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Metaphorical Terms in the Latvian Translation Landscape

ABSTRACT
The focus of the present paper is the treatment of metaphorical terms in the Latvian term formation and translation practice, and the approaches to seeking Latvian equivalents for English metaphorical terms. The work undertaken in the development of bilingual dictionaries has brought to the fore the potential conflict between metaphorical terms and the strict prescriptivist rules that exist in Latvian term formation, that no ambiguity is permissible and metaphoricity should be ousted. Yet cognitive linguistics has unveiled the capacity of abstract thought and abstract reasoning in the formation of metaphorical terminology and that metaphor is at the basis of meaning formation. There are several approaches to seeking Latvian equivalents for English metaphorical terms yet in translation and interpreting practice loan translation still prevails. Over the recent years there has been evidence of a more determined return to metaphorical terms in Latvian as a significant element in the organization of the conceptual system of the language. Time will show, which trend will prevail though at present it seems that metaphorical terms in Latvian have come to stay.
Keywords: metaphor, demetaphorisation, metaphorical term, term formation, translation

1. Introduction

Nothing has proved to be more challenging and fascinating than the research related to the human mind seeking answers to tantalizing questions how to expand the horizons of the known world and relate experiences and knowledge gained in the process, and how language reveals the outcome of these efforts to cognise the world. Language is also the instrument how experience is described, transferred and collated for the benefit of others.

The aim of the present research study is to reflect developments in the transfer of metaphorical terms from English into Latvian over the last thirty years from the point of translation and interpreting, the challenges and solutions found in the search for appropriate equivalents in Latvian.

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2. A new beginning for the nation, terminology and translation

Since 1991 when Latvia regained independent statehood and started the EU pre-accession period having submitted the application for membership to the European Union on October 27, 1995, there has been considerable activity in term formation. The European Commission published its opinion on the application on July 15, 1997, and Latvia was to devote considerable efforts to aligning its legislation to the acquis communautaire in all areas to become an applicant country. It included also the development of relevant terminology as well as approval of equivalents for concepts and practices that where to be transposed in the process of legislative harmonisation.

The soviet interlude of fifty years had in a way neglected the development of terminology in Latvian and it had to be developed concurrently in all policy areas. Another significant achievement of the period since 1991 was that translation/interpreting was treated as a relevant field of human activity as often translators and interpreters were directly involved in term formation and the search for appropriate equivalents in Latvian as the target language. Finally, translation studies were accorded their due place in the system of education and research.

The active involvement of linguists, lexicographers and professionals of various fields in term formation, dictionary development and translation/interpreting has been reflected in several publications that have presented quite an accurate picture of the processes. *Vārdnīcu izstrāde Latvijā: 1991–2010* [Development of Dictionaries in Latvia 1991–2010] published by the Latvian Language Agency in 2011 presents a comprehensive overview on the activities of lexicographers in Latvia since 1991 with a list of all lexicographic publications during the 20 year period – a total of 673 titles, of which 373 are bilingual dictionaries and 86 are multilingual dictionaries, including 8 Latvian-English/English-Latvian dictionaries of legal terms (Baldunčiks, Balode, Karpinska, Veisbergs, & Šmite, 2012). It is a good illustration of the scope of work that had to be undertaken and efforts that had to be invested. This ample lexicographic material has also been studied by various scholars, for instance, Laura Karpinska has undertaken the analysis of the development of Latvian-English-Latvian dictionaries of legal terms published over the period from 1991 to 2017 (Karpinska, 2018) as well as assessed the usefulness of these dictionaries when applied as a translation tool (Karpinska, 2019).

In 2019 Jānis Sīlis published a monograph *Trīs gadu desmiti Latvijas tulkojumzinātnē* [Three Decades in Latvian Translation Studies] with a bibliographic index of publications in translation studies listing 160 authors with more than 1770 articles about translations in English, German, French and Russian (Sīlis, 2019). In 2020 was released the sixth volume (XXVI) of the *Proceedings of* the National Library of Latvia *Latviešu terminoloģija simts gados* (Latvian Terminology in a Centenary) (Vilks & Baltiņš, 2020) comprising articles of the

participants of the international conference *Latvian Terminology in a Centenary* organized by the National Library of Latvia in cooperation with the Terminology Commission of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Latvia.

It has been recognised by all involved parties that term formation in Latvian is not without problems and challenges and in most cases takes a very long time as all the views must be coordinated taking into account all possible linguistic, interlinguistic, scientific and sociohistorical aspects; thus, at times, sadly falling behind the actual usage of terms in practice and complicating the work of translators and interpreters. The length of the process can be well illustrated by the efforts to gain approval of all stakeholders for the Latvian equivalent for the European currency *euro* – everybody was happily spending euros calling them simply *eiro* while the Terminology Commission was still engrossed in heated scholarly disputes whether the said equivalent should be *eiro* or *eira*. The discussion started in 2001, continued all through 2002 and the first decision of the Commission in the form of a recommendation was taken in November 2002 to approve the term *eira*. In September 2004 the Terminology Commission approved the official term *eira* although the government preferred *eiro*. Since then, it has been the *eiro* that has prevailed while the term *eira* has remained as a memento of the heated discussions that took so much time and ultimately was superseded by the term *euro* that was to be used in official documents in line with the requirements of the European Central Bank already in 2004 to use the full form *euro* instead of EUR in all documents. Latvia managed to win a derogation and since then the term *euro* has been used as a term in a foreign language in italics in all technical texts. Translators and interpreters most definitely would remember both equivalents; however, even they would find it difficult to indicate the officially approved equivalent. Even if *eira* was officially approved, very few people use it in daily communication and even then, mostly in a jocular manner.

The State Terminology Commission of Latvia is the ultimate authority in approving new terms and their equivalents in other languages as well as equivalents for foreign terms taken over into the Latvian language. Over the years it has faithfully and devotedly safeguarded the sanctity of term formation in Latvian following strict prescriptive rules. The homepage of the State Terminology Commission (*Terminrades vadlīnijas* [Term-formation guidelines], 2000) provides a very succinct list of key Latvian term formation principles that should be followed – terms should be systemic, precise in meaning and brief in form, monosemantic and without synonyms. In other words, any ambiguity of meaning should be eliminated, and any transferred meaning should be avoided.

3. Metaphor in thought and language

However, new findings on the workings of the human mind and the emergence of the conceptual system that shows how man cognizes the world has changed many

perceptions followed in term formation.

The theory on conceptual metaphor proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson has proved to be a turning point in rethinking ways how the human mind operates showing that "metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 3). It has generated an abundance of research on conceptual metaphor, in particular on "metaphorical concepts as ways of partially structuring one experience in terms of another" (p. 78).

It has also brought to the fore metaphorical terms where metaphor is at the basis of new meaning formation. Heikki Mattila, whose contribution to the research on comparative legal linguistics is invaluable, points out that in the field of legal terminology the presence of metaphorical legal terms can be explained by the fact that "a metaphor is a highly useful linguistic means in cases involving something brand new that has yet to be named. It brings out features analogical to the new and the old" (Mattila, 2006, p. 76). However, he also emphasizes that there are differences among the legal cultures as in legal English metaphors are more frequent than in legal French and explains it by the figurative nature of medieval legal language (p. 75).

The above statement applies in full measure also to metaphorical terms in Latvian – not only in legal terminology but likewise in other segments of terminology. Time and again voices are raised in favour of metaphoricity of terms in Latvian as well. Andrejs Veisbergs has supported this claim by emphasizing that metaphors have their own place in terminology and the metaphoric loans form an effective, simple and easily understandable as well as usually short type of terms (Veisbergs, 2012). It must be recognised that research on metaphorical terms in Latvian is not extensive and mostly it has been done in the context of translation studies due to the urgency of addressing and resolving various dilemmas concerning the transposition of new concepts that have required designations or challenging an approved equivalent in Latvian that has proved awkward and prone to misinterpretation (e.g. Liepiņa, 2005, 2013, 2020; Načiščione, 2003, 2019; Veisbergs, 2012).

4. Survival of metaphorical terms in Latvian

Metaphorical terms have had an uneasy existence in Latvian, it can be well illustrated by the difficult path covered by two legal terms *burden of proof* and *money laundering* when they appeared in the Latvian legal terminology in the middle of the 90s of the previous century. The Latvian equivalent for the term *burden of proof* was found through loan translation *pierādījumu nasta* used by interpreters, translators and legal professionals during the 1990s, later substituted by *pierādījuma smagums* – literally *heaviness of proof,* and ultimately by

pierādīšanas pienākums – the *duty of proving*.

However, it was *money laundering* (in Latvian: *naudas atmazgāšana*) that generated the most heated extensive discussions and objections. In 1998 the Law on Prevention of Legalisation of Illegally Acquired Assets was enacted by the Parliament [Saeima] of the Republic of Latvia. It launched a lengthy explanatory definition *nelikumīgi iegūto līdzekļu legalizēšana* (with a newly coined and approved English equivalent *legalisation of illegally acquired assets* for the Latvian neologism) as a substitute for the internationally recognised term *naudas atmazgāšana* (in English: *money laundering*) that had been in active use until then. As a result, the metaphorical term was rejected as inappropriate for the Latvian terminological system. In practice the Latvian equivalent for the term *money laundering – noziedzīgi iegūtu līdzekļu legalizēšana* has been often used followed by the term *naudas atmazgāšana* in brackets.

The issue of metaphorical terms was first raised by Anita Načisčione, an accredited interpreter for EU institutions and a professor of linguistics, in 2003 in the article *Translation of Terminology: Why Kill the Metaphor?* (Načisčione, 2003, pp. 104–108) where she highlighted the opposition among terminologists as well as translators to metaphorical terms listing *money laundering* and *burden of proof* as the best illustration of the search for Latvian equivalents rejecting the capacity of metaphor to convey meaning and content of a concept.

In 2019, in her article *The Role of Cognitive Theory in Translation of Metaphorical Scientific Terms*, where Načiščione has revisited the theme from the cognitive perspective, she writes: "A cognitive approach helps us to understand the significance of abstract thought and abstract reasoning in the formation of metaphorical terminology" (Načiščione, 2019, p. 555). The article is relevant for terminologists, translators and interpreters as the author presents there a comprehensive overview on approaches to seeking Latvian equivalents for English metaphorical terms: loan translation; replacement by another metaphor if the original metaphor is not possible due to some reason; demetaphorisation of the Latvian equivalent; replacement by a definition; the existence of several variants; the application of inverted commas for metaphorical loan terms in Latvian (pp. 555–559).

The ill-fated term *nelikumīgi iegūto līdzekļu legalizācija* and its English equivalent *legalisation of illegally acquired assets* fall into the category of replacement by a definition that is long and cumbersome, it has been criticized by interpreters and translators (e.g. Načisčione, 2019) all through the years since its introduction but so far with no tangible success. In fact, there are several variants of the Latvian term – *nelikumīgi iegūto līdzekļu legalizācija* and *noziedzīgi iegūtu līdzekļu legalizācija* as well as several English equivalents – *legalisation of proceeds of illicit gains* and *legalisation of illegally acquired assets.* The Interactive Terminology for Europe database (IATE, 2021) gives only one English

equivalent for the Latvian term *legalisation of illegally acquired assets,* and it is *money laundering.*

The discussion of the above Latvian term and the respective English equivalent might stop here; however, researchers have returned to the said term time and again (Načisčione, 2003, 2019; Liepina, 2005, 2013, 2020) and it would be time to draw a line under the discussion; however, in 2019 the Parliament of the Republic of Latvia enacted the Law on the *Prevention of Money Laundering and Terrorism and Proliferation Financing* (in Latvian: *Noziedzīgi iegūtu līdzekļu legalizācijas un terorisma un proliferācijas finansēšanas novēršanas likums*) (Likumi.lv. Prevention of Money Laundering and Terrorism and Proliferation Financing, 2019). In Section 1 is provided a list of terms used in the law and among them is the term *shell bank* (in Latvian: *čaulas banka)*, thus, the metaphorical term has become a full-fledged entry of legal terminology.

The most up-to-date version of the Criminal Law of the Republic of Latvia lists criminal offences, in Section 195 *Laundering of the Proceeds from Crime* (in Latvian: 195. pants. *Noziedzīgi iegūtu līdzekļu legalizēšana*) (Likumi.lv. Criminal Law, 1999) the given term presents a unique merger of two terms approved as English equivalents for the Latvian terminological neologism *noziedzīgi iegūtu līdzekļu legalizēšana*. Thus, there are several English equivalents used in various instances – *legalisation of illegally acquired assets, legalisation of proceeds of illicit gains, laundering of proceeds from crime*. In Latvian the neologism is used concurrently with *naudas atmazgāšana* and the only logical conclusion could be that the metaphorical term is slowly making its way back into the Latvian legal terminology as in practice the metaphorical term has proved to be much more successful at conveying the essence and the meaning of the concept.

Načiščione is firmly in favour of loan translation for metaphorical terms as in her view "loss of a metaphor is not justified if a metaphorical loan translation is possible because loss severs associations, inhibits perception and recognition of the term, hence hindering its back translation and interpretation" (Načiščione, 2019, p. 556). Loan translation is also the method most frequently applied by translators and interpreters in particular in the absence of an officially approved equivalent in Latvian, which in translation and interpreting practice has happened quite often and the urgency of the situation has necessitated urgent solutions later disputed and challenged by terminologists. Needless to say, that it generates very heated discussions with editors who staunchly stick by the officially approved equivalents.

The offence of money laundering has become more sophisticated in its methods and organisations have been set up to combat money laundering – among them also the Association of Certified Anti-Money Laundering Specialists (ACAMS) (ACAMS, n.d.) that has compiled an exhaustive glossary of terms related to money laundering. In actual fact, a whole cluster of metaphorical terms can be found in

various articles on money laundering techniques. Most of the Latvian equivalents for these terms are loan translations used by professionals in communication: *money mule – naudas mūlis, strawman – putnubiedēklis, richochet – rikošets, boomerang – bumerangs, hopscotch – klasītes.* Thus, the metaphoricity of the term has been retained in Latvian; however, these meanings cannot be found given for the above words in Latvian lexicographic sources. No Latvian equivalents have been found for the term *sausage machine* and the term *smurf* meaning *money launderer*. The Latvian equivalent for the term *smurfing* denoting a specific process in money laundering has followed the solution found in other languages where the selected equivalent is *structuring* (in Latvian: *strukturēšana*).

Another interesting finding in the study of metaphorical terms is the capacity of metaphorical terms to generate a cluster of related metaphorical terms by analogy. Business terminology abounds in zoomorphic metaphors where names of animals designate various participants of business transactions as well as business practices. Some are quite well known as the proverbial bulls, bears and sharks, while some are not so widely known, such as hogs, gazelles and zebras. Certainly, everybody is acquainted with tigers, in particular after the spectacular rise of Ireland as the Celtic Tiger as concerns its place in the world economy in 1995–2000. *Investopedia.com* (Investopedia, Online) is the most exhaustive source in respect of these metaphorical terms and a more in-depth examination has revealed a whole cluster of predators that inhabit economic terminology. The first metaphorical term *Four Asian Tigers* (also known as the *Four Asian Dragons* or *Four Little Dragons*) involving tigers appeared in the 1960s to describe the East Asian economies of Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan that experienced considerable growth. In the 1970s several other countries in East Asia – Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam were on the rise and to distinguish them from the *Four Tigers*, their economies were given the collective name *Tiger Cub Economies*. In the 2000s they were followed by countries in Africa – Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Uganda, and South Africa that were henceforth called the *Lion economies*.

The tiger has proved to be a very prolific generative model as a whole range of tigers have been created by adding an attribute: *the Anatolian Tigers* (cities in central Turkey) in the 1980s, *the Gulf Tiger* (Dubai) in the 1990s, *the Celtic Tiger* (Republic of Ireland) in 1995–2000, *the Nordic Tiger* (Iceland) prior to the global financial crisis of 2008; *the Baltic tiger* (Baltic states including Latvia) in 2000–2007 prior to the dramatic decline of the growth rate in Latvia in 2009, *the Tatra Tiger* (Slovakia) in 2002–2007. The tiger is the only one of all the above terms that has entered Latvian business vocabulary and so far has been tolerated although it must be noted that in an article *Baltijas tīģeri Eiropā ir tikai kaķēni* [Baltic Tigers in Europe are Just Kittens] published in the official government journal *Latvijas Vēstnesis* in 2004 (Kronberga, 2004) during the period of growth,

the term is used without inverted commas while in the article *Kur palika "Baltijas tīģeri"?* [Where have the "Baltic Tigers" Disappeared?] published in the business newspaper *Dienas Bizness* in 2010 (Verjē, 2010), when the economic crisis had reached its highest point, the term has been put in inverted commas. In Latvian, if a word is put into inverted commas, it may indicate a transferred meaning and it may also indicate that the word or phrase is used with a certain dose of sarcasm. Often loan translations in Latvian are preceded by an attribute *tā saucamais* meaning *the so-called* signalling the presence of a transferred meaning. In practice it can also give rise to certain ambiguity in interpretation signalling that the speaker does not exactly accept or recognize the value or validity of a statement or phrase or a designation.

Liepiņa (2015, pp. 185–186) has detected another similar cluster of terms constituted by metaphorical terms related to the theme of chivalry – *the white knight, the black knight, the grey knight, the yellow knight, the warchest,* and *moats and pits*. The knights designate individuals or companies with different intentions in taking over other companies. *Black's Law Dictionary* (1999, p. 1591) defines *white knight* as *a* "person or corporation that rescues the target of an unfriendly corporate takeover, especially, by acquiring a controlling interest in the target corporation or by making a competing tender offer". There has been an attempt to introduce the Latvian equivalent *draudzīgais investors* (in English: *the friendly investor*); however, the loan translation *baltais bruņinieks* (in English: *the white knight*) has also been used. No approved Latvian equivalents have been recorded in any lexicographic source. Presumably, translators and interpreters apply loan translation when the given English terms are used until an approved Latvian equivalent is found but it is clear that in all probability the metaphoricity of the term will not be retained.

5. Conclusion

The research has revealed the prevailing trends in treating metaphorical terms in Latvian – no ambiguity, metaphoricity is inappropriate in scientific terminology, definitions instead of loan translations. However, it must be said that in translation and interpreting practice loan translations are applied quite extensively due to the absence of approved Latvian equivalents for English metaphorical terms and largely due to the fact that professionals working in specific fields find the use of loan translations better in communication as it allows them to avoid misunderstanding and misinterpretation.

Research on metaphorical terms in Latvian continues as it is necessitated by the emerging trend of more metaphorical terms appearing in all walks of life. Metaphor is the way people cognize the world and construct their own conceptual system. It helps to form new meanings and to build and organise the conceptual system of the language. It is figurative thinking that is the privilege given to

the human mind that comes into play and to deprive metaphor of its due place in the formation of meaning would be like depriving man of figurative thinking. The emergence of clusters of thematically related metaphorical terms testifies to the sustainability of the trend in term formation and it should be respected.

Notwithstanding the constraints imposed on the development of terminology in Latvian, metaphor slowly fights its way and more and more metaphorical terms appear. Another factor that might come into play is the change of the generations of translators, interpreters and terminologists as the older generation retires and the younger generation enters the scene. They are not tied down by the prescriptivist rules and are ready to challenge the established equivalents. It should be welcome even though it may cause certain volatility of the lexicographic resources and it does not ease the life of translators and interpreters who can be accused of incompetence at any moment depending on the preferences of the editor.

Practice is the test of all theories and practice has shown the viability of metaphorical terms in Latvian as well. It is a new brave world that is emerging, and it should be welcome likewise in the field of term formation, translation and interpreting.

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