

## “LET THIS CUP PASS FROM ME”: TRANSLATED MESSAGES OF NIKITA KHRUSHCHEV’S POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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**Abstract.** *Paremiias are known to be a significant rhetorical force in various modes of communication. They serve well in oral speech and in writing, coming to mind almost automatically as prefabricated verbal units. The article aims to take a look at how the proverbial texts with the symbolic component “cup” employed in Nikita Khrushchev’s political speeches, as well as in his memoirs, have been rendered into English. The corpus linguistics methodology is used to identify the expressions containing the word “cup.” In analyzing the selected idioms, Conceptual Metaphor Theory is employed as a theoretical framework. The research contributes to the study of phraseology and translation as it provides an insight into challenges caused by linguistic and cultural differences while transferring metaphorical expressions from one language and culture to another.*

**Key words:** *cup, metaphor, Nikita Khrushchev, translation*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

For centuries, the wisdom of paremiias has guided people in their social interactions throughout the world. The biblical proverbial texts date back to classical antiquity and early wisdom literature. As a widely translated book, the Bible had a major influence on the distribution of common proverbs since the various translators dealt with the same texts. Several dozen scriptural adages are thus current in the similar wordings in many European languages, and the metaphors with the constituent element “cup” are part of this international proverbial treasury.

According to the *Merriam–Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* (2003, 305), the word “cup” has four senses, and three of them are of interest for this article, namely: “(1) an open usually bowl-shaped drinking vessel; (2) a drinking vessel and its contents; (3) something that falls to one’s lot.” A cup is designed to be poured into, it also has the ability to pour out (Magennis, 1985, 517). The container (the cup) stands for its content (some kind of liquid, for example, wine). The cup (as a containing part), the content (as a contained part), and the act of drinking belong to the same physical domain (Dirven, 1985, 102).

The *cup* is widely recognized as a very strong symbol of Christendom. The reference of “чаша” [cup] can be a wine cup. In the contexts, where it refers to the cup of the Eucharist, it is strongly associated with some kind of a visual image or mental picture. *Strong’s Greek Concordance* provides the following metaphorical meaning of the word “potérion” [wine cup]: “one’s lot of experience, whether joyous or adverse, divine appointments, whether

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favorable or unfavorable, are likened to a cup which God presents one to drink: so of prosperity and adversity” (*Strong’s Greek Concordance*, accessed on September 3, 2019, <https://biblehub.com/str/greek/4221htm>). As pointed out by Bosman (2019, 5), the symbol of the cup is “the end product of a cognitive process that involves both metaphor and metonymy and that carries with it a whole chain of associations, overlaid by a rich and ancient cultural tradition that transcends a specific language.”

It is important to mention, however, that the number of biblical proverbs in European languages (as well as their interpretations) is not identical. Much depended on the linguistic skills of the translators. Even though metaphors are special kinds that do not appeal to creativity, but they are instead already crystallized in the language, there is no need to say that translators face certain difficulties, while rendering scriptural metaphors from one language to another. Translation of idiomatic expressions is itself often conceptualized using a conduit metaphor, in which the translator is expected to extract meaning from a source text and transfer it into a target text. “An interpreter must have a good knowledge of the idioms of the two languages as well as take decisions to the best of his/her knowledge and taste” (Kuzmin, 1977, 9). The importance of adequate translation can hardly be overestimated.

## 2. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Metaphor translatability and transfer methods have been extensively studied within the discipline of Translation Studies (Newmark, 1988; Vinogradov, 2001). The cognitive shift in metaphor research (Lacoff, Johnson, 2003) has, by focusing on the level of thought instead of on the level of words, opposed the Aristotelian view of metaphor as a linguistic decoration, an ornament, and mere device of poetic imagination. The cognitive approach makes it clear that translatability is not only a matter of words but that is also inextricably linked to the conceptual systems of the source and target culture, since one’s conceptualization of reality depends on the language one speaks.

Translating by target language equivalents seems to be the most productive way of making the rendering of paremias figurative. The presence of figurativeness in translation of proverbs helps to communicate the necessary emotive evaluation. When using this method, translators have to observe that an equivalent is properly selected, i.e. the chosen equivalent should be able to convey such target language idiom’s indices for interpretation as meaning, usage, overtones, and style. Similar paremias, irrespective of their language material, are concrete image variants of typical situations, the latter playing the role of invariants with respect to concrete proverbs. It is a common view that translation difficulties usually arise in the cases when there happens to be no corresponding idiom in the target language that can be used for rendition, or when the existing “ready-made” equivalent cannot be employed as it is because its innovated usage in speech may convey a specific additional meaning. However, as it appears, this issue is even more complicated in relation to the translation of the idiomatic expressions with the basic component “cup.”

The lexeme “patience” has the status of a concept for Orthodox consciousness. It refers to the universal representation of man about himself in society and in nature (Koreneva, 2012). The image of the cup as a container for patience is manifested in the Russian phraseological unit with a modified emotional overtone “Чаша [терпения] переполнена” (lit. “One’s cup [of patience] runs over”). This expression conveying an image of an overflowing cup is used

in the Russian (Synodal) version of the Bible to emphasize that somebody has received so many benefits that he/she cannot contain them all. The Russian idiom “Чаша [терпения] переполнена” has acquired a different meaning: it is said when someone cannot tolerate a succession of irritations, troubles, etc. any longer. This proverbial saying has general currency throughout the country (Mokienko, Nikitina, 2008, 731). Although the image of a cup that is overflowing is presented in the English version of the Scripture, too (“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over” [Psalm 23, 5]), in English, this image has never come to be associated with patience that reached its limits (Adamiya et al. 2019b, 199). The expression “My cup is running over/overflowing” is cited in different environments when one feels overcome because many good things have happened to them. There is still a great deal of debate over if the Russian expression “чаша терпения переполнена” has changed its meaning under the influence of another biblical phrase “Да минует меня чаша сия” [Let the cup pass from me] and, as a result, it has gained a negative connotation.

One more Russian idiom that is “капля, переполнившая чашу [терпения]” (lit. “it is the last drop that makes the cup [of patience] run over”) takes on the metaphorical meaning of cause and effect and indicates that the final (often minor) aggravation when added to existing troubles, makes the situation unbearable, forcing someone to lose their patience. As mentioned previously, in English, the image of the cup that runs over has a positive connotation. To make a reference to a process by which cataclysmic failure is achieved by seemingly inconsequential addition, a different image is employed — an image of an overloaded animal being given one slight additional weight: “the straw that broke the camel’s back” (Adamiya et al. 2019a, 162). This English idiom comes from an Arabic proverb about how a camel is loaded beyond its capacity to move or stand.

It is true that paremias are flexible and adaptive to new contexts and interpretations because their metaphorical language is not limited to specific situations. The meaning of the proverb is thus very much dependent on the contexts in which it appears, and, therefore, it should be analyzed in accordance with it. Paremias contain plenty of truth, wisdom, and knowledge which they express in a few colorful words. The message of the proverb is communicated quickly and to the point, making it a very useful tool in political discourse.

One of the features that determines a politician’s manner in which he/she makes speeches and creates a certain emotional ground is the aphoristic character (i.e. idioms, proverbs, metaphors, etc.) which is notable for the novelty and originality of thought. Moreover, the preference for metaphorical paremias lies in the fact that they can be employed in a figurative or indirect way. In a number of celebrated books, internationally acknowledged paremiologist Wolfgang Mieder provided much evidence that some well-known erudite English-speaking public figures were masterful employers of proverbs in their political speeches as well as in their writings (Mieder, 2005; Mieder 2014). There is some scholarship on the use of proverbs by such Soviet/Russian leaders as Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin, and Mikhail Gorbachev (McKenna, 2000; Meščerskiĭ, 1981).

While Nikita Khrushchev’s inclination towards the employment of paremias has been noticed and paid some attention to (Burlatsky, 2008; Dautova, 2011; Taubman, 2003), there is merely a very short study that refers to his use of proverbial phrases illustrated by textual examples (Carter, 2015a; Carter, 2015b), and the metaphorical matters with a special focus on the use and the translation of the “cup-phrases” have not been explored yet. Thus, this gap in the research needs to be filled. The paper provides a comparative cross-linguistic analysis of the arsenal of the metaphorical conceptions of *cup* in the Soviet leader’s political rhetoric.

### 3. CORPUS AND METHODOLOGY

In the present research, metaphors for *cup* were examined in the parallel corpus, i.e. “a corpus that contains source texts and their translations” (McEnery, Xiao, 2007, 20), which includes the Russian speeches by Soviet leader Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev (1894–1971) delivered in different settings in the USA in 1959–1960 (Khrushchev, 1961) and his memoirs (Khrushchev, 2016a; Khrushchev, 2016b) along with their translations in the English language (*Khrushchev in New York*, 1960; *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, 2004; *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, 2006; *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, 2007). According to McEnery and Xiao (2007, 18), such corpora can give new insights into the languages compared – insights that are not likely to be noticed in studies of monolingual corpora; they can be used for a range of comparative purposes and can increase our knowledge of language-specific, typological and cultural differences, as well as universal features; they can be used for a number of practical applications, for instance, in language teaching and translation.

After compiling a parallel corpus, the original texts and their translations were searched for the target phraseological units with the symbolic component “cup.” Then the subcorpus of text fragments with the phraseological forming element was compiled, and each example was analyzed in terms of conceptual metaphors and their possible linguistic equivalents.

### 4. ANALYSIS

#### 4.1. Traditional proverbial expression “Чаша переполнена”

It is commonly assumed that proverbs activate culturally established and accepted mental schemata. In English, the idiom “the cup runs over” may be used in a non-religious discourse but always with the definite allusion to the Bible text that equates an abundant life with an overflowing cup, a potent image in a semiarid world. As can be seen from the examples given below, the Russian proverbial text “Чаша переполнена” (where the contained part of the metaphoric vessel can be extracted from the context) is unquestionably pertinent to the cases dealt with the tragic situations when the cup stands for destruction of human lives. This expression is thought not to be difficult for Russian native speakers to process and, though it involves a metaphor, it is not in need of any further explanation. However, the suggested translation might raise a question about the relevant mental schema of the metaphor being activated in the minds of the readers of the English-speaking world. It looks like this is the occasion when the corresponding phrase of the target language is markedly different from the original one, i.e. the meaning of the Russian proverbial expression used in the given context and the meaning of the equivalent “the cup overflows” do not coincide. But there is still a possibility that recipients could understand the accompanying overtones of the Russian transferred metaphor because of the image and the context:

*Evidently Beria foisted off some new material against Voznesensky, and thus when “the cup had overflowed,” Stalin ordered him arrested. (Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev, 2006, 32)*

*Видимо, Берия подбрасывал какие-то новые материалы против Вознесенского, и когда чаша переполнилась, Сталин распорядился арестовать его. (Khrushchev, 2016a, 530)*

*But she was shown that she was not trusted. She is an intelligent woman and she understood that right away. This political distrust for her as the daughter of Stalin caused **the cup to run over**. And so she plunged into the maelstrom of émigré existence, deprived herself of her homeland and parted with her children and friends. It is very, very sad. (Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev, 2006, 75)*

*Но ей показали, что она находится под подозрением. Умная женщина сразу поняла это. Политическое недоверие к ней, дочери Сталина, **переполнило чашу**. И она бросилась в омут эмигрантской жизни, лишила себя родины, рассталась со своими детьми и друзьями. Очень, очень печально. (Khrushchev, 2016a, 559)*

#### 4.2. Common Russian proverbial text “Чаша терпения переполнена”

It is known that a lexical innovation is able to specify the phrase’s meaning. The same can be said about the English proverbial analogues where such specifying may result in giving the English texts certain additional meanings they “lack” as equivalents in order to make these paremias adequate to the Russian proverbial sayings that should be translated. The component “patience” (as a contained part) placed in a metaphorical context of the following translated passages reflects the ideas Khrushchev attempts to communicate to his readers: the unbearable physical sufferings from the cold, while describing the events of the battle of Stalingrad in 1942 (in the former case); and the unwillingness to turn a blind eye to the alarming news from one of the countries of the Socialist Commonwealth in 1960 (in the latter situation). Obviously, such a translation might help the audience to adequately process the message and to somehow agree to the negative overtone of the modified English proverb.

*I was shivering from the cold despite the burka I was wrapped in. Popov was, too. **The cup of our patience was running over**. (Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev, 2004, 453)*

*Я дрожал от холода в бурке. Попов тоже. **Чаша нашего терпения переполнилась**. (Khrushchev, 2016a, 334)*

*When we found out what was going on in Albania, **the cup of our patience overflowed**, and we decided that measures had to be taken. (Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev, 2007, 479)*

*Когда мы узнали, что творится в Албании, **чаша нашего терпения переполнилась**, и мы решили, что надо принимать какие-то меры. (Khrushchev, 2016b, 83)*

#### 4.3. Transformation of the proverbial saying “Чаша терпения переполнена”

There is now a significant body of research that indicates that paremias only make sense in a given situation or context, and it is always possible to choose the proverbial text that happens to suit it best. In case if it is challenging to find particular proverbs for the right occasions, it has become customary to simply change existing paremias through additions or alterations of certain words. These manipulated proverbs are called anti-proverbs (Mieder, 2012). In the Russian and English passages below, one can see that this time distrust is the thing with which “Stalin’s cup” is filled:

*That’s why the people in his [Stalin] inner circle were there only temporarily. As long as he trusted them to some degree, they continued to exist physically and do their work. But as he lost trust in them, he started “watching them more closely.” Then **the***

*cup of distrust toward one or another of these people who had worked with him would overflow, and their turn would come to meet a sorry end; they would join the ranks of the departed. (Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev, 2006, 84)*

*Вот почему в его [Сталина] окружении все были временными людьми. Покамест он им в какой-то степени еще доверял, они физически существовали и работали. А когда переставал верить, то начинал “присматриваться”. И вот чаша недоверия в отношении того или другого из людей, которые вместе с ним работали, переполнялась, приходила их печальная очередь, и они следовали за теми, которых уже не было в живых. (Khrushchev, 2016a, 564)*

#### 4.4. Standard proverbial expression “Да минует меня чаша сия”

When the proper paremia is chosen for a particular situation, it is bound to fit perfectly, becoming an effective formulaic strategy of communication. The expression “да минует меня чаша сия”/ “let this cup pass from me” (Kunin, 1967, 220) comes from the Gospel. For the church, the cup has come to present the central events of Christianity, the death and resurrection of Christ. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ returns to the fundamental meaning of the cup as a representation of fate. In his prayer, the cup symbolizes the pain, degradation, and death that will be required of him. He prays that the cup might pass undrunk, but it is Jesus’ fate to drain it to its dregs. In his memoirs, the Soviet leader of the “thaw period” draws on this metaphor to depict the situation when “the cup” was used to indicate Stalin disfavor in case of Khrushchev’s unsuccessful report on the topic he was not profound in. But due to some circumstances, Khrushchev was lucky not to make it. It is interesting to note that, according to Strobe Talbott, this saying was “a favorite Khrushchevism” (Khrushchev, 1970, 257). As for the translation, there is no doubt about its adequacy (Kunin, 1967, 220):

*I was glad that **this cup had passed from me**. Andrei Andreyevich [Andreev] was confirmed as the reporter for the Central Committee on this question at the plenum. (Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev, 2006, 9)*

*Во всяком случае, я был доволен, что меня миновала чаша сия. И Андрей Андреевич [Андреев] был утвержден докладчиком от ЦК на Пленуме. (Khrushchev, 2016a, 564)*

#### 4.5. Alteration of the proverbial text “Да минует меня чаша сия”

As it was noted above, proverbial expressions can function in the speech with their form and meaning undergo occasional individual changes. One further example may serve as an illustration of how it works in the context where the cup was employed as the container for people’s fears to be arrested and killed in the dark age of Stalin’s repressions. The chosen variant of translation corresponds to the altered proverbial text of the original:

*I am also present in the photograph. A woman named Vera sent me this photograph. She was also serving in the political department of that army and is a pensioner now. I am very pleasant that she is alive and well, although I don’t know how **the cup of repression passed from her** during the “meat grinder” that chewed up our society in the 1930s. (Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev, 2006, 99)*

*Я тоже присутствую на фотографии. Мне прислала ее сослуживица по политотделу армии Вера, сейчас пенсионерка. Я очень доволен, что она жива и*

здоровая, хотя и не знаю, как **минула ее чаша репрессий**, когда в 30-е годы была общественная мясорубка. (Khrushchev, 2016a, 574)

#### 4.6. Traditional paremia “Капля переполнившая чашу терпения”

The special value of proverbs in argumentation lies in the fact that they enable one to bring discursive, linguistic, and cognitive strategies into play. In his speech “A Reply on the Question of the Structure of UN Governing Bodies” conducted on October 3, 1960, Nikita Khrushchev severely criticized Dag Hammarskjöld, the U.N. Secretary-General, for being pro-American as well as his insufficient efforts towards the decolonization of Africa. The speaker cited the proverb “последняя капля, которая переполнила чашу терпения” (Mokienko, Nikitina, 2010, 275). He did it in order to add some expressiveness and colloquial color to his negative evaluation of Hammarskjöld’s activities in the Congo, thus indicating the limit of his controllable vexation. Translation by means of using the English two-part proverbial equivalent by parts is observed in this case: where the first part is the beginning of the traditional adage “it is the last straw that breaks the camel’s back” (Wilkinson, 1993, 392) and the second part is a significantly varied version of it utilized by the phrase “exhaust one’s patience” (Macura, 1999, 3440). Though the contaminated English translation of the Russian idiom seems to be disputable in some way, the translator has definitely managed to make the rendition figurative and evaluating.

*Mr. Hammarskjöld has never been objective toward socialist countries; he has always defended the interests of the United States of America and other countries of monopoly capital. The developments in the Congo, where he played a most unseemly role, were but **the last straw that has exhausted our patience**. (Khrushchev in New York, 1960, 131)*

*Господин Хаммаршельд всегда был необъективен к социалистическим странам: он всегда защищал интересы Соединенных Штатов Америки и других стран монополистического капитала. События в Конго, где он сыграл просто скверную роль, — то лишь **последняя капля, которая переполнила чашу терпения**. (Khrushchev, 1961, 131)*

## 5. CONCLUSION

The analyzed illustrations do not only confirm the very existence of biblical proverbial texts with the symbolic component “cup” in Nikita Khrushchev’s political discourse, but also inform of the speech situations where these idiomatic expressions (both in cases of their common and occasional use) have been employed. As it appears, within the cognitive semantic framework, conceptual metonymy (where the source, container in the analyzed instances, the cup stands for the target that which is contained) provides us with the route to the negative experiences (physical and emotional) in which the people living in the Soviet era have been immersed due to different historical and political events.

The English renditions of the Russian contextualized examples demonstrate various means of their realization in the target language: translating by equivalents, utilizing lexical innovations by playing additions, as well as using the components of the translated paremias. It has been found out that in order to make the English proverbial texts adequate, in the cases when the target equivalent does not convey the meaning of the Russian idiom,

the lexical additions have been applied. In view of the findings, it becomes evident that all modified “cup” metaphors have been rendered into English by the translators’ equivalents.

The discussed cases clearly show the challenges arising in connection with the translation of the “cup” metaphors from the original into the English language due to the obstacles, cultural and linguistic. The English analogues, though deriving from the same source and more or less coinciding literally, are used in a different figurative sense as well as with different connotations compared to their Russian counterparts. Therefore, translators should be aware of it and exercise great care in using the English metaphorical “cup” while rendering the Russian proverbial text with the same constituent element as it is clear that the emotive–and–evaluating content of the information must not be ignored and should be transferred into the target language as well to make the translation sound proverbial. Considering the fact that the biblical paremias with the symbolic component “cup” reveal not only commonalities but also dissimilarities based on culture–related specific features, this area certainly demands further attention.

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