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

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

Keywords: metaphor, perception metaphor, metaphor translation, culture, eye-tracking

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