Translating Collocations in Political Speeches: A Norm-centred Approach

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Abstract: Collocations are elements that must be given special attention in translation, because they are essential for the correctness and the naturalness of any target text. Starting from the assumption that target texts reflect the norms followed by the text producer, the author examines a series of political speeches in English, along with their official Romanian variants, with a view to identifying the manner in which the Romanian translators of such texts should deal with their collocations and specific expressions.

Keywords: collocations, norms, political speeches, translation techniques

1. Introduction

One of the essential conditions for the production of a good translation is represented by the translator's ability to identify the appropriate semantic and terminological fields, and to clearly understand the overall tone and intended message, in order to give the correct interpretation of the lexical items present in the source text. This is not an easy task, because, as it is commonly known, words rarely convey meanings in isolation, but tend to co-occur in various combinations which sound natural to the native speakers of a particular language, and which represent the collocations and the specific expressions of that language.

Since any language imposes its own restrictions on the manner in which words can be combined in order to render the intended meaning, it should come as no surprise that the situation gets even more complicated when equivalents in other languages are sought (Pungă and Pârlog 2017: 256). Due to the interplay of linguistic, stylistic and cultural elements characteristic of their nature, collocations are elements

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deeply rooted in the system of a particular language, and, therefore, their replacement by inappropriate expressions would certainly affect the functionality of the target text.

One possible explanation for the problems caused by the translation of the source-text collocations is represented, in Baker's (2011) view, by the tension between naturalness and accuracy. More specifically, she claims that the translator is frequently faced with "a difficult choice between what is typical and what is accurate" (Baker 2011: 60). The aim of producing translations which are not only accurate to the original, but also sound natural in the target language is valid in the case of any type of text. However, I consider that attaining this aim is essential when it comes to the translation of political speeches, because such texts combine lexical units in ways meant to give extra force to their messages and to facilitate the achievement of the intended effect.

How can the (future) translators of political speeches prepare to deal with the challenges raised by the collocations typically used in such texts? Which are the norms that they are supposed to follow? How do the already existing official translations help in this respect? My paper will try to offer some answers to these questions by examining the Romanian official variants of five State of the European Union addresses in comparison to their English sources, with a view to identifying the manner in which the Romanian translators of such texts should deal with their collocations and specific expressions.

The starting point of my inquiry is represented by the hypothesis that the target text mirrors the norms followed by the text producer. As a result of the translation process, norms become an integral part of the target text, being reflected by the various linguistic features of that text, and, as such, they are amenable to analysis and description. Consequently, I consider that an analysis of the collocations displayed by the official translations of the texts under analysis will be useful for the identification of the norms that must be respected. Moreover, by comparing the Romanian collocations to the corresponding elements in the original texts, we can gather evidence of the techniques that the translators of such texts can use in order to achieve similar results.

2. Translation norms and translation techniques: conceptual challenges

The manner in which the concept of translational norms is understood in the theory of translation today has been greatly influenced by the studies of Toury (1980, 1995, 1999) and Hermans (1996, 1999). A great contribution to the field of norm theory was also made by another important theorist, namely Chesterman (1997), whose approach is partly influenced by Toury's and Herman's ideas. The present paper will be based, to a great extent, on the manner in which norms are defined and categorized by Chesterman (1997).

Thus, in my analysis of the State of the European Union speeches, norms represent explanatory phenomena which are reflected by the recurrent linguistic features of a certain type of texts. More specifically, I will focus on the category

labelled by Chesterman as "expectancy norms", norms of usage belonging to the category of the quantitative expectancy norms (cf. Chesterman 1997: 82), that is, those norms which involve the intended readers' expectations for the distribution of various types of linguistic features of the target text.

Trying to explain how the various translation norms are actually attained in practice, Chesterman (1997: 88) introduces the concept of translation strategy, which, in his definition, represents a kind of process by which the translator tries to conform to norms. Strategies are used as solutions for a translation problem regarding either the text as a whole, or some segment in it.

Chesterman (1997: 92) makes a basic distinction between comprehension strategies, on the one hand, which have to do with the whole nature of the translation commission, and production strategies, on the other, which concern the manner in which the translator manipulates the linguistic material in order to produce an appropriate target text. Referring to the latter category, Chesterman (1997: 94-112) offers a comprehensive classification of the possible changes to which translators might resort when they are not satisfied with the target variant that immediately comes to their mind.

Chesterman's classification of the various production strategies has the merit that it attempts at systematizing the approaches developed by other theorists of the field (e.g. Vinay and Darbelnet 1958, Nida 1964). The only problem is that Chesterman proposes the term strategy, while other scholars use different names with reference to the same aspect. It must be admitted that the discipline of translation studies is characterized by a certain degree of terminological and conceptual confusion with regard to the names used for the general text-processing and the translation specific operations performed by the translator. Chesterman (1997: 87) is perfectly aware of this confusion, but does not aim at a clarification in this respect, and, as I explained above, uses the term strategy in order to refer to all these practices.

More recently, however, Lucía Molina and Amparo Hurtado Albir (2002) have made an attempt at organizing the existing knowledge of translation procedures, methods, strategies and techniques, with the specific purpose of clearly delimiting their reference. Thus, they use **procedure** as a general term denoting any action performed by the translator as a result of a choice from a variety of possibilities, and covering all the other three concepts, i.e. method, strategy and technique. **Method** is defined as a global option which affects the text as a whole, and which depends on the aim of the translation. The translation method, which may be interpretative-communicative, literal, free or philological, affects the manner in which the micro-units of the text are translated, i.e. the translation techniques (Molina and Hurtado Albir 2002: 507-508). **Strategies** represent the procedures used by the translator in order to solve the problems that occur during the translation process. Strategies, which may be used for comprehension or for reformulation, "open the way to finding a suitable solution for a translation unit" (Molina and Hurtado Albir 2002: 508), and the solution is, then, materialized by means of a particular translation technique.

49

Consequently, the strategies are part of the translation process, while the techniques affect the linguistic makeup of the result.

In Molina and Hurtado Albir's (2002: 509) approach, *techniques* represent procedures that help us analyse and classify how translation equivalence works. In other words, they are analytical tools which allow us to study the manner in which the result of the translation process functions in relation to its corresponding unit in the source text. The translation techniques proposed by Molina and Hurtado Albir (2002: 509-511) are: adaptation, amplification, borrowing, calque, compensation, description, discursive creation, established equivalent, generalization, linguistic amplification, linguistic compression, literal translation, modulation, particularization, reduction, substitution, transposition and variation. The terminology used by Molina and Hurtado Albir (2002) represents an important instrument in the analysis of the Romanian variants of the State of the European Union speeches in comparison to their English sources.

3. Techniques used for the English into Romanian translation of the collocations used in the State of the European Union addresses

3.1. The corpus

Before I present the results of the analysis proper, I want to say a few words about the texts making up my corpus. As I mentioned in the introductory section of this paper, my analysis will be focussed on a special type of political speech, namely on the State of the European Union address, which is the annual speech made by the President of the European Commission in the European Parliament's plenary session in September. My corpus is made up of five State of the Union addresses written in English, together with their official Romanian counterparts. More specifically, the corpus includes two speeches addressed by José Manuel Durão Barroso in 2012 and 2013, and three speeches delivered by Jean-Claude Juncker in 2015, 2016 and 2017. The years when the speech was made will be used between brackets in order to indicate the source of the examples given in my paper.

The State of the European Union addresses, like most of the European Union's official documents, are produced in the three working languages of the EU institutions, English, French and German. From these languages, the texts are translated into all the official languages of the European Union. So, the starting point of my analysis represents a special situation of translation, one in which a certain target text has three possible sources. Anyway, as it is claimed by various external voices (for example, in newspaper articles in *The Guardian* or the *Economist*), the institutions of the European Union are dominated by the English language. This situation is vaguely admitted even in a European Union official document, the English Style Guide for the authors and translators in the European Commission, which, in its introduction, states that "now … so many texts in and around the EU institutions are drafted in English by native and non-native speakers alike" (2018: 1),

and, consequently, the English-language authors and translators must be aware of the accepted linguistic conventions for the documents in question. Some of these conventions, namely those regarding the collocations and the specific expressions that these texts predominantly contain, will be discussed in what follows.

3.2. The result of the analysis

Literal translation, the technique which, according to translation research, is the preferred choice when the translator is not faced with a problem, is very well represented in my corpus: e.g. *have diminished this understanding* – "a estompat această accepțiune" (2015), *bold, determined and concerted action* – "acțiunii temerare, hotărâte și concertate" (2015), *stand firmly against* – "suntem total împotriva" (2016), *little commonality* – "puține puncte commune" (2016).

This technique is used even for collocations with a metaphorical value, such as: *shored up the foundations* – "am reconsolidat fundațiile" (2017), *migration must stay on our radar* – "migrația trebuie să rămână pe radarul nostru" (2017).

Even in the case of this basic technique, there are a few aspects that the future translators of political speeches must pay attention to. First of all, there are cases when certain English collocations may have several possible word-for-word Romanian variants, but the ones displayed by the official translations under analysis represent felicitous solutions, being in line with the general linguistic features normally associated with this type of texts, which involve the use of more elevate, more formal words: e.g. *big issues* – "chestiuni majore" (2015), *wrong solutions* – "soluții eronate" (2016), *bridging differences* – "armonizarea diferențelor" (2017). Secondly, there are numerous instances when the Romanian variants of the collocations make use of prepositional phrases, while the source text variants display simple prepositions or structures with no preposition at all: e.g. *the consensus on fundamental objectives* – "consensul referitor la obiectivele fundamentale" (2013), *our asylum policy* – "politica noastră în materie de azil" (2015), *proposals on the emergency relocation* – "propunerile … cu privire la transferul" (2015), *we have agreed on a proper European Defence Union* – "am căzut de acord cu privire la o adevărată Uniune Europeană a Apărării" (2017). The use of these complex constructions is prompted by the need for clarity usually expected from this type of documents, and indicates, at the same time, the text producer's care for an elevated style.

When the rendering of an English collocation represents a term or an expression which is recognized as an official counterpart in the target language, we have an ***established equivalent***. My texts provide several examples of established equivalents which can be basically divided into two categories. The first category includes terms specific either to the European Union field or to the fields to which the speech makes reference: e.g. *single market* – "piața unică" (2012), *free movement* – "libera circulație" (2016), *the rule of law* – "statul de drept" (2016), *the Posting of Workers* – "detașarea lucrătorilor" (2016). The second category includes idiomatic

51

expressions of general use: e.g. *a degree of give and take* – "un anumit grad de concesii reciproce" (2017), *through thick and thin* – "la bine și la greu" (2017).

A very high frequency in my texts is registered by the technique of ***linguistic amplification,*** which means that the meaning of the English collocations and expressions is often rendered in Romanian by means of more linguistic elements: e.g. *unsustainable public debt* – "nivelul nesustenabil al datoriei publice" (2012), *we are tackling our challenges* – "căutăm … soluții la provocările cu care ne confruntăm" (2013), *a political Commission* – "o Comisie cu caracter politic" (2015), *unseaworthy boats* – "ambarcațiuni neadaptate navigării pe mare" (2015), *our policy approach* – "modul în care ne elaborăm politicile" (2015), *border controls* – "efectuarea de controale la frontierele …" (2015), *keep governments ... in check* – "țin în echilibrul necesar guvernele …" (2016), *abuses by powerful companies* – "abuzurile comise de companiile puternice" (2016), *climate action* – "acțiunile de combatere a schimbărilor climatice" (2016), *global actor* – "actor … pe plan mondial" (2017), *open policy making* – "un proces deschis de elaborare a politicilor" (2017). It is obvious that the English collocations are characterised by a more synthetic form of expression, while the Romanian ones render the same meanings by means of more complex structures. The difference between the linguistic complexity of the English collocations and the corresponding Romanian ones can be partly explained by systemic or usage differences between the two languages, but it is mostly due to the translator's preference for more explicitness.

Another technique used with a relatively high frequency is that of ***transposition***, which, in very many cases, involves the rendering of English verbal or adjectival elements by means of Romanian nouns: *to ... draw all the consequences* – "asumarea … tuturor consecințelor" (2012), *is sharply rising* – "înregistrează o creștere puternică" (2013), *now is not the time to take fright* – "acum nu este momentul temerilor" (2015), *our imperative to act* – "stringența acțiunii" (2015), *will make our financial system more resilient* – "va permite sistemului nostru financiar să capete o reziliență sporită" (2016). Sometimes, transposition is associated with other techniques, like ***particularization***: e.g. *to tackle smugglers* – "de combatere a persoanelor care introduc ilegal migranți" (2015), or ***modulation***: e.g. *bring this agenda to life* – "punerea în practică a acestei agende" (2017).

Modulation is often used for rendering the figurative meaning of metaphorical collocations by means of literal formulations: e.g. *Europe has fought back* – "Europa nu s-a lăsat învinsă" (2013), *a fair playing field* – "un spațiu al concurenței echitabile" (2016), *helping the wind change* – "schimbarea în bine a situației" (2017), *a window of opportunity* – "un context favorabil" (2017).

The Romanian text producer's tendency to express a more precise meaning is also proved by his/her use of the ***particularization*** technique: e.g. *we will be needing talent* – "vom avea nevoie de oameni talentați" (2015), *data protection* – "protecția datelor cu caracter personal" (2016), *privacy matters* – "păstrarea confidențialității datelor personale contează" (2016).

52

The analysis performed in this section has led to the identification of a number of features characterizing the collocations and the expressions typically used in the English versus the Romanian variants of the State of the European Union addresses. But the results of my analysis are meant to serve a further purpose, because, as I have already mentioned, the features of the Romanian collocations discussed so far can be considered as illustrative of the expectancy norms characteristic of this category of texts, and can be taken as models by the translators who want to produce effective texts in this field, no matter if they use English, French, or German as a source language.

4. Conclusion

The conclusions that can be drawn from the comparative analysis of the English and the Romanian collocations used in the State of the European Union speeches making up my corpus will be presented from three perspectives.

First of all, it is obvious that the producers of the Romanian variants of these speeches have a predilection for techniques which ensure more explicitness at the lexico-semantic level of the target text. This effect is created by the frequent resort to linguistic amplification, or by the preference for the use of complex prepositional phrases which render the relationships between the various constituents of the collocation with more precision

Secondly, the collocations present in the Romanian speeches under analysis make use of more nouns than their English counterparts, because the translator resorts to this type of solution not only for source text elements with the same morphological status, but also for some original text verbs or adjectives. The multitude of the nouns, as well as the nominalizations frequently present in the Romanian texts that I have analysed, are also an expression of the formal and elevated style characterizing political speeches in general.

Finally, the texts in my corpus reveal several cases in which the metaphorical expressions in the English speeches are paralleled by Romanian structures with a concrete meaning. This is a sign of the Romanian text producer's care for rendering the original meaning with more clarity, a choice which does not always prove to be felicitous, especially in the light of the fact that political speeches rely to a great extent on the rhetorical power of the metaphors, and, consequently, their translation should try to preserve this feature.

All in all, it can be concluded that the producers of the Romanian variants of the political speeches under analysis reveal a general tendency to formulate the target text in a manner meant to clarify and to explain the meaning of its source. This is the reason why, the synthetic form of expression characterizing most the collocations present in the State of the European Union addresses written in English is often paralleled by a greater degree of explicitness in the Romanian variants of these texts.

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