TRANSLATING METAPHORS IN THE NEWS: THE UKRAINIAN CONFLICT

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Abstract: This paper is a case study that explores the Romanian translation of metaphors used in the British news regarding the Ukrainian conflict, which started in November 2013. Metaphors occurring in articles of well-known English newspapers have been analyzed by clarifying their meanings and establishing their types, and then translated into Romanian according to some of the strategies proposed by Peter Newmark (1981). The results of the study show that the translatability degree of metaphors varies from one occurrence to another but, in principle, they can be preserved in translation in a proportion of over 50%. However, much more research is needed in order to obtain more accurate statistics for the translation of metaphors in the press.

Keywords: metaphor, news, strategy, translatability, Ukraine

Ever since the time of Aristotle, scholars have investigated the figurative dimension of language and distinguished it from its literal side. The topic has kept its interest to this day – covering a wide range of (related) disciplines such as linguistics, stylistics, rhetoric, literary and cultural studies, etc. Moreover, figurative expression has crossed the borders of literature and penetrated non-literary texts as well, which have mainly an informative purpose. However, rhetorical figures have proved their usefulness even in such types of texts, as they can compress information and render it in a more concise manner. Therefore the present paper analyses particular instances of metaphor occurring in British newspaper articles on the Ukrainian conflict, started in November 2013, and then provides possible Romanian translation equivalents in order to obtain clarifying results, or at least approximate ones, with regard to the degree of metaphor translatability in the aforementioned type of text. The analysis of metaphors implies elucidating their meanings and establishing the categories they fit in according to the classifications proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980) and by Peter Newmark (1988). During the Romanian translation process of the metaphors examined, we also intend to identify the metaphor translation strategy employed in each case among those suggested by Newmark (1981). Consequently, before starting the actual analysis, a brief overview of the theoretical background previously mentioned has to be given..

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) distinguished three categories of metaphors: ontological, structural, and orientational metaphors. Ontological metaphors "have a physical world entity in the source and an activity (e.g. *He put a lot of energy into his attack)*, emotion (e.g. *He has fear*) or idea (e.g. *We have a problem*) in the target" (Pérez Hernández &Ruiz de Mendoza, 2011:164).

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Structural metaphors consist of the expression of a concept by means of another one, which is better defined and structured. The mapping 'ARGUMENT IS WAR' is an example of structural metaphor. Orientational metaphors refer to concepts which are spatially related to each other, as in 'HAPPY IS UP' / 'SAD IS DOWN' (e.g. *I'm feeling up*) (ibid).

Newmark (1988:106-112) distinguishes between six types of metaphors - dead, cliché, stock, recent, adapted and original metaphors – and illustrates this typology in the following figure:

Dead … Cliché … Stock – Recent Adapted Original

The dots between the first three types of metaphors point out that these are examples of lexicalized metaphors and that there is not a clear-cut distinction between them. *Dead metaphors* can be hardly recognised because they usually refer to space and time, body parts, general ecological features and the main human activities. *Cliché metaphors* "have perhaps temporarily outlived their usefulness" and are employed "as a substitute for clear thought, often emotively, but without corresponding to the facts of the matter". *Stock metaphors* are established metaphors and in an informal context are concise ways of covering a physical and/or mental situation both referentially and pragmatically. These metaphors have particular emotional warmth which does not disappear with overuse. *Recent metaphors* are metaphorical neologisms, often 'anonymously' created, which have quickly circulated in the language. *Adapted metaphors* imply an adaptation of an existing stock metaphor. *Original metaphors* are non-lexicalized and non-adapted.

When it comes to translation, Newmark (1981:88) suggests seven metaphor translation strategies:

1. reproducing the same image in the TL;
2. replacing the image in the SL with a standard TL image;
3. translating the metaphor by a simile;
4. transferring the metaphor by simile plus sense;
5. converting the metaphor into sense;
6. deleting the metaphor;
7. translating the metaphor by the same metaphor combined with sense.

Once the prerequisite for the case study presented, it is time to discuss, in alphabetical order, a number of fifteen metaphors extracted from British newspaper articles and then draw the subsequent conclusions.

- *bitter pill*

A Crimean secession would be a *bitter pill* for a new Ukrainian government to accept. (BBC Mar. 2014)

In this case, we have a metaphorical idiom referring to a very unpleasant situation that must be accepted.[1] The idiom is based on an anlogy between the bitter taste of medicine and discomfort caused by an unpleasant event, in the present context the Crimean secession. Given that the bitter of a pill is transferred to the Crimean secession, the metaphor can fit in the

[1]Cambridge Dictionaries Online.

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category of structural metaphors. Its already established meaning in the dictionary suggests that it may be seen as a stock metaphor as well. The existence of the Romanian figurative expression *pastilă amară* makes it possible to reproduce the same image in the TL (Newmark's first translation strategy):

O secesiune în Crimeea ar fi o *pastilă amară* pentru un nou guvern ucrainean.[2]

- *blink*

For weeks, the president was the one who wasn't answering the phone, so to speak - refusing categorically to listen to the protesters' demands. But as of Saturday night, Mr Yanukovych has officially *blinked*. (BBC Jan. 2014)

As seen in the explanatory context provided here, in addition to the literal meaning, the verb *blink* means to "react to something with surprise or disapproval".[3] Considering that reaction is perceived in terms of blinking, we have to do with another structural metaphor. On the grounds of its use as a substitute for clear thought, one can equally regard it as a cliché. Nevertheless, the previous remark on the impossibility of a clear-cut distinction between dead, cliché and stock metaphors is also valid for this occurrence. The Romanian literal equivalent of the verb *blink – a clipi* – lacks such a figurative sense, and therefore we will resort to the translation strategy of converting the metaphor into sense:

Săptămâni întregi, președintele Ianukovici nu a răspuns la telefon, altfel spus a refuzat categoric să asculte solicitările protestatarilor. Însă, sâmbătă seară, acesta a avut primele *reacții* oficiale.

- (the) *clouds darkened*

But the *clouds darkened* on Monday when the Ukrainian authorities also detained Tymoshenko's chief lawyer for questioning about alleged domestic violence. (The Guardian Nov. 2013)

Clouds darkened represents a negative metaphor, according to which bad events are expressed in terms of clouds. In other words, one concept is mapped into another, i.e. WORSE IS CLOUDS (RAIN), which indicates a structural metaphor. However, the same expression can stand as an original metaphor due to its absence in the dictionary, which shows that it is non-lexicalised and its meaning must be interpreted according to the context. When trying to translate it into Romanian, we realise that we cannot reproduce the same image, neither replace it with a standard TL image. Therefore, we will convert it into sense so as to provide the compressed information:

Luni *lucrurile au luat o altă întorsătură*, deoarece autoritățile ucrainene l-au reținut pentru interogatoriu și pe avocatul șef al Iuliei Timoșenko, suspectându-l de violență domestică.

[2] All the Romanian translations belong to the present author.
[3] Oxford Dictionary online.

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- *half-asleep country*

[…]Ukraine has shifted into a different category of *country* – from that of the peaceful and *half-asleep* to the category characterised by a highly radicalised polulation. (BBC Jan. 2014)

The metaphor *half-asleep country* suggests that the population of Ukraine have not reacted or taken political measures so far, because they may have not realised that politicians were looking after their own interests instead of those of the entire nation. According to Andrey Kurkov, the author of the BBC article containing the metaphor in question, in Ukraine "politics is about power and using that power to get rich". Consequently, the concept of 'unawareness' is expressed through the concept of 'sleep', i.e. UNAWARENESS IS SLEEP, which indicates, on the one hand, a structural metaphor. This metaphor has a negative connotation, being a form of criticism towards the Ukrainian people, who have trusted politicians without being aware of their intentions until this moment. On the other hand, due to its overuse and obvious meaning, the metaphor *half-asleep country* also falls in the category of dead metaphors. The Romanian translation does not pose any problems and the same image can be reproduced literally in the TL. In this way, nothing is lost in translation and the same source text effect is preserved:

[…] Ucraina a trecut într-o altă categorie de *țară* – din pașnică și *pe jumătate adormită* a devenit o țară cu o populație extrem de radicală.

- *play hardball*

It was when that deal collapsed, violence broke out, and the conflict spread, that Putin started to *play hardball*. (The Independent Mar. 2014)

The literal meaning of *hardball* is that of baseball, especially in American English. However, there is also the informal idiom *play hardball*, meaning "to be firm and determined in order to get what you want".[4] Consequently, Putin's actions are seen as a very difficult game that he is determined to win. In other words, the mapping of this metaphor is DETERMINATION IS A GAME. Having in view this interpretation, we can conclude that we have encountered a structural metaphor once again. Moreover, the fact that it covers a mental situation, both referencially and pragmatically, sends us to the category of stock metaphors as well. The existence of the Romanian expression *a juca dur* paths the way to the second translation strategy proposed by Newmark, i.e. replacing the image in the SL with a standard TL image:

Însă odată cu eșuarea înțelegerii, cu izbucnirea violențelor și cu răspândirea conflictului, Putin a început *să joace dur*.

- *power vacuum*; *fill thevacuum*

A *power vacuum* opened up on 22 February when police suddenly abandoned their posts around government buildings and Mr Tanukovych's palatial residence, and huge crowds continued to throng the streets. Parliament moved quickly to *fill the vacuum*. It appointed a

[4] Cambridge Dictionaries Online.

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close ally of former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko – Oleksandr Turchynov – as interim president. (BBC Feb. 2014)

According to Cambridge Dictionary, a power vacuum refers to "a condition that exists when someone has lost control of something and no one has replaced them", and it is illustrated through the following sentence: "She was quick to *fill the power vacuum* that was left by the sudden death of the managing director". The same interpretation also makes sense in the context cited above, as after Yanukovych had fled the country, Ukraine needed another president. The vacant position of president viewed as a *power vacuum* implies that the head of the country is the most powerful person in Ukraine, and he "vacuums" power the way a vacuum cleaner collects dust or other things. As a result, *power* (abstract) is conceptualised by means of a *vacuum* (concrete), and this points to a structural metaphor, while its presence in the dictionary leads to a lexicalised stock metaphor. Unfortunately, in the Romanian translation, we will have to convert it into sense:

> În data de 22 februarie, *funcția de președinte a ramas vacantă*, iar forțele de ordine și-au părăsit posturile din jurul clădirilor guvernamentale și a palatului rezidențial al lui Ianukovici, și mulțimi imense de oameni au continuat să se îmbulzească pe străzi. Parlamentul a acționat *repede în vederea ocupării funcției vacante*. L-a desemnat ca președinte interimar pe Oleksander Turcinov, un aliat apropriat al fostului prim-ministru Iulia Timoșenko.

- *'rebooting' of the political power*

Now the demonstrators are demanding early presidential elections and a complete *'rebooting'of political power.*

It is highly important to mention that the italics have been added by the present author, as in the case of all the examples discussed, but the inverted commas belong to the source text and signal the metaphor from the very beginning, drawing readers' attention. If we look at the literal meaning of the verb *reboot*, provided by Cambridge Dictionary, "when a computer reboots, it switches off and then starts again immediately, and when you reboot a computer, you make it do this", we deduce that the Ukrainian demonstrators want a new start of their political power, i.e. a new president and politicians who can represent the interests of the whole nation. With all the above in view, we understand that politics is conceptualised by means of a machine, which can be rebooted any time (POLITICS IS A MACHINE). Thus the characteristics of a computer are mapped into the domain of politics, more precisely into the concept of political power. Following this line of thought, *'rebooting' of the political power* is, on the one hand, a structural metaphor, and, on the other hand, an original metaphor for its figurative sense appearing in the Ukrainian context is not lexicalised and it may have been recently coined. Therefore the Romanian translation raises difficulties and we will convert it into sense, with the risk of losing the effect created in the source text. Still, it is common knowledge for translators that in informative texts content prevails over style, and for this reason the conversion into sense might be a satisfying option:

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Acum manifestanții solicită alegeri prezidențiale anticipate și o *reorganizare* completă *a puterii politice*.

- *returning relations … to the freezer*

Though Mr Putin knows full well that instability in Europe and *returning relations* between Russia and the West *to the freezer* could have a significant impact upon economic recovery in the West. (BBC Mar. 2014)

Evidently, the metaphor in question has been employed to highlight the distant relations between Russia and the West due to their opposite views. It can be noticed that relations between countries, which are abstract to some extent, are thought in terms of food (concrete), which can be put in the freezer, i.e. RELATIONS ARE FOOD. Hence, we infer another instance of structural metaphor. In the other classification, it falls in the category of original metaphors, owing to its absence from the dictionary and, implicitly, its lack of lexicalization. It might have been created by the journalist who wrote the press article in order to lay more emphasis on the conveyed message. The metaphor can be rendered in Romanian by replacing it with a TL image, although we obtain a lower degree of expressiveness and a higher degree of formality, and we lose the ironical effect:

Cu toate acestea, președintele Putin știe foarte bine că instabilitatea din Europa și *o nouă răcire a relațiilor* dintre Rusia și Occident ar putea avea un impact semnificativ asupra refacerii economice din Europa de Vest.

- *right-hand man*

She [Yulia Tymoshenko] has no official post, but Mr Turchinov is *her right-hand man*...(The Economist March 2014)

At first glance, one may not be aware that *right-hand man* is actually a metaphor due to its overuse and evident meaning. Furthermore, as stated on the onset of the paper, parts of the body usually form dead metaphors, which is also the case here. In Lakoff and Johnson's classification, the same metaphor fits in the category of orientational metaphors for it is about the right side / right hand. The Romanian translation does not raise any problems for this language comprises the metaphor *mâna dreaptă*, utlilised in similar contexts. Thus a translator is able to apply Newmark's first translation strategy and reproduce the same image in the TL:

Iulia Timoșenko nu are o funcție oficială, însă Turcinov este *mâna* sa *dreaptă*...

- *right-wing groups*

Some radical *right-wing groups*, like Right Sector and Common Cause, have been at the forefront of clashes with police, though it is not clear how much support they have. (BBC Feb. 2014)

Thanks to its pervasiveness in political discourse, the metaphor *right-wing* has become common knowledge and can be regarded as a dead metaphor, referring to the political right,

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which supports "conservative or traditional ideas and policies".[5] At the same time, it is an orientational metaphor of the type POLITICS IS ON THE RIGHT or even a structural metaphor of the type POLITICS IS A BIRD, as it contains the noun 'wing', which literally relates to birds. As this example shows, there is not always a clear-cut distinction between particular categories of metaphors. The Romanian language allows translators to put into practice Newmark's second translation strategy, i.e. replacing the image in the SL with a standard TL image:

> Unele *grupuri* radicale *de dreapta*, precum Sectorul de Dreapta și Cauza Comună, sunt în fruntea conflictelor cu poliția, însă nu se știe în ce măsură vor fi susținute.

- *slice themselves off from Ukraine*

So if Russian-speakers in Crimea (which already has the status as an "autonomous republic") vote to *slice themselves off from Ukraine* next week and *throw themselves into the arms of the Russian Federation*, no international court will raise much of a fuss… (The Economist March 2014)

If one knows the literal meaning of *slice* (to cut something), it becomes quite simple to interpret the allusion to Crimea's separation from Ukraine, with the help of the explanatory context. Yet, the verb *slice* mainly occurs in food contexts and here Ukraine appears as 'something to eat' that can be 'sliced' by Russia. In other terms, A COUNTRY IS FOOD, and we deal again with a structural metaphor in Lakoff and Johnson's classification and a stock one in Newmark's. Unfortunately, we are forced to translate it by sense conversion:

> Prin urmare, dacă vorbitorii de rusă din Crimeea (care are deja statutul de „republică autonomă") votează *să se separe de Ucraina* și *să se arunce în brațele Federației Ruse*, nicio instanță internațională nu se va sesiza.

- *snatch Ukraine out of the European Union's embrace*

Mr Putin, who quite publicly has no love for Mr Yanukovych, managed to *snatch Ukraine out of the European Union's embrace*, promising the country, which is on the edge of default, $15bn (11bn euros) in credit.

This instance of metaphor is quite suggestive for Mr Putin's actions with respect to Ukraine, as he forced this country's hand to cancel the signing of the agreement with the EU by making the aforementioned promises. Concerning the type of metaphor, it seems to have been formed in order to point out Russia's reactions to the relations between Ukraine and the EU, and for this reason it could correspond to the class of original metaphors. Despite its originality, it can be preserved in translation, by reproducing the same image in the TL:

> Președintele Putin, care și-a arătat public lipsa de simpatie față de președintele Ianukovici, a reușit *să smulgă Ucraina din brațele Uniunii Europene*, cu promisiunea unui împrumut de 15 miliarde de dolari.

- *throw themselves into the arms of the Russian Federation*

[5] Merriam Webster Dictionary online.

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Although the source context and translation of this metaphor are already provided above, as it appears in the same paragraph with the expression *slice themselves off from Ukraine*, it is also worth a brief analysis. In addition to its high degree of expressivity, we note a significant dosage of irony. Furthermore, the Russian Federation is perceived as a person, i.e. A COUNTRY IS HUMAN for it has arms, and this infers a structural metaphor. At the same time, its outlived usefulness and emotive side indicate a cliché metaphor. As seen in translation above, the metaphor is fully translatable into Romanian and the same image has been reproduced in the TL (*să se arunce în brațele Federației Ruse*).

- *uncharted waters*

Ukraine is in *uncharted waters* after President Viktor Yanukovych fled the capital Kiev and parliament voted to oust him. (BBC Feb. 2014)

The explanatory context confirms that the journalist does not literally speak of waters, as areas of water such as the sea or a lake. Additionally, according to Cambridge Dictionary, the expression *uncharted waters* refers to "a situation that is not familiar or may be dangerous". This explanation also corresponds to the Ukrainian context because the president's leave and the proposal of ousting him brought Ukraine in a dangerous situation. More precisely, danger is conceptualised in terms of water, and this analysis indicates a structural metaphor. Thanks to its emotional warmth and ability of covering the situation explained above both referentially and pragmatically, the syntagm *uncharted waters* may equally fall in the category of stock metaphors. Although particular Romanian newspapers translated the metaphor in question by reproducing the same image in the TL (*în ape neexplorate*), a conversion into sense would be more appropriate because the idea would be clearer in this way:

> Ucraina se află într-o *situație critică fără precedent*, după ce președintele Ianukovici a părăsit capitala Kiev și parlamentul a votat pentru înlăturarea sa.

- *(the) upper house and lower house*

"If the people of Crimea take the decision in the referendum to join Russia, we, as the *upper house*, will of course support such a decision". The speaker of the *lower house*, Sergei Naryshkin, concurred. "We support the free and democratic choice of the population of Crimea", he said. (BBC Mar. 2014)

The designations in italics stand for the two chambers of Parliament: the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. Their power and status differ from one country to another, but according to Oxford Dictionary the *upper house* is "the higher house in a bicameral parliament or similar legislature", whereas the *lower house* is "the larger of two sections of a bicameral parliament or similar legislature, typically with elected members and having the primary responsibility for legislation". On the one hand, we can regard them as orientational metaphors, because THE SENATE IS UP and THE DEPUTIES ARE DOWN (LOWER). Moreover, it goes without saying that the present metaphors are lexicalised, which is demonstrated by their presence in the dictionary as well. Then, due to their pervasiveness in political discourse, one can hardly perceive them as metaphors and therefore they fit in the category of dead metaphors. When

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translating them by using the already established Romanian equivalents – *Camera Senatului and Camera Deputaților* – we actually employ Newmark's second translation strategy, replacing the image in the SL with a standard TL image. An important remark in this respect is that English conceptualises the two parts of Parliament by means of the noun *house* and Romanian by means of the noun *camera*. In addition, the idea of *upper and lower* has been lost in Romanian and thus the meaning may be a little clearer than in English:

> „În cazul în care locuitorii Crimeei decid la referendum să se alăture Rusiei, noi, *Camera Senatului*, sigur că vom sprijini această decizie". Serghei Narîșkin, purtătorul de cuvânt al *Camerei Deputaților*, a exprimat același punct de vedere. „Sprijinim alegerea liberă și democratică a locuitorilor Crimeei", a declarat acesta.

Following the above discussion of the metaphors selected, needless to say, metaphors play a significat part in newsreporting, economising on space and expressing certain thoughts and perceptions in a more accurate manner. Except for the neutral examples, such as *right-hand man*, *righ-wing group* or *upper-house*, particular metaphorical expressions carry a certain degree of irony, thus revealing a dosage of criticism towards the Ukrainian events and Russia's involvement (*blink*, *clouds darkened*, *half-asleep country*, *throw themselves into the arms of the Russion Federation*, etc). Another vital remark is that structural and stock metaphors appear to predominate among the occurences investigated here, which means that abstract concepts have been clarified by the intermediary of concrete concepts, and most of the metaphors are lexicalised and therefore explained in dictionaries, and thus they do not pose comprehension difficulties (*play hardball*, *power vacuum*, *uncharted waters*, etc). As far as the degree of translatability is concerned, we have managed to avoid Newmark's most radical metaphor translation strategy, i.e. deleting the metaphor, and rendered, entirely in some cases and partially in others, the information and effect of the source metaphors. More precisely, as seen throughout the paper, three translation strategies have been applied: reproducing the same image in the TL for five metaphors, replacing the image in the SL with a TL image for four metaphors, and converting the metaphor into sense for six instances of metaphor. That being said, the present study, which is on a very reduced scale and generalisations should not be made, shows that more than 50% of the metaphors analysed here could be preserved in the Romanian translation, although ceratain losses have been inevitable, including at register level for the British press tends to write more informally than the Romanian one, and this turned out to be valid for some cases of metaphors as well. Last but not least, it is imperative to say that more extensive reasearch would be necessary to obtain more accurate statistics for the translation of metaphors in the press, and the possible translation solutions or strategies employed may equally depend, to some extent, on one's subjectivity and expertise in the area.

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