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Кисленко К.А., Лазарев В.А. Функции пословиц и способы их перевода

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Functions of Proverbs and Methods of their
translation Functions of Proverbs

Статья посвящена анализу функций пословиц и поговорок и изучению способов их перевода

Ключевые слова: пословицы, функции, способы, перевод

The article is about functions of proverbs and the ways of their translation from English into Russian

Key words: proverbs, functions, translation, methods

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All or practically all cultures have a set of means to transmit accumulated knowledge and experience. Proverbs and sayings are speech entities that can be used in any life situation. Meider, the German professor, mentions that proverbs are found in many parts of the world, but some areas seem to have richer stores of proverbs than others (such as West Africa), while others have hardly any (North and South America) [3, p.108-109].

Nevertheless, proverbs and sayings perform certain functions. While analyzing the functions of proverbs, the attention should be paid on how traditional proverbs continue to be employed and functioned in modern world.

First of all, proverbs have a didactic function. In the didactic function proverbs are used to give advice, to help in difficult situations, to show the most important things and the proper way in life. Most proverbs having a didactic function originate from the Bible: "Seek and you shall find", "Every man must carry his own cross", "You cannot put new wine in old bottles". In this function proverbs are often used in church sermons and moralizing speeches.

Besides, proverbs are used in personal interaction. They can function as warning ("Keep your weather eye open", "Mind your P's and Q's"); advice ("Live and let live", "It is never too late to learn"); reproof ("He that seeks trouble, never misses it",

“He struts like a peacock”); explanation (“He who lives by the sword dies by the sword”); justification (“Too many cooks spoil the broth”); conclusion or commentary (“Learn wisdom by the follies of others”, “Care killed the cat”). Proverbs bring out the essence of the situation, warn of danger, tell people how to behave and how not to behave, advise, prohibit or give instructions. With the help of proverbs it is possible to forecast some life situations, express doubts, accuse someone of something, play a joke on somebody, justify or excuse somebody. They also sum up life experiences and allow us to draw conclusions that can be applied in the future [2, p.71].

Proverbs and sayings are the tool with the help of which one can discredit or criticize someone or a situation. Using polite short laconic form of proverbs we can hide our thoughts and say something that we would not dare to say in a direct way; depict wide range of problems in a satirical manner. We would say “A good husband makes a good wife” if we hear a man complaining about his wife while we know that it is not only her fault.

Proverbs and sayings have a great variety of functions. They can perform as speech acts depending on the text and the type of communicative setting in which they are used. The relevance of some proverbs is to state some information and can be interpreted on the locutionary speech level. Others can be understood only due to their metaphorical meaning, and they should be analyzed on the illocutionary speech level. The third group of proverbs is examined as perlocutionary acts concerning a person’s feelings, thoughts and actions.

Proverbs and sayings perform the same functions and subfunctions as well as speech acts. They express intellectual and emotional attitudes: disappointment, sympathy, intention, acceptance as well as moral attitudes: approval and disapproval, appreciation, apology or regret. Proverbs and sayings as well as speech acts have the function of socializing and suasion. They are used to congratulate, attract attention, advise, offer, suggest, request or warn.

Speech acts can express requests, advice or criticism in two ways: directly or indirectly. The indirect way is realized by means of proverbs.

The usage of almost all proverbs depends on the context and it is impossible to define the proverb’s function without reference to the context of its use.

Sometimes there can be problems with the understanding of proverbs as their meaning extends far beyond their literal meaning. Different dictionaries and collections of proverbs provide only examples of proverbs, informing us that proverbs do exist in the language, but they do not mention how a proverb is applied in this or that life situation. That’s why it is of great importance to pay attention on the context in which a proverb is used to define correctly its meaning and function. For example, the proverb “All’s well that ends well” can be used as a statement, a justification or an explanation.

Methods of Translation

Proverbs and sayings play an important role in the English language culture. They have exceptional meanings; they can be used in different situations and understood by English-speaking population, but at the same time they cause some difficulties in understanding of non-native speakers, because a very small amount of the English proverbs and sayings can be translated literally.

In most cases English proverbs and sayings have the same meanings as the proverbs and sayings of other languages, for example, the Russian language. The task of the interpreter while translating from English into Russian is to find the right method for translation. One should use the following methods of translation to avoid difficulties in translating and subsequently in understanding.

The first method is to use the equivalent. A number of English proverbs and sayings has a similar meaning and stylistic coloring like Russian proverbs and sayings which are the equivalents. If it is required to translate a proverb or a saying, an interpreter must check if there are any equivalents in the Russian language. If there it is, it can be used in translation. For example, "He laughs best, who laughs last" – «Смеется тот, кто смеется последним», "Like father, like son" – «Каков отец, таков и сын», "Easy come, easy go" – «Легко пришло, легко ушло».

The second method is to find the analog in the language in which a proverb or saying is translated. In most cases the interpreter uses the Russian variant of the English proverb which has the same meaning but expressed in other words. For example, "A cock is valiant on his own dunghill" – «На своей улочке храбра и курочка», "A creaking door hangs long on its hinges" – «Битая посуда два века живет».

The third method is a calque method. Sometimes an interpreter has to translate a proverb or saying which has neither equivalent nor analog in the Russian language. The calque method can be used only if the meaning of the English proverb is completely obvious in Russian. For example, "A fool may ask more questions in an hour than a wise man can answer in seven years" – «Умный за семь лет не ответит на вопросы, которые дурак задаст за час».

The fourth method is the method of description. It is necessary to use it if in the Russian language there is neither equivalent nor analog, and calque is inappropriate. For example, "When Queen Anne was alive", it means that "когда королева Анна была жива, это еще имело смысл, но сейчас это бесполезно"; "Grin like a Cheshire cat" means "улыбаться во весь рот".

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