

Available online at www.sciencedirect.com**ScienceDirect**

Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 231 (2016) 40 – 45

Procedia
Social and Behavioral Sciences

International Conference; Meaning in Translation: Illusion of Precision, MTIP2016, 11-13 May
2016, Riga, Latvia

Synesthetic metaphors: Aspects of intralingual and interlingual translation

Tatjana Smirnova*

Riga Technical University, Faculty of E-Learning Technologies and Humanities, 1 Kronvalda Blvd., Riga, LV-1010, Latvia

Abstract

In the last decade, several studies have been conducted to contrast the way synesthetic metaphors are perceived in various languages, however, these studies have not addressed translation of this type of metaphor. The paper aims to analyze synesthetic metaphors considering aspects of interlingual and intralingual translation in three working languages, English, Latvian and Russian. Samples selected from a variety of literary and promotional texts are analyzed to identify translation challenges and solutions. It is demonstrated that synesthetic metaphors composed following adjective-noun pattern display a relatively high degree of translatability whereas synesthetic metaphors based on linguistic iconicity may pose translation problems.

© 2016 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Peer-review under responsibility of the organizing committee of MTIP2016

Keywords: Synesthetic metaphor; linguistic iconicity; interlingual translation; intralingual translation; operative texts.

1. Introduction

Metaphor, metaphorical thinking and metaphorical expression have been the focus of research since the seminal work “Metaphors We Live By” by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) provided a major impetus to research in cognitive linguistics. A clear distinction between a conceptual metaphor as a mechanism of perceiving a concept in terms of another concept and a linguistic metaphor as a figure of speech used to describe one object in terms of another object has been established. At present, research on metaphor is not limited to the realm of language and cognition, metaphor is studied as a universal tool of meaning representation in such fields as the arts, cinema, and media.

*Corresponding author. Tel.: +37126705473.

E-mail address: tatjana.smirnova@rtu.lv

A metaphor that exploits a similarity between experiences in different sensory modalities referred to as synesthetic metaphor is one of the types of metaphor that has recently attracted particular attention of linguists, neurologists, and communication scholars. Traditionally studied as either neurological perception phenomenon (Yu X., 2012) or a literary device (Day, 1996), nowadays synesthetic metaphor is analyzed as one of the forms of cross-modal metaphor that can be manifested both verbally and non-verbally. According to Day (1996), synesthetic metaphor linguistically describes a certain sense in terms of a different sense modality. Syntagmatically, a typical synesthetic metaphor is a metaphor that results from a combination of a modifier and a head, where both express different perceptual qualities (Sakamoto, & Utsumi, 2009), although it may be also realized in a variety of forms. For example, manifestations of linguistic iconicity, or stable non-arbitrary connection between the signifier and signified, can also acquire the power of a synesthetic metaphor.

In the last decade, several case studies have been conducted to contrast the way synesthetic metaphors are perceived by speakers of various languages (Sakamoto, & Utsumi, 2009; Werning et al., 2006; Yu, 2003), however, these studies have not addressed translation of this type of metaphor.

The aim of the paper is to analyze synesthetic metaphors considering the aspects of interlingual and intralingual translation of these metaphors (i.e. interpretation and translation proper). According to Jacobson (2000[1959]), interlingual translation is defined as translation from one language to another, whereas intralingual translation is interpretation of the message by means of the same language. Due to their cross-modal nature synesthetic metaphors can be subject to intersemiotic translation or transcoding – a transfer between various semiotic systems, however, this aspect is not going to be considered within the scope of the present paper.

Analysis of the mechanisms of metaphorical representation of semantic and emotive content by means of synesthetic metaphor can contribute to the understanding of the processes of conceptualization of sensations and emotive experiences. The examples of synesthetic metaphors in three working languages, namely, English, Latvian and Russian, have been selected from a variety of literary texts as well as such promotional texts as advertising copy commercials, and slogans. The samples have been analyzed to identify inherent translation challenges and possible solutions, as awareness of the expressive potential of synesthetic metaphors is particularly important in production, reproduction, localization and interpretation of literary and operative texts.

2. Synesthetic metaphor: The unity of senses

Synesthesia is a perception phenomenon that occurs when an impression caused by a certain stimulus specific of a certain mode of perception is accompanied by additional sensation characteristic of other modality. Synesthesia is one of the most important components of psychophysical foundation of sound symbolism, one of the forms of linguistic iconicity. Linguistic iconicity is the property of a word conditioned by the presence of the essential, recurrent and relatively stable non-arbitrary relation between the phonemes of an underived word and the property of an object-denotatum taken as the basis of nomination (Voronin, 1982). It is used as an umbrella term to refer to such phenomena as sound imitation (onomatopoeia) and various forms of sound symbolism (articulatory and acoustic sound symbolism, phonoaesthesia). Discussing the synesthetic character of sound symbolism, Marks maintains,

Perhaps most significant is the fact that speech serves as an auditory stimulus, rousing sensations of sound whose suprasensory attributes [brightness, intensity and affect] become the medium for suggesting qualities for other modalities. In general, suprasensory attributes form a basis for synesthetic translation; and in particular, suprasensory attributes of sound form one basis for analogical sound symbolism. (Marks, 1978, p. 195)

Synesthesia is a tool that helps to verbally fix senses and feelings, and understanding of the mechanism of synesthesia allows making a conscious impact on the way information is perceived and processed (cf. Zaichenko, & Kartavenko, 2011). The phenomenon of synesthesia is associated with the mechanism of reconsidering the meaning of words identifying what properties of the concept allow using the name of one object to denote another. Therefore, essentially, the mechanism of synesthesia is similar to metaphor as there is a transfer of a quality of one sensation onto another.

Werning et al. (2006, p. 2365) characterize synesthetic metaphor as follows, “A metaphor is synesthetic if and only if its source domain is perceptual. It is only weakly synesthetic if its target is not also perceptual, and strongly synesthetic if its target domain, too, is perceptual.” The authors maintain that in such metaphors, the source domain, typically the domain of modifier in adjective-noun constructions, is restricted to concepts of perception, which form the perceptual domain.

Comparing conventional and synesthetic metaphors, Balla (cf. 2012, p. 108, 111–133) points out that the two can be distinguished on the basis of such esthetic canons as epistemological complexity and poetic quality; ideolectic pertinence and three levels of meaning, namely, literal/figurative, holistic, and ontogenic. Power of suggestion and latent symbolism, the criteria used to assess idiolectic pertinence, ascribe synesthetic metaphors the capacity to bear symbolic implications, although in a latent form. According to Balla, “Synesthesia usually occurs with latent symbolism because the collusion and collision of its sensory modalities have the propensity to produce meaning multiplied by their semantic field.” (ibid., p. 111).

Utsumi and Sakamoto (2009) analyzed synesthetic metaphors as a cognitive phenomenon. Based on a two-stage categorization theory that can explain the processes in which the cognitive effects of synesthetic metaphors are evoked, which the authors developed in their earlier works, they suggest,

...correspondence between the properties literally expressed by the adjective and the properties to be mapped onto the target concept would be indirect [...] rather than direct as predicted by the categorization theory. Since the synesthetic metaphor is a kind of adjective metaphor, cognitive effects of synesthetic metaphor could be evoked in some processes of two-stage categorization. (Sakamoto, & Utsumi, 2009, p. 1598)

Considering the mechanism of meaning transfer between the sensory modalities, Ullmann (1967) suggested that “lower sensory perceptual modalities”, such as taste, smell and touch would more frequently occur as source domains in metaphoric meaning transfer, whereas “higher senses” such as visual and auditory perception would occur as preferred target domains. The hierarchy suggested by Ullmann has been questioned and modified, e.g. by Yu, N., 2003. However, numerous empirical studies attested the general tendency to map perception experiences of smell, touch and taste onto the domains of auditory and visual perception (cf. Werning et al., 2006). Moreover, Ullmann’s hypothesis that such synesthetic metaphors are more cognitively accessible has also been confirmed.

3. Synesthetic metaphors in translation: Possibilities and limitations

Expressive resources of the language based on the principles of linguistic iconicity such as sound imitation, rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, assonance, and consonance can be employed to perform a variety of functions, including communicative, appellative, expressive and phatic, and that makes them a perfect tool to be used in expressive and persuasive communication, especially in the composition of promotional texts.

Synesthetic metaphors have a very special affective and appellative capacity, and this property is extensively employed in literature, poetry in particular, as well as recently in composition of marketing and inspirational messages. In case these messages have to be translated or localized, it is important to realize that coding of information is subject to conventions that may be effective on the individual, family, local, national, and institutionalized level, as well as can be pertaining to a definite culture. Each language has a range of conceptual and linguistic tools that may be used to induce certain synesthetic reactions, when activation of definite concepts evokes perception-like experiences. Conscious triggering of synesthetic reactions may lead to the activation of the desired response by recipients and ensure communication of the intended meaning in both literary and promotional texts. In general, adequate translation of expressive and operative texts can be complicated due to differences in conceptualization and verbalization of emotive content governed by the conceptual structure of a particular language.

Day states, “The meanings for synesthetic metaphors [...] are generated through semantic processes and fashioned by time and cultural elements, much like other metaphors.” (Day, 1996). Thus, interlingual translation of synesthetic metaphors will be subject to the same procedures as translation of any other type of metaphor. Moreover, it will be subject to the same limitations associated with incompatibility between conceptual systems, semantic structure and creative resources of the working languages. The strategies employed in translation of

metaphors, including synesthetic metaphors, can be generally grouped into full or partial reproduction, substitution, and omission, which potentially can be supplemented by various compensation mechanisms.

There are several comprehensive studies analyzing approaches to interlingual translation of metaphors (Schäffner, 2004, 2012; Fernandez, 2002; Newmark, 1988; Van Der Broeck, 1981), however, intralingual and intersemiotic translation modes have largely been disregarded.

The success or failure in the adequate interlingual transfer of a synesthetic metaphor will often depend on its transparency in the intralingual perspective, i.e. ease of decoding by the users of the source language. In other words, the more accessible the metaphor is in intralingual perspective, the more susceptible it is for cross-language transfer. Thus, stock metaphors will be the most transparent and will tend to display a decent degree of translatability (cf. Newmark, 1988).

Some synesthetic metaphors would demonstrate a relatively universal character and will have their direct counterparts or equivalents in several languages. For instance, such metaphors as *velvet(y) taste – samtaina garša – бархатный вкус* (touch to taste); *coarse/soft voice – rupja/maiga balss – зрубый/мягкий голос* (touch to auditory mode); *cutting sound – griezīga skaņa – режущий звук* (touch to auditory) have lexicalized in all three working languages and are easily translatable by means of calquing.

At the same time, it is important to realize that synesthetic metaphors, same as any other type of metaphors are “culturally and linguistically shaped, but with some neurological underpinning” (Day, 1996, p. 1). In many cases, it will not be possible to reproduce synesthetic metaphors by means of direct word-for-word translation. In English, the modifier *sweet* (taste to any other sense modality) used to denote *nice, pleasant* appears in a range of expressions, many of which can be considered synesthetic metaphors: *sweet melody, sweet music, sweet face*. In turn, in Russian the collocation capacity of a counterpart of *sweet – сладкий* will be much lower. Moreover, even when the modifier is used as an element of a synesthetic metaphor, its meaning may be interpreted differently. In English, *sweet voice* stands to denote a nice, pleasant voice, whereas its Russian equivalent *сладкий голос* will bear a negative connotation: *a flattering, coercive voice*. In Latvian, expression *salda balss* would display a very low degree of acceptability among the speakers of the language, and may appear contrived and rather marginal.

Many image-schemas underlying synesthetic metaphors are language-specific and thus the metaphors based on them cannot always be fully reproduced in translation. For example, a stock metaphor *эустой цвет* (literally thick color), based on the interaction between touch and visual modes, can be translated into English either by a different metaphor – *deep color*, or by an expression devoid of metaphorical component – *saturated color*.

Translation challenges would be more significant if synesthetic metaphors appear as a result of employment of iconic resources of the language at suprasegmental level, such as rhythmical arrangement of the utterance and application of alliteration, assonance and consonance to communicate the meaning metaphorically (cf. Smirnova, 2012).

While rhythm is an iconic phenomenon, which can be manifested both linguistically and extra-linguistically, it is relatively easily reproducible in translation. Stylistic devices based on repetition of certain sounds and sound clusters that subconsciously trigger synesthetic reactions can barely be adequately recreated in another language without a considerable loss of either semantic component of the message or its stylistic coloring and aesthetic appeal. Such loss may lead to communication failure in case of translation of operative texts that are aimed to manipulate recipient opinion and induce predictable behavioral responses. Although in translation of these texts information value may be reduced to a minimum and form may be considered to be more important than content, a translator still should maintain a certain level of content precision.

(1) The Passionate Pursuit of Perfection (Lexus)

Example (1) features a slogan of a Japanese car manufacturer Toyota which was in effect for ten years from 1989 till 1999. The slogan appeared to be extremely successful, and as many popular taglines it has started to be used independently on its origin getting detached from the brand it is meant to represent. The company has replaced the

slogan, but still uses the tag *pursuit of perfection* to characterize its performance.¹ As it is typical of operative texts, the slogan is triply structured – on the semantic-syntactic level, at the level of persuasion and the level of artistic expression (cf. Reiss 1989, 109). It features application of affective vocabulary, as well as regular rhythmical pattern that facilitates the adherence of linguistic units into one whole and thus reinforces interrelation of contextually determined elements, and alliteration that act as a form of synesthetic metaphor ascribing the sense of inherent unity to the three concepts referred to in a tagline. The slogan does not have registered language variants in either Latvian or Russian, however, it has been translated into Russian to familiarize consumers with the values the company pursues. It is a rare case when a target language version retains not only the semantic component of the message, but also its expressive potential communicated by means of alliteration: *Страстное стремление к совершенству*.

Example (2) presents a slogan of the company Philips in use from 2004 till 2013² and its official language variants in Latvian and Russian backtranslated for reference purposes. The original tagline is formed by means of phonetic coupling, that is, joining two words with the same initial sound implying certain connection between the concepts represented. Phonetic coupling is historically widely used in English, e.g. in idiomatic expressions (*kith and kin*), comparisons (*busy as a bee*), and brand names (*American Airlines*). At the same time, phonetic coupling is not as extensively used in Latvian and Russian, moreover, its application will not always imply inherent connection between the concepts in a phrase.

- (2) Sense and simplicity
 Vienkārši un ģeniāli (simply and ingeniously)
 Разумно и просто (sensibly and simply)

As it may be noticed considering both Latvian and Russian variants of the slogan, content was given priority over form. Appellative force of the message is maintained by means of using connotationally loaded vocabulary, and the effect triggered by the application of alliteration is fully disregarded.

- (3) We are what we wear (Nike)

The last example (3) features a slogan unique in the way it is composed – /w/ is the only consonant sound used in the line, and as it is a voiced labiovelar approximant, no obstruction occurs in the process of articulation. When the phrase is pronounced, it sounds like a tune or one single breathe. It is an instance of a successful synergy between the form and meaning and may be perceived as form of synesthetic metaphor. The slogan has never been translated into two target languages. Considering the possible translation hypothetically, it is clear that the message can be possibly transferred into Latvian and Russian only at the semantic-syntactic level, retaining the content fully losing both emotional appeal and aesthetic effect.

4. Conclusions

Synesthetic metaphors composed following adjective-noun pattern display a relatively high degree of translatability. Many metaphors of this type already have established equivalents in the working languages, which have lexicalized and entered the respective word stocks. Calquing may be efficiently employed in case a metaphor should be recreated in the target language, however, the translator should carefully consider the meaning of an attribute, the source domain in a synesthetic metaphor, to reproduce it accurately in each particular context. It is important to realize that the meaning of an attribute may differ across the languages in terms of connotation and collocation capacity.

Suprasegmental synesthetic metaphors rarely display high translatability, especially across languages from different language families. Rhythm is the only iconic element that is easily reproducible in the process of

¹ www.lexus-int.com

² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philips>

interlingual translation. At the same time, synesthetic metaphors based on conscious arrangement of certain sounds and sound clusters, i.e. communicated by means of alliteration, assonance, and consonance, are often neutralized or omitted in translation. Therefore, the effect communicated by application of instances of linguistic iconicity in the source language is generally lost.

References

- Balla, B. (2012). *Symbolism, synesthesia and semiotics, multidisciplinary approach*. USA: Xlibris Corporation.
- Day, S. (1996). Synesthesia and synesthetic metaphors. *PSYCHE* (vol. 2). Retrieved 12 May, 2016 from <http://www.daysyn.com/Day1996.pdf>
- Fernandez, E. S. (2002). Translators' English-Spanish metaphorical competence: Impact on the target system. *ELIA* 3, 203–218. Retrieved 12 May, 2016 from <http://institucional.us.es/revistas/elia/3/12.%20samaniego.pdf>
- Jacobson, R. (2000). On linguistic aspects of translation. In L. Venuti (Ed.), *The translation studies reader* (pp. 113–118). London/New York: Routledge.
- Marks, L. E. (1878). *The unity of senses. Interrelations among the modalities*. USA: Academic Press, Inc.
- Newmark, P. (1988). *A textbook of translation*. UK: Prentice Hall International.
- Oswald, L. R. (2012). *Marketing semiotics. Signs, strategies and brand value*. USA: Oxford University Press.
- Pršir, T., & Simon, A. C. (2013). Iconic representation of rhythm in speech. In S. Hancil & D. Hirst (Eds.), *Prosody and iconicity*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Reiss, K. (1989). Text types, translation types and translation assessment. In A. Chesterman (Ed.), *Readings in translation theory* (pp. 105–114). Finland: Loimaan Kirjapaino Oy.
- Sakamoto, M., & Utsumi, A. (2009). Cognitive effects of synesthetic metaphors evoked by the semantic interaction. *Proceedings of CogSci 2009*, 1592–98. Retrieved 12 May, 2016 from <http://csjarchive.cogsci.rpi.edu/proceedings/2009/papers/343/paper343.pdf>
- Schäffner, C. (2004). *Metaphor and translation: Some implications of a cognitive approach*. Retrieved 12 May, 2016 from <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0378216604000244>
- Schäffner, C. (2012). Finding space under the umbrella: The Euro crisis, metaphors, and translation. *The Journal of Specialized Translation*, 17. Retrieved 12 May, 2016 from http://www.jostrans.org/issue17/art_schaeffner.php
- Smirnova, T. (2012). How to translate a dream: Pragmatic aspects of promotional text translation. *Vertimo studijos (Translation Studies)*, 5, 90–100.
- Ullmann, S. (1967). *The principles of semantics*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Van Der Broeck, R. (1981). The limits of translatability exemplified by metaphor translation. *Poetics Today*, 2(4), 73–87. Translation Theory and Intercultural Relations (Summer - Autumn, 1981).
- Werning, M., Fleischhauer, J., & Beseoglu, H. (2006). The cognitive accessibility of synaesthetic metaphors. In R. Sun & N. Miyake (Eds.), *Proceedings of the Twenty Eighth Annual Conference of the Cognitive Science Society* (pp. 2365–70). London.
- Yu, N. (2003). Synesthetic metaphor: A cognitive perspective. *Journal of Literary Semantics*, 32(1), 19–34.
- Yu, X. (2012). On the study of synesthesia and synesthetic metaphor. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 3(6), 1284–1289.
- Воронин, С. (1982). *Основы фоносемантики*. Ленинград: ЛГУ.
- Заиченко, А. А., Картавенко, М. В. (2011). Синестезия – феноменология, виды, классификации. *Информатика, вычислительная техника и инженерное образование*, 3(5).