

The Translation Process of Spanish Paremia into English: a Comparison of the Current Tools and Methodological Approach

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Received: 20/5/2019 | Accepted: 18/6/2019

Abstract

This chapter aims to present the workflow that was used to develop the English section of the Centro Virtual Cervantes project *Refranero multilingüe*, an online database containing the equivalents in several languages for paremia found both in the literature and document archives and in the current oral language. After a brief review of the three main techniques for paremia translation (that is, actant, subject and synonyms), the translation process that was followed in order to feed the *Refranero multilingüe* is introduced. This work led to the simultaneous assessment of eleven English paremia dictionaries as a traductological tool. As a practical case study for these dictionaries, as well as to explain in more detail how the *Refranero multilingüe* was conceived, four cases which illustrate the usage of the different above-mentioned techniques will be analyzed. The different translation solutions for paremia can be literal translation, translation of the keyword, translation of the actant, translation of a synonym, and even non-idiomatic translation due to the lack of an equivalent in the target culture.

Keywords:
Paremiology.
Paremia.
Lexicography.
Translation.
English.
Spanish.

Resumen

Título: «El proceso de traducción de las paremias españolas al inglés: una comparación de las herramientas actuales y su enfoque metodológico».

Este capítulo pretende presentar el proceso mediante el cual se desarrolló la sección en inglés del proyecto del Centro Virtual Cervantes, el *Refranero multilingüe*, una base de datos en línea que incluye equivalentes en varios idiomas de paremias encontradas tanto en la literatura y archivos documentales como en la lengua oral actual. Tras un breve repaso a las tres técnicas principales para la traducción de paremias (esto es, por actante, tema o sinónimos), se presenta el proceso traductológico que se siguió para alimentar el *Refranero multilingüe*. Este trabajo llevó, simultáneamente, a la valoración de once diccionarios de paremias en lengua inglesa como herramienta traductológica. Como estudio de caso de estos diccionarios, así como para explicar más en detalle la concepción del *Refranero multilingüe*, se analizan cuatro casos que ilustran el uso de las técnicas mencionadas anteriormente. Las distintas soluciones de traducción de paremias pueden ser la traducción literal, la traducción de la palabra clave, la traducción del actante, la traducción de un sinónimo o una traducción no idiomática en caso de que no exista un equivalente en la cultura meta.

Palabras clave:
Parémiología.
Paremia.
Lexicografía.
Traducción.
Español.
Inglés.

Résumé

Titre : « Le processus de traduction des parémies espagnols en anglais: une comparaison des outils actuels et de leur approche méthodologique ».

Ce chapitre a pour objectif de présenter le flux de travail utilisé pour développer la section anglaise du projet *Refranero multilingüe*, du Centro Virtual Cervantes, une base de données en ligne contenant les équivalents en plusieurs langues de les parémies trouvées dans la littérature et les archives de documents, ainsi que dans la langue parlée actuelle. Après un bref examen des trois techniques principales de traduction de la parémie (ac-

Mots-clés:
Parémiologie.
Parémie.
Lexicography.
Traduction.
Espagnol.
Anglais.

tant, sujet et synonymes), le processus de traduction suivi pour alimenter le *Refranero multilingüe* est présenté. Ces travaux ont conduit à l'évaluation simultanée de onze dictionnaires de parémies anglaises en tant qu'outil traductologique. Pour étudier ces dictionnaires et expliquer plus en détail la conception du proverbe multilingue, quatre cas illustrant l'utilisation des différentes techniques susmentionnées seront analysés. Les différentes solutions de traduction des parémies peuvent être une traduction littérale, la traduction du mot clé, la traduction de l'actant, la traduction d'un synonyme et même une traduction non idiomatique en raison de l'absence d'équivalent dans la culture cible.

INTRODUCTION

From 2005 and up to this very moment, the *Centro Virtual Cervantes* project *Refranero Multilingüe* (Sevilla and Zurdo, 2009) has been developed with the main objective of facilitating the translation of Spanish paremia into German, Arab, Catalan, Chinese, French, Galician, ancient and modern Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Latin, Polish, Portuguese, Persian, Romanian, Russian, Basque, and the language that concerns us: English. Although each author and contributor may have their own workflows, depending on their role within the project and the available tools for each language, this chapter aims to illustrate how the English section was conducted between 2010 and 2011, in an attempt to systematize, through the presentation of practical cases and the recommendation of a specific bibliography, the resolution of the problem of the translation of paremia.

Paremiologist Julia Sevilla first defines paremia in 1988 as “functional units memorized in competence” characterized by their brief, dogmatic and old-fashioned nature, and for them being closed units set into the discourse. Later on, Gloria Corpas Pastor (1996: 132-151) presented paremia as brief statements with textual autonomy and a dogmatic message conditioned by its cultural context. It can be inferred from these definitions that, due to the complex nature of paremia, translating them can be specially problematic, mainly for two reasons:

- Comprehension issues. Paremiias are closely linked to the chronolect in which they were coined, they often include archaic vocabulary or allusions to realities that do no longer exist. Similarly, in many cases they use metaphors that can be dark or ambiguous for the modern speaker or reader.
- Equivalence issues. Cultures organize their knowledge in different ways, therefore the target language often does not include paremiias alluding to the same subject from the same approach as the target language.
- A lack of exhaustive bilingual dictionaries which provide a direct and simple satisfactory solution facing these enunciates. As a result, the translation of paremiias often relies in the translator's personal cultural heritage, as well as monolingual dictionaries.

These and other obstacles imply that the translator, in his search for an equivalent, not only conceptual but ideally also formal, has to opt for one or several paremiological translation techniques. Given that this process may notably delay the translator's workflow, a valuation and classification of the available tools for paremia translation was deemed necessary. In this context, Permy (2012) studied a number of monolingual paremiological dictionaries in English, aiming to determine which ones of the available options are more useful for traductological tasks from Spanish into English.

The works that were researched included: *Gnomologia: adagies and proverbs; wife-sentences and witty sayings, ancient and modern, foreign and British* (Thomas Fuller 1782); *A hand-book on*

proverbs (Henry G. Bohn 1858); *English proverbs and proverbial phrases* (Carew Hazlitt 1907); *Early English proverbs* (Walter W. Skeat 1910); *The Penguin dictionary of proverbs* (Rosalind Fergusson 1983); *A dictionary of American proverbs* (Wolfgang Mieder 1991); *NTC's dictionary of proverbs and clichés* (Anne Bertram 1993); *The MacMillan dictionary of English proverbs explained* (Ronald Ridout 1995); *Dictionary of proverbs* (George Latimer Apperson 2006); *Dictionary of proverbs and their origins* (Linda and Roger Flavell 2008); *Oxford dictionary of proverbs* (Jennifer Speake 2008).

1. TECHNIQUES FOR PAREMIA TRANSLATION

The analysis methodology of these eleven dictionaries consisted on an exhaustive comparison of the information provided by each work when trying to find equivalents for the paremias found in *1001 refranes españoles con su correspondencia en ocho lenguas* (Sevilla and Cantera 2008). The process for translating paremias usually involves the combination of different paremia translation techniques that are defined by Sevilla and Sevilla (2000): by actant, subject or synonym. There is another technique highlighted by the authors, the hyperonym technique, which was not used due to the organizational strategies present in the dictionaries checked, which classify their paremias according to keywords, subjects and synonyms:

- The actant technique consists on looking for an equivalent for the subject or object of the verb action. For instance, in the paremia “A caballo regalado no le mires el diente”, the actant is the word “horse” and, when translating and searching for conceptual equivalents in the various paremia including “horse”, the proverb “Never look a gift horse in the mouth” is reached.
- With the subject technique, conceptual equivalents are sought by analyzing the key idea of paremia, shifting the attention from its linguistic components and its correspondent literal translation. In the example above, it could be established that the conceptual meaning is “gratefulness”. Proverbs pertaining to the same subject realm could be: “When you drink from the stream, remember the spring” or “A crust is better than no bread”, etc.
- The synonym technique complements the other two techniques, helping translators to find other equivalents that may not correspond to the form of the Spanish proverb, but they have coincidental meanings: “Beggars can’t be choosers”. This technique is especially useful in matters of register and tone of the text, as well as of synchronization or space constraints, if we are dealing with audiovisual translation or localization.

Needless to say, these techniques are not mutually exclusive. To keep with the previous example, if the category technique is being used, once the paremias about being thankful are located, the search could be complemented by an actant search, provided that the dictionary allows this possibility, in order to find a closer equivalent.

2. REVIEW OF PAREMIOLOGICAL DICTIONARIES IN ENGLISH

The first step in the search for equivalents was to determine which kind of structure or organizational criteria was followed by the dictionary. Thus, in this section, eleven paremiological dictionaries in English will be introduced, with a brief description of their chosen layout:

2.1. *Gnomologia: adagies and proverbs; wife-sentences and witty sayings, ancient and modern, foreign and British* (Fuller 1782), however, includes a list of 6071 entries in strict alphabetical

order, making it impossible to look for equivalents that are not a word-by-word translation of the Spanish proverb.

2.2. *A hand-book on proverbs* (Bohn 1858) is divided in chapters, each following their own independent structure: Proverbial sentences ordered alphabetically by keyword; Proverbs related to health, diet and physic with no apparent order; Proverbs related to husbandry, weather and the seasons with no apparent order; Proverbs related to love, wedlock and women with no apparent order; An alphabet on jocular, nugatory and rustic proverbs, ordered alphabetically by keyword; Miscellaneous proverbs and sayings, ordered according to subject within categories such as drunk, liar, bankrupt, trades, etc.; Proverbs that are entire sentences ordered alphabetically by keyword; Proverbial phrases and forms of speech ordered alphabetically by keyword; Proverbial similes, ordered purely alphabetically; Proverbial rhymes and old saws, with no apparent order.

2.3. *English proverbs and proverbial phrases* (Hazlitt 1907). In strict alphabetical order, it includes nonetheless an index of keywords.

2.4. *Early English proverbs* (Skeat 1910). In this collection, content order responds to the book from which they were extracted. At the end it also includes an alphabetical index, but incoherent, for sometimes it follows the proverb keyword and others it's just strictly alphabetical, ignoring articles but not every preposition.

2.5. *The Penguin dictionary of proverbs* (Fergusson 1983). In this dictionary, *paremias* are classified by subjects (for instance, gratitude) and these subjects, in turn, are divided in sub-subjects such as –following the same example– its value, its necessity, ingratitude. Besides, the dictionary offers two indexes: one with the subjects of the work, alphabetical; and another with keywords, also alphabetical.

2.6. *A dictionary of American proverbs* (Mieder 1991). Ordered alphabetically according to the *paremiological* keywords. It does not include any indexes, but a feature rather practical: if we search a keyword such as “horse”, at the end of the list with the proverbs containing that keyword it provides the option “SEE ALSO: He that will steal an ARROW will steal a horse”, indicating that there are more *paremias* including the word “horse”, even if its keyword is considered to be “arrow”.

2.7. *NTC's dictionary of proverbs and clichés* (Bertram 1993). It follows a strict alphabetical order and includes an alphabetical index by keyword.

2.8. *The MacMillan dictionary of English proverbs explained* (Ridout 1995). Alphabetical order, ignoring the articles. It includes an index by actant, presented alphabetically, that allows the possibility of more than one keyword per proverb. That is, “Never look a gift horse in the mouth” would appear under both “gift” and “horse”. The entries also include suggestions for synonyms with different actants.

2.9. *Dictionary of proverbs* (Apperson 2006). Its organization is rather arbitrary. It is supposed to be alphabetical by keyword, but there are several instances of *paremias* classified under words like “like”, “so”, or “two”. However, this problem is solved by the fact that, under each keyword, it provides suggestions of alternatives; for instance, “horse” suggests “better riding” and “like a horse”. However, there is no index to help navigate these keywords.

2.10. *Dictionary of proverbs and their origins* (Flavell 2008). It includes an alphabetical index with the keywords.

2.11. *Oxford dictionary of proverbs* (Speake 2008). Paremiias are here organized alphabetically by keywords and it incorporates a subject index.

After a year of extensive usage of these dictionaries, aiming both at determining which ones are the best traductological tools and at completing the online multilingual paremiological dictionary *Refranero multilingüe*. Several parameters were considered in this assessment: the number of proverbs recorded; the organization criteria of these paremiias; the inclusion of examples, contexts of use, definitions, synonyms or variants for a better understanding; relevance of the dictionaries according to their date of publication as well as the documentation provided for each paremiias; and, consequently, translation techniques for which these works were most helpful in the development of the English part of the *Refranero multilingüe* and thus can potentially be helpful for any translator facing a similar traductological challenge.

Permuy concluded that, except for the works of Bohn and Fuller, the remaining nine dictionaries can be used when applying the actant technique. Bohn's, Fergusson's and Speake's are in turn adequate to translate per subject, thanks to the division into chapters in Bohn's, and the main idea indexes of the latter. As for the synonyms technique, the collections by Fergusson, Ridout, Bertram and Flavell usually provide definitions for the paremiias they include; Ridout's having, moreover, synonyms for each of its entries straight away. Taking all of this into account, it could be said that Fergusson's dictionary is the most complete for the task of translating paremiias. However, Permuy (2012) discusses that the fact that this work presents a mixture of outdated and current paremiias, the results found in it have to always be double-checked with other dictionaries in order to establish an actual correspondence with the source language paremia, above all in terms of anachronisms. In this sense, Speake and Flavell include British paremiias in use, while Fuller, Bohn, Hazlit and Skeat are rather outdated repertoires that include, nonetheless, paremiias that still persist. The remaining dictionaries blend together paremiias that have fallen in disuse and others that are in our day-to-day vocabulary; unfortunately, they mostly do not provide any clear indication in that respect.

Two more aspects to be considered as a result of the comparison between the dictionaries studied here are, on the one hand, the documentation of real texts where the paremiias have been used and, on the other hand, the inclusion of examples of contexts of use. In the collections by Mieder, Apperson and Speake all the paremiias included are documented over time, which can prove to be helpful when determining if a proverb, for instance, is still in use. In Fergusson's dictionary, by contrast, only some of the entries are documented. As far as the context of use is concerned, Speake's work is the one that facilitates the most the comprehension of the actual meaning of the paremia, thanks to its thorough exemplification. Some contexts of usage can also be found in the dictionaries by Apperson, Hazlit and Skeat, but not in all of their entries.

For the translation of current paremiias, it seems that the most appropriate dictionary is the Oxford dictionary of proverbs (Speake 2008), in which an extensive repertoire of proverbs of current use is compiled, classified according to a subject-based index and organized by actant; contexts of use are also included and all the cases are documented over time, as commented above, but the meanings of almost no proverb is explained. Despite the positive aspects of this dictionary, it is not the solution for the translation of all types of paremiias; in some cases, it is necessary to resort to other works. The MacMillan dictionary of English proverbs explained by Ridout (1995), thanks to its definitions and examples of usage, is a good complement, although it does not offer a very wide

repertoire. The extensive paremia collection of *A Dictionary of American Proverbs* (Mieder 1992), which includes variants for each paremia and a meticulous documentation of every one of them is a very good resource, as well as *The Penguin dictionary of proverbs* (Fergusson 1985), that has a very meticulous organization and extremely clear indexes, allowing the user to apply the three techniques of paremia translation and guaranteeing the reaching of the most adequate equivalents, if possible. If the paremias at stake are in disuse, *A hand-book on proverbs* (Bohn 1858) is the best option due to its alphabetization by actant and the use of some key ideas for the classification of a part of the collected proverbs. Nevertheless, it is interesting to complement it with English proverbs and proverbial phrases (Hazlitt 1907), in which the paremia are documented and appear in contexts of use, and with Early English proverbs (Skeat 1910), also with contexts of usage, for paremia in use until the year 1400.

In short, there is no collection of monolingual paremias in the English language that can offer solutions for the translation of all paremias in any given text. To date, a set of various paremia compilations must be used in combination if the most suitable equivalent is to be found. This is why the *Refranero multilingüe* is such a useful traductological tool: it saves the translator who stumbles upon a paremia the hassle of going through the afore-mentioned process with several sources, with no guarantee to ever finding the right equivalent anyway, as will be seen in the next section.

3. POSSIBLE OUTCOMES IN THE TRANSLATION OF PAREMIA

In this section, different practical cases will be presented in order to illustrate the application of the different paremiological translation techniques discussed above, with the help of the dictionaries hereinabove analyzed.

3.1. Pure equivalent.

There are occasions when both cultures, in this case, English and Spanish, converge, resulting in proverbs that can be translated literally, obtaining both functional and formal equivalents. Some examples would be: “La curiosidad mató al gato” and “Curiosity killed the cat”; “El comer y el rascar, todo es empezar” and “Eating and scratching, it’s all in the beginning”; or “El fin justifica los medios” and “The end justifies the means”. The actant technique would be more than enough to find the appropriate translation of this type of paremias. However, these cases are extremely unusual.

3.2. Same actant equivalents.

The actant technique can also be useful for those cases in which, while not coinciding word by word, both the source and the target language have similar paremias including the same keyword. In the case of “Más sabe el diablo por viejo que por diablo” [The devil knows better because he is old, not because he is the devil], when translating the actant *diablo* for its English equivalent *devil* and looking it up in the keyword index, for example in Fergusson’s dictionary, or alphabetically in the entries of Mieder’s and Speake’s, the paremia “The devil knows many things because he is old”. They are not exactly the same paremia, form-wise, but they still convey the exact same meaning while invoking the same images.

However, sometimes the equivalent actant in the target language does not correspond to the literal translation of the actant from the source language, but to a synonym. This would be the case of paremias like “Ojos que no ven, corazón que no siente” [eyes that do not see, heart that does not feel], whose English closest translation would be “Out of sight, out of mind”. Similarly,

“Aunque la mona se vista de seda, mona se queda” [Although the monkey dresses in silk, she will still be a monkey] would be translated as “An ape is an ape, a varlet is a varlet, though they be clad in silk and scarlet”. As it can be observed, if the search by actant does not provide a direct result, translators must be more flexible and try to find equivalents by means of the synonyms technique.

3.3. Same subject equivalents.

In most cases, the actant technique is insufficient, since each language represents its reality in different ways, and even more so when we talk about references as idiomatic as those that can be found in a paremias. In cases where the search by actant has not been fruitful, we would resort to the subject technique.

This technique, although it may seem simple *a priori*, it has the disadvantage that each dictionary makes its own classification of key ideas. The proverb “Cada maestrillo tiene su librillo” [Every little teacher has his little book] can be paraphrased as a reference to each person’s individual preferences. However, if we search the thematic indexes of some of the dictionaries under the key idea “preferences”, we will not find the appropriate equivalent. Said equivalent, “There’s more than one way to skin a cat”, and its variants, “There are more ways to kill a cat/dog than to choke it with cream/butter”, are under the “differences” category, for instance, in Fergusson’s work, and under “Ways and means” in Speake’s. It proves to be necessary, then, to carefully analyze the meaning of the paremia in the source language in order to deduce under what key idea the equivalents in the target language may be classified. It is also very useful to know well the indexes of the dictionaries being used, in order to accelerate the process of pairing the topics under which they operate with the possible ideas gathered in the paremias.

Using the example above, we will now insist on the utility of the synonym technique. The proverb “Cada maestrillo tiene su librillo” uses a vocabulary that could be rated as innocent, and could well be included in a children’s book. If we are faced with this situation, it would be extremely inappropriate to translate it by the previously proposed equivalents, which refer to animal abuse. Thus, the appropriate solution would be to find more suitable equivalents for the target audience. For example, in the work of Fergusson we find, among many other examples, “There are more ways to the wood than one”, which would be an apt enough translation for minors.

3.4. Cases without an equivalent.

As previously stated, sometimes the target culture simply does not offer a satisfactory equivalent. Obstacles to this task may be as varied as the following:

- the functional equivalent is not a paremia,
- the equivalent changes the actant so that for certain contexts that translation is not valid, or
- the reality to which is alluded by the paremia in Spanish is non-existent in the cultures of the target language and obviously the linguistic resources of the latter do not contemplate it.

“A todo cerdo le llega su San Martín” [San Martin arrives for every pig] would be a good example for the first case. Neither a search by actant nor by key idea would bear fruit to find this paremia, due to the fact that the closest equivalent would be “To meet one’s Waterloo” (Cowie 1998: 578), an idiom in English, that cannot be found in a paremia or proverb dictionary.

Especially problematic in terms of finding equivalents are some of the weather-related or sowing and harvesting seasons, as they are part of the specific geolect in which they were coined. For example, “Cuando marzo mayea, mayo marcea” [When March is Mayish, May is Marchish] has an equivalent that would not be adequate in all contexts, since it changes the months to which it refers: “March in Janiveer, Janiveer in March I fear”. The deeper meaning of both paremias is essentially the same: if in a month that should supposedly be cold we have good weather, in

the months in which good weather is expected it will be cold. In many occasions, this functional equivalence could serve its purpose perfectly, but sometimes authors play with actants in context. Hypothetically, a text incorporating “Cuando marzo mayea, mayo marcea” could be referring to the actual month of March, where a splendid sun is shining, while an important outdoors event, like a wedding or concert or funrun, is being planned for May. At this juncture, the apparently equivalent paremia “March in Janiveer, Janiveer in March I fear” ceases to be so.

Finally, sometimes even a non-idiomatic translation has to be used due to the total lack of an equivalent in the target acquis. This seems to be the case with “Días de mayo, días del diablo: no amanece cuando ya oscurece”, a paremia that is very dependent on the latitude of some places in Spain and, therefore, not applicable to other geographical areas.

This is the trajectory that had to be followed in order to find the English equivalents for the Spanish paremia included in the *Refranero multilingüe* from 2010 to 2011:

1. The collaborator and author of this article would add to the database a proverb from the compilation *1001 refranes españoles con su correspondencia en ocho lenguas*;
2. She would start her search by using the dictionaries that include an index or an alphabetical organization by the exact same actant or keyword.
3. If no equivalent came up that way, she would search by similar actants or synonyms of the keywords.
4. If that technique did not prove fruitful, she would either continue her search paying attention to the subject of the paremia.
5. Whenever she found the equivalent, she would double check if the meaning was truly the same in English as in Spanish, by means of those dictionaries including definitions and contexts of usage.

The relative completion of the *Refranero multilingüe* (which still is an on-going project) took several years and a full team of linguists and translators who carried it out so that future translators do not have to anymore.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the translation process, a range of problems of diverse nature may arise that do not always have an exclusively linguistic answer. One of these problems is the translation of paremias. Because of their idiomatic nature, they can be incredibly difficult to translate. Finding a fully satisfactory equivalent implies to find a proverb that coincides in terms of functional meaning, geolect, chronolect and diaphase variation. Ideally, formal equivalence should also be a requirement, although the cases in which all of these conditions are met are minimal.

To achieve the desired equivalence in paremiological translation, knowledge of the available techniques and the use of specialized paremiography dictionaries are essential. When translating a paremia, the translation professionals must go through a process that in many occasions can be problematic and time consuming. This process usually includes the combination of the different translation techniques (actant, subject and synonym) and different sources of information. This chapter has tried to classify and evaluate a set of dictionaries of paremias in English according to their utility in relation to these techniques.

To overcome these obstacles of the translation process, the idea of the *Refranero multilingüe* emerged, so that the effort can be reduced from multiple dictionary searches to a quick search engine in a multilingual database. The *Refranero Multilingüe* is an ever-expanding project, which

includes year after year new Spanish proverbs with their equivalents in several languages, as well as variants, synonyms and contexts of use for each one of them.

Another plausible line of further research could be, taking into consideration the shortcomings and strengths of the dictionaries analyzed, to undertake the design of the ideal paremiological dictionary in English. As far as the author is concerned (Permuy 2015), that ideal dictionary should include a wide and complete repertoire of paremias, current and in disuse (differentiating one from the other), with variants and synonyms, all of them documented over time, with clear explanations of their meanings and with one or several contexts of use for each one. A repertoire of such paremia would be helpful, not only for translators, but for everyone who worked with paremias. Nevertheless, the elaboration of a dictionary with all of these features is a task of titanic proportions.

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