Culture and context in translating perception metaphors: Using eye-tracking methology in English-Estonian empirical research

Anu Kalda, Mari Uusküla
Tallinn University, Tallinn University
anukalda@tlu.ee, mari.uuskula@tlu.ee

The topic of metaphor translation has attracted attention in linguistics, cognitive linguistics, psycholinguistics and translation studies, and it has been widely researched (Van den Broeck 1981, Newmark 1981, Glucksberg 2003, Kövecses 2003, Philip 2003, Schäffner 2004, Li 2011, Sandford 2016, etc.). However, less attention has been paid to the topic of perception metaphor translation, and therefore is an appropriate ground for further development. In translating perception metaphors from one language into another it is crucial to understand the intersection between linguistics, translation and culture, as each of these elements play an important role in any understanding of how the others behave and what their ties with each other are. On top of the cultural aspects, modern metaphor theory emphasises the usefulness of context (Glucksberg 2003, Kolahdouz 2015, Kövecses 2003, Philip 2003: 315-317, Wyler 1992: 143–149, De Knop 2014: 74).

A cognitive empirical research with 20 participants on translating English perception metaphors was carried out. The subjects were provided with sentences that contained perception metaphors (colour, sound, touch, taste and smell included). Data was extracted using eye-tracking technology. Eye fixation duration and attention shifts were monitored. All participants were also asked to provide post-test feedback of the experiment.

We conjectured that translators will dwell longer over the processing complexities involved in translating a metaphor than a non-metaphorical concept. It was assumed that metaphors may require increased cognitive processing in a translation situation. We also expected that universal metaphors were translated more easily than culturally specific metaphors.

The data gathered enables us to suggest that metaphors involve longer fixation time, presumably indicating a greater cognitive processing load in a translation task. The study revealed that perception metaphors can become a translation problem due to the linguistic and cultural differences between languages. The participants emphasised that context is important in both comprehension as well as while translating.

References

De Knop, Sabine (2014). A contrastive study on colour terms in French and German causal constructions. In Luna Filipovic & Martin Pütz (eds.), *Multilingual Cognition and Language Use: Processing and Typological Perspectives*. 73–96. John Benjamins, Amsterdam, Philadelphia.

Glucksberg, Sam (2003). The psycholinguistics of metaphor. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 7 (2): 92–96.

Kolahdouz, Mandala (2015). *A Cognitive Approach to Translating Color Metaphors in English and Turkish Proverbs*. Conference Paper [WWW] https://www.researchgate.net/publication/284181074 (accessed 2 April 2018).

Kövecses, Zoltán (2003). Language, figurative thought, and cross-cultural comparison. *Metaphor and Symbol* 18 (4): 311–320.

Li, Zhu (2011). A study on cognitive models in colour term translation between English and Chinese. *International Forum of Teaching and Studies* 7 (1): 49–59.

Newmark, Peter (1981). *Approaches to Translation*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Philip, Gillian (2003). *Collocation and Connotation: A Corpus-Based Investigation of Colour Words in English and Italian*. PhD Thesis. The University of Birmingham.

Sandford, Jodi L. (2016). Cognitive entrenchment of color categories and implicit attitudes in English. In Geda Paulsen, Mari Uusküla & Jonathan Brindle (eds.) *Color Language and Color Categorization*: 40–61. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholar Publishing.

Schäffner, Christina (2004). Metaphor and translation: Some implications of a cognitive approach. *Journal of Pragmatics* 36 (7): 1253–1269.

Van den Broeck, Raymond (1981). The limits of translatability exemplified by metaphor translation. *Poetics Today* 2 (4). 73–87.

Wyler, Siegfried (1992). *Colour and Language: Colour Terms in English*. Gunter Narr Verlag Tübingen.