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Impact of the cross-cultural variation of the conceptual metaphor “A government institution is a body” on the cognitive effort during the Estonian-Russian translation of metaphorical expressions

Abstract:

Conceptual metaphor is arguably one of the most complex objects studied by linguistics. On the one hand, according to the conceptual metaphor theory by Lakoff & Johnson (2003), conceptual metaphors are omnipresent in language. On the other hand, as many studies (e.g. Kövecses 2006) have shown, conceptual metaphors tend to vary across different languages and cultures. It has been suggested (Mandelblit 1995) that the discrepancies between metaphors on the cognitive level are the main reason why the translation of metaphorical expressions presents particular difficulties for translators. Several studies (e.g. Sjørup 2013, Massey & Ehrensberger-Dow 2017) attempted to evaluate the impact of cross-cultural variation of conceptual metaphors on the cognitive effort, related to the translation of metaphorical expressions. However, the body of research in this field is relatively modest and is mainly restricted to studying the process of translation either to or from English.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the impact of cross-cultural variation on the cognitive effort during the Estonian-Russian translation of metaphorical expressions that represent the conceptual metaphor A GOVERNMENT INSTITUTION IS A BODY. Based on corpus data, the expressions were divided into two groups according to the classification developed by Mandelblit (1995): expressions with SMC (similar mapping condition), for which the cognitive domains of the conceptual metaphor in the source and target languages overlap, and expressions with DMC (different mapping condition), for which they do not. During the experimental study, a group consisting of 25 participants was asked to translate texts that contained metaphorical phrases from Estonian (L2) into Russian (L1). The translation process was recorded using keylogging software Translog-II 2.24 (Carl 2012). The translation time and the duration of pauses were measured and analyzed using the statistical Linear Mixed Model. Quantitative data was accompanied by the evaluation of the cognitive effort given by participants via the questionnaire.

Data obtained from both the log-files and the questionnaire showed, that the discrepancies between the conceptual metaphors in the source and target languages had a significant impact on the cognitive effort related to the translation of the metaphorical expressions, as there were statistically significant differences between both the translation times and the duration of pauses related to the translation of the expressions with SMC and DMC. The results of the quantitative measurement of the cognitive effort was partially confirmed by the qualitative data. Overall, the research showed that there was a significant difference in the cognitive effort depending on the cross-cultural variation of the conceptual metaphor.
References:


