

**ISCKMC 2022****International Scientific Congress «KNOWLEDGE, MAN AND CIVILIZATION»****ASYMMETRY FACTORS OF RUSSIAN MORBIAL METAPHORS,  
THEIR TRANSLATIONS INTO ENGLISH AND GERMAN**

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**Abstract**

The article looks into the problem of metaphor translation in the framework of narrative discourse. The data for the research was taken from a piece of literary work ‘The Gulag Archipelago’ by A.I. Solzhenitsyn and its translations. The translated narration does not only serve as the source of information about the peculiarities of a writer’s culture but also promotes the development and enrichment of the receiving ethnical literature. In this context striving for excellence in translating fiction is of key importance. The choice of the material is accounted for by the controversial critical comments relating to the translation of the work into English and German. As a matter of fact, a metaphor appeared to create some obstacles for translation. 53 morbial metaphors and their translations were subjected to a component analysis of their inner form. The comparison was carried out on the basis of a contrastive analysis of the cognitive and semantic content of a target unit. The research demonstrated the difference in the meanings of an original metaphor and its translation equivalents. The article indicates possible reasons causing such asymmetry. These are ethnic and cultural specifics of associations, differences in the grammatical systems with the prevalence either of analytical or synthetic structures, and culturally-specified basis for a metaphorical transfer.

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## 1. Introduction

Translation of literary texts is considered to be one of the international means of mass communication. ‘The Gulag Archipelago’ is an extensive non-fictional narration with a detailed description of the Soviet system of prisons and forced labour camps. It was conceived by Solzhenitsyn as a means of struggle against the communist regime. In 1974 the translation of ‘The Gulag Archipelago’ by Thomas Whitney was introduced to American readers. According to the viewpoint of a literary critic Klimoff, ‘that American translation’ was a failure with metaphors translation being one of the reasons for criticism (1975, p. 207). Alexander Solzhenitsyn was not satisfied with the American translator’s work (Solzhenitsyn, 1996). In 1974 due to the efforts of the translator Anna Peturing a German adaptation of the novel was brought to life which later received higher critical acclaim (Bonde, 1983).

Translator skills involve multitasking and creative approach: a translator has to keep the balance between the form and the content of a translated text which requires maximum preservation of stylistic devices and conveying hidden meaning. This task becomes extremely challenging when it comes to translating metaphors as any metaphor can be both a stylistic device and a code of the author’s message.

Metaphors have been the focus of attention of scholars since Aristotle’s days. As a result, present-day linguistics offers many definitions of this language phenomenon. In our opinion, Glazunova (2002) gives the clearest definition of what metaphor is: metaphors compare one thing to another on the basis of semantic similarity of their state, attributes, and actions which characterize these phenomena and, consequently, words (word combinations or sentences) meant to denote particular objects or situations of reality are used to describe other objects or situations on the basis of relative similarity of the predicative features attributed to them. Thus, in the novel under study government officials are compared to executioners on the basis of a common feature which is “the source of death”, Soviet citizens are compared to insects or rabbits on the basis of a common feature of ‘defenselessness and vulnerability’ and judicial authorities are compared to a meat grinder on the basis of a common feature of ‘irreversibility of what is going on’.

## 2. Problem Statement

Thus, a metaphor becomes a tool of cognition, structuring and explaining the world (Arutyunova, 1990; Kubryakova, 1981; Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). The process of cognition as well as structuring the world around us is not of a universal character, although on the level of human ethnic and cultural entity some common characteristics of mental processes may become apparent (Komissarov, 2011). A metaphor is based upon the ethnic and cultural perception of the world and therefore it holds the potential to reflect fundamental cultural values. This potential becomes most evident on the level of structural metaphors. According to the theory of conceptual metaphors by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, structural metaphors actualize two things or events in our mind with one of the things or events (target domain) being structured through the terms of another (source domain). While translating metaphors we should figure out whether there is a similar way of rendering things or events in a receiving culture. The study object of this article is a peculiar type of a structural metaphor which can be defined as a morbidal

metaphor. Morbial metaphors project properties and features of things and events from a conceptual field “disease” to other related things or events (Chudinov, 2003).

It is immediately apparent from the foregoing that translating a metaphor requires a challenging decision making as both an original metaphor and its translation equivalent can be culture-specific and it is conceivable that the translation equivalent of a metaphor can acquire new connotations and associations specific to the receiving culture of the language. Moreover, such a scenario is possible in the case of calquing as well as in using other translation transformations. According to a cognitive interpretation of the lexical meaning of a word, each word comprises not only language awareness but also some knowledge about the world around us, which is always culture-specific (Langacker, 1997). The metaphors of a literary text are therefore extremely important as they contain contextual, semantic, and pragmatic information. So in this type of texts, a translator has to give serious consideration to each metaphor (Newmark, 1995).

### **3. Research Questions**

The cases when in different languages two lexical units are identical in all their lexical meanings given in dictionaries are quite rare. The vast majority of words of any language are polysemic and the systems of their semes hardly ever match together. Consequently, comparing words from two different languages the most typical case is their partial match (Barkhudarov, 2017). Thus, a partial match is rather an acceptable phenomenon in translation practice. In this respect, the question that has to be answered is why the way metaphors were translated by an American translator became a stumbling block among critics whereas the German translation of the novel went down well with the critics. The search for the answer to this question becomes the aim of this research.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

To get the answer to the question above we need to give a quantitative assessment of translation equivalents' match value to the original lexeme in both languages (English and German). The quantitative assessment will enable us to define whether translation equivalents are equipollent or to find out the degree of their asymmetry. The componential analysis of a metaphoric unit's semantic structure will make it possible “to measure” match value to the original metaphor.

### **5. Research Methods**

Due to a relatively limited number of evident morbial metaphors in the novel under study, it is worthwhile employing the continuous sampling method. Moreover, this method will also be used to carry out a contrastive analysis of other kinds of structural metaphors. Such an approach makes the sampling most representative.

A metaphor, like any other linguistic sign, has its inner and outer forms. In this research we will focus on its inner form, that is on its meaning. According to the theory of linguistic meanings, the inner structure of a lexical unit consists of referential and pragmatic meanings. The pragmatic meaning is not a mandatory characteristic of a linguistic sign and it arises from the cases when the attitude of the speech

community towards a linguistic sign becomes a part of its semantic structure, i.e. culturally-based (Komissarov, 2011).

Since a metaphor is regarded as the product of secondary naming, there is no sense in analyzing the whole referential meaning in its structure, we can limit our attention only to the feature which triggered metaphorical transfer and the pragmatic meaning should be amplified with the metaphorical image or connotation. Thus, an original metaphor can be decomposed into the following elements: 1) the part of the referential meaning which triggered metaphorical transfer, or the so-called similitive feature (Koshelev, 2012), 2) image (connotation), and 3) the pragmatic meaning.

As far as the translation equivalent of a metaphor is concerned, due to the fact that the pragmatic meaning of a lexical unit is determined by the attitude of the speech community, its structure should be amplified by the fourth element of 'cultural connotation', i.e. by culturally-based connotation which arises after the translated unit is introduced. In other words, the perception of the introduced translated unit in English among the American could differ from that of German among the Germans, which will inevitably lead to the asymmetry in the meanings of translation equivalents.

As a result of a metaphor's "meaning" decomposition into several elements, we can carry out a contrastive analysis of the cognitive and semantic content of an original metaphor and its translation equivalents on the basis of the equivalence levels theory by Komissarov (Komissarov, 2011). Thus, the data was processed by the following algorithm:

- 1) expose in a metaphor the feature serving as the basis for a metaphorical transfer and analyze whether this feature appears in the translations under study;
- 2) define a metaphor's image and check whether it is similar to the one that is created in the culture of the receiving language;
- 3) define a metaphor's connotation and check whether it remains unchanged in the translation;
- 4) analyze the meaning of translation equivalents and check whether they denote any additional culture-specific connotations.

For clarity, the four above-mentioned criteria will be presented in the table, and in order to carry out a contrastive analysis, each criterion will be given a conditional rate depending on the level of a translation equivalent deviation from this criterion. Provided that a translation equivalent gains any additional culture-specific connotation, its conditional rate will be 0 (zero), but if it does not receive any "unnecessary" connotation, it is going to get 1 (one). In the last table column, the equivalence level of the translation under study will be shown in percentage points which will enable us to determine which translation equivalent is the closest to the original metaphor in terms of its cognitive and semantic content.

## 6. Findings

Let us consider the morbid metaphor 'гибель' and its translation variants:

Example 1:

<...> сами жертвы в согласии оперативниками ведут себя как можно благороднее, чтобы не дать живущим заметить **гибель** обреченного (Solzhenitsyn, 2011). – <...> the victims, in cooperation with the Security men, have conducted themselves in the noblest conceivable manner, so as to spare the

living from witnessing **the death** of the condemned (Solzhenitsyn, 2011). – <...> die Opfer selbst <...> benehmen sich, in voller Übereinstimmung mit den Verhaftenden, maximal wohlherzogen, auf daß die Lebenden vom **Untergang** des Gezeichneten nichts bemerken (Solschenizyn, 1974).

For the contrastive analysis it is necessary to define lexical meanings of each word under study using dictionaries:

Гибель – полное разрушение, уничтожение, смерть от какой-нибудь катастрофы (книжн.) (Ushakov, 1998).

Death – 1) the act of dying; the end of life; the total and permanent cessation of all the vital functions of an animal or plant; 5) extinction (annihilation), destruction; 10) bloodshed or murder (Macmillan English Dictionary ..., 2002).

Der Untergang – 1) das Verschwinden hinter dem Horizont; 2) das Verschwinden unter der Oberfläche des Wassers; 3) das Zugrundegehen (Langenscheidts Großwörterbuch ..., 1998).

The contrastive analysis results for Example 1 are shown in Tables 01 and 02:

**Table 1.** The component analysis of an original metaphor’s meaning

Language Unit	Decomposition criteria			
original metaphor	the basis for a metaphorical transfer (part of the referential meaning )	image (connotation)	the pragmatic meaning	new connotation
<b>гибель</b>	the permanent end of the life (here: the end of one’s independent and free life)	not identified	presence of an outer violent factor	not relevant

**Table 2.** The component analysis of the translation equivalents’ meanings

Comparison criteria	English translation	German translation
	the death	der Untergang
The degree of referential meaning’s similarity	1	1
Is the image of the translated metaphor similar to the image of an original one?	1 (yes)	0 (the image of ‘a sunset’)
Does pragmatic meaning remain unchanged?	0,5 (The word has a wider range of meanings compared to the original metaphor)	0,5 (lower frequency of this meaning in the receiving culture)
Is there any new culture-specific connotation?	1 (no)	0,5 (higher frequency of an inanimate nature image)
<b>The equivalence degree, %</b>	<b>87,5</b>	<b>50</b>

Let us consider the morbid metaphor ‘погибший’ and its translation variants:

Example 2:

Мой **погибший** дневник был только минутной стружкой той сажи (Solzhenitsyn, 2011). – My **doomed** diary was only one momentary plume of that soot (Solzhenitsyn, 1974). – Mein **verlorenes** Tagebuch war von jenem Ruß nicht mehr als ein minutenlanges Hauch (Solschenizyn, 1974).

For the contrastive analysis it is necessary to define lexical meanings of each word under study using dictionaries:

Погибнуть – разрушаться, подвергаться уничтожению, умирать, исчезать от какой-нибудь катастрофы (Ushakov, 1998).

To doom – 1) to destine, esp. to an adverse fate; 2) to pronounce judgement against; condemn; 3) to ordain or fix as a sentence or fate (Macmillan English Dictionary ..., 2002).

Verlieren – 1) etwas irgendwo liegen oder fallen lassen und es nicht mehr finden; 2) j-n nicht mehr haben, weil er stirbt; 3) den Kontakt zu j-m nicht mehr haben (Langenscheidts Großwörterbuch ..., 1998).

The contrastive analysis results for Example 2 are shown in Tables 03 and 04:

**Table 3.** The component analysis of an original metaphor's meaning

Language Unit	Decomposition criteria			
original metaphor	the basis for a metaphorical transfer (part of the referential meaning)	image (connotation)	the pragmatic meaning	new connotation
погибший	non-availability	calamity / disaster	inevitability, death	not relevant

**Table 4.** The component analysis of the translation equivalents' meanings

	English translation	German translation
<i>Comparison criteria</i>	<b>doomed</b>	<b>verlorenes</b>
The degree of referential meaning's similarity	1	1
Is the image of the translated metaphor similar to the image of an original one?	0 (no)	0 (no)
Does pragmatic meaning remain unchanged?	1 (yes)	0,7 (the meaning is the second in the frequency)
Is there any new culture-specific connotation?	0 (unfavorable destiny)	1 (no)
<b>The equivalence degree, %</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>67,5</b>

Let us consider the morbid metaphor 'оздоровительная работа' and its translation variants:

Example 3:

Эта **оздоровительная работа** полным ходом пошла с 1927-го года и сразу въявь показала пролетариату все причины наших хозяйственных неудач и недостат (Solzhenitsyn, 2011). – This **therapy** continued full speed from 1927 on, and immediately exposed to the proletariat all the causes of our economic failures and shortages (Solzhenitsyn, 1974). – Diese **Assanierungsarbeit** lief ab 1927 auf Hochtouren und führte dem Proletariat die Ursachen unserer wirtschaftlichen Mißerfolge und Mängel sogleich mit aller Deutlichkeit vor Augen (Solschenizyn, 1974).

For the contrastive analysis it is necessary to define lexical meanings of each word under study using dictionaries:

Оздоровить – 1) сделать здоровым, улучшить состояние чьего-н. здоровья, 2) перен. улучшить состояние чего-н., привести в порядок, в нормальный вид (что-ниб., находящееся в беспорядке, расстроенное) (Ushakov, 1998).

Therapy – 1) the treatment of disease, as by some remedial or curative process; 2) a curative power or quality; 3) physical treatment for curing or rehabilitating a patient or to overcome a physical defect, as by exercise, physical treatment, etc. (Macmillan English Dictionary ..., 2002).

Assanierung – Verbesserung der Bebauung von Liegenschaften aus hygienischen, sozialen, technischen oder verkehrsbedingten Gründen (Langenscheidts Großwörterbuch ..., 1998).

The contrastive analysis results for Example 3 are shown in Tables 05 and 06:

**Table 5.** The component analysis of an original metaphor's meaning

Language Unit	Decomposition criteria			
original metaphor	the basis for a metaphorical transfer (part of the referential	image (connotation)	the pragmatic meaning	new connotation

	meaning )			
<b>оздоровительная работа</b>	improvement (recovery) vector	preventive measures (care)	subjective-ness	not relevant

**Table 6.** The component analysis of the translation equivalents' meanings

	English translation	German translation
<b>Comparison criteria</b>	<b>therapy</b>	<b>Assanierungsarbeit</b>
The degree of referential meaning's similarity	1	1
Is the image of the translated metaphor similar to the image of an original one?	0 (treatment)	1 (yes)
Does pragmatic meaning remain unchanged?	1 (yes)	1 (yes)
Is there any new culture-specific connotation?	1 (no)	1 (no)
<b>The equivalence degree, %</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>100</b>

Let us consider the morbid metaphor 'немое' and its translation variants:

Example 4:

Свои, действительно, стараются в беде не оставлять, есть условие у них **немое**: своим устраивать хоть содержание льготное (Solzhenitsyn, 2011). – *Friends*, as a matter of fact, did try not to leave their friends in a bad spot. They had their own **unspoken** understanding: at least to arrange favorable conditions for *friends* (Solzhenitsyn, 1974). – Die *Ihrigen* bemühen sich tatsächlich, einander beizustehen in der Not, da gilt eine **stumme** Übereinkunft: den *Ihrigen* zumindest Haftprivilegien zu verschaffen (Solschenizyn, 1974).

For the contrastive analysis it is necessary to define lexical meanings of each word under study using dictionaries:

Немой – 1) не говорящий, лишённый способности речи вследствие каких-н. природных недостатков или болезненных расстройств, 2) перен. тихий, исполненный безмолвия (книжн.), 3) скрытый, ничем не обнаруживаемый (книжн.) (немое страдание) (Ushakov, 1998).

Unspoken – 1) implied or understood without being spoken or uttered, 3) not talking, silent (Macmillan English Dictionary ..., 2002).

Stumm – 1) nicht fähig zu sprechen, weil man die Laute nicht produzieren kann, 2) so völlig Angst oder Anders, dass man nichts sagen kann (stumm vor Angst, Schreck, Wut sein), 3) so, dass sie kein Wort sagen, 4) so, dass dabei kein Wort gesagt wird (Langenscheidts Großwörterbuch ..., 1998).

The contrastive analysis results for Example 4 are shown in Tables 07 and 08:

**Table 7.** The component analysis of an original metaphor's meaning

Language Unit	Decomposition criteria			
original metaphor	the basis for a metaphorical transfer (part of the referential meaning )	image (connotation)	the pragmatic meaning	new connotation
<b>немое</b>	not articulated	physical disability	common knowledge	not relevant

**Table 8.** The component analysis of the translation equivalents' meanings

	English translation	German translation
<b>Comparison criteria</b>	<b>unspoken</b>	<b>stumme</b>
The degree of referential meaning's similarity	1	1
Is the image of the translated metaphor similar to the image of an original one?	0 (no)	1 (yes)

Does pragmatic meaning remain unchanged?	1 (yes)	1 (yes)
Is there any new culture-specific connotation?	1 (no)	0,5 (additional ‘Angst, Schreck, Wut’ in the second meaning)
<b>The equivalence degree, %</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>87,5</b>

Let us consider the morbid metaphor ‘зараза’ and its translation variants:

Example 5:

Один из первых ударов диктатуры пришелся по кадетам (при царе – крайняя **зараза** революции, при власти пролетариата – крайняя **зараза** реакции) (Solzhenitsyn, 2011). – One of the first blows of the dictatorship was directed against the Cadets – the members of the *Constitutional Democratic Party*. (Under the Tsar they had constituted the most dangerous **ranks** of revolution, and under the government of the proletariat they represented the most dangerous **ranks** of reaction.) (Solzhenitsyn, 1974) – Einer der ersten Schläge der Diktatur traf die Kadetten (unterm Zaren – revolutionäres **Gift**; unter der Herrschaft des Proletariats – reaktionäres) (Solschenizyn, 1974).

Зараза – 1) болезнетворное начало, распространяемое среди организмов паразитически размножающимися в них микробами; 2) эпидемия, порождаемая этими микробами (разг.); 3) перен. отрицательное, губительно влияющее и угрожающее широким распространением явление в сфере культуры (книжн. ритор.) (Ushakov, 1998).

Ranks – the people comprising a military force; military enlisted men as a group (армия; солдаты, рядовые) (Macmillan English Dictionary ..., 2002).

Gift – eine Substanz, die dem Organismus stark schadet und tödlich für ihn sein kann (Langenscheidts Großwörterbuch ..., 1998).

The contrastive analysis results for Example 5 are shown in Tables 09 and 10:

**Table 9.** The component analysis of an original metaphor’s meaning

Language Unit	<i>Decomposition criteria</i>			
original metaphor	the basis for a metaphorical transfer (part of the referential meaning )	image (connotation)	the pragmatic meaning	new connotation
<b>зараза</b>	sudden destruction	disease	doomness	not relevant

**Table 10.** The component analysis of the translation equivalents’ meanings

	English translation	German translation
<i>Comparison criteria</i>	<b>ranks</b>	<b>Gift</b>
The degree of referential meaning’s similarity	0,5 (it is implied but not necessarily regarded as its direct consequence)	1
Is the image of the translated metaphor similar to the image of an original one?	0 (war)	0 (poison)
Does pragmatic meaning remain unchanged?	0,5 (partially offset by the context)	1 (yes)
Is there any new culture-specific connotation?	1 (no)	1 (no)
<b>The equivalence degree, %</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>75</b>

As for Example 5 the translator into the English language had to replace an original morbid metaphor with a military metaphor, which lowers the equivalence degree of the translated metaphor.

Following the pattern of comparison presented in the tables “The component analysis of translation equivalents’ meanings” we compared 53 metaphors. As a result we came to the conclusion that the actualized referential meaning of an original metaphor and its translation equivalents match in 99



per cent of cases. Thus, the decrease in the equivalence degree was caused by the differences in the pragmatic meaning and in the images the translated equivalents refer to.

## 7. Conclusion

Translating conceptual metaphors across languages and cultures is a complex and complicated task. It even becomes more challenging when a metaphor taken from a literary text might impose a biased (generated by an author) view on a phenomenon or realia (Khotimsky, 2016). In our previous article (2019) we came to the conclusion that a metaphor’s nature is determined by an intricate system of cultural and personal images of a particular image. Metaphoric modeling of ‘ARREST’, which was the center of scientific interest in the framework of that article, reflected three dimensions: national, social, and self-identity (Salo & Kurbanov, 2019).

In this research, we have made an attempt to conduct a contrastive analysis of morbid metaphors and their translations into the English and German languages so as to give a scientific explanation of all the differences in the meanings of an original metaphor and its translation equivalents. The analysis was aimed at revealing possible reasons causing such asymmetry. The research is consistent with the patterns of a cogno-cultural framework for metaphor translation discussed in the article ‘Cogno-cultural issues in translating metaphors’ (Al-Zoubi et al., 2016) and adds to the scientific theories that conceptual metaphors are products of the human mind which are composed of systematic cognitive relations of particular national and culture-specific concepts and metaphoric models (Cui et al., 2017).

As a result of contrastive analysis of 53 morbid metaphors and their translations into the English and German languages we discovered that the equivalence degree of the metaphors translated into English is 57 %, into German – 75 %. It should be mentioned that, compared to Peturing, Whitney resorted to the use of metaphor calquing more often but it did not bring any positive effect on the equivalence degree. Thus, in the German culture of language the cognitive and semantic content of the translated morbid metaphors are closer to the original metaphors, which is demonstrated in Table 11.

**Table 11.** The contrastive chart of the pragmatic meaning components’ degree of similarity applied to morbid metaphors and their translations into English and German

<b>Criteria for Comparison</b>	<b>Translation into English, %</b>	<b>Translation into German, %</b>
Similarity of the image	53	62
Keeping the pragmatic meaning unchanged	71	84
Absence of new (“unnecessary”) connotations	77	80

Within the scope of this research the asymmetry of a metaphor’s cognitive and semantic content can be explained by several reasons. Firstly, being one of the types of a secondary meaning of a word, the metaphorical meaning is ethnic and culture specific, which results in asymmetry in case of calquing as it creates images absolutely different from the ones implied by the author of the original novel. Secondly, German and Russian have much in common in their grammatical systems, particularly in their synthetic structures, which somehow brings certain amount of similarity in the pragmatic content between an original metaphor and its translation equivalent. Thirdly, in the receiving culture a significatum and a

denotatum may not always have the similitive feature, which can be used as a basis for a metaphorical transfer, which results in ‘different mapping conditions’.

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