

UDC 811.111:811.161.2]`25`42

DOI <https://doi.org/10.32782/modernph-2025.4.23>

STRATEGIES OF TRANSLATING PRECEDENT PHENOMENA AS A TYPE OF LANGUAGE GAME

Pieshkova Olha Hennadiivna,

PhD in Philology, Associate Professor

Mykola Lukash Translation and Interpreting Studies Department,

School of Foreign Languages

V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-3616-7852

The present paper examines the precedent phenomenon of as a type of language game within popular scientific discourse. Precedent phenomena, in particular precedent names, expressions, and allusions, can perform a ludic function provided that they are simultaneously manifestations of semantic or contextual incompatibility and serve as means of discourse clarification. In this case, their use not only enlivens the text, but also performs a password function – it helps identify the author as belonging to a particular social or cultural group and appeals to the target audience's similar experience. The article proposes a classification of six strategies for translating precedential phenomena: direct translation, partial lexical equivalent, functional equivalent, inclusion of a comment in the text, use of a footnote, and removal of the precedent element. Particular attention is paid to cases of transformation or loss of symbolic meaning as a result of adaptation to the target culture. The author also emphasizes the importance of maintaining a balance between equivalence and adequacy of translation within the framework of intertextual transfer, especially when it comes to character names, allusions to cultural texts, popular songs, or literary works. Thus, the article not only offers a typology of translation strategies, but also formulates important conclusions about their effectiveness from the perspective of translation studies, pragmatics, and cognitive linguistics. The six translation strategies include the following ones: 1. using direct (dictionary) translation; 2. choosing partial lexical equivalents; 3. choosing indirect (functional) equivalents; 4. implementing contextual addition (translator's comment directly into the context); 5. implementing external addition (translator's comment in the form of a footnote at the end of the book or chapter); 6. deletion. The practical value of the study lies in the fact that it can be used to improve teaching methods for literary and popular science translation, as well as serve as a basis for further research in the field of intercultural communication.

Key words: language game, precedent phenomena, translation adequacy, translation equivalence, translation strategies, translation transformation.

Пєшкова Ольга. Стратегії перекладу прецедентних феноменів як виду мовної гри

У статті розглядається феномен прецедентних явищ як різновиду мовної гри в межах науково-популярного дискурсу. Прецедентні феномени, зокрема прецедентні імена, вислови та алюзії, можуть виконувати лудичну функцію за умови, що вони водночас є проявами семантичної або контекстуальної несумісності та служать засобами вираження дискурсу. У такому випадку їх використання не лише пожсавлює текст, а й виконує парольну функцію – допомагає ідентифікувати автора як належного до певної соціальної або культурної групи та звертається до аналогічного досвіду цільової аудиторії. У статті запропоновано класифікацію шести стратегій перекладу прецедентних феноменів: прямий переклад, частковий словниковий відповідник, функційний відповідник, включення коментаря до тексту, використання виноски та вилучення прецедентного елементу. Окрему увагу приділено випадкам трансформації або втрати символічного навантаження внаслідок адаптації до цільової культури. Автор також наголошує на важливості дотримання балансу між еквівалентністю та адекватністю перекладу в межах інтертекстуального перенесення, особливо коли йдеться про імена персонажів, алюзії на культурні тексти, популярні пісні чи літературні твори. Таким чином, стаття не лише пропонує типологію перекладацьких стратегій, а й формулює важливі висновки щодо їх ефективності з позицій перекладознавства, прагматики та когнітивної лінгвістики. Шість стратегій

перекладу включають такі: 1. використання прямого (словникового) перекладу; 2. вибір часткових лексичних відповідників; 3. вибір непрямих (функціональних) відповідників; 4. введення контекстуального доповнення (коментар перекладача безпосередньо в тексті); 5. введення зовнішнього доповнення (коментар перекладача у вигляді примітки в кінці книги або розділу); 6. вилучення. Практична цінність дослідження полягає в тому, що воно може бути використане для удосконалення методик викладання художнього та науково-популярного перекладу, а також слугувати основою для подальших досліджень у сфері міжкультурної комунікації.

Ключові слова: мовна гра, прецедентні феномени, перекладацька адекватність, перекладацька еквівалентність, перекладацькі трансформації, стратегії перекладу.

Introduction. Researchers increasingly point to the variety of expressive means of language play used by authors in scientific and popular science discourse, among which we would like to pay special attention to precedent phenomena. Before proceeding to consider the peculiarities of the translation reproduction of precedent phenomena, we should provide their definition and brief description (including classifications relevant to translation analysis) and find out on what grounds precedent phenomena can be considered a type of language game.

Under what conditions can precedent phenomena be considered a type of language play? In our opinion, precedent phenomena fulfill the ludic function when they meet the two main criteria of language play: (1) they are a manifestation of incompatibility and (2) they serve as a means of discourse expression. If we talk about popular science discourse, it is obvious that these two criteria will be met by those precedent-setting phenomena that are not thematically related to scientific information and, due to their unusual nature, attract increased attention to the context in which they are used. In the terms of cognitive linguistics, we could assume that precedent phenomena become playful when they appeal to such fragments of reality that, although they seem incompatible with the kind of discourse in which they are actualized, in fact have quite close, non-obvious symbolic and metaphorical connections with it. It follows that the preservation of these connections in the context of interlingual and intercultural transfer is the key to successful translation of precedent phenomena, and thus to translation victory.

For example, precedent names borrowed from popular culture would be incompatible with the scientific style of presentation, but at the same time they are well known to the potential recipient, who can easily «grasp» and interpret the symbol they represent. Our hypothesis is also confirmed by Irena Snikhovska, who writes that «in PLPs [precedent ludic phenom-

ena], functional paradoxicality is manifested in a new associative processing and representation of a particular linguistic or extra-linguistic knowledge» [1, p. 137]. Accordingly, it can be assumed that precedent phenomena in a popular science text, in parallel to the ludic function, also realize the password function, the essence of which is that the precedent phenomena used by the author can be understood only by members of «their» social group. Accordingly, the presence of a number (and possibly a whole corpus) of precedent phenomena in the usage of a certain social group (age, professional, class, etc.) not only emphasizes their communicative behavior, but also contributes to the formation of a sense of group identity.

The aim of the present paper is to analyze the strategies of reproducing precedent phenomena, which, according to our observations, also have similarities to the strategies of reproducing other types of translation difficulties.

Research. (1). The first is the strategy of direct (dictionary) translation, in which the use of a dictionary (usual) equivalent of a precedent phenomenon allows preserving the effect of precedent and, accordingly, language play. The use of this strategy ensures both a high level of equivalence and adequacy of translation.

Let's take an example:

*Then take someone from the 1950s and move him **Austin Powers** – style into the present day* [2, p. 34].

*Потім візьмімо когось із тих п'ятдесятих років і закиньмо його в стилі **Остіна Паверса** в наші дні* [3, с. 34].

In this case, the name of a character in a series of comedy action movies, the super spy Austin Powers, is precedent-setting. The symbolism of this precedent name is gestalt in nature, as Austin Powers can be associated with various characteristics: overconfidence, sexuality, or can be perceived as a spy or playboy. The context makes it clear that the image is used here to symbolize time transfer (as you know, Austin Powers was

first frozen, and forty years later he was thawed out and returned to service).

Due to the great popularity of these films, the precedent name has become widely used worldwide and does not require any additional comments or substitutions in the English-Ukrainian translation.

As part of this strategy, let's also consider the following example:

A world in which the bankers are rescued but all other debtors, including governments, are not: this is the worst of all possible worlds. In fact it is a sterile world in which the economy produces only instability, failure and the grapes of wrath [4, p. 47].

Світ, у якому рятують жменьку банкірів, а велику решту боржників, включно з урядами великих країн, – ні, найгірший з усіх можливих світів. Насправді, це безплідний світ, який продукує лише нестабільність, занепад і грона гніву [5, с. 48].

The phrase «*grapes of wrath*,» which the author italicizes as if to draw our attention to its precedent-setting nature, is actually the title of John Steinbeck's «most famous American novel,» *The Grapes of Wrath*. Published in 1939, the novel describes the wanderings of a farm family forced by the Great Depression to leave their homeland and set out on a journey in search of a better life. Thus, the phrase *grapes of wrath* becomes symbolic: «For Steinbeck, 'grapes of wrath' represent the growing anger in the souls of oppressed migrants. This symbol appears at the end of chapter 25, in which the author describes how large farms harvest crops, including fruits such as grapes. Harvesting is dehumanized because the process involves destroying food instead of allowing poor people to eat it. Steinbeck takes the image of a bunch of grapes and turns it into a symbol for migrants. As large farms harvest grapes to turn them into wine, a symbolic harvest called the grapes of wrath grows in the souls of hungry people watching the process.»

The translator reproduces the precedent-setting title with its Ukrainian equivalent, since the novel has long been translated into Ukrainian. The absence of any commentary signals that the translator and editor believe that the symbolism of the precedent statement should be fully understood by the Ukrainian-speaking recipient.

(2). The second is the strategy of partial dictionary matching, in which the original precedent

phenomenon is replaced by a target shortened version. As a rule, such a reduction is caused by cultural peculiarities, although it allows to fully preserve the effect of precedent and does not lead to a decrease in the level of intensity of the language game.

Let's take an example:

But who can prevent the unstoppable drive to mechanize production from causing crisis after crisis, condemning generation after generation of workers to underemployment or even fully fledged unemployment? Who can appear as the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come and warn the Ebenezer Scrooges of our mechanizing world of the future they are working towards? [4, p. 90].

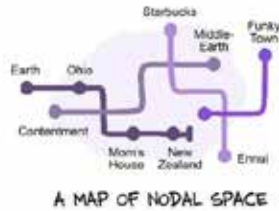
*Але ж хто може запобігти нестримному прагненню до механізації, продукуванню кризи за кризою, приріканню цілих поколінь на низький рівень життя або безробіття? Хто може явитися приви́дом майбутнього Різдва всім **скруджам** на планеті та попередити їх про механізований світ, над створенням якого вони зараз працюють?* [4, с. 90].

In the above passage, the name *Ebenezer Scrooge* is precedent-setting, and it is also used in the plural, turning it into an antonym, which confirms the presence of a symbolic meaning. Ebenezer Scrooge, a character in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, is known for many negative traits, but above all for his greed. It was greed that became the basis of the precedent. From the context, we understand that the author uses the name to refer to entrepreneurs who seek to generate large incomes through mechanization, condemning ordinary people to hunger and unemployment.

The translation retains the surname, which is better known to Ukrainian readers, and removes the name Ebenezer, perhaps to avoid creating an additional interpretive burden. Another possible reason for the deletion is that the name Scrooge was once borrowed by cartoonists for the character in the Duck Tales cartoon series, the anthropomorphized billionaire duck Scrooge McDuck. As you can see, both characters share only a part of the name, which was reproduced by the translator.

(3) The third is the strategy of indirect (functional) correspondence, in which the original precedent phenomenon is replaced by another (contextual or occasional) one that is more understandable to representatives of the target culture and is able to preserve the symbolism of

the original and, accordingly, the language play associated with it. In essence, the implementation of this strategy is associated with the technique of translation compensation. Let's look at an example:



[6, p. 120]



[7, с. 120]

In the original illustration, we have the nodal elements of a map of space – places that are important to each individual. One of these places is *Funky Town*, a neighborhood in Atlanta that is a symbol of the unity of representatives of different cultures, social backgrounds, and interests. In addition, a place on the map, such as *Middle-Earth*, the central continent of J.R.R. Tolkien's world, is precedent-setting, symbolizing a fictional but familiar universe, something fabulous but real at the same time.

In the target version, the translator replaces *Funky Town* with *Troyeshchyna*, probably intending to use a place name better known to Ukrainian readers as a functional equivalent. Although, in our opinion, *Funky Town* and *Troyeshchyna* have in common only the fact that they are both districts of large cities, they have completely different symbolic meanings: while *Funky Town* denotes a community of very different people, *Troyeshchyna* rather stereotypically denotes the most disadvantaged neighborhood. At the same time, it must be admitted that precedent name *Funky Town* would indeed be much more difficult for the Ukrainian reader to understand. In any case, we consider the symbolic meaning of the original to have been lost, and

where there should have been a translation victory, we have an obvious defeat.

At the same time, the strategy of direct correspondence was used by the translator for the precedent name *Middle-Earth*. The used equivalent «Middle-Earth» is an established translation in the Ukrainian language, which is definitely familiar to readers who are familiar with J.R.R. Tolkien's works directly or, perhaps, to a much wider audience of films based on his works.

(4). The fourth strategy is to add a translator's commentary, written in context. The strategy is used when the translator or another commissioner (in Hans Fermeier's terminology) of the translation believes that a case name used in the original may be unfamiliar or unclear to readers, but a short commentary is sufficient to ensure greater understanding.

Let's take an example:

*We have a complete and beautiful portrait of the Tudor tavern in Shakespeare because the Boar's Head Tavern in East Cheap is where **Falstaff** spends most of his time and all his money. People often get **Falstaff** wrong. They think that he and his companions are the poorest of the poor and the lowest of the low* [8, p. 92].

*Завдяки Шекспіру маємо повне та барвисте зображення трактиру періоду тюдорів, адже багато часу **Фальстаф (комічний персонаж творів Шекспіра – прим. перекладача)** проводив саме у трактирі «Голова кабана», що в Істчипі. Люди часто помиляються щодо **Фальстафа**, вважаючи, що він та його компаньйони – найбідніші з усіх* [9, с. 92].

The name of Falstaff, the hero of William Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Henry IV*, is presented in the original without comment, as it is a well-known symbol of a drunkard for all Britons, who, at first glance, is a kind man who likes to show off his sense of humor, but is actually only interested in his own enrichment at any cost. In the Ukrainian translation, a commentary was added, the purpose of which was obviously to explain the precedent of the character. Instead, the translator (or editor) limited himself to simply stating that Falstaff is a Shakespearean character, which, firstly, is tautological (since Shakespeare is mentioned earlier in the same sentence), and secondly, does not allow us to realize the symbolism of the character.

Let's take another example:

*The conductor of our orchestra used to repeat the same joke. Imagine at a job interview you are asked if you are good at performing **under pressure**. You can always answer that even if you cannot, you can try **Bohemian Rhapsody**. As you understand, we were preparing to perform it at that time* [10, p. 26].

Диригент нашого оркестру повторював один жарт. «Уявіть, що вас на снівбесіді запитали, чи ви вдало граєте **“Under Pressure”**. А ви скажете – якщо і ні, то можете зіграти **Богемську Рамсодію**. Мені завжди здавалося, що **Фреді Мерк'юрі** високо б оцінив цей жарт» [11, с. 26].

The precedent of the title «*Bohemian Rhapsody*» is that it not only embodies the work of Queen, but also symbolizes the quintessence of popular music. The original did not mention its author Freddie Mercury, and in the translation his name was inserted into the context to hint to the readers that it was *Queen's* songs that were meant. At the same time, we also had a pun in the original (*perform under pressure* – «to act under pressure»), and in our context – to perform the song «*Under Pressure*»), but it was lost in the translation due to the use of the zero translation strategy.

(5). The fifth strategy is to add a translation commentary in the form of a footnote at the end of a book or chapter. The purpose of the commentary remains the same as for the previous strategy: to explain to the readers a case study phenomenon that is potentially unfamiliar to them. It can be assumed that, when choosing between the fourth and fifth strategies, the translator prefers the fifth one for two possible reasons: (1) if he believes that understanding this case study is not critical for understanding what the author is describing, since readers often ignore footnotes outside the text; (2) the case study requires a more extensive commentary that cannot be contained in a few words.

Let's take an example:

*«Dad taught us to work in the garden. Definitely, I didn't understand it then being a six-year-old girl who preferred reading to planting flowers but physical work in the garden presupposes direct contact with the land and encourages what in Psychology is usually called Sensory-motor learning. We can even say that Dad was a **Jean Piaget** of his time»* [12, p. 4].

«Батько навчав нас через роботу в саду. Коли мені було 6, я цього, звісно не розуміла, мені тоді більше подобалось читати книжки, аніж копирсатися в землі, але фізична робота в саду передбачає пряму взаємодію із землею і сприяє тому, що в психології називають сенсомоторним навчанням. Можна навіть сказати, що батько був **Жаном Піаже** свого часу» [13, с. 4].

We consider the name of the prominent Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, mentioned in this study, to be precedent-setting in the above passage, known not only for his developments in the field of psychological interpretation of the game, but also for many other significant achievements, which makes him one of the founders of the school of cognitive psychology. This is what is described in a separate commentary at the end of the book, which contains information that «Piaget was a Swiss psychologist and philosopher who proposed a theory of cognitive development in learning.» According to the translator (or the editor), it is likely that the name of Jean Piaget should have been familiar to the readers, including because the book is a psychological popular science book. On the other hand, the mention of Jean Piaget was not important for understanding the fragment as a whole, so even if readers «forgot» to look at the footnote at the end of the book, it would not have affected their perception.

(6). The sixth strategy is to remove the precedent phenomenon in translation. As the analysis of the illustrative material shows, translators usually resort to this strategy when a precedent phenomenon is used several times within a small fragment of text, and if it was explained the first time it was mentioned, it is possible to remove it the next time without compromising the understanding of the text.

Let's take an example:

*The other spine-tingling aspect of the story is that Jane was a woman, **a kind of a new Madam Geneva**. Women loved their gin. It was an entirely unisex drink* [8, p. 156].

Ще одне лоскоче нерви – те, що Джейн – жінка. Загалом жінки полюбляли джин – напій, щодо якого поняття гендерної нерівності не існувало [9, с. 155].

The original fragment mentions Madame Geneva, the goddess of gin, to whom the entire previous chapter of the book was devoted. Apparently, assuming that the readers have already received enough information about this

venerable lady, the translator removes her name from the further context of this situation.

Conclusions and perspectives. To sum up, precedent phenomena as manifestations of intertextuality fall into the category of language games when they are manifestations of thematic incompatibility and thus serve as a means of discursive clarification. Their reproduction in English-Ukrainian translations of popular science discourse texts follows six strategies: 1) the strategy of direct (dictionary) translation involves the use of a dictionary (usual) equivalent of the precedent phenomenon, which allows the effect of precedence and language play to be preserved; 2) the strategy of partial lexical equivalents involves replacing the entire precedent with its abbreviated version, which is due to cultural differences, although it allows the effect of precedence to be fully preserved and does not lead to the loss of linguistic play; 3) the strategy of indirect (functional) equivalents involves the use of contextual or occasional equivalents that are more

understandable to the target audience and at the same time capable of preserving the symbolism of the original and the associated linguistic play; 4) the strategy of contextual addition involves the introduction of a translator's comment directly into the context. It is used when the translator or other interested party believes that the original proper name may be unfamiliar or incomprehensible to readers without a brief comment that does not interfere excessively with the author's text; 5) the external addition strategy involves inserting a translator's comment in the form of a footnote at the end of the book or chapter. It differs from the previous strategy in both the location of the comment and its length; 6) the deletion strategy involves omitting the precedent phenomenon in translation, which results in the loss of linguistic play and a reduction in the level of equivalence and expressiveness of the target text.

The perspective of the current research lies in studying the specificities of precedent phenomena's translation in other types of discourse.

Bibliography:

1. Сніховська І.Е. Прецедентні лудичні феномени як лінгвокультурні значущі утворення. *Вісник Житомирського державного університету імені І. Франка*. 2006. Вип. 27. С. 137–140.
2. Florida R. *The rise of the creative class*. New York : Basic Books, 2014. 415 p.
3. Флорида Р. *Номо Creativus. Як новий клас завойовує світ*. Київ : Наш Формат, 2018. 431 с.
4. Varoufakis Ya. *Talking to my daughter about Economy. A brief history of capitalism*. London : Random house, 2018. 224 p.
5. Варуфакіс Я. *Розмови з донькою про економіку. Коротка історія капіталізму*. Львів : Видавництво старого Лева, 2019. 168 с.
6. Cham J., Whiteson D. *We have no idea. A guide to the unknown universe*. New York : Riverhead Books, 2017. 336 p.
7. Чем Х., Вайтсон Д. *Гадки не маємо. Подорож невідомим всесвітом*. Київ : Наш Формат, 2019. 347 с.
8. Forsyth M. *A short history of drunkenness*. London : Penguin Books, 2017. 173 p.
9. Форсайт М. *Коротка історія пияцтва*. Харків : Фоліо, 2023. 206 с.
10. Hodge S. *The short story of art*. London : Laurence King Publishing, 2021. 222 p.
11. Годж С. *Коротка історія мистецтва*. Львів : Видавництво старого Лева, 2023. 224 с.
12. Stuart-Smith S. *The well-gardened mind. Rediscovering nature in the modern world*. London : William Collins, 2020. 315 p.
13. Стюарт-Сміт С. *Садотерапія. Як позбутися бур'янів в голові*. Київ : Yakaboo Publishing, 2021. 328 с.

References:

1. Snikhovska, I. Ye. (2006) Pretsedentni ludichni fenomeny yak lingvokulturni znachushci utvorennia [Precedent ludic phenomena as lingual and cultural significant compounds]. *Journal of Ivan Franko Zhytomyr State University*. № 27. P. 137–140. [in Ukrainian].
2. Florida, R. (2014) *The rise of the creative class*. New York : Basic Books. 415 p.
3. Florida, R. (2018) *Homo Creativus. Yak novyi klas zavoyovuye svit* [Homo creativus. How new class is conquering the word]. Kyiv. Nash Format. 431 p. [in Ukrainian].
4. Varoufakis, Ya. (2018) *Talking to my daughter about Economy. A brief history of capitalism*. London : Random house. 224 p.
5. Varoufakis, Ya. (2019) *Rozmovy z donkoyu pro ekonomiku. Korotka istoriya kapitalizmu* [Talks with the daughter about Economy. A brief history of capitalism]. Lviv : Vydavnytstvo starogo Leva. 168 p. [in Ukrainian].

6. Cham, J., Whiteson, D. (2017) *We have no idea. A guide to the unknown universe*. New York : Riverhead Books. 336 p.
7. Cham, J., Whiteson, D. (2019) *Hadky ne maiemo. Podorozh nevidomym vsesvitom* [We have no idea. A guide to the unknown universe]. Kyiv : Nash format. 347 p. [in Ukrainian].
8. Forsyth, M. (2017) *A short history of drunkenness*. London : Penguin Books. 173 p.
9. Forsyth, M. (2023) *Korotka istoriia pyiatstva* [A short history of drunkenness]. Kharkiv : Folio. 206 p. [in Ukrainian].
10. Hodge, S. (2021) *The short story of art*. London : Laurence King Publishing. 222 p.
11. Hodge, S. (2023) *Korotka istoriia mystetstva* [The short story of art]. Lviv : Vydavnytstvo starogo Leva. 224 p. [in Ukrainian].
12. Stuart-Smith, S. (2020) *The well-gardened mind. Rediscovering nature in the modern world*. London : William Collins. 315 p.
13. Stuart-Smith, S. (2021) *Sadoterapiia. Yak pozbutys buryaniv v golovi* [Garden Therapy. How to get rid of wild grass in your head]. Kyiv : Yakaboo Publishing. 328 p. [in Ukrainian].

Стаття надійшла до редакції 09.08.2025

Стаття прийнята 29.08.2025

Статтю опубліковано 27.10.2025