Image-driven interpretations in professional communicative mediation: Bringing translation and psychotherapy together

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Abstract. This paper focuses on the nature of interpretations in translation and in psychotherapy and shows that these forms of professional communicative mediation, though otherwise distinct, are similar in terms of this nature. This paper treats interpretations as creative acts of giving a meaning to a sign and assumes that interpretations are driven by mental images that derive from the representational content of the human mind. Image-driven interpretations take the crucial role in professional communicative mediation. In translation, this is mediation across cultures; in psychotherapy, this is mediation across the conscious and the unconscious minds. Whereas mental images are inherently conscious, their psychological precondition is in the unconscious mind. This paper moves on to explore psychotherapeutic dream interpretation because dreams make the interface between the conscious and the unconscious interpretive minds. Dreams as dream images and dream reports need a mediator to interpret their content. The image-driven nature of dream interpretations makes a psychotherapist's mediating job similar to that of a translator: a good translator uses words to 'draw' images in the mind; a good psychotherapist does the same. This paper interprets names for translation offered in the translation studies domain and via an etymological analysis arrives at the primary images that motivated these names. Interpretations in translation are shown to capture the spirit of the content and transfer this spirit cross-culturally via words in the source and target languages. This paper continues to discuss the role of image thinking in the evolution of human communication. The perspective on communication that this paper takes proposes a role for translation among the imperatives of evolutionary survival.

Keywords: communication with words, image-driven interpretations, interpretations in translation, mental image, professional communicative mediation, psychotherapeutic dream interpretation, translation.

Introduction. In this paper, we focus on the nature of interpretations in translation and in psychotherapy and show that these forms of professional communicative mediation, though otherwise distinct, are similar in terms of this nature. We treat interpretations as creative acts of giving a meaning to a sign, or of providing the meaning of a sign, and also as the results of these acts. We believe that interpretations are driven by mental images and rest on the representational properties of the human mind.

Mental images are internalized symbols that stand for and represent in the human mind the entities, processes, and states found in the experiential world (Kosslyn, Thompson, & Ganis, 2006). Mental images are not the world they represent; they derive from the mind's representational content and are construals of this world shaped by human embodiment. On the representational view, mental images as non-propositional objects in the mind are generally ineffable (Chalmers, 2004). They do not depend for their formation and retention on a manifestation with words, and it is only in communication that this manifestation becomes necessary.

We are of the view that 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 depict the world, whereas words describe it, which also has a different brain substrate. 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.

Theoretical background and methods. Image-driven interpretations take the crucial role in professional communicative mediation. In translation, this is mediation across cultures; in psychotherapy, this is mediation across the conscious and the unconscious minds. Whereas mental images are inherently conscious, their psychological precondition is in the unconscious mind. Archetypes of the collective unconscious make for mental imagery its primary schemes that fill with content when reaching into the consciousness and that become manifest in particular in dreams (Jung, 1980). It is because dreams are the interface between the conscious and the unconscious minds that in this paper we choose to focus on dream interpretation from among the other techniques in the psychotherapeutic repertoire.

Medicinal dream interpretation is a unique form of professional communicative mediation that contributes to the general healing purpose of psychotherapy. Psychotherapy is talking cure, and dream interpretation as its part requires that dreams be manifested with words, with the understanding that dream content changes when under awareness and in verbal report. Dreams as dream images and as dream reports need a mediator to interpret their content, which makes a psychotherapist's job similar to that of a translator: a good translator uses words to 'draw' images in the mind; a good psychotherapist does the same. The words the translator uses must describe the mental images the author 'draws', with good interpretations minimizing the semantic cost to verbal communication. Good interpretations capture the gist, or, as we in this paper call it, the spirit of the content. This is the content of a word, a text, or a dream and the spirit of this content must not be lost.

In this light, we treat translation as not a sign-to-sign, but a mental image-to-sign correspondence. Translation is not a matter of knowing words but of having an insight into the spirit of their content, with this insight delivered by a good interpretation. Interpretations capture the spirit of the content and transfer this spirit cross-culturally via words in the source and target languages (henceforth, SL and TL). A translator hears the author's words; the words via their meanings grant access to the author's mental images; the

translator internalizes these images, *i.e.* 'sees' with the mind's eye, and describes them with words in the TL. This requires a talent, a skill, and a linguistic acumen from the translator not to lose the spirit of the content in this transfer.

In this paper, we use insights from the domains of translation studies, cognitive linguistics, philosophy of mind, cognitive psychology, and archetypal psychology. We base our assumptions on our professional service in translation (Dr. Vakhovska, since 2007) and in psychotherapy, in particular in dream interpretation (Dr. Jusuk, since 1972). We also make extensive use of introspection and self-reflection in this paper.

Section 1 of this paper summarizes our reflections on the role of image thinking in the evolution of human communication. **Section 2** looks into the nature of translation from an etymological perspective. We believe that word etymologies expose the primary images that motivated the words in the archaic worldmodel. We analyze etymologies of the names for translation offered by influential theorists and practitioners and intend this etymological analysis to capture the spirit of the content of some of the major definitions for translation. **Section 3** examines from a psychotherapeutic perspective the nature of dreams as that of dream images and dream reports and discusses what it means for a psychotherapist to interpret a dream so that the spirit of its content is not lost. This paper **concludes** with prospects for further research.

Results and discussion

1 Human communication and the role image thinking plays in it: an evolutionary perspective. Communication is essentially a transfer of information from one information carrier to another one. Information in this transfer might potentially be deformed, while it is imperative to transfer it in a quality way at the lowest semantic cost. Communication is phylogenetically older than the arrival of language and writing as we know them. It emerged at the dawn of biological life when protozoans aggregated into colonies and has run through the Internet era with humans engaging in computer-mediated discourse. Communication has from the onset secured survival of biological life through interaction and cooperation and continues to do so.

The protocarriers of information in human evolution are images, for example, cave drawings. It is from drawing an image that the development of human intellect as that of a psychomotor act started. The emergence of writing, ideographic and, later, phonographic, has sustained this development in phylogenesis. Ideographic writing is essentially writing ideas down as ideograms that convey their meaning via pictorial resemblance to their referents (see Picture 1 with an example from (Hop, 2018); we discuss the message this example conveys in Conclusions to this paper). Phonographic writing is writing sounds down, which, unlike ideography, is not image-based but rests on auditory perception. Whereas images save mental effort, words are costly in cognitive terms since processing auditory and visual data rests on different brain regions and requires an 'adapter' between these.

Some writing systems have undergone complete phonetisation, for example, the Greek writing to which the other European systems of writing, including the Latin and Cyrillic alphabets, ascend; some have not and today preserve their archaic pictorial nature, for example, the traditional Chinese writing remains hieroglyphic for the most part. This being the case, translating from English into Chinese, metaphorically, is similar to mediating the communication between the blind and the deaf. What is this mediation like? And what qualities does this mediator need to have?
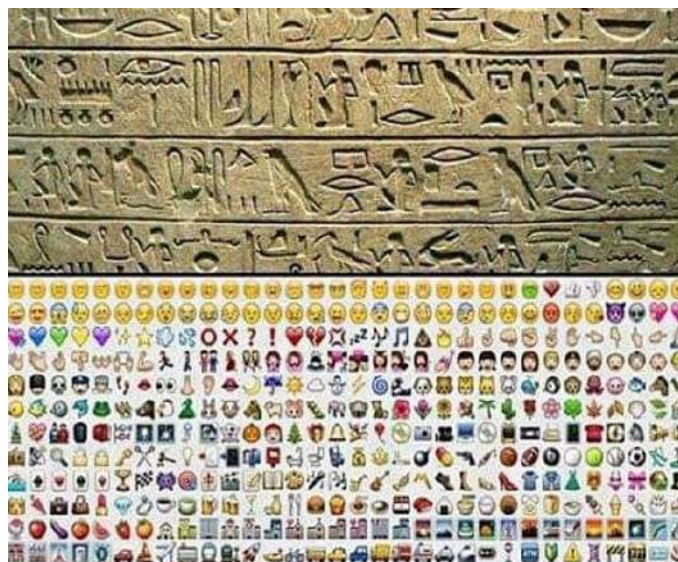
Picture 1. Examples of ideograms as ideas written down

Similarly to phylogenesis, in ontogenesis drawing and writing come at successive stages, with transitions between these. Young children draw, and in them there is no learning to draw in instructional terms. Yet, independently of one another, they draw the same ideas. Reading and writing harvest only later when children gain literacy via exposure to conventions, rules, and norms. We presume that reading is a hearing- but not a vision-based process. A reader starts with words but needs to arrive at mental images, which is where interpretations come into play. Children need books with pictures because their brain has not fully developed the switch between its regions and pictures will support interpretations.

In reading, humans 'see' mental images and words are the brushstrokes that paint these. The images a reader 'sees' differ from those 'seen' and drawn by the illustrator, which may cause the reader's dissatisfaction and surprise. This does not mean however that some images are better or worse; they are just different. Individuality of images underlies the untranslatability, or, rather, under- and uninterpretability, problem in translation.

2 Translation and the spirit of the content that it cannot lose. This section takes as its starting point the etymology of the term *translation* that is traced back to the Latin noun *translatio* 'carrying across, over, or beyond; bringing through; transferring, transporting' (OnED). In this view, translation is a transfer of an object from one location to another in the physical space. It is this very image in the archaic worldmodel that the etymology suggests.

Nowadays, the term *translation* refers to a transfer of a meaning across languages, which suggests that the transfer that once was physical has shifted to operate within the abstract space. In this metaphorical conceptualization, meanings are physical objects that in translation are transferred from one language (container) to another one. This is a universal metaphor, with words explained as containers for meanings (see Reddy, 1979). Entailments of this metaphor

are that prior to the cross-linguistic transfer translators need to unpack meanings from containers, *i.e.* to decode meanings from SL words, and to pack them into other containers, *i.e.* to encode meanings into TL words. Affordances in this transfer are that an object potentially can deform: word (re-)packaging can have a semantic cost in terms of a change or a loss of meaning.

Change is the generic basic-level name that we choose to label the thematic group of keywords used by theorists and practitioners in their seminal definitions of translation: *transformation*, *representation*, *substitution*, *replacement*, *conversion*, *modification*, *metamorphosis*, etc. (see Brislin, 1976; Bassnet-McGuire, 1980; Nida, 1982; Larson, 1984; Newmark, 1988 among others). These words name concepts found in the *is-a* relationship with change, each highlighting one of the aspects in the complex nature of translation.

We aspire to specify translation in terms of transformation and metamorphosis and to base this specification on an etymological insight. The prefix *trans-* in *transformation* has the meaning 'across, beyond, through, over' and is traced back to the Proto-Indo-European root **tra-* with the meaning 'to carry or cross over, to pass through' (OnED). In this light, *transformation* implies that in translation a meaning goes beyond and is carried across different forms from a SL into a TL. The focus is on changing the forms: a SL form is replaced by a TL form and the meaning remains the same, at least its propensity to change is not in the focus. This rationale to connect two points is salient in *a transatlantic flight from Europe to North America* in which the midway remains hidden and is secondary in relation to the starting and ending points. Similarly, a translator connects SL words and their TL equivalents, and this connection is definitional for translation.

The propensity to change that a meaning in translation intrinsically has is highlighted by the term *metamorphosis* with its prefix *meta-* 'change of nature' + 'between, in the middle' and its root *morphē* 'shape, form'. The focus is on the midway change that the meaning undergoes while between its SL and TL forms. This change is an interpretation that takes place in the translator's mind, and it is this change that we explore in this paper. Metamorphosis is when the input causes the form to change. Similarly, a translator's interpretation determines one word chosen from among many in the TL. In decoding, the meaning of a SL word is converted into a mental image; in encoding, the mental image is converted into a meaning, and a word is picked in the TL 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.

The term *metamorphosis* has a developmental biology flavor and has historically sustained ideas of evolution of biological life. Reference to metamorphosis in this paper is colloquial and not intended as biologically precise. If a meaning metamorphoses, it undergoes or is capable of undergoing an inner change. We borrow from the biological domain into this paper an observation that in metamorphosis it is a change in the content that induces a change in the form. It is a many-stage change, and each stage is of equal significance. Indeed, the larval stage in insects, for example, cannot be ruled out from the lifecycle as a non-life in contrast to the adult stage; both are the life of an organism that preserves its identity throughout all of the stages.

This state of biological affairs endorses the priority we give to meaning-based translation in this paper. The form, however, is not indifferent to the content as well. We want to emphasize their dialectical relationship (in G.W.F. Hegel's terms). The form shapes the content into an entity, indicates changes in this content, and has a potential to modify it. The word *content* ascends to the meaning 'to hold together, enclose' (OnED), which shows that without the form there is no content: there must be something that holds the amorphous mass together and encloses it, and this something is the form. The virtue of the form is to make the content into an entity that is distinct, structured, and bounded. An entity lends itself to manipulation either by the faculty of the mind, which is the case with mental entities, or by the faculty of the body, which is the case with physical entities.

There are three stages in construing the world by the faculty of the human mind; each stage suggests a representational change: (1) the world lends itself available for perception, and differently embodied organisms would perceive the world differently, not the way humans do; (2) awareness of the percept emerges into consciousness and a concept is formed; (3) the concept is manifested with language (see Vakhovska, 2017 for detail). Words capture only salient features in concepts. We believe that the capability to select such features is a hallmark and the prerequisite for development of human intellect both in phylogenesis and in ontogenesis: 'Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name' (Genesis 2:19, 20). Similarly, interpretations in translation need to select and not lose the salient features in concepts that SL and TL words capture.

3 Psychotherapeutic dream interpretation and the spirit of the content that it cannot lose. Dreams in humans have an evolutionary basis and extend back beyond consciousness into the unconscious mind and its archetypes (Jung, 1980). By this virtue, dreams plug the experience of an individual life into the evolutionary experience of the species.

The time humans spend sleeping is precious in terms of restorative inner life processes, both psychological and physiological. Sleep and wakefulness are the proverbial blow and sip that at once cannot be done. They are the contrary states of the mind and of the body and cannot be explained in each other's terms. Their intermediate state is subwaking when one transitions from wakefulness into sleep, and vice versa. The three states have their distinct 'languages' that a psychotherapist needs to 'translate' in communicative mediation.

The iceberg metaphor by Z. Freud slices to human consciousness one ninth only, with eight ninths given to the unconscious mind. Whereas consciousness spans over the outer life and is overt, unconsciousness is the inner life that is covert and hidden from the eye. The outer life uses signs, such as words; the inner life uses images, such as dream imagery. Images have the goodness to capture immediately and depict broad qualities that otherwise would need a detailed description with words. Words are the intervening medium between the mind and the external world. They are

communal and intended for the general public use. Hence, words fail to expose in subjective experience its private and intimate content.

Dreams as subjective experiences in humans are difficult, if not impossible, to find words for. Unconsciousness is not at mercy of words, and a dream, because of its different function, is not intended as a verbal dream report. Words are inadequate vessels for the content of a dream. When a dream report is endowed with a psychotherapeutic function, this content needs to be interpreted, *i.e.* the patient's dream (her inner life) and the dream report (her outer life) need a professional mediator. In this mediation, the patient interprets her own dreams and has her dreams interpreted by the psychotherapist, which by nature are different interpretations.

One's own interpretation of a dream takes three stages. First, while looking at the scenes of the dream one sees in them an image. Looking at differs from seeing because of the focus that the latter has. The collocation *to see a dream* is definitive; seeing dream imagery and seeing actual referents in waking consciousness has the same substrate in the human brain. Seeing dreams is indicated by rapid vs. non-rapid eye movement.

Seeing as a more or less clear and defined condition of the dream image is the primary interpretation that starts immediately in the dream when one is still asleep. Dreams have contents of different degrees of compression; if we compare dreams to movies as dynamic sequences of scenes, then a static snapshot of one scene can be more valuable than the whole movie in terms of the information that is compressed in it, *cf.* data minification in programming. Information can get compressed or decompressed; dream images, when in the focus, can get minified or magnified, which is a construal operation on them. If the movie is interesting, one wants to see more of it.

Second, the dream image is detained (one forgets it) and retained (one in wakefulness recalls the image and sees it again with the mind's eye). Dream images are elusive and to retain them is difficult. One may find in the life experience something similar and recognize and remember the image via this similarity. Some dream images are never retained. This might be the case when the message intended by the archetypes has been delivered as early as in the primary interpretation. Third, the image that is retained must be verbally reported on. It is at this stage that words come into play and with them the social filter is administered. At each of the stages, the content of the dream is (re-)construed, *i.e.* the original content deforms. Dreams are individual, unique, and not repetitive; rounding them with the help of words robs them of these subjectively experienced qualities. Dream images cannot be interpreted to have universal meanings.

The outer life is confined and regulated by the society, the inner life is free and not restricted by judgment. Psychological immunity in humans forbids wakefulness from entering dreams. In a dream, one can be either a participant or a contemplator who gazes over the events but never assesses their right or wrong. This assessment takes place in wakefulness. In order to avoid disapproval if the dream is deemed disreputable and unwanted, one may (try to) lie to themselves, which curtails the psychotherapeutic function. Misrepresentation, voluntary or involuntary, of the dream content steers the professional mediation towards the patient's preferred interpretation. The psychotherapist must see to it that the patient does not lie to herself; otherwise, the healing effect is postponed.

The psychotherapist's interpretation of the patient's dream takes as its starting point the dream report. This report must be converted into a dream and then the dream must be re-converted into a dream report. The psychotherapist needs to see with their own mind's eye the images and scenes of the patient's dream. The patient's dream report is used as an intervening medium to access and interpret the dream content against the background of the patient's life and experience. The re-converted dream report will often prove different from the one given by the patient, *i.e.* this originally should have been a different dream report to describe the qualities that the patient's dream images depict in her unconscious mind. The therapeutic approach is to discern in the patient's dream its essential content so that the spirit of this content is not lost in mediation.

Conclusion. In this paper, we endorse a conclusion that communication primarily is in acting together, with words coined only later to capture the concepts that emerged. This is like cutting trees with a two-handled saw when two people must help each other and contribute equally, otherwise there is no avail in their task. It is only thereafter that names to the task are given. The right words chosen in communication are premises for sustainable development of the human race.

Human evolution has reached a critical juncture: on the one hand, massive migration brought by economic inequality and by wars, on the other, information technology overuse and Internet addiction with gross debilitating effects upon human intellect. The current planetary crisis calls for shared action. Our perspective on communication proposes a role for translation among the imperatives of evolutionary survival.

English is towering above the other languages in global digital communication (we do intend an allusion to the Tower of Babel). Will English retain its role as a lingua franca in the globalized world? Or must there emerge a new lingua franca that will be an ideogram-based language? Computer-mediated discourse has in a way returned to ideograms, which we illustrate by the picture in Section 1 of this paper. As long as the evolution of human intellect started with images, the answer could presumably be yes: such a language would correspond to humankind's evolutionary direction. Decisions on this language are of civilizational importance and as such cannot be made from the position of today only.

Theory of translation must look into the history of the human race back to the pre-writing, preliterate stages with their full-blown image thinking. Myth and national oral traditions were once ousted by books, books are nowadays being ousted by the Internet, which marks 2000-year-long tectonic cultural shifts when a new and a different sign system was created. We are of the view that today the Internet has assumed the role of a global-scale national oral tradition. National oral traditions by definition are pictorial: they 'draw' images in the mind. Alphabets and writing shifted humans from the visual to the auditory modes of perception, which generally swayed the intellect and opened doors to fiction. Literacy was not welcomed by Dao

philosophy, for example, because of the illusions that it has the potential to promote.

Fiction literature describes something that has not happened and is not real. Whereas ideography had the function to secure survival and not to amuse and entertain, the Internet has come to substitute real life with illusions and idleness; this is idleness of the intellect. A veneer of reality has been brought in the place of systems of human survival. Human intellect must break the evolutionary deadlock it has found itself in, and we believe that in this respect theory of translation has powerful insights to offer.

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