

# Translation of Phraseological Units in Abai Kunanbayev's Poems

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**Abstract**—Abai Kunanbayev (1845-1904) was a great Kazakh poet, composer and philosopher. Abai's main contribution to Kazakh culture and folklore lies in his poetry, which expresses great nationalism and grew out of Kazakh folk culture. Before him, most Kazakh poetry was oral, echoing the nomadic habits of the people of the Kazakh steppes. We want to introduce to abroad our country, its history, tradition and culture. We can introduce it only through translations. Only by reading the Kazakh works can foreign people know who are kazakhs, the style of their life, their thoughts and so on. All information comes only through translation. The main requirement to a good translation is that it should be natural or that it should read as smoothly as the original. Literary translation should be adequate, should follow the original to the fullest. Translators have to be loyal to original text, they shouldn't give the way to liberty.

**Keywords**—concept, literature, semantics, tracing

## I. INTRODUCTION

A phraseological unit is a complex linguistic phenomenon. Understanding the phraseological units' artistic role in poetry, their identification and transfer to another language is not an easy task. The transfer of meaning and the artistic function of the phraseological units of great poets such as Byron, Pushkin and Abai to other languages require from a skilled translator deep knowledge and poetic talent. There are several objectives for the translator: knowledge of the basic issues of the phraseology theory; the same deep knowledge of the phraseological units' values of two languages; and an adequate transfer of their meanings, semantics, expressive and stylistic features in the translation. The practical implementation of these objectives depends on the level of pre-translation analysis and interpretation of a phraseological unit by a translator. Even at early stages of the phraseological units' pre-translation analysis, the translator starts facing many difficulties. The main ones are the following: definition of the phraseological units' structure; understanding their textual, contextual and hidden meaning, content, idea; determining their artistic and aesthetic functions; finding the phraseological units' full and appropriate alternatives in the target language; finding the closest alternative of the phraseological units in the language of translation; descriptive transfer of the phraseological units' values in translation, etc. Each of these tasks corresponds to a certain stage of phraseology translation [1].

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Addressing issues revealed during the initial stages of great importance. The translator who does not know fully both languages can easily make mistakes. There are frequent errors found in current translations of Abai's phraseology in Russian and English. These fall into several types. First, the translator is not taking the entire phraseological unit as a stable indivisible phrase, but rather is dividing and translating it word by word. This distorts the meaning of the phrase. Second, the translator cannot find in the Russian language existing equivalents of the original's given phraseological units. Third, he perceives the figurative units used in the original language as phraseological units and translates them as they are. Therefore, in such cases we can't say that the content, meaning and artistic features of the original are conveyed adequately.

The main requirement is that the translator should strive to translate a phraseological unit using similar phraseology of the other language. However, in most cases translators don't manage to find appropriate phraseological units in the target language. In such cases a translator has to use other recognized translation methods such as: tracing, descriptive, lexical, selective translation and contextual replacement.

We believe that the lexical, grammatical and semantic transformations can be used during translation of phraseology if they are used in convenient and suitable places.

This old Kazakh phraseological unit "kara kyldy kak zharu" translates as cutting a horse's tail in half. However, its figurative meaning refers to a sense and method of distributing justice fair and even-handed. This phraseological unit has existed with Kazakhs for a long time. The phraseological unit is used to refer to the high level of figurative justice exhibited mainly in the proceedings, in the settlement of various household, social and other conflicts between individuals, groups, tribes and 'uluses' (nations), which has been handled in the past mainly by the Biis and Aksakals (elders) [2]. In his poem "So Here is Old Age, Sad Thoughts, Sensitive Sleep", Abai used this old, well-known Kazakh phrase. In the poem text it serves for deeper understanding of the justice and fairness concept. D.Brodsky translates this line into Russian as follows:

*"A wise person keenly penetrates deep into things,  
Breaks the hair into forty pieces"[3].*

The translation conveys the meaning of the original to a certain extent. We cannot deny that. But it is impossible not to notice the presence of extra, extraneous words. You cannot negate the fact that they do not prevent disclosure of the verse meaning. But the extra, extraneous words still have had their influence on the nature of the original and on the creative individuality of the author. The single line "Akyldy kara kyldy kyrykka bolmek" phraseological unit in the original (literally: a clever person would divide the horse hair into forty pieces), in the translation of D.Brodsky takes two lines. The extra words used in the translation "Zorko pronikayet v glube veshey" (keenly penetrates deep into things) are words that the

translator added himself. In the Kazakh-Russian dictionary the word "kyl" is translated as "hair of a horse tail or mane"[8]. In D. Brodsky's translation the unit associated with the "horse" has been missed. Not horse hair but a piece of human hair is presented to a reader. Therefore, in order to make it more understandable to the reader, the translator should have used not just "hair" but "horse hair". In addition, the translator omitted the "kara" (black) epithet which was present in the original. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the translator has not considered the word "black" in the original as important enough to translate. In the language system of the original, "black" has a specific meaning. If it is removed the phraseological unit loses its meaning. The result is the diminished meaning of the poet's thought, as well as the artistic originality and the aesthetic impact of descriptive and expressive means of the poem. Additionally, in literary translation a connotative, i.e. a hidden meaning of a word, plays an important role. In Kazakhstan, we believe that it would be more effective if the translator conveyed the phraseological unit used by the author into the Russian language by finding a similar equivalent in Russian.

After identifying and studying phraseological combinations in a text of a poem, the translator must first search for a similar phraseological unit in a target language that carries an equivalent sense.

To return to our example, in the history of any people there were fair and honest leaders. Take for example, King Solomon, who remained in history thanks to his wise and just management, his name is still known to many people today. There is a well-established combination of words "the Solomonic decision" in the Russian language associated with the name of this king, and this phraseological unit still exists. In other words, if a translator uses such consolidated phrases that are understandable to the reader, it would be the translator's more appropriate decision.

A. Kodar translates this verse as follows: "A reasonable person would think all sides"[5]. The translator conveyed the idea of the original not word for word, but in such a way that the reader could easily understand it. In this case, although the general meaning of the original phraseological unit was conveyed, the phraseological unit itself has completely disappeared. Two translators translated one phraseological unit in two ways: if A. Kodar conveyed the meaning of the phraseological unit in his translation, D. Brodsky translated the phraseological unit word for word.

Yu. Kuznetsov could not be drawn away from the order that D. Brodsky was sticking to, and at the level of a word for word translation he created the following: "Umnyi mozhet rassech vdol na sorok chastey" (A Smart person can cut into forty parts). The translator did not show the subject to be cut (horse hair), in this line. However, he added a second line in which he wrote "tonky volos", (thin hair), which then made the translation of the original content understandable. We know that this is a common inversion that is met in translated poems. But the fracture of the author's figurative structure is apparent. In addition, the conceptual meaning of the original text has not been properly conveyed in the translated version.

In the original version there is information about the colour of the horse hair but it is not known whether it is thin or thick. But the translator uses a "thin hair" combination. We believe

that the word "thin" is not necessary in the translated text. The concept of "thin" is already incorporated within the meaning of the word "kyl" (horse hair). Although the translator is trying to convey the exact meaning of the line, he hasn't reached a substantial result. The line meaning is close to the original to a certain degree. The translator tries to convey exactly the meaning of the poet's poem and seeks every possible way to reconcile with the meaning of the original. This is why it is translated word for word.

None of the translators who have translated the phraseological units into Russian has not been able to accurately convey the meaning of "en adil" (most fair) when translating to Russian. Instead, they have focused on the thickness of the hair, the action of cutting hair, missed the subtlety of the meaning conveyed the colour of the hair... and in the process, missed adequately conveying the concept of justice that the poet was relaying.

Now let's pay attention to the English version of the poem line as translated by D. Rottenberg using Brodsky's Russian translation:

*«Beneath the surface looks the keen-eyed sage.*

*He splits a hair in four times forty parts»[6].*

D. Rottenberg composed the lines of the poem in the same sequence as Brodsky's translation. Splitting the hair by forty pieces is similar to the "rascheplyaet volos na sorok chastey" (splits the hair into forty pieces) of the Russian translator. Rottenberg's understanding of the Russian translator's phrase "pronikayet v glube veshey" (penetrates deep into things) actually is more like another Russian phrase "uvidit to, chto nakhoditsa pod vami" (sees what's beneath you). By doing consecutive translation of the original text but using the Russian version as a basis, D. Rottenberg makes the same mistakes that have been made by the translator into Russian. As a result, the made in the Russian language mistakes are repeated in English. Also the made by D. Rottenberg omissions are added to this. All this has had an opposite effect on the translation quality.

In Abai's poem "Oh, Kazakhs, my poor people" one of the lines entirely consists of a phraseological unit "Auzymen orak organ onkey kyrty" (literally: you windbags mow everybody with your mouth)[4]. "Auzymen orak oru" (literally: to mow harvest with one's mouth) is a figurative phraseological unit. This phraseological unit is translated by S. Lipkin in the following way: "Rezhet vsek bez razbora tvoi serp yazyk" (your sickle language mows everybody without consideration). There is "auzben orak oru" (to mow harvest with one's mouth) phraseological unit in the literary Kazakh language, and there are also people referred to as "orak auyz" (literally: "sickle-like mouth"), which has a totally different meaning. "Orak auyz" means an eloquent, wisecracker man. But the "auzben orak oru" words combination generates the meaning of "a windbag person who does nothing". The translator has destroyed the "auzben orak oru" (to sickle harvest with a mouth) concept of the original and used the concept similar to the "orak auyz" (sickle-like mouth) instead. The used in the translation "serp yazyk" (sickle language) corresponds to the Kazakh "orak auyz" (sickle-like mouth). Instead, the two phraseological units "molot yazykom" (to grind with a tongue) and "palets o palets ne udarit" (not to do a hand's turn) in the Russian language form the full content of

the "auyzben orak oru" phraseological unit of the original. Coordination of these units and their use in maximum accordance with the original depends on the translator's skill level.

The word "kyrt" (talker, windbag) to which the poet is critical, in the translated version is given as "perfect, eloquent man". Lack of sufficient knowledge of the original meaning, the poet's native language, the peculiarities of verbal speech in the poem creation system led the translator to such significant errors.

Let's pay attention to the translation made by Yu. Kuznetsov: "A tvoiy pustozvony gremyat yazykom" (And your windbags rattle with their tongues). If we compare the translation of Yu. Kuznetsov with the work of other translators, his version is most similar to the meaning of the original. But even here there is no precision and clarity, nor the work effort to attempt to uncover the national peculiarities of the poem. A. Kodar translates this line this way: "Pogryazshiy v pustom suyesloviy sbrod" (the mired in an empty idle talk rabble). There are contours of semantic content in A. Kodar's translation. But he also could not find a full analogue in the target language, or at least a similar phraseological unit as used in the original. M. Adibayev translated the same line as follows: "Nesete vzdor, kosite vsekh podryad" (you talk nonsense, mow everybody). It seems that the general meaning of translation is somewhat similar to the original. But if you look closely, it becomes obvious that the translator was unable to convey the figurative colors of the poet's thoughts.

R. McCain translated the line into English like this: "And you rattle your tongue with idle talk". The meaning of the original text is preserved. But there is a similar phraseological unit that exists in English. For example, the «Great cry and little wool» "All talk, and no action" phraseological units which could be used instead of descriptive translation of R. McCain. In other words, the descriptive method used by McCain is acceptable translation of the meaning. However we suggest that if there is a corresponding phraseological unit in the target language, that the translator use this so that the fullest meaning is conveyed in the context of the reader's own language.

In this Abai's poem you can see the "Bir urty mai bir urty kan" (Fat on one cheek, blood on the other) phraseological unit. This unit is used to describe a man in whom live the diametrically opposite, contradictory, contrasting qualities, i.e. it is about the type of people who are capable to do good things with one hand while doing the evil things with the other. S. Lipkin translates this phraseological unit this way: "Zlo na levoi sheke, na pravo dobro" (The evil on the left cheek, the good on the right one). The poet's "fat on one cheek, blood on the other" idea has been given by the translator as "the evil on the left cheek, the good on the right one". The notions of right and left do not harm the meaning of the original, but you cannot see meaningfulness of the translator's thoughts, his ability to think artistically. Yu. Kuznetsov carries this line as follows: "Gde dobro ili zlo, um li tvoi razberyot" (Where is the good and the evil, would your mind be able to distinguish?). In the original the idea is not given as a question sentence. The fact that the translator has translated the phraseological unit not with a phraseological unit but with the questioning sentence has led to distortion of

the original's meaning. Therefore this translation cannot be attributed to translations which accurately convey the meaning of the original. A. Kodar translated this line as follows: "V krovi i obzhorstve ni den i ne god" (not a single day without blood and gluttony). The thoughts that are present in the original have also undergone great changes here. The used combination of words "not a single day without blood and gluttony" is out of place. The poet did not refer to any meaning associated with a season: there is nothing about the day or the year in the original. Using meanings, concepts and ideas in translation that are not available in the original brings a shadow on the author's poetic art and creative individuality. In the translation of M. Silchenko this line is translated: "Na odnoi sheke u tebya krov, na drugoi maslo" (blood on your one cheek, oil on the other)[7]. Although the translator carried the line's meaning, he could not disclose the value in the same exciting, visual, deep sense way as does the author of the original.

R. McCain has translated the line into English as: «Now you have blood on one cheek and grease on the other». The consecutive translation of Richard McCain was based on M. Silchenko's translation: the line corresponds to M. Silchenko's translation word for word.

In the deepest sense, Abai is referring to the opposing sides of character that can exist in an individual and the contrasting periods of good times ("fat") and bad or hard times ("blood") that have existed in the history of the Kazakh people. When Kazaks read Abai's poetry, they understand this deep and dual meaning of the phrase. It is the difficulty of the translator into Russian and again into English to capture this fullest sense of the poem and in an artistic manner as well.

## II. CONCLUSION

We tried to cover the translation of phraseological units of Abai's poems in this article. None of the translators could find in English and Russian languages appropriate phraseological units that would be similar to the author's phraseology. This is due to the fact that it is extremely hard to translate Abai's poems into foreign languages. Not every translator, only the true masters of their craft can convey to a target language the unique originality of the poetic genius of Abai. Magnetic field of Abai's poetry does not open up all of a sudden. It is not clearly showed in the text. It is embedded in the subtext or supertext. It is the translator's task to find out which variant is closer to the original.

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