A relevance-theoretic analysis of concept narrowing and broadening in English and Norwegian original texts and translations*

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This paper studies the lexical-pragmatic processes of narrowing and broadening of conceptual content in the relation between original texts and their corresponding translations in the English-Norwegian Parallel Corpus (ENPC) from a relevance-theoretic point of view. It is suggested that, in at least some cases, translations can be seen as a kind of mirror reflecting the pragmatic processes at work in lexical interpretation. A translator may choose to render an underspecified concept encoded in a source text by a word that more closely encodes the interpretation given to the concept in question, in which case the semantics/pragmatics distinction (as it applies to the source text) will be made explicit in the relation between source and target text. In other cases, the comparison of source and target text shows that similar lexical encodings in the two languages do not necessarily provide the same possibilities for lexical broadening.

Keywords: Relevance Theory, lexical pragmatics, translation, narrowing/broadening, English/Norwegian

1. Introduction

Many current approaches to pragmatics, and Relevance Theory in particular, subscribe to the strong linguistic underdeterminacy view, according to which linguistically-encoded meaning underdetermines the proposition expressed (‘what is said’ or ‘explicature’) by an utterance (see Sperber and Wilson 1995; Carston 2002a). At the lexical level, this view of underdeterminacy implies that the concept communicated in a given situation often needs to be worked out pragmatically, taking the concept encoded by a word as input to the inferential process. When a word’s encoded conceptual content is underspecified or very general, pragmatic narrowing of the linguistically-specified denotation may be required in order to determine
which proposition the speaker was intending to convey by her utterance. In the opposite case, overspecificity or narrowness of the encoded conceptual content may call for pragmatic broadening. Relevance Theory, which is concerned with the way in which hearers are able to bridge the gap between linguistically encoded meaning and what is communicated by a speaker, presents a unified account of the pragmatic processes involved in the narrowing and/or broadening of conceptual content (Carston 1997; 2002a; Wilson 2003; Wilson and Carston 2007). The fact that the concept expressed may be narrower (e.g. fish used to express ‘shark’) or broader (e.g. circular used to express ‘approximately circular’, genius used as a hyperbole to express ‘very intelligent’, dry used metaphorically to express ‘boring’) than the encoded one, is explained in terms of a single interpretive process that adjusts the communicated meanings of individual words, based on interaction between linguistically encoded content, contextual assumptions and contextual implications, guided and constrained by expectations of relevance.

An interesting issue for this view on lexical-pragmatic processes is its implications for translation, that is, the way in which conceptual meaning is transferred from one language to another. The present paper seeks to explore whether translation can be seen as a kind of mirroring of the pragmatic processes at work in lexical interpretation. Depending on the interplay between pragmatic inferences and the linguistic resources of the target language, a translator may choose to render an underspecified concept encoded in a source text by a word that more closely encodes the interpretation given to the concept in question. On such an occasion the semantics/pragmatics distinction may be made explicit in the relation between source and target text, in that the target text may (semantically) encode a concept that has been (pragmatically) derived from the concept encoded in the source text. This is not to claim, however, that there exists a single relationship between source and target text in this respect, only that this is one of many relations that may hold between them; one that may give us some insight into the pragmatic inferences made by a translator in the course of translation, as well as into lexical interpretation more generally. The present paper is an attempt to look at the ways in which lexical narrowing and broadening apply in the relation between English and Norwegian original texts and translations. How is an underspecified concept encoded by the source text translated, and to what extent does the target text mirror the pragmatic narrowing/broadening made during translation? Do we find that the lexical adjustment process applies in the same way for words having similar (or the same) encoded meanings in the two languages?

Carston (1997) and Sperber and Wilson (1998) assume a partial mapping between (atomic) mental concepts and words in the lexicon. A number of mental concepts do not map onto words, they argue, and thus we have many times more mental concepts than there are words in our language. In their view, a linguisti-
cally-encoded concept may function just as a pointer to the concept the speaker has in mind and intends to communicate on a given occasion. The communicated concept may be the one encoded by the word used by the speaker, in which case the word is used in its literal sense, but this is taken to be no more than a possibility, as the concept conveyed by a word in a given utterance needs to be contextually worked out. A similar point of view is taken by Bosch (2007), who claims that in many cases, lexical entries contain pointers to (underspecified) lexical concepts whose semantic values are constructed on the basis of information from non-linguistic sources. The idea of a partial mapping between mental concepts and the lexical resources of a language, as well as the assumption that (communicated) concepts must be contextually worked out will be central to the issues discussed in this paper. When necessary, I will operate with an intuitive notion of the linguistically-encoded meaning of a given word, as a starting point for analysing cases of narrowing and broadening of conceptual content. It should be noted that the use of intuitions in deciding on the encoded meaning of a word is a general problem when accounting for lexical meaning, and people may have different intuitions on these matters. However, the outcome of the corpus analyses may provide some indication as to the adequacy of the suggested encoded meanings of the lexical items discussed in this paper.

The paper is structured as follows: In Section 2, some data demonstrating lexical narrowing and broadening are presented. Section 3 focuses on the relevance-theoretic account of communication and its implications for the analysis of lexical-pragmatic processes, while Section 4 presents the analyses of the cross-linguistic data collected from the English-Norwegian Parallel Corpus.

2. Lexical narrowing and broadening

‘Lexical narrowing’ can be seen as a pragmatic process that targets a particular word and strengthens the concept it encodes (Carston 2002a:324). There is thus a restriction of the linguistically-specified denotation, in that the word is used to express a more specific sense. Consider (1):

(1) a. Walking in the mountains requires good shoes
    b. All doctors drink
    c. Susan is happy

In (1a) the communicated sense of the noun shoes is not ‘shoes in general’, but rather a concept which denotes a proper subset of the set of shoes, those suitable for walking in the mountains. The verb drink in (1b) will in most cases not communicate that all doctors ‘drink some liquid or other’, but rather a narrower
concept, such as ‘drink alcohol’ or ‘drink large amounts of alcohol’ (Wilson 2003). In (1c) the adjective happy encodes a general concept that covers a wide range of emotional states (Carston 2002a:324), while the concept communicated by this word on each occasion of use will be more specific.2

‘Lexical broadening’ is the case where the concept communicated is more general and so has a broader denotation than the concept encoded by the linguistic expression; according to relevance theorists, this includes cases that fall under such labels as ‘approximation’, ‘hyperbole’ and ‘metaphor’ (Sperber and Wilson 1985/86; Wilson 2003; Wilson and Carston 2006; 2007). In the case of approximation, a word is used to apply to a penumbra of cases that strictly speaking fall outside the linguistically-specified denotation. Consider (2):

(2) a. The dinner party starts at 8.00 pm
b. My room is square
c. Susan's Norwegian is flawless

In (2a), the concepts encoded by 8.00 pm would normally communicate ‘around 8.00 pm’, while in some contexts, the concept communicated may also be interpreted as meaning ‘8.00 pm or later, but no later than around 8.30 pm’, as it may be considered inappropriate to arrive earlier than the given time but also not acceptable to arrive more than half an hour late for a dinner party. In (2b), the geometrical figure encoded by square is used to convey ‘squarish’, as it is probably never the case that the shape of a room fits the standards of precision required for geometrical figures. The communicated sense of flawless in (2c), would, in the case of approximation, be ‘nearly flawless’ and would apply in a case where Susan’s Norwegian is close to perfect and she only rarely makes a grammatical or idiomatic mistake.3 Hyperbole can be seen as a more radical variety of broadening (Wilson 2003; Wilson and Carston 2007), where the concepts communicated are much broader than the linguistically-specified denotation (e.g. ‘This bag cost a million’ where the expression a million does not, at least in most cases, communicate the actual price of the bag but is used to convey that the bag was ‘very expensive’). In the case of metaphor, the communicated concept extends to items way outside the linguistically-specified denotation. Consider (3):

(3) a. Her performance made me speechless
b. The book was slaughtered by critics
c. John is a financial wizard

In (3a), the adjective speechless is used metaphorically to communicate that the speaker was strongly moved by the performance, while the use of the verb slaughtered in (3b) conveys that the critics did not particularly like the book in question.
The metaphorical use of the noun *wizard* in (3c) contributes to the interpretation that John is very skilled in financial matters.

The nature of the processes contributing to lexical adjustment has been subject to debate between the neo-Gricean camp (e.g. Levinson 2000), and the contextualists (e.g. Carston 1997; 2002a; Recanati 1995; 2004; Wilson 2003). For instance, Levinson analyses narrowing as a kind of context-independent default inference, and broadening (hyperbole and metaphor) as involving overt maxim violation triggering the search for a related implicature. In this respect, narrowing and broadening are taken to be distinct interpretive processes: narrowing is seen as an automatic, local process, whereas broadening is a global process, requiring ‘what is said’ (i.e. the literal, or encoded, meaning) by the utterance to be computed as a whole and then used as a starting point for further inference. Contextualists, however, analyse lexical narrowing and broadening as complementary processes contributing directly to the proposition expressed by an utterance, i.e. to its truth-conditional content. Recent contextualist accounts (Carston 1997; 2002a; Wilson 2003; Wilson and Carston 2007) have argued that narrowing and broadening involve the very same interpretive mechanisms, and may combine in forming a communicated concept. In this approach, narrowing and broadening are treated as local, online processes, applying in the interpretation of individual words. There is thus no need for a full ‘literal’ proposition to be computed before broadening can apply in the interpretation process.

An advantage of treating both broadening and narrowing as contributing to the proposition expressed is the possibility of constructing a unified account of the pragmatic processes involved in lexical interpretation. The details of the relevance-theoretic account of lexical pragmatics are presented in the following section.

3. **Relevance theory and lexical pragmatics**

Relevance-theoretic pragmatics is based on a definition of relevance and two principles: the Cognitive and the Communicative Principles of Relevance. Relevance is a potential property of any input to cognitive processes and is defined in terms of processing effort and cognitive effects, where cognitive effects include contextual implications, strengthenings of assumptions, and eliminations of existing assumptions. (For more detail, see Wilson and Sperber 2004.) Other things being equal, the greater the cognitive effects of an input for an individual who processes it, and the smaller the processing effort required to derive these effects, the greater the relevance of that input to that individual at that time. On the basis of this definition, the two principles are proposed. The Cognitive Principle of Relevance states: “Human Cognition tends to be geared to the maximisation of relevance” (Sperber
and Wilson 1995:260; cf. also Wilson and Sperber 2004). In accordance with the
definition of relevance, this principle predicts that hearers will aim to derive as
many cognitive effects as possible for as little processing effort as possible. The
Communicative Principle of Relevance tells us: “Every act of ostensive commu-
nication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance” (ibid.) It fol-
lows from this principle that the speaker, by the very act of addressing the hearer,
is communicating that her utterance is the most relevant one she could have pro-
duced given her own preferences and abilities. The hearer’s goal then is to find an
interpretation of the speaker’s meaning that meets his expectations of relevance.
The relevance-theoretic comprehension heuristic (Wilson and Sperber 2004:613),
which is applied automatically to verbal input, is motivated by these principles.
According to this procedure, the hearer (1) takes the decoded linguistic meaning,
follows a path of least effort in mutually adjusting explicit content, contextual as-
sumptions and contextual implications, and (2) stops when the interpretation she
arrives at satisfies his expectations of relevance.

The assumption that decoding and inference combine in verbal comprehen-
sion has important consequences for the study of lexical-pragmatic processes,
in that there is no need to assume that every expression encodes a full concept
(a lexical item may just function as a pointer to the concept the speaker wishes
to communicate) or that encoded concepts are necessarily part of the intended
message. Nor is one committed to assuming that every concept communicated by
an utterance could have been encoded (Wilson 1998). Relevance theory assumes
a broadly Fodorian (1981; 1998) model of lexical semantics: most word mean-
ings are not decompositional (i.e. it is not possible to give necessary and suffi-
cient conditions on their meaning), but are simple, unanalysable, atomic concepts,
represented in our ‘language of thought’ (e.g. the word cat encodes the atomic
concept cat). Such mentally-represented concepts consist of an address, or entry,
in memory that may give access to (1) the logical properties of the concept (e.g. a
one-way meaning postulate such as cat ⇒ animal of a certain kind), (2) a set
of assumptions, or encyclopaedic information, about the denotation of the concept
(e.g. ‘cats have four legs’, ‘cats purr’, various kinds of culture-specific information
related to the concept, etc.), and (3) the lexical (i.e. phonological and syntactic)
information related to the linguistic form that encodes the concept (Sperber and
Wilson 1995:85–93). Taking the encoded concept and its associated logical and
encyclopaedic information as input, lexical interpretation typically involves the
construction of an ad hoc concept (i.e. an occasion-specific sense), using the rel-


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and Powell (2006) provide the following example as a brief illustration of how this mutual adjustment process is assumed to work:

(4) A (to B): Be careful. The path is uneven.

The second part of A’s utterance is likely to achieve relevance for B by offering some kind of explanation as to why, or in what way, he should be careful. The concept encoded by uneven is very general (it is probably true of every path), but as B is looking for a particular kind of implication (e.g. he might trip over, he should take small steps, he should keep his eye on the path) he will narrow down the encoded concept uneven so as to arrive at an interpretation compatible with the implication(s) he is searching for. The result is the construction of the ad hoc concept uneven*, whose denotation is significantly narrower than the one encoded. This may be seen as a process of ‘backward’ inference from expected contextual implications to the explicitly expressed proposition containing the ad hoc concept.6

On the relevance-theoretic account, narrowing and broadening are simply different outcomes of a single process of lexical adjustment; they emerge as a by-product of the hearer’s search for relevance and contribute to the explicit content of an utterance. Unlike standard accounts of figurative language, this approach assumes no clear cut-off point between more or less ‘literal’ uses such as approximation and allegedly figurative uses such as hyperbole and metaphor; rather, these are seen as constituting a continuum of cases of broadening, ranging from approximation through hyperbole to more radical cases, such as metaphor (Wilson 2003; Wilson and Carston 2006; 2007).

4. Some cross-linguistic data

The data examined in this study are collected from the English-Norwegian Parallel Corpus (henceforth ENPC), a parallel, bidirectional corpus containing original texts and translations in both languages.7 Searches were made in the English texts (originals and translations) for the following words: happy, dry, and flat. I was interested in investigating words that seem to have more or less equivalent meanings in the two languages in order to see whether the processes of narrowing and broadening apply in similar ways in both cases. I was also interested in investigating how a word that encodes a general concept in one language was translated into a language that does not encode this general concept, hence the choice of the English word happy as a search term. It is obvious, however, that in a contrastive comparison of words in Norwegian and English one can by no means take it for granted that the words chosen are really equivalent in a strict sense. Even though
the words chosen are for the most part listed as equivalent in bilingual dictionar-
ies, it is unlikely that any of these words will give access to the same encyclopa-
dic information for native speakers of English as they will for native speakers of
Norwegian. This is, of course, not only an issue pertaining to speakers of different
languages, but is (following the relevance-theoretic account) a general fact about
comprehension; the contextual assumptions that may be brought to bear on the
interpretation of a given utterance (or a string of words or a single word) vary
across individuals, within individuals and across contexts. It is likely, however, that
speakers of different languages, not only by virtue of their speaking different lan-
guages but also by virtue of differences in cultural references, will often interpret
utterances on the basis of very different background knowledge, and they may in
this respect be more likely to construct different concepts than they would if they
had spoken the same language.

4.1 Narrowing: The case of happy

The English word happy was initially chosen because it seems able to cover a
very wide range of emotional states, and has a wide array of uses (see Carston
2002b:137). Norwegian, on the other hand, does not have a corresponding lexica-

tal item encoding a general concept comparable to that of happy, but has lexical
items which encode a more specific concept or a concept which partially overlaps
with the general concept happy. In the cases in which happy occurs either in the
English original or translation one may therefore expect to find a word encod-
ing a more specific, or only partially overlapping, concept in the corresponding
Norwegian text. The Norwegian translations would in these cases often explicitly
reflect the pragmatic narrowing made by the translators in the course of transla-
tion, although the choice of translation has to be seen as an interplay between such
pragmatic considerations and the linguistic resources of the target language.

Bilingual dictionaries list either glad and lykkelig, or glad, lykkelig and
fornøyd (in this order), as the Norwegian equivalents to happy. The Norwegian
word glad may be said to encode a relatively moderate state of happiness, similar to
the concepts encoded by words such as cheerful or joyful, and it often describes a
temporary emotional state that is subject to change on a day-to-day or a moment-
to-moment basis. Lykkelig, on the other hand, encodes a stronger, more perman-
ent, existential state of happiness, and may for instance be used in an assessment
of the general quality of someone’s life; the occurrence of happy in an utterance
such as ‘She led a happy life’ would in most cases translate into lykkelig in Norwe-
gian, whereas the use of glad in order to describe someone’s life would not only
represent a pragmatic anomaly, but would also be grammatically impossible. The
third Norwegian equivalent to happy, the word fornøyd, may be said to encode a
moderately positive emotional state comparable to those encoded by the English words *pleased*, *satisfied* or *content*. This implies that for each occurrence of *happy* in the English original texts, the corresponding word chosen in the Norwegian translations may be seen as reflecting the pragmatic inferences made by the translator; he or she has to choose a word that encodes a more specific concept, or a concept that only partially overlaps the one encoded by the English word in the original. Thus, while the English reader will, by virtue of lexical-pragmatic processes constrained by expectations of relevance, construct a mental representation of the concept communicated by the word *happy*, the Norwegian text will contain a lexical item whose encoded concept may correspond more or less to what the translator has judged to be the communicated concept in the original text. The encoded sense of this word may, however, also become modified in the course of interpretation and give rise to new mentally-constructed concepts.

4.1.1 *Happy in English originals*
There are 85 occurrences of the lexical item *happy* in the English original texts in the ENPC, of which 81.2 % were treated as cases involving pragmatic narrowing, 14.1 % as requiring a combination of narrowing and broadening and 4.7 % as lexicalised collocations. These are shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of use</th>
<th>Number of occurrences in the ENPC</th>
<th>Frequency in %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrowing</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>81.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrowing + metaphorical extension</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexicalised collocations</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>85</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given the general concept encoded by *happy* in English, the high frequency of lexical narrowing is hardly surprising, but a detailed analysis of the corpus data revealed that the direction of narrowing varies from one context to another. This is also revealed by the Norwegian translations. Compare (5)–(7):

(5) When he licks you that’s his way of sayin’ I likes you and you makes me *happy*. (MM1) / Når han slikker deg, sier han egentlig “jeg liker deg, og du gjør meg *glad*”.

(6) She would pass through the rooms where she’d been so *happy* all these years. (AT1) / Hun vil gå igjennom de rommene der hun hadde vært så *lykkelig* alle disse årene.
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(7) She had never wanted children, and would have been quite happy on her own, with her numerous activities to fill up her spare time. (AB1) / Hun hadde aldri ønsket seg barn, og ville ha vært fornøyd med å leve alene, med sine utallige aktiviteter å fylle fritiden med.

In (5) happy communicates the instantaneous state of happiness experienced by a dog upon encountering a human being, which is a concept much narrower than the linguistically-encoded one. We may represent this ad hoc concept as HAPPY*. The Norwegian translation contains the word glad, which may be said to encode a relatively moderate, time-constrained state of happiness. The concept communicated by use of this word, however, is probably narrower than the encoded one; that is, the ad hoc concept GLAD* (equivalent to HAPPY*) may be said to cover the instantaneous kind of happiness experienced by dogs. In the context of (6) happy communicates a more stable, permanent state of happiness, related to a specific period of time in the life of the speaker, a concept we may represent as HAPPY**. The Norwegian translation contains the word lykkelig, which, as we have been suggesting, seems to encode a more permanent state of happiness. The result is that the concept communicated by the word lykkelig in (6), does not deviate in any noteworthy way from the concept linguistically-encoded by the Norwegian translation, and so this may be an occasion in which lykkelig is used in its more or less literal sense, communicating the concept LYKKELIG. One may see this as a case in which the concept encoded by the source text undergoes a process of narrowing in the course of translation, and the resulting translation therefore does not require the same adjustment on the part of the hearer as is required by the original text. Here the translation in fact seems to encode what is communicated by the original text, and in this sense the distinction between semantics and pragmatics (applied to the English text) is made visible in the relation between original text and translation. In (7) the concept communicated by use of the word happy is also narrower than the one encoded, but again the process of narrowing takes a different direction than in the previous examples. The concept communicated in this case, the ad hoc concept HAPPY***, denotes a state of satisfaction with regard to a state of affairs, and need not involve any feelings of ‘happiness’ as such. The Norwegian translation fornøyd encodes an emotional state comparable to the one communicated by happy in the English original, and may in this case be said to communicate its encoded concept FORNØYD, for the same reasons as in example (6) above.

Given the general concept encoded by happy, this word will rarely be used in its ‘literal’ sense.15 This implies that the concept expressed by use of this word will almost always be narrower than the general concept encoded. This is not to say, however, that the encoded concept cannot also undergo broadening in the course of interpretation. Consider the occurrences of happy in (8):
In all of these cases, the encoded concept has to undergo both narrowing and broadening in constructing the relevant ad hoc concept. If we assume that the encoded sense of happy is something along the lines of 'a positive state of mind, arising from satisfaction with one’s circumstances or condition', we would have to treat these examples as cases of broadening, since states of mind are in general properties of living kinds and can hardly be said to be properties of abstract terms such as the ones found in (8). So the encoded sense of happy needs to be narrowed in each case in order to specify the appropriate kind of happy, and, for the concept to apply to non-living kinds as well as to living kinds it needs to be broadened by metaphorical extension. The fact that both processes seem to be required in forming a communicated concept supports the relevance-theoretic view that narrowing and broadening are the outcomes of a single process that fine-tunes the interpretation of individual words.

As for the translation of these uses of happy, all but one have become lykkelig in the Norwegian translations:

\[(9) \text{ lykkelig liv; lykkelig tid; lykkelig ekteskap; lykkelig oppvekst; lykkelig barndom; lykkelige år; lykkelig slutt; godt forvarsel}\]

In (9), glad could have been used instead of lykkelig, with varying pragmatic acceptability, in collocation with the translations of time, growth and childhood, while fornøyd is not pragmatically acceptable in collocation with any of the abstract nouns in (9). The choice of translations here seems to be the result of an interaction between morpho-syntactic factors (glad cannot be used in combination with neuter singular nouns such as liv, ekteskap and forvarsel), and pragmatic considerations. What seems to be the main motivation for the choice of lykkelig as a modifier in (9) is the various ways in which the abstract nouns (with the exception of slutt and forvarsel) all encode representations of (longer) periods of time. This may confirm the intuition that the varying degree of durability associated with the state of mind encoded by lykkelig, glad and fornøyd is indeed part of their linguistically-encoded meaning.

### 4.1.2 Happy in English translations

In the preceding section, we saw that translation from English into Norwegian involved a sort of explicit narrowing of the concept encoded by happy in the English originals. Since the corpus searches included all occurrences of happy in both English originals and translations, the concepts encoded in the English translations should therefore be broader than the ones expressed and encoded in the
Norwegian originals. The question one might ask, then, is whether readers of the English translation, who are likely to narrow the interpretation of happy during the translation process, will end up with the same concept as the one communicated by the more specific word in the Norwegian original. Consider (10)–(13):

(10) Jacob var en glad klovn. (HW2) / Jacob was a happy clown.

(11) Det er ikke noe annet enn din egen gåte du ser; den gjør deg bare trist og lykkelig. (EFH1) / You see nothing but your own enigma; that just makes you sad and happy.

(12) Når han kommer tilbake har bestefaren allerede spist fire fiskekaker og virker fornøyd. (LSC1) / When he comes back, Grandfather has already eaten four fish cakes and looks happy.

(13) Han var tilfreds dersom han greide å drepe byttet på en brukbar måte. (JM1) / He was happy if he managed a clean kill.

In each of (10)–(13) the Norwegian original words are translated by an English word that has a broader linguistically-specified denotation, a result of the fact that the two languages differ in the means by which the concept in question can be expressed. However, the English reader will, of course, narrow down the concept encoded by happy in each case, so as to arrive at an ad hoc concept that fits the expectations of relevance raised in the overall context. That happy communicates a different concept in each case can also be seen in the original texts, as happy is used as a translation of four different Norwegian terms encoding more specific concepts, all of which may themselves be narrowed down further in the relevant contexts. In (12) for instance, fornøyd will be narrowed down to the ad hoc concept FORNØYD*, indicating that the grandfather has had enough food, that he is full. This sense does not seem to be equally accessible in the English translation although it would be one of the possible interpretations primed by use of the word happy. In this case one may therefore speak of a genuine loss of specificity in the English translation. However, the fact that in the English translations, happy is used to express a wide range of different concepts communicated by the Norwegian originals does not necessarily mean that the English reader misses out on some of the meanings that are encoded or expressed in the Norwegian texts. Given a powerful enough pragmatics this should not pose any particular problems for the general interpreter. Gutt (2000) treats translation as interlingual interpretive use of language. Interpretive use of language as defined by Sperber and Wilson (1995) takes place when a mental representation with a given propositional form is used to represent some other representation, also having a propositional form, “in virtue of a resemblance between the two propositional forms” (ibid.:228–229). According to Gutt (2000:107), a translation should resemble the original “in
respects that make it adequately relevant to the audience — that is, that offer adequate contextual effects.” This implies that the translation should resemble the original in such a way that it yields the intended interpretation without putting the readers to unnecessary processing effort. Relating this to the present case, the use of happy as a translation of a Norwegian word encoding a much more specific concept should in most cases be unproblematic; happy is a word of high frequency (it occurs 11,340 times in the British National Corpus) and should not cause any particular processing difficulties as the English reader will, on each occasion, take the encoded concept as input and mutually adjust both explicit and implicit content in the search for an optimally relevant interpretation, as a result of which the concept encoded by happy is pragmatically adjusted. However, because the structure of the vocabularies of English and Norwegian is different, English readers do not get as much guidance as Norwegian readers of the original, and it would depend on constraints imposed by context and expectations of relevance whether English readers will end up with concepts as specific as the ones constructed by Norwegian readers.

4.2 Narrowing and broadening combined: The case of dry

Relevance theory assumes that most word meanings are simple unanalysable, atomic concepts, i.e. their meanings do not decompose into definitions. It seems clear, however, that in order to determine whether the concept expressed by a word has undergone narrowing or broadening, one needs to have some sort of intuition or evidence about what the encoded meaning of the word may be. For the adjective dry and its Norwegian equivalent tørr, the delimitation of their respective encoded meanings reduced to a considerable extent the cases in which it was possible to speak of a literal use of the two words.

The OED Online defines the word dry, when used to describe a physical quality, as “destitute of or free from moisture; not wet or moist; arid; of the eyes, free from tears”. In Bokmålsordlista the equivalent Norwegian term tørr is also defined negatively, as ‘not containing or not covered by moist’. It therefore seemed sensible to assume that the literal meaning of dry and tørr was free of moisture. As to the definition given in the OED Online, I considered dry when used to describe the eyes to be a loose use of the word, hence not part of its encoded meaning.

The example in (14) was considered a case in which dry and tørr convey the same literal senses, that is, as communicating ‘free of moisture’:

(14) Paul built a small fire on the dry stones of the creek bed. (TH1) / Paul gjorde opp et lite bål på de tørrste steinene i bunnen av bekkefaret.
However, if the literal meaning of *dry* is ‘strictly no moisture’, the following cases have to be treated as approximations, or even hyperboles:20

(15) “You look a lot better with your hair *dry*”, he said. (AH1) / “De tar Dem mye bedre ut med *tørt* hår,” sa han.

(16) He threw small *dry* branches on it. (TH1) / Han kastet på noen små, *tørre* kvister.

(17) “Never”, he said with *dry* lips. / “Aldri”, sa han med *tøre* lepper. (OEL1)

The examples above have in common that *dry* and *tørr* are used to describe (various parts of) living things, which are all largely composed of water. If we assume that there is a strict literal meaning of *dry* and *tørr*, there will almost always be an element of approximation (or hyperbole) when they are applied to living things. In the examples above, neither *dry hair*, *dry branches* nor *dry lips* are strictly and literally true, and should therefore be treated as approximations or hyperboles. However, there also seems to be an element of narrowing involved in each of these cases. In (15) and (17), the adjective *dry* used in the collocations *dry hair* and *dry lips* convey ‘almost free of surface moisture’, while the use of *dry* in *dry branches* in (16) may convey ‘almost free of internal moisture’ or ‘almost free of surface moisture’, or both. The fact that the distribution or the source of the moisture needs to be specified may therefore be seen as a type of narrowing.

The investigation of *dry* and *tørr* showed a very high correspondence between the English and Norwegian texts with regard to the use of these words in the ENPC. The concept encoded by these words is often subject to approximation or hyperbole in both languages and they are frequently used in metaphorical expressions, as illustrated by (18)–(21):

(18) Oliver bowed to her and said: “Behold, madam, the *dry* monk and the damp sinner.” (JB1) / Oliver bukket til henne og sa: “Vær hilset, frue, fra den *tørre* munk og den fuktige synder.

(19) … still he was a tempting, enigmatic man, not *dry* or beaten like the other men she knew. (JC1) / … fortsatt var han en tiltrekkende, spennende mann, ikke noen *tørr* taper, slik som de andre mennene hun kjente. (JCIT)

(20) … that caused Dorothy to make *dry* remarks, which Harriet felt like accusations. (DL1) / … som fikk Dorothy til å komme med noen *tørre* bemerkninger, som Harriet følte som en anklage.

(21) Felt how empty and *dry* I was. / Kjente hvor hul og *tørr* jeg var. (EHA1)

According to the relevance-theoretic account of metaphor, the hearer drops the logical content, i.e. ‘free of moisture’, and constructs an *ad hoc* concept on the basis
of encyclopaedic information made accessible by the concept, guided by expecta-
tions of relevance raised by the utterance itself. In each of (18)–(21) a different
ad hoc concept is constructed based on information made accessible by the en-
cyclopaedic entry of the concept encoded by the words dry and tørr. In (18) dry
conveys ‘abstaining from alcohol’; in (19) it conveys ‘boring’; in (20) it may convey
‘sarcastic’ or ‘sardonic’ and in (21) it is used to convey ‘depressed’. It is interesting
that metaphorical uses as diverse as these may be fully transferable between Eng-
lish and Norwegian; this indicates that there is a considerable overlap in the kind
of information made accessible by these words in the two languages.

As the examples above indicate, dry and tørr occur in a number of different
discourse contexts in the ENPC. Table 2 gives a rough overview of these contexts:

Table 2. Types of contexts in which dry and tørr occur and their respective frequencies in
the ENPC.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>English originals</th>
<th>English translations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>of season or climate</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of persons</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of food and drink</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of human-made sounds</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of sounds</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of the human body</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of abstention from alcohol</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of speech</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of nature</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of utensils</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of emotion</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of cultural landscape</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of house/household</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of office supplies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of personal qualities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of quality of life</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of hardship</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of tobacco</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>64*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* There are 66 occurrences of dry in the English translations, of which 64 correspond to tørr in the Norwe-
gian originals.

The variety of contexts in which dry and tørr occur illustrates a great flexibility of
lexical–pragmatic processes. There is also considerable variation in the kind of con-
cepts expressed by dry and tørr within the contexts described by Table 2. Consider:
(22) I pulled my hood down and my hair was dry; Oliver’s was still soaking wet.

(23) … the oven that will bring profit, money, fresh bread, meat and fish to the listless youngsters around her, bring back the shine to the dry reddish hair…

Dry and tørr communicate different concepts in (22) and (23) even though they collocate with hair in both cases. In both (22) and (23), dry and tørr are used as approximations or hyperboles. The concept expressed by use of these words in (22), however, does not involve the same kind of physical dryness as the one in (23); while the ‘dryness’ expressed in (22) is external to the hair, the one in (23) is internal to it, and may also convey that the hair in question is damaged. How does the addressee decide on which concept to construct in each case? As we have already seen, the construction of different concepts in the case of (22) and (23) is, following relevance theory, triggered by the search for relevance. The reader follows a path of least effort in mutually adjusting contextual assumptions, explicit content and cognitive effects in order to arrive at an interpretation that satisfies his expectations of relevance. The kind of context-dependence manifested in these examples would prove difficult to explain without a notion of relevance-driven pragmatic inference.

4.3 Approximation, hyperbole and metaphor: The case of flat

Lewis (1983:245–246) analyses the word flat as an absolute term. By this he means that it is “inconsistent to say that something is flatter than something that is flat”. When we speak of the pavement as flat and our desk as flatter, it is because, according to Lewis, the standards of precision are different in each case. Assuming that flat is indeed an absolute term, one should not expect to find many literal uses of the word. The investigation of this term in the ENPC confirmed this hypothesis.

Table 3. The frequencies of the uses of the lexical item flat occurring in the English texts in the ENPC.
There are no literal uses of this word in the English texts in the ENPC; it is used as an approximation or hyperbole in 66% of the cases in the English originals and in 71% in the translations. The directions and degrees this process may take are diverse. Consider:

(24) To begin with he was unattractive, with a reddish face, flat hair, and uneasy eyes. (AB1) / Til å begynne med var han lite tiltrekkende, med rødsprengt ansikt, flatt hår og usikre øyne.

(25) Though blurred eyes he saw the tufts of grass spilling up between the flat stones. (MM1) / Gjennom tårevåte øyne så han gresstustene mellom de flate steinene.

(26) Rembrandt clothed Homer with simple brushstrokes that were broad and flat… (JH1) / Rembrandt kledde på Homer med enkle penselstrøk som var brede og flate…

(27) His upper lip was thin and flat… / Overleppen var tynn og flat… (BV1)

(28) He couldn't know whether her breasts were round or flat. / Han kunne ikke vite om hun har runde eller flate bryst. (CL1)

Here flat is used as an approximation or hyperbole both in English and Norwegian in five different contexts, and again there is a high correspondence between the two languages with respect to the use of this word. This is shown in Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of occurrences in the ENPC</th>
<th>Frequency in %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Correspondence</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-correspondence</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table shows that in 73% of the cases where the English original text has the word flat, we also find flat (in one of its forms) in the Norwegian translation. In 27% of the cases, however, the Norwegian translator has chosen another word as a translation of flat in the English original. A closer investigation showed that in 9 out of 11 cases of non-correspondence between the English and Norwegian texts with regard to the use of flat, this word is used in a metaphorical sense in English. Consider:

(29) She felt very flat, going to bed after all the gaiety… (RDA1) / Hun følte seg veldig tom ['empty'] ved tanken på å gå til sengs etter lystigheten…
(30) Jess’s voice was confident and flat, without resonance, as if everything he might say would be the simple truth. (JSM1) / Stemmen til Jess var trygg og rolig [‘calm’], som om alt han sa ganske enkelt var sant.

The use of flat as a translation of the English word flat in (29)–(30) would give very odd results in Norwegian. In (29), this would have communicated that the person in question had no particular feelings at all about ‘going to bed after all the gaiety’, while in (30) the use of flat as a collocate of trygg [‘confident, secure’] would be close to representing a pragmatic anomaly. Although our data have shown so far a great flexibility of lexical-pragmatic processes and also a high correspondence between English and Norwegian in the ways in which these processes apply, this indicates that there are limits as to their flexibility. In the Norwegian translations in (29) and (30) the use of flat would not yield the intended cognitive effects for the Norwegian readers, and the translator has chosen a word that s/he judges to be more apt to communicate the meaning expressed in the original text. This may be because there is no information made accessible by the concept encoded by Norwegian flat that is compatible with or relevant enough to the overall interpretation of the utterances in (29) and (30), or because this information is not accessible enough to be appropriately used. This indicates that the concepts encoded by these apparently identical words may give access to different encyclopaedic information, or to similar information organised in different ways in the two languages. The use of Norwegian flat as a metaphor is, however, licensed in the following case:

(31) Now she sounded listless, flat, all the incandescence of fury gone. (DL2) / Nå hørtes hun matt og flat, som om det lysende raseriet hadde brent ut i henne.

Why is the use of Norwegian flat as a metaphor acceptable here but not in (29) or (30)? In this case it seems that the concept encoded by the Norwegian word flat does give access to encyclopaedic information that yields the expected relevance in this context. We saw in (29) that flat could not be used to express the feeling of sadness and emptiness that was communicated by the original, but would instead have expressed a feeling of indifference had it been used in the Norwegian translation. As a consequence, the translator had to choose the word tom [‘empty’]. In (31) however, flat is used both in English and Norwegian to express a feeling of indifference, and this seems to be what makes the use of flat in the Norwegian translation acceptable. The word matt in the Norwegian text also guides the addressee towards this intended interpretation of flat. This case illustrates the context dependence of metaphor construction, while the examples in (29)–(30) show that similar lexical encodings in the two languages do not necessarily provide the same possibilities for lexical broadening.
5. Summary and conclusions

The corpus investigations of the words *happy*, *dry*, and *flat* and their Norwegian equivalents raised some interesting issues.

First, the investigation of *happy* in the English originals revealed that the Norwegian translator was forced, by lack of a sufficiently comparable general expression in Norwegian, to use a more specific, or only partially overlapping, expression in the translation, which thereby explicitly reflects the direction and degree of pragmatic narrowing undertaken in the translator’s comprehension of the original text. The investigation of *happy* in English translations raised the question of whether the English and Norwegian readers may be said to end up with similar concepts as a result of relevance-driven pragmatic inference, in cases where the concepts encoded in the target and source text differed in terms of specificity. It was assumed that, given a powerful enough pragmatics, this should not pose any particular problems for the general interpreter. However, because the structure of the vocabularies of English and Norwegian is different, it would depend on constraints imposed by context and expectations of relevance whether English readers will end up constructing similar or different concepts in the course of interpretation. In the case of *happy*, the result seemed to be that in some cases there was a genuine loss of specificity in the translation from Norwegian into English.

Second, the corpus investigations of *dry* and *flat* revealed that in many cases, the distinction between approximation and hyperbole was very difficult to draw. Collocations such as *dry mouth, dry steak, flat hair* and *flat stones* may all be treated either as approximations or as hyperboles depending upon the expectations of relevance raised by the overall context in which they occur. The fact that there seems to be a gradient of uses supports the relevance-theoretic view that there is no clear cut-off point between ‘relatively literal’ cases such as approximation, and allegedly ‘figurative’ ones such as hyperbole.

Third, the corpus investigations revealed that the problem of accounting for the encoded meaning of lexical items is a genuine one. In the case of *dry* and *flat*, the delimitation of their assumed encoded meanings had as a consequence that there were very few cases in which these words could be said to be used in their ‘literal’ senses; in the case of *flat*, no such uses were in fact observed. In the case of *happy*, the very general concept encoded by this word made it difficult to decide on its exact meaning in English. I therefore ended up with a very general notion of the encoded meaning of the word; the corpus analysis consequently revealed no clear cases of *happy* used in its encoded sense. One might therefore ask whether it was sensible to operate with such strict or loose delimitations of the encoded meanings of these words, if the consequence was that these meanings never, or only very rarely, figure as part of the propositions expressed by the utterances in
which the linguistic forms that encode them occur. It may seem equally problem-
atic that one must to a large extent rely on intuitions in order to determine the
linguistically-encoded meaning of a given word, and that the subsequent analysis
is dependent upon which meaning one decides on. However, the fact that linguis-
tically encoded meanings often prove very difficult to pin down should come as
no surprise given the number of concepts that a single word may be used to com-
municate in different situations.\textsuperscript{21}

Finally, I believe this study shows how parallel corpora may provide useful
data for the study of lexical pragmatics, not only because they facilitate and make
accessible the comparison of original texts and translations, but also because they
may give insights into the pragmatic inferences made by translators in the course
of translation. These valuable sources of data should be further explored in future
studies of lexical narrowing and broadening.

Notes

* This work was originally an MA Dissertation submitted to the University of London. I am
grateful to Robyn Carston for very helpful comments on previous drafts of the present paper
and to Deirdre Wilson for her supervision and encouragement during the writing of the dis-
sertation. I also thank two anonymous referees for useful comments and suggestions, which
helped improve the paper.

1. Sperber and Wilson (1998) distinguish between words that do not encode concepts at all (e.g.
indexicals), words that seem to encode what they call ‘pro-concepts’, by which they mean words
that have some conceptual content but whose semantic contribution must be contextually speci-
fied (e.g. \textit{my}, \textit{have}, \textit{near}, \textit{long}), and words that might be said to encode full-fledged concepts.
Their central claim is that all words, whether they encode full concepts or not, behave as though
they encoded a pro-concept, in that the concepts they are used to convey on different occasions
are contextually determined.

2. Levinson (2000:37) discusses narrowing in terms of context-independent default inference,
but this approach could, at best, only apply to cases of stereotypical narrowing. See Wilson
(2003) for a critical discussion of Levinson’s account.

3. Lewis (1983:245) analyses approximation as a kind of pragmatic vagueness involving con-
text-dependent variations in the standards of precision determining when a sentence is ‘true
enough’. This account has been criticised by relevance-theorists (see Wilson 2003) for lacking
an explanation of how speakers and hearers decide on the appropriate standard of precision on
a given occasion. What may count as ‘true enough’ often depends on the direction of approxi-
mentation (e.g. the utterance in (2a) would not have counted as true enough had the dinner party
started at 7.30 pm) and there are often variations across individuals (e.g. some people might
not consider (2a) as a true assertion if the dinner party starts at 8.45 pm, while others would).
Lasersohn (1999) takes a similar point of view to that of Lewis, and similarly does not explain
how the hearer decides on the direction of broadening or the context-dependence of variations in standards of precision.


5. This term was first introduced by Barsalou (1987). I am following the convention of marking *ad hoc* concepts with an asterisk.


7. The ENPC can be found at http://www.hf.uio.no/ilos/forskning/forskningsprosjekter/enpc/. In the examples, the reference to the corpus accompanies the original version.

8. The fact that the Norwegian equivalents may be only partially overlapping with happy in their encoded conceptual content was pointed out by one of the reviewers. This seems a likely possibility, but investigations as to what extent and in what ways these encoded concepts are only partially overlapping is beyond the scope of this paper. One method for determining whether lexical items in two languages have fully or partially overlapping denotations is described in Behrens and Fabricius-Hansen (2003). This point is, however, tangential to the issue I am addressing here, since whether the Norwegian equivalents to happy are taken to encode more specific or only partially overlapping concepts, the translation into Norwegian would still reflect the way in which happy has been interpreted by the translator.


11. In fact, the adjective glad cannot be used to modify a neuter singular noun in Norwegian. One might ask to what extent this lack of grammaticality may have been motivated by semantic factors.

12. This word may also be used to denote another kind of satisfaction; an utterance such as ‘I’ve had enough’ would in many cases translate into Norwegian as ‘jeg er fornøyd’ whose literal meaning is ‘I’m satisfied’. I have chosen not to regard this meaning as encoded by the word fornøyd because the recovery of this second sense seems to be entirely dependent upon pragmatic factors.

13. These cases included lexicalised collocations such as *Happy Birthday* and *Happy New Year*. These collocations may in fact be analysed as cases of lexicalised metaphorical uses, but they were disregarded in the general analysis.

14. I am assuming the relevance-theoretic notion of context as a psychological construct, as a “subset of the hearer’s assumptions about the world” (Sperber and Wilson 1995:15–16). This includes assumptions derived from observations of the physical environment, the hearer’s encyclopaedic knowledge, memories and beliefs as well as the preceding linguistic context. In the case of face-to-face conversation, aspects of the speaker–hearer physical environment may play...
a crucial contextual role, while, clearly, in the case of translating texts it is assumptions derived from the preceding linguistic context which will be most important.

15. The use of happy in questions such as e.g. ‘How many happy people are there in the world at this moment?’ may be an exception.

16. It should be noted that many of these collocations, including happy life, happy marriage, happy ending etc. are very common, and that treating them all as cases of metaphorical extension may not necessarily be the best solution.

17. This is obviously a result of the way in which the corpus searches were conducted. English has, of course, other more specific encodings as well, such as e.g. joyful, contented, cheerful, pleased. A more comprehensive search would doubtless show up cases where these more specific words are used in similar contexts.


20. In many cases it is difficult to determine whether the ad hoc concept in question is an approximation or a hyperbole, and I have therefore chosen not to distinguish between these two uses in the analyses in 4.2 and 4.3.

21. One way of addressing the problem of accounting for the encoded meaning of lexical items could be to take the relevance-theoretic view (according to which some words merely encode pointers to the concept the speaker has in mind on a given occasion of use) one step further, and assume that all words encode nothing more than pointers to bundles of information (hence do not encode concepts). This possibility is currently being explored in the literature (see Carston 2002a:Chapter 5; Recanati 2004:Chapter 9; Bosch 2007).

References


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