

Novel metaphor comprehension:

The role of translation strategy and translation direction

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Focusing on the perspective of the reader, we investigated how translation strategy may affect novel metaphor comprehension in L1-L2 and L2-L1 translation direction. Thirty-four Greek-English bilinguals (mean age = 24.2), highly proficient in L2-English, read novel metaphors in L1 or L2 (source language), and upon presentation of the translation in the other language, were required to respond whether the meaning of the translation matched that of the source sentence (50% yes/no responses per condition). Sentences were controlled for word length and emotionality. Strategy type (figurative vs. non-figurative) and translation direction (L1-L2 vs. L2-L1) were manipulated within participants. Reaction time and accuracy were measured. In the reading of the source sentence, repeated measures ANOVA revealed faster novel metaphor reading in participants' L1 than in the L2 (2909 vs. 3286 ms). In the meaning matching task, there was faster identification of the correct translated meaning when a figurative strategy was used that maintained the exact metaphorical image of the source-sentence than when a non-figurative paraphrase was used (3262 vs. 3765 ms). Accuracy analyses also yielded a significant main effect of translation strategy with more accurate responses for the figurative (84.5%) than for the non-figurative strategy (68.8%). The interaction with translation direction revealed that the translation strategy effect was significant only in L1-L2 direction ($p < .001$; L2-L1: $p = .147$). Considering these findings together, we may conclude that maintaining a metaphorical image in translation reinforces the semantic overlap across two languages by increasing the semantic similarities between source and target concepts. This way, activation of corresponding connotations is restricted into the most relevant ones, resulting in the intended sentence interpretation (van den Broeck, 1981, and Dagut, 1987). In line with bilingual memory/word translation models (Kroll & Stewart, 1994, Finkbeiner et al., 2004, and Kroll et al., 2010), our results show that such processing is enhanced in L1-L2 translation direction in which semantic representations are assumed to be richer than in the reverse direction, even for novel metaphors whose interpretation by default cannot be based on prior stored figurative meaning but is constructed online (Glucksberg & Keysar, 1993, Giora, 1997, and Bowdle & Gentner, 2005).

Our results suggest that translation strategy and translation direction are modulating factors in metaphor comprehension and that in the case of novel metaphors, a figurative translation strategy can be proposed as a successful translation approach, especially in L1-L2 translation direction.

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