

# Metaphors in translation processes and products

Sonja Tirkkonen-Condit

University of Joensuu. Savonlinna School of Translation Studies

P.O. Box 48. SF-57101 Savonlinna. Finland

sonja.tirkkonen-condit@joensuu.fi

www.joensuu.fi/slnkv/

www.savonlinnakampus.joensuu.fi

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## 1. Background

The TAP-based research of translation processes started at Savonlinna School of Translation Studies in 1987, and publications related to this research include articles in journals (*Target, Meta, TTR*), several unpublished M.A. theses, two Licentiate theses (Jääskeläinen 1990 and Laukkanen 1997), and one PhD thesis (Jääskeläinen 1999). Two collective volumes on translation processes (edited by Tirkkonen-Condit and Jääskeläinen) are also forthcoming shortly as a result of international conferences initiated by the Savonlinna group of researchers.

## 2. General objectives

At the early stages of the Savonlinna research project our aim was to describe what happens in the translator's mind. In this first generation research, the hypotheses that were tested were very general. We tried to answer questions such as what features in the processes were conducive to good quality in products. Our major aim was —and still is— to identify dimensions of expertise in translators' decision-making and behaviour. With the advance of the project the hypotheses have become more specific. The research on metaphors in translation processes reported in this paper is an example of our second generation research. A particular hypothesis is being tested by a variety of methods which we have developed in the course of our first-generation projects. (For a discussion on first and second generation research see Jääskeläinen 1999.)

## 3. Metaphor translation: specific objectives

The overall aim is to test hypotheses relating to the processes of translating metaphorical expressions. The specific hypothesis being tested in the current research by Tirkkonen-Condit and Martikainen is the Cognitive Translation Hypothesis first presented by Nili Mandelblit (1996), according to which metaphorical expressions take more time and are more difficult to translate if they exploit a different cogni-

tive domain than the target language equivalent expressions. The reason for this difference in the translation process is, according to the hypothesis, that it is the search for another conceptual mapping (another cognitive domain) which causes delay, uncertainty and difficulty in the translation of different domain metaphors.

#### 4. Research design: subjects, methods, results, problems

The subjects were professional or near-professional translators who performed simulated translation tasks in think-aloud conditions. In Tirkkonen-Condit's research the number of subjects was nine and in Martikainen's research five. Each translation session was tape-recorded and the tapes were transcribed into think-aloud protocols.

The aim in Tirkkonen-Condit (1998) was to capture the symptoms of difficulty in translating metaphoric expressions. In order to develop an instrument to measure the difficulty I developed a quantitative method of analysis which took account of 1) the tentative translation variants produced; 2) the runs-through; 3) the dictionary checks, verbalised problem identifications, evaluations, questions and comments as well as 4) the length of TAP segments (in terms of printed lines) devoted to metaphor treatment in the translators' think-aloud transcripts. The results supported the cognitive translation hypothesis in that the different domain metaphors attracted more of these items than the similar domain metaphors.

The experiment reported in Tirkkonen-Condit (1998) was not specifically designed to test hypotheses on metaphor translation. Thus the source text chosen for the translation brief (the *Big Issue* text<sup>1</sup>) did not contain instances of metaphorical expressions that could be predicted to present a challenge for translators. However, the text contained three such expressions which were metaphor-like from the translators' point of view and seemed suitable for a tentative analysis: 1) The expressions were more general than any of their potential translation equivalents and thus called for specification in the target text. 2) Their thinkable translation equivalents were problematic in that none of them was unequivocally superior to the rest. Thus it was to be expected that each of the three metaphor-like expressions would involve a complex choice and would therefore attract abundant think-aloud material. 3) Two of the three expressions exploited cognitive domains which were similar to the domains exploited by the potential translation equivalents, whereas one expression exploited a different cognitive domain. Thus a tentative comparison between similar domain versus different domain expressions was possible.

For the purposes of this paper, a comparison of two expressions will suffice. The expression representing similar domain expressions, for Finnish translators, will be *artwork*, and the expression representing different domain expressions, *vulnerably housed*. Both items represent instances of translation in which translators

1. *The Big Issue* text was suggested by Miriam Shlesinger for the Process Team (formed at AILA96), to be used in a joint experiment in which professional translators in various countries were to carry out a translation task in a think-aloud condition. The data elicited in these experiments were to be analysed and the results compared.

face a relatively complex choice, since literal translation, and the translation that first comes to mind is impossible. Both items, however, were easy to interpret in their particular contexts and the problems, if any, were genuinely translational. According to my estimate, the choice in both instances was equally complex. What we would want to know is whether *vulnerably housed* turned out more difficult to translate than *artwork* and whether this was due to domain conflict.

*Artwork* in the context of the *Big Issue* text means something graphic which can be reproduced in printed material. The translations offered contained items such as *kuvitus* (illustration with pictures), *piirroksset* (drawings), *kuva-aineisto* (picture material), *graafinen tuote* (graphic product). *Artwork* seemed a good candidate for a same domain expression. It was clear from the context that the potential Finnish equivalent in this context could not be the item that probably first comes to a Finnish speaker's mind when they see the word. The equivalent *taideteos* (piece of art) was unthinkable in the context of the *Big Issue* text. But there is a choice of Finnish expressions in the same cognitive domain that can be exploited to convey the idea of something graphic which can be reproduced in printed material such as a magazine.

*Vulnerable*, according to the descriptions given in dictionaries, means something that can be wounded, open to injury or attack, not adequately protected. The first translation equivalent given by Finnish bilingual dictionaries for *vulnerable* is *haavoittuva* (that can be wounded). *Vulnerably housed*, then, refers to people whose housing conditions are inadequate and insecure and who are, for example, under the risk of becoming homeless.

The verbalisations related to *vulnerably housed* were to a great extent affected by the «dictionary equivalent» which supposedly most Finnish learners of English know for the lexical item *vulnerable*, namely 'haavoittuva', which can be back-translated into English as woundable. I do not know how many native English speakers think of wounds, blood and other such things when they come across the word *vulnerable* or *vulnerably*. At any rate this was quite prominent in the Finnish translator's thinking aloud. Since it is out of the question that the dictionary equivalent could be used as a translation equivalent in the context we have here, it becomes necessary for the Finnish translators to get rid of the cognitive domain of wounds and blood and to find expressions which roughly convey the idea that people who are referred to as vulnerably housed have problematic housing conditions. The translator's behaviour —in respect of the two items which I compared here, i.e. *vulnerably housed* and *artwork*— was as predicted by the cognitive translation hypothesis. In other words, the former attracted more verbalisation and more run-through than the latter, and a lot of the verbalisation for *vulnerably housed* can perhaps be interpreted as a search for another cognitive domain.

The original aim in Martikainen (1999) was to carry out a similar study as my pilot study reported above, but with an experiment which was specifically designed to test the cognitive translation hypothesis, i.e. with a translation brief which did contain genuinely metaphoric expressions, some of which exploited similar cognitive domains as the potential translation equivalents while others did not. Martikainen was my M.A. student, and it was in the interest of both of us to find a truly ideal

source text and to devise a translation brief which would elicit the desired metaphorical expressions.

The simulated translation brief in Martikainen's experiment was to translate from English into Finnish a brief news item from the Football column of *The Express on Saturday* (October 25, 1997), to be published in the Finnish Football Magazine *Futari*, in its column called «Maalin takaa» (From Behind the Goal). The source text as a whole is given below:

Sugar's FA rant scores own goal

SPURS chairman Alan Sugar's attack on the Football Association this week was greeted with disbelief at White Hart Lane as well as Lancaster Gate.

Sugar said the FA «haven't a clue what's going on in the outside world, they're totally out of their depth», adding: «They're like Madame Tussaud's dummies, out to lunch the lot of them.» Yet one of the most recent recruits to the FA just happens to be Peter Barnes, Sugar's long-serving club secretary at Tottenham.

Barnes, who joined the FA as a divisional representative in April, would only comment: «I'm not saying anything on this subject.»

An FA source said: «We're all alive and kicking and that includes Mr Barnes. We're treating Sugar's remarks with the contempt they deserve.»

There are at least five idiomatic expressions in the above text which attract attention from the point of metaphor translation, namely the following:

- To score (one's) own goal
- Not to have a clue
- To be (totally) out of one's depth
- To be out to lunch
- To be alive and kicking

Instead of looking at all of these expressions from the point of view of translation difficulty, as this would emerge from the translators' think-aloud data, Martikainen focused on three expressions, namely the ones that had the semantic content of 'not understanding'. These expressions are *not to have a clue*, *to be out of one's depth*, and *to be out to lunch*. Of these three expressions, the most difficult, when measured with the instrument developed by Tirkkonen-Condit (1998), was *to be out of one's depth*. This is probably because there is no Finnish idiomatic expression which exploits the cognitive domain of vertical dimension and has the semantic content of 'not understanding'. In other words, there is no Finnish translation equivalent which would exploit the domain of 'failing to reach deep enough in order to grasp something'. In contrast, there is a host of Finnish idioms which exploit the domain of 'being outside', along the same lines as the English idiom *to be out to lunch*. Similarly, the idiom *not to have a clue* exploits a similar cognitive domain, i.e. the domain of detective work, as the Finnish idiom *ei ole hajuaakaan* (does not have a slightest trace of smell). While the English idiom literally refers to *clue* in the meaning of thread left behind in order to find one's way back from a labyrinth, the Finnish idiom refers to a sniff dog who fails in his task if he loses even the slightest hint of the smell of the person he is trying to trace.

All in all, Martikainen also got support for the hypothesis that metaphorical expressions with different source domains —whether they originated in a shared conceptual metaphor or not— caused more verbalisation and tentative translation variant production in the TAPs. In these terms, they were more difficult to translate than metaphorical expressions with similar source domains.

In addition to measuring translation difficulty from the think-aloud material, Martikainen also made an attempt to trace back the conceptual metaphors that the source and target languages might share as the ultimate basis for the conceptual mapping of ‘understanding’ and ‘not understanding’. It seems that the following conceptual metaphors are largely shared, as shown by idiomatic expressions and the etymologies of the lexical items referring to understanding: UNDERSTANDING IS BEING WITHIN ONE’S REACH, while NOT UNDERSTANDING IS BEING BEYOND ONE’S REACH; UNDERSTANDING IS BEING INSIDE, while NOT UNDERSTANDING IS BEING OUTSIDE, and UNDERSTANDING IS MOVING AHEAD, while NOT UNDERSTANDING IS GETTING STUCK IN ONE PLACE. Since understanding is a good thing and not understanding is a bad thing, these conceptual metaphors can be traced back to the more primitive conceptual metaphors which relate to HAVING WITHIN ONE’S REACH versus NOT HAVING WITHIN ONE’S REACH, BEING INSIDE versus BEING OUTSIDE, and BEING ABLE TO MOVE versus BEING UNABLE TO MOVE, which imply contrast between good and bad.

The results we have obtained so far indicate that the cognitive translation hypothesis gets support from our TAP research on the processes of translating metaphorical expressions.