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Challenges and procedures in transferring fully metaphorical terms in the EU's multilingual institutional setting

Abstract. The use of figurative language in European political jargon can pose a significant translation challenge, particularly given the European Union's 24 official languages. This study examines fully metaphorical terms such as *whistleblower*, *gatekeeper*, and *greenwashing*, aiming to identify issues of interlingual transfer from English into Italian and Estonian – a rare language combination in multilingual terminology research. Following a descriptive, cognitive approach, the research combines qualitative and quantitative observations of terminological data taken from IATE, the terminology database of the European institutions. The objective is to propose a concrete set of procedures that can be put into practical use by language professionals in the processes of term creation and translation. As a result of analysing the way fully metaphorical English terms are rendered, our study identifies five main interlingual transfer procedures. The findings reveal that direct metaphor transfer, the most common method, is not applied when the transferred metaphor would have culture-specific connotations incompatible with the source language's unit of understanding. In such cases, the metaphor may be lost, adapted, changed, or the English term borrowed. The study highlights the importance of well-considered terminological choices in multilingual institutional settings where political decisions have a significant social impact.

Keywords: metaphorical terms, interlingual transfer, IATE, procedures of metaphor transfer, secondary term formation, EU terminology, clear communication.

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1. Introduction

Several authors have demonstrated that metaphor is an important element of term formation (e.g. Volanschi & Kübler 2011; Rossi 2017; Humbley & Grimaldi 2021). This can be explained by the need to denominate complicated, abstract, or novel concepts in an accessible manner, relying on analogy with a more common sphere of life or bodily experience. In other words, since “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 5), it may be suited to conveying specialised concepts in a way that is understandable for a broad audience. Given the way in which metaphorical conceptualisations can model or even channel thought in a sometimes covert manner (Shuttleworth 2017: 55), this research is based on the assumption that not only metaphorical framing in general but also metaphorical terminology can play a significant role in specialised discourse.

Metaphorical terms are also present in European Union (EU) terminology. This can be observed in both legislative and non-legislative EU texts as well as in IATE², the main terminology database of the European institutions. This observation seems at odds with a prevailing claim in traditional terminology theory that advocates using literal terms to ensure clarity and efficiency. Contrary to this prescriptive view, Temmerman (2000: 228), for instance, demonstrated that figurative language, polysemy, and synonymy play an essential role in specialised discourse by improving understanding, perceived as a social construction in a constructivist view of cognition. Moreover, according to Temmerman’s sociocognitive approach to terminology, there has been a shift from clearly delineated concepts in traditional terminology theory to prototypically-structured units of understanding. Our current research is likewise based on these premises, which is why we shall use the term ‘unit of understanding’ in this article instead of ‘concept’ to emphasise the dynamic nature of conceptual phenomena.

Having worked as a translator and terminologist for the European Parliament for nearly two decades, the first author of this article has closely witnessed the challenges posed by metaphorical terms in a multilingual setting. EU legal acts, policy documents, press releases, and a wide range of other procedural and non-procedural documents meant for in-house or public use need to be available and equally understandable in 24 official languages. As such, how to ensure the equal understandability of metaphorical terminology in all these languages, with their varying cultural backgrounds and structural differences, is a question that frequently arises in the work of translators, terminologists, lawyer-linguists, and other language professionals of European institutions.

This article is unique in that its focus lies on a specific type of terms that are often hard to render, and that is those terms that are fully metaphorical in the source language. According to Meyer et al. (1997: 526), in fully metaphorical terms all components are used

² The IATE database is available to the public at <https://iate.europa.eu>

metaphorically. Examples include *whistleblower*, *glass ceiling*, or *greenwashing*. We aim to illustrate the challenges of interlingual transfer in the multilingual EU institutional setting wherein terminological decisions can have a high social and political impact. In doing so, we adopt a descriptive, cognitive approach and combine qualitative and quantitative observations of terminological data in IATE. Considering that nowadays English is the most common source language (SL) for terminology and translation in most European institutions, this study is based on a collection of 65 units of understanding that are lexicalised by means of fully metaphorical terms in English and their equivalents in two target languages (TL): Italian and Estonian. Italian is the fourth most-spoken official language of the EU, and Estonian is a small Finno-Ugric language with only about 1.1 million native speakers.

In Section 2, the research setting and related challenges are described. In Section 3, an overview of relevant previous research is given. Our research method is presented in Section 4. Section 5 is dedicated to the methods of interlingual transfer identified as a result of the study, along with concrete examples. In Section 6, we discuss the findings and delve into several factors affecting the choice of a transfer procedure, such as connotations, the socio-cultural background of the target language, and language policy. Finally, conclusions are drawn in Section 7.

2. Research setting

This research is set in the highly multilingual institutional environment of the European Union. To better understand the practical application of this research, it is necessary first to examine the most recent advancements in communication within the EU.

When Eurobarometer surveys and related studies³ revealed that citizens' trust in the European institutions had fallen significantly between 2004 and 2015, adjustments to the communication policy were required. More emphasis was put on engagement with citizens, especially in the European Parliament.

Another aspect to consider is the growing attention paid to clear or plain language as it may be called in different countries and institutions. For example, the European Commission launched a *Clear Writing for Europe* campaign⁴ in 2010 to promote better drafting. Ever since, several dedicated conferences have been held and numerous booklets have been published. Nevertheless, in a recent analysis of almost 45,000 press releases of the European Commission it was concluded that in the past 35 years the institution has used

3 Exploratory study. Major trends in European public opinion with regard to the European Union. Updated in November 2015. Available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/eurobarometre/2015/major_change/eb_historical_deskresearch_en.pdf (accessed on 2.3.2023).

4 More information on the clear writing campaign and related conferences and booklets is available at https://commission.europa.eu/about-european-commission/departments-and-executive-agencies/translation/clear-writing-europe_en (accessed on 9.2.2023).

and continues to use highly complex language, specialised jargon, and a nominal style that obfuscates political action (Rauh 2022: 1).

Given that the texts of the European Union are extremely rich in terminology, clear language in the EU context depends heavily on well-considered use of terminology. Advice such as “Avoid jargon!” or “Keep it short and simple” does not suffice when translating, for example, the Digital Markets Act⁵, where one of the key terms is *gatekeeper* (a provider of core platform services). Similarly, as described in the Discussion section below, both the Italian and Estonian language communities had trouble dealing with the term *whistleblower*, which appears in Directive (EU) 2019/1937 on the protection of persons who report breaches of Union law. What is more, these terms appeared in legal texts to which the principle of equal authenticity of language versions is applied, presuming that all authentic language versions are originals and render the same meaning. Even without considering the challenges posed by metaphorical terms, rendering the same meaning is difficult to achieve by multilingual legislative drafting (Doczekalska 2009: 280).

Due to the difficulties in transferring fully metaphorical terms into other languages, many such terms tend to have two, three, or even more term variants in target languages, including both literal and fully or partly metaphorical options. Choosing the term that works best for a certain type of text and target audience is a constant struggle for language professionals. Therefore, greater metaphor awareness might be highly beneficial for them. On the one hand, being aware of how metaphorical reasoning is reflected in specialised language (i.e. how terms can be motivated by analogical thinking) will enable translators to distinguish between metaphorical models that are specific to a language and culture and those that are not (Temmerman 2021: 211). On the other hand, having a general idea of the choice of procedures for metaphor rendering will help them select the strategy best adapted to each specific case, keeping in mind the intended audience. By raising awareness of the importance of well-grounded terminological decisions, EU communication could be improved. Conscious rendering and use of terminology, be it metaphorical or literal, would make it easier for European institutions to reach the citizens and spread their message in line with the clear language principles they advocate.

3. Previous related research

This section provides a summary of related research, which has laid the foundation of the current study in some respects. Due to space constraints, we restrict ourselves

5 Regulation (EU) 2022/1925 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 September 2022, available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32022R1925> (accessed on 9.2.2023).

to studies concerning interlingual transfer⁶ and secondary term formation. The latter refers to the process of generating a new term for an established unit of understanding through knowledge transfer to a distinct linguistic community (Sager 1990: 80, cited in Humbley 2000: 1). In the context of our study, this means transposing terms from one language into the other official languages of the European Union, though it should be noted that Sager does not equate secondary term formation with translation. However, there are some parallels in the process (Humbley 2000: 1). In the three main EU institutions, secondary term formation is the task of terminologists, who are typically also involved in translation, while translators and intercultural language professionals also need to transfer terms but are not necessarily trained for such terminology work. Thus, knowledge about metaphor transfer can serve both professions.

Schäffner (2004: 1254–1255) provides a thorough overview of different approaches to the treatment of metaphor as a translation problem, making a distinction between normative models (what a target text should look like) and descriptive models (what target texts look like). Analysing metaphors from the perspective of cognitive linguistics and using examples of metaphorical expressions (e.g. *der Freundschaftsbrücke über den Atlantik, Haus Europa*) translated from German into English in political texts, Schäffner refers to cultural differences between the source language and target language as problems for the translation of metaphors (ibid: 1264) and observes that once a metaphor has been brought into the international (political) discussion, it can change when transferred from one language and culture into another (ibid: 1267).

Humbley (2006: 198) uses the example of the fully metaphorical IT term *bootstrap* and its French and German equivalents (resp. *boot/booter* and *Boot/booten*) to demonstrate that secondary term formation by metaphor (i.e. transferring the SL metaphor into the TL) can only be successful on the condition that the source metaphor is shared by the two language communities involved. In this case, the metaphor is lost because no metaphor similar to the underlying expression “to lift/hoist yourself up by your own bootstraps” exists in popular speech in French or German. Humbley also refers to the computer term *Trojan horse* (in German *Trojanisches Pferd* and in French *cheval de Troie*), which could be directly transferred since the original unit of understanding of the Trojan horse belongs to shared European history (ibid: 207). In the current article, the idea that a shared cultural space facilitates metaphor transfer will be illustrated in section 5.1 by the term *Iron Curtain*.

Oliveira (2009) published a thought-provoking study on the nature and functions of metaphor in French and Portuguese medical terminology. The study included a quantitative

6 Although we cannot avoid speaking about translation in this article, we prefer the term ‘interlingual transfer’ in the context of term formation, given that terms are not translated, but rather equivalents are found in the target language.

comparison of 300 French metaphorical terms (mostly partly metaphorical) and their Portuguese equivalents, which revealed that, in total, three out of four terms made use of the same metaphorical references (Oliveira 2009: 169). Based on an analysis of possible equivalences between these terms, the researcher concludes that the variety of metaphorical references contributes to better understanding (ibid: 184).

A recent major contribution to the subject of metaphors in translation and an inspiration for this study is the work by Shuttleworth (2017). His study is centred on scientific discourse and includes the following six languages besides English: Chinese, French, German, Italian, Polish, and Russian. The study sets out four broad translation approaches (ibid: 67), depending on whether the metaphorical expression has been retained, removed, omitted, or added. In addition to this, and with a deliberate focus on more theoretical concepts from metaphor research, it presents a new list of eleven procedures for translating metaphorical expressions. Worded in a manner that requires in-depth knowledge of underlying theories and related terminology, the list holds more value for theorists than practitioners. Besides this, the procedures are intended for translating metaphorical expressions, and not specifically metaphorical terms. A focus on metaphorical terminology and the influence the cultural setting of a particular language community has on translation have been recommended by Shuttleworth as areas for further research (ibid: 191). In what follows, both points will be addressed.

In summary, the current study differs from previous work in that its focus is narrowed down to metaphorical terminology and, more specifically, the relatively rare fully metaphorical terms. The starting point is a collection of fully metaphorical terms gleaned from IATE, one of the largest multilingual termbases in the world, with the aim being to devise a list of procedures geared towards practical application by language professionals, especially translators and terminologists. Another original aspect of the research lies in a novel combination of languages — Estonian has only rarely been included in multilingual terminology-related or metaphor research.

4. Research method

To collect the research data, selected fields of about 10,000 terminological records were exported from IATE and analysed, resulting in approximately 700 metaphorical English terms of which 65 were fully metaphorical. The IATE export targeted English terms belonging to domains of high social relevance, such as the environment, economics, social affairs, employment, politics, IT, and communication. However, since many terms belong to several domains, the list of domains cannot be considered exhaustive. The exported data files featuring several hundred terms and their definitions were inspected one by one.

In the first round of inspection, candidate figurative terms were highlighted, including both fully and partly metaphorical terms, as the latter will be used for further research. In the second round, the main elements of existing metaphor identification procedures

(MIP, developed by the Pragglejazz Group (2007), and MIPVU (Steen et al. 2010)) were used, albeit in a manner adapted to terminology. In short, our method involved the following steps:

1. Split the term into lexical units.
2. Identify the contextual meaning of the lexical units by examining the domain and definition.
3. Determine if there is a more basic meaning of the lexical unit (more concrete, older, precise, or human-oriented). If not, consider the lexical unit to be used in the literal sense. If so,
4. Decide whether the contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning but can be understood in comparison with it. If so,
5. Consider the lexical unit metaphorical.

The first phase of analysis resulted in about 700 metaphorical terms. In the next round, fully metaphorical terms were identified. Determining whether a word is being used metaphorically is not a straightforward task, even when considering one's mother tongue, as the process entails a certain degree of subjectivity and presents numerous ambiguous cases (which has also been reported by Hendrikson 2018: 56). To minimise such uncertainties, three native speakers of English were consulted for their insights into the candidate metaphorical terms in question.

Once the collection of fully metaphorical English terms was established, their Estonian and Italian equivalents (all term variants recorded in their respective entries) were added to the table. Next, all the equivalents were marked, based on whether they were fully or partly metaphorical, literal, or borrowed from English.

5. Results

As a result of analysing the collection of fully metaphorical terms, five main procedures for interlingual transfer can be distinguished, some of which substantially coincide with the translation approaches proposed by Shuttleworth (2017) and the translation procedures described by Newmark (1980), though the focus of their research differed.

Table 1 presents a qualitative and quantitative overview of the main interlingual transfer procedures that were applied to render the 65 units of understanding lexicalised by fully metaphorical English terms in IATE⁷. All term variants existing in IATE in the target languages (except for those marked as obsolete, deprecated, or having the lowest level of reliability) have been included in the analysis. Since each unit of understanding can be expressed by several terms in the target languages, the total number of terms in each language varies: for 65 units of understanding lexicalised by means of 74 fully

7 It should be kept in mind that terminology evolves over time, and the examples provided in this study are based on information that was available in IATE and other resources at the time of writing (Spring 2023).

metaphorical terms in English, we identified 85 unique interlingual transfer procedures in Italian and 78 in Estonian, leading to a total of 108 Italian and 91 Estonian term equivalents. The procedures are ranked in the table based on their frequencies (mentioned next to each procedure).

Table 1. Interlingual transfer procedures and their frequencies of appearance

Italian (total 85)	Estonian (total 78)
Borrowing the English term (41.2%)	Direct transfer (48.7%)
Direct transfer (28.2%)	Losing the metaphor (28.2%)
Losing the metaphor (20%)	Adapting the metaphor (14.1%)
Adapting the metaphor (5.8%)	Changing the metaphor (5.1%)
Changing the metaphor (4.7%)	Borrowing the English term (3.8%)

In the five subsections that follow, each procedure is described in detail.

5.1. Directly transferring the metaphor

Table 1 shows that direct transfer of the metaphor – whereby the original image is reproduced in the TL – was a common procedure in the Italian and Estonian data. A precondition for this kind of transfer to work is that the SL term is not culture-specific, that the SL and TL share the same cultural space, or that their cultures are close enough to conceptualise it in the same manner.

This procedure is considered the first in order of preference by Newmark who, albeit not strictly talking about metaphorical terms but rather poetic stock metaphors, referred to this as “reproducing the same image in the TL, provided the image has comparable frequency and currency in the appropriate register” (Newmark 1980: 95).

Some examples of direct metaphor transfer can be seen below. Henceforth, asterisks are used to mark terms that have other synonyms available in the termbase, created by the same or other transfer procedures.

Table 2. Examples of direct metaphor transfer into Italian and Estonian

EN term and domain	IT term	ET term
<i>glass ceiling</i> (SOCIAL)	<i>soffitto di vetro*</i>	<i>klaaslagi</i>
<i>brain drain</i> (SOCIAL)	<i>fuga di cervelli</i>	<i>ajude äravool</i>
<i>Trojan horse*</i> (ITECH)	<i>cavallo di Troia*</i>	<i>Trooja hobune</i>

EN term and domain	IT term	ET term
<i>Iron Curtain</i> (POLITICS)	<i>Cortina di ferro</i>	<i>raudne eesriie</i>
<i>echo chamber</i> (COMM)	<i>camera dell'eco*</i>	<i>kajakamber</i>
<i>greening</i> (ENVI)	<i>inverdimento*</i>	<i>rohestamine*</i>

As already noted by Humbley in the context of the French (FR) and German (DE) languages, the computer term Trojan horse (DE: Trojanisches Pferd, FR: cheval de Troie) can be directly transferred since the Greek myth of the Trojan horse belongs to shared European history (Humbley 2006: 207). The same can be said about the term Iron Curtain, used to denote the political boundary dividing Europe into two separate areas from the end of World War II in 1945 until the end of the Cold War in 1991. In this sense, the metaphor rose to prominence in Winston Churchill's Iron Curtain Speech given on March 5, 1946. As the historical reference is well known to many Europeans, the metaphor can be transferred directly into most, if not all, European languages.

5.2 Adapting the metaphor

If the SL metaphor cannot be directly transferred, it may need to be adapted to suit the TL better. The image conveyed by the metaphor thus remains close to the original. This procedure is quite rare in the Italian and Estonian data (cf. Table 1 above).

Some examples of metaphor adaptation have been provided in Table 3 below. Empty spaces mean that another transfer procedure was used for the term and language in question.

Table 3. Examples of terms involving metaphor adaptation

EN term and domain	IT term	ET term
<i>from farm to fork</i> (ENVI) <i>from farm to table</i> <i>from stable to table</i> <i>from plough to plate</i>	<i>dai campi alla tavola*</i> (‘from fields to table’)	<i>talust taldrikule (preferred)</i> (‘from farm to plate’) <i>talust toidulauale</i> (‘from farm to dining table’)
cherry picking (ECON)		parimate palade väljanoppimine* (‘picking the best pieces of food ’)
<i>footprint</i> (ENVI)	<i>impronta</i> (‘imprint’) <i>impronta negativa</i> (‘negative imprint’)	

EN term and domain	IT term	ET term
<i>handprint</i> (ENVI)	<i>impronta</i> ('imprint') <i>impronta positiva</i> ('positive imprint')	
<i>dumpster diving</i> (ITECH)		<i>prügisorimine</i> ('rummaging in trash')

The first example involves a group of terms that in recent years have been used mostly in the context of the European Green Deal and, more precisely, the Farm to Fork strategy for a fair, healthy, and environmentally friendly food system. The English term variants owe their catchiness to assonance, consonance, and alliteration. This has required some creativity from TL terminologists. In the Italian equivalent, the word *fields* has been introduced and *table* has been taken over from English, resulting in a rhythmic repetition of the 'a' sound. The preferred Estonian term combines the words *farm* and *plate*, which form a nice assonance and consonance in the target language.

The term *cherry picking*, which has several figurative meanings in different domains, has been recorded in IATE as belonging to the domains of Economics and Finance, and denoting the practice of selecting only the most favourable items or opportunities. According to Wikipedia⁸, cherry picking refers to the childish habit of picking out only the cherries (or other favoured tidbits) from a cake, leaving the rest of it behind. However, cherries do not seem to be the most obvious choice among all things one might be tempted to pick, at least in Estonia. Therefore, in the equivalent Estonian term, the metaphor has been adapted to leave the choice open (*picking the best pieces of food*). In the German term *Rosinenpicken* and in the Swedish term *plocka russinen ur kakan*, cherries have been replaced by raisins. Thus, the image conveyed by the metaphor has been adapted yet remains close to the original. Another popular procedure for transferring this term into other languages is losing the metaphor and rendering the sense by literal means, along the lines of *choice of convenience* or *selective implementation*.

In the example of the terms *footprint* and *handprint*, an adaptation of the metaphor is necessary due to the inherent lexical and structural differences between languages. Namely, Italian and French speakers would more commonly use the general word *imprint*, without specifying the *hand* or *foot* (see Augé 2021: 15–16 for an analysis of the word *empreinte* in French). While a more specific word for footprint exists in Italian (*orma*), and a prepositional group could be used in French to specify the origin of the imprint (e.g. *empreinte de pas*), these options have not been deemed suitable, possibly due to their lower frequency in the target languages.

⁸ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cherry_picking_\(disambiguation\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cherry_picking_(disambiguation)), accessed on 3.2.2023.

5.3 Changing the metaphor

Changing the metaphor was not often observed in the Italian and Estonian data. Let us consider the following examples in Table 4.

Table 4. Examples of terms involving metaphor change

EN term and domain	IT term	ET term
<i>think tank</i> (RESEARCH)	<i>fabbrica di idee</i> (‘ factory of ideas’) <i>serbatoio di pensiero</i> (‘ reservoir of thought’) <i>laboratorio di idee</i> (‘ laboratory of ideas’)	<i>mõttekoda*</i> (‘ thought chamber ’)
<i>gatekeeper</i> (ITECH)		<i>pääsuvalitseja*</i> (‘ access governor/ruler ’)
<i>gatekeeping</i> (SOCIAL)	funzione di <i>filtro</i> (‘ filter function’)	

To illustrate the procedure, let us analyse the term *think tank*. Until the 1960s, this term was used to colloquially refer to a person’s head or brain. Thereafter, a semantic shift from brain to research organisation occurred, as a research centre based in Stanford University acquired the nickname “the Think Tank” for its high concentration of brainpower (Medvetz 2012: 26). In the EU context, the term denotes a group of people with experience or knowledge of a particular subject who collaborate to produce ideas and give advice. In Italian, three equivalents have been provided in IATE, each featuring a different metaphor: a *factory*, a *reservoir*, and a *laboratory* of thought or ideas. In Estonian, two of the recorded terms are non-metaphorical, back-translated as *expert group* and *expert organisation*, while the third is metaphorical and roughly corresponds to *thought chamber*. Hence, the metaphor that has its origin deeply rooted in American society had to be changed in the European context. The same creative procedure has been employed by other European languages, such as Finnish (*ajatushautomo* (‘**thought hatchery**’)), Spanish (*vivero de ideas* (‘**nursery** of ideas’)), Hungarian (*szellemi műhely* (‘**intellectual workshop**’)) and Polish (*kuźnia idei* (‘a **forge** of ideas’)).

This procedure requires the highest degree of creativity from language professionals dealing with secondary term creation. For neologisms, linguists and experts of the domain should work together to propose options, and if possible, term variants could be tested on a few target group members to check for undesirable connotations and misunderstandings.

5.4 Borrowing the foreign term

It is beyond doubt that English can be considered the lingua franca of scientific communication. Terminologists inserting terms into the IATE database witness this first-hand, as these days it is rare to come across a term that has a language other than English as the source language (or anchor language as it is called in IATE). Some examples of term borrowing are given in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Examples of term borrowing from English

EN term and domain	IT term	ET term
<i>bootstrapping</i> (ECON)	<i>bootstrapping</i>	<i>bootstrap-meetod</i> ('bootstrap method')
<i>over-the-top</i> * (ITECH)	<i>over-the-top</i>	<i>OTT-teenused</i> ('OTT services')
<i>safe harbour</i> * (FINANCE)		<i>safe harbour-põhimõte</i> ('safe harbour principle')
<i>catfishing</i> (SOCIAL, ITECH)	<i>catfishing</i>	
<i>gaslighting</i> (SOCIAL)	<i>gaslighting</i>	
<i>troll farm</i> * (ITECH)	<i>troll farm</i>	
<i>backdoor</i> (ITECH)	<i>backdoor</i>	
<i>greenwashing</i> * (ENVI, TRADE)	<i>greenwashing</i>	
<i>painting the tape</i> (ECON)	<i>painting the tape</i>	

A large share of terms borrowed from English into Italian belongs to the domain of Information Technology. On the one hand, this could be explained by the total dominance of English in this entire sector. On the other hand, the initial data reveal that the domain of Information Technology and Data Processing (which in IATE belongs to the broader domain of Education and Communications) yields the most significant percentage of fully and partly metaphorical terms compared to the other domains included in the research.

An interesting case is the term *gaslighting*. According to the current records of IATE, most EU languages (except for Estonian, Finnish, Lithuanian, and Spanish) have rendered it by borrowing the English term. However, interlinguistic transfer of this unit of understanding is complicated because it originates from a British play dating back to 1938⁹ and refers to the dimming of gas lights, which most people alive today have never experienced.

⁹ More information on the meaning and etymology is available in Wikipedia at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaslighting> (accessed on 17.3.2023).

5.5 Losing the metaphor

In quite many cases the metaphor cannot be retained, and thus the unit of understanding needs to be conveyed through literal rendering. Let us consider the examples below.

Table 6. Examples of losing the metaphor

EN term and domain	IT term	ET term
<i>level playing-field</i> (ECON)	condizioni di parità* ('equal conditions')	võrdsed tingimused* ('equal conditions')
<i>red tape</i> * (POLITICS)	burocrazia* ('bureaucracy')	bürokraatia* ('bureaucracy')
<i>gold-plating</i> (EU)	sovraregolamentazione* ('overregulation')	ülereguleerimine ('overregulation')
<i>whistleblowing</i> (EMPL)	denuncia di irregolarità* ('reporting of irregularities')	rikkumisest teatamine ('reporting of a breach')
<i>painting the tape</i> (ECON)		kauplemisaktiivsuse moonutamise ('distorting the trading activity')
<i>greening</i> (ENVI)		kliimat ja keskkonda säästvate põllumajandustavade kasutamine ('using agricultural practices that spare the climate and the environment')

An example of a metaphor that cannot be transferred to other European languages due to cultural differences is *red tape*. According to the Online Etymology Dictionary¹⁰, the term came into figurative use in 1736 in reference to the red tape formerly used in Great Britain for binding up legal and other official documents. Since no such practice seems to have existed in other countries, the metaphor would remain opaque in other languages. Indeed, none of the official EU languages has opted for direct transfer of the metaphor, nor have they found a way to adapt it. The most common solution across the 23 target languages is losing the metaphor entirely and instead rendering the unit of understanding non-figuratively, using words such as (*excessive/unnecessary*) *bureaucracy* and *administrative formalities*.

Sometimes, the loss of metaphor can result in rather lengthy explicative terms. The environmental term *greening* in Estonian (see Table 6) is an example where the six-word-long, non-metaphorical term was introduced in the context of EU agricultural policy in 2013 and is still considered preferable in official texts, although the one-word-long

10 Online Etymology Dictionary, available at <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=red+tape> (accessed on 9.2.2023).

directly transferred term (rohestamine – ‘greening’) has been available since about 2015 and is now recorded as a neologism in the Estonian language portal¹¹. Considering the general tendency towards shortening and the catchiness of metaphorical terms, it can be assumed that the shorter metaphorical term will take precedence in coming years.

6. Discussion

The study once again confirms what has been pointed out and exemplified by Temmerman (2011: 115–117): the interlingual transfer of metaphorically motivated terminology is complicated by the asymmetry or anisomorphism between languages due to their inherent lexical and structural limitations. As a result, full equivalence between an original text and its translation is impossible to achieve, even though it may be highly desirable in some processes such as European multilingual legislative drafting.

In this study, we have identified five main procedures for the interlingual transfer of fully metaphorical terms. What distinguishes these procedures from certain broadly similar ones that can be found scattered in previous research is that they apply specifically to fully metaphorical terms. Owing to this research, term creation based on intuition and/or procedures that were not quite intended for metaphorical terminology can be replaced by consciously appraising and weighing the pros and cons of the five methods. What is more, they are easily applicable in practical terminological work in at least two (but presumably many more) target languages without requiring thorough theoretical knowledge from language professionals, whose educational background – in the context of multilingual institutions – inevitably varies.

Admittedly, some compound terms represent a combination of two procedures or a partial application of a procedure. So, for instance, the equivalent of *green shoots* (signs of economic recovery) in Italian is *germogli di ripresa* (*shoots of recovery*), which involves a partial loss of metaphor (green) and an addition of a non-metaphorical complement (*ripresa* – recovery). In total, adding a non-metaphorical component could be observed in seven instances in Italian and thirteen instances in Estonian. Some examples are given in Table 7 below:

11 Sõnaveeb, language portal of the Institute of the Estonian Language, available at <https://sonaveeb.ee/search/unif/dlall/dsall/rohestama/1> (accessed on 9.2.2023).

Table 7. Examples of metaphor transfer with the addition of a literal component

EN term and domain	Transfer procedure	IT or ET term
<i>revolving door</i> * (EMPL)	directly transferring the metaphor	ET: <i>pöördukse efekt</i> (' <i>revolving door effect</i> ')
<i>cloud</i> (ITECH)	directly transferring the metaphor	IT: <i>nuvola informatica</i> * (' <i>computing cloud</i> ')
<i>gatekeeping</i> (SOCIAL)	adapting the metaphor changing the metaphor	ET: <i>värvavahisüsteem</i> (' <i>goalkeeper system</i> ') IT: <i>funzione di filtro</i> (' <i>filter function</i> ')
<i>gatekeeper</i> (ITECH)	changing the metaphor	ET: <i>pääsuvalitseja</i> * (' <i>access governor/ruler</i> ')
<i>bootstrapping</i> (ECON)	borrowing the EN term	ET: <i>bootstrap-meetod</i> (' <i>bootstrap-method</i> ')

The fact that directly transferring the metaphor is by far the most frequently used procedure in Estonian and the second most frequent procedure in Italian is in line with Oliveira's observation that about 73% of metaphorical cardiology terms have the same metaphorical references in French and Portuguese (Oliveira 2009: 169). The leading position of direct transfer in Estonian also coincides with Newmark's order of preference, as the first among his seven translation procedures for stock metaphors is "reproducing the same image in the TL" (Newmark 1980: 95). Schäffner (2004: 1256) explains that in equivalence-based approaches, the underlying assumption is that once identified, a metaphor should ideally be transferred intact from SL to TL. She admits, however, that cultural differences between SL and TL can often prevent such an intact transfer (ibid: 1256).

Although it may seem to be the easiest procedure to apply, direct transfer is not free of perils. If chosen without carefully analysing the suitability of the metaphor in the TL, the result will be perceived as an unsuccessful word-for-word translation. In the worst case, when socio-cultural connotations are not considered, a directly transferred TL term can evoke associations totally incompatible with the SL unit of understanding. To exemplify, rendering the term *whistleblower* into Estonian by a direct transfer (*vilepuhuja* – 'whistle+blower') has been considered problematic due to its undesirable negative connotations, whereas the English term was meant to be positive¹². According to the Estonian branch of Transparency International¹³, Estonia's historical burden (the Soviet occupation) is responsible for the fact that 25% of Estonians refrain from

12 Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whistleblower> (accessed on 2.3.2023).

13 For more information, see <https://transparency.ee/tohus-vihjeandjate-kaitse> (accessed on 4.3.2023).

reporting wrongdoings for “not wanting to betray others” (compared to an EU average of 19%). What is more, whistling often features in Estonian idiomatic expressions bearing a negative connotation: a crook *whistles on the law* (= ignores the law) or *blows into somebody’s beard* (= lies blatantly); one can *see water and whistle* (= have a hard time) or *be met with a choir of whistlers* (= booed)¹⁴. Since 2022, however, the language authority’s opposition to the directly transferred term has decreased due to its wide spread¹⁵. This demonstrates that metaphorical terms, even if semantically faulty, can gain ground easily with the help of the media. If possible, a thorough analysis should be performed before release to the public.

Heated debates on the term *whistleblower* have also been held in Italy. In 2014, the Italian language authority Accademia della Crusca¹⁶ admitted that there was no word in the Italian lexicon semantically equivalent to the Anglo-American term. For historical, socio-political, and cultural reasons, what the word *whistleblower* designated had not been the subject of specific attention, theoretical reflection, or public debate. Italians, too, were puzzled by the connotative aspect: the translated equivalents proposed on the pages of Italian newspapers as an alternative to the full loan were considered inadequate since they did not guarantee either the denotative or connotative equivalence with *whistleblower*. Having also considered certain non-metaphorical options, the language authority wisely concluded: words do not enter the lexicon of a language and a community’s use via imposition from above; only the progress of the debate on the subject and the intensification of public interest in the designated ‘thing’ will make it possible for a shared linguistic designation to take root. In 2016, Italian terminologist Licia Corbolante commented in her terminology blog¹⁷ on the use of the term in an Italian legal act, stating that occurrences of the anglicisms were found in the draft law yet they disappeared from the final text, in which the term *autore di segnalazioni di reati o irregolarità* (*author of reports of crimes or irregularities*) was adopted. According to Corbolante, the local media still extensively used both *whistleblower* and *whistleblowing*, often assuming that the reader already knew the meaning. Thus, the example of *whistleblower* in both Estonian and Italian serves to

14 Toomla, S. Tartu Postimees, 5.9.2019, <https://tartu.postimees.ee/6769968/keele-teritaja-vile-voi-lokulaud> (accessed on 4.3.2023).

15 According to the Estonian language portal, the directly transferred term was more widely used than its synonyms in the Estonian National Corpus 2021. <https://sonaveeb.ee/search/unif/dlall/dsall/vilepuhuja/1> (accessed on 2.3.2023).

16 Torchia, M. C. (Accademia della Crusca). 28.10.2014. Che cosa indica e come si traduce la parola inglese *whistleblower*? <https://accademiadellacrusca.it/it/consulenza/che-cosa-indica-e-come-si-traduce-la-parola-inglese-whistleblower/918> (accessed on 2.3.2023).

17 The blog article is available at <https://www.terminologiaetc.it/2013/06/12/significato-traduzione-whistleblower/> (accessed on 2.3.2023).

illustrate the importance of connotations and socio-cultural differences in secondary term formation.

The procedure that results in the loss of metaphor occupies second place in our Estonian data and third place in the Italian data. Van den Broeck (1981: 77, cited in Schäffner 2004: 1256) refers to this as paraphrase (rendering an SL metaphor by a non-metaphorical expression in the TL). A parallel can also be drawn with Shuttleworth's four broad translation approaches, in which "removed" (i.e., removing the metaphorical expression) ranks second after retaining the metaphor (Shuttleworth 2017: 67).

The loss of metaphor substantively corresponds to what Newmark (1980: 97) refers to as "conversion of metaphor to sense" when discussing the translation of stock metaphors. In his view, the procedure is to be preferred to any replacement of an SL image by a TL image which is too wide of the sense or the register (including current frequency as well as the degrees of formality, emotiveness, and generality, etc.). Provided that a parallel can be drawn between the literary metaphors Newmark discussed and the terminological metaphors analysed in this study, it could be deduced that losing the metaphor is better than changing it for another, unsuitable one.

The use of this procedure accounts for the observation that translations are less metaphorical than original texts (Shuttleworth 2017: 187). While in literary texts the loss of a metaphor could at least theoretically and to some extent be compensated by introducing another metaphor at another point in the text, this is not feasible in terminology-rich EU texts.

It can be observed that in Italian, losing the metaphor and borrowing the foreign term often go hand in hand, meaning that both a non-metaphorical and a borrowed term are available and either of these can be used in a text, with the other one in brackets at first occurrence. The fact that in Italian a large number of the analysed terms have two variants recorded in IATE (the anglicism and its non-metaphorical Italian equivalent) may also explain the slightly greater term variation in this language compared to Estonian. In Estonian, the non-metaphorical term is either the only term provided, or it has a directly transferred, adapted, or altered metaphorical alternative, which may be rather new in the language but is likely to gain ground easily with the help of the press. Given that journalists seem to prefer figurative language, and especially if the non-metaphorical term is long and complicated, there is the threat of developing double terminology: "official" non-metaphorical terms for specialists (Eurocrats) and borrowed foreign terms or directly transferred metaphorical terms for citizens. This kind of linguistic divide could further alienate the citizens from political institutions who do not "speak their language", even if it is the same language.

Adapting and changing the metaphor are quite rare procedures in both languages, possibly due to the greater degree of effort and time required. Changing the metaphor bears resemblance to Newmark's second procedure in his order of preference: replacing

the image in the SL with a standard TL image (Newmark 1980: 96). This research demonstrates that in secondary term formation, the SL image can also be replaced by a novel, non-standard TL image, resulting in a neologism. Namely, during the research, the first author had the chance to put the freshly gained insights into practice and test the procedures in an actual term creation process involving the transfer of the term *gatekeeper* into Estonian. *Gatekeeper* is an example of a metaphor that is quite overloaded with meaning and used in several domains, such as healthcare, education, and communication. In 2021, it acquired yet another meaning in the proposal for a Digital Markets Act, adopted in 2022. The preamble of this act explains that a small number of large undertakings providing core platform services have emerged with considerable economic power that could qualify them to be designated as gatekeepers. Some of those undertakings exercise control over whole platform ecosystems in the digital economy. The Estonian equivalent of the term (*pääsuvalitseja* – ‘access **governor/ruler**’) is a result of lengthy discussions between the lawyer-linguists, terminologists, and translators of the EU institutions, also involving Estonian experts. All five metaphor transfer procedures described in this study were tried out and considered, and a survey was conducted among twelve people participating in the discussion to analyse the positive and negative aspects of each possible term variant, gather information about connotations, and collect suggestions. In the end, it was decided to alter the metaphor in a way that reflects the dominant role of gatekeepers. In doing so, having this debate before the adoption of the legal act helped to avoid disseminating the directly transferred calque *värahoidja* (‘gateholder’), although it had been seriously considered in the initial phases of the legislative procedure.

Quantitatively, the most striking observation of this study is that term borrowing from English is much more common in Italian than in Estonian: in Italian, 35 terms denoting the 65 units of understanding (ca 54% of the terms analysed) have the anglicism as one of the term variants recorded in IATE, while the respective numbers for Estonian are 3 out of 65 (ca 5%). Moreover, in almost half of the borrowing cases (17/35), the anglicism was the only term recorded in the respective Italian entry of the termbase.

It is natural that there is always a struggle between the domesticating and foreignising strategies in the process of interlingual transfer. What prevails is possibly determined by language policy and the situation of the language in question. As for Estonian translation policy, it can be considered simultaneously pragmatic and cautious (van Doorslaer & Loojus 2020: 74). Nevertheless, serious concern has been expressed about possible domain loss and the growing pressure to use English in Estonian universities (Nemvalts et al. 2020: 8–15). Unlike Estonians, Italians, with about 85 million native speakers around the world, might not need to worry about the survival of their language in the digital era.

Practice shows that language professionals working in different languages often opt for different procedures when transferring the same unit of understanding. Consider the example of *greenwashing*¹⁸ in Figure 1.

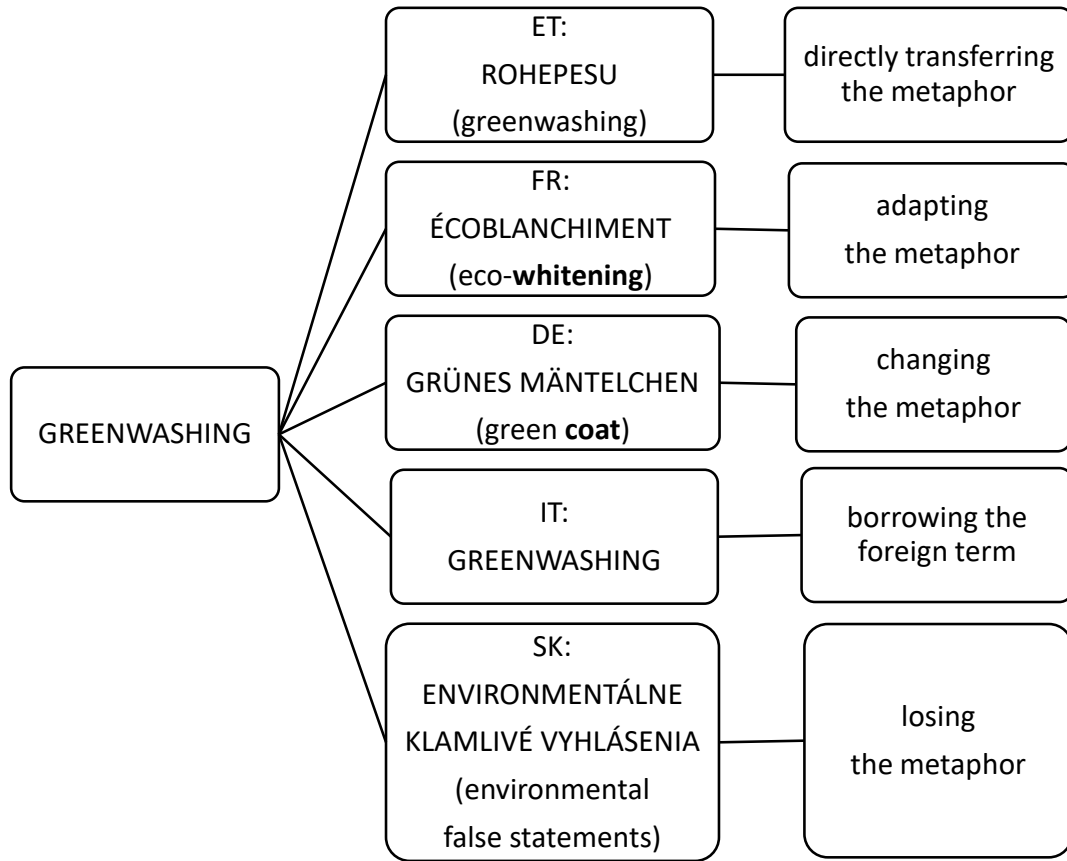


Figure 1. Use of different transfer procedures by different languages

Here, the terminologists of the five languages have all opted for a different procedure. At the same time, it must be noted that often the term has several synonyms in the TL, created by up to three different procedures, as could be observed in our collection of terms. Theoretically, there could even be five term variants in one language, created through all five procedures.

The example of *greenwashing* resonates with Shuttleworth’s observation that there appears to be no clear consistency in how individual metaphorical expressions are translated into different languages. According to him, the choices are rather unpredictable: not only do the translators working in the different target languages frequently use different procedures, but individual translators are not always consistent in the way in which they repeatedly translate particular metaphorical items (Shuttleworth 2017: 187).

¹⁸ In the Cambridge Dictionary, greenwashing is defined as behaviour or activities that make people believe that a company is doing more to protect the environment than it really is.

7. Conclusions

The study aimed to identify the challenges and procedures of transferring fully metaphorical terms in the EU multilingual setting. Given the setting and the aim of facilitating the work of translators and terminologists, the research was designed to be multilingual. Having witnessed the difficulties encountered by language professionals in transferring terms such as *whistleblower* or *gatekeeper* into the 23 target languages, the authors' objective was to devise a concrete list of procedures that can be used intentionally in the process of secondary term creation or translation.

65 fully metaphorical English terms were collected from the IATE termbase along with their equivalents in Italian and Estonian. Having analysed the transfer mechanisms, five interlingual transfer procedures were identified:

1. Directly transferring the metaphor
2. Adapting the metaphor
3. Changing the metaphor
4. Borrowing the English term
5. Losing the metaphor

It can be concluded that direct transfer of the metaphor, which is the most prevalent procedure for interlingual transfer, cannot be used in cases where the transferred metaphor would have culture-specific connotations incompatible with the source language's unit of understanding. In these cases, the metaphor is either lost, adapted, or changed, or the English term is borrowed. The latter option is much more common in Italian than in Estonian, possibly for reasons related to language policy.

The results were tested in practical terminological work when the term *gatekeeper* had to be transposed into the other official EU languages for the Digital Markets Act. All procedures were knowingly considered in the process of finding a suitable Estonian equivalent to this politically sensitive term. National experts were consulted, and the connotations of term candidates were tested among a small group of language professionals to arrive at a carefully considered decision.

Throughout the study, parallels were drawn with procedures and approaches identified by earlier research, none of which had focused specifically on fully metaphorical terms. Only practical use by terminologists and further research can attest to the robustness of the procedures, which can certainly be described in greater detail, including specifying their subtypes. In addition to this, the results of the study could be consolidated by increasing the number of analysed terms and involving more languages. The next step could be to perform a similar analysis on a collection of partly metaphorical terms.

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