

Romanian paremias as intangible cultural
heritage: the challenge of translating cultural
specificity

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Introduction

- Forms that reflect the millennial wisdom of a community on a territory, paremias (proverbs, aphorisms, sayings, etc.) are a remarkable immaterial cultural heritage. They transmit the experience, customs and way of life of the community, fixed in specific stereotyped structures, more or less intangible.
- Employed especially for argumentative or stylistic reasons, still used by the modern speaker for their expressiveness and strength to evoke ancestral experiences, feelings and behaviors, they make the flavor of the written and spoken speech, and, despite their oldness, they continue to frame the discourse and to transmit moral values from one generation to the next.

Introduction

- **Our objective** → to highlight their specificity and the difficulty of transferring them in another language, without semantic or stylistic losses. Although many are part of a common pan-Romanic fund, their belonging to a well-defined cultural space leads to difficulties in decoding their meaning, sometimes even for the natives, when certain practices have disappeared or when their meaning has become opaque.
- **Advanced hypothesis** → After a study of the syntactic properties of paremias, we will consider their lexicon and finally the techniques of translation that preserve their properties.
- **Corpus** → drawn from the Romanian proverbs dictionaries of Hințescu (1985), Zanne (2006), Candrea (2002), Cuceu (2006) and Cărare (2003), from Gheorghe's dictionary of Roman world proverbs (1986) and from Gorunescu's Romanian-French phraseological dictionary (2000).

Paremiias' Structure

- generally binary, consisting of a subordinate and a main clause:
L. *Quod tibi fieri non vis, alteri ne feceris.* (Gheorghe, 1986:127)
R. *Ce ție nu-ți place, altuia nu face.*
F. *Ne pas faire à autrui ce qu'on ne voudrait pas qu'il vous fit.*
- a simple sentence, of a definitional nature:
L. *Aqua profunda est quieta.* (Gheorghe, 1986:85-86)
R. *Apele line sunt amăgitoare.*
F. *Les eaux calmes sont les plus profondes. / Il n'y a pire eau que l'eau qui dort.*
- elliptical form, the message being concentrated so as to express a lot in a few words:
L. *Hodie mihi, cras tibi. / Hodie ille, cras ego.* (Gheorghe, 1986:96)
R. *Azi mie, mâine ție.*
F. *Aujourd'hui (à) moi, demain (à) toi.*

Lexicon

Vocabulary usually consisting of simple words from the current lexicon. Nevertheless some Romanian proverbs include regional words, such as *arcea* [loom], *para* [penny], *păpușoi* [maize], *melestreu* [rolling pin], which are only decoded by Romanian natives through the context. Their transfer into other languages imposes a global, semantic translation, where the specific character of the word and its regional connotation are totally lost :

*Nici bărbat la **arcea**, nici femeie la război.* [lit. Neither the man at the loom, nor the woman at war] ; equiv. *A chacun sa place et les vaches seront bien gardées.*

***Paraua** e mică, dar loc mare prinde.* [lit. The penny is small but it takes a lot of space] ; equiv. *Plusieurs peu font un beaucoup.* (Gorunescu, 2000 : 443 / 445)

*Dacă nu semeni **păpușoi** la vreme, pune **melestreul** pe foc.* [lit. If you don't sow the maize in time, throw the rolling pin into the fire] ; our equiv. *Mais semé tard, mauvaise récolte valant un liard / Quand on sème tard, la récolte est en danger.*

Translation strategies of paremias

The transfer of paremias from one language to another raises many problems for translators, because of the intralinguistic aspects of proverbs, the most important of which relate to their sociolinguistic, stylistic and metaphorical nature. The translator's intervention in this situation is limited, because he is only applying a pre-established equivalence, learned by heart or found in a bilingual dictionary (Ballard, 2003: 183). The difficulty lies in the different degrees of readability of a proverb:

a) paremias where the direct, literal meaning is immediately perceptible:

Dracul nu doarme [The devil never sleeps]

Nu se teme nici de Dumnezeu nici de dracul [He fears neither God nor the devil].

b) the proverb has a second, metaphorical, but deductible meaning, which does not raise a problem for the foreigner:

Pe dinafară sfinți, pe dinăuntru draci cumpliți [lit. On the outside they are saints but deep down they are devils]; equiv. *Anges au chemin, diable à la maison*.

Translation strategies of paremias

c) the meaning of paremia is opaque, because it is too old or takes a form too pictorial to be correctly interpreted even by a native speaker - the equivalent offered by the translator will be more general or more approximate:

Dracul alb îl mănâncă p-ăl negru. [lit. The white devil eats the black devil];
equiv.1. *Mieux vaut un pécheur repentî qu'un dévot hypocrite;*
equiv.2. *Péché avoué, péché à demi pardonné.*

Another challenge for the translator : succeeding in keeping the prosody of the source language and achieving a similar effect.

Toți sapă, dar el duce câinii la apă. [lit. They all dig but he takes the dogs to the water] ; equiv. *La semaine du travailleur a sept jours, la semaine du paresseux a sept demains;* our equiv: *Tout le monde bêche, et lui, il prêche.*

It is even more difficult to find an equivalent to culturally connoted paremias:

Dâmboviță apă dulce, cin' te bea nu se mai duce [lit. Dâmbovita, sweet water, he who drinks some will never leave] our equiv. *Douce Dâmbovita, qui t'a bue ne te quitte plus.*

Translation techniques

- 4 techniques (participant, thematic, synonymic and hyperonymic) instituted by Sevilla Muñoz, 2004.

a) **the participant technique** establishes correspondences "between the proverbs of the target language with the same participant or a participant analogous to the proverbs of the source language" "Participant = the noun which indicates the being or the object which participates in the process expressed by the verb (human, animal or object)" (Sevilla Muñoz, 2004):

Femeia îl întrece și pe dracul. [lit. Women outmatch the devil]; equiv. La femme sait un art avant le diable.

b) **the thematic technique** consists in "looking for the correspondence through the key sense" (id.). Interesting method in that we can group the paremies of the compared languages in similar conceptual fields, having a common theme. The result is a kind of cross typological analysis, starting from the way a reality, a being, a behavior is related:

Banul la ban trage [lit. Money attracts money]; equiv. Un sou amène l'autre.

Calul bătrân cu greu se învață la ham [lit. The old horse does not easily get used to reins]; equiv. Vieux chien ne change pas de voie.

Translation techniques

c) By the **synonymic technique** we put together in the same language the paremias of similar or related meaning, then we seek for an equivalent in the other language. The equivalents in the foreign language can also be constituted in synonymic series, such as:

R. *La calul nărăvit, pinten ascuțit* [lit. For the stubborn horse the sharp spur] ;

La unul fără cuget, trebuie unul fără de lege [lit. A man without a conscience needs an outlaw];

La omul fără suflet, om fără inimă [lit. Man without a soul, man without a heart].

F. *À méchant cheval, bon éperon; À rude âne, rude ânier; À corsaire, corsaire et demi; À bon chat, bon rat.*

d) The **hyperonymic technique** consists of "looking for generic paremia", that is to say the proverb whose general meaning includes the meaning of other more specific paremias (Sevilla Muñoz 2004). It is also the most common method when the proverb does not exist in the other language and refers to a very specific cultural reality:

Blânda sparge tinda [lit. The sweet one breaks the terrace] is to be related with a proverb with the same meaning such as *Mâța blândă zgârie rău* [lit. The gentle cat scratches badly], most well known to Romanian natives and easily transferable into French: *Gare-toi du vinaigre fait avec du vin doux.*

Conclusions

As an important part of the immaterial cultural heritage, paremias, as linguistic elements that particularize a community's activities, beliefs and know-how, constitute a priceless treasure and their preservation becomes imperative because "losing one's language is losing one's roots, one's culture" (Calvet, 2017: 99).

Made up of elements of everyday life, some are common to the pan-Romanic space, others are deeply rooted in a culture and a territory. In addition, some are regional or dialectal and translators do not always find them in phraseological dictionaries.

Their meaning can also be rendered only partially (stylistic, semantic or prosodic losses).

Glossaries, databanks and concordancers, heritage documentation centers are important tools that translators should have at their disposal to express their meaning.

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