

Translation of spoken English business jargon into Ukrainian

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Abstract. The article studies certain issues in the translation of English business speech into Ukrainian, in particular such components as loanwords and business jargon which spring from figures of speech with different degree of idiomaticity and acquire new meanings in business communication.

Keywords: *English business discourse, business jargon, figures of speech, idiomaticity, semantic meaning, loanwords, transcoding, descriptive translation, demetaphorisation.*

Introduction. In Ukrainian translation studies the issues of business discourse translation have focused traditionally on written texts, such as business letters, contracts, etc. [1;2;3]. English speech in business environment and its consecutive and simultaneous translation were explored less through the obvious reason of being non-material in nature, which resulted in problems of such speech being committed to a fixed form that would facilitate its research. Extensive experience of the authors of this article in oral translation in a business environment, in particular, that of business presentations and slides supporting such presentations, as well as the appearance of certain business presentations in the public domain makes it possible nowadays to study certain aspects of English business speech which are most relevant for translation and offer translation solutions for the most difficult elements of such business discourse.

Short review of publications. English business discourse on the whole is characterised by the use of the so-called “corporate-speak” or business jargon, which creates serious problems for translators. John Lister of the Plain English campaign says in this respect: “Unlike medical or legal jargon, which tends to refer to specific ideas, business jargon is often just verbal padding. It is often used to hide the fact that you have got nothing to say” [4].

When commercial companies selling similar goods and services try to stand out and differentiate themselves from other companies, and generally to look better, they extensively use business jargon which makes their speech more colourful, which at the same time makes their speech less understandable for outsiders. Paul Jacobs, director of corporate communications at Office Angels, said corporate lingo might be created at an almost unconscious level and can be used to “help bring people and teams together in an almost tribal way as companies develop their own specific jargon. Or it can be used to exclude and confuse others, as well as mask inexperience and lack of expertise” [5]. Thus, in English speaking countries two contrary tendencies can be observed: on the one hand, there is the flourishing of business jargon, the development of which costs millions to corporations in terms of the cost of staff poring over and “freshening” presentations for ubiquitous meetings, and, on the other hand, campaigns to clear the English language from non-understandable business jargon.

The results of the research. English business jargon mostly originates from figures of speech with different degrees in the loss of their “freshness”: starting from fresh metaphors, allusions etc. to trite ones which have acquired

for all intents and purposes a certain degree of idiomaticity. Our research shows that such figures of speech were borrowed into business jargon from other types of discourse related to human life and activities, often from everyday speech and political discourse, but with a shift in their semantic meanings. Unlike Ukrainian business discourse, English is overloaded with business jargon based on metaphors, epithets, allusions and other figures which undergo the process of being turned into standard speech patterns, idioms, that lost their originality. The more original and the “fresher”, the figure of speech is, the more context-dependent its meaning becomes in business discourse, and, thus, the more difficult is the task for the translator to correctly perceive its meaning before it is then adequately rendered into Ukrainian.

This striving to find new original images, to avoid the use of cliché phrases and “direct” use of lexical units can be explained, as it was mentioned above, by the desire of speakers in business environment to make their speech, presentations, and communication on the whole more interesting, to stand out among competitors, to catch the addressee’s attention, to persuade them in the advantages of their business products, and, thus, to achieve their business aims.

This current general tendency in the development of English business discourse can be shown using the example of the word combination “low hanging fruit” to mean an easily attainable goal, which creates a powerful sight image of, for instance, an apple that hangs low and can be easily picked by just stretching your hand. To convey the same meaning in business discourse only twenty years ago or so a different metaphor would have been used, that of “easy pickings”, which as of today has completely lost its originality and was borrowed initially from pickpockets’ jargon. Some half a century ago “easy pickings” were preceded by non-metaphorical and quite direct “easy target”.

Some other fresh metaphors, often non-understandable even for people from a business environment, let alone outsiders, include: “blue sky ideas” to mean ambitious plans, “helicopter view” to mean a general review, and “drool proof” to mean technical advice for non-competent PC users.

The researched language material shows that the most common areas from which language units are transferred into business discourse with a shift of meaning to create metaphors include war, sport, body parts and functions, including sex, transport and some others. Thus, “competitive battle” originated from military discourse to mean

competition, as well as “keep your powder dry” to mean to show caution, to wait until the situation in the market becomes favourable, “pre-emptive strike” which in business discourse may mean, for instance, to launch your product in the market earlier than your competitors. Warfare which gave an impetus for the creation of many metaphors in the business and political discourse now is drifting into the background, as the generations of English language speakers affected by World War Two or the Vietnam war are less active, whereas for younger generation other aspects of life come to the fore, such as sport, sex, travel and others.

For instance, such a trite metaphor as “knockout blow” originated from sport discourse to mean actions which may result in the elimination of your competition [6, p.127] or a “fresher” metaphor - “play” - took its origin from the sports term “play/tactical play”. The latter was used, for instance, in a presentation by “Royal Dutch Shell PLC” in the word combination “frontier-exploration plays” [7, p.7]. One of the possible approaches to translating this metaphor would be by losing the metaphor and giving a descriptive translation: “дії, націлені на розвідку газу на нових територіях”, that is, by applying the demetaphorisation technique.

Travel and transport produced such now trite metaphors as “to come on board” to mean “to join the team”, or “to drive up a one-way street” to mean “to do something incorrectly”, “to keep on an even keel” to mean “to do stable business” [6, p.1]. It must be noted that the nature of a trite metaphor is such that its use is not limited to business discourse, but all the above given examples are commonly used in it, which can be proved by their inclusion to English Office Use Dictionaries, in particular the one by Carl Newbrook [6].

But what may be the largest volume of trite, idiomatic, metaphors in English business discourse is related to rude and simplistic description of bodily parts and functions, in particular, sex. The use of such idiomatic expressions is based on gender stereotypes and is aggressive in essence. Such expressions make someone’s speech expressive and emotional and are on the whole acceptable for usage in oral communication in business environment.

It must be emphasized right from the beginning that Ukrainian business communication, even in its oral form, does not tolerate such expressions, and the stylistic standard is in this case quite different. Thus, when translating such expressions, neutralisation in mandatory and only the general meanings must be rendered. For instance, “fucking silly” should be translated as “абсолютно нерозумно”(totally unwise), “to have balls” as “мати силу волі, мужність”(to be brave, to have willpower), “to be screwed/fucked” as “бути поставленим в невідгдане становище”(to find oneself in a disadvantage), “cocks on the block” as “ви несете повну відповідальність/на кін поставлено все” (you have full responsibility for the results [6, p.53], “belly up/tits up” as “піти шкереберть”(everything went wrong) [6, p.208], “bangs for a buck ratio” as “рівень ефективності капіталовкладення” (the return on investment ration), “stick to the knitting” as “не лізти куди не треба, уникати конкуренції”(not to stick your nose where not allowed) [6, p.126].

In addition to metaphors with different degrees of idiomaticity, English business discourse also abounds in epithets and allusions. Thus, the same Shell presentation contains the word combination “robust fundamentals” [7, p.5], where “robust” should be translated as “ефективний в фінансовому відношенні”(financially effective).

An interesting example is constituted by an allusion to a notorious event, namely the sinking of the Titanic, “to rearrange the deckchairs on the Titanic”, as in the following context: “We’re getting nowhere fast here. You’re just rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic” [6, p.208] to signify unnecessary action in the face of a serious threat. Another allusion refers us to Joseph Geller’s “Catch-22”, as in the following example: “The Catch-22 was that every time they increased profit they were expected to reduce costs” [6, p.47] to signify any action which also brings about its negation.

Translation of figures of speech in business discourse should use the same approaches that are used for their translation in fiction and other functional styles. Provided the original message has been perceived correctly, which in itself is not an easy task, figures of speech may be either lost and translated by a stylistically neutral phrase or word combination or recreated based on the same image or based on an analogue conveying the same meaning in Ukrainian.

The first approach, which is also called demetaphorisation, can be observed in the translation of “upstream marketing director” and “downstream marketing director” [7, p.5] as “директор з маркетингу, що працює над проектом до його реалізації” (marketing director in charge of the project before its implementation) and “директор з маркетингу, що працює над проектом після його реалізації”(marketing director in charge of the project after its implementation) correspondingly. The second approach, which is also called demetaphorisation, can be observed in the translation of the word “debottlenecking” as in “debottlenecking mining options” [7, p.12] by a phrase “прибирати вузькі місця”, where one image of a bottleneck was replaced by another one of narrow placed with the same semantic meaning in Ukrainian. Retaining the same image in translation or replacing it with an analogous one is not frequent in oral translation due to the nature of oral translation, i.e. limited time for reproducing available to translators, as well as the impossibility to reproduce a figure of speech based on the same image in principle.

The authors’ experience shows that the most difficult task for an oral translator is not the reproduction stage, but the first stage of perceiving information and analysing it. For instance, is the word “volatility” [7, p.5] in the same Shell presentation a chemical term meaning “летючість” or is rather business jargon to mean “нестабільність, нестійкість економічних складових”? Does the phrase “to mature new options” [7, p.5] mean “визрівання нових опціонів” (where the last word is a financial term) or “доведення до завершального етапу планів на майбутнє”, which literally means “to mature options regarding future planning”? Does the word “delivery” [7, p.3] in the same presentation mean, as in many other contexts, “поставку товару”(delivery of goods) or “успішне виконання проекту”(successful implementation of the project)? The latter is far more often the correct transla-

tion in the business environment. The fact that business jargon units, as well as those of other adjoining areas of knowledge, often have multiple meanings, the use of business jargon based on images unrelated to the business environment, all this may result in translation mistakes if the original message was perceived incorrectly.

Another important issue, in our point of view, is whether to use or not loan words and how to use them. It seems that the accepted approach in Ukrainian studies provides for using only those loan words which do not have synonymous words of the Ukrainian origin, and in such words, exist preference should be given to original Ukrainian words and not the loan words. Borrowing should be allowed only when a Ukrainian signifier for a notion or thing does not exist. Although the practice of oral translation of business discourse testifies to the opposite tendency. A whole number of borrowed words, especially from English, have become a characteristic feature of Ukrainian business discourse, for instance "місія" (for mission) instead of "мета", "візія" (from vision) instead of "бачення", "драйв" (from drive) instead of "рушійна сила", "трансформація" (from transformation) instead of "перетворення", "позиціювання" (from positioning) instead of "розташування" and other words transcoded from English. Their semantic meanings in Ukrainian are transparent and do not create a problem for perceiving the message, but changes in its stylistic qualities have occurred by making the addressee of the message closer to English business culture, and developing trust in the translator and the translation itself, as transcoded words are easily perceived in most instances directly. In addition, in oral translation practical considerations of time limits for the reproduction of the original message balance the choice of the translator in favour of the transcoded or loaned word rather than searching for a Ukrainian equivalent.

If such a Ukrainian equivalent is missing, the translator has even less choice. For instance, some 10-15 years ago the authors of this article had to translate the word "outsourcing" descriptively, for instance, "передача іншій компанії частини бізнес-функцій підприємства, закупівля із зовнішніх джерел" (transferring some business functions of a company to another company, purchasing from external sources). Nowadays the borrowed word "аутсорсінг" is commonly accepted as the notion, which is signified by it, and is now widely known in Ukrainian business culture and does not require additional description. Another example the word combination "due diligence", which can be found in its transcoded form "д'ю діліженс" in oral translation of business discourse to mean "всебічного аналізу перспективним продавцем діяльності компанії, особливо її активів та пасивів з метою оцінки її комерційного потенціалу" (comprehensive analysis by the prospective buyer of company's activities, especially its assets and liabilities with the purpose of assessment of its commercial potential). Unlike the previous example, the transcoded form of the latter example cannot easily be found yet in dictionaries, but we may safely forecast that this will change as soon as the signified concept becomes part and parcel of Ukrainian business mentality. A whole number of other borrowed words found their way in their transcoded form into the Ukrainian business discourse

earlier, such as: стратегічна ідея (from strategic idea), організаційна культура (from organisational culture), бізнес-модель (from business model), корпоративне управління (from corporate management) and others.

There are two pragmatic areas we wish to now examine as we conclude this paper.

Much of the semantic value of the notions used in business English is derived from their "shock value" and there is a tendency to believe that the more dramatic the better. This is difficult to demonstrate objectively as intuitive response, the objective of such colourful language, is personal, i.e. subjective and difficult to quantify, but we can see the effect in the difficulty of back-translation, given that Ukrainian culture, to date, simply does not use such terminology. Any native speaker who has worked in an office environment will instantly understand an, effectively, set phrase to mean that something is poorly perceived: "That went down like a lead balloon" has to be rendered into Ukrainian as descriptive or explanatory translation. As the set phrase became clichéd and trite, in recent years many native speakers now use the synonymic "That went down like a horseshit sandwich" that needs to be rendered by the same technique.

The second area is that of the attractiveness of the stylistics involved. The objectives of communicating in creative, original, and innovative language, chic and sophisticated to many, is transferring to other sectors, not only in English, but in Ukrainian as well. The Ukrainian examples are very restrained in comparison to their English equivalents in terms of their "shock value" but may still be unusually colourful for the Ukrainian language and style of communication.

A term that has emerged from business has extended the formerly popular concept of "environment" (as in 'commercial environment') to the use of "ecosystem" as a more specific analogy, as may be found in the 'secondary school ecosystem' in a Ukrainian Ministerial publication. The same word may be found in academic papers on linguistics.

Thus we can say that business jargon penetrates many other types of discourse, such as politics, education, the academic world and government.

Conclusions. The difficulties of translating English business discourse into Ukrainian include, first and foremost, English business jargon, which in most instances is based on figures of speech of different degree of idiomaticity with new meanings, which such figures acquired when transferred into business discourse from other types of discourse. These new meanings are stable for business jargon based on trite metaphors and other trite figures of speech. And they are less stable for relatively fresh figures of speech, which in business discourse are quite often contextual and, thus, difficult for perception by the translator, who has the task of defining their terms of reference before their correct translation. Such translation may or may not preserve the figure of speech used in the original utterance. Another difficulty of English business discourse translation into Ukrainian is presented by the necessity for the translator to make a decision on the approach of tackling certain English business jargon units depending on the availability of Ukrainian equivalents and the "freshness" of certain English business concepts for the Ukrainian business environment, as well as other

stylistic and practical considerations related to oral translation of English business discourse. The above factors will then define whether the translator should transcode

an English business jargon unit, i.e. to reproduce its graphical and phonetic form taking into account the specifics of the target language, or use descriptive translation.

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Український переклад усної делової англійської мови

М. Возна, А. Гапонів

Анотація. В статті розглядаються деякі складнощі українського перекладу усної делової англійської мови, зокрема, таких її елементів як заїмствовання і деловий жаргон, який ґрунтується на фігурах мови різної ступеня фразеологізації і набуває нову семантику в деловому спілкуванні.

Ключові слова: англійська делова мови, деловий жаргон, фігури мови, фразеологізація, семантичне значення, заїмствовані слова, транскрипція, описателський переклад, деїафоризація.