

# Translating English Idioms into Greek Subtitles: The Functional Variation Model Proposal

FIELDS : Translation, Pragmatics, Sociolinguistics

RESEARCH QUESTIONS : 1) What exactly is an idiom in an utterance? 2) In order to translate it into Greek, which communication factors do we have to take to consider? 3) Which one is a successful translation of idioms: the translation, which is based on the literal meaning of them, or the one, which captures the impact an idiom has on the interlocutors? 4) Can we come up with a translation model, which is able to translate idioms into the demanding – due to time and space restrictions – channel of subtitles?

PROBLEMATICS : Idioms and their translation into subtitles have been selected as this paper's topic, because not a lot of research has been done in this area. The only paper relevant to the topic is Henrik Gottlieb (1997), whose basic claim is that it is possible to learn or understand idioms' meaning through their textual and pragmatic context (1997:315). However, the paper does not exactly define what it means by "context"; is it the channel of communication (television vs. books), is it the register of discussion (formal vs informal talk)? Furthermore, the paper distinguishes between stylistic loyalty (= focus on the meaning of the original text) and contextual loyalty (idiom's intended effect on the readers of the idiom) (1997:317). All the same, again this distinction seems to be vague enough, because not only is there no example to illustrate it, but also, in my opinion, these two loyalties are interdependent and, therefore, difficult to be differentiated. What is meant by "interdependent" is that, since idioms draw their meaning from the context, in which they are used, their contextual loyalty is part of their meaning. Finally, the stylistic loyalty is by definition problematic, because as the author admits, "an idiom is a phrase which you cannot understand by putting together the meanings of the words in it" (1997:315).

HYPOTHESES: My hypotheses are based on my research questions. 1) An idiom in an utterance is "a linguistic pattern, which often carries meaning which cannot be deduced from its individual components" (Baker 1992:63). This meaning is not just semantic but it also has a pragmatic (= register-based) and sociolinguistic (speaker's background-based) aspect. 2) Therefore, in order to translate it into Greek, both the pragmatic and sociolinguistic aspect of meaning should be taken into consideration, if the translators are aiming at providing their audience with a realistic translation. 3) My hypothesis is that a translation that captures the idiom's impact on the interlocutors is a successful one. 4) The proposed Functional Variation Model (FVM) takes equally into consideration both the pragmatic (functional) and the sociolinguistic (variation) diversity idioms' meaning has and these are the two general criteria that translators could be based on, in order to translate idioms. The term "functional" means the communicative force which accompanies the uttered idiom, e.g. threatening, warning etc. (Hatim & Mason 1990:60). The term "Variation" means the social and idiolectal variation among the speakers. The social variation depends on the social background of the speaker, while the idiolectal variation is related with some favorite expressions characters tend to use (e.g. 007 keeps saying "I 'd have a martini, shaken, not stirred"). The FVM proposes that for English idioms equivalent Greek idioms should be given in translation. "Equivalent" is an idiom, which goes in

has the same impact on the audience as the impact the English idiom has on the hearers and is able to fit in the restricted subtitle space (Nida 1969:142). I follow Karamitroglou's subtitling standards proposal (1998).

**METHODOLOGY:** I have gathered 125 idioms from all 21 James Bond films. The idioms belong to various characters of the films and they are part of utterances used during the first sixty minutes of every film. The row in each the idioms are listed is also random, because it is based on the row I have watched the films and not according to their chronological order. In my paper I give a three-column list, which contains the original English idiom, its translation in the Greek subtitles and a back translation of the Greek subtitles into English. Based on my data, I have grouped the gathered idioms into two categories: the first contains those, whose translation is successful, because it creates the same impact on the Greek audience the English idiom has on the hearer and it respects the social and idiolectal variation of the utters. The second one contains those idioms, whose translation could be improved through the application of the proposed model.

**RESULTS:** The results are based on the answers given by 15 native speakers of Modern Greek, who study in UK universities, thus they speak (and understand) English fluently. People were asked to watch the clips of the JB movies with the idioms (and their subtitled translation) and to say whether they think it is successful or not. It turns out that the idioms belonging to the first category are only 30%, while the rest 70% are idioms, whose translation could be more efficient, if the proposed model is applied. Therefore, FVM could be characterized as a viable translation solution at least for the case of rendering English idioms into Greek subtitles.

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