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Irina G. Zhirova<sup>1</sup>   
Xingkai Sun<sup>2</sup> 

Adaptive Translation of Phraseological Units in Nikolai Ostrovsky's  
"How the Steel was Tempered" into Chinese and English

<sup>1</sup> Moscow Region State University  
14 Vera Voloshina St., Mytishi, Moscow Region, 141014, Russia  
E-mail: zhirova557@yandex.ru  
ORCID iD: 0000-0001-5684-3005

<sup>2</sup> Moscow Region State University  
14 Vera Voloshina St., Mytishi, Moscow Region, 141014, Russia  
E-mail: 281050438@qq.com  
ORCID iD: 0000-0002-4780-292X

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**Abstract.** The article considers the peculiarities of adaptive translation of phraseological units from Russian into Chinese and English based on the material of the literary text «Kak zakalyalas' stal'» (Eng. 'How the Steel was Tempered' / 'The Making of a Hero') by Nikolay Ostrovsky (Eng. Nikolai Ostrovsky / Nicholas Ostrovski). The scientific novelty of the article is obvious since it concisely presents a comparative analysis of the phraseological systems in three languages: Russian, Chinese, and English. The methodological basis for the study of the phraseological map of the literary text "How the Steel was Tempered" by Nikolai Ostrovsky is a comparative analysis and study of two variants of translation into Chinese and two variants of translation into English. The authors also actively use such methods as an interpretive and descriptive analysis and some others. The main criteria of phraseology – stability and semantic uniqueness – of the compared phraseological units with the description of their national identity are presented. The phraseological system of any language has the necessary expression for the emotional impact on the recipient. The article consistently demonstrates the possibilities of transferring the nationally marked phraseological corpus of the Russian language to Chinese and English. In the end of the paper, it is concluded that the difficulties of adaptive translation of phraseological units met in the literary text "How the Steel was Tempered" by Nikolai Ostrovsky are due to the fact that most of them relate to the colloquial style, which imposes additional requirements on the translator associated with the need for a deep understanding of Russian culture and language traditions.

**Keywords:** Literary translation; Phraseological units; Methods of translation; Phraseological equivalent; Phraseological analogue; Tracing

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Жирова И. Г.<sup>1</sup>  
Сунь Синкай<sup>2</sup>

Адаптивный перевод фразем романа Николая Островского  
«Как закалялась сталь» на китайский и английский языки

<sup>1</sup> Московский государственный областной университет  
ул. Веры Волошиной, д. 14, Московская обл., г. Мытищи, 141014, Россия  
E-mail: zhirova557@yandex.ru  
ORCID iD: 0000-0001-5684-3005

<sup>2</sup> Московский государственный областной университет  
ул. Веры Волошиной, д. 14, Московская обл., г. Мытищи, 141014, Россия  
E-mail: 281050438@qq.com  
ORCID iD: 0000-0002-4780-292X

Статья поступила 20 мая 2021г.; принята 19 июня 2021г.; опубликована 30 июня 2021г.

**Аннотация.** В статье рассматриваются особенности адаптивного перевода фразеологических единиц с русского языка на китайский и английский на материале художественного произведения Николая Островского «Как закалялась сталь». Научная новизна статьи очевидна, поскольку в ней впервые кратко представлен сопоставительный анализ фразеологических систем трех языков: русского, китайского и английского. Методологической основой исследования фразеологической «карты» художественного произведения Николая Островского «Как закалялась сталь» является сопоставительный анализ двух вариантов перевода на китайский язык и двух вариантов перевода на английский язык. Авторы также активно используют общенаучные методы анализа, описания, сравнения, обобщения, интерпретации и некоторые другие. Представлены основные критерии идиоматичности – устойчивость и семантическая уникальность – сравниваемых фразеологических единиц с описанием их национальной идентичности. Фразеологическая система любого языка обладает необходимым выражением для эмоционального воздействия на реципиента. В статье последовательно демонстрируются возможности перевода национально маркированного фразеологического корпуса русского языка на китайский и английский языки. В конце статьи делается вывод о том, что трудности адаптивного перевода фразеологических единиц, встречающихся в романе Николая Островского «Как закалялась сталь», обусловлены тем, что большинство из них относятся к разговорному стилю, что предъявляет к переводчику дополнительные требования, связанные с необходимостью глубокого понимания русской культуры и языковых традиций.

**Ключевые слова:** Художественный перевод; Фразеологические единицы; Способы перевода; Фразеологический эквивалент; Фразеологический аналог; Трассирование (отслеживание)

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## Introduction

Phraseological units presented in the literary works of writers can rightfully be attributed to as the most active artistic expressive elements. These elements reveal artistic images and play a significant role in the emotional impact on the reader. Phraseological units, as a rule, represent the rich historical and cultural experience of the people, their national culture and authenticity, and the national identity of a person through his/her language. The phraseological corpus of any language is nationally and culturally marked and accordingly reflects its national 'flavour': originality and uniqueness. The main difficulty in translating phraseological units from one language into the other is that even at first glance similar phraseological units do not have complete correspondences in two languages: semantically as well as structurally they are different in many aspects. Phraseological units do not refer to extensionally open signs in a literary text, they are characterized by a minimal subject-logical information load and a maximum emotional-expressive load. Thus, "the informational heterogeneity of signs in a literary text is always intuitively felt by translators" (Kazakova, 2006: 36).

As is known, the novel of Nikolai Ostrovsky «Kak zakalyalas' stal'» (Ostrovsky, 2018) is one of the most – if not the most – ideologically influential works of world literature in China, which in many respects forms the value paradigm of the Chinese culture in modern world. There are over a hundred different versions of the translation of the novel into Chinese in the country.

In English-speaking countries, Nikolay Ostrovsky's literary work is only widely studied as the most vivid example of the revolution events which took place in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century. However, in these countries, there are only two translations of this novel into English. The first one (the short version) – 'The Making of a Hero' by Nicholas Ostrovsky – was

translated from the Japanese language by Alec Brown in 1937 and the second version of translation – 'How the Steel was Tempered' by Nikolai Ostrovsky – was made by Raisa Prokofieva in 1952.

The novel contains many phraseological units (idiomatic and non-idiomatic set-phrases) – those special stable figurative turns that allow the writer to create his unique style. In this research report, we – the authors – aim to analyze the features of the adaptive translation of phraseological units from Russian to Chinese and English based on the novel 'How the Steel was Tempered' / 'The Making of a Hero' («Kak zakalyalas' stal'») by Nikolai Ostrovsky. One cannot help marking in this instance that 'interpreters in general, and simultaneous interpreters in particular, use, in the process of translation, *blocks of equivalents*. The more equivalents in a block, the more elbow room an interpreter has for tackling different contexts' (Kuz'min, 2001: V-VI). The language cultural and national space represented in a particular literary work is characterized by a complex semantic relationship of lexeme complexes, including phraseological ones, presented in the literary text. We emphasize that 'a systematic approach to the analysis of the methods of transcoding linguoculturologically determined vocabulary involves an integrative vision of culture as a whole by the translator, as well as the ability to distinguish its individual parts' (Moiseeva, Ogneva, 2013: 24).

Following this goal, we stated the specific tasks, the solution of which will contribute to complete disclosure of the particular linguistic style of the Soviet writer Nikolai Ostrovsky, who is still so much popular in China. The said tasks are:

- to make a summary of the phraseological theory presented in modern linguistics;
- to establish a research of the peculiarities of translation of phraseological units in a literary text;

▪ to compare lexical-semantic and stylistic features of the translation of phraseological units presented in the novel «How the Steel was Tempered» by Nikolai Ostrovsky into Chinese and English.

### **Theoretical summary**

Phraseological semantics attracts many linguists around the world. The national mentality reflected in various phraseological units is one of the most relevant research objects at present. In Russia, many scientific works have been published on the study of the phraseological system and its translation into other languages. These are the works of (Alekseeva, 2008; Amosova, 1963; Vinogradov, 1972; Kuz'min, 2001, 2007; Kunin, 2005; Ogneva, 2012, and many other). In English-speaking countries, the most famous scientific works on phraseology are monographs and articles by: Burger, 2007; Cowie, 1998; Dixon, 1951; van Dijk, 2009 and many other famous scientists).

It is obvious that in theoretical works on phraseology, many definitions of this linguistic phenomenon are presented. So, phraseological units certainly represent:

- a) complex and largely contradictory stable formations;
- b) semantically transformed word combinations with a generalized integral meaning;
- c) figurative phrases;
- d) semantically independent formations.

Thus, in Russian linguistics, idiomaticity «is interpreted as the non-derivability of the general meaning of a stable combination of words from the sum of the meanings of lexical components (semantic integrity, unity of the meanings of lexemes); as the globality of the nomination, which is related to the idiomatic combination of words with a single word, as literal non-translatability into other languages» (Savickij, 2006: 11). As a rule, literary works present a specific idiomatic form of expression of thought, determined by the ethno-cultural and

ethno-linguistic characteristics of a person. The active use of stable speech acts, including phraseological units, increases the automatism of human speech activity, thereby greatly facilitating the generation and understanding of speech in the native language environment.

Many phraseological units at first seem completely meaningless, and only due to the context they acquire meaning. For translators, it is important to recognize interlanguage phraseology / idiomaticity as a relationship between multilingual counterparts. Anisomorphism (structural and semantic difference) indicates, first of all, the exceptional originality of the phraseological corpus of the compared languages. At the same time, it is recognized that the idiomaticity of a language unit depends on its structural and semantic modeling: the higher the structural and semantic modeling, the lower the idiomaticity and vice versa. The structural and semantic uniqueness of a phraseological unit leads to serious translation problems. Thus, E. A. Ogneva, while considering the key problems of adaptive translation, rightly states that ‘consideration of the regularities of the process of transferring the components of the translation code on the basis of structural and functional analysis both at a single level and within the text structure as a whole helps to identify the optimal ways of transcoding characters in the process of adaptation’ (Ogneva, 2012: 208).

Phraseological units differ from free word combinations in the following characteristic features:

- “...1) the reproducibility (a phraseological unit is not created, but is present in the language in a finished form);
- 2) the semantic integrity (the meaning of a phraseological unit does not coincide with the meaning of each of its constitutive elements);
- 3) the separate formulation (the constitutive elements of a phraseological unit

are words whose meaning is obscured or lost to one degree or another);

4) the stability (the possibility or impossibility to make any changes in the phraseological unit)” (Shanskij, 1985: 86).

In the phraseological system of any language are, as a rule, distinguished four groups of phraseological units:

1) phraseological combinations: where one word is included in the combination in its associated meaning, while the meaning of the second is metaphorical;

2) phraseological unity: fully metaphorical, motivated (the motivation of the phraseological meaning as its synchronous connection with the literal meanings of the components) units with a single integral meaning arising from the fusion of the meanings of lexical components, phraseological unity is semantically motivated, has imagery.;

3) phraseological adhesions/idioms: unmotivated units whose meaning is in no way connected with the values of the components and is not derived from them;

4) phraseological expressions: stable combinations of words, quotations, sayings, or proverbs fixed in the vocabulary of the language (Shanskij, 1985: 45).

The article will consider examples of translating idiomatic expressions from Russian into Chinese and English.

### **Methods and Materials**

The first version of the translation of the novel «Kak zakalyalas' stal'» into Chinese was made by the translator Mei Yi in 1942. However, Mei Yi translated this novel into Chinese from English text performed by the American translator Alec Brown in 1937. The first complete translation of this novel from Russian into Chinese was done by Huang Shunan. It was first published in China in 1994.

Note that there are only two versions of the translation of N. Ostrovsky's literary work «Kak zakalyalas' stal'» into English: Alec Brown's translation "The Making of a Hero" (Alec Brown, 1937) and Raisa Prokofieva's translation “How the Steel was Tempered” (Prokofieva, 1952).

This research is carried out on the material of the fiction novel «Kak zakalyalas' stal'» by Nikolai Ostrovsky and its translations into Chinese and English. In the report, we consider only a few examples of possible translations of text fragments in which two phraseological units are encountered from Russian into Chinese and English. We (the authors) also present our interpretive analysis of the translations.

The examples below present the original text extract and translation options into Chinese and English.

The report presents a number of research methods and specific techniques that allow us to streamline and systematize the results of the analysis of the phraseological units we have identified: descriptive-analytical (observation of phraseological units in the text with their further description) and comparative (systemic comparison with options for translating a phrase into other languages and definition of interlingual correspondences) methods. We also used the method of phraseological analysis (phraseological identification, which allows establishing the degree of rethinking of lexemes included in the phraseological unit) and an interpretive and descriptive analysis.

The listed methods of the linguistic research of phraseological units contribute to a more complete understanding of linguistic patterns.

Table

The author's original text and its translation versions in Chinese and English

Таблица

Авторский оригинальный текст и варианты его перевода на китайский и английский языки

The original text (Russian)	Translated text (Chinese)	
<b>N. Ostrovski</b>	<b>Huang Shunan</b>	<b>Mei Yi</b>
«Жухрай, которого молодой Литке перебрoсил в мгновенье ока из одного конца города в другой, не мог не выразить своего одобрения» (Ostrovskij, 2018: 120). // «ZHuhraj, ktorogo molodoj Litke perebrosil v mgnoven'e oka iz odnogo konca goroda v drugoj, ne mog ne vyrazit' svoego odobreniya»	“小李特克一转眼工夫就把朱赫来从城市的这一头送到另一头。朱赫来不禁满意地说” (黄树南, 2012: 194).	“转眼间, 他就把朱赫来从城市的一头送到了另一头。朱赫来不禁夸奖他说” (梅益, 2004: 265).
	Translated text (English)	
	<b>R. Prokofieva</b>	<b>A. Brown</b>
	“Zhukhrai, whom young Litke drove from one end of town to the other <i>in the twinkling of an eye</i> , was moved to voice his approval” (Prokofieva, 2002: 27).	“Zhoukhrai - he it was Litke was driving <i>in a few short moments</i> from one end of the town to another - could not but express his approval” (Brown, 1937: 239).
The original text (Russian)	Translated text (Chinese)	
<b>N. Ostrovski</b>	<b>Huang Shunan</b>	<b>Mei Yi</b>
«...«Жаль только, что я по-немецки ни в зуб ногой» – подумал он» (Ostrovskij, 2018: 205). // «...«ZHal' tol'ko, chto ya po-nemeckii ni v zub nogoj» podumal on»	“...“可惜我对德语一点也不懂” 保尔暗想” (黄树南, 2012: 341).	“...“可惜的是我对德语一窍不通” 保尔这样想” (梅益, 2004: 472).
	Translated text (English)	
	<b>R. Prokofieva</b>	<b>A. Brown</b>
	“...“Too bad I <i>don't know any German</i> , though,” Pavel thought ruefully”...” (Prokofieva, 2002: 202).	“...“Only,” Paul said to himself, “what a pity I <i>don't know a scrap of German</i> ”...” (Brown, 1937: 398).

**Results and Discussion**

The study of the peculiarities of the adaptive translation of phraseological units in the novel «Kak zakalyalas' stal'» into Chinese and English made it possible to obtain the significant results.

Those results listed below, indicate a high level of figurative thinking of both Nikolai Ostrovsky and the translators of his novel into Chinese and English:

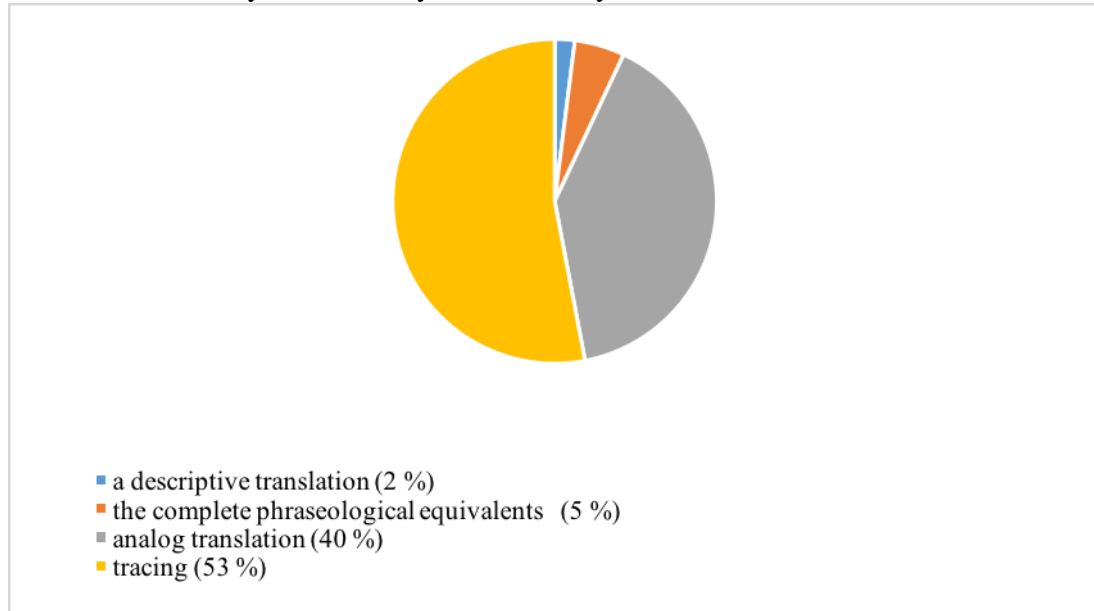
▪ Translators quite successfully conveyed or interpreted the semantic and stylistic meanings of phraseological units of the original text;

▪ The complete phraseological equivalents are the rarest tool of translation. Most often the translators use tracing (to preserve the cultural flavor of the original language) or analog translation. The least productive tool of translation (when it is impossible to find an

equivalent or analog) is a descriptive translation. The quantitative (percentage) ratio of translation tools/transformations of phraseo-

logical units in the novel is presented in Diagram.

Diagram Quantitative (percentage) ratio of translation transformations of phraseological units in the novel «Kak zakalyalas' stal'» by N. Ostrovsky



▪ Of great importance for the successful translation of phraseological units from Russian into Chinese and English in the novel «Kak zakalyalas' stal'» is the translator's knowledge of the natural language metaphysics, the realia of both the original and the translation languages and cultures.

When translating phraseological units, it is important to consider four types of correspondences to phraseological units of the original text:

- 1) a full phraseological equivalent;
- 2) the phraseological analogs
- 3) tracing, and
- 4) the descriptive translation of the phraseological unit (analog translation).

The group of phraseological units translated using equivalents includes, first of all, the so-called international expressions, which are biblical-mythological or literary in nature. Phraseological equivalents for almost all indicators are equivalent to the unit being translated: regardless of the context, it has a similar denotative and connotative meaning.

Phraseological analogs coincide in meaning, but they are based on a different image.

From time to time, translators of fictional literature resort to verbatim transfer (tracing). At the same time, this method of translating phraseological units contributes to the preservation of the figurativeness of the original. That transformation is used for the units that have neither an equivalent nor an analog in the accepted language culture.

The descriptive translation is used only when there is no equivalent, analog in the accepted culture, and tracing can lead to incomprehensible literalism.

As an example, consider the two text extracts and their translations presented in Table.

In the first statement, the author used such phraseological units as «v mgnoven'e oka (в мгновение ока)». In this phraseological unit, the logical and semantic compatibility of the elements included in it is obvious and allows one to predict an approximate situation of use. So, in the

Russian language this phraseological unit means “to happen immediately, instantly”. The meaning of this phraseological unit is due to the internal form of the semantics of both constitutive components – “too fast to notice or be noticed”. The context usually dictates the use of set expressions. So, in the Russian context, «слишком быстро, чтобы заметить либо быть замеченным» (слишком быстро, чтобы заметить либо быть замеченным)» the meaning “quickly” is presented. The phraseological unit form is laconic, which allows it to easily interblend the context of the entire utterance. In Chinese, this definition corresponds to: “非常快, 瞬间的”.

Chinese translations provide the following options: “转眼间” and “一转眼的功夫”. Both translators conveyed the main meaning of this phraseme. However, in the Chinese versions, transfer of the phrases “转眼间” and “一转眼的功夫” do not belong to the Chinese phraseological fund of the language. In the Chinese language, there is an idiomatic expression of four characters 转瞬之间. In our opinion, the proposed translation option can be attributed to almost complete phraseological equivalents.

In English, the concept «сразу же, моментально» is performed in such phrases, as: *in no time, in a flash, in a heartbeat, in an instant, in a twinkling*. When comparing Russian phraseological unit «в мгновение ока (в мгновенье ока)» and English variants of possible translations, a communicative-syntactic, lexical-grammatical difference is well seen.

Structurally, the Russian and English versions are different. However, the version of the translation of the Russian phraseme «в мгновение ока (в мгновенье ока)» proposed by R. Prokofieva – “in the twinkling of an eye” – can be considered as a complete phraseological equivalent. In the second translation, this phraseological unit is conveyed descriptively “in a few short moments”. The phraseological structure of the

original unit has been lost, although semantically both variants (Russian and English) are comparable. So we may state that an intercultural adaptation of the original text has been made.

Consider the second example. It contains a phraseological unit – «ни в зуб ногой (ни в зуб ногой)».

According to the “Big Phraseological Dictionary of the Russian Language”, this idiom means “(informal; spoken with disapproval) that a person or a group of people are completely unprepared, do not understand a question or business” (Teliya, 2006). The interesting fact is that in the Russian language it also corresponds to such a phraseological unit as “Chinese grammar” – “phenomena in which there is no hope of ever understanding” (Teliya, 2006). The translator Mei Yi translated it as 一点也不懂 (understands nothing). In the proposed Chinese version, we see a complete loss of idiomatic characteristics. In the second version, Huang Shunan used the Chinese analog of this idiom 一窍不通 (literal translation: not a single hole in the heart goes through). In our opinion, the translator has retained the main meaning of the statement, although the lexical components of the Russian and Chinese idioms are different.

The translation of this idiom into English is presented in the first version as “*don't know any German*”, and in the second – “*don't know a scrap of German*”.

Both translations hold almost the same meaning. However, in our opinion, the English versions are also devoid of the necessary idiomatic specification. The version “*don't know a scrap of German*” is more expressive since the translator used the phrase “*a scrap of*”, which gives the idiom both more imagery and symbolism and some negligence inherent in the colloquial style. In the English language, several phraseological units express “ignorance”. They are: *left in the dark; batting a whopping zero in; not to know a scrap of sth; not to know a hawk from a handsaw; it's absolutely Greek to me, etc.*



Analog translation of phraseological units, idioms, in particular, allows us to state that translators while maintaining the meaning of the phraseological unit, find a substitute in the translated language. That substitute/analog, however, is based on a different image of natural language metaphysics.

### Conclusion

The process of involving phraseological units into the language is determined by the interaction of units of different linguistic levels. This happens due to the figurative thinking inherent in humans. Usually, phraseological units are characterized by laconicism, vivid images, and national colors. People live on the same land, and due to common thinking and emotions, different cultures and languages become similar and compatible. The novel "How the Steel Was Tempered" by N. Ostrovsky contains a significant number of various phraseological units, in particular, colloquial, vernacular. The translated text must not only correspond to the original but also be adapted to the culture of the target language. A translator, faced with the need to transfer phraseological units from one language to another, must comprehend both his own and the other linguistic culture and traditions. Thus he has to find ways to convey the information contained in one or another phraseological unit.

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**Irina Grigorievna Zhirova**, Doctor of Philology, Professor, Head of the Department of

Translation Studies and Cognitive Linguistics, Moscow Region State University.

**Xingkai Sun**, Post Graduate Student, Department of Translation Studies and Cognitive Linguistics, Moscow Region State University

**Жирова Ирина Григорьевна**, доктор филологических наук, профессор, зав. кафедрой переводоведения и когнитивной лингвистики Института лингвистики и межкультурной коммуникации Московского государственного областного университета.

**Сунь Синкай**, аспирант кафедры переводоведения и когнитивной лингвистики Института лингвистики и межкультурной коммуникации Московского государственного областного университета.