

## TRANSLATION OF RUSSIAN BUSINESS SLANG PHRASEOLOGY IN ITALIAN: FOCUS ON INTERMEDIARY LANGUAGE TO AVOID AMBIGUITIES

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**Abstract:** In recent years Russia has changed rapidly from a socio-economic point of view. The economic changes have led to the development of slang phraseological units (herefrom, PUs) in the business communication. The Russian jargon PUs are taken from the dictionary *Pochti seryoznyj slovar' delovogo obscheniya* (Pogrebnyak: 2007) and are translated into Italian, mostly via English, functioning as Intermediary Language (herefrom, IL). The materials consist in Russian slang PUs that are ambiguous, as it appears hard to understand, whether they are calques from IL or properly Russian expressions. The study underlines the importance of the IL to avoid ambiguity and of the idiomatic translation to both understand business culture and language. The functional equivalence is also taken into account as an interlinguistic equivalence strategy needed to find a communicative coincidence between Source Language (herefrom, SL) and Target Language (herefrom, TL) contexts. To conclude, the work attempts to facilitate informal business communication between Russian and Italian partners and to mitigate misunderstandings that may arise in the presence of cultural differences between the two countries.

**Keywords:** slang phraseology; intermediary language; equivalence; ambiguity; informal business communication

### 1. Introduction

The last twenty-year economic situation in Russia has changed rapidly and globally, bringing to new tendencies in business and communication fields. New interaction forms, coming mainly from the Anglo-American business language, enter the Russian language in the form of slang PUs. Slang PUs contribute to a jargonization of the Russian language and to the creation of elite circles. The business partners become members of a niche, a closed society handling words for 'special uses,' in unofficial contexts of communication, and difficult for others to be understood.

The phraseological semantics is the product of the human linguo-creative activity, where thinking, consciousness, language and speech interact (Alefirenko 2008: 80-82).

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The PUs are both ironic and expressive units. Irony and expressiveness are conveyed by the paradoxical nature of the PU itself. Phraseology itself is, by its functional nature, a linguistic paradox (Mokienko 2012: 102) that evokes laughter. The linguistic paradoxes are systemic mechanisms for the formation of PUs that cause a comic effect (Mokienko 2012: 101), associated with the speech strategic intention of the ones engaged in communication. The slang PUs under examination have features of irony due to the contrast between the literal (explicit) and the figurative (implicit) meaning. The literal meaning is strictly related to the Russian language and culture as SL, the figurative one is not of immediate understanding and comes from IL.

The business speakers, by using slang ironic PUs, share a ‘hidden agreement,’ a sociocultural form of communication, related to the, so-to-say, game situation. The sociocultural aspect of using slang PUs is correlated to the origin of slang. According to the *Lingvisticheskij entsiklopedicheskij slovar’* “slang sostoit iz slov i frazeologizmov, kotorye vznikli i pervonachal’no upotrebyalis’ v otdel’nykh sotsial’nykh gruppakh, i otrazhaet tsennostnuyu orientatsiyu etikh grupp” (Yartseva 1990) [slang consists of words and PUs that arose and were originally used in certain social groups and reflects the value orientation of these groups (translation mine, A.M.)]. As argued by Akhmanova, slang is also the set of:

“Elementy razgovornogo varianta toj ili drugoj professionalnoj ili sotsial’noj gruppy, kotorye, pronikaya v literaturnyj yazyk ili voobsche v rechi lyudej, ne imeyuschikh pryamogo otnosheniya k dannoj gruppe lits, priobretayut v etikh raznovidnostyakh yazyka osobuyu emotsional’no-ekspressivnuyu okrasku (osobuyu lingvostilisticheskuyu funktsiyu)” (Akhmanova 1969: 419).

[Elements of speech variation of a professional or social group which, on entering the literary language or, in general, the speech of people with no direct relation to this group, acquire in these language varieties a peculiar emotive and expressive hint (a peculiar linguo-stylistic function)” (translation mine, A.M.)].

This paper aims at exploring the use of mediated language in Indirect Translation (hereafter, ITr) of Russian slang PUs (SL) and its effect on Italian as TL. Usually, the main ways of rendering PUs in the target language are descriptive translation, literal translation, translation by phraseological equivalents (full, partial, and null), translation by phraseological analogues (Mykhaylenko 2019: 70). To these strategies, we would add the translation by using the IL. ITr is interpreted in many ways:

- as ‘a translation of a translation’ (Gambier 1994: 413); thus, it is seen as a retranslation, that is a new translation, in the same language, of a text that had been already translated fully or partially (Gambier 1994: 413);
- as “a chain of (at least) three texts, ending with a translation made from another translation” (Ringmar 2012: 141), the three texts are the original, the intermediary and the end texts;
- as a process rather than a result; in fact, the term ‘relay translation’ used by Ringmar highlights the process contrary to the term ‘indirect translation’ that focuses on the final product (Ringmar 2012: 141).

Then, the terminological apparatus for intermediary translation shows numerous definitions, such as indirect, mediated, mixed, pivot, relay(ed) or second-hand translation (Pięta 2014: 17-18).

The focus of the present paper is on the relationship, both formal and semantic, between ITr and slang PUs. In the practice of translating Russian slang PUs into Italian we follow the principle of the so-called 'idiomatic translation' and the strategy of trying to re-create correspondence between SL and TL, especially when ambiguities arise cause calque or multiple-meaning words. Phraseological calques are the result of an accurate or restructured transmission of lexical components, grammatical structures, and meanings of a PU of one language by means of another language (Solodukho 1982: 136). In literature calques can be semantic or morphological. The semantic calques are phenomena of acquisition of a new meaning in TL, formed according to a foreign language sample (Solodukho 1982: 130). They are a type of semantic borrowings that occur when the nominative meaning coincides both in SL and in TL. The foreign language prototype dictates a new meaning in TL (Solodukho 1982: 130). The morphological or literal calques are translations of the morphological structure of foreign words (Solodukho 1982: 132). They are organized into a phrase in accordance with the norms of TL (Arsent'eva 1989: 116). The literal calques keep the significative-denotative meaning, the evaluative connotation, the structural and grammatical organization of the components, the functional and stylistic connotations. Moreover, the PUs develop as a result of phonetic borrowing, based on the similarity of sound both in SL and TL.

## 2. Materials and Methods

We proceeded by extracting monomorphemic polysemous PUs from the monolingual dictionary *Pochti seryoznyj slovar' delovogo obscheniya* (Pogrebnyak: 2007). Therein the calques in the Russian language are showed in the dictionary in brackets (*ot angl.* = from English). First of all, we observed the economic information transmitted by the IL in a figurative way that might cause equivocation with the Russian literal meaning. We also found out an appropriate translation into Italian, by examining their cultural adaptation, making reference to the IL. The context is fundamental when we deal with ambiguous polysemous PUs. Thus, we applied the idiomatic translation strategy, with reference to all the implicit elements of the specific the context of communication (Ryabtseva 2018: 89-91).

Since the translation at issue was carried out in a cross-linguistic perspective, we also adopted a functional equivalence as an interlinguistic equivalence strategy that attempts to find equivalencies functional to a context in the TL. Nida's theory of functional equivalence has a great influence on translation. According to the author, "the translator must strive for equivalence rather than identity" (Nida & Taber 1982: 12), which emphasizes the impact of the message on the TL. The functional equivalence is necessary when the translation is likely to result in serious misunderstandings of the associative meaning or in a loss of stylistic features of the original text (Shiflett 2012: 31). Nida and Taber suggested that the equivalence can be

natural, when the translation does not sound like a translation to the target reader, but when it is close to the natural translation (Nida, Taber 1982: 12-13). The typology of equivalence generally distinguishes four types of equivalencies: full equivalents, partial equivalents, zero equivalents and phraseological analogues (Rajkhshtejn 1980; Solodukho 1982; Arsent'eva 1989). Total equivalence occurs when the PUs of the SL and TL bring the same significative and denotative meanings, evaluative, functional-stylistic, emotional-expressive connotations, as well as the same component structure. The morphological and grammatical organization may be the same, although some typological features of each language can be kept in their prototypical form. Regarding partial equivalents, they may have minor differences related to the inner structure or the morphology. Zero equivalence happens when non-correspondence exists between the PUs of the two languages. Phraseological analogues arise when the PUs show some differences in their structural and grammatical organization, in their composition, and deviations in the significative and denotative meanings or in the functional-stylistic connotation (Arsent'eva 1989: 106-115).

### 3. Results and Discussion

As a result of our research, we have detected five ambiguous slang PUs in the SL that belong to the business sphere, to the informal style of conversation. The following examples carry the Russian source PU (sPU), the corresponding translation into the IL, that is in most cases English, and finally our translation proposal of the target PU (tPU).

The triangulation (SL, IL and TL) is applied not only to English, but also to other languages.

#### Example 1

sPUs: *bukhat*, ' *zabukhat*, ' *probukhat*, ' *perebukhat* '

IL: (from Germ.) *buchen*

tPU: *gestire la contabilità*

The sPUs have the following literal meanings: the verb *bukhat* ' with accent on the first syllable (*búkhat*) means 'to produce a dull sound' and 'to hit and throw something with force and noise' (Ozhegov 2012: 64), that is *to bang* (at the door, for example), in Italian *sbattere*, or *to thump* and *rimbombare*. If the accent falls on the second syllable (*bukhát*'), then the meaning is *to get drunk* and *ubriacarsi*. Here, we deal with a semantic calque that entered the TL via German adding a new meaning to the already existing verb, carrying a phonetic assonance with the Russian verb *búkhat*. ' The German *buchen* 'register, for example, an invoice or a payment' (Collins Dictionary) gives to the Russian verb a new semantics. Moreover, the German borrowing adapts itself to the rules of TL by taking the prefixes typical of the Russian language (*za-*, *pro-*, *pere-*). The ironic aspect is here particularly evident: the Russian business partners create language puns by virtue of the new formation. However, the Italian counterparts can grasp the new business meaning, only through the intermediation of the German language (IL). In the process of translation from Russian to Italian the ironic connotation is lacking in the latter, due to the absence in the TL of a jargon expression

for accountability issues and of phonetic effects that create language puns. Consequently, we have opted for a more neutral translation that belongs to a more formal register. Nida and Taber affirm that though style is secondary to meaning, it is nevertheless important, above all in the case of ‘puns,’ where the meaning of the expression depends on the double meaning of the word or on the allusion (Nida, Taber 1982: 14). Due to their different registers and to the absence of a functional slang equivalent in the TL for the slang source PU, the Russian and Italian expressions are phraseological analogues.

The loan words from English enter the Russian language in different ways, for example changing their grammatical class.

### **Example 2**

sPU: *grabli*

IL: (from En.) *to grab*

tPU: *grabbare*

The English source grammatical class is a verb, the Russian calque is a noun. Being a noun, the Russian form can be declined according to the case needed in the sentence, as reported in the dictionary ‘Ne kopiruetsya? Togda grablyami’ (Pogrebnyak 2007: 28). *Groblyami* is the instrumental case of the noun *grabli*. The change of the grammatical category makes the direct translation from Russian into Italian an even more difficult task. *Grabli* is translated into English with *rake* (Wordreference) and into Italian with *rastrello* (Kovalev 2007: 169). If the translator attempts to translate this directly and literally, he will have the following translation \*‘Non si copia? Allora con i rastrelli’ that sounds awkward. The reliance on the IL to get across the slang business meaning is fundamental: the verb *to grab* means in the computer science and in economics ‘to capture the screen.’ In the attempt to find an appropriate functional equivalence to this context, we opted for the Italian neologism *grabbare* which is also a calque from English, more specifically an adaption to the Italian language due to the verb infinitive suffix *-are*. Therefore, the previous sentence can be translated into Italian ‘Non si copia? Allora grabbiamo.’ The PUs of the SL and TL are partial equivalents because of the use of a noun in Russian and a verb in Italian.

PUs can be polysemic and can belong to different jargons. The following example concerns the word *kasha* and its uses in Russian that differ from the English original form.

### **Example 3**

sPU: *kasha*

IL: (from En.) *cash out*

tP: *incassare*

Firstly, the word *kasha* indicates *porridge* (Italian, *pappa*). Secondly, it is used in the colloquial register in a figurative way to indicate confusion (Ozhegov 2012: 267) (‘u neyo v golove kasha’ – ‘she is a mess’ – ‘ha un gran casino in testa’). Thirdly, the word has acquired a new meaning under the influence of English. The cultural adaptation into Italian requires a reference to the English language to avoid a wrong translation with *pappa* or *confusione*. The correct equivalent form in this specific context is the verb *incassare*. While in the SL *kasha* is a noun, equivalents in both IL and SL languages are verbs. The dictionary gives the following example: ‘chto za

kashu vy tut ustroili na stekol'nom zavode?' (Pogrebnyak 2007: 46) which can sound as \*‘what kind of mess did you make at the glass factory?’ and \*‘che casino avete fatto alla vetreria?’, but actually means ‘what did you cash out at the glass factory?’ and ‘cosa avete incassato alla vetreria?’. The PUs *kasha* and *incassare* can be considered as phraseological calques due to the noun and verb choice, but also due to their different connotations.

The following example has a double meaning: in the literal Russian meaning the term is a zoonym, while in the figurative one it indicates ‘losses in the stock exchange.’

**Example 4**

sPU: *los'*

IL: (from En.) *loss*

tPU: *perdita*

The first literal meaning is that of *moose*, *alce*, the second figurative meaning recalls the English stock exchange term of *loss*. The translation of the translation is carried out to facilitate the resulting product. Examples like ‘slovit' losya,’ ‘rezat' losej, zabivat' losej’ and ‘pasti losya’ can only be understood by Italian business partners thanks to the mediation of English. ‘Slovit' losya’ means ‘to suffer a loss,’ ‘soportare una perdita’ and not \*‘acchiappare l'alce.’ ‘Rezat' losej, zabivat' losej’ means ‘to sell a stock at a loss,’ ‘vendere azioni in perdita,’ instead of \*‘tagliare alci, macellare alci.’ Lastly, ‘pasti losya’ cannot be translated with \*‘to graze the moose’ and \*‘pascolare l'alce,’ but rather with ‘anticipation action’ and ‘azione di anticipazione.’ All these examples are phraseological analogues, as the register changes in the translation process. These expressions show in the SL a lower register level with respect to the TL.

The next example is the case of a sheer transliteration from English.

**Example 5**

sPU: *orekh*

IL: (from En.) *opex*

tPU: *opex*

The source English form is the abbreviation for *Operative Expenses*. This form enters the Russian language without any change, that is through ‘transliteration’; however, the phonetic alphabets of English and Russian are different. Therefore, a translator engaging himself to translate *orekh* from Russian into Italian, will face a problem linked with its primary meaning, that of *nut* (En.), *noce* (It.). The reference to the ITr reduces the distance between the SL and TL and simplifies the translator’s job.

#### 4. Conclusion

The main goal of the current study was to determine how the IL facilitates the translation of business informal slang PUs from Russian into Italian. The analysed examples confirm that the reference to the IL avoids ambiguities, and it allows the translators to expand their own vocabulary to polysemantic expressions. The starting point was, indeed, that slang PUs acquire new meanings from English. We hope this first work will be of interest for translators in terms of the development of their creative

skills. As a matter of fact, translating slang PUs requires a combination of linguistic, cultural, and original abilities, as the slang PUs are, by their nature, products of linguo-creative thinking. By referring to the IL, translators should try to capture the intent and meaning of the SL to find appropriate equivalents in the TL.

One of the challenges of slang translation lies in the fact that many times the slang economic PU cannot be translated literally, sometimes neither directly. This issue brings forth the functional equivalence hypothesis. In our study, functional equivalence is related to the ITr: the translator understands the concept in the SL thanks to the IL and discovers how to express the same concept in the TL in order to convey the same meaning and intent as the original. Therefore, the translation strategies adopted are directly related to the respective degree of assimilation of the PU in the TL.

The study has identified the type of equivalence of the source and target PUs. We have noticed how it is subject to change by means of the IL support. Indeed, most of the PUs were phraseological analogues or partial equivalents, but after an explanatory translation they became full equivalents due to the identity of meaning and the denotative reference. Therefore, the mediated translation shortens the gap between the phraseological analogues or between the partial equivalents, bringing the SL and TL closer.

However, it is important to note that using an IL can also have some disadvantages, such as the loss of stylistic traits in the target text that leads to a less precise and natural translation.

Future studies should consider a wider number of business slang PUs, in consideration of the fact that company slang always changes together with new people in the company, who give rise to new slang formations.

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### Conflict of Interests

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

### Ethical Standards

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.