

ON THE ORIGINS OF SOME ENGLISH IDIOMS AND THE ADEQUACY OF THEIR DEFINITIONS IN THE GEORGIAN DICTIONARIES (II part)

Nino Dvalidze

*Department of European Studies
Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University
35 Ninoshvili str., Batumi, Georgia, 6010
Nino.dvalidze@bsu.edu.ge*

Abstract

The aim of this article is to fill the informative gap and to overcome those difficulties which arise in case of not having the adequate interpretation or exact definition of the English idioms in the Georgian dictionaries. This paper investigates some idiomatic expressions and observes how often they are used in the modern English publicist texts from “The Guardian”, “Fortune”, “The Scotsman”, “The Independent” etc. whether they have preserved their original meanings or obtained some other new senses and coloring. More than this, the goal is to research if there is an adequate translation or interpretation of those English idioms in the Georgian language bilingual dictionaries. If there is not any, then the objective is how to make their adequate Georgian equivalents and, as a result to compose a new mini-dictionary of idioms. The urgent need for etymological study of idioms is also stimulated by the fact that the phraseology condensates the complex interaction of the culture and psychology of people, national self-being and their unique metaphoric mentality.

The research value is dictated by its outcome, namely, it will be the research not only of those idioms which have the adequate definitions in the Georgian dictionaries, but find out some cases of not having the right definition and in result to compile the mini bi-lingual dictionary of idioms. It can be assumed, that it will make a significant contribution to the development of lexicography in Georgia.

Keywords: adequate translation, bilingual dictionaries, etymology, idioms, mini dictionary of idioms, publicist texts.

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1. Introduction

It is said, that the cultural and educational level of the nation is measured by those mono or bilingual dictionaries, which were compiled by the lexicographers of this or that nation. They claim that long-life dedication is demanded for developing new dictionaries, but an outcome and trace is so productive and deep, that its importance is invaluable. If there weren't dictionaries, nobody would be able to learn deeply neither the native, nor foreign languages. Dictionaries play the greatest role in facilitating the intercultural dialogue. Thus, developing the new mini-dictionaries seems rather urgent affair, as the world changes rapidly and consequently does the human language. That is the reason why a good deal of researches has been still dedicating to the abovementioned issues.

The famous lexicographer Ladislav Zgusta proposes the four types of standard-influencing dictionaries:

1. Dictionaries that aim at creating a written standard (standard-creating dictionaries): this falls into three sub-types, namely those that:

- a) help to create a new standard language;
- b) try to revive languages;
- c) help to raise the variety of a language into a standard language of its own.

2. Dictionaries that try to make a standard more modern(modernizing dictionaries).

3. Dictionaries that try to stop any change in the standard or even to reverse linguistic change by reintroducing obsolete forms and meanings (antiquating or archaizing dictionaries).

4. Dictionaries that try to describe the existing standard, thereby clarifying it (standard descriptive dictionaries) [1].

As for Robert Lew, he delivers very interesting ideas about on-line dictionaries: “Another issue that still awaits satisfactory answers is the organization of access to data in online dictionaries. Even in highly respected dictionaries, there remain basic problems of access, such as with locating multi-word units, notwithstanding the upbeat tone of metalexigraphers who often just

pronounce the problem as essentially solved in the electronic medium. Other issues, related to new technologies, are the use of graphics, multimedia and alternative presentation modes, and these receive some attention. Finally, I play with the idea of the dictionary as an advanced query system, sitting on top of a text corpus. Using collocation dictionaries as an example, I demonstrate that the difference between a sophisticated corpus query system and a more traditional lexicographic product may soon become something of a technical subtlety" [2, 3].

I Would like to prove the preference to develop the bilingual mini-dictionary of idioms rather than slangs, by Rachelle Gauton's words: "Idioms and figures of speech, i.e. exocentric expressions, create special difficulties for the bilingual lexicographer as a certain amount of adaptation is necessary for the translation of these expressions. A metaphor in the SL cannot simply be translated with a corresponding metaphor in the TL. For example, the English metaphor 'Adam's apple' cannot be translated by way of a metaphor in Zulu, as such a metaphor does not exist. (The Zulu equivalent for 'Adam's apple' is the term *igilo*.) Mtuze (1990: 32) points out that idioms and other figurative expressions have become so fixed by usage in a particular language that it is very difficult or even impossible to render them in another language" [4].

Why did I delve into the etymology first and then tried to find their adequate definitions?! I would like to answer this question by Oktay Yağiz and Siros Izadpanah words: "phraseology condensates the complex interaction of the culture and psychology of people, national self-being and their unique metaphoric mentality" [5]. The further problem, which I had to decide, was what kind of bilingual dictionary I should compile, thematic or idioms, just arranged in the alphabetical order. For deciding this issue I acknowledged with Martin Stark's Book "Bilingual Thematic Dictionaries", which has three practical goals: "to identify the characteristic features of the bilingual thematic dictionary (BTD), to gauge its usefulness, and to make suggestions as to how it could be improved. These aims are achieved by considering the lexicographic genres (bilingual, thematic, and pedagogical) which have been combined to create this hybrid reference work, carrying out textual analyses of contemporary thematic dictionaries, and employing three pieces of user research (a questionnaire, a test, and an experiment) to reveal learners' opinions and use of BTDs" [6].

In order to carry such a great work individually and achieve the real results, one should base his work on existed corpus data, as Arleta Adamska-Salaciak mentions: "Many specialists believe that a modern dictionary worthy of the name cannot be prepared without a suitably large" electronically stored language corpus". Corpora provide evidence for SL meanings and for the fluency of occurrence of logical items. They also help identify common syntactic patterns and recurring phraseological combinations" so that lexicographers can tap them for illustrations of various aspects of language use, which are then presented in the dictionary in the form of example sentences. On sum "it is on the basis of corpus data that representative" up-to-date word lists can be drawn up and the use of headwords illustrated" thereby ensuring that nothing of importance has been overlooked" [7].

Finally, I cannot leave without special mentioning, one of best academic online bilingual dictionary, [8] and L. R. Flavell *Dictionary of idioms and their origins* [9]. These resources made my research really interesting and easy to compare the chosen idioms with each other and to come to the main point of developing a new mini-dictionary of idioms, arranged in the alphabetical order.

Thus, the above mentioned authors and their researches, underling the peculiarities and difficulties of translating or giving the adequate definitions to idioms of two different cultures, stipulated my goals as the following:

The aim of this article is to fill the informative gap and to overcome those difficulties which arise in case of not having the adequate interpretation or exact definition of the English idioms in the Georgian dictionaries. One should know this while translating the idioms adequately from one language into another.

To investigate the origins of some English idioms and observe how often they are used in the modern English publicist texts from "The Guardian", "Fortune", "The Scotsman", "The Independent", etc. whether they have preserved their original meanings or acquired some new ones.

If no equivalent is found, the Georgian equivalent is proposed, so that a new phraseological mini-dictionary could be compiled. It is hoped, that at least to some extent, proposing the equivalents will fill the gaps in lexicology, facilitating the intercultural dialogue.

2. Etymology of some English idioms and their adequate definitions in the Georgian dictionaries

Delving into the etymology of words, and particularly idioms, has been aptly described by the chairman of the Harvard Department of linguistics as the “Old Curiosity Shop” of linguistic research. There are some “antiques” that can no longer be found in everyday language. Yet, there are, however, words still commonly used in English which have lost some of the shades of meaning they once had. However, these obsolete meanings are sometimes preserved in idiomatic phrases. One may often meet such idioms in the English publicist texts, so having their adequate equivalents in Georgian seems to be an urgent issue, as it may help to carry the successful intercultural dialogue.

The word *beck*, for instance, was used from the 14-th to the 19-th century to describe a gesture of command. In modern English, it is fossilized in the 19-th century phrase *to be at someone's beck and call* which means ‘to be constantly at someone's service’ [9]

3. 1. Middle of the road

‘a position mid-way between two extremes, a safe position; inoffensive, bland’ [9].

There are sound reasons for choosing the idiom *the middle of the road*. According to Philip Thicknesse, who in 1777 wrote a book, called *A Year's Journey*, describing his travels around France and Spain. It is necessary “to keep in the middle of the road, so as not to be too suddenly surprised”, while a report in the “Rocky Mountain News” of 17 July 1892 advocated “the middle of the road, because side tracks are rough, and they're hard to walk”.

In the United States, by the late nineteenth century, the expression *the middle of the road* was a political phrase, coined to describe a person or policy that took no risks, avoided extremes. It was particularly applied to the moderates of the Populist Party (originally the People's Party), established in 1891, to advance agrarian issues: The only honest Populist is the ‘middle-of-the-road’ Populist (Congressional Record, 10 December 1896). The phrase remains a political one. Harold Wilson, British Prime Minister in the 1960s and '70s' claimed: “I'm at my best in a messy, middle-of-the-road muddle”.

Mr Verhofstadt established his free market credentials early in his political career, though he is now seen as a middle-of-the-road politician. “The Independent”, 27 May 2004.

From the second half of the twentieth century, it has also been used to describe arts and entertainment, popularly produced to achieve wide appeal.

Our arts are in decline, made bland and packaged as an unadventurous, middle-of-the-road “product” for mass consumption. “The Times”, 27 March 2004.

In a big on-line Georgian dictionary (Dictionary.ge), the above-mentioned idiom, i. e. *the middle of the road*, is defined as follows:

- 1) ‘the mid-way (as the safe position in the road)’
- 2) ‘moderate position in politics, non-extreme, centric’
- 3) ‘dull, not interesting’
- 4) ‘distinguished (a rather bland style of writing)’ [8];

შუა გზაში სიარული; ზომიერი, არაექსტრემისტული, ცენტრისტული; მოსაწყენი, არასაინტერესო; გამორჩეული წერის მანერა; shua gzashi siaruli; zomieri, araesqstremistuli, tsenstristuli, mosatskeni, arasaintereso, gamorcheuli (CEGOLD).

3. 2. A millstone around one's neck

‘a heavy burden, a great responsibility’ [9].

“And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea”. These are the words of Jesus, recorded in Matthew 18:5-6. Here, the large millstone refers to one, pulled round by a donkey, and not the small domestic kind, used by women at home. The figurative use of millstone to denote a ‘heavy burden’ probably comes from this biblical source and dates back to the eighteenth century.

Unlike in the Fifties, we are no longer an imperial power. This is a plus for us since the colonies were so often millstones about our necks.

“Daily Mail”, 31 May 2002.

In a big on-line Georgian dictionary, the word *millstone* is defined as a ‘heavy burden’ and the expression *millstone around one’s neck* is interpreted as ‘carrying the heavy burden’ or ‘taking a very serious, great responsibility on oneself’: მძიმე ტვირთის, სერიოზული პასუხისმგებლობის აღება, აკიდება საკუთარ თავზე; mdzime tvirtis, seriozuli pasuxismgeblobis agheba, akideba sakutar tavze [8].

There was a related version of this idiom in another English-Georgian dictionary by Isidor and Tamar Gvarjaladze – *to see far into a millstone*. It is defined as ‘the ability of foresight, pre-science’: შორსმჭვრეტელობა; shorsmchvreteloba [10, 11].

3. 3. Not to mince matters/one’s words

‘to speak frankly, to be brutally honest’ [9].

Current since the sixteenth century, the allusion refers to chopping up cheaper, stringier cuts of meat finely in order to make them easier to chew and digest.

“Thomas Churchyard expressed the connection between meat and message well: Ear he obtained the thing he sought, howe he his tong could fiell. To talk and mince the matter well, the better to disgeast (The firste parte of Churchyards chippes, 1575)”. About a hundred years later, the now much more common negative form was found. Someone, who does not mince matters, makes no attempt to soften his tough message. It is not until the early nineteenth century that the variant not to mince one’s words is first found.

As usual, an indignant Kim does not mince words and awards domestic delinquent Georgina ‘the prize for the dirtiest, rottenest hovel’. “Daily Mail”, 12 November 2003.

The expression *not to mince matters/one’s words* is interpreted by the Georgian on-line dictionary a bit differently, namely: 1. ‘to say something directly, without some deviations and pardonable words’ 2. ‘to mitigate the tone of intended speech in order to make the intention not so important and serious’: 1. სათქმელის პირდაპირ უბოდიშოდ, მიუკიბ-მოუკიბავად თქმა 2. ტონის, ნათქვამის შერბილება, რისამე ნაკლებ მნიშვნელოვნად, სერიოზულად წარმოდგენა; satkmelis pirdapir ubodishod, miukib-moukibavad tkma; tonis, natkvamis sherbileba, risame nakleb mnishvnelovnad, seriozulad tsarmodgena (CEGOLD) [8].

It is worth mentioning the third and fourth extra definitions of the above given phrase by the Georgian bilingual on-line dictionary: 3. ‘to say something with an unnatural knack manner’, 4. ‘to walk fast with a quick steps’: 3. არაბუნებრივად /მანერულად ლაპარაკი ან ქცევა, 4. მოკლე სწრაფი ნაბიჯებით სიარული(დადის) (CEGOLD) [10].

A following more adequate Georgian explanation of ‘to be brutally honest’ for the new mini dictionary of idioms could be given: ‘to be brutally honest’ იყო ულმობლად პატიოსანი, ანუ თქვა სიმართლე დაუნდობლად; iko ulmoblad patiosani, anu tqva simartle daundoblad (CEGOLD).

3. 4. To mind one’s Ps and Qs

‘to take great care how one speaks; be on one’s best behavior’ [9].

Speculation abounds about the origin of this phrase, which has been in use since at least the second half of the eighteenth century. Other scholars say the phrase may have arisen from the old custom in alehouses of hanging a slate behind the counter on which *p* or *q* (pint or quart) was written against the name of each customer, according to how much he had drunk. The accounts would be settled on payday. The landlord had to keep a careful record of his *p*’s and *q*’s and the customer had to ensure that only the ale he had consumed was marked up.

There are also stories from the nursery and schoolroom of children, being told to mind their please’s and thank-you’s or instructed to be careful, not muddle their *p*’s and *q*’s when learning to write their letters. Similarly, typesetters had to be careful not to mistake a *p* for a *q* when composing a text, although the letters *b* and *d* pose a comparable problem.

These stories are all purely speculative. Even if they sound plausible themselves, it is sometimes difficult to reconcile them with the actual meaning of the expression they are supposed to have birthed. However, until a piece of real evidence is uncovered, speculation of this kind remains. The two following excerpts illustrate the use of the unit.

We should be proud of our unique identity rather than apologetic about it. It's liberating to be here. We can talk without minding our Ps and Qs.

“The Daily Telegraph”, 12 March 2003.

We English are renowned for having good manners. We mind our Ps and Qs, give up our seats on buses and wait our turn in line. I like the fact the English have retained courtesy as part of our make-up. I can't abide people who think they have the right to jump the queue when I was clearly next in line.

“Hudders field Daily Examiner”, 11 April 2005.

There is given absolutely the adequate definition of the idiom *mind one's Ps and Qs* in the on-line Georgian dictionary: ფრთხილობს, ყურადღებით ეკიდება თავის სათქმელს; ცდილობს თავზიანი იყოს საზოგადოებაში; prtkhilobs, kuradgebit ekideba tavis satkmels, tsdilobs tavaziani ikos sazogadoebashi (CEGOLD) [8].

3. 5. Moment of truth

‘a crisis point’ [9]

Ernest Hemingway explains the origin of this phrase in his book *Death in the Afternoon* (1932), a novel about bullfighting: The whole end of the bullfight was the final sword thrust, the actual encounter between the man and the animal which the Spanish call the moment of truth.

The moment of truth, then, is a translation of the Spanish *hora or momento de la verdad*, which speaks of the kill, the climax of the whole fight. Hemingway was undoubtedly responsible for bringing the phrase to the attention of the English-speaking world. It was used until the 1950s with a real understanding of its origins: “A good detective story should be like a good bull-fight ... The author plunges the unexpected explanation into [the reader] like a sword; the moment of truth, as the Spaniards call it” (“New Statesman”, 15 January 1949).

Since the 1959s, however, the phrase has stood alone, its bullfighting origins largely forgotten, which is attested by the excerpts, presented below:

Arguably, the most wrenching scene in the ‘20/20’ story is when Jessica cradles her newborn in the hospital and the adoption contract is placed on her bedside table. It’s Jessica’s moment of truth: Does she honor her commitment to give up her baby, or does she back out as allowed?

“Milwaukee Journal Sentinel”, 1 May 2004.

Monita McGhee’s moment of truth came as she checked out of an Austin, Texas, hotel. She happened to see a co-worker’s bill and noticed that it was 15 percent less than hers, even though both rooms had been the same.

“My colleague had requested the senior discount, and I hadn’t”, the Dallas woman said. Since turning 50 more than a year earlier, she had resisted asking for any of the thousands of discounts available to 50-plus adults. McGhee, the new director of the Area Agency on Aging, didn’t want to take Advantage of special offers that she thought were needed more by elderly consumers.

“But I’m not reluctant any longer, even at Denny’s”, she said.

“Dallas Morning News”, 12 May 2005.

The idiom *moment of truth* is defined adequately by the on-line Georgian dictionary as: 1. ‘a fatal moment of stabbing the rapier’ 2. ‘critical decisive moment of something’: დაშნის სასიკვდილო ჩაცემა; გადამწყვეტი, კრიტიკული მომენტი; dashnis chacema, gadamtskveti, kritikuli momenti (CEGOLD) [8].

3. 6. A monkey on one's back

‘a drug addiction, a burdensome problem’ [8].

In the second half of the nineteenth century, *one's monkey* was one's temper and the phrases *to get one's monkey up* and *to have a monkey on one's back* meant ‘to get angry.’ These expressions are now obsolete, but in 1930s America, the phrase *to have a monkey on one's back* was used by addicts, particularly those taking heroin to describe their addiction, the allusion, referred to the inability to shake off the clinging creature. More recently, the idiom has also been used to express the meaning ‘a weighty problem that refuses to be shifted’. The following excerpts illustrate how the idiom is used in the modern English language:

As a new biography published next week makes clear, Chesney Henry Baker Jnr... had a monkey on his back of gorilla-like proportions. According to the author ... the trumpeter was on 6g of heroin a day by the time he died. And that's not counting the cocaine, codeine, barbiturates, alcohol and hash Baker used as a regular top-up.

“The Independent”, 24 May 2002.

Hughes, like Sanchez, wants to see an end to that depressing run of 14 matches without a win and no goals in 1,242 minutes – an embarrassing statistic which Sanchez describes as a monkey on his back.

“The Daily Telegraph”, 17 February 2004.

Now owned by Whitbread, the David Lloyd clubs act as a performance benchmark, business enemy and reminder of Lloyd Senior's huge success - something that has been both a springboard for [Lloyd's son] Scott's career and a monkey on his back.

“The Daily Telegraph”, 25 April 2004.

There are about 28 versions of interpreting the word *monkey* in the bilingual dictionary and there is the same definition of the phrase *a monkey on one's back* among them: 1. as the drug addiction: ნარკოტიკებზე დამოკიდებულება; narkotikebze damokidebuleba, 2. to have a serious problems; სერიოზული პრობლემების ქონა; seriozuli problemebis qona (CEGOLD) [8].

3. 7. In a month of Sunday

‘an interminable period of time’ [9].

In the first half of the nineteenth century, when this phrase was coined, the biblical injunction to labour for six days and rest on the Sabbath was taken more seriously and activities on Sundays were restricted, at least for the better-off. For some, the day seemed to drag by in tedium; a whole month of Sundays was an unimaginable stretch of time. In modern use, if a person says that something will not happen in a month of Sundays, it means that it will not happen in the foreseeable future.

But far more alluring to them were the temples we visited in Ponda, the heartland of Hinduism in this state. Here was more life and colour than they would find in a month of Sundays in a Renaissance church.

“The Daily Telegraph”, 1 April 2000.

She will never vote for you in a month of Sundays!

“The Guardian”, 12 June 2004.

On-line dictionary also defines the expression *in a month of Sundays* as the ‘infinite period of time; the whole century’: განუსაზღვრელად დიდი დრო, პერიოდი; მთელი საუკუნე; ganusazhvrelad didi dro, periodi; mteli saukune (CEGOLD) [8].

It is worth mentioning that there was a similar phrase in Georgian folk-tales, i. e. “a Sunday without Saturday”, indicating the time, which may never happen (უმაბათო კვირა; ushabato kvira). This expression is not registered in the Georgian dictionaries.

4. Results and Discussions

The appropriate definitions of some English idioms were found in the Georgian dictionaries in order to fill the informative gap between cultures.

The origins of some English idioms were investigated and observed how often they were used in the modern English publicist texts from “The Guardian”, “Fortune”, “The Scotsman”, “The Independent”, to observe whether they have preserved their original meanings or acquired some new ones

The importance of compiling the new bilingual dictionaries was underlined generally.

Some cases of not having the exact definition were found out and in result I am going to develop the mini bilingual dictionary of idioms, arranged in the alphabetical order.

5. Conclusions

1. The idea that some old idioms can no longer be found in everyday language did not appear true, since some antique words and phrases still are commonly used in the English language, especially we may meet them in everyday conversations and press articles.

2. Some of the idioms have lost some of the shades of meaning they once had, but their obsolete meanings are preserved in idiomatic phrases, which proves that phraseological stock is a reservoir of archaisms. That's why there was an urgent need of investigating the etymology of selected idioms.

3. Almost all the analyzed English idioms have adequate translations and interpretations in the Georgian dictionaries. If continued, such research studies as the present one will contribute to developing a new English-Georgian dictionary of idioms.

4. The research value is dictated by its outcome, namely, it will be the research not only of those idioms which have the adequate definitions in the Georgian dictionaries, but find out some cases of not having the right definition and in result to develop the mini bilingual dictionary of idioms. It can be assumed, that it will make a significant contribution to the development of lexicography in Georgia.

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