

Who Cooks Rushdie's Phraseological Geese?

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Once again, the odd locutions. There is mystery here.
(Salman Rushdie, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, 257)¹

Why breed geese (phraseological for that matter) in the first place and why keep them in a book, and leave translators to their own devices? Since the author chooses to be a hell of a transformer, language-twister, tongue-seeker, lexical inventor, keeper of idiosyncratic idioticons. *Word-gamester*. Player-on-words. We would like to be a fly on the wall (or on his knee and on ours simultaneously); the translator would like to have been, and should have, as sure as fate.

On close phraseological inspection, Salman Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* contains idioms galore. Canonical, modified, alluded to. Idioms in the broad meaning of the term: idioms proper, idiomatic similes and comparisons, proverbial sayings and proverbs. On nearly 600 pages, we encounter more than 300 phraseological units (to the best of my belief and knowledge and mathematical calculation), some of them used more than once. Due to this estimation, Rushdie can be legitimately labelled a writer with a phraseological difference. The idiomaticity of his language deserves an autonomous analysis (*His ships begin to shut up shop* (...), 298; *Vina, always the loudmouth, the thrower-down of gaunlets, will come out with it soon enough, and put a few patriotic noses out of joint*, 378; (...) *he would turn a*

¹ All fragments come from Salman Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. 2000, NY: Picador and its translation into Polish by Wojśław Brydak. *Ziemia pod jej stopami*. 2001, Poznań. The numbers represent the relevant pages in the respective books.

blind or at least a patched eye to her amours (...), 429/430, and such examples are legion)². However, I choose here to focus only on the phraseological aspects of the translation of his *tour de force* into Polish. With a critical eye cast here and there, I intend to show how easily the ground rifts beneath the translator's feet, and into what linguistic apertures he falls. Some of these orifices are opened by Rushdie's phraseo-lexicon, his ability to transfigure, gild the lily (necessarily), conceal his intentions, lead translators astray and, in consequence, to rise to the bait. Phraseologically speaking, Rushdie is the rule and at the same time an exception to it. He is and isn't translatable. He is and isn't lost in translation. Yet, he is always a challenge to the translator, when the former cuts the stone and the chips are down.

To follow Mrazović's³ (1998: 557) division of writers according to their use of phraseology, Rushdie belongs to at least two groups. He is a writer employing the phraseological apparatus to enhance his literary style, of which idioms become part and parcel; at the same time, he is one of those who see a language and its components as lending themselves easily to idiosyncratic transformation. He is a player on words and idioms *par excellence*, restricting himself to no particular linguistic elements as long as they serve his purpose of literary, and linguistic, creation. The naturally-posed question – why does the author employ idiomatic language in his work? – will not be answered here, a multilayered question not to be answered in a narrow study of his prose and with reference to translation alone. The functions of Rushdie's idioms are doubtless as numerous as their applications in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. Although I will try to inspect the phraseological bridges spun between the English and the Polish versions, I will have to refer to other aspects of the book and seek information beyond its linguistic structure, as it is essential that the phraseological component be seen as inseparable from the rest; this indivisibility is manifest in Rushdie's work. To remove one building block out of Rushdie's book and make it an object of scrutiny may seem to deprive *The Ground* of its unquestionable integrity. I will venture to do so without any fear, however, since the book will, I am certain, lose nothing of its solidity in the process.

A translator's task, when it comes to dealing with non-literal language in translation, starts with recognition, identification of, among other things, what I refer to

2 Cf. a preliminary discussion of Rushdie's phraseology in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* in the author's article *Phraseology in a literary text: forms and functions*, in print.

3 Mrazović P., 1998, *Phraseologismen als Übersetzungsproblem in literarischen Texten, Euphras '95. Europäische Phraseologie im Vergleich: Gemeinsames Erbe und kulturelle Vielfalt*, ed. Wolfgang Eismann, Bochum.

broadly as idioms, word-combinations in the form of phrases or sentences which have acquired their syntactic and lexical integrity by shedding the skin of individually meaningful elements. Idioms are traditionally seen as indivisible units of meaning in which semantic individuality gives way to semantic totality (*sweet tooth*, 66, 294; *up sticks*, 88; *close ranks*, 34, 116; *not come up to scratch* 132; *take sth on the chin* 144; *bring up the rear*, 177; *out of kilter*, 215; *burn one's boats*, 247; *cut no ice*, 292; *at a low ebb*, 315, to quote just a few of Rushdie's idioms as dictionary entries)⁴. The disintegration of the shape of idioms and their meanings leads to their seeming incompatibility with the text in which they are submerged. This feature of idioms is supposed to help a translator to single out what he or she feels, at face value, to be a free combination of words, when their meaning is taken literally. This recognition of a structure that violates the flow of words, sentences and their meanings is a prerequisite, *sine qua non*, for a translational process to get underway. If the identification fails, the translation of a given idiomatic fragment (meaning containing an idiom) is literal, the idiomaticity is lost and even if the translation does not sound odd, the semantic intentions are not communicated.

The Polish translation of *The Ground* regrettably manifests the failure on the part of the translator to notice idiomatic elements in the text. Let us look at some of the barkings-up-the-wrong-tree. Rushdie uses the idiom *go to hell* on pages 45 and 103: *he would often shake his sons awake to accuse them of moral turpitude, of going to hell, to the dogs, to pot* (45) and (...) *the kids went to hell at high speed* (103). In the Polish translation the idiom goes unnoticed and is rendered as *zstępowanie do piekła* (54) and *szły w piekło* (116). The English idiom *go to hell* – ‘undergo destruction’ (‘psuć się’) – is translated by means of the Polish phrases “zstępować do piekła”, “iść w piekło”, non-idiomatic structures, alluding perhaps to the Polish *pójść do piekła, skoczyć do piekła*, whose meanings have nothing to do with the English idiom's semantics.

In a passage about one of the characters' debts (165-6), Rushdie makes use of the idiomatic phrase *wipe sb's slate clean*, which means in the context of the passage (the idiom itself is polysemous to make matters worse) ‘erase one's debts’ (*umorzyc komuś/czyjeś dług*). The Polish equivalent of *the slate is wiped clean* rests in incomprehensibility on page 182 and reads as follows: “tabliczka łyeczyszczona na glanc”. What/which *tabliczka*, why *łyeczyszczona* and why *na glanc*? No idiom, no meaning.

4 The dictionaries consulted are listed in Literature.

Nor does the penny drop on page 232, where the idiom *chicken-feed* ('a paltry sum of money' – *psie pieniądze*), used in the sentence *Goat feed=chicken feed, you may scornfully conclude*, is unrecognized and translated as follows in the sentence: "Wzgardliwie można podsumować: tyle tej paszy dla kozy, **ile dla kury**" (251). *A stiff upper lip* in *he had acquired the stiff upper lip (...)* on page 410 is translated, or more correctly, transliterated as "napięta górna warga" ("napięta górna warga to właściwość nabyta", 434), though *a stiff upper lip* means 'hiding one's emotions, poker face' – *kamienna twarz, pokerowa twarz*.

On page 332 in a fragment on American national character Rushdie employs the idiom *wrap oneself in the flag* (*Well bang that drum, wrap me in the flag and call me Martha*), typical of American English, which means 'show excessive patriotic feelings'. The idiom is lost as the Polish translation offers a literal rendering "owińcie mnie we flagę" (352).

Other examples of the unrecognised idioms are the following: *Tall Vina's tall tale* (58) – "**koturnowej historii** koturnowej Winy" (może "wysoce (!) nieprawdopodobna historia Viny"). (67-8). *A tall tale* – 'a tale difficult to believe' ('nieprawdopodobna historia'). *Not to learn about rhythm or withdrawals, but to get old Piloo's goat* (235) – "Nie w celu studiowania rytmu i stosunków przerywanych, lecz żeby **dorwać kozy starego Pilu**" (254). *To get sb's goat* – 'irritate, annoy' ('grać komuś na nerwach'). *In the doorway, hat in hand, is blind Yul Singh* (321) – "W drzwiach, **z kapeluszem w ręce**, niewidomy Yul Singh" (341). *A cap-in-hand schoolboy* (453) – "jak uczeń **z czapką w garści**" (480). *Hat/cap in hand* – 'humble and respectful' ('ze spuszczoną głową, pokornie, uniżenie'). *Mend no fences* (294) – "**nie uszczelniajcie ogrodzeń**" (313). *Mend one's fences* – 'improve relations with sb' ('naprawiać, normować, uzdrowić stosunki'). To boot, *at the nadir of the struggle* (404) becomes "**w nadirze wojen**" (428) and *your skull and crossbones* (423) is "twa **czaszka i skrzyżowane piszczele**" (448). *At the nadir of sth* – 'at the critical point' ('w krytycznym punkcie, w najgorszym, najtrudniejszym momencie'); *a skull and crossbones* – 'pirates' flag' ('flaga piracka'). It beats the reader, doesn't it?

On top of that is *cook sb's/one's own goose*, with the meaning of 'destroy sb'/one own's chances of success'. Rushdie uses the idiom in the phraseological frame of goose idioms. A phraseological frame refers to a passage, whose language is shaped by the idioms used, which influence the imagery of the scene. The third paragraph on page 121 is dominated by the image of geese introduced by the idiom *not say boo to a goose* – 'be too shy to make any protest' – modified and adjusted to the context to yield (...) *it is getting harder by the moment to say boo to a goose* (the translation preserves the image of the bird in "coraz trudniej ofuknąć byle gęś")

(136). An additional Polish connotation of “stupidity” may distort the meaning of the English idiom) and finished off with the above adduced *cook sb's/one's own goose* in *they cook their own goose*, which in Polish translation is “najwyraźniej pieką własną gęś” (136). In the paragraph the goose is definitely cooked and fried, and so is the idiom and the message. By the way, *That goose of yours? It's fried* (157) is translated as “Cóż to za duby? Świeżo smalone” (173).

A phraseological frame is also a specific context which shapes the lexical fabric of (a part of) a text. For the translation of idioms, a non-idiomatic context should be also of some significance to the translator in preserving the other language's idiomaticity. A non-idiomatic context, contents, may significantly affect the choice of lexical (including idiomatic) elements. By way of example, in the chapter called ‘The Decisive Moment’, as Vina Apsara pays a one-day visit to Bombay, there is an image of her short stay there and Vina's sudden departure by plane. Later on in the same chapter (230), her visit is referred to as a *flying visit*, and no wonder. The translator chose to translate this phrase as *migawkowa wizyta* (249), collocational-ly and semantically acceptable, but in the context of the chapter, this flying visit's Polish equivalent might have been *przelotne odwiedziny*, *przelotna wizyta* – the “flying” (“przelotny”) character of the visit would have been preserved. Otherwise, the connection between the image that emerges from the context is neither continued nor reinforced in the Polish translation.

And it never rains but it pours. Failure to recognize an idiom may lead to distortion of meaning. The reader remains unaware of the loss of idiomaticity but is, more unfortunately, misled in his or her interpretation of the text. A good or bad example of this kind of meaning misrepresentation is the idiom *put in a good word for sb*, which means ‘say sth favourable in support of sb’ (close to *szepnąć komuś słówko na czyjś temat*, *wstawić się za kims u kogoś*). The English sentence *Put in a good word for me with my sons* (285) was translated as “Mógłbyś mi powiedzieć coś dobrego o synach” (304). Yet another idiom – *have money to burn*, ‘mieć pieniądze do wyrzucenia’⁵, in (...) *he befriended his victims, usually foolish young people with money to burn* (...) (136) – appears to have caused the translator difficulty understanding the whole structure. From the context we conclude that it was the young people that had money to burn, not Cyrus Cama, the Pillowman, who was penniless. The translator decided that the latter did the splashing-out, which totally distorts the meaning of the passage: “(...) jednał sobie przyjaźń ofiar, zwyczajnie mając młodych ludzi szastaniem pieniędzmi (...)” (152). Similarly, the Polish

5 After Skorupka's *Słownik frazeologiczny języka polskiego*.

translation of *pulling her grumpy bulldog face* (256) as “na buldogowatą twarz wciąga opryskliwy grymas” (275) tampers with the meaning of the English phrase. In one syllable, a whole catastrophe.

The strategy employed by the translator in the examples just discussed is a strategy of literalness, which results in no meaning, semantic obscurity, stylistic awkwardness and/or pseudo-idiosyncratic phraseology (“tabliczka ł/wyczyszczona na glanc”, “z czapką w garści”, “piec własną gęś”, “dorwać czyjegoś kozła”, “napięta górna warga”, “wciągać na twarz grymasy”). On the basis of the above examples, however, it is not easy to decide beyond doubt whether the translator omitted to notice idiomatic structures or chose to translate them literally into Polish. Whichever is true, the Polish phrases stand out as unrelated to the phraseological structure of the original and are incomprehensible to the Polish audience.

Having made first base, translators are left to their own devices as to which translation strategy to use in providing the idioms in the original text with their equivalents in a target language. To cut a long story short, the translator can choose to find an equivalent of the idiom in the target language, one that will semantically, stylistically and pragmatically correspond to the overall meaning expressed in the original (overlapping of concepts expressed by means of the same idiomatic imagery). That may be impossible if there is no synonymous idiom in the target language. If this is the case, the translator chooses either a paraphrase (with or without explication of the meaning) or its non-idiomatic equivalent. What does the translator credit is the first option – idiomatic equivalence (sometimes along with congruence). Other options are lesser evils. Omitting idioms in translation is no option. Such a deletion occurs in the case of the idioms *get sb's goat* ‘zirytować kogoś’ (66), *all and sundry* ‘wszyscy bez wyjątku’ (261), *stop sb in their tracks* ‘wprawić w osłupienie’ (372) (I consider the translation “Wina widzi przed sobą barierę, (...)” (393) as containing no reference to the idiom *stop sb in their tracks* whatsoever, so I disregard it, or maybe this is a way of rendering it?), whose equivalents are not to be detected in the relevant fragments of *Ziemia pod jej stopami* (76, 280, 393).

In *Ziemia pod jej stopami* we stumble over some literal translations of the English idioms which certainly recall the idiomatic nature of the original. In some cases, the translations convey the intended meaning of the original, but they give up on the idiomaticity. An illustration is the idiom *(to wait) in the wings*, used twice in (...) *we mortals must hang about in the wings* (341) (...) and *she can now wait in the wings* (...) (535). In the translations the passages read as follows: “my, śmiertelnicy, musimy **pętać się po kulisach**” (362) and “(...) potrafi teraz (...) **czekać za kuli-**

sami (...)" (565). There is no idiom "czekać za kulisami/ pętać się po kulisach" in Polish, though there does exist *czekać na swoje pięć minut*, *czekać na swoją kolejkę*. The lack of an idiom with the word *kulisa* in Polish, which would best correspond to the English one, resulted in the two open phrases, which cannot be perceived by a Polish reader as fixed idiomatic expressions. In this and other similar cases, the strategy was to translate the phrases literally, preserving the lexical equivalents of the original, which was required by the context in which the English idioms were used, to good advantage in a play on words. Let us take *a skeleton in the cupboard/closet*, of which "(żywy) szkielet w szafie" is by no means a suitable, let alone idiomatic, equivalent ("Zatem w szafie Ormusa znajdował się żywy szkielet", 153 and "powywlekał z rodzinnych szaf Ormusa wszystkie szkielety", 451). In both cases in the original (138, 426), the use of this idiom is motivated by the murderous context; yet, shouldn't the translator have avoided the risk of the phrases sounding alien to a Polish reader? The same risk was involved in rendering *one-horse town* (*pipidówa*, *wiocha zabita dechami*, *zadupie*) as "jednokonne miasto" (124, 382). Rushdie indulges in play on words each time he uses this idiomatic phrase (110, 360), making references to the word *horse* from the idiom (a phraseological frame again). Since the Polish equivalents do not use the same imagery, the translator decided to use a literal counterpart to save at least some of the play on words. To my mind, the literal translation meant, unfortunately, loss of the idiom and the word play altogether.

Literal translation, a conscious choice or a wide of the mark interpretation of the original, may be highly confusing when it is anything but illuminating. Literal or semi-literal translation of *jump on the bandwagon*, 'join in a fashionable activity' ('przyłączyć się'), in (...) *just another case of an opportunist schomo jumping on the unstoppable Vina bandwagon* (489), (Rushdie at his best as a transformer), as "skok do pociągu" in "(...) a może jako wyczyn kolejnego oportunistycznego bubka, **skok do wciąż pędzącego pociągu Winy?**" (517). (For readers unfamiliar with the characters of *The Ground*, Vina is a pop singer, a diva, not a waggoner, and most of the time she flies by plane). Readers lose their bearings but the translation has more in store for us. "Nielicznych a rozdzielonych wielkimi przestrzeniami?" (51) for *Few and far between?* (43) – 'nieliczni/e, rzadki/e'; "tknąć jakiś nerw" (402) for *touched a nerve* – 'dotknąć do żywego' (380); "wyciągnięta z rękawa niespodzianka" (507) for *a surprise up her sleeve* – 'niespodzianka trzymana w zanadrzu' (479), to name a few, but not far between.

Sometimes, nevertheless, almost word-by-word translation seems the only option to follow in order to retain the overall symbolic imagery in the book. This is

illustrated with the idiom *pull the rug out from under sb* – ‘suddenly withdraw support, leave sb to their own devices’ (*wycofać swoje poparcie*) used in modified forms a few times (121, 167, 313). In the translation the idiom is rendered as “wyciągnąć dywan spod nóg” (137) or “wyrwać dywan spod nóg” (184 and 332). The literal translation is justified here as long as it contributes to the image of the ground beneath the characters’ feet, dominant in the book.

In most cases the translator relies on Polish idioms and in most cases he does it to perfection. Only few fragments show inaccurate matching of the English idioms with their Polish equivalents. For instance, *get one’s just deserts* (197) cannot be translated as “dostać się komuś za zasługi” (215) but *dostać za swoje; tarred with the same brush* (434) does not mean ‘mierzony tą samą miarką’ (460) but *po jednych/tvch samych pieniądzach; when the chips are down* (310) is not synonymous with *kiedy kości zostaną rzucone* (329) but ‘w decydującym momencie’; *come apart at the seams* (451) does not cover the meaning of the Polish idiom *pękać w szwach* (478) but ‘ulegać rozkładowi, rozpadać się na kawałki, trząść się w posadach’; *throw cold water over sb/sth* – ‘make sb less enthusiastic/excited/sth less exciting’ (228, 359) does not correspond well to “zalać coś zimną wodą” (246) or “wylać kubek zimnej wody na kogoś” (380). Into the bargain, *Break a leg* (186) was rendered as “złam kark” (204) in Polish. Both are idioms but their meanings differ substantially. The former means ‘złam nogę’, the latter ‘get lost’. Ormus is turning in his grave.

In some instances the translator gives up on idiomatic translations although the Polish language has equivalent constructions in its phraseological stock. The idiom *lay waste to sth* (61) may be rendered as ‘siać spustoszenie’; the translator’s choice is simply *pustoszyć* (72); whereas *tie the knot* (417) could have been translated as ‘połączyć się, związać się węzłem małżeńskim’, instead of the nominal *ślub* (441). And *podbić* (286) was selected as the equivalent of the English *take sb by storm* (267), whilst *podbić czyjeś serce* would have been an phraseological choice. *Gawędzić* (485) is non-idiomatic equivalent of *shoot the breeze* (458), for which *uciąć sobie pogawędkę* could be suggested. All Polish counterparts are not phraseological units, they are one-word equivalents, which cannot obviously carry the stylistic character of the English expressions.

There is a group of Polish idioms or non-idiomatic equivalents in *Ziemia pod jej stopami* whose meanings are either broader or narrower than those of the English idioms. Due to their slight semantic incongruities, the translation luckily suffers non-sea changes. To show these differences between the two versions, I can quote the idiom *sleep rough* (*they weren’t carrying begging bowls or sleeping rough*,

415), which means more in English than the Polish *spać na ziemi* (“nie chodżyły z żebraczymi miseczkami, nie sypiały na ziemi,” 439). *Sleeprough* means ‘spać pod gołym niebem, najczęściej w złych, niekomfortowych warunkach.’ In Polish you can *spać na ziemi* but nowhere else; the Polish phrase does not cover other instances of sleeping rough. The same problem appears with the translation of the English *come of age* (*He waited for her to come of age ...*, 370; “Czekał, aż Wina dorosnie (...),” 391) and *a white elephant* (*On her say-so Ormus had bought that white elephant of an apartment (...)*, 397; “Z poduszczenia Winy Ormus kupił to baśniowe mieszkanie (...),” 420). In English the idiom *come of age* refers to someone that can be considered legally an adult; its best Polish equivalents are ‘ukończyć 18 lat’ (however culture-bound and fairly formal) or ‘osiągnąć pełnoletniość’. In the translation *dorastać* is too general, and does not necessarily refer to legal age implied in the context. Moreover, it does not show the multiword idiomatic character of *come of age*. *Baśniowe mieszkanie* – ‘de luxe, opulent apartment’ – does not convey the connotations of the English phrase, which means ‘sth costly, expensive and usually useless’; moreover, Rushdie uses the idiom in the phraseological frame of colours: in the same sentence he uses the idiom *in the red*, ‘to owe money to a bank, have an overdraft’, which justifies the use of the colour name in the first idiom. The colourful imagery is lost in translation. Walking on eggs was not taken into consideration in the case of the English *bad egg* (83), which becomes *ziółko* on page 96. One could say that *ziółko* is included in the meaning of *bad egg* – ‘a worthless person’ – but cannot convey exactly the same meaning. I believe *kompletne zero*, *śmieć* might hit a bull’s eye.

Sometimes the translator’s choices are manipulations of the Polish language, which results in structures that are perhaps close to the original semantically but of dubious stylistic merit. What’s more, they are equivalents of unmodified English idioms, which does not explain why the Polish version should contain collocational “variants.” In the sentence *Lose the east and you lose your bearings (...)* (176), the English idiom *lose one’s bearings* was translated as “postradać namiary,” (194) – (is this like *postradać zmysły?*) – why not *stracić orientację* (the title of the chapter is ‘Disorientations’ – “Dez-orientacje”). *My plan was to get as far off the beaten track as possible* (237) in *Ziemia pod jej stopami* becomes “Mój plan (...) polegał na tym, żeby dotrzeć jak najdalej od bitej drogi” (256). *Primo*, “od bitej drogi” does not mean *off the beaten track* (‘z dala od uczęszczanych tras/szlaków’). *Secundo*, the idiom is lost as there is no idiomatic or collocation equivalent in Polish to match it with. *Tertio*, it simply does not read well. In his struggle with the fragment *Wina had her hooks in me (...)* (83) (a modification of *get one’s hook into*

sb – ‘start controlling, influencing sb strongly’), the translator comes up with “Zdażyłem już połknąć haczyki zarzucone przez Winę (...)” (96). While *połknąć haczyki* is a suitable Polish idiom for the context, “zarzucić haczyki” is no longer a satisfying Polish collocation (what about *znaleźć się w zarzuconej przez kogoś sieci*?). There is yet one more translation I dare challenge, namely “dorobić się ostróg” in “(...) i przez ten czas naprawdę dorobiłem się ostróg (...)” (264) as an equivalent of (...) *and since then I’ve earned my spurs* (...) (245). Why does the translator refrain from using fixed collocations like *zdobyć, zyskać, pozyskać ostrogi* and by doing so stretch a collocational point? And why does he invent the idiom “zarabiać na masło do chleba” (338), allegedly an equivalent of *make one’s bread and butter* (318), if we are spoilt for choice by *zarabiać na chleb, zarabiać na kawałek chleba, zarabiać na życie/ utrzymanie*. And why does the Polish idiom *przechodzić nad czymś do porządku dziennego* undergo a transformation and become “przechodzić nad czymś do porządku” (“a my nauczymy się przechodzić nad nimi do porządku”, 373)?

Similarly alien is the Polish equivalent of the idiom *off the peg* – ‘available ready made.’ This idiom appears in the sentence *The rest of us get our personae off the peg* (...), (95), which becomes in Polish “Reszta z nas bierze tożsamości z haka, gotowe, jak konfekcję (...)” (108). Why not *z wieszaka* – ‘off the peg’?; *z haka* ‘off the hook’ is not idiomatic and puts a reader in mind of a butcher’s rather than a clothes shop (the English idiom originated in the latter). I am equally unconvinced by the translation of (...) *but the photography is alive & kicking* (...) (210) as “(...) a fotografia cała & zdrowa” (228). In English you can say that sth or sb is alive or kicking – ‘still exists’; in Polish, however, the phrase *cały i zdrowy* is restricted to human reference. No way of getting off the hook.

Another stumbling-block in *The Ground* is found in its proverbs. The difficulty with proverbs, as with the case of idioms, may arise through the culture-specificity of this genre of short forms. International proverbs (like, for example, *Mens sana in corpore sano* used in the book, page 48 and 52, and *mano a mano*, page 266, which remain the same in the translation, 57, 61, 285) do not cause problems in translation, neither should those which express universal concepts, though wrapped in culture-specific imagery. Rushdie incorporates in the text language-specific proverbs, like *Charity begins at home* (134), *Honesty is the best policy* (modified in *Honesty is not the best policy in life*, 213) and *A cat may look at a king* (modified in *Because a cat may look at a queen* (...), 385). As there are no semantic and formal equivalents in the target language of these proverbs, the translator chooses literal translations to preserve the meaning of the original, being aware of the loss of

word-play, as in the two last proverbs cited. In *Ziemia pod jej stopami* the proverb *Charity begins at home* becomes “(...) miłosierdzie zaczyna się w domu” (149); however, *charity* in this proverb means rather *miłość bliźniego*. The other two proverbs are translated as “Uczciwość to nie najlepsza postawa życiowa” (231) and “Bo kotu można patrzeć na królową (...)” (408). I wonder whether the last version can be easily understood by a Polish reader. ‘Každemu wolno popatrzeć na królową’ might have been semantically transparent in the context, close to the meaning of the original and in natural Polish, but, obviously in the given context, this translation would have violated the whole passage of the (tom)cat-queen image, for which a Polish equivalent would have had to be found.

The two English proverbs *Where there's will, there's a way* and *A word to the wise is enough* have Polish equivalents. In the book, however, these two English proverbs are used in shortened forms *Where there's a will, etc.* (...) (189) and *A word to the wise* (381), respectively, as it very often happens that a proverb in its full form is signalled by a fragment, as if to avoid sounding trite for too long a time. This is a conscious operation on the part of the writer and such should the translation be as well. For *Where there's will, etc.* the Polish version has “Chcieć to móc” (207), which is, by all means, a semantic equivalent of the English proverb but Rushdie's decision to truncate the proverb is lost in translation. The Polish proverb chosen is too short to cut it neatly in half, but there is another Polish proverb – *Dla chcącego nie ma nic trudnego* – which could be easily abbreviated to retain the original's play on the proverb (for example: *Dla chcącego ...*). The translator should have more than one string to his bow.

A word to the wise is rendered as “Słowo dla kogoś, komu nie trzeba dwa razy powtarzać (...)” (403). This translation lacks the characteristic brevity of proverbs as well as the brevity of Rushdie's shortening. But most importantly, it is not a “proverbial”, phraseological translation. The Polish equivalent of *A word to the wise is enough* is *Mądrej głowie dość dwie słowie*: a succinct proverb which lends itself to shortening.

An allusion to the proverb *An apple a day keeps a doctor away* in the form of *a bar of chocolate a day* (352) – “tabliczka czekolady dziennie” (374) – is lost since the latter line does not refer the Polish reader to any element in the stock of Polish fixed expressions, and remains to be interpreted only literally, without phraseological play on words.

There are idioms irretrievably lost in translation, either by a conscious process of elimination or negligence on the part of the translator or simply by choosing one of the lesser evils. To such lost phraseological pearls, apart from the ones I have di-

scussed so far, belong: *take up his willow cudgel* (27); *here, it's hot off the boat* (93); *because the cat had gotten his tongue* (263); *red in tooth and claw* (341); *most innocent insights about the birds and the bees* (397); *that was my narrowest escape* (418); *to wreak a little British havoc* (435); *I screamed infra-red murder* (442). I encourage the readers to find out for themselves how the above were translated.

I have essayed to highlight and analyse some of the pitfalls that Rushdie's phraseology presents in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. I have not discussed all of the idiomatic material collected and thus have not done credit to the translator, who managed most of the idioms with flying colours. (Most of the hard phraseological nuts were cracked). My humble intention was to remind translators of the unsolid ground beneath their feet and ask them to step carefully on it, especially when it is phraseological ground. Sitting in judgement on the translation, I intended to show what was misunderstood, distorted and irrevocably lost in translation of the book – the book which does our hearts good, not exclusively but to a large extent through the refined phraseology given with a free hand by the author. Come hell or high water, the idiomatic component in any book should be paid proper heed before the translator takes a bow.

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Kto miesza Rushdiemu frazeologiczne szyki?

Artykuł stanowi ocenę tłumaczenia frazeologizmów w książce Salmana Rushdiego *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* na język polski (*Ziemia pod jej stopami*). Autor zwraca uwagę na różne aspekty tłumaczenia frazeologizmów: ich nierozpoznanie w tekście oryginału, pominięcie frazeologizmów w tłumaczeniu, błędny dobór polskich odpowiedników, zwraca uwagę na tłumaczenie ram frazeologicznych oraz problemy ekwiwalencji na poziomie modyfikacji frazeologicznej.