

Book Review

Idiom Translation in the Financial Press: A
Corpus-Based Study. by Despoina Panou. Newcastle
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Dr. Luke Prodromou

ELT Materials Writer, Teacher Trainer, Item Writer

University of Nottingham

Nikomachou, 11, Thessaloniki, 546 33, Greece

Tel: 30-231-022-5862 E-mail: lukep@otenet.gr

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Review

The book under review is a modified version of the author's doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Leicester, UK. The main aim of her study was to investigate what happens to idioms in the process of transition from one language to another, in this case, from English into modern Greek. Dr. Panou focuses on two questions: how translators deal with idioms as they encounter them in the Source Text (ST) and attempt to convey them into the Target Text (TT) and secondly, which parameters influence the choices the translators make. Panou takes her data from the financial press in Greece and specifically articles from the Greek quality newspaper *Kathimerini*, in Greek, translated from the British 'Economist' magazine.

The book is organized into six chapters, and an appendix containing the source of all the texts used in Panou's research. The brief introduction highlights some theoretical issues in idiom translation and identifies the relative lack of studies on idiom translation in financial texts, which gave rise to her study in the first place. On a practical level, the author's experience as a teacher of English as a foreign language brought home to her the difficulty for students (and

teachers) of understanding and translating idioms. Accuracy in translating idioms is not only important for students preparing for examinations: they are important in the real world, in the financial texts under scrutiny, as the ineffective capturing of idiomatic meaning into the TT, on a formal and semantic level, may cause misunderstandings on a pragmatic level and give the reader of the translation a mistaken impression of what may turn out to be significant information: in migrating from one language to another, the illocutionary force of an utterance containing an idiom may change, depending on the strategy chosen by the translator.

Chapter two is a thorough survey of the various theoretical approaches to idioms from syntactic to pragmatic; Panou also reminds her readers of the significant contribution made by corpus approaches to idiomaticity in foregrounding the importance of authentic texts and context and the impact of corpora on raising our awareness of the pragmatic and interactional patterns of idiom use. Panou provides a similarly insightful review of approaches to translation, with a special focus on the work of Juliane House on translation from a Hallidayan systematic functional perspective. The model Panou applies to her corpus draws on a number of strategies for translation of idioms: e.g. from ‘congruence’ - when the translator comes up with an identical idiom in the TT to that found in the source text - to leaving out the idiom altogether in the translation.

In Chapter three, Panou outlines her corpus-based methodological approach and gives details of her corpus design and data; she explains the basic division of idioms into two types: inward (or approximately personal) and outward (social) idioms. Given the nature of her corpus, Panou is particularly interested in idioms that have to do with money, sales, marketing and negotiations and their importance in the real world where global finance may have a profound effect on people’s lives.

Chapters four and five present the results of Panou’s research: her sifting through and analyzing idiom translation strategies and her attempt to explain the parameters affecting the choice of strategy preferred by the translator. At nearly 100 pages the chapter presenting the quantitative and qualitative finds of the research is clearly the heart of the book. Chapter four sums up the factors that might affect the specific idiom-type to be translated with a specific idiom-translation strategy. One parameter, for example, which may affect the choice of opting for the adherence strategy, is the existence of similar idioms in the target language.

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Panou had set out to explore the translation of idioms in particular text types from English into Greek and to come up with some kind of explanation for why one strategy is chosen by the translator rather than another. She achieves her objectives in a thorough and eloquent book; as a native Greek speaker and expert user of English she is in a strong position to understand the sea-change that idioms undergo from the one language to the other. Idioms

require a subtle grasp of degrees and fixity and flexibility which Panou demonstrates page after page.

The author's knowledge of the idiom literature goes deep and she provides a masterly, readable summary of previous work which will be handy for future researchers in the area of idiomaticity and translation. For her own original work, Panou adopts a framework which brings some order to the messy area of idioms in English, an approach which weaves together individualistic, social and pragmatic factors in a seamless verbal fabric.

Panou has a comparable confidence with issues in translation and her use of House's Hallidayan model and that of others provides a coherent set of principles for approaching this controversial area. Her methodology, corpus-based and data-driven, adds to the contextual sensitivity and depth of her work.

Panou's data is well chosen: her corpus of 101,2012 words of texts on mainly financial and political topics retrieved in 2009 reflects the eruption and disruption of the global financial crisis which has affected Greece – and other countries – so profoundly. This gives Panou's largely linguistic study a real world relevance and resonance, which it would have been fascinating to have seen explored in more detail. A good example of this tantalizing aspect of Panou's work is the extract from the *Economist* which says the 'global economy would benefit from a trade -liberalizing Doha deal, but as unemployment rises governments will *have their work cut out* just to keep protectionism at bay'. The highlighted idiom is transformed, in the Greek version, to 'governments *should take care not to fall under* protectionism'. This changes the illocutionary force of the utterance to make it more of imperative and one wonders what the Greek translator brought to the original text, in terms of background knowledge, ideology and expectations, given the state of the Greek economy and the nightmarish levels of unemployment in the country. Panou herself identifies the (untapped) potential of her research in this respect when she says:

'Greek translators' choices regarding idiom translation might be better explained if they themselves provided an explanation as to why they preferred one strategy over another' (page 213).

Finally, Panou, while summing up very clearly her contribution to idiom-translation studies, is fully aware of the limitations of her work and points to areas which future scholars can usefully develop, such as the differential approach to degrees of compositionality in idiom-translation and the motivating force of socio-cultural factors of idiom use in face-to-face business negotiations (pages 214-215) .

Panou has laid a firm foundation for future work in the hybrid area of idiom translation in financial contexts; and given the prevailing and persistent role of global finance in the lives of ordinary people she has chosen an area of applied linguistics which has increasing importance and 'application' in the real world.

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Dr. Luke Prodromou
Email: lukep@otenet.gr

The reviewer: Luke Prodromou has a Ph.D from Nottingham University. His thesis on idioms in English as a Lingua Franca was published by Continuum (2010).