

BUSINESS THROUGH ENGLISH PROVERBS AND THEIR ROMANIAN TRANSLATED EQUIVALENTS

Anca-Mariana PEGULESCU¹

Abstract

When stating that ‘Proverbs mean more than they say’ – which can be in itself a proverb - we might need to rethink some of the fundamental terms in the study of proverbs. If, on the other hand, we believe that ‘Proverbs do more than they mean’, then, we have to take into account possible different approaches and explore the latest terminology in paremiological research.

Beginning with the literal meaning of words, phrases or sentences, proverbs can offer a perfect image of a literary translation. I do consider proverbs as texts in themselves and it is really interesting to see how two languages, the source language (SL) and the target language (TL) can complete each other when a certain version is preferred. Exploring translation as an act of communication, we can understand how the negotiation of meaning between interactants is related to coherence and cohesion, as “a covert potential meaning relationship among parts of a text” or as “an overt relationship holding parts of a text, expressed by language specific markers” [Blum-Kulka, S:2002, pp.298-299].

*My analysis will target the ethnological fields of “to buy” and “to sell” in English proverbs and their Romanian variants, using both a cognitive and a systematic approach. The paremiias samples have been selected from Virgil Lefter’s **Dicționar de Proverbe Englez-Român și Român-Englez**.*

Keywords: definition, invariant, modification, variation, variability

1. Theoretical Concepts versus Practical Strategies

1.1. The word ‘proverb’ remains in itself a mystery. Proverb scholars have issued different and varied definitions that have even nowadays their own interpretations. What is to be proved when referring to a proverb’s definition? Language units reflecting people’s social and individual experience? Metaphors of community wisdom? Proverbiality in itself? Particular patterns belonging especially to the oral code and not so much to the written code? Here are some examples:

Business before pleasure.
Buy low, sell high.

¹ The Bucharest University Of Economic Studies, The Faculty of International Business and Economics, The Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication, Bucharest, Romania, a_pegulescu@yahoo.com

Money isn't everything.

Modern proverbs are found in our readings, talkings to relatives, friends, colleagues, students. Literature, mass media, films, songs, advertisements, speeches and oral communication of all types are also important sources.

A proverb has the following essential properties:

- a) a specific syntactic structure of the sentence (in most of the cases);
- b) an anaphoristic character;
- c) figurativeness;
- d) specific semantics containing both moral and philosophical thought.

A real important characteristic is the difference between the oral and the written codes. Linking the saying with the thinking is no doubt best illustrated by the written code. This does not mean that the oral code 'should be interpreted as an indication of lesser cognitive skills.' [Unseth, P: 2012, in *Proverbium* no 29, p. 390]. Sophisticated cognitive functions are required by appropriate use and interpretations of proverbs in context.

Any person can hear the use of proverbs in natural conversational contexts. It is important, however, to know the people and the social network "multiplexity" and "density" [Unseth, P:2012 p.390] in order to understand the environment dynamics, to be able to interpret it in deeper ways.

If I am to admit that proverbs are used to comment on a situation, the following examples may offer the choice between being an analyst instead of being a participant:

- (1) Many hands make light work.
- (2) A bad workman always blames his tools.
- (3) Practice makes perfect.
- (4) Necessity is mother of invention.
- (5) One good turn deserves another.

From a cognitive semantic perspective, (1) has the meaning of 'the more people are working together, the easier the work is', (2) can be explained by 'people who are not good at their work, criticize their materials rather than admit their own mistakes or, as a general truth, (3) means that 'we perform better if we practice regularly'. The above given examples are only some samples that underline the importance of the social context in understanding proverbs. The social context is definitely richer and more revealing than lists of proverbs and their analysis. On the other hand, I cannot deny the usefulness of examining lists of proverbs if the ethnological fields [Negreanu, C: 1983] are taken into account. I have chosen the ethnological fields of 'to buy' and to 'sell' because I consider them linked to the business world and practice.

The emic/etic distinction is another reason for which I have made the choice of the above mentioned ethnological fields. The emic perspective is the insider's point of view while the outsider's etic point of view targets the surface variants.

1.2. Turning towards *translation vs equivalence* norms, nobody can deny that there are two major sources for the reconstruction of translational norms. They are active and effective in the act of translation itself:

- a) textual sources that are perceived in the texts themselves;
- b) extratextual sources when theories, statements, critical formulations are made by translators, editors, publishers involved or connected with the translation activity;

The fundamental difference between the two types of sources is the fact that texts are primary products and immediate representations, while normative pronouncements are products of the existence and activity of norms.

'Necessity is the mother of invention' has as an extratextual source, the statement 'when the need is urgent, a solution is found' while 'One good turn deserves another', displays as a possible extratextual source: 'we should repay the kindness of others by helping them in return'.

Irrespective of the two sources for reconstructing the translational norms, translation studies and consequently the activity itself should be viewed as a separate discipline, overlapping with linguistics, philosophy, exploring cross-cultural communication and sometimes sociology. More than that, translating is seen as enacting its own signification which answers to different linguistic and cultural contexts.

According to Vinay and Darbelnet [in Venuti, L: 2000, pp.84-93], there are different methods of translating, each one representing a degree of complexity:

- direct translation based on parallel categories:

R: Cine nu te **știe**, te **vinde**, iar cine te **știe**, te *cumpără*.

E: He who doesn't **know** you, **sells** you, he who **knows** you, *buys* you.

- direct translation based on parallel concepts:

R: **Nu se vinde** gogoșarului, *gogoși*.

E: You must **not teach fish to swim**

Proverbs may offer sometimes the image of *transposition*. The following example is displaying not only an interchange (referring to the animal that is named in the text source (TS) as opposed to the target text (TT)) but it also allows a particular nuance of style, transforming an interdiction into a statement and displaying a metaphor:

R: Nu **cumpăra** mâta-n sac/pisica-n *traistă*.

E: To **buy** a pig *in a poke*.

The above example can also enter what is called *modulation* which is considered a variation of the form of the message, obtained by a change in the point of view: what is an interdiction in the ST – ‘do not buy a cat in a bag’ becomes a statement and a warning in the TT. If you ‘buy a pig in a poke’ this means that you buy something without seeing it or knowing it.[Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary:2005 p.1140].

1.3. The diversity of the *equivalence* types can be felt in the relationship between the ST and the TT. Within the proverbs translation, the linguistic equivalence is to be searched at the structures level, the syntagms’ level and even the words’ level. The correspondence that is established through different categories and classes leads to a semantic equivalence. It is stated that proverbs are the image of *equivalences* in most of the cases:

R: Să **cumperi** vecinii întâi și apoi casa.

E: You must **ask** your neighbour if you shall live in peace.

The Romanian proverb uses the verb ‘to buy’ and the direct objects ‘neighbours’ and ‘house’ while the English equivalent uses the verb ‘to ask’ with the meaning ‘to have the permission/acceptance’ of the neighbourhood. The equivalence of the above example is felt through the Romanian word ‘casă’/house that conveys the idea of ‘peace’ and ‘quietness’.

Adaptation is a special kind of *equivalence*. The cultural gap *between* the SL and the TL imposes sometimes a new situation that can be considered as being equivalent. For most of the examples, it is a situational equivalence:

R: Calul bun se **vinde** din *grajd*.

E: Good ware **makes** quick *market*.

The *adaptation* in the case of the previous example went a bit farther than expected: the ‘horse’ as an animal from the Romanian proverb has as its equivalent the noun ‘ware’ which is [-animate]. In such a way the *adaptation* covers very many items, everything which favours an efficient market and goods that make economy (and the market) flourish.

The three levels of expression, i.e. lexis, syntactic structure and message seem to work together within the same proverbial unit as in the following one:

R: Inima de **vânzător** e venin otrăvitor.

E: In the heart of a **traitor** there is the most venomous poison.(trans.)

The paradox of the above example is that the cultural gap between the SL – Romanian - and the TL-English - allowed the figurative use of the Romanian word ‘vânzător’ with the meaning of the English term ‘traitor’. The possible *adaptation* and the *equivalence* between the two terms was permitted by the fact that a ‘traitor’ gives away secrets and facts while a ‘seller’ gives something in exchange for money [Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary: 2005, pp.1629, 1379]. The common denominator is the verb ‘to give’/‘to sell’ which is not expressed either in the Romanian or the English proverb. The syntagm ‘venin otrăvitor’ correctly rendered by ‘venomous poison’ as well as the noun ‘inimă/heart’ are linked to the idea of negative deed and attitude. Both proverbs do not imply the idea of ‘a market’ but both of them may imply a business background and an agreement between two or more partners. The particular feature of the *equivalence* procedure in such a context is the message in its totality. If we are to question the notion of *equivalence* as an ‘identity’ between ST and TL, we can admit that there is information only in possible differences and a translation is a code in its own right.

2. *Emic versus Etic Approaches*

Pike [1954-1967] proposed the emic/etic dichotomy (derived from the linguistic terms *phonemic* and *phonetic*) as a solution to philosophic issues, to objective vs subjective accounts that are important for maintaining identities and bonds.

E: Ale **sellers** should not be tale-tellers.

R: Cârciumarul care știe toate ale mușteriiilor săi, nu trebuie să bată toba.

The Romanian proverb user should understand that **an ale seller** is not supposed to **sell** both the ‘the product’ and the customers’ secrets. In fact this is another way of saying ‘in ale there is the truth’ as opposed to ‘in vino veritas’.

Proverbs are culturally interpreted both formally and contextually. The emic-etic approaches applied to proverbs underline three main paremic functions:

- support a claim concerning behaviour:

R: Economul bun își **cumpără** iarna *car* și vara *sanie*.

E: **Have not** thy *cloak to make* when it begins to rain.

Even if ‘formally’ we deal with ‘objects’ both in Romanian and English, the objects from the above example are belonging to different classes: a vehicle for ‘travelling over snow and ice’ – the Romanian noun ‘sanie’ that has its equivalent in the English noun ‘cloak’ which is ‘a coat having no sleeves and hanging loosely from the shoulders’. The seasons are different - winter - opposed to possible spring or autumn but the texts contain the same advice: *spend your money in a wise way and do not buy what you need in the last minute when the items may be very expensive*. The message is about attitude, mentality and behaviour.

- give advice:

R: Nu **vinde** *pielea vulpii* înainte de a o prinde.

E: Don’t **sell** the bear’s *skin* before you killed the bear.

The above example might illustrate the direct translation based on parallel concepts and having the same pattern both in SL and in TL. Still the outsider’s point of view makes a clear cut difference between the idea of ‘catching’ the fox and having its fur in Romanian and killing the bear and having its skin/fur in English.

- establish rapports between people and add variety:

R: Mai bine să **cumperi** decât să **împrumuți**.

E: Better **buy** than **borrow**.

The skillful use of proverbs requires significant cognitive skills. It is not enough to get people to know the meaning of a proverb, people should be able to think how they got there, reaffirming cultural and interpersonal bonds.

E: **Buy** the truth and do not **sell** it...*wisdom, instruction* and *insight* as well.

R: **Cumpără** *adevărul* și nu-l **vinde**....*înțelepciunea, educația și viziunea*.

From ‘buying’ to ‘getting’, the distance seems to disappear because what it really matters is the way to keep the truth.

E: **Get the truth** and never **sell** it; also **get wisdom, discipline** and good *judgement, instruction and education*..

R: **Obține adevărul și nu-l vinde...obține și înțelepciunea și buna judecată**

3. Variability versus Modification in Proverbs

3.1. Proverb variability is no doubt a mechanism of a proverb system to renovate itself. Proverb modification is also a mechanism but it refers to proverb transition to another linguistic unit [Vager, M, 2015 in *Proverbium* no 32. p. 359].

The study of *proverb variability* goes back to A. Taylor's work [1931] and opened the path towards proverb *variants* studies. The difference between the two concepts is very important because a proverb *variation* does not make a change of the proverb basic meaning, while a proverb variant modifies it.

A proverb variant can be seen in:

R: La grădinar *castraveți* să nu **vinzi**.

E: An old fox needs no craft.

The *gardener* and the *cucumbers* in the Romanian proverb have as a corresponding comparison in the English proverb variant the *fox* and its *craft*. The noun 'craft' may fit a good gardener and in such a way the vegetables obtained may be very good. Thus the gardener cannot be sold cucumbers of a poor quality. On the other hand, a fox is well known for its shrewdness, which is, in fact, its craft. A good gardener does not need to be sold cucumbers and an old/shrewd fox knows its tricks. The same situation appears in:

R: Nu se **vinde** gogoșarului, *gogoși*.

E: You must not **teach** fish *to swim*.

Referring to the last two pairs of the above examples, another possible situation appears: the proverbs-synonyms [Vager, M, 2015 in *Proverbium* no 32. p. 362]. Unfortunately the difference between proverbs-variants and proverb-synonyms is not very clearly defined. The idea of synonymy within proverbs is blocked by the argument that a proverb is not a concept, it displays a proposition or elements that are connected through special relations. In my opinion, only the *meaning of the message* of a certain *paremia* can be synonymous to another one.

The proverb variants have the same invariant in:

R: Cine deschide ochii după ce **cumpără, cumpără** întotdeauna *marfă* proastă.

E1: The **buyer** needs a hundred eyes, the **seller** but one.

E2: Measure thrice what you **buyest** and cut it but one.

Examples E1 and E2 display a relative stability of the semantics, having different structures. They represent the meaning of the message conveyed by the Romanian proverb where the 'buyer' is not named but he/she is supposed 'to open the eyes' when buying goods. Both Romanian and English proverbs have the same invariant: *think twice before you do something*.

3.2. Besides proverb variations and proverb variants, the notion of *modified* proverbs deserves to be discussed. The *modification* of a proverb is a qualitative proverb alteration implying a mechanism for a proverb transfer into another phraseological unit (idiom and maxim):

E: The **buyer** needs *a hundred eyes*, the **seller** but one.

R: **Mușteriu** trebuie *să se uite* de zece ori, **negustorul** doar o dată.

Researchers agreed that the essential properties of a *modified* proverb can be recognized:

- at the level of syntactic structure of a sentence;
- in the aphoristic character and figurativeness;
- in the moral and philosophical thought;

E: **Buy** the truth and **do not** sell it, *wisdom, instruction* and *insight* as well.

E1: **Buy** the truth **sell** it not.

E2: **Get** the truth and **never** sell it, also *the wisdom, discipline* and *good judgement/wisdom, instruction* and *understanding*.

The E1 and E2 are examples of proverb contamination which is the combination of two parts of different proverbs in one expression.

When analyzing a *modified* proverb, one has to know the original form. Between ‘buy the truth’ and ‘get the truth’ the figurativeness disappears and the statement becomes a potential maxim. The proverb *modification* can be researched through contrastive analysis implying semantics, syntactic structures, morphological and stylistic devices. Belonging to an open system, proverbs can be modified, these modifications giving birth to different patterns. What remains in the end is the message.

In the following examples the pattern does not change too much but the meaning and the message is differently centered:

R: Cu bani nu poți **cumpăra** *fericirea* dar poți s-o închiriezi.

a) E: Money does not **buy** *happiness* but you may rent it.

R: **Banii** nu aduc *învățătură* dar învățătura aduce *bani*.

b) E: **Money** does not **buy** *knowledge* but **knowledge** brings *money*.

Knowledge-----Money-----Happiness

The connection between the three above key words is a very strong one. The above proverbs seem sharing the same pattern but in fact both a) and b) illustrate modified proverbs. Between ‘money’ and ‘happiness’, *knowledge is power*.

3. Conclusion

Paremiology has proved itself an interdisciplinary field of study, borrowing methods from very many other sciences and domains. Proverbs can be a very useful teaching instrument when we refer to business communication, economics, management or simply human interrelationships.

Summarizing the observations I have already included in this article, I can affirm that:

- proverbs and their behaviour cannot be predicted; they can be studied through linguistic, semantic, literary approaches;
- proverbs still remain an open system that interacts with socioeconomic and cultural influences and undergo qualitative and quantitative alterations;
- translating proverbs or using equivalence when having a TT from a ST means accepting the idea of a process of signification that might be either formal or primarily dynamic; while the former focuses on the message, the latter produces a dynamic equivalence based on the relationship between the TT and ST.

References and bibliography

Blum-Kulka, S. 2002 ‘Shifts of Cohesion and Coherence in Translation’, pp.298-313 in Venuti, L ed. *The Translation Studies Reader*, Routledge, London and NY

Lefter, V. 2007, *Dicționar de Proverbe Englez-Român și Român-Englez*, Teora, București

Negreanu, C. 1983, *Structura proverbelor românești*, București, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică.

Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary: 2005, OUP

Pike, K.L [1954, 1955, 1960] 1967. *Language in relation to a unified theory of the structure of human behavior* (2nd. ed.). The Hague: Mouton.

Taylor, A. 1931, *The Proverb*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press,

Unseth, P. 2012, ‘The Function of Proverbs in Discourse’ in *Proverbium* 29:2012, pp.389-396

Vager, M., 2015, 'Variability and Modification of Proverbs in the Bulgarian Mass Media: A Systematic Approach' in *Proverbium* 32:2015. pp. 359-382

Vinay, J-P and **Darbelnet, J.**, 2002, 'A Methodology for Translation' pp. 84-94 in Venuti, L ed. *The Translation Studies Reader*, Routledge, London and N Y

The author

Anca-Mariana PEGULESCU graduated 'Al. I. Cuza' University from Iași and had her PhD in contrastive linguistics at the University of Bucharest. She was a visiting fellow at the University of Southampton in 2007 and in 2008 she attended the program of the International Visitors Leadership in USA. As a general inspector for English, Japanese and Chinese in the Romanian Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research, her administrative responsibilities have covered teaching assessment, curriculum monitoring and teacher training. During the period of time when she has been an associate lecturer of the University of Craiova, Drobeta Turnu Severin branch, she taught English grammar, semantics and pragmatics. She is currently teaching students of Bucharest University of Economic Sciences, focusing on ESP in public administration and management as well as in business and tourism.

She has published books on transitivity, English phonetics and lexicology as well as on modern languages communication (*La transitivity et ses incidences contrastives*, Scrisul Românesc, Craiova, 2005, *What Should a Hearer and a Listener Do*, Ed. Universitaria, Craiova, 2007, *Why Do People Need Communication?*, Ed. Universitaria, Craiova, 2007). She has written articles on various topics linked to proverbs, having contributed to PROBERBIUM, the Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship, edited by Professor Wolfgang Mieder, from the University of Vermont, USA and to different international specialized magazines, on translation studies, both in Romania and abroad, on teaching English as a second/foreign language in Romania at the level of pre-university education. **Anca-Mariana PEGULESCU** produced the Romanian versions of the *European Profile of Language Teacher Education. A Frame of Reference* (issued under Professor Michael Kelly's coordination) and the *The European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL)* (issued under Professor David Newby's coordination). The Romanian versions of the above mentioned documents are to be found on the European Commission site and respectively on the site of the European Centre of Modern Languages from Graz.

Anca-Mariana PEGULESCU is a member of the Romanian Association of English and American Studies since 1991, affiliated to ESSE. In 2013 **Anca-Mariana PEGULESCU** has been elected as one of the Romanian US Alumni Association Board members and in 2016 she has been designated the interim president of the Romanian US Alumni Association.

ANNEX 1

A CUMPĂRA – A VINDE

1. Cine deschide ochii după ce cumpără, cumpără totdeauna marfă proastă.
The buyer needs a hundred eyes, the seller but one.
Measure thrice what you buyest and cut it but once.
2. Cine nu te știe, te vinde, iar cine te știe, te cumpără.
He who doesn't know you, sells you, he who knows you, buys you.(trad.)
3. Economul bun își cumpără iarna car și vara sanie.
Have not thy cloak to make when it begins to rain.
4. Nu cumpăra mâța-n sac/pisica-n traistă.
To buy a pig in a poke.
5. Omul cuminte/gospodar își cumpără vara sanie și iarna car.
In fair weather prepare for foul.
He is wise that is ware in time.
6. Să cumperi vecinii întâi și apoi casa.

You must ask your neighbour if you shall live in peace.

7. Săracul cumpără scump.

The poor man's shilling is but a penny.

8. Calul bun se vinde din grajd.

Calul bun din grajd se vinde și mai bun preț pe el prinde.

Good ware makes quick markets.

9. La grădinar castraveți să nu vinzi.

An old fox needs learn no craft.

10. Nu se vinde gogoșarului, gogoși.

You must not teach fish to swim.

11. Nu vinde pielea vulpii înainte de a o prinde.

Don't sell the bear's /lion's skin before you killed the bear/lion.

12. Inima de vânzător e venin otrăvitor.

In the heart of a traitor there is the most venomous poison.(trad.)

13. Cu bani nu poți cumpăra fericirea, dar poți s-o închiriezi.

Money does not buy hapiness but you may rent it.

14. Bani nu aduc învățătură, dar învățătura aduce bani.

Money does not bring knowledge, but knowledge brings money.

ANNEX 2

TO BUY - TO SELL

1. Better buy than borrow.

Mai bine să cumperi decât să împrumuți.(trad.)

2. If you buy a cow, take the tail into the bargain.

Când te apuci de o treabă n-o lăsa fără ispravă.

3. The buyer needs a hundred eyes, the seller but one.

Mușteriu trebuie să se uite de zece ori, negustorul doar o dată.

4. He that buys land buys many stones; he that buys flesh buys many bones;

he that buys eggs buys many shells;but he that buys good ale buys nothing else.

Cine cumpără pământ, se-alege cu pietre,cine cumpără carne rămâne cu oasel, cine târguiește ouă are parte de coji, dar cel ce cumpără bere bună, acela n-are ce pierde.(trad.)

5. Don't sell the bear skin before you killed the bear.

Nu vinde pielea ursului din pădure.

6. Ale sellers should not be tale – tellers.

Cârciumarul care știe toate ale mușterilor săi, nu trebuie să bată toba.

7. Buy the truth and do not sell it....wisdom, instruction and insight as well.

Get the truth and never sell it; also get wisdom, discipline and good judgement/wisdom, instruction and understanding.

Cumpără adevărul și nu-l vinde....înțelepciune, educație și viziune.

Obține adevărul și nu-l vinde...obține și înțelepciune și bună judecată.

Lefter, V , 2007, *Dicționar de Proverbe Englez-Român și Român-Englez*, Teora,
București