

LEXICAL GAPS IN ROMANIAN FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ENGLISH: THE CASE OF CULINARY VERBS

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Abstract: *This paper aims at presenting the lexical gaps which occur when translating a text from English into Romanian. In the first part of the paper causes for and types of lexical gaps, common strategies for dealing with lexical gaps in the process of translating are investigated and illustrated. The analysis made in the second part of the paper focuses on English verbs expressing the technique of cooking in water. The verbs which lead to lexical gaps in Romanian are insisted upon and the appropriate solutions to fill in these gaps are offered.*

Keywords: *culinary verbs, troponymy, lexical gaps, translation difficulties, translation techniques*

1. Introduction

The problem of *lexical gaps* is mainly approached from two perspectives: that of Structural Semantics or that of Translation Studies. Structural Semantics analyses the *lexical gaps* which occur in lexical fields represented as matrixes that divide the conceptual fields in a certain language; that is why *lexical gaps* are sometimes called *matrix gaps* by semanticists (Lehrer 1974, Lyons 1984 etc.)

Translation theorists, although not always disregarding the theories of semantic fields, focus on instances where there is no word-for-word equivalence between the two languages in question. They sometimes provide typologies of *lexical gaps* (or *lacunae*) and methods of dealing with such instances of non-equivalence (Baker 2003, Newmark 1988 etc.).

In this paper *lexical gaps* are analyzed from the perspective of translation. Thus, a *lexical gap* occurs whenever

...there is no one-to-one correspondence between words across language boundaries. (Warren, 1999)

...a language expresses a concept with a lexical unit whereas the other language expresses the same concept with a free combination of words. (Bentivogli and Pianta, 2000)

English linguists and translation theorists also use the term *lacuna* to mean *lexical gap*; many definitions actually include both terms (“A *lexical gap* or *lacuna* is...”). Although these two terms may be used interchangeably, only *lexical gap* will be used throughout the paper.

Some other researchers consider *lexical gaps* as part of the larger issue of non-equivalence (at word level), without even mentioning the term, such as Mona Baker, in her book *In Other Words. A coursebook on translation* (2003). She analyses the issue of equivalence in translation at several levels, starting at the simplest possible level: that of the word.

Baker discusses here the common types of non-equivalence, providing examples from various languages. The first type is represented by *culture-specific concepts*. This, we may add, causes a *cultural gap*, and occurs when

...the source-language word may express a concept which is totally unknown in the target culture (Baker, 2003: 21)

English words which create such gaps in most languages are: *privacy*, *Speaker* (of the House of Commons), *airing cupboard*.

A second type arises when *the source-language concept is not lexicalized in the target language*, i.e. the target language does not lack the concept, it only does not lexicalize it by a single word. This is the general case when a *linguistic gap* occurs. Baker mentions here the word *savoury*, which expresses a concept that most languages have, but do not name it by a single word.

The third type refers to situations when *the source-language word is semantically complex*. That is, the source language expresses a complex set of meanings (sometimes more complex than a whole sentence) by a single word. This usually creates a *cultural gap* that is filled by long paraphrases in the target language; this is the case of the Brazilian word *arruacao* which means, according to Baker “clearing the ground under coffee trees of rubbish and piling it in the middle of the row in order to aid in the recovery of beans dropped during harvesting” (2003:22).

The fourth and the fifth types of non-equivalence problems can be grouped, as they bring semantic fields into the question. Thus, *the target language may lack either a superordinate or a hyponym*. English, for instance, lacks a common superordinate for *finger* and *toe*, while Romanian has it (*deget*). As to hyponyms, English has hyponyms for *meat*, while Romanian does not.

Finally, the *use of loan words in the source text* may lead to *lexical gaps* in the target text. Although some loan words may have the same (or approximately the same) form and meaning in

both languages involved in translation, or the meaning is rendered in the target language by another (similar) loan word, there are cases when a loan word in the source language creates a *lexical gap* in the target language.

In order to deal with these problems, Baker offers some strategies or techniques. Yet, she warns against relating specific problems to specific strategies.

The first strategy mentioned by Baker is *translation by a more general word (superordinate)* when a hyponym is missing from the target language semantic field. This implies that the translator must be familiar with the source language semantic field to which the word belongs and especially with the target language semantic field, which is to be checked carefully, as there might be a word to avoid the gap.

Translation by a more neutral/ less expressive word is a strategy which, in a way, may include the previous one. However, what Baker means by “more neutral/ less expressive word” is actually a (near) synonym which may come from a different semantic field or belongs to the same semantic field as the source language word, but is not an equivalent of the source language superordinate. What is important is the fact that the target language word loses the connotations the source language word displays.

Many source language culture-specific items, modern concepts or new coinages can be rendered into the target language by applying the strategy of *Translation using a loan word or loan word plus explanation*. The explanation may be intratextual if not very long; once it is explained, the loan word can then be used on its own in the same text.

The commonest strategy appears to be *Translation by paraphrase*; the paraphrase may include a word related to the source language item or not. Paraphrases which do not include a related word may be based on modifying a subordinate or simply on unpacking the meaning of the source language item.

2. Analysis

In order to analyze the *lexical gaps* that occur in Romanian from the perspective of English I have chosen the field of verbs which express a specific culinary/ cooking technique: *cooking in water*.

Cooking is the act of preparing food for eating. It encompasses a rather vast range of methods or techniques which can be divided into two large classes, according to a crucial criterion: *the use of heat*. Thus, one may speak of *hot cooking techniques* (which require the application of heat) and *cool cooking techniques* (which do not imply the use of heat). All these techniques may be expressed by one-word verbs or by verb expressions; I will analyze only those techniques which are named by a one-word (be it simple or compound) verb in English.

The verbs which express *hot cooking techniques* can be divided into several groups which, in their turn, can be sub-divided into a few other groups. The main division implies the following verbs: *boil*, *bake*, *fry*, *broil*, and *roast*.

Boil is the superordinate verb for the technique of cooking in/ by means of water. It is defined as “to subject to heat in water” and “to cause (a liquid) to bubble with heat: esp. said of food, wholly or partly liquid, in the process of cooking” (*Oxford English Dictionary*; from now on: *OED*). Thus, there are two main meanings attached to the verb *boil*. The meaning “cooking in heated water or water-based liquid (milk, wine, stock)” is named by the lexical unit *boil*₁; it is the superordinate of the class. The second meaning, named by the lexical unit *boil*₂, is, as circular as the definition may look, “cooking in boiling water, i.e. in a liquid bubbling with heat”; it is a hyponym of *boil*₁, alongside *simmer*, *etc.*

The most comprehensive English – Romanian dictionary, *Dicționar Englez – Român* (*DER*, Levițchi and Bantaș 2000), provides the following translations for the culinary meanings of the transitive verb *boil* in Romanian: “a fierbe; a pune la fiert”. The authors of the dictionary mention that a comma separates synonyms while a semicolon separates words and expressions which render the same source language meaning but are “too dissimilar to be taken as synonyms” (Levițchi and Bantaș, 2000: 8; my translation). Thus, we seem to have two ways of rendering the meaning of the verb *boil* in Romanian, one of which represents an instance of *lexical gap*, filled by a paraphrase which includes a related word (it may be considered a collocation). One can notice that both Romanian translation equivalents render the meaning of *boil*₁, e.g.: *She is boiling some eggs.* – *Fierbe/ A pus la fiert niște ouă.* The Romanian gap is caused by the wish to specify the initiation of the action of boiling.

*Boil*₂ is not much used independently; it is usually accompanied by a modifier such as *over high heat* (Romanian: “la foc mare/ puternic”). It is rendered into Romanian by the same equivalents as *boil*₁ (perhaps the paraphrase is not so much used), e.g.: *Boil apple juice over high heat.* – *Fierbeți/ Puneți la fiert sucul de mere la foc mare/ puternic.*

Seethe is a synonym of the verb *boil*, but it is now obsolete. If encountered in a text in its culinary meanings, it is to be rendered into Romanian the same way as *boil* is, e.g.: *Seethe the meat immediately.* – *Puneți imediat carnea la fiert; Seethe the meat until the fat is boiled off.* – *Fierbeți carnea până se topește grăsimea.*

The phrasal verb *boil down* means “to lessen the bulk of food by boiling” (*OED*). This verb creates a *lexical gap* in Romanian, filled in by the expression “a lăsa să scadă la foc” (*DER*), e.g.: *Boil down the soup* – *Lăsați supa să scadă la foc.*

Simmer is the main troponym of *boil*₁; It implies “keeping in a heated condition just below boiling-point” (*OED*); “just below boiling point” implies that tiny bubbles should slowly

float to the surface. The equivalents provided by *DER* are “a fierbe la foc mic; a ține (supa etc.) sub punctul de fierbere”. We are dealing here with a culture-neutral *lexical gap* which is filled by either one of the two paraphrases, both including a related word (the Romanian superordinate *fierbe* and the nominalisation *fierbere*). Both paraphrases can be taken as expressions which display a certain internal cohesion; they may be considered collocations. They are synonymous, with the difference that the latter is more technical than the former. Thus, *Simmer the soup for another ten minutes* can be rendered as either *Fierbeți supa la foc mic încă zece minute* or *Țineți supa sub punctul de fierbere încă zece minute*.

There are several troponyms to *simmer*, e.g.: *poach*, *stew*, *braise*, *coddle*. The verb *poach* may be defined as “to cook (fish, fruit, etc.) by simmering in water or another liquid” (*OED*); a better definition can be made up from the many electronic glossaries (listed in the *References* section) which include the verb: “to simmer food (such as unshelled eggs, fish or chicken) carefully so that the shape is preserved; the food being poached is no more than slightly covered by the liquid”. This time the *DER* translation equivalents are not satisfactory: “a fierbe (ouă, fără coajă), a face ochiuri”; the definition tries to fill the *lexical gap* by mentioning the food that is commonly poached in the Romanian culture: eggs. Fortunately, the only available Romanian gastronomical dictionary (Gal 2003) comes with a much better solution to fill this gap; the author mentions the verb *poșă*, an orthographically-adapted loan word from French. It is the best solution, but the word has not yet gained enough currency; that is why, perhaps, one should also consider the translation by superordinate/ by paraphrase provided by *DER* (when eggs are poached) or translation by the approximately the same paraphrases as *simmer*. Thus, a sentence such as *Poach the eggs, then make the sauce* may be translated as *Poșați ouăle, apoi faceți sosul; Faceți/ Fierbeți ochiurile de ou (la foc mic) apoi faceți sosul*. A sentence such as *Poach the chicken breast in wine* may be rendered as *Poșați pieptul de pui în vin* or *Faceți/ Fierbeți pieptul de pui (la foc mic) în vin*.

The verb *stew* is defined as “to boil slowly in a close vessel; to cook (meat, fruit, etc.) in a liquid kept at the simmering-point”; “to simmer slowly in a small amount of liquid in a covered pot for a long time”. (*OED*) The *DER* provides the following translation equivalents: “1. a fierbe sau a frige sau a găti înăbușit; a stufa 2. a face un compot de (fructe)”. Since *stewing* is a type of *simmering*, “a frige înăbușit” is not a good Romanian equivalent; “a găti înăbușit” is too general; “a stufa” is mostly applied to lamb. That is why *stew* should be translated as “a fierbe înăbușit; a stufa (carne de miel); a face un compot de (fructe)”. Thus, there are two *lexical gaps* which can be filled in by a collocation (*a fierbe înăbușit*) or by a paraphrase including unrelated words (*a face un compot de (fructe)*). A sentence such as *Stew the pork for 30 minutes* may be rendered as *Fierbeți înăbușit carnea de porc timp de 30 de minute*. The sentence *Stew the apples till they are*

very soft should be also translated as *Fierbeți înăbușit merele până când devin foarte moi* while *She was stewing apples* is to be translated as either *Făcea un compot de mere* or, maybe, *?Fierbea mere înăbușit*.

Braise is a verb which includes the meaning of *stew* but displays some other meaning components; it is defined as “to first sear food in oil or fat using an open pan and then slowly boil it in a small quantity of liquid in a tightly-covered pan”. The *DER* provides the equivalent “a fierbe înăbușit (carne etc.)”; it is indeed difficult to render the complex meaning of the English verb in order to fill the resulting *lexical gap* in Romanian, but one must specify that the food is first seared/ browned. Thus, a better translation would be the explanatory paraphrase “a rumeni/ căli (în grăsime/ ulei) și apoi a fierbe înăbușit (carne etc.)”, e.g.: *Braise the veal until tender – Rumeniți/ Căliți carnea de vițel și apoi fierbeți-o înăbușit până se frăgezește*. It is strange that Romanian displays this lexical gap, since Romanian cuisine makes frequent use of the technique expressed by *braise*. There is a recent verb provided by Gal (2003), i.e. *a breza*, an orthographically-adapted loan from French, which is obviously the best solution to fill in the gap; unfortunately, it is too technical to use in order to translate a recipe for the general public.

A verb that has a very specific meaning is *hard-boil*, i.e. “to boil (an egg) until hard-boiled” (*OED*). The concept is obviously present in Romanian, but there occurs a *lexical gap* caused by the English compound form. The *DER* does not include the verb, but one can easily translate it by the expressions “a fierbe (ouăle) tari”, “a face ouă răscapte”, which include the specific object. Thus, *Mother hard-boiled the eggs* is rendered as *Mama a fiert ouăle tari* or *Mama a făcut ouă răscapte*.

The verb *coddle* has a very complex meaning. The *OED* defines it as “to boil gently, parboil, stew (*esp.* fruit)” which is rendered by the *DER* as “1. a fierbe înăbușit. 2. a opări”. Nowadays, however, it is eggs that are usually coddled. One technique implies boiling eggs for a short period of time, so that they stay rather soft; this creates a gap in Romanian, easily filled in by the expressions “a fierbe ouăle moi”, “a face ouă moi”. The other technique refers to putting unshelled eggs in an *egg coddler* (a porcelain or pottery cup with a lid) which is partially immersed in boiling water for a few minutes. This leads to a *cultural gap* in Romanian, gap that may be filled by the paraphrase “a fierbe (ouă) bain-marie” which includes a superordinate and a loan word. Thus, a sentence such as *He coddled the peaches* may be rendered as *A fiert piersicile înăbușit/ A opărit piersicle*, while *He coddled the eggs* may be rendered, according to the context, as *A fiert ouăle moi/ A făcut ouă moi* or *A fiert ouăle bain-marie*.

The verbs *parboil* and *blanch* refer to immersing food in boiling water for a very short time. *Parboil* does not lead to a gap (“a opări”, *DER*), but *blanch*, which implies the additional meaning of immersing the food in ice cold water or frozen storage to stop the cooking process,

does. One could fill in the gap by the technical “a blanşa” or by the paraphrase “a opări şi apoi a răci brusc”, e.g.: *She blanched the peas – A blanşat mazărea/ A opărit mazărea şi apoi a răcit-o brusc*. The verb *scald* is a synonym of *parboil* in one of its meanings, but, whenever it refers to heating a liquid to a point just short of boiling point, it leads to a *lexical gap* in Romanian, filled by the lengthy “a încălzi până aproape de fierbere” (*DER*).

The verb *steam* refers to cooking food by means of steam. Romanian seems to display here a *cultural gap*, which is pointed out by the absence of an equivalent in the *DER*. However, the gap can be easily filled in by a short paraphrase, “a fierbe în aburi” (Gal, 2003), e.g.: *Steam the fish for 10 minutes – Fierbeţi peştele în aburi timp de 10 minute*. There are other lengthier or more general paraphrases in common use: “a fierbe/ găti/ face într-o baie de aburi”, “a fierbe/ găti/ face pe aburi”.

The verb *pressure-cook* obviously refers to cooking in a pressure-cooker. The English compound (which actually fills in an English gap) leads to a gap in Romanian, filled by the definition-like paraphrase “a găti/ face în oala sub presiune”; since one could either *boil* or *fry* food in a pressure-cooker, the Romanian equivalent may sometimes be “a fierbe/ prăji în oala sub presiune”.

3. Conclusions

By considering all the above English verbs which express techniques of cooking in water, one may notice that most of the Romanian *lexical gaps* are culture-neutral; there are, however, some culture-bound gaps (*cultural gaps*) such as those apparent in the case of *coddle* (eggs) or *steam*. Some gaps are created by *register* and *dialect*, e.g. *blanch*, *poach*, which are usually rendered by paraphrases in colloquial or regional Romanian and by one-word verbs at formal or technical/ specialized levels of language.

The strategies used in order to fill in the *lexical gaps* created in Romanian by the English verbs expressing cooking in water may be classified into two categories, i.e. *Translation by loan word* and *Translation by paraphrase*. The former is applied in the case of very few verbs such as *braise* – *a breza*, or *poach* – *a poşa*, where the equivalents are actually orthographically-adapted loan words from French; we would not be talking of *lexical gaps* here if these terms were widely used.

The other type, *Translation by paraphrase*, is by far the commonest one. Many of the paraphrases include a *superordinate modified by an explanatory phrase*. The superordinate may be either *immediate* or *mediate*; the commonest *immediate superordinates* are naturally the ones that name the basic cooking techniques, e.g.: *simmer* – *a fierbe la foc mic*. The most frequent *mediate superordinate* is the field superordinate, *a găti*, e.g.: *pressure-cook* – *a găti în oala sub*

presiune, etc. Alongside *a găti*, one can notice the use of the neutral verb *a face*, which is, in its turn, a superordinate of the verb *a găti*, e.g.: *steam - a face pe aburi*.

The modifying explanatory phrases may refer to the *place/ recipient* where the cooking action takes place, e.g.: *pressure-cook - a găti în oala sub presiune*. The type of *heat* and the *medium* are often referred to, e.g.: *simmer - a fierbe la foc mic*. Finally, the *ingredient(s)* or the *resulting dish* may be mentioned, e.g.: *poach - 2. a fierbe (ouă, fără coajă), a face ochiuri*.

Some paraphrases imply *two modified verbs* in Romanian, out of which at least one is a superordinate, e.g.: *braise - a rumeni/ căli (în grăsime/ ulei) și apoi a fierbe înăbușit (carne etc.)*. There are very few instances where a *paraphrase including no superordinate* is used, e.g.: *boil/seethe - a pune la fiert; simmer - a ține (supa etc.) sub punctul de fierbere; scald - a încălzi până aproape de fierbere; boil down - a lăsa să scadă la foc*.

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