MetaFoot – Translating Ecological Keywords

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1. Introduction

The well-known proverb "A picture is worth a thousand words" is extremely apt to describe the relationship between an image and a text – whether written or spoken. The meaning of the proverb can be expanded to illustrate the relationship between a text and the figurativeness of a text. A written text always includes many figures of speech and, though the use of different figures of speech is especially typical of fiction, metaphors are used in other genres as well. Metaphors are, in fact, a crucial part of our everyday language use, as they hide conceptual networks within them. This phenomenon arises from the nature of language: metaphors permeate our everyday language.

This paper is based on the idea that, in metaphor research, there is an abstraction behind the metaphorical expression, some kind of core or basic metaphor, which gathers proper metaphors around it. This abstraction is also called a *conceptual metaphor*. In cognitive linguistics, a *conceptual metaphor* refers to the understanding of one idea, or *conceptual* domain, in terms of another. For example, the conceptual metaphor TIME IS MONEY embodies metaphors like *to save time*, *running out of time* and *to budget time*, or THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS can be found behind the metaphors like *the foundation for the theory*, *the argument collapses* and *the theory needs more support*. (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 456–458, 469–470; Kövecses 2005, 39–43, 72–75.)

In this paper, I will discuss the possibility of metaphor translation from two points of view. First, I will examine to what extent it is possible to talk about the universal nature of conceptual metaphor and the way in which the conceptual metaphor that can be found behind a certain metaphor influences the translation process. I will concentrate on the metaphor *footprint* used in the ecological terms *carbon footprint*, *ecological footprint* and *water footprint* and their relationship with the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY. Secondly, I will use the anthropomorphic model (Kela 2008) as a tool to discuss whether the bodily image that the metaphor is based on – in this case, *foot* – makes it easier to understand a metaphor that is new or unknown in the target culture. From this perspective, for example, a carbon footprint should be easy to understand and translate, independent of whether the concept already exists in the target language or not.

My research questions are: In which way have the ecological keywords been transferred to EU languages? To what extent is it possible to talk about one conceptual metaphor in this case? Does the bodily image make it easier to understand a metaphor that is unknown or new in the target culture?

The research material contains three texts which are found on the *EUR-lex* website. The chosen texts are two European Parliament resolutions and one Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions (E1, E2, E3). Almost all of the texts are in official EU languages (Irish and Kroatian are still lacking). This gives a good opportunity to research many parallel texts.

2. Metaphorical nature of language

Every language contains a large number of expressions which have a figurative origin even if the original meaning can be found only by examining the etymology of the words. This metaphorical nature of language is significant – if not the main reason being the fact that languages renew continuously. Tiina Onikki-Rantajääskö (2008) has researched the metaphorical layers of the Finnish language, and she illustrates the connection between the development of language and culture with several examples. Onikki-Rantajääskö gives some examples of new metaphors that have influenced the language. The influence can be seen, for example, in vocabulary: verkko 'net(work)' and polku 'path' are good examples of new metaphors in the vocabulary of information technology (Onikki-Rantajääskö 2008, 51).

As a metaphor, *path* can be seen as one of those incorporated around a possibly clichéd but still usable and very productive conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY. 'Path' as a term is used in information technology, but it is also a way in which we can carry on our virtual life.

In real life, we leave many kinds of imprints behind us. The *footprints* researched in this paper are related to environmentalism, and it is a good example of the wider approach to the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY, because in this case the walker can be not only a person but also a state, a product or even a service.

3. Anthropomorphic model and bodily image

In her Ph.D. dissertation, Finnish researcher Maria Kela (2008) examines metaphors in translations of The Bible and comes to the conclusion that the more bodily the image is in the source language, the easier it is to understand even if there is no corresponding metaphor in the target language. Kela names this phenomenon as an *anthropomorphic model*. According to the model, the image is the more universal the closer it is connected to the human body, and vice versa: the bigger the distance between the image and the body, the more cultural specific information is needed when transferring the metaphor into the target language.

Following the idea of an anthropomorphic model, the word *footprint* as a metaphor seems to be at least cross-cultural, if not universal. This means that the metaphor *footprint* should be relatively easy to transfer into any other language.

4. Metaphor and translation strategies

The translator has several ways to translate a metaphor. According to Newmark (1981, 87–91) and Schäffner (2004, 1257), the translator can (1) reproduce the same image in the target language, (2) replace the image in the source language with a standard target language image which does not clash with the TL culture, (3) translate metaphor by simile, retaining the image, (4) translate the metaphor by simile plus sense, (5) convert the metaphor to sense, (6) delete the image or (7) use the same metaphor combined with sense.

Technological or jurisprudential terms are in some cases left as they are, because the exact content of the term is transmitted from source language to target

language. In these cases the transfer of a metaphor is less important than the transmission of exact information. (Klaudy 1999, 59).

5. Footprints in the research material

The starting point for the research was to examine in which way the concepts of *carbon footprint*, *ecological footprint* and *water footprint* have been expressed in different EU languages. I chose one EU text for every term from the *EUR-Lex* online page and examined these in twenty-one EU languages. The analysis is not rigorous, but even on the strength of such narrow research it is possible to make approximate observations.

After collecting the terms and expressions I divided these into four groups:
(1) terms which include a word having a meaning of 'foot' (32),
(2) terms which include a word having a meaning of 'track' or 'imprint' (22),
(3) terms which include a word having a meaning of 'effect' (6)
(4) terms which include a word having a meaning of 'discharge' (3)

This categorization produced the means to analyze the terms as follows:

In six languages [Danish (DA), Dutch (NL), English (EN), Finnish (FI), German (DE) and Portuguese (PT)], every examined footprint is expressed with a metaphor having a bodily image (DA **fod**aftryk, NL **voet**afdruk, EN **foot**print, FI **jalan**jälki, DE **Fuβ**abdruck, PT **pe**gada). In five languages [Czech (CS), Hungarian (HU), Latvian (LV), Lithuanian (LT) and Slovakian (SK)], not all footprints have an equivalent, but, if there is, the term includes a word having a meaning of 'foot' (CS **stopa**, HU **láb**nyom, LV **pēd**a, LT **pėd**sakas, SK **stopa**). The Czech and Slovakian terms include the word 'stopa', which has an etymological meaning of 'foot'.

In five languages [Bulgarian (BG), French (FR), Italian (IT), Romanian (RO) and Spanish (ES)], all three footprints are expressed with a term including the non-bodily metaphor of 'track' or 'imprint' (BG отпечатък, FR empreinte, IT impronta, RO amprenta, ES huella).

In other languages, the concept *footprint* is expressed different ways in three cases examined: Estonian (jalajälg 'footprint', jälg 'imprint', heitmed 'discharge'), Hungarian (lábnyom 'footprint', kibocsátás 'disharges'), Polish (ślad 'imprint', emitowane 'disharge'), Swedish (fotavtryck 'footprint', avtryck 'imprint').

Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese and Slovenian differ from other languages. In these languages the concept *footprint* is expressed in one or more cases by using the word 'effect': Latvian (pēda 'footprint', iekteme 'effect'), Lithuanian (pėdsakas 'footprint', poveikis 'effect'), Maltese (impronta 'imprint', impatt 'effect'), Slovenian (odtis 'imprint, sled 'imprint', vpliva 'effect').

6. Analysis and discussion

The results of the analysis indicate that the use of different footprints in selected texts vary in EU languages: the majority of the variations (32) include the metaphor *footprint* but in many variations (22) the bodily metaphor has been replaced with another, non-bodily metaphor with the meaning 'imprint' or 'track'. This finding indicates, too, that the conceptual metaphor behind these non-bodily metaphors is not LIFE IS A JOURNEY but more likely EFFECTS ARE LEAVING IMPRINTS, TRACKS. The variations which include a word with the meaning of 'discharge' or 'effect' do not contain a figurative image at all.

Even if we do not take a stand on the original language of the ecological terms but instead research the variations, the fact is that translation strategies are used in the process of term formation, too. An analysis of the terms indicates that there are signs of at least three strategies that have been used in the term formation process. In most cases the bodily metaphor ('footprint') has been reproduced in the language in question. In the cases of a non-bodily metaphor ('imprint' or 'track'), the image has been replaced with another image. In some cases the image has been converted to sense ('effect', 'discharge').

It is necessary for a language user to realize that the same "image" (for example, the same metaphor) does not always transmit the same information in every culture. When translators translate different figures of speech, they have to take into account the conventions of the genre and the typological characteristics of the text, and also the language- and culture-specific matters that either help or complicate the translation of the metaphor.

The strategy chosen by the translator mainly depends on the genre of the text and therefore on the function of the text, too. The EU texts examined in the research are typically of a genre in which the most important issue is to transmit the exact information. The translator's choice either to ignore reproducing or replacing the metaphor, and more likely to convert the image to sense as a strategy, arises from this fact.

If we examine the different footprints in any one language, it is possible to assume that the terms are under development. For example, in the Italian research material, the footprints are all expressed using the non-bodily metaphor 'imprint', but in other Italian texts the English term *carbon footprint* is also in use. The process of the establishment of these terms in different languages would offer a challenging topic for further research.

One hypothesis of my research was that the metaphor can be transferred to the target language because the incorporation of a figurative image helps a person to understand it even if there is no corresponding metaphor in the language examined. The other hypothesis was that the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY is behind the ecological keywords and the effects on the term formation process that was examined in different languages. According to the results of the analysis, the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY cannot be the only basic metaphor behind the ecological keywords in the languages examined, and its embodiment – even if it possibly helps to understand the term – doesn't seem to be a relevant issue in term formation. Anyhow, in most cases the terms contain a metaphor, but the conceptual metaphor is not the same in every language. Consequently, by combining the two conceptual metaphors found as a result of this research – LIFE IS A JOURNEY and EFFECTS ARE LEAVING TRACKS/IMPRINTS – it seems to be possible to construct a new, more complex conceptual metaphor LIFE IS LEAVING TRACKS/ IMPRINTS.

7. References

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E2 = *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Options for an EU vision and target for biodiversity beyond 2010.* http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52010DC0004 (30.4.2014)

E3 = *A resource-efficient Europe European Parliament resolution of 24 May 2012 on a resource-efficient Europe (2011/2068(INI)).* http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52012IP0223&qid=1398836310417 (30.4.2014)

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