

Translating phraseologisms in comics – the example of an Asterix album

Translating phraseologisms in comic books may turn into a challenge: on the one side, equivalence between phraseologisms in different languages is not always given; on the other, comics creators may play with existing phraseological units to achieve special (con)textual effects (Korhonen 2004 and 2007, Kollner 2007). Additionally, in comics words and images are strongly interwoven and the language varieties used are typically close to the pole of conceptual orality (Fiedler 2004, Rodríguez Abella 2020): these factors, too, cannot be neglected in the translation process.

This contribution aims to examine which means and strategies translators can adopt when dealing with phraseologisms in comics. The Asterix volume “La rose et le glaive” in the original French (Uderzo 1991a) and its translations into Italian and German (Uderzo 1991b, 1991c) will serve as a database. Having been translated into several languages, Asterix albums lend themselves well to contrastive analyses, as the overview in Zanettin (2014) shows. However, investigations have rarely focused on phraseologisms so far – a gap that this contribution will try to fill.

The following steps were taken to examine phraseologisms and their translations: first, all phraseological units occurring in the original album and in the Italian and German translations were identified and classified according to the categories proposed by Kollner (2007) and Dobrovol'skij (2011), i.e., total, partial, and no equivalence; then, a quantitative and a qualitative analysis were conducted. From a quantitative perspective, it emerges that in most cases a total or partial equivalence is given; interestingly, total equivalence is higher in the French-German pair (46%) than in the French-Italian one (34%). Additionally, phraseologisms with no equivalence (about 10-15%) can be regarded as having been “compensated”: in the German and Italian translations phraseological units happen to occur in text passages in which the original French shows no phraseologism.

In the talk the results of the quantitative analysis will be presented in detail and single issues raised by the qualitative analysis will be discussed: this will lead to the conclusion that translating phraseologisms in comics requires a balancing act between the figurative and linguistic (con)text on the one side and the linguistic-cultural background of the potential readers on the other.

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