# On Intracultural Idiolectal Phrasemes Coined by a Politician from a Translational Perspective.

# A Case Study: Problem Areas in Translating Jarosław Kaczyński's phraseology

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**bstract:** The aim of the paper is to discuss intracultural idiolectal phrasemes coined by a politician from a translational perspective with a view to determining and highlighting potential problem areas. Their idiolectal nature and underrepresentation in bilingual lexicographic works pose linguo-cultural difficulties in the process of translation. In order to analyze the phenomenon of transferring a politician's idiolectal phraseology into another linguo-cultural reality, a case study will be offered: this aspect will be discussed on the example of the problem areas in translating Polish phrasemes coined or popularized by Jarosław Kaczyński into English. The study will analyse chosen issues in order to emphasize the most important difficulties in the process of translation.

→ **Keywords:** idiolect, phraseme, political discourse, translation

### 1. Introduction

→ Multiword expressions are used in all forms of discourse, including communication in the sphere of politics. In fact, political discourse is rich in fixed polylexemic units of dif-

ferent kind, for instance: collocations, idioms, proverbs and winged words (Diadechko, 2010: 137; Chlebda, 2005: 296; Fiedler, 2007: 47). Thus, in order to avoid terminological problems, the name *phraseme* is used as an umbrella term for various units which meet the two main criteria: polylexicality, i.e. being composed of at least two words, and fixedness understood as stabilization in language.

The aim of the present paper is to discuss idiolectal phraseology of a politician from a translational perspective. Certain persons active in the sphere of politics, like Lech Wałęsa in Poland (Bralczyk, 1990; Szerszunowicz, 2011a; Szerszunowicz, 2016a), produce and/or popularize various lexical and phraseological items which often enrich the standard language. This issue will be analyzed on the example of the phrasemes coined or popularized by Jarosław Kaczyński – a Polish politician. The units have been excerpted from Słownik polszczyzny politycznej po roku 1989 [A dictionary of political Polish after 1989] (Zimny, Nowak, 2009). The lexicographic inclusion reflects their stabilized position and importance for communication.

So far, the personal language of Kaczyński has been analyzed mostly with a focus on lexical and grammatical persuasive means (cf.Kępka, 2017), with little emphasis on idiolectal phraseology *per se*. From a cross-linguistic perspective, a question arises how to translate such individual multiword expressions, on one hand, conveying the intentions of the speaker in a clear way, on the other, ensuring their stylistic quality and idiolectal function (Szerszunowicz, 2014). In terms of translation, the expressions chosen for the analysis will be viewed from two perspectives: first, as units belonging to the politician's idiolect; second, as phrases identified as part of his idiolect and used by others.

# 2. Intracultural idiolectal phrasemes in the sphere of politics: a cross-linguistic view

- → The Oxford Companion to the English Language (McArthur 1996: 455) calls the idiolect a personal dialect, which is indicative of its complex character. Pieczyńska-Sulik (2002: 55) mentions several defining criteria: time, the number of languages, the relation between the system and the individual language etc. The personal language can be understood as a total of utterances made by an individual during his or her whole life or within a given period of time, one language or a few languages used by a given speaker, the deviations from the norm or the norm with the deviations (Pieczyńska-Sulik, 2002: 55).
- → The present study follows the approach adopted by Bańkowska (2003: 75) who defines the idiolect as the whole linguistic and stylistic potential of a language user and his or her linguistic competence. The individual style is situated within the idiolect, like a functional style is placed within the system of a particular language community. The individual style requires

a multiaspectual analysis at several levels: for instance, phonetic, lexical, phraseological and syntactic (Szerszunowicz, 2011b). The reconstruction of one's idiolect can be done on the basis of the analysis of the texts produced by the individual (Bańkowska, 2003: 76).

- → Each discourse, including political communication, develops its own phraseology (Szerszunowicz, 2016a). Political discourse is understood as a variety of language used in texts produced by politicians, related persons and journalists specializing in politics, addressed to all language users, referring to politics, with a dominant persuasive function (Walczak, 1994; Zdunkiewicz-Jedynak, 2008; Szerszunowicz, 2016b).
- → Phrasemes can be divided into two groups: intercultural units (cf.Piirainen, 2008; Szerszunowicz, 2008, 2009, 2014), shared by various ethnic groups, and intracultural ones, specific to one culture (Szerszunowicz, 2008, 2014). As stressed by Chlebda (2001: 301), many intracultural units verbalize individual contents created by the author, so they constitute lacunae, i.e. gaps, in another language (Szerszunowicz, 2016a).

# 3. Potential difficulties in translating Jarosław Kaczyński's idiolectal phrasemes

- 3.1 Kaczyński and his idiolect from a cross-linguistic perspective
- → Jarosław Kaczyński, born in 1949, is the twin brother of the late Lech Kaczyński, ex-President of Poland who died in a plane crash in 2010, at Smolensk in Russia. This Polish politician and lawyer was the Prime Minister of Poland from July 2006 to November 2007. He performed the duties of the Chief of the Chancellery of the

President in the period December 1990–October 1991. Kaczyński is the current leader of the party *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (Law and Justice), rated among most influential Polish politicians. Certain facts from his private life are important for his image: unmarried with no children, a cat owner with great fondness of cats, with no bank account. These aspects were widely commented on and featured in a plethora of memes, cabaret skits etc.

- → The language used by Kaczyński is characteristic: he uses sophisticated words and expressions, while many politicians opt for the colloquial variety (Zdunkiewicz-Jedynak, 2008; Wiśniewska, 2009). He also tends to choose rare lexical items, archaic words and terminology. Moreover, Kaczyński employs figurative language, frequently constructing metaphors on the basis of the division we / others and is also known for slips of tongues.
- → From a translational viewpoint, it is important that the majority of Kaczyński's winged words is not included in lexicographic sources (Szerszunowicz 2009). Only the monolingual work titled *Słownik polszczyzny politycznej po roku* 1989 (Zimny, Nowak, 2009) contains several of them. This dictionary (Zimny, Nowak 2009) is of great help to translators, yet, the entries are just a starting point for searching for contextual equivalents.
- → As a consequence, the first translation-related problem regards the recognition of a given phraseme as an idiolectal multiword unit. Then, once the expressions has been interpreted as fixed and the translator has retrieved sufficient information of the unit, the following questions arise: how to convey its meaning, then, how to retain its phraseological character, and, finally,

how to find equivalents in terms of stylistics, i.e. idiolectal nature.

- 3.2 Problem areas in translating intracultural idiolectal phraseology
- 3.2.1 Fixedness as a distinctive feature of idiolectal phrasemes
- → Kaczyński established his reputation for coining phrasemes, many of which entered the Polish lexicon. One of them is *oczywista oczywistość* [lit. obvious obviousness], a phrase aimed at emphasizing an extremely obvious fact. Kaczyński had used this phrase approximately 10 years before he became the Prime Minister (Zimny, Nowak 2009). Yet, because of his inclination to make *lapsus linguae*, it was interpreted as one of his slips and thus gained an ironic markedness. The expression established its status as a phraseme meaning 'something not obvious, often not complying with facts or somebody's feelings' (Zimny, Nowak, 2009: 175).
- → One of the main problems related to the translation of idiolectal phraseology is how to indicate that a given expression is a fixed word combination, not an *ad hoc* construction created in a given context. In fact, at the moment when it is used for the first time, it is translated as a loose string of words. Yet, after becoming institutionalized, its status should be retained in the translation:

Trzeba pamiętać, że jeśli jakaś osoba nieustannie obraża urzędującą głowę państwa – [...] – no to nie może liczyć na to, że będzie następnie przyjmowana. To jest chyba oczywista oczywistość (NKJP)

[One should remember that if a person keeps offending the current head of state – [...] –

cannot expect to be received. It's just obvious obviousness].

- → The phrase is used in the same way as standard phraseology is employed: To jest oczywista oczywistość, że politycy chcą się dostać do parlamentu [lit. It is obvious obviousness that politicians want to get into the Parliament]. Such units as obvious obviousness can be easily created spontaneously: cold coldness, warm warmth, nice nicety etc. Therefore, it can be assumed that the phraseological status of oczywista oczywistość may not be obvious to the receiver who is not a native speaker of Polish.
- → If this phraseme is used by others, introducers facilitate creating the effect of fixedness of the expression. In the Polish national corpus (NKJP), two kinds of introducers were retrieved. The first group comprises the metaoperators referring to the authorship of the words:

można by za klasykiem powtórzyć, że to "oczywista oczywistość" [lit. one could repeat after the classic that it is "obvious obviousness"], trawestując słowa znanego polityka [lit. travestying a famous politician's words], oczywista oczywistość, jak mówił były premier [lit. obvious obviousness as the ex-Prime Minister used to say].

- → In the first example, the quotation mark is a graphic indicator of citation reflexing the speaker's perception of the phrase: it is treated as a candidate for a phraseme and its meaning is different from the literal one. The surname is not mentioned, since the unit is associated with Kaczyński by the majority of Polish receivers.
- → The second group of introducers of the expression *oczywista oczywistość* makes no refer-

ence to the politician as its author. They inform the interlocutor about the status of the expression, for instance:

oczywista oczywistość, jak to się teraz mówi [lit. obvious obviousness, as it is said now], to jest tak zwana oczywista oczywistość [lit. it is so-called obvious obviousness].

→ The addition and choice of the introducer are context-based: it can contain the surname or may just hint at the phraseological nature of the unit.

## 3.2.2 "Invisiblity" of idiolectal phraseology

→ As already mentioned, Kaczyński is known for using rare words, archaic lexical items or foreign lexemes (Zimny, Nowak, 2009: 107-108) striking the receivers as inadequate in a particular context. He employs various multiword expressions situated between phrasemes and terms. They pertain to academic and/or scientific discourse, as illustrated below:

permanentny imposybilizm prawny [lit. permanent legal impossibilism],
dyferencjacja uprawnień obywatelskich [lit. differentiation of civil rights],
równoważenie trójpodziału władz [lit. balancing the separation of powers],
kondominium rosyjsko-niemieckie [lit. Russian-German condominium].

→ The use of terms is often justified by the subjects discussed, yet, the frequency of their occurrence shows Kaczyński's predilection for them. Many of them are composed of three constituents, often of foreign origins, thus rather difficult or bookish.

- → Generally speaking, such expressions do not pose much difficulty in translation, since they can be rendered literally into another language. Yet, bearing in mind that their use is an idiolectal feature, one has to translate them with a view to retaining the stylistic effect. The units seem to be mere terms, but, in fact, they are not stylistically neutral. That is why they can be called "invisible" exponents of the idiolect.
- 3.2.3 Complex semantics: the meaning of an idiolectal phraseme
- → In translation, Kaczyński's idiolectal phrasemes pose various problems at the semantic level: he originally uses them in his speeches with a given intention; then, they may develop new meanings. For instance, the phraseme nadużycie semantyczne [lit. semantic abuse] "exaggeration" was used by Kaczyński in September 2006 to comment on his opponents describing the scandal with so-called tapes of truth as political corruption (Zimny, Nowak, 2009: 192). According to Kaczyński, the semantic abuse was committed by media falsifying the true picture of the events.
- → The expression *nadużycie semantyczne* carries a blurred meaning: nowadays, it is used to refer to political communications whose authors do not have clear intentions. It is employed rather intuitively to criticize somebody. The phraseme contains the constituent *nadużycie* [abuse], so it is not neutral: it expresses strongly negative evaluation (Zimny, Nowak 2009: 162), as exemplified in Kaczyński's words:

Padło słowo, które w Polsce jest słowem bardzo obciążającym – słowo korupcja. I stąd mamy do czynienia z pewnym wielkim semantycznym nadużyciem (NKJP)

- [One used the word which in Poland is a very aggravating word the word corruption. And therefore we are dealing with a certain great semantic abuse].
- → Another example of the subtleties is related to the previous use of phrasemes as regular collocations before the adoption by Kaczyński and their subsequent neosemantization. This phenomenon is illustrated by the collocation porażająca wiedza/wiedza porażająca [lit. transfixing knowledge] attested in media discourse beforehand (Zimny, Nowak, 2009: 204). By means of this phrase Kaczyński referred to the report prepared by Antoni Macierewicz, the head of the Military Counterintelligence, on the liquidation of the Military Information Services. The excerpt from the interview for the magazine Wprost illustrates its potential:

To będzie wiedza porażająca. To materiał o tym, jak wielką siłą było to, co zostawił po sobie PRL w sposób świadomy (NKJP)

[It will be transfixing knowledge. It will be the material on the immense force of what had been left by the Polish Republic of People in a conscious way].

→ In February 2007, the report was heavily criticised. Then, the phraseme *porażająca wiedza* began to function in a different way, i.e. ironically or as a paraphrasis. In fact, the expression meant the opposite from what Kaczyński had intended to indicate by using it.

- 3.2.4 Stylistic markedness of idiolectal phraseology
- → Kaczyński's idiolect is rich in stylistically marked phrasemes. One of the distinctive features of his idiolect is the excessive use of terminology, term-like constructions, sophisticated words and rare lexical items. The choice of lexis and phraseology results in the creation of stylistically marked texts. In terms of translation, this property of his language should be retained, so that the idiolect could be re-created in the target language.
- → Kaczyński also uses phrasemes which employ lexical constituents with strong associative potential. For instance, the term-like expression oczyszczanie państwa [lit. cleaning the country] contains the component oczyszczanie which may be interpreted as cleaning or purging, since in Polish, both words stem from the same root: czyścić [to clean], czystka [purge] (Zimny, Nowak, 2009: 174). The first interpretation intended by Kaczyński is positive, yet, the second one is strongly negatively marked.
- → Similarly to some other Kaczyński's expressions, the phraseme *oczyszczanie państwa* began to be used by his opponents in the latter meaning, i.e. with a negative markedness. It tends to be used ironically, for instance, like in the excerpt from a press article below:

Odrzucam "oczyszczanie" państwa sprowadzające się do przejmowania i ubezwłasnowolniania kolejnych instytucji demokratycznych (NKJP) [I reject "cleaning" the country which boiled down to taking over and depriving other democratic institutions of freedom].

- → The use of the quotation mark is not accidental, since its function is to change the semantics of the constituent. In the above sentence, cleaning is not evaluated positively, on the contrary, it conveys the message that the process of cleaning should be viewed as a pseudo-cleaning the term *cleaning* is a euphemistic word for acting against the institutions mentioned by the author of the article.
- 3.2.5 Intertextuality and personal phraseology
- → From a translational perspective, another problem is related to intertextuality of idiolectal phrasemes. One of the examples includes the unit *Czarne jest czarne, a białe jest białe* [lit. Black is black and white is white] which was used in the following sentence from the expose in July 2006:

I żadne krzyki nie przekonają mnie, że białe jest białe, a czarne jest czarne. Przepraszam bardzo, że białe jest czarne, a czarne jest białe, przepraszam bardzo (NKJP)

[And no screams will convince me that white is white and black is black. I'm very sorry that white is black and black is white, I'm very sorry]

→ What is of importance is the fact that Kaczyński exactly reproduced Wałęsa's slogan from the presidential campaign of 1995. Since Kaczyński is known for his reluctance towards Wałęsa, the expression was viewed as a Freudian slip – an accidental repetition of his adversary slogan. The phrase gained the status of winged words and began to be express clear-cut nature, tenacity and intransigent worldview (Zimny, Nowak, 2009: 60).

→ In fact, *lapsus linguae* is one of the elements of Kaczyński's idiolect: in the 11<sup>th</sup> edition of the radio competition of Polish Radio Program Three *Srebrne Usta* [lit. Sliver Lips], in which prizes are awarded to the politicians who made most interesting utterances, he took the second place for the following utterance:

Po wichurze potrzebna jest folia, ale Donald "nic nie mogę" Tusk nawet tego nie potrafił załatwić. Natomiast wójt "nic nie mogę" Daniel Obajtek, "wszystko mogę", przepraszam, "wszystko mogę" Daniel Obajtek, bo tutaj się po prostu pomyliłem, wójt "wszystko mogę" Daniel Obajtek to załatwił natychmiast (NKJP)

[After a gale, one needs foil, but Donald "I can't do anything" Tusk couldn't do even that. However, the village mayor "I can't do anything" Daniel Obajtek, "I can do everything", sorry, "I can do everything" Daniel Obajtek, I just made a mistake here, the village mayor "I can do everything" Daniel Obajtek did it immediately].

→ Moreover, the phrasemes can be used in a creative way involving transformations. Cultural literacy is a prerequisite to a proper interpretation of such modifications, since without the shared knowledge, a person in unable to interpret such utterances. An example of the described use of Kaczyński's phrasemes is given below:

Jest takie przysłowie, że nie ma ludzi niezastąpionych. Nieprawda! Zenon Laskowik jest niezastąpiony. To taka oczywista oczywistość, jak to, że białe jest białe, a czarne jest czarne (NKJP)

[There is a proverb saying that there are no irreplaceable people. Not true! Zenon Laskowik is irreplaceable. It is such obvious ob-

viousness, like the fact that white is white and black is black].

- → In the above excerpt from an Internaut's blog, two Kaczyński's idiolectal phrasemes are used to compose a sentence which gains a humorous markedness. From a cross-linguistic perspective, such transformations are difficult to translate, since they refer to the receiver's cultural knowledge. If translated literally, the expressions convey the general meaning, yet, what is lost in the process is the idiolectal character and the ludic effect.
- → Yet, it should be added that it is perfectly possible to use idiolectal phrasemes without referring to the authorship, as it is done in the following excerpt:

Oczywista oczywistość to fakt, że życie ludzkie jest bezcenne, i jeżeli dokonując jakiegoś czynu, możemy uratować ludzkie życie to musimy to zrobić (NKJP)

[It is absolutely obvious that human life is priceless and if you can save somebody's life by taking action, you should do so].

→ The above example shows that in such a context, the introduction of an intensifying expression can be an adequate technique to convey the meaning of the original utterance. The dominant aspect is the semantics, not the form or cultural connotations. Therefore, there is no need to introduce lexical exponents of fixedness of the multiword combination used in the original text.

#### 4. Conclusion

→ As mentioned at the beginning of the paper, Jarosław Kaczyński's winged words are deeply set in the modern Polish culture and his

idiolectal phraseological expressions may pose various difficulties in the process of translation. Created in a particular situation, they develop new meanings and connotations over time, which contribute to their complex character. The phrasemes in question appear in a variety of texts and the translation is heavily context-dependent, yet, certain conclusions of general nature can be drawn.

- $\rightarrow$ First of all, some of Kaczyński's expressions resemble terms, thus, they may not be recognized as exponents of his idiolect. As a result of translation, the target text may vary stylistically from the original one. Secondly, the meanings of phrasemes develop in a particular situation: then, the units are interpreted by language users. As a consequence, their semantics differs depending on who uses them: for instance, the meaning often evolves into the opposite from what was intended by Kaczyński, since the interpretation is related to the speaker and his or her views. Thirdly, the intertextual aspect is of great importance: the politician's idiolect is rich in term-like units, phrases and proverbial constructions which create a phraseological structure.
- → From a translational perspective, three main frames of relations can be distinguished. First, the person uses his or her own idiolect: phrasemes are employed naturally, in the same way as standard units. Second, a person uses somebody's idiolect in political communication: in the utterance, the authorship is important or not relevant; if not, then the phraseological character of the unit is dominant, or both are important in a particular text. Third, the speaker uses the politician's idiolectal phraseme in other spheres of communication: the authorship may be important or, again, fixedness is the main

property, also there may be a balance between these two, with no clear shift towards one or the other.

- → To a great extent, it is the frame and the dominant that determine the translational choices. In the case of idiolectal phrases in the speaker's own idiolect, it can be assumed that in many contexts the literal translation may be sufficient, especially if the context enables the receiver to properly decode the message. It can be supported with additional information: for instance, introducing the elements of cultural background.
- → When it comes to the occurrences in political discourse in other users' idiolects, the context determines whether the introducers and other compensation means are necessary. If a politician's idiolectal phrasemes are employed in other spheres of activity, it can be expected that in many cases, providing there are no references to the original use, a descriptive phrase or a parallel counterpart might be an adequate translational equivalent.
- → To sum up, it should be emphasized that a politician's idiolectal phraseology belongs to culture-bound units. Such phrasemes are coined or popularized in a particular situation and may be used in different ways in political discourse. Moreover, they may change their parameters, like semantics or stylistic value, over time. Therefore, their translation requires in-depth knowledge on the specifics of one's idiolect and the target culture, with a special focus on political discourse.

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