

**An Investigation of Hungarian EFL Learners’
Translation of English Idioms into Hungarian**

— conducted within the cognitive framework —

jelige: **Beyond**

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1.Introduction

The universality and variation of conceptual metaphors and metonymies constitute a major focus within the field of Cognitive Linguistics (Kövecses, 2004, 2005; Kövecses & Benczes, 2010). Whilst it is widely accepted that most conceptual metaphors and metonymies originate in universal bodily experience (Kövecses, 2004, 2005; Kövecses & Benczes, 2010; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Yu, 2008), and are therefore shared across cultures and languages, variation occurs both at the general and the specific level. However, research done so far has mainly concentrated on the similarities; the cross-cultural and within-culture variation of metaphors and metonymies has not been given sufficient attention (Kövecses & Benczes, 2010: 95), despite the fact that it could provide researchers with a clearer insight into certain questions of language learning and translation (see Kövecses, 2005).

Metaphor- and metonymy-based comparative studies of Hungarian versus an other language have largely been based on Kövecses' categorisation of translatability (see, for example, Kövecses & Benczes, 2010: 120-124). Such works include Csábi (2006). Csábi's research on English and Hungarian body part idioms takes the standpoint that idioms have a metaphor- and/or metonymy-based cognitive motivation. This view challenges traditional theories about the unmotivated nature of idioms. Postulating Danesi's assumption of conceptual fluency (1993, [In: Kövecses, 2005: 208]), Kövecses argues that the use of the cognitive approach could elicit more effective acquisition of foreign language idioms (Kövecses & Szabó, 1996 [In: Kövecses, 2005: 208]). Such observations suggest that the application of cognitive linguistic principles may have positive pedagogical implications: on the one hand, it can result in a richer vocabulary; on the other hand, it can raise questions about the implementation of abstract meaning from one language to another through translation.

As can be seen from the above, Cognitive Linguistics can contribute to the field of second language acquisition and translation studies. To the best of my knowledge, however, up to now there has been no published enquiry into Hungarian L1 English L2 students' translation of idioms within the cognitive framework. The present study is therefore an attempt to make an investigation into Hungarian L1 English/American Studies majors' translation of English idioms in order to see whether a cognitive linguistic approach can lead to a deeper understanding of translation processes. To this end, a survey containing 17 English idioms and metaphorical

expressions was given to 15 Hungarian L1 speakers majoring in English/American Studies at the University of Szeged. The research targets at the analysis of translation equivalents given by participants, based on the similarities and/or differences of the constitutive conceptual metaphors and/or metonymies across the two languages. Results suggest that the outcome of the translation process may depend on a variety of interacting cognitive factors.

2.Literature Review

2.1 The principles of Cognitive Linguistics

Cognitive Linguistics constitutes part of today's interdisciplinary approach to human cognition referred to as Cognitive Sciences. In an attempt to synthesize all the intersecting fields – e.g., Psychology, Anthropology or Computer Sciences –, Cognitive Linguistics seeks to uncover the relation between the different aspects of meaning, that is, between cognition (creating meaning), language (communicating meaning) and culture (behaviour built on meaning) (Kövecses & Benczes, 2010: 13). It is an essentially experimentalist approach which emphasizes the primacy of human bodily experience in the construction of meaning and reality. Since physical experiences are not solely universal, but also individual, meaning depends on the way(s) the individual and/or the culture conceptualizes reality; that is, meaning cannot be defined in absolute terms.

In what concerns language, Cognitive Linguistics maintains that language is not a separate module working independently of cognitive processes, such as those of perception or force dynamics. Indeed, these processes are intertwined in human cognition, which imposes on language a double function: it is at the same time the vehicle for the conceptualization (of the world) and the primary transmitter of meaning. This view is clearly opposed to the objectivist approach, which claims that form is the essential property of language (Kövecses & Benczes, 2010: 20).

2.1.1 The nature of knowledge

According to current views of Cognitive Psychology (see, for example, Atkinson & Hilgard, 2005: 353), our knowledge of the outside world is represented in two ways:

- (1) as propositions (statements)
- (2) in visual (image-schematic) forms

As it will be seen later on (2.2.1), image-schematic representations of knowledge are tightly connected to creating meaning and to its linguistic conceptualization (Kövecses & Benczes, 2010: 133-134). Image-schematic knowledge originates in our physical experience of the world: much of what we (unconsciously) know is stored in the brain in forms of schematic images. If, as stated above, language is operated by shared cognitive processes, it follows that image-schematic forms of knowledge are manifested in language. This is what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) call the embodied mind: human thinking and language are based on tempo-spatial experience. Take, for example, the expression *the heart of the problem*: when analysed, it is interpreted as *the centre/the essence/the most important part of the problem*. That is, the organ *heart* is conceptualized as the central part of the human body both from an anatomical and functional point of view. This schematic image is then applied to the structure of the concept *problem*. In other words, the experience-based visual knowledge is extracted from its original context and is implemented into a different, definitely more abstract one. This connection may be defined as THE CENTRE IS THE HEART/ THE IMPORTANT IS CENTRAL. Such metaphorical relations construct the very basis of human thought. A key element of Cognitive Linguistic Theory, the conceptual metaphor is detailed in the following section.

2.2 Metaphor: linking frames

This section summarizes fundamental knowledge on conceptual metaphor and is largely based on the general introductory book of Kövecses and Benczes (2010), which provides an up-to-date overview of the topic.¹

In stylistics, the term *metaphor* is defined as “a word or phrase used to describe somebody or something else, in a way that is different from its normal use, in order to show that the two things have the same qualities and to make the description more powerful” (OALD 8th edition, 2010). Traditionally, metaphor is a trope consisting of two parts – the vehicle and the tenor – linked by some kind of easily observable similarity, such as in the sentence (author’s example):

¹ Since two of the referred materials (Kövecses & Benczes, 2010 and Kövecses, 2005) are in Hungarian, technical terms in English are taken from the Hungarian-English glossary at the end of Kövecses and Benczes (2010: 223-231) and from the cited references published in English (for example, Kövecses, 2004).

(1) Her heart is ice.

Her heart is ice

vehicle linker tener

In sentence (1) the basis for setting up an equating relationship is coldness: the rigid, distant behaviour of the referent is similar to the physical coldness of ice.

According to Kövecses and Benczes (2010: 80) a distinction has to be made, however, between what literary theory and Cognitive Linguistics mean under the term *metaphor*. Whereas the conventionally understood metaphor is a tool for creating an elevated style, the conceptual metaphor provides a basis for the understanding of abstract concepts.

In essence, the conceptual metaphor (also called cognitive metaphor, henceforth: metaphor) establishes a conceptual interaction between two frames which share some kind of feature. A frame or idealized cognitive model (ICM) is “the structured mental representation of a conceptual category”². For example, the frame FAMILY automatically recalls all ideas associated with it, such as family members, home or belonging. These associated categories are implicitly stated in the ICM; the understanding of a frame involves therefore a complex cultural knowledge of interrelated concepts. ICMs show divergence across cultures, that is, they are often culturally determined (e.g., rituals such as MARRIAGE). This observation justifies them being alternatively referred to as “cultural models”.

Similarly to its conventional definition, the cognitive metaphor has a two-part structure, the difference lying in the understanding of the relation between the parts reflected in the terminology³:

(2) LOVE IS WAR

LOVE IS WAR

target domain

source domain

As stated earlier, metaphor serves to facilitate the interpretation of abstract frames. Accordingly, the link through which it becomes possible to grasp meaning needs to be something existent in

² „A fogalmi keret [...] a fogalmi kategória strukturált mentális reprezentációja.” (Kövecses and Benczes, 2010: 51). English Translation made by the author of this paper.

³ In Cognitive Linguistics, metaphors are given in small capitals, the target domain being listed first.

spatio-temporal dimension. In example (2) it is the ICM of WAR that ensures access to the bodiless space of LOVE. In terms of naming, the abstract concept is the target domain, and the (at least partly) concrete part is the source domain: we understand the concept of LOVE with the help of the correpondances that can be established between the elements of the two frames, called projections (author's example):

FIGHT	LOVE
the enemy groups	the lovers
the war	the relationship and its hardships
the battles	the quarrels
the wounds	the psychological loss quarrels cause

Another, often cited example is metaphor INTENSITY IS HEAT (Kövecses & Benczes, 2010: 81) When the body undergoes intensified activity – be it exercise, anger or excitement –, it starts to produce more heat to endure pressure. This physiological process becomes the source domain of the abstract concept of *intensity*.

The above examples illustrate the intrawoven nature of bodily experience in human thought and language. The embodiedness of the mind is manifested in metaphors that constitute a great part of complex thinking. There appears to be, in fact, biological proof for the existence of metaphorical connections in the brain: according to Gallese and Lakoff (2005), abstract concepts – and, therefore, conceptual metaphors – are connected⁴ to the sensory-motor circuitry of the brain. This may suggest that certain connections established between different (lower and higher) regions of the brain are assumed to elicit the formation of base metaphors such as INTENSITY IS HEAT, laying the foundations of expressions like *reply with some heat*.

Base metaphors can be tied up in more complex relationships (Kövecses & Benczes, 2010: 86-87): on the one hand, the combination of two or more of them results in complex metaphors. On the other hand, the associations building up ICMs automatically trigger metaphorical implications, that is, an understanding of metaphorical relationships extending beyond basic projections. For example, if love is a war as stated in (2), then the relationship (the war) is lined by quarrels (battles). Wars have different outcomes, such as the victory of one and the defeat of the other; or, alternatively, a cease-fire can be announced. If *cease-fire* gets accentuated within the ICM of WAR, then another correspondence can be detected in (2): cease-

⁴ “...concepts of wide variety make use of the sensory-motor circuitry of the brain...abstract reasoning in general exploits the sensory motor system.” (Gallese & Lakoff, 2005: 19)

fire is a temporal cancellation of conflict between the members of the couple (with an intention to reconcile). This mapping clearly goes beyond basic correspondences – that is to say, metaphorical implications require the understanding of the intricate network of associations within and between frames.

2.2.1 A brief typology of metaphors

Metaphors can be classified according to their different characteristics. Before giving a short summary of metaphor types, however, it is necessary to pinpoint that language is not the sole medium through which metaphorical thinking is manifested: it forms our cultural practices as well. Kövecses and Benczes (2010: 88) note that an instance of this is the visual plan of a meeting: the head of the office always occupies the middle seat, and the others sit around him according to their rank; the smaller position one has, the further s/he will sit from the head. In this ritual, it is metaphor *THE IMPORTANT IS CENTRAL* that dominates. This and similar actual practices reflect the embeddedness of metaphors in individual and social behaviour. The typology to be followed here, however, focuses exclusively on language. This typology is from Kövecses (2005: 45-55). It differentiates between four aspects of categorization, namely:

- conventionality: the everydayness of metaphor (e.g., *LOVE IS WAR*) and metaphorical expression in which it is manifested (such as *These wounds won't heal*). The more a metaphorical expression is used in everyday conversation, the more conventionalized it becomes. New and unusual metaphorical expressions are most frequently produced for artistic purposes.
- cognitive function: defines the type of human experience reflected in metaphor. There exist three subtypes:
 - ontological metaphors have very little structure. Their role is to put abstract, non-physical concepts into general categories so that different mental operations be executed on them, e.g., *ABSTRACT IDEAS ARE THINGS* → *the fears I have*
 - orientational metaphors or spatialization metaphors are considered to be the least structured ones. They define the basic spatial directions (i.e. up-down, in-out, front-back, on-off, deep-shallow, central-peripheral (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980:14), e.g., *POSITIVE IS UP* → *I'm up*.

→ structural metaphors, such as (2) on page 4 above with the source and the target domain connected through correspondances (see 2.2). Structural metaphors can have their source in ontological metaphors.

- image-schematic and detailed mental images: although – being part of knowledge –, most metaphors are based on image-schematic representations, sometimes more detailed mental images may also find their way in the building of metaphors.
- specific metaphors contain specific concepts, such as *journey* (LIFE IS A JOURNEY) or *life* (LIFE IS A FIGHT). Most metaphors are specific. However, certain metaphors exists at a general level such as EVENTS ARE ACTIONS (see ontological metaphors earlier this page).

Out of these four categories, conventionality and cognitive function will be utilized in the course of the data analysis and interpretation process (see 4.2).

Apart from metaphor, there is an other (mental and linguistic) phenomenon that plays a significant role in conceptualization: metonymy. Before addressing the question of universality and variation, it is necessary to define metonymy, comparing it to metaphor.

2.2.2 Metonymy: linking elements within the frame

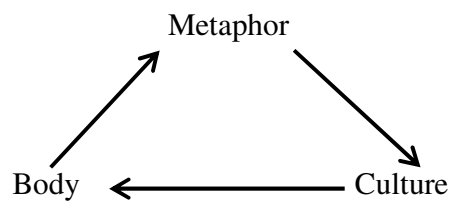
If earlier it was stated that metaphor helps conceptual understanding by connecting two ICMs, then metonymy does so within the same frame (Kövecses & Benczes, 2010: 63-77). Starting out from its etymology –metonūmia, “change of name”–, metonymy substitutes one element of a frame with another one. That is to say, the source and the target domain form a linkage within the same conceptual category. There exist two basic types of metonymy:

- Part for the whole metonymy, e.g., *Moscow refused to enter the alliance* (PLACE INSTEAD OF THE GOVERNMENT)
- Part for the part metonymy, e.g., *They found a Picasso in the cellar* (CREATOR INSTEAD OF THE CREATION)

Naturally, metonymical relationships, just like in the case of metaphor, are not limited to the level of language; they are manifested in cultural rituals, such as visiting each classroom at the school leaving celebration in Hungarian high schools (CLASSROOMS STANDING FOR CLASSES within the EDUCATION ICM, Kövecses & Benczes, 2010: 76).

2.3 Universality and variation of metaphors and metonymies

As put forward in 2.1, thought and therefore language are to a great extent determined by physical and cultural experience. This is not a one-way process, however. The triad of body (likely to be a universal source domain), culture and metaphor/metonymy mutually influence each other, grounding the very basis of human understanding. Their relationship may be viewed as follows (diagram taken from Yu [In: Frank, R., Dirven, R. Ziemke, T. and Bernández, E. (eds.), 2008:388]), a paper discussing metaphor only):



Since metaphor and metonymy are base elements of conceptualization, it logically follows that they are integral part of the interaction outlined above. Due to the fact that much of conceptualization happens the same or similar way across cultures – take, for example, the *face* taking priority over all other bodyparts in distinguishing people (Kövecses & Benczes, 2010: 75) or the equation of *up* with *positive* (ibid, p. 95)–, the universality of metaphors and metonymies becomes indubitable. It would be mistaken to suppose, however, that *all* of the conceptualization process takes place exactly the same way: cultural differences show up in the organization of one’s conceptual system and language.

When examining the variation of metaphors and metonymies, the basic distinction is made between cross-cultural and within-culture variation (Kövecses, 2004, 2005; Kövecses & Benczes, 2010). In what concerns the latter, individual and regional differences are more salient at a language-scale level. Also, the speaker’s broader cultural context and historical/cultural changes play a part in the verbal manifestation of metonymies and metaphors.

Apart from the broader cultural context, the speaker’s natural and physical environment need to be taken under examination in the case of intercultural differences. One derivable consequence is that differences arise either at the metaphor-level or, presumably, at the word-level manifestations of metaphor(s) mapping the (same) concept. Take, for example, metaphor ANGER IS A SUBSTANCE (FLUID/GAS) IN THE CONTAINER (THE HUMAN BODY). Although this

metaphor exists in a number of languages (e.g., English, Hungarian, Japanese, Chinese), its specific realizations may be different in different cultures. In Chinese, *anger* is represented in the (specific) metaphor ANGER IS EXCESS QI IN THE BODY, whereas in Japanese it is located in the stomach, the *hara* (selected from Kövecses, 2004: 139-163):

- (3) a.the anger qi in one's heart (Chinese)
- b.one's intestines are boiled (Japanese)
- c.Tele van dühvel. (Hungarian) 'He is full of anger'
- d.He was filled with anger (English)

Also, there can be divergences in the degree a given metaphor is worked out (detailed) in one language or another, e.g., whereas Hungarian and English express *happiness* (also) with the shining of the eyes, Chinese does the same by featuring the eyebrow in the matching metaphorical expressions. Similarly, one language may prefer metaphors whereas another uses metonymies to conceptualize the same idea (Kövecses, 2004, 2005; Kövecses & Benczes, 2010).

Summarizing the role of metaphors and metonymies in conceptualization, it may be stated that they represent “points on a continuum of mapping processes” (Barcelona, 2000 [In: Yu, 2008, as above), where both universality and variation occur. If cross-cultural differences exist – and they do exist –, then these differences are bound to cause obstacles in the course of second language acquisition. A field where such problems may arise is the learning of idioms and other expressions. They can be, indeed, a major source of difficulty in L2 learning.

2.4 Idioms in Cognitive Linguistics. Research in Applied Linguistics

From a traditional point of view, idioms are lexical units consisting of two or more words having a meaning not deductible from the summary of the words (Kövecses, 2005: 201). According to this definition, idioms are considered to be no more than linguistic phenomena stored in the mental lexicon. The cognitive view, however, challenges this assumption. When understood in the framework of Cognitive Linguistics, idioms have a cognitive motivation in which the base metaphor/metonymy is combined with one's conventional knowledge, i.e. knowledge shared by the interpretive community (author's example):

- (4) a. take one's medicine (BAD THINGS ARE BAD (BITTER) TASTE)
- b. lenyeli a békát (BAD THINGS ARE AN APPALING ANIMAL) 'to swallow the frog'

Another possible – slightly differently used – translation to (4) a. may be *ez a mérég nem a ciánkáli* ('this is poison, not cyanid'), which would be a more matching sentence pair in what concerns metaphorical conceptualisation.

Naturally, not all metaphorical expressions are idioms. Proverbs and a number of phrasal verbs have their metaphorical motivation, e.g., *to nose something out*. Now, from the point of view of pedagogy, it can be with the help of cognitive motivation that learners understand and internalize idioms and other metaphor-based expressions more efficiently. Cognitive motivation and alternative construal –the different ways a concept may be grasped by the individual (Kövecses and Benczes, 2010: 145) – have been in focus of cognitive linguistic research in Hungary. In an experiment led by Kövecses and Szabó (1996, [In: Kövecses, 2005: 208]), ESL learners were divided into two groups, one getting traditional instruction on idioms (which mainly included memorization), the other learning idioms with the help of explanations about their respective conceptual grounding. Results suggest that the second group performed on average 25% better on tasks than those who simply learnt the structures. The research is linked to Danesi's assumption of conceptual fluency (1992-1993, In: Kövecses, 2005: 208): Danesi claims that native speakers of a language have the fundamental competence of understanding a text in metaphorical ways⁵.

In a later study, Kövecses (reported in Kövecses & Benczes, 2010: 120-124) investigated the translatability of metaphorical English expressions into Hungarian. Twenty Hungarian L1 American majors at Eötvös Lóránd University were asked to translate example sentences taken from Lakoff and Johnson (1980). The following criteria were used in the course of evaluation: word-level (literal) meaning, figurative meaning (bound to be the same both in the original and in the translation equivalent), conceptual metaphor and the variations of these three factors. The purpose of this study was not didactic; it aimed to measure whether abstract meaning in one language is expressed either with literal translation or figurative expressions in an other language. On the basis of participant answers it may be concluded that abstract meaning can be expressed only through figurative use of language.

The above criteria elements – word-level meaning, figurative meaning and conceptual metaphor – are used in another piece of research, Csábi (2006). Using the Collins Cobuild

⁵ „A szöveg metaforikus módokon történő megformálása az anyanyelvi beszélők kompetenciájának egyik alapvető jellemzője. Ez a folyamat húzódik meg amögött, amit fogalmi folyékonyságnak (*conceptual fluency*) neveztem.” (1993: 49 [In: Kövecses, 2005: 208])

Dictionary of Idioms (CDI), Csábi compared the translation possibilities of the most frequent English and Hungarian human body part idioms. Categories varied from the ideal translation equivalents (same/slightly different literal meaning, same figurative meaning, same conceptual metaphor) to the least ideal ones (very little or no correspondance). Also, she listed metonymies as a relevant phenomenon, arguing that metonymy BODY INSTEAD OF THE PERSON (e.g., *I need a helping hand*) is present in many of the body idioms in both languages. As a result, she suggests that despite the fact that more than 30% of the studied metaphors belong to the category of ideal translation equivalents, differences do occur, most saliently on the specific level, e.g. *turn a blind eye to something* and *szemet huny valami felett* ('to close one's eyes upon something') are two similar, but slightly differently worked out expressions based on metaphors KNOWING IS SEEING and ATTENTION IS LOOKING.

These instances of Hungarian applied linguistic research appear to indicate the importance of cognitive motivation behind metaphorical expressions, including idioms. The mapping of conceptual metaphors and metonymies – and the awareness of their cross-linguistic variation – could elicit increased effectiveness in both language teaching and translation studies. The purpose of the present study is, indeed, to make an attempt to gain some insight into EFL students' translation processes. Postulating the functioning of metaphor- and/or metonymy-based motivation behind idioms and other non-literal expressions, I put forward the following, multi-perspectival research question:

RQ: Do translation equivalents of the idiomatic target expressions show variability across solutions? If they do, can it be accounted for by within-culture variation (the fact that participants use different Hungarian equivalents), or can it be subject to language transfer (the superposition of English conceptual metaphor and/or metonymy or metaphorical expression onto the Hungarian equivalent)?

Basically, the research targets at the manifestations of universality and variation, their possible reasons through participant answers and their divergences from the "predicted" solutions based on Kövecses' Idiom Dictionary of English-Hungarian, Hungarian-English (2010).

3.Methodology

3.1 Participants

Subjects of the research were 15 Hungarian L1 English/American BA majors (second- and third year) studying at the University of Szeged. They are all participating in the two-cycle curriculum of the Bologna system.

3.2 Research material

The research material consisted of a task containing 17 English sentences. Each sentence included a metaphorical or metonymical or both metaphorical and metonymical expression with body parts, either idiom or a phrasal verb⁶ (see Appendix 1). The author's choice of body parts was inspired by Csábi (2006). Apart from some exceptions, the test expressions are frequently used in everyday English speech. The test sentences were constructed by the author, using on-line dictionary (*thefreedictionary.com*) as a guide when it was necessary. The material was piloted by a Hungarian L1 English major (these answers were not included in the analysis). Surveys were handed out or electronically sent to participants whose task was to give translations equivalents to the expressions underlined in the sentences. In case they could provide more than one solution, they had to rank their answers in an order they considered best. In addition, they were asked to indicate (circle) the possible clues that led to the comprehension of the target expression.

3.3 Method of analysis

Prior to the data analysis, the English test expressions were matched with Hungarian equivalents based on Kövecses English-Hungarian and Hungarian-English Idiom dictionary (2010). In case a given expression did not figure in the dictionary (or it did, but context-dependent meanings were missing), other sources were consulted to verify its existence (via an Internet-based corpus, or *thefreedictionary.com*). Furthermore, each translation pair was compared and contrasted on the level of metaphotical/metonymical motivation (see Appendix 2) to see similarities and differences both at metaphorical and word level. This mini-typology (following Kövecses' typology of metaphors/metonymies, 2004 and 2005) served as a foundation for data interpretation.

⁶ 14 idioms, 3 phrasal verbs/ 14 verbs, 3 nouns (identical numbers do not mean that all 14 idioms were verbs)

Due to the pre-assumed variability of answers, the analysis employed in the research is a decidedly descriptive one: although it was possible to make some quantified observations with the help of basic statistical means, a more detailed, descriptive analysis was needed in an attempt to account for some of the peculiarities of the data. The data analysis is divided into two parts: in the first, a table is presented to see the extent to which participants' answers matched translation equivalents proposed in the Kövecses Idiom Dictionary. It is necessary to point out that the Kövecses Idiom Dictionary was by no means intended to be the norm or the absolute reference point in the evaluation of participant answers. It served as an aid in finding possible Hungarian translation equivalents to the English idioms. Divergences from the dictionary proposals are therefore not incorrect (unless obvious mistranslations happened): they are indicators of variability.

The second part attempts at interpreting some peculiarities of the data. Due to the vastness of the incoming material, not all responses could be discussed in detail; I chose those expressions which triggered a greater variability of answers due to some reason.

4. Data analysis and discussion

4.1 Participant answer-dictionary equivalent matches

Table 1 illustrates the percentage of correspondence between participant answers and translation equivalents offered by the the Kövecses Idiom Dictionary or, in three cases, the already mentioned on-line sources (indicated with a “ ’ ”). Items are listed in a descending order of correspondence. In two cases (sentence no. 14 and 17), no appropriate Hungarian translation was found; here meaning was inferred from the contexts in which the expressions were found.

sentence no.	Expression	percentage (%)
11	to shoulder the responsibility	100.00
17	'to talk one's head off	100.00
3	'to hand it to somebody	88.24
1	to be an eye-opener	81.25
6	not to raise one's finger	76.47
14	'the eye of the storm	61.10
2	to nose something out	55.50
9	to find one's feet	52.63
15	to be knee-deep in something	52.38
10	to slip through one's fingers	41.17
16	at the back of one's head	36.84
5	to weigh on one's shoulders	27.77
8	not to have a leg to stand on	17.65
7	to be hard to stomach	11.11
12	to throw something into one's face	6.66
13	to hand something down to somebody	6.66
4	to bring something to a head	0.00

Table 1. participant answer-dictionary equivalent matches (of total number of answers for each, items in bold are to be discussed)

As can be seen, there is a relatively wide range of scores: there are only two expressions where participant answers have total correspondence with the Kövecses Idiom Dictionary equivalents, and in contrast, almost half of the expressions (8 out of 17) show a less than 50% correspondence. Possible explanations for discrepancies are dealt with in the next section, where expressions **in bold** in Table 1 will be subject to interpretation.

4.2 Issues of cognitive motivation, transfer and context: interpreting the data

This section aims at finding possible explanations for the visible divergence of participant answers from the Kövecses Idiom Dictionary equivalents. A more detailed analysis of the selected idioms suggests that participant answers – meaning either correct or, in only a few cases, incorrect translation equivalents – may be a result of interactions occurring between alternative construal, individual preference, transfer processes and context during the translation process.

Idioms subject to analysis are grouped according some shared feature of participant answers reflecting the possibility of at least one of the above phenomena.

4.2.1 *to weigh on one's shoulders and to raise one's fingers: variability despite similarity*

The idiom *to weigh on one's shoulders* figured in sentence 5:

Sometimes I'm so exhausted that I feel as if all the problems of the world were weighing on my shoulders.

According to the Kövecses Idiom Dictionary, the Hungarian equivalent of the idiom is *vállára nehezedik* ('to weigh on one's shoulder') which fits the context of the test sentence. Although all participant answers reflected this meaning, only 27.77% of them followed the pattern *nehezédne/nehezülne* ('would weigh'). The same percentage goes for the alternative verb use *nyomná* ('would press'). Other alternatives include *nyugodna, szakad, zúdul and zuhan* ('to rest, split, pour and fall'). The choice of verb may not have been conscious, but this could be revealed only with a series of interviews. All the same, these verbs seem to represent degrees of a graded understanding of the idiom *to weigh on one's shoulders* where the criterium for distinction is the intensity of the pressure the thing (in our case, responsibility) exposes on the body. It may be noteworthy remarking that these alternatives surfaced without an extended context (a paragraph or a text). In this case it would probably be implausible to think of any transfer effects, since the Hungarian translation equivalents show no trace of Englishness (above all because the idiom is the same both at metaphorical and word-level in the two languages). What may play a part here is individual preference, and mentality – this latter would postulate a decisive role to subjectivity, though.

Individual preference may be more manifest in some of the solutions given to the idiom *not to raise one's finger* in sentence 6, although transfer processes may also be assumed to have been operating in the course of translation. Despite the fact that more than two-thirds (76.47%) of the answers correspond to the dictionary, in two instances highly idiomatic equivalents were given:

- (5) a. várja, hogy a sült galamb a szájába repüljön
'to wait for the roast pigeon to fly into one's mouth'

- b. egy szalmaszálat sem tenne keresztbe
's/he wouldn't cross a straw'

Taking the almost total correspondence of the English idiom and its Hungarian equivalent into account, the choice of these two idioms appear to be a matter of personal taste: two participants chose an expression which is (in all likelihood) statistically less frequent and metaphorically more complex than the commonly used idiom *kisujját sem mozdítja* 'not to move even one's little finger' (or, another, though more rarely heard *füle botját sem mozdítja* 'not to move even one's ear'). The question then arises as to why some are more apt to use a – with regard to the English expression – more distant and heavily idiomatic expression despite the obvious, almost word-by-word translation.

One possible explanation may actually lie in the simplicity of the expected translation equivalent: the similarity between the form of the English and the Hungarian idiom may have provided a ground for confusion, and opting for a saliently different solution was a strategy to avoid transfer. However, this hypothesis may be undermined by the fact that one of the two participants did list *kisujját sem mozdítja* in the second place. Or, alternatively, it may be plausible to maintain the transfer-avoiding strategy assumption, arguing that ranking the most frequent equivalent in second place may signal uncertainty about its correctness. As to transfer processes, only one of the answers appear to have been influenced by English. In this particular case the participant gave the word-by-word translation *az ujját sem mozdítja* ('not to move even one's finger.'). A parallel case may be the faulty translation of the expression *to be knee-deep in something* (sentence 15) in two instances. A proposed – and commonly used – equivalent to this idiom is *nyakig ül/van valamiben* ('to sit/to be in something up to one's neck'), which shares its metaphor and, therefore, its cognitive motivation with the English expression. Difference manifests only at word level: whereas English uses the body part *knee*, Hungarian prefers *neck*. Nevertheless, there are two translations which appear to reflect the influence of the original English sentence:

- (6) a. térdig áll a munkában 'to stand in work up to one's knees'
b. térdig járt a munkában 'to march in work up to one's knees'

Although the difference is only one word, the result is a new, rather odd-sounding Hungarian equivalent.

Up to this point, examples of possible transfer processes were instances of negative transfer. The upcoming analysis of the idiom *to throw something into somebody's face* negotiates, however, the possibility of positive transfer.

4.2.2 *to throw something into somebody's face*: a case of positive transfer?

According to the Kövecses Idiom Dictionary, it is *szemébe vág valakinek valamit* ('to throw something into somebody's eye') that best corresponds the above English idiom. In contrast, only one out of 15 answers matches the dictionary proposal. All other translations are related to the *head* and, more, specifically, the human face realized in Hungarian either as *arc* ('face') or *kép* (~'face, jowl'). Actually, *képébe/arcába (/fejéhez) vág valakinek valamit* ('to throw something into one's jowl/face(/head)) is as common as *szemébe vág valakinek valamit*, the difference being that whereas the latter reflects a more analytical approach to the human face, the former represents the face as a whole, assimilating all its parts, eyes included. All the same, both idioms are based on metonymy PART OF BODY INSTEAD OF THE HUMAN BEING and the orientational metaphor the IMPORTANT IS IN CENTRAL. Supposing participants are in the possession of both idioms, one may logically ask for a reason behind the unanime preference for idioms with face. One possible explanation may be provided by the fact that there is an almost word-to-word correspondence between the English and the Hungarian idiom: participants' judgement of the most appropriate translation equivalent may have been influenced by this salient similarity. In other words, some kind of transfer process may have been in operation, which resulted in a correct solution. Nevertheless, it may simply be the case that participants use this particular form far more frequently in everyday communication.

4.2.3 *to be hard to stomach*: a case of alternative construal?

Observations related to the idiom *to be hard to stomach* (sentence 7) may be interpreted as a synthesis of the above assumptions concerning transfer, individual preference (as seen in 4.2.1.), and alternative construal. Only 11.11% of answers matched the dictionary translation *nem nyel le valamit* ('not to swallow something'). The majority of equivalents – 52.38%, to be precise – include, either implicitly or manifestly, the organ *gyomor* ('stomach'), just like the English expression, e.g.,:

- (7) a. *felfordul tőle a gyomrom* ‘makes my stomach feel queasy’
 b. *nem veszi be a gyomrom* ‘my stomach does not take it in’
 c. *nehezen emészttem meg* ‘I digest it with difficulty’

The variety of solutions to this idiom may have some peculiarities concerning the universality and variation of metaphors. First of all, *to be hard to stomach something* and the equivalents appearing in greatest number are of the same ontological metaphor, namely, THOUGHTS/FEELINGS ARE FOOD. This similar grounding may actually explain participants’ preference for forms in (7) above, which could be another example for positive transfer. However, by taking a closer look at the equivalent proposed in the Kövecses Idiom Dictionary, *nem nyeli le* (‘not to swallow something’), it can be seen that its base metaphor is the same as that of the other one. It is probably the difference in form that triggered the relatively poor percentage of this translation equivalent. Also, *nehezen nyeli le* (‘to swallow something with difficulty’) and *nehezen emészt meg* (‘to digest something with difficulty’) are two stages of the eating process: if one were to establish one-to-one correspondences (adding up to a structural metaphor), not/swallowing the food would stand for accepting/rejecting something (behaviour, idea), whereas digesting the food would stand for processing and understanding something. The former is logically the prerequisite of the latter – if one does not swallow the food, s/he will not be able to digest it. Similarly, if one categorically rejects a behaviour or idea⁷, s/he does not even give a chance to understand it, and processing does not even start. That is not to say that participants were consciously motivated by this distinction, but it may not be implausible to assume that percental relation of *nem nyeli le* to *nehezen emészt meg* may have more to it than formal similarity or difference.⁸

4.2.4 The role of context in the interpretation of meaning: three examples

As mentioned earlier in 4.1., there were two idioms the intended meaning of which is context-dependent:

⁷ Note that such refusal may have something to do with disgust

⁸ *To swallow something* exists in English as well, but –according to the Kövecses Idiom Dictionary- in rather fixed expressions such as *to swallow a/the bitter pill*.

(8) the eye of the storm (sentence 14)

(9) to talk one's head off (sentence 17)

Depending on the information content on the sentence, the above expressions may carry different meanings; participants, therefore, had to rely not only on the idioms themselves, but also on the surrounding words when translating them. A third case example of the role of context was the idiom *to have a leg to stand on* (sentence 8): although its meaning is not context-dependent in English, specific parts of the sentence proved to be essential in the correct translation of the idiom, as the context clues marked by some participants indicated it.

4.2.4.1 the eye of the storm

Certainly, this idiom does not figure among the commonest ones in dictionaries. In fact, Kövecses' Idiom dictionary gives only one equivalent to it: [*a vihar központi része*] *a vihar által okozott legnagyobb pusztítás helye* ('[the central part of the storm] the place where the storm has done the greatest damage'). The expression is rooted in the combination of the two metaphors THE CENTRE IS THE EYE and THE IMPORTANT IS CENTRAL. In its original sense *the eye of the storm* is limited to a natural phenomenon. It is possible, however, to shift its meaning to a more abstract level with the help of contextualization; that is, it may be transferred to other domains in function of the content of the given sentence. In the survey, the context alluded to a business debate (sentence based on an example sentence on *thefreedictionary.com*):

The issue in the eye of the storm is whether the company should be expanded overseas.

Note that here participants had to translate not only the idiom itself but also the theme (the DP *the issue* taking the idiom in a PP as complement). Apart from two obvious mistranslations (*a vihar előtti csend*, 'silence before the storm'), participants seem to have – at least to some degree – grasped the essence of the idiom, even if some of the answers were longer circumscriptions. Context clues indicated on the test sheets include *the eye*, a choice reinforcing the embeddedness of the central role of the eye in thinking, *the eye of the storm* and the subordinate clause *whether the company should be expanded overseas*.

4.2.4.2 to talk one's head off

In the Kövecses Idiom Dictionary, the idiom is listed as *to talk somebody's head off* meaning [*folyton beszél*] *lyukat beszél a hasába* ('[to talk infinitely] to talk a hole into one's stomach') It is possible, however, to attribute a different meaning to this expression by changing the "possessor" of the head from the Direct Object (e.g., *He talked Jim's head off*) to the Subject, such as in sentence 17:

There's no point in talking your head off—he won't listen.

In this form, there's a shift in meaning which basically modifies the focus: whereas the dictionary entry meaning emphasizes the persuasion of the Hearer, here it is the Speaker's attempt of convincing the other (with a long talk) that is accentuated. Although various translation equivalents were provided by participants, ranging from *felesleges tépni a száját* ('it is unnecessary to tear your mouth') to *akár meg is feszülhetsz* ('you may as well be strained'), none of the answers suggest a lack of understanding. Context clues included the idiom itself, the verbal expression *there's no point in* and the second half of the sentence (which gives the reason for not talking your head off) *he won't listen*.

4.2.4.3 to have a leg to stand on

Answers to this particular idiom may be notable from the point of view that it was the only expression where the percentage of (apparently) literal translations superseded that of the more saliently metaphorical equivalents (like *biztos lábakon áll*, 'to stand on stable legs'). Out of the 15 answers, 7 (46.67%) corresponded to the schema *amíg nincs DP, nem tudod bizonyítani az igazad* ('as long as you don't have DP, you can't prove your right'), the DP being either *bizonyítékok* ('proof', in genitive case), *érvek* ('argument', genitive case) or *indokok* ('reason', genitive case). It needs to be added in parenthesis that this structure also reveals a common, though not salient ontological metaphor: IDEAS ARE OBJECTS, which – as the verb *have* and *van* (in its meaning 'to possess') show – can be possessed by the thinker. The commonness of this structure among answers suggests that participants understood and could meaningfully interpret the sentence. There were three solutions (14.29%), however, where participants misinterpreted the idiom and gave the false translation *amíg nem állsz meg a saját lábadon* ('as long as you don't stand on your own feet'), an equivalent corresponding to *find one's feet* in sentence 9. This mistranslation calls for the examination of context clues participants indicated on the test sheet:

those who incorrectly translated the idiom seem to have interpreted it in isolation, circling only the expression itself or some parts of it. In contrast, those who showed comprehension marked the second half of the sentence or at least the verbal part *can't prove*, which indicates an extended, sentence-level analysis of the meaning.

4.3 Revisiting the research question

The previous section looked at the possible explanations for the variation that occurs across translation equivalents given for the same English idiom. The research question, which basically aimed at observing variation in the sample, was the following:

Do translation equivalents of the target expressions show variability across solutions? If they do, can it be accounted for by within-culture variation (the fact that participants use different Hungarian equivalents), or can it be subject to language transfer (the superposition of English conceptual metaphor and/or metonymy or metaphorical expression onto the Hungarian equivalent)?

In the light of the above data, there can be no categorical ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer given to the research question. While both within-culture variation and transfer appear to manifest themselves in the incoming data, a more complex process may be in operation, including the interaction of individual preference, alternative construal (instances of within-culture variation), transfer processes and the interpretation of context. Individual preference may have most saliently surfaced in the case of unusual translation equivalents (think of *várja, hogy a sült galamb a szájába repüljön*) or in participants’ use of verbs of different intensity when translating the idiom *to weigh on one’s shoulders*. As to cross-linguistic interference, there may be proof for both positive and negative transfer, though the latter does not appear to be substantial on the whole. The role of context appears to have been crucial in the case of infrequent and context-dependent idioms, and when interference may have been potentially stronger because of the word-level correspondence between two idioms carrying different meanings (see 4.2.4). It may be stated, therefore, that the translation of idiomatic expressions from one language to another – at least in this case of English and Hungarian – is a multivariate issue where several factors interact.

5. Conclusion

The present study had as major aim the analysis of Hungarian EFL learners' translation of English idioms into Hungarian based on the existence of the conceptual metaphor and metonymy, the base theory of Cognitive Linguistics. An in-depth, though not exhaustive interpretation of participant answers suggests that the translation of idioms from one language to another is a complex, multivariate process which involves several aspects of linguistic and cognitive competence.

5.1 Further research

It is necessary to note that the conclusions may not be generalizable to the whole of the English EFL community. For a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, a substantially larger sample would be needed. As a continuation of this research, I am planning to conduct a qualitative research within the same framework where I employ the Think-Aloud Method. Seeing how participants get to the final translation equivalent of the English idiom will probably contribute to a deeper understanding of the intricate cognitive processes underlying translation.

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www.thefreedictionary.com

Appendix 1: The research material

TRANSLATING ENGLISH IDIOMS INTO HUNGARIAN⁹

The aim of the following survey is to have an insight English/American BA majors' translation of some English idioms into Hungarian. With your participation, you make an invaluable contribution to my TDK research.

Your task is to translate the **underlined** sentences or expressions. **Circle** the word(s)/sentence part/sentence (appearing anywhere) that helped you recognize the meaning. **If you think that there are more than one translation equivalents to the underlined items, please rank them in an order you consider to be the best**, e.g., She got cold feet. 1.Berezelt. 2.Megijedt., etc.

Please do not use any kind of dictionary or translator. The survey takes about 15 minutes to complete. Thank you very much for your help.

1. It wasn't until my best friend had come over to have a word with me that I realized I had to start a new life. What she said was a real eye-opener for me.
2. The enemy managed to nose out the next destination of the troops.
3. Paula performed extremely well at the competition –you've got to hand it to her.
4. We've been putting off this decision too long –we either bring the matter to a head or we'll have to face bankruptcy.
5. Sometimes I'm so exhausted that I feel as if all the problems of the world were weighing on my shoulders.

⁹ Spaces contracted here for sake of economy

6. Jack is such a good-for-nothing; he wants to be rich and succesful, but he wouldn't raise his finger for it.
7. Some people find Mr Smith's assertive style appealing, but for me it's really hard to stomach.
8. As long as you don't have a leg to stand on, you can't prove you're right in this question.
9. When I first arrived at Stanford, I felt lost. It took me long months to find my feet.
10. I just can't understand how Jen could let such a fantastic opportunity slip through her fingers!
11. You have to shoulder the responsibility for the consequences of your actions.
12. I know I shouldn't have thrown the truth about his father into his face so bluntly, but I just couldn't hold my temper any more.
13. When Sonia's grandfather died, he handed down all his antiques to her.
14. The issue in the eye of the storm is whether the company should be expanded overseas.
15. Sarah said she was knee-deep in work, so she won't be able to come tonight.
16. He may be upset now, but at the back of his head he knows I was right not to let him go to Australia without any money.

17. There's no point in talking your head off –he won't listen.

Appendix 2: A typology of metaphors underlying the test expressions

(Based on: Kövecses, 2004 and 2005. If the base metaphor did not figure in Kövecses' list, I tried to find one, although by no means do I reckon my attempts to be exact)

Hungarian equivalents taken from: Kövecses (2010) *Hungarian-English, English-Hungarian Idioms*. Budapest:

Akadémia Kiadó. (participant answers are not included in the list)

IDIOM/EXPRESSION	CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR/METONYMY	HUNGARIAN EQUIVALENTS	CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR/METONYMY
To be an eye-opener	KNOWING IS SEEING	Felnyitja a szemét Lehull a hálóg a szeméről Leveszi a hálógot a szeméről	KNOWING IS SEEING KNOWING IS LIGHT
To nose out	KNOWING IS SENSING (SMELLS)	Kiszimatol valamit	KNOWING IS SENSING (SMELLS)
To hand it to sb	HAND STANDS FOR THE ACTIVITY PRAISING IS GIVING	Elismer valamit Megadja az elismerést valakinek Fejet hajt valaki/valami előtt	PRAISING IS GIVING PRAISING IS THE INCLINATION OF THE HEAD
To bring sth to a head	ABSTRACT CONCEPTS ARE HUMAN BODIES → THE DECISION IS THE HEAD THE CENTRAL PART IS A HUMAN HEAD	Dűlőre visz valamit Kenyértőrésre visz valamit	MAKING DECISIONS IS A JOURNEY THE FINAL DECISION IS THE END OF THE JOURNEY
To weigh on one's shoulders	RESPONSIBILITY IS A LOAD	Vállára nehezedik valami	RESPONSIBILITY IS A LOAD
To raise one's fingers for sth	HAND (FINGER) STANDS FOR THE ACTIVITY	Kisujját sem mozdítja Füle botját sem mozdítja	BODYPART STANDS FOR THE ACTIVITY
To be hard to stomach	THOUGHTS/FEELINGS ARE FOOD	Nem nyel le valamit	THOUGHTS/FEELINGS ARE FOOD
To have a leg to stand on	STABILITY IS PHYSICAL STRENGTH	Tud mire támaszkodni Biztos lábakon áll	STABILITY IS PHYSICAL STRENGTH
To find one's feet	SELF-DEPENDENCE IS STANDING ON STRONG FEET	Egyenesbe jön Feltalálja magát Megáll a lábán Megtalálja saját magát Újra talpra áll	SELF-DEPENDENCE IS STANDING ON STRONG FEET SELF-DEPENDENCE IS UNITY
To slip through one's fingers	HAND STANDS FOR THE PERSON THOUGHTS/IDEAS ARE THINGS POSSESSING SOMETHING IS HOLDING IT IN THE HAND LOSING SOMETHING IS LETTING IT OUT OF THE HAND	Hagyja, hogy kicsússzon valami a kezei közül Kicsúszik a markából valami	HAND STANDS FOR THE PERSON THOUGHTS/IDEAS ARE THINGS POSSESSING SOMETHING IS HOLDING IT IN THE HAND LOSING SOMETHING IS LETTING IT OUT OF THE HAND LOSING SOMETHING IS LETTING IT GO
To shoulder the responsibility	RESPONSIBILITY IS A LOAD	Vállalja a felelősséget valamiért	RESPONSIBILITY IS A LOAD
Throw something into one's face	FACE STANDS FOR THE PERSON SAYING OUT THE TRUTH IS EMPLOYING PHYSICAL FORCE	Szemébe vág valamit	EYES STANDS FOR THE PERSON SAYING OUT THE TRUTH IS EMPLOYING PHYSICAL FORCE
Hand something down to somebody	HAND STANDS FOR THE PERSON	Ráhagy valakire valamit Hagyományoz valamit Örökül ad valamit	TRADITION IS PASSING ON
The eye of the storm (from context)	ABSTRACT CONCEPTS ARE HUMAN BODIES → THE CENTRE IS THE EYE	A vihar által okozott pusztítás legnagyobb helye	NATURAL PHENOMENA ARE HUMAN BODIES → THE CENTRE IS THE EYE

To be knee-deep in sth	THE AMOUNT OF WORK IS HEIGHT	Nyakig ül/van valamiben	THE AMOUNT OF WORK IS HEIGHT
The back of one's head	HEAD STANDS FOR THE PERSON/ FOR CONSCIOUSNESS	Szíve mélyén	HEAD STANDS FOR THE PERSON/FOR CONSCIOUSNESS
To talk one's head off	HEAD STANDS FOR THE PERSON HEAD STANDS FOR UNDERSTANDING	Lyukat beszél a hasába valakinek	STOMACH STANDS FOR UNDERSTANDING