INTERPRETATION IN TRANSLATION
AS A WORD-IMAGE METAMORPHOSIS

ТЛУМАЧЕННЯ У ПЕРЕКЛАДІ
ЯК МЕТАМОРФОЗА СЛОВА В ОБРАЗ

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This paper offers a cognitive translation studies perspective on the interpretation of individual words viewed as a creative act of giving a meaning to a word of language and, vice versa, of manifesting a meaning via a word of language.

This is a follow-up paper to [10] where ***interpretation*** is discussed against the background of the theory of image-driven interpretations developed by the author (see [1; 6; 7; 8; 9]), and is explained in terms of a ***metamorphosis*** that a word – more specifically, a word meaning – undergoes when converted into a mental image. This metamorphosis is essentially a shift between the auditory and the visual codes in verbal communication, wherein one switches from the auditory (the words one hears or reads) to the visual (the mental images one 'sees') modes of perception [2]. This paper has the objective to elaborate on the essence of the word-image metamorphosis in terms of its codes and modes.

Mental images represent in the human mind the entities of the world afforded to human experience by the powers of consciousness and of embodiment that are specific to the species [3; 5]. On the representational view, interpretation of individual words in verbal communication [4] rests on converting the words that one perceives – hears or reads – as strings of phonemes or graphemes into the mental images that one 'sees' with the eye of one's mind, and back when mental images are converted into words [10]. This draws in one's different brain areas and – since mental images depict the world, whereas words describe it – brings about a number of different-stage representational changes in the content of one's mind [7]:

Metamorphosis is when the input causes the form to change. Similarly, a translator's interpretation determines one word chosen from among many in the target language. In decoding, the meaning of a source language word is converted into a mental image; in encoding, the mental image is converted into a meaning, and a word is picked in the target language to capture this meaning. Interpretation requires *a shift between the visual and the auditory codes* in communication: between mental images and words. This shift is the essence in translation [10, p. 65; italics added – O.V.].

As [2] shows, reading a book is different from looking at a picture as reading is based not on the visual perception of images but on the visual perception, and the recognition, of the letters of the alphabet that are arranged distinctly into the words of this language: the outer form of these words as a material container for their meanings is a string of graphemes in writing and a string of phonemes in speaking, which is generally the case with phonographic writing systems in contrast to hieroglyphic ones [10]: reading a book depends on an alphabet and is, thus, a hearing-based process. A reader starts with words but eventually arrives at mental images, which is where interpretations take place: words convert into mental images, with a word and an image making an entity of two hypostases, and it is this entity that metamorphoses in the act of interpretation.

Whereas mental images are non-propositional objects in the mind, natural languages are designed to have propositions at their basis [3; 5], cf. the phenomenal experience of seeing that the sky is blue vs. the thought that the sky is blue. The word-image-word conversion in translation inevitably incurs semantic costs that must be minimized by finding in the target language the words that make for mental images their optimal descriptions [7], with the understanding that such descriptions can at best be only optimal but never perfect. Ultimately, what these words describe must correspond to what these mental images depict [8]:

Verbal communication is in essence converting the mental images that one 'sees' with the mind's eye into words that others can hear and read as strings of phonemes and graphemes, and vice versa. In this communication, one switches from *the visual* (the mental images they 'see') to *the auditory* (the words they hear and read) *modes of perception*. <...> Mental images are individual, subjective, and non-repetitive; words are communal and repetitive, they round the mind's content and operationalize it for the purposes of communication [10, p. 63; italics added – O.V.].

Translation therefore involves interpretation as a many-stage conversion of words into mental images, and back, that rests on a word-image metamorphosis, with an interplay of the visual and auditory modes of human

perception when in the acts of interpretation the visual and the auditory codes of communication must shift.

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