniază similaritățile și diferențele dintre proverbele ruse și cele din limba engleză. În final articolul include o clasificare a proverbelor conform traducerii lor și o analizare a rezultatelor acestei cercetări.*

Cuvinte-cheie: *proverb, frazeologie, definiție, analizare, investigație, traducere, comparare, similarități, diferențe, clasificare.*

Every language consists not only of simple lexical units, it contains special word combinations that give to the language a unique coloring and expressiveness. These are phraseological units or idioms that have become a constituent and rather significant part of any language enriching and supplementing it with new, explicit connotations. This part of the language is also associated with proverbs. Proverbs have become an integral part of any person's routine speech. It doesn't even matter what layer of the society a particular person belongs to, because using proverbs turned into something ordinary like a morning cup of coffee for breakfast. But applying proverbs in various everyday situations, do we really understand what the term "proverb" means? Actually, we take the proverbs as a matter of course without thinking about the term "proverb". Usually we consider proverbs as short sayings which present the wisdom or a piece of advice given to us by the previous generations. Indeed, according to "Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs", *a proverb is a traditional saying which offers advice or presents a moral in a short and pithy manner.* [5, p. 14] Further, W. Mieder in his work "Proverbs Speak Louder Than Words: Folk Wisdom in Art, Culture, Folklore, History, Literature and Mass Media" affirms that proverbs *are short, generally known sentences of the folklore which contain wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorable form and which are handed down from generation to generation* [3, p.11]. Thus, we can state that proverbs are short and commonly known sentences based upon the rationale, genuineness and standards of any nation transmitted from generation to generation. According to this bunch of definitions we can conclude that Russian proverbs are brief and commonly known sentences which reflect the perception,

reality and perspectives of the Russian nation passed on from father to son since the dawn of time. In other words, they transfer the national and cultural identity and the particularity of thinking of the Russian people which has been forming for a long time, making these people different from other cultures. At the same time, Russian proverbs can show not only the difference of the Russian language from other languages, but also the similarities between them. As a result, this hypothetical discovery of proverbs can become decisive to the Russian language, as well as for the language with which it will be compared, or it will be identified as a similar one. Namely because of this hypothetical discovery of something new between two languages, we have decided to compare the Russian and the English proverbs considering in the present research their translation from Russian into English.

Most of the Russian linguists studied the problem of Russian phraseology within one language, Russian. For example, V.N. Telia, a famous Russian linguist and phraseologist, who investigated the problem of Russian phraseology, compiled some Russian phraseological dictionaries and even founded the Moscow School of Phraseology.

At the same time, within the comparative study of the phraseology of two or more languages, there exist not fewer works than in the phraseology of one language. For example, the Russian scholars M. I. Dubrovin and V. S. Modestov investigated the differences and similarities between Russian and English phraseology. Or, for example, the Russian linguist L. S. Barhudarov studied the correspondences between the Russian and English phraseological units. He singled out three types of correspondences between the phraseological units of these two languages [6, pp. 74-96]:

- *Full Correspondences*
- *Partial Correspondences*
- *Lack of Correspondence*

According to these correspondences, we have classified 150 English selected proverbs from the “Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs” by J. Speake and the “Explanatory Dictionary of English Proverbs” by R. Rydout and K. Whitting and translated them into Russian in the previous research, concerning the analysis of the English and Russian proverbs from point of view of their translation from one language into another. It also seemed to us interesting to make a similar investigation of the Russian proverbs, considering their translation into English. For this reason, we have selected 150 Russian proverbs from “1000 Russian and English Proverbs and Sayings” by A.I. Grigorieva and from the “Russian-English Dictionary of Proverbs and Sayings” by A. Margulis and by A. Kholodnaya. The selected proverbs were classified according to the mentioned above classification by L.S. Barhudarov concerning two languages.

As a result, 56 proverbs out of 150 are assigned to the first group - **full correspondences**. This represents 37.40% of the total number of analyzed proverbs. For example:

- “Глаза – зеркало души.” – “The eyes are the window of the soul.”
- “Если хочешь мира, будь готов к войне” – “If you want peace, you must prepare for war”

- “Мертвый не укусит.” – “Dead men don’t bite.”
- “С собакой ляжешь, с блохами встанешь.” – “If you lie down with dogs, you will get up with fleas.”

Meanwhile, 51 proverbs from 150 selected proverbs are ascribed to the second group, i. e. to **partial correspondences**. This represents 34% of the total number of investigated proverbs. For example, the proverb “Дай ему палец, он и всю руку откусит” is translated into English like “Give him an inch and he will take an ell”. In this case, the words *палец* and *рука* were replaced by more characteristic words to the English language, such as *inch* and *ell* in order to keep the meaning of this proverb in English. Let us analyze another example: the proverb “Одна ласточка не делает весны” which is translated into English like “One swallow does not make a summer”. It can be assumed that this proverb was adapted according to the specificity of the habitat of the English people and of the weather of the United Kingdom. It is widely known that swallows are the harbingers of the warmth's coming, as they usually come back from warm countries, where they had spent winter, in some days or weeks before the warmth. Based on this knowledge, we can make a supposition that swallows in Russia usually come back in spring after their wintering, whereas swallows in the UK usually come back in summer which tells us that the warmth in this country comes much more later, than in Russia. It can be explained by the location of the UK in a colder climate than Russia. In that way, the English people could keep the genuine meaning of the proverb, not translating it word for word. But the most striking example of partial correspondences found by us is the proverb “Знать птицу по перьям, а молодца – по речам” which is translated into English “The bird is known by its note, the man by his words”. It cannot be translated word for word from Russian, therefore the word *перья* is substituted by the word *note* according to the common idea and the perception of birds of the English people, or, rather according to their common conception of the birds' characteristic features. It means that the Russian people consider that the main characteristic feature of any bird is its aspect, or, better to say, its feathering. Whereas the conception of the English people is a little bit different, because they suppose that the main characteristic feature of any bird is its note, or, so to say, its singing. Thus, it is a very good example which shows the cultural diversity and singularity of these nations reflected in their languages.

Finally, the third group – **lack of correspondences** – includes 43 proverbs. This constitutes 28, 60% out of all examined proverbs. This type comprises proverbs which cannot be translated literally or partially into English. Therefore, these proverbs are often translated by a description, or are translated by an English equivalent proverb. For example, the proverb “В чужих руках кусок больше кажется”, which is translated verbatim into English “In the wrong hands a piece seems more”, cannot be transferred literally into English. It is transferred by an equivalent proverb “The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence” which has a closer and more appropriate meaning to the initial Russian proverb. Let us analyze some other examples of this group. For instance, the proverb “Жизнь прожить – не поле перейти” actually could be literally translated into English, but undoubtedly its genuine meaning would be lost. This proverb would become a simple sentence

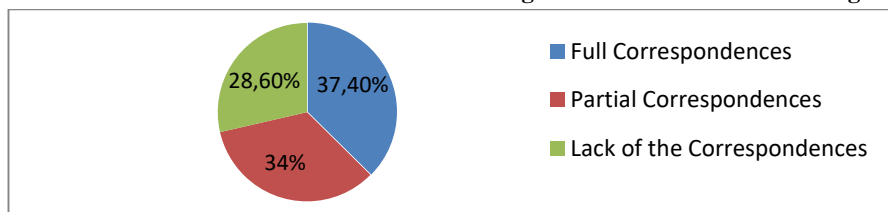
without any special meaning or context. For this reason, it is translated by means of the English proverb “Life is not all beer and skittles”. Let us regard another example: “Языком молотъ – не дрова колотъ, спина не заболит”. It surely cannot be translated word for word, because such a translated version of the proverb would be odd, confusing and unintelligible to the English people, as well as to other English speaking people. To avoid such a misunderstanding, it can be translated by an extremely short, but no less good English proverb “Talk is cheap”, that without doubt simplifies the understanding of the proverb.

The results of the above classification can be seen in the following table and in the succeeding diagram.

Classification of the Russian Proverbs According to Their Translation into English

Group	Number	%
Full Correspondences	56	37,40
Partial Correspondences	51	34
Lack of Correspondences	43	28,60

Classification of the Russian Proverbs According to Their Translation into English



Investigating and analyzing the above-described types of correspondences between the Russian and the English proverbs, it can be observed that the most numerous type is *the full correspondences group* which represents 37, 40% out of 150 selected proverbs. Meanwhile, the least numerous type is *the partial correspondences group* consisting of only 28, 60% out of the whole number of investigated proverbs. It was already presumed by us that the group of full correspondences would prevail upon other ones, because such a result was obtained in the previous research where we tried to classify 150 English proverbs according to their translation into Russian. Though it would be more expected that the group of lack of correspondences would prevail instead of the group of full correspondences, because of the enormous amount of differences between Russian and English, as they belong to the different language families, such as Slavic and Germanic, there were obtained other results. In spite of the differences between these two languages, they turned out to be much closer to each other, fact that is shown in the present work and that gives us the possibility to presume that these two opposite languages were some time influenced by each other in the course of their historical development. Or, maybe they were affected by the same influencer who could be an invader, a colonizer or an aggressor. However, the obtained results may be a proof that Russian and English, being languages of different groups, originated from the same common ancestor language, Proto Indo-European, which presumes so many similarities between them.

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