

TRANSLATION PROPERTIES OF VULGAR AND INVECTIVE VOCABULARY IN POLITICAL MEDIA DISCOURSE

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Abstract: The present research is an attempt to specify vulgar and invective vocabulary in modern political media discourse and to determine their translation properties (from English into Russian and Armenian, from Russian into English and Armenian, from Armenian into English and Russian) within the frames of pragmatic and socio-cultural discourse analyses. The article aims at indicating the language code differences in terms of cultures. Such analysis fosters also the determination of ways and methods of transmitting discrepancies between positive and negative connotations of various language units and to create the balance of emphatic equivalence when translating from source languages (SLs) into target languages (TLs). Invectives contain universal cultural values, they indicate aggression, anger, hostility and indignity. To translate invective proverbs, aphorisms, jargon, obscenities, the translator uses various transformations to pragmatically adapt them for the target cultural environment, since the source culture cognitive principles do not always coincide with those of the target culture.

Keywords: political media discourse; vulgar and invective vocabulary; cultural code; pragmatic adaptation

1. Introduction

Public speeches as a variety of political discourse have always been widely considered by scholars in cognitive linguistics, pragmatics, rhetoric, political discourse analysis. The chief parameters of the modern communicative environment and extralinguistic factors specifying the verbal component of political communication, are the technological innovations, creating a total information space, which brought to significant changes in the field of mass communication. The combination of political

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communication and new media predetermines the vectors of linguistic and cognitive processes taking place in such a dynamic segment of the modern information space as political discourse. Political events have always been a considerable component of mass media, but their significance has currently increased, due to the new aspects of communicative interaction. As an integral part of the contemporary information environment, the political language is partially losing its elitism and adapts to the communicative and pragmatic challenges of the new millennium.

The need to ensure effective political communication in modern discursive conditions leads to the activation of linguistic and creative processes (the use of a large number of semantic innovations and neologisms proper), the identification of political terms and implementation of hybrid genre-style forms. Linguocognitive mechanisms, initiated by extralinguistic factors, determine political language as a flexible, multifunctional system that creates new conceptual content: compact and expressive indications of changing political realities, indirectly transmitting information, ensuring relative simplicity in decoding implicit content to regulate the manipulative impact on the audience, if necessary.

Modern politicians, regardless of their nationality and the country they represent, create specific properties of modern public speaking style (brevity, definiteness, coherence). Simultaneously, they skillfully combine their speech with colloquial, sometimes rude/invective idioms and terms atypical for traditional rhetoric, which cause significant difficulties in the translation process. To eliminate these complications and produce an adequate and equivalent translation, the translators use various transformation techniques to pragmatically adapt the text of the source language(s), based on cognitive models and national characteristics of target cultures.

Any translation (verbal), presupposes both linguistic and ethnic barrier. People usually face difficulties associated with the concept of ethnicity, the so-called cultural codes: differences in cultures and national psychology, awareness of the current life of a foreign country, etc. (Lатышев 2005: 17). Usually, unexpected difficulties arise with how to transfer the meaning of words which are unfamiliar to another culture (Pavlova, 2020: 66). The cultural codes represent all the symbols used to convert messages into signs, as well as the rules governing the relationship between these symbols. These codes represent the ways of communication and characteristics that distinguish one culture from another. (Тилепова 2024). Therefore, extralinguistic factors also have a great influence on the nature of transformations when translating texts of political discourse, public speeches in particular. The analysis of extralinguistic situation is necessary for specifying the speech genre and selection of translation strategies, to keep the impact value of phraseological units and idioms, vulgarisms and slang, the structure and composition of the text etc. Such features of public speeches very often cause certain difficulties in the translation process, since the world of politics deals with different cultures. The speech of politicians is full of culturally specific elements. To overcome these difficulties and to achieve the adequacy and equivalence of translation, the translator uses various methods of translation transformations in order to pragmatically adapt the text of the source language(s), taking into account the cognitive models of their cultures, which may be completely different from those of the transmitting cultures.

The present research is an attempt to specify vulgar and invective vocabulary in modern political media discourse and to determine their translation properties (from English into Russian and Armenian, from Russian into English and Armenian, from Armenian into English and Russian) within the frames of pragmatic and socio-cultural discourse analyses.

The article aims at indicating the language code differences in terms of cultures. Such analysis fosters also the determination of ways and methods of transmitting discrepancies between positive and negative connotations of various language units and to create the balance of emphatic equivalence when translating from source languages (SLs) into target languages (TLs).

2. General Characteristics of Vulgar and Invective Vocabulary

Linguists have recently turned their focus on the study of invective vocabulary. The reason for such interest is the evident decline in speaking style of politicians. Cultural decline and the use of invective vocabulary is predominantly a consequence of socio-political events, which leads to the loss of generally established moral values, a change in the culture of communication and the leveling of accepted norms of behavior and intolerance.

Invective can generally be defined as a manifestation of verbal aggression, recognized in a definite social group (subgroup) as harsh or taboo. An invective can also be specified as a verbal violation of an ethical taboo, conducted by uncodified (prohibited) means (Jelvis 2001: 13).

There are a large number of classifications of invectives: thematic, semantic, functional. Linguists suggest different approaches to the description of invective vocabulary. Posidelova divides invective resources depending on the type of lexeme proposed for analysis: 1) obscenities; 2) vocabulary with reduced emotional and stylistic coloring (slang, jargon, vulgarisms, dialecticisms, colloquialism); 3) expletives; 4) literary vocabulary with a negative assessment in a contemptuous modality (Posidelova 2016: 14).

Rawson's classification distinguishes: 1) blasphemous invectives that encroach on sacred concepts; 2) obscene words associated with the names of "shameful" body parts; 3) insults that vilify people in relation to their ethnic differences, faiths, political views, sexual, physical and mental capabilities (Rawson, 1989: 6).

It should be noted, that invective alongside with insult, threat and other acts of verbal aggression, comprise obscenity, abusive language, gossip, slander, deliberately false information, "compromising material." It may include sayings containing roughly colloquial words, sarcastic quotes on the verge of brutal cynicism as well.

The integral part of the invectives, according to Pozolotin, are:

- professions, that have already become common names for insulting a person
- professions, which are often given a pejorative connotation by means of suffixes
- invective animal metaphors
- a group of condemning verbs with negative modality
- direct expressive negative vocabulary used to offend a person

- euphemisms, i.e., mild or indirect words or expressions for those considered to be too harsh or blunt when referring to something unpleasant or embarrassing. They help to make any word from all other groups more elegant, standard (literary), though offensive, but clear and easy to understand (Pozolotin 2005).

According to Mokienko, two mandatory points should be added, to complete this classification:

- occasionalisms (creative neologisms) with a negative connotation referring to a definite profession, occupation, religious or political affiliation
- scatological vocabulary, which includes words and expressions related to the “result” of physiological functions (Mokienko 1994).

Invective vocabulary exists within the limits of emotionally expressive vernacular. An invective communicative act can also be an emotional response in a dispute, an unintentional, uncontrollable emotional reaction. Respectively, two types of invectives can be singled out:

- an involuntary, uncontrollable emotional reaction
- a conscious intention to humiliate an opponent in order to demonstrate someone’s dominant position (Demidov 2004: 93).

Vulgarisms are rude words and expressions used in the literary language. The sources of vulgarisms are jargon and vernacular. Vulgarisms are evaluative and/or expressive in nature, therefore, they can be used to express emotions as an element of a language game, and, of course, for personality characteristics.

Each nation uses its native negative characteristics to express a common emotional state, identifying the receptor with various objects of reality. This is due to the fact, that different communities have their own criteria for evaluating people, behavior and mentality. They contain universal cultural values specifying aggression, anger, hostility and contempt. Invective units are directly related to the concepts that create the core of the linguistic picture of the world and are a means of storing and transmitting the centuries-old experience of the people.

3. Pragmatic Adaptation as an Effective Technique of the Invective Lexicon Translation in a Political Media Text

Verbal aggression is especially intensified during the elections, when the politicians use all the possible means to reduce the rating of their opponents: invective vocabulary with culturally specific elements, such as proverbs and sayings of abusive meaning, rude sarcastic quotes from films, books, jokes and swear words. Translator, being a mediator in between the two parties of communicative process, should realize definitely that translation is not a mere act of rendering words into a different language, it is an exact transmitting of language and cultural units into a different culture. If information is incorrectly decoded and transmitted, misunderstanding may arise, which will lead respectively to a failure of the communicative act.

Invectives contain universal cultural values, they indicate aggression, anger, hostility and indignity. To translate invective proverbs, aphorisms, jargon, obscenities, the translator uses various transformations to pragmatically adapt them for the target

cultural environment, since the source culture cognitive principles do not always coincide with those of the target culture.

1. After Turkey's invasion of Syria, US President Donald Trump sent a letter to Turkish leader Recep Erdogan, where he called for a cease-fire. At the end of his extraordinary letter, he added a phrase, which presupposes an implicit invective:

Don't be a **tough guy**. Don't be a **fool!** (Trump 2019)

Russian translation completely corresponds to the SL contextual meaning:

Не строй из себя **крутого парня**. Не будь **дураком!**
(Literally: Don't act like a cool guy. Don't be a fool!). (Trump 2019)

The word combination **tough guy** is transmitted into TL by means of a corresponding Russian cultural-bound unit **крутой парень** (tough guy, cool guy), whereas in the Armenian version the primary vocabulary meaning of the word **tough** is used:

Մի՛ եղեք **կոշտ տղա**: Մի՛ եղեք **հիմար**:
(Literally: Don't be a hard guy. Don't be a fool!). (Trump 2019)

The Armenian **կոշտ տղա** (hard guy, rough guy) does not convey the pragmatic value of the SL unit, though in the Armenian corresponding cultural inventory there exists a relevant unit **լավ տղա** (a good guy). Thus, the sentence could be translated as **Քեզ լավ տղայի տեղ մի դիր** (Do not behave as a good guy), where *good* is used in the meaning of *tough*. Furthermore, the translator has unreasonably used second person plural of the verb **եղեք** (be). According to Russian and Armenian grammatical structure personal, pronouns and corresponding verbs, have both singular and plural forms, whereas the pronoun *you* is used for both singular and plural in English. In Russian and Armenian, if *you* is used to address one person, it determines politeness and respect towards the interlocutor. In case with the Armenian **Մի՛ եղեք հիմար** (Don't be a **fool**) such a polite and respectful manner is inappropriate, since the speaker names his interlocutor **a fool**.

2. Talking about nuclear weapons, Putin responded to NATO's calls to reduce nuclear weapons in Russia:

У нас такого оружия больше, чем у стран НАТО. Они знают об этом и все время склоняют нас к его сокращению - **хрен им**, как у нас в народе говорят.
(Literally: We have more such weapons than the NATO countries. They know this and always force us to reduce it. Fuck them, as our people would say).
(Putin 2023)

There are two versions of translation into English:

1. We have more such weapons than the NATO countries. They know about it, and all the time we are being persuaded to start negotiations on reductions. **The hell with them**, as our people say. (Putin 2023)

2. We have more than NATO countries, and they want to reduce our numbers. **Screw them.** (Putin 2023)

In the first version, the vulgar unit **the hell with them** does not reflect the real concept of the Russian idiom, in fact, meaning **Fuck them, they will hardly ever catch it one day**. There are similar expressions in English, denoting rude denial of something, disagreement, protest - **Hell No! No way! Fat chance! Not bloody likely!** but none of them are used in the translation. Interlingual, intercultural and cognitive complications occur here due to the wrong interpretation of culturally specific units. The second version of the translation **Screw them** stands closer to the original and conveys the required essence of the message. Moreover, a method of addition is applied in the first version **and all the time we are being persuaded to start negotiations on reductions**. This method is likely used by the translator to transfer the Russian combination **склоняют нас к его сокращению** (force us to reduce it) and to convey the pragmatic impact on the target receptor.

3. Once, during Fundraiser Wednesday in San Francisco Joe Biden said about RF President Vladimir Putin:

We have a **crazy SOB guy**, PUTIN. (Biden 2024)

Likewise, the previous example, this one has two versions of translation as well.

1. Байден **оскорбительно высказался** в адрес Путина.
(Literally: Biden insulted Putin). (Biden 2024)

2. Джо Байден назвал Владимира Путина **crazy S. O. B.** («сумасшедшим сукиным сыном»)
(Literally: Joe Biden called Vladimir Putin crazy S. O. B. (“crazy son of a bitch”).
(Biden 2024)

In the first version a euphemization technique was used, the translator selected an expression neutral in meaning and emotional significance, replacing an indecent and inappropriate unit, characterizing the President of RF. In addition to euphemization, the translator used a semantic development technique, replacing dictionary correspondence with contextual, logically related one.

In the second version, **crazy S. O. B.** is maintained together with the explanation in brackets «сумасшедшим сукиным сыном» (crazy son of a bitch).

In the Armenian version, the equivalent translation method is used:

Մենք ունենք **խելազար շան տղա**, ինչպիսիս Պուտինն է:
(Literally: We have such a crazy son of a bitch like Putin). (Biden 2024)

Concerning the SL invective unit “*son of a bitch*,” it should be noted, that there is no specification regarding the noun *bitch*: it can be either a she-wolf, or a she-dog or any other she-animal. In Armenian, there is no gender specification of the concept: the noun *շու՛ն* (*dog* in general) is used. Respectively, due to this culturally specific substantiation, the translator, within the scope of pragmatic adaptation, used a similar cultural-bound unit, well known to the Armenian-speaking people.

During a presidential debate in 2020 Joe Biden defined Donald Trump as **Putin's puppy**:

He's **Putin's puppy**. (Biden 2020)

Both Russian and Armenian translators pragmatically adapted the unit **Putin's puppy** and used the corresponding idiomatic expressions existing respectively in their linguo-cultural storage. Thus, in Russian it sounds as **щенок (щеночек)** – a dog cub, which is most used by Russian people as an invective, whereas in the English version there is no specification for the noun **puppy**: it can be a bear cub, a tiger cub, a wolf or a lion cub.

Он «**путинский щенок**».
(Literally: He is a cub of Putin). (Biden 2020)

In the Armenian translation the invective unit **թուլա** (a cub) is used, which likewise the English corresponding one has no specification: it can be a cub of any animal.

Նա **Պուտինի թուլան է**:
(Literally: He is a cub of Putin). (Biden 2020)

Anyway, all the units of both source and target versions move into the category of invective lexicon due to a specific situation, they are used in.

4. In his comments on the missile and bomb attack on Grozny (September 24, 1999), Vladimir Putin declared:

Мы будем преследовать террористов везде... Вы уж меня извините, в туалете поймаем, мы и **в сортире их замочим**...
(Literally: We will pursue terrorists everywhere... Excuse me, we'll catch them in the toilet, and we'll soak them in it). (Putin 1999)

In the English translation for the vulgar unit of criminal jargon **в сортире их замочим** (will dunk them in the crapper) a phraseological equivalent is used **snuff them in a crapper**:

We are going to pursue terrorists everywhere... If we capture them in the toilet, then we'll **snuff them in a crapper**. (Putin 2011)

While in the Armenian translation, a semantic development occurs: **замочим** is transmitted as **վերջը կտանք** (will put an end to them):

Մենք ահաբեկիչներին հետապնդելու ենք ամենուր, կապ չունի, թե նրանք որտեղ կլինեն: Եթե մենք նրանց, ներողություն եմ խնդրում, զուգարանում բռնենք, ապա հենց այնտեղ էլ նրանց **վերջը կտանք**:
(Literally: We will chase the terrorists everywhere, no matter where they are. If we catch them, I'm sorry, in the toilet, we'll finish them right there). (Putin 2016)

To avoid tautology, the Armenian translator uses the word **զուգարան** (toilet) only once. The translator did not use another Armenian word, meaning *toilet*, since the word *շէտքարան* does not exactly correspond to the SL word *сopтup* (*crapper*), it has rather the meaning of *toilet*.

In the English version the SL parenthetical clause **Вы уж меня извините** (Excuse me) is omitted as in any English community it is unusual to apologize in such situations. Besides, the Russian verb *замочим* (dunk) is substituted by *snuff*, as the expression *snuff them in a crapper* corresponds exactly to the Russian *в сортире их замочим*.

5. In his Inauguration Speech in 2020 Vladimir Putin announced:

У нас нет права быть «Иванами, не помнящими родства».

(Literally: We have no right to be “Ivans who do not remember kinship”. (Putin 2020)

There is an implicit insult towards those who renounce their history. “**Иван, не помнящий родства**” (Ivan, who does not remember kinship), is a cultural-bound unit, used by Russian people, for those who do not respect their history, ancestors, who forget about their roots. In the English version a modulation (semantic development) technique is used by the translator:

And we do not have the right to **be heedless of our past**. (Putin 2020)

The proper name Ivan, having a nominal value, is usually used to specify Russian people in general. This name and the specific action associated with it were omitted in the English translation, which conveys merely the meaning of the statement without indicating, the origin of the unit used by the orator. Simultaneously, the expressive value and the emotional impact upon the receptor are reduced due to the use of **heedless of our past** instead of *do not remember kinship*.

6. In response to the RA Prime minister Nikol Pashinyan’s Facebook postings, RA ex-President Levon Ter-Petrosyan’s speaker said:

Նախագահ Տեր-Պետրոսյանը անիմաստ է համարում անդրադառնալ **ազգակործան պատուհասի հոգեկան տվայտանքներին**: Ինչ ուզում է՝ թող դուրս տա: Միևնույն է՝ նա արդարանալու ոչ մի ճար չունի: Հայ ժողովուրդը նրան երբեք չի ներելու:

(Literally: President Ter-Petrosyan considers it useless to respond the mental disorders of the destroyer of the nation. Let him say whatever he wishes. He still has no way to justify himself. The Armenian people will never forgive him). (Musinyan 2021)

In the Russian translation the combination **ազգակործան պատուհաս** (destroyer of the nation) is transmitted as **губящее народ олицетворение зла** (the evil ruining people) thus revealing the contextual meaning of the word by means of explication (descriptive translation) – *the destroyer of the nation*.

Президент Тер-Петросян считает бессмысленным обращаться к **душевному метаниям губящего народ олицетворения зла. Пусть болтает, что хочет.** Все равно, у него нет никакого шанса оправдаться. Армянский народ никогда не простит его.

(Literally: President Ter-Petrosyan considers useless to respond the mental anguish of the evil embodiment destroying the people. Let him talk what he wants. Anyway, he doesn't have any chance to justify himself. The Armenian people will never forgive him). (Musinyan 2021)

In the English version the SL **ազգակործան պատուհաս** (destroyer of the nation) is substituted by the attributive combination **national scourge**, which respectively loses its expressiveness and emotional impact upon the receptor.

President Ter-Petrosyan considers it pointless to respond to the **mental tribulations of this national scourge. Let him do whatever he wants.** In any event, cannot justify himself. The Armenian people will never forgive him. (Musinyan 2021)

It should be noted, that the translation was done by an Armenian translator, who failed in conveying the essence of the message. As a compensation, descriptive translation technique or explication could be used here to reveal the contextual meaning of the statement – *an evil person who destroys his nation*. Moreover, the SL device of concretization **Ինչ ուզում է թող դուրս տա** (Let him say whatever he wishes) is substituted by generalization in the English version: **Let him do whatever he wants.**

In case with the attributive combination **հոգեկան տվայտանքներ** (*mental disorders*), in Russian translation equivalent method was used – *душевные метания* (mental tossing), whereas the non-native translator of the English version suggests an incorrect modification – *mental tribulations*. The noun *tribulation* meaning *grief, misfortune, trouble, sorrow, calamity, adversity* is never used to determine such contextual significance. This part of the translation leads in fact to misunderstanding because of semantic discrepancy and incorrect interpretation of the statement.

Thus, the examination of the above-illustrated examples reveals that the following translation transformations have been applied within the pragmatic adaptation of the vulgar and invective vocabulary:

- equivalent translation
- modulation (semantic development)
- euphemization
- full transformation
- compensation
- generalization

4. Conclusion

A comparative political media discourse analysis suggested in the article focuses on the translation properties of invective lexicon, its cultural potential, linguistic and

extralinguistic parameters, as well as translation transformations within the scope of pragmatic adaptation of the corresponding units, based on illustrations specifically of Russian, English and Armenian sources.

It is really impossible to fix all the culturally specific meanings of lexical units in dictionaries, therefore, their contextual significance should be taken into account while transmitting them into a different communicative environment. In fact, they should be pragmatically adapted to convey the real meaning to be well recognized by the target receptor.

It is a mandatory requirement to be well aware of the cultural distinctions of both source and target languages to pragmatically adapt the SL invective lexicon and to transmit sufficiently its cognitive significance. Thus, proper interpretation of culturally specific information is a key to the correct linguistic and cultural decoding of vulgar and invective vocabulary and its exact and relevant transmission into a TL.

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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.