How to sneeze off papers from the desk in Polish translation: re-conceptualization and approximation at work

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Abstract: This study explores a range of constructions proposed by Polish translators for rendering the meaning of the sentence “Tom sneezed off papers from the desk” to examine how re-conceptualization and approximation, theoretical cognitive-linguistic frameworks proposed by Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (2010, 2012), work in the practice of translation. Since this particular English pattern does not have a readily-available lexical/syntactical equivalent in Polish, translators dealing with this linguistic structure must first absorb the message, then re-conceptualize the original scene in order to approximate its meaning in the target language. Based on 51 analyzed proposals, the results indicate a key role of construal (Langacker, 1987, 2008) in shaping the target language message, which is strongly affected by subjective preferences of individual translators in picking up or devising particular target language forms to convey the meaning of the source language text. From this perspective, equivalent structures emerge as dynamic blends established iteratively through the subjective interpretation of linguistic code against the semantic structures, which potentially involves numerous conceptual shifts and modulations.

Key terms: re-conceptualization, approximation, construal, motion events, caused motion, cognitive semantics, construction grammar,

1. Introduction

Over the last two decades there has been a modest but steady flow of studies advocating the application of insights from cognitive linguistics to translation studies (e.g. Deckert, 2013; Hejwowski, 2004; Tabakowska, 1993; see Deckert, 2015 for a review). What is emphasized in these studies is that a proper account of translation requires looking beyond the linguistic units alone (cf. Vinay & Darbelnet, 1958/2000; see also Waliński, 2015a for a recent review), because a maximally meaningful inter-linguistic transfer extends far beyond lexical and syntactic correspondences between the source language (SL) and the target language (TL) text. From the cognitive linguistic perspective, translation can be approached on the grounds of closely intertwined theories of re-conceptualization (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2010) and approximation (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2012) in communication. On these grounds, translation emerges as an iterative process that is accomplished through a number of mental cycles, which are guided not only by the language translators use and the constraints of the context and discourse, but also by the subjectively constructed mental models that organize our conceptions of the reality. This perspective assumes that the TL message, apart from the linguistic and encyclopedic knowledge of the speaker, is also affected by his/her individual intensions, preferences, as well as expectations of the reader.
It is plausible to assume that different translators intending to stay within the paradigm of *natural equivalence* (Pym, 2014), can choose different paths of *re-conceptualization* to profile a scene in the target language in a subjectively optimal way. Different paths taken by translators for rendering a particular linguistic structure indicate a key role of *construal* (Langacker, 1987, 2008) in moulding the TL message, which is, at least to a significant extent, guided by subjective preferences of individual translators in picking up or devising particular TL forms to render the meaning of the SL text.

This study aims to examine how the re-conceptualization and approximation work in practice by investigating different ways of rendering the meaning of the sentence “Tom sneezed off papers from the desk” proposed by Polish translators. Since this language snippet does not have a direct lexical/syntactical equivalent in Polish (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2015, p. 21), translators dealing with this structure must first absorb the message in the source language, and then re-conceptualize the Event Structure (cf. Davidson, 2001) it conveys to express its meaning. Since the cognitive linguistic approach to translation assumes that research on how linguistic structures are transposed between languages must be built on research on how particular structures are represented, the analysis of the re-conceptualization and approximation should start from a review of findings on linguistic structuring of events that involve a *sneeze* as the cause of motion.

2. Constructionist and cognitive semantic approaches to caused-motion
In traditional, generative approaches to semantics (e.g. Gruber, 1965, 1976; Jackendoff, 1972), predicates select their arguments, i.e. selection restrictions are considered to be a subset of semantic and syntactic information specified by a main verb. A verb such as *give*, for instance, would be classified as a three-argument verb: \( \text{give}(\text{arg}_1, \text{arg}_2, \text{arg}_3) \), thus it can appear in expressions such as “The girl (\text{arg}_1: \text{Subject}) gave (\text{Verb}) a toy (\text{arg}_2: \text{Object}_1) to the dog (\text{arg}_3: \text{Object}_2)”. On the other hand, a verb such as *sneeze*, would be classified as profiling single argument, i.e. the participant role of a sneezer: \( \text{sneeze}(\text{arg}_1) \) as in “The boy (\text{arg}_1: \text{Subject}) sneezed”.

However, Goldberg (1995, 2006, 2013) points out that putatively single-argument verbs, such as *sneeze*, can also appear in expressions with three arguments, such as “Tom sneezed off papers from the desk”. From the perspective of her *construction grammar*, this is not a violation of selection restrictions, but instead an example of a standard construction that functions in English, which she calls *caused-motion construction*. Goldberg (2006, p. 100) assumes that the verb *sneeze* can appear in the caused-motion construction “because sneeze
can be construed to have a meaning, relevantly like other verbs that readily appear in that construction, as a verb that effects a causal force”. Whether such uses are judged as metaphorical appears to be related to level of abstraction, yet still remains an open question (see Torreano, Cacciari, & Glucksberg, 2005).

In more general terms, Goldberg (1995, 2006, 2013) argues that recognizing this construction enables us to avoid the problem of positing implausible verb senses to account for examples such as “She sneezed the foam off the cappuccino”, “He sneezed the napkin off the table”. To account for these sentences in the traditional terms, we would have to assume that sneeze, which intuitively is an intransitive verb, actually has a three-argument sense: “X causes Y to move Z by sneezing”. Assuming the existence of the caused-motion construction independently of the verbs which instantiate it, allows to avoid positing arbitrary lexical stipulations on verbs that intuitively do not require the direct object complement, but can potentially occur in the construction, such as laugh, e.g. “The audience laughed him off the stage”, or cough, e.g. “He coughed a moth out of his mouth”, etc.

Therefore, Goldberg rejects the claim that the syntax and semantics of the clause are projected exclusively from the specifications of the main verb.

On a constructional approach, we can understand aspects of the final interpretation involving caused motion, intended transfer, or caused result to be contributed by the respective constructions. That is, we can understand skeletal constructions to be capable of contributing arguments (Goldberg, 1995, p. 10).

The basic semantics of the caused-motion construction is that the agent or causer argument directly causes the theme argument to move along a path designated by the directional phrase to a new location: ‘X causes Y to move Z’. Goldberg (1995, pp. 75–76) adds that this central sense can be extended in various ways, allowing the construction to appear with a variety of related patterns, created by polysemy links1 (cf. Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2007), which license expressions such as “Mary locked Bob into the room” (X causes Y not to move from Z), “Sue let the water out of the bathtub” (X enables Y to move Z), “Sam helped her into the car” (X helps Y to move Z), etc.

However, Kay (2005, 2013) presents argumentation to reject the caused-motion construction as a true construction of the grammar of English. He argues that caused-motion

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1 According to Goldberg (1995, p. 75) polysemy links “capture the nature of the semantic relations between a particular sense of a construction and any extensions from this sense”.
expressions should rather be accounted as a pattern of coinage (cf. Fillmore, 1997). A basic distinction between the two is that “A construction is reliably productive synchronically; a pattern of coinage is unreliably productive diachronically” (Kay, 2005, p. 91; see also Bybee, 2010, Ch. 6). A basic diagnostic that indicates that the caused-motion pattern is not productive is approaching it as a productive construction, which leads to overgeneration illustrated with the following examples:

?She screamed him out of her apartment.
?They coughed him off the stage.
?The bomb detonated the desk through the window.
?The storm raged the roof off the house.

Kay emphasizes that although these sentences, which are coined on analogy with other conventionalized examples of the caused-motion pattern, are readily understandable to English speakers, they are ungrammatical. According to Kay (2013), because each expression of this kind has to be learned and remembered on its own, the caused-motion construction proposed by Goldberg does not qualify as a part of English grammar. Instead, sentences such as “Tom sneezed papers off from the desk” should be treated as more or less idiosyncratic lexicalizations based the coinage pattern (Kay, 2005, p. 90).

Notwithstanding this discussion, the caused-motion expressions can be interpreted from the cognitive semantic perspective of Talmy’s (1985, 2000) lexicalization patterns of motions events. Talmy characterizes a basic Motion event as a situation consisting of four internal core components: (1) the presence or absence of motion (Motion); (2) the moving entity (Figure); (3) the object with respect to which the Figure moves (Ground); (4) the course followed by the Figure with respect to the Ground (Path). Moreover, Talmy (1985, 2000) distinguishes an associated co-event, which refers to (5) the manner in which the motion takes place (Manner); or (6) the cause of its occurrence (Cause). Talmy (1985, pp. 139–140) explains that the assessment of whether Manner or Cause is conflated in a verb depends on the verb’s basic reference to what the Figure does or to what the Agent (or Instrument) does. For instance, “He pushed the keg” expresses Cause because it refers to what

\[Talmy\ (2000,\ p.\ 25)\ assumes\ that\ the\ component\ of\ Motion\ refers\ to\ “the\ presence\ per\ se\ of\ motion\ or\ locatedness\ in\ the\ event”,\ despite\ the\ fact\ the\ in\ the\ latter\ the\ Figure\ does\ not\ change\ its\ position\ with\ respect\ to\ the\ Ground.\]
the Agent did. In contrast, the sentence “He rolled the keg” expresses Manner since it basically refers to what the Figure (keg) did.

Mandler (1992, 2004) proposes a typology of basic image schemas of motion that enable infants to make an initial conceptual division of the world into animals and artifacts. She argues that the image schema for caused motion involves an additional trajector acting at the beginning of path, which can be represented schematically as a vector toward a point occupied by an object, and another vector leaving that point. The first trajectory ends or changes its course at the place and time at which the other begins its motion. Mandler (1992, 2004) adds that the cause of motion can be either animate, e.g. a hand picks up an object, or inanimate, e.g. a ball rolls into another, starting it to move.

Mani and Pustejovsky (2012, p. 37) provide a list of roles which they consider relevant to the semantic description of motion events form a computational perspective: (a) Agent – the event participant that performs or causes the event; (b) Experiencer – the event participant who experiences or perceives the event; (c) Source – the location or place where the motion begins; (d) Goal/Recipient – the location or place where the motion terminates or is directed to; (e) Patient – the event participant who is affected by the event; (f) Theme/Figure – the event participant undergoing a change in position or state; (g) Instrument – the event participant used by the Agent to perform or cause the event; (h) Location/Ground – the location or place where the event occurs. Taking these findings into consideration, the sentence “Tom sneezed off the papers from the desk” can be decomposed as follows:

Agent – Tom;  
Motion+Cause – sneezed off;  
Figure – papers;  
Ground – the desk;  
Path – from (the desk).

This structure parallels other, probably more usual, sentences expressing similar motion events, such as “Sam blew off the dust from the screen”, “The wind swept tiny leaves off of the new oaks”, etc. Approaching sentences describing caused-motion events from the cognitive semantic perspective opens a path to a systematic cognitive analysis of different paths of re-conceptualization that can be taken by translators dealing with such expressions.

3. Re-conceptualization and approximation in translation
A fundamental assumption of re-conceptualization as a theory of translation is that language interacts with the extra-linguistic reality not directly, but through a construction of mental spaces (Fauconnier, 1985/1994, 2007) and processes of conceptual integration (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002; Turner, 2007), which fuse together both linguistic and extra-linguistic elements. From this perspective, linguistic interaction is shaped not only by the linguistic context, but also other factors relevant to a given communicative situation, which include the psychological and emotional state of speakers, their encyclopedic knowledge, particular social background, as well as specific intentions and preferences. Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, (2010, p. 106) assumes that this “is reflected in the cognitive-semantic layer of language, in which meanings are understood as conceptualizations of fragments of reality, constrained by conventions involving symbolic morpho-syntactic and phonological forms of a given language system”. Moreover, our cognitive experience can be structured linguistically in different ways, which are dictated only in part by the language code we use. In another part, they are shaped by the context and discourse, and yet in another part, they depend on the speaker’s subjective choice of structures used to shape meaning.

This part of the theory of re-conceptualization refers to Langacker’s (1987, pp. 487–488, 2008, Ch. 3) thesis that a linguistic expression imposes a particular construal, which reflects a specific way of portraying a given situation. Construal, defined by Langacker (2008, p. 43) as “our manifest ability to conceive and portray the same situation in alternate ways”, reflects the observation that an expression’s meaning is not just the conceptual content it evokes. What is equally relevant to the meaning is that every symbolic structure construes its content in a specific fashion, which involves a range of construal phenomena, such as specificity, focusing, prominence, and perspective (see Langacker, 2008 for a broader discussion). This approach to meaning assumes that any linguistic unit is not merely an objective structure of a conceived situation, but resides in the way its conceptual content is construed and portrayed by the speaker. This, in turn, depends not only on the particular language system, but also on the speakers involved in the communicative situation and the particular context of its occurrence.

From this perspective, meanings of utterances emerge as dynamic conceptualizations, which are influenced by the construal phenomena, as well as the process of subjectification, which Langacker defines as “a semantic shift or extension in which an entity originally

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3 Langacker (2008, p. 43) notes that in certain earlier works he used the term imagery, but more recently replaced it with construal to avoid confusion with other applications of that term.
constrained objectively comes to receive a more subjective construal” (Langacker, 1991, p. 215; see also Langacker, 2006, 2008). On the other hand, meanings of lexical items can be approached as stimulators, which are responsible for concept activation to different extent and range. They stimulate conceptual shifts (see Coulson, 2001), modify or override old, and create new concepts in existing or emerging mental spaces. Accordingly, they can be understood as instructions to build various mental models used for the cognitive processing of the linguistic information (see Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 1987; see also Glenberg & Robertson, 1999; Zwaan & Radvansky, 1998).

Viewed from this perspective, language is a dynamic phenomenon, in which meanings emerge from the interaction between the meaning of a lexical unit and the semantic interpretation of discourse. Hence, a word is not merely a unit abstracted from a verbal act in its static role, but also an active element of discourse that exerts influence and shapes context. The context, in turn, shapes the meanings, which emerge dynamically in the online processing through these interactions. As emphasized by Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (2010):

Language, interpreted in terms of a cognitive-interactional framework, is an expression of two perspectives. First, as partly conventional conceptualisation in terms of recurrent patterns of neural activation, and secondly, as an expression of an open potential for capturing alternative realities where new links are created and new construals proposed . . . On each occasion meanings of linguistic units referring to these realities are individually re-created and negotiated among the participants of the communicative act (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2010, p. 107).

On the grounds of this dynamic view of language, Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (2010) proposes that translation involves a number of cycles of re-conceptualization of the original source language message, which eventually are expressed in the target language. The first cycle of the translation process involves comprehension of the original SL message. At one level, the construal of the original scene is structured by the SL convention. For instance, a scene structured with the infinitive construction in English “I’d like Tom to come earlier”, in Polish is typically structured by the subordinate complementizer żebym with more context-grounded information (subordinate clause) “Chcę, żeby Tomek przyszedł wcześniej [EN lit.: “I want so that Tom came earlier”], which is marked for Tense, Aspect, Number, and Gender.
Besides, a translator has an individual life experience, certain background knowledge, and may act in a number of possible contexts. Thus, the message may be shaped by cultural conventions of politeness and social conduct, by his/her background knowledge about Tom and his habits, and countless other factors, which depend on the speaker’s and Tom’s roles and mutual relations. What must also be taken into consideration is that at yet another level a particular mental model of the original SL scene is shaped by the individual disposition and preferences of the translator as the SL message recipient.

Then, the second cycle of re-conceptualization involves rendering the mental model developed upon hearing or reading a SL message into the target text in a manner that a translator considers most faithful to the original meaning of the message. At this stage, any linguistic form within the TL grammar which the translator takes into consideration as a possible SL equivalent brings about a new re-conceptualization cycle with an alternative mental model. As summarized by Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (2010):

Re-conceptualization is not only possible but unavoidable in translation, as it is dictated partly by new construal parameters in the target language form, different context (author/speaker – i.e. translator, time, place, addressee – TL audience), but also brought about by subjective preferences of the translator in picking up or devising particular target language forms, which do not profile the same entities (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2010, p. 108).

Another cycle of re-conceptualization takes place, when the TL message, structured according to the TL morphology and syntax as the SL equivalent, undergoes a new re-conceptualization with the TL recipient, whose construal of the TL scene is shaped by factors parallel to those involved in the first cycle of re-conceptualization.

Therefore, re-conceptualization as the theory of translation assumes that while processing the linguistic input, first the SL author, then the translator, finally the reader construct some conceptual integration networks, which is associated with the emergence of new meanings. Moreover, in all the cycles of translation, meanings are constructed within the flow of discourse by forming conceptual integration networks that combine elements of TL and SL, as well as specific properties of subjective language users’ mental models. In the outcome, translators and their readers’ mental
spaces are populated with characters bearing some resemblance to the original ones, interacting in ways which remind us of the source interactions, but clearly reconstructed.

Since each re-conceptualization is a matter of degree, the translation process often involves using approximative, underdetermined senses, which are considered sufficient for the context in which they are used. Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (2012, p. 5) points out that “some meanings are of a more-or-less approximative type when contrasted with their fully accessible sets of properties as in the case of the word boys in Boys like to fight” (cf. Gibbs & McCarrell, 1990). She emphasizes that even within the same language code, speakers tend to resort not to what they would consider the first and most adequate expression of their thoughts, but rather to what approximates their communicative objective. These conventional language forms that diverge from the original thoughts are used for a variety of reasons. In some cases, their use is dictated by politeness strategies. In other cases, their use is intentional, for instance, when the speaker chooses an approximative form for rhetorical purposes – to impress or surprise the audience, or for connative reasons – to persuade the audience to a certain point of view. Moreover, since different speakers have varying language repertories, linguistic portrayals of their thoughts are more or less faithful to what they intend to share with others.

Following the differentiation of mathematical solutions proposed by Sossinsky (1986), these more-or-less cases of language use can be defined as approximations of an exact solution. Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (2012) sees them as approximative spaces. They are mental spaces constructed dynamically in communication from the level of a conventional prototype up to a context-specific tolerance threshold beyond which a communicative fiasco occurs. They are ubiquitous in communication for a number of reasons:

Approximative spaces are at work in all contexts. Areas of approximation between what we see and how we talk about it are rooted in the diversity of the outside world, language users’ perception and their thoughts, expressing their personality, background knowledge as well the cultural and linguistic conventions and constraints, followed unconsciously or with full awareness, as well as in the individual needs and preferences concerning the explicitness of thoughts which surface in an interaction (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2012, pp. 16–17).
One of the key factors of approximation is related to the language typological parameter, which restricts the type of a linguistic construction in which the speaker can choose to convey a message. In some linguistic systems certain ontological categories are verbally marked and can be expressed, while in others they may be absent or left non-verbalized. This is exemplified by the above-discussed English caused-motion construction, whose expressions sometimes do not have direct counterparts in Polish. By examining different ways of dealing with a sentence belonging to this construction in translation, this study aims to explore how re-conceptualization and approximation work in practice.

4. Research methodology
Following the assumption that a particular linguistic construction in which the speaker chooses to convey a message symbolizes a particular semantic perspective conveyed by language forms via different profiling and cognitive construal of a given scene or event (Langacker, 2008), this study aims to observe alternative paths of re-conceptualization followed by Polish translators dealing with the sentence “Tom sneezed off papers from the desk”. In this case, the full meaning of the sentence is accessible to the translator, but the output has to be approximated in the TL because a straightforward one-by-one conceptual transfer is blocked by restrictions of the Polish language code, which does not offer a parallel syntactic/lexical structure. For that reason, one may reasonably expect that the resulting proposals will employ different profiling and cognitive construal of the scene, which should result in more or less faithful portrayals.

The research was conducted in June 2014 with 51 translator trainees studying at the 1st year of MA studies of English philology in the Institute of English Studies of the University of Lodz who took the translation course as their specialization. The group included 33 females and 18 males. The age of participants ranged between 22–30. Their mean age was 24. At the time of the experiment, the translators had been learning English for 8–25 years. The mean period of study was 14 years.

The experiment was conducted as an introductory activity for the class devoted to translation procedures used by translators (see Waliński, 2015a). The translators were asked to translate the above-quoted sentence “as faithfully and naturally as possible” into Polish. It was explained to them that this particular caused-motion pattern is not syntactically/lexically realized in Polish, which makes rendering the meaning of this sentence a challenging task. Apart from making sure that all participants understand the meanings of constituent words, no
other context for the event was given. This is because the overall aim of the experiment was not to evaluate individual translators but to elicit various proposals, without shaping them in one way or another. The translators had enough time to take into consideration different options of translating this sentences into Polish, as they were given 10 minutes to complete the task. At the end of the session all translators duly submitted their proposals, with no participant asking for additional time.

5. Constructions proposed for Polish

Among the 51 translations submitted by the participants, the range of different constructions employed for rendering the meaning of the SL sentence into Polish amounted to nine (some with sub-variants discussed below), which far exceeded expectations of the tutor. The most frequently proposed construction was an instrumental construction proposed by 12 translators, as shown in examples (1a–k).

(1) Instrumental construction

a. Tomek kichnięciem zdmuchnął papiery z biurka. (×2)
   [EN lit.: Tom (by) sneezing_INS blew off papers from the desk]
b. Tomek kichnięciem zdmuchał z biurka dokumenty.
   [EN lit.: Tom (by) sneezing_INS blew off from the desk documents]
c. Tomek kichnięciem zmiótł kartki z biurka.
   [EN lit.: Tom (by) sneezing_INS swept off sheets (of paper) from the desk]
d. Tomek kichnięciem zrzucił kartki papieru z biurka.
   [EN lit.: Tom (by) sneezing_INS knocked off sheets of paper from the desk]
e. Tomek kichnięciem zrzucił kartki z biurka.
   [EN lit.: Tom (by) sneezing_INS knocked off sheets (of paper) from the desk]
f. Tomek kichnięciem zrzucił papiery z biurka.
   [EN lit.: Tom (by) sneezing_INS knocked off papers from the desk]
g. Tomek zdmuchnął kartki z biurka kichnięciem.
   [EN lit.: Tom blew off sheets (of paper) from the desk (by) sneezing_INS]
h. Tomek zdmuchał kichnięciem karteczki z biurka.
   [EN lit.: Tom blew off (by) sneezing_INS little sheets (of paper) from the desk]
i. Tomek zmiótł kichnięciem kartki z biurka.
   [EN lit.: Tom swept off (by) sneezing_INS sheets (of paper) from the desk]
j. Tomek zrzucił dokumenty z biurka kichnięciem.
   [EN lit.: Tom knocked off documents from the desk (by) sneezing_INS]
k. Tomek zrzucił kartki z ławki kichnięciem.
   [EN lit.: Tom knocked off sheets (of paper) from the bench (by) sneezing_INS]

What characterizes these proposals is that the translators nominalize the verb sneeze to gerund, which they put in the instrumental case. The instrumental case marks sneezing semantically as the direct Cause of the event. The Agent is foregrounded, which parallels the original sentence.
Another popular solution taken by the translators participating in the study was based on employing participials to render the meaning of the sentence into Polish. Altogether 12 translator chose this way of rendering the meaning, with 9 participants employing a present participial construction, as shown in examples (2.1a–f), and 3 participants employing an anterior participial construction, as shown in examples (2.2a–c).

(2.1) Present participial construction
a. Kichając, Tomek zdmuchnął kartki z biurka. (×2)
[EN lit.: Sneezing_PRP, Tom blew off sheets (of paper) from the desk]
b. Kichając, Tomek zdmuchnął papiery z biurka. (×3)
[EN lit.: Sneezing_PRP, Tom blew off papers from the desk]
[EN lit.: Tom, sneezing_PRP, ?blew-up off sheets (of paper) lying on the desk]
d. Tomek kicha?ąc zdmuchnął kartki z biurka.
[EN lit.: Tom, sneezing_PRP, blew off sheets (of paper) from the desk]
e. Tomek kicha?ąc zdmuchnął papiery z biurka.
[EN lit.: Tom, sneezing_PRP, blew off papers from the desk]
f. Tomek kicha?ąc zrzucił papiery z biurka.
[EN lit.: Tom, sneezing_PRP, knocked off papers from the desk]

(2.2) Anterior participial construction
a. Kichnąwszy, Tomek zdmuchnął z biurka kartki papieru.
[EN lit.: Having sneezed_ARP, Tom blew off from the desk sheets of paper]
b. Tomek, kichnąwszy, stracił papiery z biurka.
[EN lit.: Tom, having sneezed_ARP, knocked off papers from the desk]
c. Tomek, kichnąwszy, zrzucił dokumenty z biurka.
[EN lit.: Tom, having sneezed_ARP, knocked off documents from the desk]

These constructions transfer the meaning of the original sentence by putting the verb sneeze into participial forms (either present or anterior) to foreground Tom’s action as the semantic Cause of the event.

Moreover, some translators used a present participial construction in a way that distances the sneeze, as the original Cause of the event, from its Effect, i.e. the removal of papers from the table, as shown in examples (3a–c).

(3) Present participial: distancing Cause and Effect
a. Tomek kicha?ąc, zdmuchując kartki ze stołu.
[EN lit.: Tom sneezed blowing off_PRP sheets (of paper) from the table]
b. Tomek kicha?ąc, zdmuchując dokumenty z biurka.
[EN lit.: Tom sneezed blowing off__PRP documents from the desk]
[EN lit.: Tom sneezed, knocking off_PRP at the same time documents lying on the table]

In these proposals, the sub-events of (i) sneezing and (ii) blowing papers off are rendered as co-occurring but not directly connected to each other by the Cause-Effect chain. Moreover,
the act of sneezing in sentences (3a–b) can possibly be interpreted not as the Cause, but as the Effect of Tom’s actions, i.e. Tom sneezed while blowing papers off the desk (probably dust was stirred up).

Another solution used by the translators is based on employing a coordinate construction to render the meaning of the sentence. Altogether, 9 translator chose this option. What is noteworthy about these proposals is that some translators profile the Figure, as shown in examples (4.1a–d), while others the action of the Agent as the ensuing entity in the focus of attention, as shown in examples (4.2a–c).

(4.1) Coordinate construction: Figure profiling
a. Tomek kichnął a dokumenty spadły z biurka. [EN lit.: Tom sneezed and documents fell down from the desk]
b. Tomek kichnął i papiery zleciały z biurka. (×2) [EN lit.: Tom sneezed and papers flew off from the desk]
c. Tomek kichnął i wszystkie papiery spadły z biurka. [EN lit.: Tom sneezed and all papers fell down from the desk]
d. Tomek kichnął i wszystkie papiery zleciały z biurka. [EN lit.: Tom sneezed and all papers flew off from the desk]

(4.2) Coordinate construction: Agent profiling
a. Tomek kichnął i zdmuchnął dokumenty leżące na biurku. [EN lit.: Tom sneezed and blew off documents lying on the desk]
b. Tomek kichnął i zdmuchnął dokumenty z biurka. [EN lit.: Tom sneezed and blew off documents from the desk]
c. Tomek kichnął i zdmuchnął papiery z biurka. (×2) [EN lit.: Tom sneezed and blew off papers from the desk]

What is also notable about these proposals is that they translate the chronological flow of events from the perceptual experience in the iconic fashion, which corresponds to the principle of natural order proposed by Levelt (1989).

Three other translators decided to nominalize the verb sneeze and put it in the prominent position of the sentence Subject, as shown in examples (5a–c).

(5) Verbal nominal construction
a. Kichnięcie Tomka straciło papiery z biurka. [EN lit.: Tom’s sneezing knocked off papers from the desk]
b. Kichnięcie Tomka zdmuchnęło dokumenty z biurka. [EN lit.: Tom’s sneezing blew off documents from the desk]
c. Kichnięcie Tomka zwiał papiery z biurka. [EN lit.: Tom’s sneezing blew away papers from the desk]

Interestingly, these proposals demote the original Agent to a secondary role of the Genitival modifier.
As an alternative option, one person decided to employ an *adverbial sequencing construction* based on an adverbial phrase, as shown in the example (6)

(6) Adverbial sequencing construction

Dokumenty spadły z biurka po kichnięciu Toma.
[EN lit.: Documents fell down from the desk after Tom’s sneezing]

Although only one person chose this way of rendering the meaning of the original sentence, this solution is not unusual. In discourse, especially in narratives, the default chronology of events is often overridden with temporal adverbials (Ter Meulen, 1995; Zwaan, Madden & Stanfield, 2001).

Furthermore, two translators decided to use a *comparative consecutive complementation* to render the meaning of the original sentence, as shown in examples (7a–b)

(7) Comparative consecutive complementation

a. Tomek kichnął z taką siłą, że aż papiery pospadły z biurka.
[EN lit.: Tom sneezed with so much strength that papers fell down from the desk]
b. Tomek kichnął z taką siłą, że wszystkie papiery spadły z biurka.
[EN lit.: Tom sneezed with so much strength that all papers fell down from the desk]

What is noteworthy about these proposals is that they enhance the description of *sneezing* by explicitly emphasizing its unusual strength, which is not available in the original SL sentence.

Five other translators decided to render the translation with a simple sentence. As shown in examples (8a–d), these proposals simplify the meaning of the original sentence by replacing *sneezing* (the original Cause of the event) with more conventional actions that typically occur in such contexts. In these renditions the Agent *blew off, swept off, or knocked off* papers from the desk.

(8) Simple sentence: Cause alteration

a. Tomek zdmuchnął dokumenty z biurka.
[EN lit.: Tom blew off documents from the desk]
b. Tomek zdmuchnął papiery z biurka. (∗2)
[EN lit.: Tom blew off papers from the desk]
c. Tomek zmiotł kartki z biurka.
[EN lit.: Tom swept off sheets (of paper) from the desk]
d. Tomek rzucił papiery z biurka.
[EN lit.: Tom knocked off papers from the desk]

It seems that these translators found themselves unable to render the complexity of the original scene expressed with the caused-motion construction, thus they decided on Cause alteration, which simplifies the original scene by getting rid of the sneeze as a rather atypical originator of the motion event.
Finally, four translators decided to coin a non-standard caused-motion construction by adding the verbal prefix “s-” (z-/s-) to the Polish verb kichnąć (cf. Tabakowska, 2003), as shown in examples (9a–b).

(9) Non-standard caused-motion construction
a. Tomek skichnął papiery z biurka. (×3)
[EN lit.: Tom sneezed off papers from the desk]
b. Tomek skichnął z biurka papiery.
[EN lit.: Tom sneezed off from the desk papers]

As pointed out by Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (2015, p. 21), this verbal form is not normally found in Polish, which is confirmed by the fact that it does not occur in the Polish National Corpus (see www.nkip.pl).

The summary of results obtained in this study is presented in Figure 1, which shows the range of constructions proposed by the translators taking part in the experiment.

Figure 1. Summary of constructions proposed by Polish translators

Although it might be tempting to evaluate these proposals, for a single contextless sentence it is impossible to state which translation actually renders the meaning of the text better than others. For each respective translator, attempting to stay within the paradigm of natural equivalence, his/her own subjective solution was the optimal way of rendering the meaning of this particular sentence into Polish.

Rather, the results obtained in this study demonstrate that within the linguistic system there exist alternative ways to structure a particular experience, which are partly conventional, partly discourse- and context-constrained, and partly entirely subjective (Lewandowska-
Tomaszczyk, 2010, 2015, p. 22). For even a simple scene, like this analyzed in this research, a translator can choose different paths of re-conceptualization to profile the situation in the target language in a manner that he/she subjectively considers the most optimal way of rendering the scene for the target audience. This demonstrates a key role of construal (Langacker, 1987, 2008) in translation, which is shaped not only by the constructions available in the TL system, but also, in significant part, by the subjective choice of a translator to shape meaning using particular target language forms (see Waliński, in press for a parallel study that analyses construal in these proposals).

What is particularly interesting about the results is that, paradoxically, the only construction proposed by translators that is semantically equivalent with the SL sentence is the caused-motion construction loan, i.e. “?Tomek skichnął papiery z biurka”, which happens to be not lexicalized in Polish. The fact that it was proposed by 4 translators rises some important questions. First, what is the role of L2 transfer in proposing the caused-motion construction by some participants? In a recent study, Tomczak and Evert (2015) found that Polish advanced speakers of English rate the meaningfulness of fictive motion sentences translated from English (cf. Waliński, 2015b) higher than monolingual speakers of Polish. A working hypothesis that can be proposed in this context is that a high proficiency in English significantly contributes to importing the caused-motion construction into Polish, which gives raise to translationese language occurrence (cf. Duff, 1981).

Another key question that needs to be answered for these proposals is what semantic dimension prevents the verb sneeze from having a correspondent pattern of caused-motion in Polish lexical/syntactic system. Taking into consideration that the parallel structure involving the verb blow is realized in Polish with the perfectivizing verbal prefix “z/s-”, i. (cf. Tabakowska, 2003), e.g. “Tomek zdmuchał kurz z biurka” [EN: Tom blew off the dust from the desk], a hypothesis proposed here is that the lack of a correspondent pattern derives from the non-intentional characteristics of sneezing, which occurs involuntarily as the reflex caused by irritation of the nasal mucous membrane. However, a discussion on the possibility of importing the caused-motion construction into Polish as a loan via the morpho-syntactic calque (cf. Otwinowska-Kasztelanic, 2000) expands beyond the scope of this study.

6. Conclusions

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4 The term translationese is a pejorative term used to refer to the language of translation that derives from calquing ST lexical or syntactic patterning (Duff 1981).
A wide range of re-conceptualizations exemplified by the proposals analyzed in the study indicates that the Event Structure (cf. Davidson, 2001) of even relatively unsophisticated event chains can be construed in alternative ways, which poses a challenge for translators (cf. Tabakowska, 2000). In response to the re-contextualization of the SL message, a translator can profile a particular scene in different manners by picking up or devising certain linguistic forms to structure the TL message according to his/her individual view of the reality emergent in the approximative mental spaces developed through conceptual integration. These mental spaces developed in re-contextualization consist both of conceptual-semantic content and the way this content is construed subjectively by a translator. Therefore, although they bear resemblance to the original ones, in each case they are only more or less faithful reconstructions of the original mental model, i.e. its approximations.

From this perspective, equivalence as the central concept in theoretical approaches to translation can be viewed as a dynamic blend involving construal phenomena, as well as naturalness (Pym, 2014). Whether a particular approximation is successful in producing a massage suitable for the target language users, depends also on entrenchment and conventionalization,5 (Langacker, 2008, p. 38), which form a cline extending from totally novel interpretations to long established linguistic meanings. As postulated by Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (2010):

Full equivalence between language systems does not occur in natural languages from the point of view of the ‘sameness of meaning’ requirement in the static sense of the word. The relation between an original and its translation is not that of identity, as it cannot be, by definition . . . The translation can bear a family resemblance to its original, showing a degree of equivalence on different parameters of meaning construction (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2010, p. 115).

Taking this into account, the common level of reference required for the conceptual transfer between different languages cannot assumed to be exclusively linguistic, but must incorporate

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5 As explained by Langacker (2008a, p. 38), “Meanings (like other linguistic structures) are recognized as part of a language only to the extent that they are (i) entrenched in the minds of individual speakers and (ii) conventional for members of a speech community. Only a limited array of senses satisfy these criteria and qualify as established linguistic units. But since entrenchment and conventionalization are inherently matters of degree, there is no discrete boundary between senses which have and which lack the status of established units. We find instead a gradation leading from novel interpretations, through incipient senses, to established linguistic meanings”.
the totality of socio-cultural and psycho-physiological processes shared between different speakers participating in the translation-mediated communication.

Translators re-create the original SL message according to their own conceptualization model, which is affected both by the SL text and by their own interpretation of its meaning. Although the original subjective conceptualization of the author constitutes a common ground for all the operations involved in translation, the outcome is not the original author’s model of a scene or event, but a blend developed through the interpretation of linguistic meaning against the semantic structures, and the context of interaction. The results of this study indicate that it is established dynamically and normally involves a variety conceptual shifts and modulations. In this context, the theories of re-conceptualization and approximation provide a fundamental set of guidelines that can be employed for a systematic description of how meanings emerge across languages, and how their conceptual content gets structured in the translation process.

References


