

**“THERE IS ONLY A THIN RED LINE BETWEEN THE SANE AND
THE MAD”: MIND, CULTURE, LANGUAGE AND METAPHOR**
Interactions between imagination, visual perception and
cognition

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Abstract

The present paper considers points of convergence of common metaphors and imagination in three languages: European Portuguese, English and Polish, focusing mostly on interactions among imagination, visual perception and cognition. The analysis is fundamentally based on conceptualisation differences observed in some filmic verbal and non-verbal examples in the three mentioned above languages (Batoréo, 2002). The comparison of different languages figurative solutions corresponding to a given spatial situation or a given filmic scene triggers the ever-lasting problem of metaphor translatability, i.e., if the corresponding text can be ‘translated’ or, using other strategies, either reproduced or newly created. Key words: metaphor processing – visual perception – cognition – mind and culture.

Theoretical approach to film script translation focuses on recapturing the source intention of the audio visual filmic imagination – the text in the source language in the context of the (audio-) visual

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stimulus – and on recreating it in an imaginative way. In the most difficult cases, the bad solution will be deletion of the source metaphor or its extended paraphrase. The well solved problem, on the other hand, will lead us to cultural substitution, e.g., the replacement of a cultural specific metaphor within the target language expression that does not have the same meaning but is likely to have the similar effect on the target audience imagination (Gottlieb, 1997; Dollerup, 1998).

In order to illustrate the above mentioned phenomenon, let's take into consideration a Terence Malick film *The Thin Red Line*, and the analysis of its original American English script compared to the counterparts of the Polish voiceover version and the European Portuguese subtitle translation (Cf. Sobon, 2000).

A Terrence Malick's film, *'The Thin Red Line'* is based on James Jones' novel with the same title. It refers to the heroic efforts of the Charlie company during the fighting at Guadalcanal in World War II. The title of the book and, consequently, of the film itself can be easily deduced from the motto of James Jones' book: *'A Thin Red Line of heroes'*, quoted from Rudyard Kipling's poem *Tommy*. It reports to an old Midwestern saying: *"There is only a thin red line between the sane and the mad"*.

From the cognitive and linguistic point of view, the analysis of the Kipling's poetic expression as well as of the American saying is a multi-level metonymic and metaphoric one (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1992). Let's have a look at it, paying attention to the principal steps we have to deal with in the analysis.

(i) No matter how many they are, as professional war workers, soldiers do not act as an unorganised block. From the spatial point of view, they line up, according to the military rules and orders of the superiors they obey to. Lining up soldiers, i.e. marching (physically), for instance, one after another, create a *visual line of soldiers*. The change of the reference domain from the physical one to the perceptive (visual) one originates (i-a) the metaphor of line that can be imagined as a made up drawing, where you only refer to (i-b) the causal (metonymic) effect of the physical action it was originated by. As a result, you cannot

see the 'dots' (= soldiers) that made the line up: they disappear as insignificant in the new domain we moved over to.

(ii) During war fights there are only few those who can be selected as heroes out of the mass of soldiers for whom they symbolically stand for, giving origin to the metonymy: a part for whole.

(iii) If we apply the line metaphor to the heroes of a given war, in comparison with the soldier line, the hero line will be insignificantly small – *the thin line of heroes*.

(iii) In a war, an individual effort is due to be noticed and referred to only if it ends up well, i.e., if it leads to a final global victory, even if the individuals (= *soldier heroes*) have to pay for it with their own lives. The blood shared in a war, understood as (iii-a) a metonymic result of physical fights, (iii-b) metaphorically, stands for its causal origin: the war itself, as we move over from a physical domain to a non-physical one. *The blood means war*.

(iv) *The blood is red*. When the colour stands for the substance it characterises, metonymically we can refer to the substance by the colour we attribute to it.

(v) *The blood is red*, and – metaphorically - *so is the war*, as again we change the reference domain. If – symbolically – *the war is red* and – metaphorically (as shown in (i), (ii) and (iii) – it can be conceived as *the thin line of heroes*, consequently, we can speak of: *the thin red line of heroes*, as in Kipling's poem.

Nevertheless, the multi-level complex conceptual analysis we gave account of in our multi-step analysis from (i) to (v) covers only in part the interpretation of the saying that gave origin to the title of the James' book. The Midwestern saying that lies at its origin that *there is only a thin red line between the sane and the mad* enriches the interpretation. One of the possible ways of understanding this saying is conceiving a *thin red line* as a metaphor with the image schema of a border distinctive *frontier* between two different mental spaces: *sanity* and *madness*. It is very difficult to decide what enables us to draw the frontier between the two, as the real border is a *sharp edge* it is very easy to fall over into one of the distinct spaces it separates and, thus, draw the real distinctive

line between the two. If it is *sharp* it can be conceived metaphorically as *thin*; if it is *distinctive* it can be conceived metaphorically as *red*, as this colour is often symbolically used to show *outstanding contrast*. But the *red* can also stand metaphorically for *blood*, resulting metonymically from '*sharp suffering*' that originates *insanity*. If there is only a sharp border made of suffering between the sane and the mad, who can distinguish which is which? Who can draw the frontier between the mad and the normal?

The most interesting part of the analysis is the encounter point of the two conceptual interpretations presented above. If, conceptually, the WAR can be represented by an image schema of *the thin red line of heroes*, and *the thin red line*, on the other hand, is conceived as a frontier between the world of the *sane and the insane*, the WAR can be metaphorised as the border itself. More than that, metonymically, *WAR can be at the origin of the madness itself*, as it is very easy to fall down from the sharp edge of the frontier between the two.

Thus,

WAR =	
•	the thin red line of heroes = few that survive the blood-shed
•	'sharp suffering' that originates insanity
•	a border distinctive frontier between two different mental spaces: sanity and madness
•	origin of madness itself
	= MADNESS

The conceptualisation of WAR presented above and expressed in just one saying on a linguistic level in American English is totally culturally dependent. It brings literally associations (Kipling and Jones) and American folk tradition connotations (Midwestern saying) that cannot be translated in its complexity into any other language. Naturally, any translation, even the most 'faithful' one can be only a

partial approximation of the original version. This is precisely what we can observe in European Portuguese and in Polish translation examples discussed below.

In the first case, there is a difference in the title translation of the book and the commercial title given to the film. '*Os Sãos e os Loucos*' (*the sane and the mad*) is the Portuguese title given to James Jones' novel, whereas '*A Barreira Invisível*' (*an invisible barrier*) comes up as the title of a Terrence Malick's film. In the second case, both in the novel and the film, the Polish option goes to '*Cienka Czerwona Linia*' (*the thin red line*). In all three cases, the translator's function is to *choose the part of the conceptualisation* of the title (s)he considers the most important, as there is no possibility to cover for the global interpretation.

Taking into consideration the whole analysis of the complex, culturally embedded title, let's examine some of the examples instancing the metaphor WAR IS MADNESS collected from the American script of the film and its Polish and European Portuguese counterparts (Sobon, 2000), and marked as following:

- **American original version**
- *transcript of the Polish voiceover*
- transcript of the European Portuguese subtitling.

The greatest translating problems are observed in the examples that have a fixed, idiomatic meaning in American English, and which translators fail to decode. The solution given in the voiceover Polish version or the Portuguese subtitles is often a literal one (with no idiomatic character) which sometimes results in a hilarious context-independent proposal, difficult to fit in into the text. Sometimes the translation is simply omitted. In the following 16 examples, six [from (i) to (vi)] different conceptualisation strategies can be observed, using various linguistic means.

(i) The first group of examples are instances of literal translation in both target languages with no attempt of renderring the image schema conceptualised in the original expression:

(1)

Shut up in a tomb. Can't lift the lid.

[meaning: TRAPPED IN A SITUATION WITH NO ESCAPE]

Uwięziony w grobowcu, nie mogę podnieść pokrywy. =

= Fechado num túmulo e não posso levantar a tampa.

(2)

Have you passed through the night?

[meaning: HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED THE EVIL?]

Czy przetrzałeś tę noc? =

= Passaste por esta noite?

(ii)

The following examples show that only one of the translation versions – here the Portuguese one – maintains the original conceptual image:

(3)

In a situation like that all a man can do is shut his eyes, let nothing touch him.

Ale wystarczy, że zamknie się oczy i wszystko znika.

[it is enough to shut our eyes and everything disappears]

Apenas podemos fechar os olhos e não deixar que nada nos toque.

[we can only shut our eyes and not let anything touch us]

(4)

Once you get used to the idea ... They're just meat, kid.

Kiedy się oswoisz z widokiem, przestaniesz zwracać na to uwagę.

[when you get used to the sight, you stop paying attention to it]

Quando nos habituamos à ideia, são carne também.

[when you get used to the idea, they are also meat]

(5)

We came in standing up.

(meaning: NONE OF THE SOLDIERS WAS WOUNDED OR KILLED)

Zdobyli przyczolek bez walki.

[they got to the bridge-head without any fighting]

Chegaram sem baixas

[they arrived without any casualties]

(iii)

The following examples show that only one of the translation versions – here the Polish one – maintains the original conceptual image:

(6)

But once a man gets those eagles, ooh, he can't wait to get that star.

Kiedy awansuja na pulkownikow, od razu chca stac sie generalami.

[once you a coronel you want to become a general]

Mas assim que um homem recebe essas águias, quer a estrela.

[once a man gets those eagles (= birds), he wants the star (from the sky)]

(7)

Those goddamn little brown brothers.

Zoltki.

[the little yellow ones]

Aqueles malditos camaradas.

[those goddamn comrads]

(iv)

The following examples show that both the translation versions try to maintain the original conceptual image but succeed to achieve this aim only in part, sometimes managing to apply a fixed expression in the target language:

(8)

You get something twisted out of your insides by all this blood, filth and noise.

(meaning: TO SUFFER THE WRENCHING LOSS OF COMAPASSION AND SYMPATHY)

Ta krew, ten brud i hałas zatruwają wewnątrz duszy.

[this blood, this filth, and this noise poison the insides of your soul]

Qualquer coisa é arrancada de dentro de nós com todo este sangue.

[there is something that is pulled out of your insides by all this lood]

(9)

Now we are turned against each other ... each standing in the other's 'light'.

(meaning: BLOCKING OF THE SUNLIGHT ON EACH OTHER AND DENYING EACH OTHER PEACE AND COMFORT)

Teraz stoimy naprzeciw siebie ukryci we własnych cieniach.

[now we are standing facing each other hidden in our own shadows]

Agora virámo-nos uns contra outros .. cada um fazendo sombra ao outro.

[now we have turned against each other ... making shadow on each other]

(v)

The following examples show that both the translation versions try to maintain the original conceptual image but do not manage to provide a fixed linguistic expression corresponding to the English idiom:

(10)

I don't want to be a wet blanket.

(meaning: TO HAVE DISCOURAGING EFFECT)

Nie chciałbym się naprzykrzać.=

= Não quero ser chato.

[I would not like to be a nuisance]

(11)

We feel like you got a rotten deal.

((meaning: RECEIVING EXTREMELY UNFAIR TREATMENT)

To krzywdzaca decyzja.=

= Sentimos que foi uma injustiça

[we feel it was unfair treatment]

(12)

How I was supposed to know there was gonna be a fucking war?

Skąd miałem wiedzieć, że wybuchnie ta cholerna wojna? =

= Como é que podia saber que ia haver o raio de uma guerra?

(13)

We are sitting here on this ocean like a couple of fucking ducks in these boats.

(meaning: WE ARE EASY TARGETS)

Na tych śmiesznych łódkach wystrzelają nas jak kaczki.

[in these funny boats we shall be shut out like ducks]

Nestes barcos somos alvos fáceis.

[in these boats we are easy targets]

(vi)

The following example shows misconceptualisation in both target languages:

(14)

What keeps us from reaching out?

(meaning: LETTING GO ALL FEARS AND DESIRES)

Co nas powstrzymuje od pogoni za szczęściem, od jego blasku?

[what keeps us away from looking for happiness for its light?]
O que nos impede de tentar alcançá-lo?
[what does not let us get it?]

(vii)

The following examples show the usage of (partial) euphemisms in both target languages (or: omission of the translation) in renderring American dirty language characteristic of soldiers' dialogues:

(15)

The Japs must have hauled ass.

Wyglada na to, ze Japonce wyprowadzili sie stad.

[it looks as if the Japs have left this place]

Os Japoneses devem ter-se posto a mudar

[the Japanese must have started moving over]

(16)

Tojo eats shit.

(meaning: HE IS VILE AND CONTEMPTIBLE)

[translation omitted]

Tojo é um filho-da-mãe.

[Tojo is a son-of-a-bitch]

The small *corpus* of 16 examples from the script of a Terence Malick's film *The Thin Red Line* matched with the available Polish and European Portuguese translations presented above shows that the real translating result is far from the ideal of recapturing the source conceptualisation and intention of the audio visual filmic imagination. Desirable image schema recreation in the target language is very rare, either because the translator does not decode the source idiom, or because it is much easier a task to paraphrase the source expression on a linguistic level than to look for a replacement of a cultural specific metaphor within the target language expressions that may not have

the same meaning but are likely to have the similar effect on the target audience imagination.

After having appreciated some instantiations of the metaphor WAR IS MADNESS in a Terence Malick's American film with its target Polish and Portuguese translations, let's take an example of a Polish film made in the eighties, and its English and European Portuguese translations.

The film is dealing with the emotional family aspects of the Martial Law (introduced in Poland on Dec. 13, 1981). There is a scene in this film in which an adult couple in love has a very dramatic separation moments before the man's departure due to political reasons. It is Christmas time, but it is dark and silent: a 'silent' dramatic separation dialogue. He is handing out a piece of something biscuit-like to her, asking her to take it. In Polish he says: *'Podzielmy sie opłatkiem'* [*let's share the holy wafer*]. The English version of the film is as follows: *'(do you) care for a wafer?'* The Portuguese subtitle worked out on the basis of the English version proposes a following solution: *'Queres uma bolacha?'* [*[do you] care for a biscuit?*].

What is the purpose of this translation? Is it to make the film audience conceive a 'wafer' as a common 'biscuit' - helping to sweeten a difficult moment of a romantic scene of a young couple - or rather as a 'symbolic catholic disc' shared at Polish Christmas Eve as a symbol of unity and solidarity by the same couple, in a scene that is to be considered as humanitarian or spiritual rather than romantic? *Is a wafer a biscuit?*

In order to answer these questions we must consider the polysemic nature of the word 'wafer' in English: "1. Thin crisp sweetened biscuit, with different flavourings, served with ice cream, etc. 2. *Cristianity*, a thin disc of unleavened bread used in the Eucharist as celebrated by the Western Church, (...), related to 'waffle' à *Chiefly U.S.* a. a crisp golden-brown pancake, with deep indentations on both sides. (...)" (*Collins English Dictionary*, Collins, London, Glasgow, 1979, p.1628).



Figura 1 - Cálice

Let's start our analysis with the second meaning of 'wafer' corresponding to 'host' – "the bread consecrated in the Eucharist (...)." (*Collins English Dictionary*, Collins, London, Glasgow, 1979, p. 1628), rendered in Portuguese by '*hóstia*' and in Polish by '*hostia*' at church and '*oplatek*' chiefly at home, during the Christmas Eve 'sharing the wafer' tradition.



Figura 2 - Sharing

The first meaning of English '*wafer*', more common and frequent, is, roughly speaking, a rectangle layer biscuit or, more precisely a crisp golden-brown pancake with different flavourings disposed in layers, with deep indentations on both sides, cut in small rectangle pieces ('*wafel*' in Polish and '*wafer*' or '*bolacha*' ('*biscuit*') in Portuguese).



Figura 3 - Belgian butters

If, by any chance, you are drawn to think that the 'eucharistic' meaning of the English '*wafer*' is somehow antique and out of use (of course, outside the Polish Christmas tradition context) and, thus, not expected to be known by an average translator, pay attention to the American 'biscuit market'.



Figura 4- Waffers 3



Figura 5- Waffers 4



Figura 6- Waffers 5

Recently, some new white, thin and crispy biscuits have appeared with the name of 'Wafer Snacks' and 'Communion Crunchies', some of them advertised as '100% Fat Free' and some even with an astonishing commercial slogan: 'I Can't Believe It's not Christ!'. As the designation 'Communion Crunchies' blurs totally the frontier between the two apparently separated conceptualisations of the polysemous 'wafer', the previous conceptual analysis does not seem as linear as it seemed to be at the very beginning. So, do you still believe that a wafer is not a biscuit?

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Figure 1 **caliceclip**

Figure 2 **sharing**

Figure 3 **Belgian butters**

Figure 4 **wafers 3**

Figure 5 **wafers 4**

Figure 6 **wafers 5**