

The Third Riga Symposium on
Pragmatic Aspects of Translation

PROCEEDINGS

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Aarhus School of Business

Riga 2003

The Third Riga Symposium on Pragmatic Aspects of Translation was held at the University of Latvia on November 1-2, 2002. It hosted scholars from various institutions of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Lithuania, Belgium and Latvia as well as representatives of several international organizations. The Symposium carried on the tradition of broad international discussion of translatology and related problems.

The Symposium was organized within the framework of the cooperation programme between Aarhus School of Business and the University of Latvia started in 2001.

The papers delivered at the symposium addressed a wide range of translation and interpreting related issues, including linguistic, historical, cultural, sociolinguistic, terminological, methodological and lexicographical aspects.

Acknowledgements: The editors wish to thank the authors and all participants for their contribution as well as the Aarhus School of business and the Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs for financing this edition.

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Aarhus School of Business
ISBN 9984-30-049-8
Published by SIA "JUMI"

TRANSLATION OF TERMINOLOGY: WHY KILL THE METAPHOR?

This paper explores the issue of the translation of metaphorical terms, which is directly connected with the significance of metaphor in thinking, language and cognition. What role do metaphors play in science and terminology? Why do metaphors appear in terms? The reasons are cognitive. The pragmatic difficulty, however, lies in the translator's choice: to preserve the metaphor or not to preserve it in the term in the TL (in this case in Latvian).

Metaphor in translation has not been widely researched and it still remains a challenging and a controversial area. There are a number of factors, which make the translation of metaphorical terms difficult. Among them are the complex nature of figurative language, the traditional concept of a term and the patterns of thought and culture in the TL.

A. The complexity of figurative language

The question of metaphors in terms is part of a wider issue of the function of figurative language in thought formulation and expression. Research in psycholinguistics and cognitive linguistics has made great advances over the last three decades. It has proved that metaphor is pervasive in thought and language. There is nothing in language that has not been in thought. Metaphor is part of everyday speech that affects the ways people perceive, think and speak (see Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Lakoff and Turner 1989; Gibbs [1994] 1999; Steen 1994; Kövacs 2002 and others). It is a tendency of the human mind to create metaphor and to use it.

Findings of cognitive research show that language is a direct and natural reflection of the way people think, reason and imagine. Metaphorical language reflects figurative thought, which is a fundamental characteristic

of the human mind (see Gibbs [1994] 1999: 17). Metaphor is not in a word or words, it is in thinking. Metaphor is the main mechanism through which we understand abstract thought and perform abstract reasoning, which means it is a major technique for reasoning. In other words, cognitive research has revealed that metaphor is something we think with and it is pervasive in the way we think. We are influenced by metaphor more than we realise.

There is a close link between the figurative nature of thought and the regular use of language. The ability to create metaphors is a feature of the human mind. Research in cognitive archaeology and anthropology reveals that it is this capacity that really created *Homo sapiens* and human culture (see Mithen 1999). The capacity for metaphorical thought proved to be the defining feature in human evolution. Mithen comes to the conclusion that the ability to use metaphor is an advantage of *Homo sapiens* over the ancient ancestors who could use tools but lacked the ability to think metaphorically.

Metaphor is a tool of abstract thinking, at the same time abstraction is one of the features of figurative meaning. Metaphorical imagination helps to frame ideas. Hence the importance of metaphor in terminology as many terms denote abstract entities. There is no practical alternative to metaphor when people think about abstract domains, which are complex or subtle. On the other hand, metaphorical meaning serves to understand the process of generalisation of particular instances as “metaphors provide a general mechanism for understanding the general in terms of the specific” (Gibbs [1994] 1999: 313). Cienki (2002: 199) also points out the role of metaphor in the understanding of abstract concepts.

Metaphor is also a basic technique for reasoning. It plays a fundamental role in science and research (see Taylor 1995; Mithen 1999: 214-5, 261). It does not only enable the formation of new meanings and abstract concepts, but also sensible arguments and intelligent judgements. Therefore scientists need metaphors to create theories. Metaphorical conceptualisation is prevalent in scientific knowledge.

It is interesting to note that in some areas of science and research metaphorical terms are much more common than in others, such as IT, especially the Internet, biology, physics, astronomy and others where scientists do not hesitate to convey their ideas metaphorically or designate new notions, inventions or discoveries, using figurative language, e.g. some of the commonly quoted astronomical terms – *dark matter, a black hole, a red giant, a white dwarf, the Big Dipper, the Little Dipper, a wormhole*, to name but a few. As Vandaele points out, metaphorical terminology is a challenge for both terminologists and translators¹ (Vandaele 2002: 649). She explores metaphor in terms of cell biology, e.g. *a chain, a ring, a loop, a sheet, a site* etc.

The findings of researchers on the pervasive character of metaphor in thought, reasoning and language have a practical application. The figurative modes of thought are crucial for all applied stylistics², not only for teaching and learning, advertising or lexicography, but their understanding and use are essential for translation too. Metaphor in thinking and language is a topical issue not only from the cognitive point of view but also the pragmatic perspective of the translation of terminology.

B. A traditional approach to the understanding of terminology

The handling of metaphor in translation differs in different languages. It generally depends on the theoretical conceptions. In Latvian metaphorical translation of terms is to a large extent hampered by the conventional tenets, which are still very much alive. The basic postulates, which lie at the basis of the traditional theory of a term, determine that a term should be:

1. Monosemous

Ideally, terms should be monosemous. However, words may develop new meanings, which change their semantic structure. Polysemy is both the consequence and the cause of figurative language. “A language can normally tolerate such a semantic ‘overload’ because context aids the selection of the appropriate meaning of a word.” (Wales [1989] 995: 309). For instance, *a valve* is polysemous with the general meaning of any device for controlling the flow of fluid, it may be a valve on a pipe or a heart valve or a range of other meanings,

but each of them is in a separate branch of knowledge. However, even in the same area, say, medicine, there are many terms which are polysemous, e.g. *an axis, a band, a bud, a cast, a cell, a coat, an envelope, a loop, a pocket, a ring, a rod, a sack, a taenia, walleye* etc.

2. Non-figurative

The idea that terms should be literal, that is, non-figurative and with no image, does not work either. Scientific language is not void of figurative thinking, and hence there are many figurative terms, e.g. *an anchor, to bleed, a blend, a dead branch, a fork, a freak, a goat-leap pulse, hot, a mail path, a mouse, polka fever, a seal, a shadow memory, a side, a sink, surfing, a wave, a wing* etc.

3. Stylistically neutral

The terminology of today does not meet the presupposed standards of neutrality or, in other words, the idea that scientific language should be stylistically neutral. There are many terms, which are formal, especially in some spheres, for instance, legal terminology, e.g. *acquiescence, adjudication, an affidavit, appurtenance, divestiture, estoppel, exoneration, forfeiture, letters rogatory, a misdemeanour, the preponderance of evidence, unequivocal* etc.

There are many areas where terms may be informal. One of the best examples of the rapid development of terminology is IT, where the neutrality requirement is largely ignored, e.g. *a bug, a chatroom, a logoff, a login, a logout, a lookaside cache, a loop-back test, a rollback, a smiley, screen dump* etc.

Even serious linguistic editions fail to cover the complicated semantic and stylistic development of terminology, e.g. *Lingvisticheskiy Entsiklopedicheskiy Slovar'* points out that terms have a tendency to be monosemous, that they are characterised by absence of expressivity and are stylistically neutral (1990: 508). The idea that terms are monosemous and non-figurative has remained but a dream! The traditional widespread assumption what a term should be like does not reflect the actual development of terminology. Today many terms have several meanings, they may be figurative and/or formal or informal.

C. The speakers' cultural patterns of thought and perception

Each language has features, which are not only language-specific but also to a certain extent culture-specific. The treatment of figurative meaning and various stylistic techniques is a cultural feature³. Translation is not culture-independent either. Despite the enormous progress and achievements attained in the translation of texts into Latvian since the regaining of independence in Latvia, there are some trends that seem to be emerging in Latvian translations of terms, which cause concern:

1. Loss of metaphor

An attempt to avoid metaphor in terminology may perhaps be explained by a sense of uncertainty that a metaphorical term may not be accepted or understood, or a feeling that the metaphor is not quite a proper choice.

There is an interesting feature, which occurs in Latvian newspaper texts and advertisements. Inverted commas are sometimes resorted to if a creative metaphor is used in discourse. It is generally believed that inverted commas show that the word or phrase that is used is not completely accurate or suitable (see Macmillan 2002: 757). However, the use of inverted commas also reveals fear that the reader may fail to perceive the figurative meaning.

2. Amelioration of meaning

There are translations, which reveal an attempt at amelioration of meaning, a desire to improve it, make it less harsh or at least a bit more formal than in the SL. The tendency to ameliorate may be one of the cultural patterns of the Latvian language, taking into account its hard history and its struggle to survive with the best possible result. This goes together with lack of readiness to accept loan translations for borrowed concepts.

3. Explanatory translation

In Latvian there is a trend to create longer translations than in the SL. As a result the notion is expressed periphrastically, that is, in a more complicated indirect way than is necessary. This leads to circumlocution, proceeding from a striving for precision and a misguided desire to explain the obvious.

It is not only the lexicon that is a key to history, nation, society and culture (see Wierzbicka 1997), but also the patterns of the stylistic use of language and attitudes to various stylistic features. Different cultural norms and patterns are an issue of cross-cultural communication⁴. They are important and revealing.

In the face of all the difficulties the translation of English texts into Latvian has generally been a success story, especially considering the huge amount of documents, including EU Laws and Regulations, and training materials. The urgency for translation has appeared due to Latvia's desire to accede to the EU and NATO and the need to cover all the new areas, which have appeared in the post-Soviet development. As a result innumerable new terms have had to be created over a short period of time. In many cases the English metaphor is preserved in the Latvian loan translation. In some areas adequacy in metaphorical translation has been achieved to a greater extent than in others, e.g. many of the original metaphors have been retained in computer language⁵ in Latvian, e.g. E. *a bridge* – Latv. *tilts*; E. *a burst error* – Latv. *sprādzienklūda*; E. *a cold start* – Latv. *aukstais starts*; E. *to drag and drop* – Latv. *vilkt un nomest*; E. *file grooming* – Latv. *datņkope*; E. *a hot start* – Latv. *karstais starts*; E. *an orphan* – Latv. *bāreņrindiņa*; E. *sleep mode* – Latv. *miega režīms*; E. *a star network* – Latv. *zvaigžņtīkls*; E. *a tree* – Latv. *koks*; E. *a wallpaper* – Latv. *tapete*; E. *a widow* – Latv. *atraitņrindiņa*; E. *a window* – Latv. *logs*; E. *the World Wide Web* – Latv. *pasaules tīmeklis*; E. *a worm* – Latv. *tārps* etc. It sometimes seems to me that the use of metaphor is a matter of inner freedom. Figurative terms reveal how imagination shapes language and how language reflects imagination (see Gibbs [1994] 1999).

The translation of computer terminology stands out for a more avant-garde approach, as IT is a modern and fast developing area. The original metaphor is sometimes replaced by another metaphorical image: e.g. E. *bubble memory* – Latv. *domēnatmiņa*; E. *a bug* – Latv. *blusa*; E. *a pop-up menu* – Latv. *uznirstošā izvēlne*; E. *word wrap* – Latv. *aplaušana* etc.

It is the emerging trend of demetaphorization in the translation of metaphorical terms that causes most concern. In IT the loss of metaphor occurs infrequently, e.g. E. *a data mart* – Latv. *datuve*; E. *Letter Wizard* – Latv. *vednis* while in other branches of knowledge it is much more common.

Let me explore some legal terms. For instance, the English metaphorical term *the burden of proof* is generally accepted and its metaphor does not cause any protestations in the English-speaking world. It has equivalents in many languages. Cf.: Swe. *bevisbörda*; Dan. *bevisbyrde*; Nor. *bevisbyrde*; Sp. *peso de pruebas*; Pol. *ciężar dowodu* etc. The translation *pierādījumu nasta* exists in Latvian. It is, in my opinion, an adequate metaphorical loan translation, which has been used by and among Latvian specialists for years. It is also used in the Latvian Civil Law of 1937, which is the basis of Latvian civil legislation today. Moreover, it goes back to Roman Law. Cf.: Latin *onus probandi*, which is the source of the metaphor.

However, the present approved translation of *the burden of proof* in Latvian is *pierādīšanas pienākums*⁶ (the duty of proving). This is clearly a deliberate attempt to avoid the metaphor “burden” in translation by substituting it by the non-figurative word “duty” in an effort to “ameliorate” the age-long term. The question arises, “Is non-metaphorical language a better language?” The inevitable result of metaphor replacement is that the image is lost, back translation is made impossible or encumbered.

Another striking example of deliberate demetaphorisation is the Latvian translation of the English term *money laundering*: *noziedzīgi iegūto līdzekļu legalizācija*. Actually it is no translation. It is a definition. Its word-for-word meaning is: legalisation of means gained in a criminal way, that is, legalisation of proceeds of illicit transactions or legalisation of illicit gains. *Money laundering* is a loan concept and an adequate loan translation retaining the metaphor exists in the Latvian language: *naudas atmazgāšana*, however, official preference has been given to the definition in an attempt to reach for clarity of meaning. Is the definition of a concept a term? The approach is obviously based on the assumption that *naudas atmazgāšana*

is unsuitable, as it is metaphorical and informal. Indeed it is but so is the original. In Latvia the term *noziedzīgi iegūto līdzekļu legalizācija* has been approved by the Terminology Commission and it has to be complied with.

Let me offer a few translations of this term in some other European languages for comparison. Cf.: Swe. *penningtvätt*⁷; Dan. *pengevask*; Nor. *hvitvasking av penger*; Sp. *lavado del dinero*; Pol. *pranie pieniędzy*. Interestingly, this metaphor relates to *dirty money*, which is also metaphorical: money obtained in an illegal way. Thus it is a broader concept. If it were clean money, there would be no need to launder it. The term *money laundering* has been accepted as the official term in many countries and also internationally. Cf.: the official name of the US law is “Money Laundering Statute”. The UN has a programme called “The United Nations Global Program Against Money Laundering”⁸. OECD has established The Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering (FATF). It is an intergovernmental body, which develops and promotes policies nationally and internationally, to combat money laundering. The English term is flexible, it lends itself to derivative and phrase formation. Some phrases from an OECD text⁹: anti-money laundering systems, to implement money laundering countermeasures, laundering techniques, to misuse a company for money laundering etc. Let us imagine that the translator or interpreter (especially in simultaneous interpreting) has the obligation to use the definition instead of the handy English term in actual use.

The definition fails to operate in real texts to be translated or interpreted, as it is not functionally viable. Moreover, back translation is a practical requirement. The translated terms must be recognisable. The criterion of recognisability implies that the term can be identified as known or experienced before in a foreign language, which means that the main semantic and stylistic features have been preserved and it is possible to retrieve it from the long-term memory by associative links. Composite terms in particular need to be recognisable when going from one language to another. A term is functional only if it works both ways: English→Latvian and Latvian→English, it is not a one-way street. The definition has a different function: it specifies the features or characteristics

that the concept under consideration possesses to distinguish it from other concepts. The difference between a term and a definition is both semantic and stylistic.

The argument that Latv. *naudas atmazgāšana* for *money laundering* is a borrowing from Russian does not seem to hold water as the term was introduced in many other European languages much earlier. Moreover, in Russian legislation the officially approved term is also a definition. Thus it might as well be argued that the Latvian terminology authorities have borrowed the definition too. Interestingly, sources in Russian have not succeeded in achieving uniformity with the definition version either, which is only natural with a periphrastic approach. The official name of the Russian law is Закон РФ «О противодействии легализации (отмыванию) доходов, полученных преступным путем» (syntactically the term includes a participial phrase, and the translation loan in brackets). In Ukraine it is called *отмывание преступно добытых средств*¹⁰. This gets quite confusing, especially as in back translation the accepted English term appears instead of the definition: On-line *Правда* speaks about the Russian Senate adopting «the money-laundering bill»¹¹.

When a brief metaphorical term is replaced by a lengthy definition in translation, it will sound oblique and periphrastic. It is likely to cause problems in back translation. The approval of a definition instead of a term is a last-resort technique when all the other possibilities fail. It would be inadvisable to apply this technique in cases when an adequate loan translation is available and is commonly used by both the public and the specialists working in the given area. It is interesting to observe that Latvian media, newspapers including, use only the loan translation as it gives freedom to express themselves in different forms and types of sentences, e.g.

Lietuvā *atmazgā* milzīgas *naudas* summas (...) Saskaņā ar Lietuvas likumiem par *naudas atmazgāšanas* apkarošanu... (*Diena*, 16 Jan., 2003, p. 2).

The replacement of the loan translation by the definition would create serious syntactic and stylistic problems. Being international, the terms present a result of language contacts. A definition denies access to

metaphors and associations embodied in figurative language. A loan translation enables the Latvian language users to derive the same meanings implied in English metaphorical terms that native speakers do (see Naumova 2002).

Loss of metaphor in Latvian translations occurs in many terminological areas. A few more examples: E. a *black light* (mil.) – Latv. *infrasarkanā staru lampa*; E. *wildtype cells* (biol.) – Latv. *normālās šūnas*. The loan translation of the latter *savvaļas šūnas*, which has retained the metaphor, exists and is used by specialists on a regular basis, but it is not an approved term. As the public and most people working in the area use the loan translation, there is lack of uniformity in Latvian terminology. Actually there are two terms used for the same concept. All this creates ambiguity and additional challenges for translators and interpreters.

Many translations are improved and changed and sometimes there are several parallel versions, which means no uniformity. This situation is aggravated by lack of coordination among different bodies which translate and/or publish, e.g. the English term *approximation of laws* is translated as *likumu tuvināšana* by the Translation and Terminology Centre, while the European Integration Bureau gives the translation *likumdošanas saskaņošana* for *approximation of legislation* in their information booklets.

Another term, which is confusing in Latvian translation, is *free movement*. The European Integration Bureau preserves the metaphor in the translation of all the four types of freedom in the EU single market: E. *free movement of goods* – Latv. *brīva preču kustība*; E. *free movement of persons* – Latv. *brīva personu kustība*; E. *free movement of services* – Latv. *brīva pakalpojumu kustība*; E. *free movement of capital* – Latv. *brīva kapitāla kustība*¹². At the same time the Translation and Terminology Centre offers a range of Latvian translations for the key term *movement*: 1) *kustība* (movement of goods); 2) *aprite* (movement of capital); 3) *pārvietošanās* (movement of persons, employees). The *movement of goods* is translated as: a) *preču kustība*, b) *preču pārvietošanās*, c) *preču aprite*, depending on the

area of activity (legal matters, customs etc.)¹³. Thus the same EU legal term *free movement* has acquired several translations in Latvian.

Screening of legislation is a term, which has not achieved uniformity in Latvian either. *Likumu caurskatīšana* has retained figurative meaning while *likumu izvērtēšana*, *likumu salīdzināšana*, *likumu atbilstības izvērtēšana*, *likumu atbilstības ES prasībām izvērtēšana* are all non-figurative and could be translated back into English in a number of non-figurative ways. Moreover, the metaphorical meaning of the term has not been preserved.

It is true that in some cases it may be very difficult or even impossible to create a loan translation, e.g. a *trigger list* (border control). Currently it has four translations in Latvian, none of them meet the requirements. The recommended version *sevišķi jūtīgo vielu saraksts* (a list of especially sensitive substances) is periphrastic and ambiguous at the same time, as it can be easily mixed up with *the end-user list*. New metaphorical terms are coming in that do not have equivalents in Latvian. What is their fate? For many of them no translation has been provided as yet, e.g. a *green-field site/development/investment*. Will the metaphor be preserved?

It is essential to retain metaphor in the translation of terms. The fear of metaphor is unsubstantiated. The avoidance of metaphor or figurative modes of thought in general is an adverse tendency. It causes demetaphorisation, which may produce a misunderstanding, a false friend, a parallel translation or a formal definition, resulting in a semantic and a stylistic loss, and impeding back translation. These are artificially created difficulties in an attempt to ameliorate the meaning. A periphrastic phrase is cumbersome in use. Lengthy explanations instead of terms hamper communication across languages and prove to be a serious obstacle in translation and interpretation. A term must be brief, not a description or a definition. Moreover, the replacement of metaphor leads to an impoverished vision, as the image is lost. It is a different kind of conceptualisation.

The ability to comprehend and use metaphor is important in all walks of life. Hence the need for training in stylistic awareness of metaphor in translation and readiness to recognise and accept metaphor as a tool of abstract thinking and a technique of reasoning. Language is alive and metaphor is part of it. Why kill it in translation? Let it live. Let us use our imagination and creative thinking. Recreating the metaphor in another language calls for a flexible approach to the process of translation.

Failure to understand and appreciate metaphor is to the detriment of the applied sphere involved, whether it is teaching and learning, advertising, lexicography or translation. Language is not independent of the mind, it reflects our perceptual and conceptual understanding and experience. In translation of terms the cognitive, cultural and functional aspects of language are all important to achieve adequate translation.

Proceeding from the cognitive findings and my own observations I may conclude that metaphor in translation is not an embellishment or a deviation but a systematic part of human cognitive functions. It is the way people ordinarily understand the world and the processes they are involved in. The comprehension of the role of metaphor in thought and language is also crucial for translators. Creation of a metaphorical term is a cognitive ability, as is its recognition, translation, and use.

Notes

- ¹ Metaphorical conceptualisation is particularly common in medicine and associative domains, such as cell biology, molecular biology or genetics, and Vandaele discusses specific terms used to describe the structure of the principal metaphorical concepts in cell biology (Vandaele 2000: 649-55).
- ² For applied stylistics see Naciscione (2001: Ch. 6.1).
- ³ For instance, the wealth of the diminutive in the Latvian language. See Naciscione (2001: Ch. 5.2).
- ⁴ See Wierzbicka (1997) for cultural psychology and the use of the insights of linguistic semantics for cultural analysis.

For intercultural communication and translation issues see Chamizo Domínguez (1999).

⁵ The Latvian translations of computer terms have been taken from *Angļu-latviešu-krievu informātikas vārdnīca* (2001).

On metaphorical internet terms see Meyer, Zaluski & Mackintosh (1997).

⁶ See *A Dictionary of Legal Synonyms: Latvian-English-Latvian* (1993).

⁷ See Eurodicautom – the translation service of the European Commission at <http://europa.eu.int/eurodicautom/login.jsp> .

⁸ See <http://www.washlaw.edu/forint/alpha/m/moneylaundering.htm> .

⁹ See <http://www.oecd.org> .

¹⁰ See http://ukrbiz.net/eng/a_pages/7049 .

¹¹ See <http://english.pravda.ru/politics/2001/07/20/10648.html> .

¹² See <http://eiropainfo.lv/infocentrs/;lat/infocenter44.htm> .

¹³ See <http://www.ttc.lv> .

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