

CROSS LINGUISTIC EQUIVALENCE THE PARTICULAR CASE OF THE METAPHOR OF LIGHT

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Abstract

Language of perception is common to all humans within a similar cultural background. Its conceptualization, from a semantic standpoint, is however language specific. With this view in mind, this study aims at investigating, from a cognitive linguistic perspective and from a Descriptive Translation standpoint, the transfer in meaning of conceptual properties assigned to the visual metaphor of 'light', in a small scale, English (source language) - Romanian (target language) investigation, seeking to provide a better understanding regarding the nuances implied in the cross-linguistic equivalence of such metaphors, its secondary aim being that of validating these preliminary results through a cross linguistic investigation of similar matters on larger corpora.

Keywords: Visual conceptual metaphor, cognitive linguistics, light, descriptive translation studies, cross-linguistic equivalence

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1. Theoretical considerations

Relevant literature on conceptual representation and metaphorical mappings is outlined in this section. It includes references to literature and studies on translating nuances encompassed by conceptual metaphors, addressing fundamental challenges that require problem awareness in regard to cross-linguistic equivalence. As such, the current study focuses on the original English version of the novel *'All the light we cannot see'* (2014), written by Anthony Doerr, respectively the Romanian version of the same novel, translated by Iulia Gorzo (2019).

1.1 Cognitive Linguistics

Cognitive linguistic views on metaphors have been supported by a growing body of literature in recent years. The extension of metaphorical language beyond its rhetorical function was advanced by pioneers in the field of Cognitive linguistics George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980, 1999). Their Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) regards the extension of metaphorical language beyond its rhetorical function, linking it to the sociocultural context. Such an extension of metaphorical language towards the sociocultural context sets a prosperous ground for a productive inference into the way the mind, through linguistic devices, conceptualizes reality. Their study on the transfer of the conceptualization of the 'ARGUMENT OF WAR' into the 'ARGUMENT OF DANCE', provides a reconceptualization of reality into an imaginative, cultural realm. This particular line of thought provides the basis for a deeper, more abstract related inquiry as to the processes involved in the

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transfer of meaning from source to target domain when it comes to the translation of conceptual metaphors. Kövecses (2014) updates this perspective with frame-like structures on emotion concepts, ‘represented as cognitive cultural models in the mind’ (2014:12), explaining that they form a domain matrix in relation to the conceptual system, thus pointing to the necessity of not underestimating the role played by qualitative intuitive analysis, in favour of larger quantitative data. In the case of the present study, it is the interpretation attributed to the concept of ‘light’ in Western society that shapes its metaphorical usage triggering a certain emotion concept, such as fear or hope. “In other words, the concept of EMOTION can only be defined relative to the frame and the other elements that the frame contains” (Kövecses, 2014 : 23).

This interrelationship between conceptual linguistic structures and emotionality is most meaningful in Translation Studies, as the process of translation itself entails the building a *mental imagery construction* (Fauconnier and Turner, 2004) in which meanings are understood as *conceptualizations of fragments of reality* constrained by the forms of a given language system. Accessing layers of meaning conveyed via language entails finding representations of reality which are in their turn reflected in the terminology, structure of language or rhetoric, forming a blended entity combining not only elements of the target and source language, but also properties of users’ mental models, along with their cultural and emotional background.

A more recent line of investigation (Proos, 2019) deciphers the usage of the Estonian verb of vision “nägema” as a mapping towards the abstract domains of intellect and knowledge, concluding that its interpretation can be that of ‘experience’, therefore extending its meaning towards the emotional sphere. As such, asymmetries between source and target conceptual metaphorical language imply a re-mapping of abstract domains, a process which entails fine nuances in translability and a debate as to the most viable strategies available in the translation process. It is this line of thought that the present study regards as potentially fruitful in relation to the transfer of meaning in the case of the metaphor of light, focusing on its English to Romanian translation.

1.2 Descriptive Translation Studies

Translation seen as an embedded part of the strategies through which cultural groups construct representations of the other is a standpoint that has lately become mainstream. Recent research has been directed towards bridging the area of translation studies with disciplines such as philosophy, ecocriticism, political science, literary theory, game studies, critical discourse analysis or cognition, to name just a few. Some researchers have investigated the incumbent ways of how ideology is expressed in translation (Pérez (2003), Munday (2007)), determining various facets of how lexicogrammatical choices made by the translator convey a particular representation of reality that can alter, distort or even change the messages of the source text, be it in a conscious or unconscious manner. Other lines of investigation have focused on ground-breaking queries into trauma translation seen as the process of not only obtaining insight into repressed memories, but also “constructing new meaning from a past traumatic event” (Stumm, 2015:47) (Wolf, 2016; Arnds, 2015) or rethinking translation as part of the climate change discourse (Cronin, 2017; Morton, 2016). A complementary approach is proposed by Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (2010). Explaining the relevance of Tomaszczyk’s line of thought for the translation of conceptual metaphors, Massey and Ehrensberger-Dow (2017) conclude that interlingual translation involves a series of “re-conceptualisations” of an original message in the source language until it is expressed in the target language, where it continues to be re-conceptualised by the target-language audience itself” (Massey and Ehrensberger-Dow, 2017:174).

Subsequent research looking at the target language equivalence of metaphorical concepts, through the standpoint of the translation procedures advanced by Schäffner (2004) and Toury (1995), has been carried out at the School of Languages within University of Salford, with the aim of determining the translation strategies applied in the case of metaphorical content in Arabic magazines. Their results validated George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s (1980) theories, also showing that conceptual metaphors are powerful persuasive devices in the biomedical domain. A more practical approach was proposed

by Massey and Ehrensberger-Dow (2017) whose aim was to determine the best practices to be applied in the research of such peculiar matters. Their study on the processes of managing interlingual asymmetry in regard to conceptual metaphors found process elicitation and analysis methods to be promising for obtaining more rigorous results, thus justifying the usage of Descriptive Translation Studies in the analysis of metaphorical language translation practices.

2. Visual Metaphorical Conceptualization

A major case in point in the translation of conceptual metaphors are the strategies that lay at hand in the process of meaning decoding. Such strategies guide the translator in the process of rendering source to target language equivalence. In essence, taking into account the culture specific needs of the recipients, the translator may adopt conscious and unconscious procedures for the purpose of transferring meaning.

2.1. Translability of conceptual metaphors

Particularly rare is the research addressing the transfer of meaning in relation to the Romanian language. The insufficient available specialized literature leaves fruitful ground for cross-linguistical research on translation of conceptual and perception metaphors to be carried out. As such, the methodology chosen for the subsequent analysis as to the equivalence of the perception metaphor of light is that of a **contextualized linguistic approach, from a cross linguistic English-Romanian perspective and through the standpoint offered by the area of Descriptive Translation Studies.**

Besides the above-mentioned methodology, a twofold dimension of **formal versus dynamic** equivalence, is to be taken into account in regard to the analysis of conceptual metaphor of light. A useful exemplification of this twofold dimension is the Romanian translation of the book title ‘THE LIGHT THAT FAILED’. Its translated version ‘LUMINA CARE A CĂZUT’ ignores a subtle nuance in meaning. The Romanian verb *to fall* (*a cădea*) implies mapping towards movement, a physical state of falling with a high probability of injury. This sensory dimension of the verb has made it a resourceful tool in the conceptualization of other metaphors. In Romanian *leaves fall* (*frunzele cad*), *cities fall in a warlike context* (*a cădea în mâna adversarului*), *people fall sick* (*a cădea la pat*) or *fall deep in thought* (*a cădea pe gânduri*), all attesting to its versatile potential and the subtle meanings that should be taken into account in regard to the conceptual asymmetries between source and target language. Given its negative connotation, especially in relation to a warlike scenario, this translation doesn’t seem to ‘fall’ far from its original meaning, however the subtle implications of fail as opposed to fall are not to be ignored. When light fails, a battle seems to be lost, but on the contrary, when it falls, hope is alienated and a more somber meaning is implied, along with deeper emotional valences. The second translation ‘LUMINA CARE A EȘUAT’ seems to offer a closer interpretation of its original meaning. Such decision making processes implied in translation are the bedrock for the interpretation of the metaphor of light against the background of the profusion provided by the conflictual, strain, warlike atmosphere presented in Doerr’s novel.

2.2 Translating the metaphor of light

‘Shoot the ‘Very lights’

Conceptual metaphor involving the mapping of the source domain of vision with the target domains of fear, respectively war.

<i>Original English version</i>	<i>Romanian Translation</i>
“Most nights the enemy would shoot pistol flares called ‘ very lights ’ over the trenches, short-lived stars suspended in the air from parachutes, meant to illuminate possible targets for snipers”. (Doerr, 2014:123)	„Aproape noapte de noapte, dușmanul trăgea cu așa-zisele „rachete de semnalizare” peste tranșee, niște aștri efemeri care pluteau în aer agățați de parașute, pentru a lumina posibile ținte pentru pușcași.” (Translation by Gorzo, 2019:135)

TRANSLABILITY

LIGHT is a peculiar conceptual metaphor commonly interpreted in regard to its potential of rendering a general positive atmosphere through a visual perspective. Interpreted in western culture as having a hopeful meaning, especially in contrast with the horrors of war, it is remapped in Doerr's novel, in the context of the warlike atmosphere provided by its narrative, into the conceptual domain of fear. This initial antithesis, among light, interpreted as deriving from a positive emotional state, and darkness as a grim facet of existence, re-maps Doerr's interpretation of light into its opposite equivalent. This particular re-conceptualization is troublesome when it comes to its translation into Romanian.

Light is dissociated from its positive meaning and inverted into an opposing state, emphasized by the adverb 'very'. The equivalence of 'very lights' in the Romanian translated version of Doerr's novel was "*asa zisele rachete de semnalizare*" (the so-called pistol flares). A complete omission of 'very lights' and a change of the verb 'called' into the 'so-called' offers neither a formal equivalence, nor a dynamic one. Light, a conceptual metaphor which the author uses from the very title of his novel, is left out of the translated version, thus emptying its vast meaning from one of its senses.

'Muted lights'

Conceptual metaphor involving the mapping of the source domain of vision with the target domains of fear, respectively war.

<i>Original English version</i>	<i>Romanian Translation</i>
"He tries to imagine their descent, sporadic and muted lights passing and receding, cables rattling, everyone quiet, sinking down to that permanent darkness where men claw at the earth with a half mile of rock hunched on top of them". (Doerr, 2014:63)	„Încearcă să-și închipuie coborârea lor pe lângă lumini răzlețe , slabe, care rămân tot mai în urmă, în răpăit de cabluri, toți muți, afundându-se în acel întuneric perpetuu unde oamenii scurmă în pământ, iar deasupra lor se încovoiaie jumătate de milă de rocă". (Translation by Gorzo, 2019:57)

TRANSLABILITY

The transition from salience into visual perception, metaphorically conceptualized towards the abstract domain of hopelessness or darkness, captures once more the profusion of remapping the visual perception of light into its antithesis. This situation unfolds as problematic in its translation. The emotional state brought about by salience and the auditory domain, encompassed by the adjective 'muted', is overlooked in the translated version. The choice of 'lumini răzlețe' doesn't use the strategy of metaphor to metaphor equivalence, metaphor into different metaphor, nor metaphor into sense. Rather, it falls distant from its original meaning, the Romanian translation having the sense of isolated lights.

‘December sucks the light...’

Conceptual metaphor involving the mapping of the source domains of touch and movement into the target domains of vision.

<i>Original English version</i>	<i>Romanian Translation</i>
<p>“December sucks the light from the castle. The sun hardly clears the horizon before sinking away. Snow falls once, twice, then stays locked over the lawns. Has Werner ever seen snow this white, snow that was not fouled immediately with ash and coal dust?” (Doerr, 2014:146)</p>	<p>“Decembrie sleiește lumina din castel. Soarele abia apucă să însenineze orizontul înainte de a scăpăta. Ninge o dată, de două ori, iar a doua oară zăpada se așterne hotărât peste câmpuri. Oare Werner mai văzuse vreodată zăpadă atât de albă, care să nu se murdărească imediat cu cenușă și praf de cărbune?” (Translation by Gorzo, 2019:161)</p>

TRANSLABILITY

The dichotomy of light and darkness is ever more evident in this particular extract. It posits the complex conceptual metaphor of light in its primary, culture-specific positive mapping. The coldness of a winter month, with its short days and limited exposure to light implies a general, rapid descent into darkness. The positive emotional state triggered by the hope of light is shortly lived in the cold season. However, towards the end of the extract, darkness and coldness, represented through the visual stimulus brought about by the whiteness and stillness of untouched snow, re-conceptualize the initial general strain atmosphere, turning winter, with all its negative emotional implications, into a source of light, respectively hope.

It must be mentioned that the characteristics of winter, or better said of the month of December in general, have similar traits in the seasonality of the target system in this particular case. Romanian weather is cold in winter; however, translating this entire extract in accordance with the particularities of an Ecuadorian target system for instance, would have required a much more different approach on behalf of the translator.

The preferred choice for equivalence in this case was that of the Romanian verb ‘sleiește’. Differences in meaning are better derived from their dictionary meanings. If the Romanian word has the meaning of ‘solidified by cooling/coagulated’, the English verb ‘suck’ is depicted with the meaning of pulling something with great force. In this particular case the translation seems to capture or even amplify the original meaning of the conceptual metaphor of light. The duality and remapping of the concept of light, interpreted as darkness and of darkness interpreted as light, creates a general re-conceptualization of both senses, mapping them into antagonistic, unexpected abstract domains. A peculiar situation attesting to the conceptual irregularities created by the author and its future potential for ulterior research.

‘Light turns on you’

Conceptual metaphor involving the mapping of the source domains of vision into the target domains of movement, implying treason.

<i>Original English version</i>	<i>Romanian Translation</i>
<p>“This, she realizes, is the basis of his fear, all fear. That a light you are powerless to stop will turn on you and usher a bullet to its mark.” (Doerr, 2014:123)</p>	<p>“Ea are revelația că asta trebuie să fie rădăcina fricii lui, a oricărei frici. O lumină pe care nu o poți opri, care se va întoarce spre tine, călăuzind un glonț spre țintă”. (Translation by Gorzo, 2019:136)</p>

TRANSLABILITY

Used against the background provided by the misfortunes of war, light is represented here in opposition to brightness and its constructive implications, being instead re-conceptualized as obscurity. As such, it implies a betrayal as it is remapped into a trigger of death. This nuance in meaning is lost in translation altogether. Turning on someone implies something mischievous, inconspicuous, while the Romanian translation ‘a se întoarce spre tine’ (turning towards you) only renders the meaning of movement, lacking its subdivision of concealment resulting in a life-threatening situation. The translation doesn’t entirely lose its equivalence in meaning given that it continues with the phrase ‘ushering a bullet towards the target’, consequently managing to partly render the general atmosphere and re-conceptualization of light as a negative instrument of the narrative, but not entirely.

3. Conclusions

Rendering equivalence when translating the deep nuances and abstract domains encompassed by conceptual metaphors are instances that require further investigation, especially in cross-linguistical studies on large corpora. The dichotomy among light and darkness triggers connections to both the rational and the emotional hemisphere, light being purposely used as part of a conceptual metaphor that involves the physical domain of vision with reference to other abstract, sometimes opposing domains.

The examples from Doerr’s narrative discussed above show the profusion of nuances embodied by the conceptual metaphor of light and alerts to the deep nuances that are to be looked into in the process of translation. A point to be made in relation to the Romanian version of Doerr’s novel stands in the overall loss in meaning in regard to this particular conceptual metaphor. Light is the backbone of the conceptual realm of the narrative and its mapping into Romanian needs to conserve its integral meaning. Irrespective of being called a dynamic equivalence or a metaphor into sense meaning retrieval, the translation process must take into consideration the intended target system, scaling the intention of the source one as well.

Tracing the various extended meaning of ‘light’ has shown that its conceptual structure transcends a purely visual meaning, encapsulating nuances that have cultural and affective implications. Nonetheless, the proposed investigation reiterates previous assumptions of research done in the area of Descriptive Translation studies, validating the importance of a target-oriented approach in translation, notifying the impact of the strategies that lie at hand in the translation process, as well as of the overall sociocultural environment of the translator. Its drawback stands in that the examples are still limited in number, consequently acknowledging the importance of further exploration of similar matters on larger parallel corpora, especially in regard to Romanian as target language, given the lack of research available on similar cross-linguistic perspectives.

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With a Bachelor Degree in Political Science and a Master Degree in Language Studies for Intercultural Communication, my research interests lie in a multidisciplinary, extrinsic and intrinsic investigation of language from a multifaceted perspective. As a PhD student I am interested in language research, focusing on translation processes seen as an embedded part of the strategies through which cultural groups construct representations of the other, a key factor in the development of new technologies through computational linguistics or main property of the human mind embedded in the emotional and reasoning cognitive capabilities.