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# **Translating Culture-Specific Metonymy: A Scenes-and-Frames Semantic Analysis**

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# 1 Introduction

As Barack Obama stood in Chicago before a crowd of an estimated 240,000 people on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November, 2008 to give his victory speech in the 2008 United States (US) Presidential election, he was aware that the world was watching. He knew that his speech would be recorded, transcribed and translated for the international community to hear the message the first African American elected to the US Presidency would deliver on his triumphant night. Yet the speech, carefully written by Obama's speechwriters who are credited with writing some of the most rousing speeches in recent political history, was primarily intended for a singular audience: the American people, those who were responsible for his election to the office of the Presidency. In the speech, Obama transports the message that his victory story is the very story of the American dream, a story (or rather, an entire system of beliefs) engrained in the collective consciousness of the American people. One way in which Obama effectively invokes this story is by using metonymy to reference a series of American scenes, historical events and figures which are well-known to the American people and emblemize this American dream. This story is, though certainly generally known to his international audience, particular to the American people, presenting a challenge to the translators who must decide how to transfer Obama's message, and specifically his use of metonyms, to an audience not possessing of this consciousness.

This paper will address the following questions: How can a translator produce a comprehensible translation of a text designed for one specific audience for an audience with an entirely different set of experiences? Furthermore, is it more important to retain the stylistic aspects of a speech (such as metonymy) at the expense of comprehension on the part of those reading that speech, or is security in comprehension more important than retaining the stylistic factors that are so often at the core of stirring speeches? Using as a basis Charles Fillmore's scenes-and-frames semantics (1977) as well as Mia Vannerem and Mary Snell-Hornby's application of scenes-and-frames semantics to the field of translation (1986), this paper will examine two German-language translations of Obama's 2008 victory speech, specifically with respect to the decisions of the translators when translating

metonymy. After an analysis of these translation decisions, a recommendation will be given as to the best approach to the translation of culture-specific metonymy.

## 2 Scenes-and-frames semantics: an overview

Scenes-and-frames semantics was introduced in 1977 by Charles Fillmore as a novel approach to understanding meaning and how people communicate with one another in a comprehensible manner. He departs from the traditional componential model of analysis common in transformational grammar, which Fillmore calls the “checklist theory of meaning” (1977: 55), whereby categories are determined by a componential analysis, or as Mia Vannerem and Mary Snell-Hornby describe it, “die herkömmlichen Ermittlung der Bedeutung aus der Addition von Komponenten” (1986: 185). This approach conjectures that humans assign a linguistic unit, i.e. a word, to all cases that satisfy a checklist of components that make up the features of that case. The classic example first given by Katz and Fodor (1963) of the meaning of the word *bachelor* can be displayed using the following “checklist”:

- (+) human
- (+) male
- (+) adult
- (+) unmarried

The plus-signs before the components indicate that in order for a person to be considered a bachelor, he must fulfill all of these components. The concept *bachelor*, however, extends far beyond the four above-listed components, as the mere fulfillment of these four criteria to determine the bachelorhood of a certain human adult male would entail that Popes can also be considered bachelors, an entailment that would certainly not be supported by the common native English speaker. It would also be largely uncommon to call an 18-year-old unmarried male a bachelor for reasons concerning the Westernized view of maturity and an acceptable age to get married. The problem that arises now concerns the number of components required in order to sufficiently provide the full scope of the meaning of *bachelor* and exclude everything that does not fit under bachelorhood. Critics, including Fillmore, argue that this approach does not correspond to what happens in reality, when people must decide what category to assign to novel cases.

Fillmore asserts that instead of attempting to determine the boundary conditions for a category, it is more important to find out “what it is that a speaker of the language needs to know in order to use the word appropriately” (1977: 68), which can be more effectively achieved with prototype semantics, an approach adopted in linguistics from the psychologist Eleanor Rosch (1973). Instead of using a set number of components to determine what cases fits into which categories, a speaker has a certain “innately available” prototype of this category in his mind. This prototype develops experientially, i.e. through individual experience. In the case of a prototypical tree, for example, the region in which one grew up and the trees that are predominant in that region will most likely be the tree after which a person’s prototype is modeled. A prototypical tree for a Hawaiian may be a palm tree, whereas a maple tree may be the prototype for a Wisconsinite. Cultural differences also play a role in determining prototypes, and in the bachelor case, the prototypical bachelor is based upon “a set of presuppositions that represent common assumptions about the normal course of a man’s life in Western society” (Coulson 2001: 18), which accounts for the fact that very young men as well as Popes are, independent of a bachelor checklist, not considered bachelors.

In order to assign a category to a novel case, a speaker ultimately compares the new case to his prototypes and decides in which prototype the new case fits the best “in some sufficiently satisfying way” (Fillmore 1977: 55-56). This may not include all components most commonly associated with the category, but this category simply fits the best out of all possible choices. This explains why a person who sees a six-foot tall yellow object in the shape of a lemon may decide to call it a “giant lemon,” although the size of the lemon would certainly rule it out as being a lemon according to a checklist theory containing sufficient-condition statements that make up how a lemon must be in order to be considered a lemon (Scriven 1959: 859 f.). A single set of defining attributes is no longer required as categories are considered in Gestalt-like concepts, i.e. as conceptual wholes and not broken down into their individual components (Fillmore 1977: 60; Geeraerts 2002: 289).

According to Fillmore, the experiential nature of prototypes is what most determines knowledge of a category: “Because of the fact that it is personally meaningful its

recurrence – or the occurrence later on of something similar to it – will be recognized” (1977: 62). He thereby developed scenes-and-frames semantics as an approach in analyzing how the experiential nature of prototypes plays an important role in the communication and comprehension process. The so-called scenes are not only defined in the traditional, visual sense, but as

familiar kinds of interpersonal transactions, standard scenarios, familiar layouts, institutional structures, enactive experiences, body image; and, in general, any kind of coherent segment, large or small, of human beliefs, actions, experiences, or imaginings. (1977: 63)

The frame refers to “any system of linguistic choices - the easiest cases being collections of words, but also including choices of grammatical rules or grammatical categories – that can get associated with prototypical instances of scenes” (1977: 63). Scenes and frame are able to mutually activate each other (1977: 63), meaning, for example, that the frame *pencil* will activate the scene of a prototypical *pencil* (whose color, size, etc. will depend on the speaker’s personal experience with pencils), and the scene *pencil* (which, for example, the speaker sees lying the table) activates the frame (i.e. the word) *pencil*. The associations between frames and scenes develop as language competence develops, and the scenes that are activated by the frames vary from speaker to speaker, depending on their individual experiences. Those accustomed to mechanical pencils may conjure a dark, metal-cased pencil upon the activation of this particular scene, whereas a young child first learning to write may think of a standard wooden pencil with a large eraser on the end. Furthermore, the level of abstraction among adults for scenes such as *writing* will be much greater than among children, who may activate a specific scene of sitting at their desks in school and learning how to write under the instruction of one particular teacher. An adult will most likely have a much more abstract scene of *writing* in mind, with many of the details of the scene “left blank”, due to his wide array of experience with the concept *writing* (1977: 63). Frames may also activate other frames, and scenes may activate other scenes – the frame *pencil* may, for example, activate the frame *eraser*, which each in turn activates its corresponding scenes. These corresponding scenes (a prototypical pencil and eraser) can then activate further, perhaps more complex scenes, such as *writing*. Meaning is thus an interlinked web of frames and scenes that create coherency in communication (1977: 66).

### 3 The application of scenes-and-frames semantics in metonymy translation

Mia Vannerem and Mary Snell-Hornby were the first to recognize the value of scenes-and-frames semantics as it applies to research in the field of translation, and, in particular, how this approach could help to shed light on the creative role of the translator (1986: 189). As the author of the source text (ST) composes a text, he has certain intentions; he has certain cognitive scenes that he would like to activate with certain frames. Now it is the task of the translator to transfer not only the frames but also the intended accompanying scenes to the target text (TT), a task which carries with it challenges pertaining to more than just his level of competence in the source language (SL) and target language (TL):

Als spezifisches Problem des Übersetzer kommt hinzu, daß er als Nicht-Muttersprachler möglicherweise nicht die *scenes* aktiviert, wie es der Muttersprachler tun würde oder wie es der Autor beabsichtigt hat, da die von einem *frame* aktivierten *scenes* sehr eng mit der Soziokultur des betreffenden Sprachbenutzers verbunden sind. (Vannerem et al. 1986: 190)

Just as the individual experiences of the author plays an important role in his individual activations of frames and scenes, the experiences of the translator affect which scenes are activated when he encounters certain frames in the ST. These activated scenes, in turn, influence the decisions the translator makes as he attempts to find the appropriate frames in the TL that will activate the intended scenes among speakers of the TL. These challenges thus require the translator to have sufficient background knowledge of the topic at hand and the ability to transfer these scenes by the use of appropriate frames in the TT without allowing his own subjective interpretation of the text to dominate over the original intention of the author (1986: 190).

The case of metonymy presents an even more daunting challenge for the translator as he determines which frames to choose in the TL that will effectively activate the intended frames. While there are several approaches to defining metonymy, this paper will follow the definition given by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980: 35), who define metonymy, and its contrast to metaphor, by first presenting the following example:

The *ham sandwich* is waiting for his check.

In this case, the ham sandwich does not refer to the sandwich itself, but the person who ordered (and presumably ate) the sandwich. Metonymy is different from metaphor in that it serves a referential function; it is not used to invoke a comparison, as the qualities of the ham sandwich are not intended to be compared to the person who ordered it. Instead, the ham sandwich “allows us to use one entity to *stand for* another” (1980: 36). *The ham sandwich* is a case of THE PART FOR THE WHOLE metonymy, where one aspect (the ham sandwich) of the whole (the person who ordered the ham sandwich) is chosen to refer to the whole, because this is the aspect that the speaker determined requires the most focus (1980: 36). In this case, it is easy to see why *ham sandwich* was chosen, as the amount of the check will depend on the price of the ham sandwich this person ordered.

Other common examples of metonymy include the following (examples taken from Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 38-39):

PRODUCER FOR PRODUCT

He bought a *Ford*.

I hate to read *Heidegger*.

CONTROLLER FOR CONTROLLED

*Nixon* bombed Hanio.

*Napoleon* lost at Waterloo.

THE PLACE FOR THE EVENT

Let's not let Thailand become another *Vietnam*.

*Pearl Harbor* still has an effect on our foreign policy.

When taking into account the cultural backgrounds and individual experiences of the ST author, the translator, and the readers of the TT, the challenges in metonymy translation become evident. For the frame *Ford* in *He bought a Ford*, the reader must have gained the necessary experience to be aware that the company *Ford* is a producer of automobiles, and therefore *Ford* refers to an automobile produced by the Ford company. While it is difficult to imagine that Ford, which is presumably internationally known, would create comprehension difficulties, the latter example *I hate to read Heidegger* may be a source of confusion among readers, as Heidegger is more likely unknown to those possessing little knowledge of German philosophers. Those without the necessary background of Heidegger may therefore not activate a

scene of reading the philosophy of Heidegger, but may have to resort to a much more general scene of reading any type of writing from a person evidently named Heidegger. Those with absolutely no background of German last names may even ponder the possibility that Heidegger is the title of a book and not the author. It is easy to imagine how one without the necessary background could run into difficulties in comprehension without the appropriate experiential scenes available to them.

The above case emphasizes “the conceptual and cognitive nature of metonymy where universal human knowledge and embodiment are essential for the interpretation of metonymy” and thus “points to the role of cultural background knowledge which may have a prototypical value in understanding target meanings” (Krišković et al. 2009: 50). It further illustrates the futility of the translator’s pure reliance on the similarity of the respective frames in the SL and the TL; translating *I hate to read Heidegger* directly in another language may present few linguistic problems, but if the readers of the TL do not know who Heidegger is, i.e. they do not possess the necessary cultural background knowledge, this direct translation will not be effective in activating the scenes that the author of the ST intended to activate. The translator must ensure that the scenes that are activated in the TT adequately correspond to the scenes intended in the ST. Vannerem et al. further elaborate on the overall high responsibility of the translator:

Er ist voll und ganz auf seine Kompetenz in AS und ZS angewiesen, da er nicht einfach linguistische *frames* „dekodiert“ und neu „enkodiert“, sondern die *scenes* hinter dem *frames* nachvollziehen, verstehen muß und entsprechend dem, was er verstanden hat, Bedeutung vermittelt. Somit liegt das Gelingen der Kommunikation zwischen AS-Autor und ZS-Leser, das „Verstehen“, allein in seiner Verantwortung. (1986: 191)

The extraordinary challenges on the part of the translator in creating this successful communication between the ST author and TT reader in the case of metonymy will be exemplified in the following chapter.

## 4 Metonymy in Obama's victory speech: translating the American dream

In this chapter, the use of metonymy in Obama's victory speech and the subsequent translations of these metonyms will be investigated by comparing the English text of the speech (the ST)<sup>1</sup> with two German translations (two TT's), one from the online newspaper *Spiegel Online* and the other from the blog *Amerika Dienst*, a service that publishes official translations from the US Embassy in Berlin.<sup>2</sup> The metonyms discussed all pertain to the American dream: firstly, the importance of humble beginnings, and secondly, the historical events that shaped this dream. The translators chose, in many cases, different approaches to translating the same cases of metonymy. These choices will be discussed in terms of Fillmore's scenes-and-frames semantics by addressing the intended scenes of the ST authors as well as whether the translations were adequate to activate these intended scenes (or, at the very minimum, comparable scenes) in the minds of the German-speaking TT readers.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the analysis will include recommendations as to a better method of using frames that activate the intended scenes.

### 4.1 Metonymic reference to the importance of humble beginnings

The election of Barack Obama to the US Presidency was, for many Americans (including Obama himself), another realization of the American dream. In his victory speech, Obama<sup>4</sup> intended to invoke the image of the American dream among his audience, to give them the feeling that their election decision was the very

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<sup>1</sup>The full reference for the American transcription of Obama's speech can be found on the Works Cited page at the end of the paper.

<sup>2</sup>The full references for these translations can be found on the Works Cited page at the end of the paper. The authors of these translations are not known and will be referred to as "the Spiegel Online translator" and "the Amerika Dienst translator."

<sup>3</sup>As it is impossible to determine with complete assurance which scenes are activated by which frames in native speakers of German, the discussion is based on presumptions about the differences in cultural backgrounds between Americans and people living in German-speaking cultures. More studies would be needed to determine the true scenes activated by in both cultures, perhaps with the use of think-aloud during translation and reading processes to get a better impression of the scenes activated by metonymy.

<sup>4</sup>For clarity purposes, Obama is referred to as the author of his victory speech with due awareness that Obama's campaign speeches were primarily written by his team of speechwriters, which included Jonathan Favreau, Adam Frankel and Ben Rhodes.

embodiment of this dream. Furthermore, he wanted to convey his own interest in the well-being of the lower-classes in the United States and emphasize his belief in the American dream in that every person should be given the same opportunities. Obama mentions the humble beginnings of his Vice-Presidential running-mate and the Presidential campaign itself, as well as the importance of working-class Americans by using metonymy. The following sub-chapters address three instances of metonymy related to the realization of the American dream as it pertains to gaining great success from humble beginnings.

#### 4.1.1 On the streets of Scranton

The son of a largely absent African father and a middle-class white mother, Obama's success with regards to the American dream is easy to identify. However, Obama wanted to stress that not only he but also his running-mate, Vice President-elect Joe Biden, was able to realize the "rags to riches" aspiration that makes up a large part of the American dream ideology. In his victory speech, Obama mentions Biden's humble beginnings, a commonly-implemented strategy during the campaign to gain sympathy among blue-collar voters, through the use of metonymy:

ENGLISH ST 1

I want to thank my partner in this journey, a man who [...] spoke for the men and women he grew up with **on the streets of Scranton**<sup>5</sup> and rode with on the train home to Delaware, the vice president-elect of the United States, Joe Biden.

SPIEGEL ONLINE TT 1

Ich will meinem Partner auf dieser Reise danken, einem Mann, der [...] für die Männer und Frauen gesprochen hat, mit denen er **in den Straßen von Scranton** aufgewachsen ist und mit denen er den Zug nach Hause nach Delaware genommen hat: dem gewählten Vize-Präsidenten der USA, Joe Biden.

AMERIKA DIENST TT 1

Ich möchte meinem Partner auf diesem Weg danken, einem Mann, der [...] für die Frauen und Männer sprach, mit denen er **in den Straßen von Scranton** aufwuchs und mit denen er im Zug zurück nach Delaware saß, dem gewählten Vizepräsidenten der Vereinigten Staaten, Joe Biden.

In this case, *On the streets of Scranton* can be considered THE PLACE FOR THE EVENT metonymy, the event not being a historical event that occurred on one specific day or period in time, but the event of living in Scranton, New Jersey, which is well-known to Americans as a city with blue-collar workers and a coal-mining industry that was economically hard-hit after the Second World War. The place that

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<sup>5</sup>All emphases in this paper are from the author.

he grew up, however, was focused even further by the inclusion of *on the streets*. This is a typical metonym used to describe the living situation of people that are either homeless or are surrounded by/partake in criminal activity; it can even be used as a metonym for prostitution (*she works on the streets*). While, at the time of the election, it was well-publicized that Joe Biden was anything but homeless and that his rather middle-class family lived in Scranton before the economic downfall of the city, the inclusion of this specification only strengthened the scene of the American dream in the American psyche: Biden is an ordinary man with the humblest of beginnings who was able to, through self-accomplishment, work his way to the forefront of the American government. In other words, the larger the disparity between origins and achieved goal, the more impressive it is to the American people. While no American truly imagines Biden on the street of Scranton upon hearing these frames, this metonym aids in their focusing on what Obama wants us to consider an incredible accomplishment and proof that the American dream is still live.

A comparable metonym in German could be, unsurprisingly, *auf der Straße in Scranton*, yet both translators chose the translation *in den Straßen von Scranton*. In reading the source text, one of two suppositions could be made about the decisions of the translators: First, the translators may not have realized the intentional reference to Biden's blue-collar roots and grossly modest upbringing. Had the translators not known of Scranton's reputation in general, or in other words, had they not activated the intended scene for the frame *Scranton*, it could be assumed that the metonym *on the streets of Scranton* was a simple reference to the fact that Biden was a part of the Scranton community. They specifically chose the phrase *in den Straßen* instead of *auf der Straße*, a change in preposition that makes a large difference in the meaning of the metonym. However, had Obama intended to activate the scene of Biden simply growing up in a Scranton neighborhood and being part of the Scranton community, *on the streets* would not have been his choice in wording, but rather a less affected phrase such as *in the neighborhoods of*. In this case, the translation of this metonym was executed out of unawareness of the cultural background of Scranton as well as the rather complex corresponding scenes the metonym "on the streets of Scranton" was intended to activate.

Second, the translators could have been aware of the scene that would be activated with the use of the frame *on the streets* and simultaneously aware of the fact that the Germans, in contrast to Americans, would not view a childhood spent *on the streets* as a positive aspect about a politician's background. Rather, it may have been an attempt to avoid casting Biden in a bad light, as the metonym directly translated into German may have caused alarm among the German-speaking readers, who, not possessing of the American obsession with "rags to riches" stories, may take their interpretation of this metonym more literally and view Biden as man who had had a seriously dysfunctional childhood. In this case, it can be argued that the translators made a conscious decision to change the metonymy to something that maintained a level of neutrality. This, interestingly enough, reveals that even if a largely comparable metonym exists in the TL (*on the streets* = *auf der Straße*), it is the job of the translator to take into account the further belief systems of the respective culture, and whether these metonyms will be interpreted by both cultures in the same way. It could then be argued that the awareness of the translators led them to modify the metonym to remain in sync with the belief systems of German-speaking cultures (*auf der Straße aufgewachsen* -> *bad* and not *grew up on the streets* -> *admirable*).

It should also be addressed that not only the translators but also the German-speaking readers of the TT may not be aware of the city of Scranton altogether, which calls to question the necessity of reproducing the metonym in the TT instead of using other frames to activate a comparable scene. As Snell-Hornby states:

The text is embedded in a given situation, which is itself conditioned by its sociocultural background. The translation is then dependent on its function as a text "implanted" in the target culture, whereby there is the alternative of either preserving the original function of the source text in its culture [...] or of changing the function to adapt to specified needs in the target culture. (1988: 44)

Assuming that Germans are, due to their lack of sociocultural background about American culture, not aware of the economic history of Scranton, any scenes activated by the frame *Scranton* are vague, if not entirely inaccurate. What should a translator do when the metonym is unknown to the readers of the TT? Did the (slightly modified) reproduction of the metonym make it impossible for the readers of the TT to conjure any scene at all? In this case, an argument for the paraphrasing of the metonym could definitely be made, when the translator believes, from his

knowledge of the source culture as well as the target culture that the inclusion of a certain metonym in the TT will only lead to less comprehension on the part of the TT reader. Perhaps a reference to growing up in a blue-collared town would have more adequately activated the intended scene, but the translator also encounters challenges with translating the metonym *blue-collar*, because it does not exist in the German language. Perhaps a general description of the city as an industrial city (*die Industriestadt Scranton*) would conjure the best-fitting scene that was intended by the author, though this frame would not necessarily activate the scene of a city hard-hit economically, which is so important to the overall scene of Biden's humble upbringing. Another option may have been to draw a comparison with a similar situation in Germany and call Scranton *America's Ruhr Region* (*Amerikas Ruhrgebiet*). Frankly put, the loss of the scene and thus the rhetorical function of *on the streets of Scranton* may have been necessary in order to retain the activation of any comparable scene at all.

#### 4.1.2 In the front porches of Charleston

A large part of Obama's victory speech was dedicated to the recognition of those who helped him win the election. That average Americans, as opposed to those with financial and political influence in American politics, were responsible for his successful election campaign was something he emphasized throughout his speech. The community effort involved in his election was expressed in the speech in the following way:

ENGLISH ST 2

Our campaign was not hatched in the halls of Washington. It began **in** the backyards of Des Moines and the living rooms of Concord and **the front porches of Charleston.**

SPIEGEL ONLINE TT 2

Unser Wahlkampf wurde nicht in den Hallen von Washington ausgebrütet. Er begann in den Hinterhöfen von Des Moines, den Wohnzimmern von Concord und **unter den Vordächern von Charleston.**

AMERIKA DIENST TT 2

Unser Wahlkampf entstand nicht auf den Fluren Washingtons. Er begann **in** den Hinterhöfen von Des Moines, den Wohnzimmern in Concord und **den Veranden von Charleston.**

As this triptych of metonyms was spoken, a series of classic American scenes were intended to flash before the minds of the American audience and can again be considered a PART FOR WHOLE metonymy, as of course, his campaign began in

many more places than just these areas of houses in these three cities, but his use of metonymy shows where he wanted to place the focus. The prototypical house in Midwestern states such as Iowa include large backyards which are largely occupied during the summer with regular, middle-class families. With the living rooms of Concord, one can imagine a cozy living space during the cold winters of Massachusetts. Finally, the front porch, a cultural mainstay of the American South, is a place where families keep cool and socialize with their neighbors during the hot summer months. The prototypical front porch in the South is large and meant for entertaining guests; they are meant to be occupied with people. The front porch is more than just a place to sit; it symbolizes one's connection with the community. Before the Second World War, which brought with it a greater focus on privacy, the front porch was a symbol for the openness and prosperity of the United States (Dolan 2002: 5). Though "porch culture" has declined in recent years and is now a component of the stereotype of impoverished African American communities with the racial epithet *porch monkey* having increased in usage over the past 20 years (Hendersen 2003: 72), Obama's specific inclusion of the front porch designated it a positive aspect of the United States; namely, it was used to symbolize the renewed spirit of community togetherness among Americans. This case shows the complex nature of metonymy: a metonym can activate one scene which activates yet another, and perhaps yet another. Here the frame *front porch* activates the prototypical front porch, which in turn activates the scene of a prototypical family spending time on the front porch, which in turn activates the scene of the type of community which has families who spend time on their front porches. It was intended as reminder that what happens on those front porches in the Southern states of the US matters for the rest of the country.

While the metonyms *backyards* and *living rooms* prompted the same translation from both Spiegel Online and Amerika Dienst, the translators diverged in their translations of *front porch*. The Spiegel Online translator chose *Vordach*, whereas the Amerika Dienst translator chose *Veranda*. Though both are considered acceptable translations of front porch in general, they are by no means equivalent with respect to the prototype that is activated in the minds of the readers of the TT. The following definitions and examples of usage of *Vordach* from *Duden: die deutsche*

*Rechtschreibung* and *Veranda* from *The Free Dictionary by Farlex*<sup>6</sup> illustrate this difference:

Vordach, das; -[e]s, Vordächer: (bes. über Eingängen angebrachtes) vorspringendes Dach: das Fahrrad unter das V. schieben.

Ve-*ran*-da, *die* <Veranda, Veranden>: ein überdachter Vorbau eines Wohnhauses: An lauen Sommerabenden sitzen wir gerne auf der Veranda.

As can be seen from both their definitions and the example sentences, German speakers activate very different scenes with the frames *Vordach* and *Veranda*. The former activates the image of a small roof that protects the entrance area of a house, under which a bicycle can be stored to protect it from the elements, while the latter activates a covered room attached to the house, where people sit on summer evenings. From these definitions, it can be determined that the Spiegel Online translator was not aware of the cultural meaning behind *front porch*, as they chose a frame for the TT which certainly does not activate the intended scene among TT readers. A *Vordach* is a roof but is not a separate room of the house; it is not envisioned that it has its own floor or enough space to want to spend time in. This can be further seen by the Spiegel Online translator's divergence from the original preposition, *in*, to the preposition *unter*; A *Vordach* is not a place one spends time *in*, but is briefly *underneath*. Perhaps the readers activate the scene of a politician knocking on doors, much to the effect of a door-to-door salesman. While this would also promote the thought that Obama's campaign staff was connected with the community, it is still a different scene than the intended one; the scene of Southern folks expressing their hopes and ideas for the future of America on the porch over a glass of cold lemonade, a tranquil scene that occurred before the aggressive campaign season was underway.

The frame *Veranda*, in contrast, seems to activate a much more similar scene in the minds of the TT readers. *Veranden* are also places intended for sitting and talking, and they also seem to express the idea of being outside yet still in a comfortable area attached to the home. In this respect, it can be assumed that the translator was aware of the intentions of Obama and translated this scene accordingly. One component,

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<sup>6</sup>Two different dictionaries were used because examples of usage were not given for *Veranda* in *Duden: die deutsche Rechtschreibung* and for *Vordach* in *The Free Dictionary by Farlex*.

however, that was neglected by the Amerika Dienst translator is the modifier *front* in porch, which carries an important meaning, as the front porch is a place of openness, whereas the back porch is a place of privacy. Obama used front porches intentionally to activate this scene of community, yet it remains generally neglected in the German idea of a *Veranda*. Yet it stands to reason that a German translation for this specification does not exist without unnatural-sounding paraphrasing such as *vor den Häusern in Veranden*, which the translator most likely wanted to avoid. The limitations of the available terms in the German language thus forced the translator to choose the most appropriate, i.e. “the best fitting,” TT frame, *Veranda*. Unfortunately, both *Vordach* and *Veranda* forgo the complex multiple scene-activation that was actually intended by Obama with the use of the frame *front porch*.

#### 4.1.3 Wall Street and Main Street

Obama not only wanted to thank those ordinary Americans who were involved in his campaign; he also wanted to assure them that, as President, he would protect their interests. Thus, as he outlined his intended course of actions as President, he included the following:

ENGLISH ST 3

Let us remember that, if this financial crisis taught us anything, it's that we cannot have a thriving **Wall Street** while **Main Street** suffers.

SPIEGEL ONLINE TT 3

Lasst uns daran denken – und das ist vielleicht etwas, das uns die Finanzkrise gelehrt hat – dass wir keine prosperierende **Wall Street** haben können, wenn **der kleine Mann** leidet.

AMERIKA DIENST TT 3

Lasst uns daran denken, dass wenn uns diese Finanzkrise überhaupt etwas gelehrt hat, ist es die Tatsache, dass es keine blühende **Wall Street** geben kann, während **die Main Street** leidet.

*Wall Street* is a commonly used metonym that refers to the American financial industry, and, more specifically, the interests of these industries; it is used because the New York Stock Exchange as well as the majority of the most important American banks are located in Wall Street, Manhattan. This THE PLACE FOR THE INSTITUTION metonym is internationally known and used, rendering it to both translators worthy of reproduction in their TTs. *Main Street*, in contrast, is a lesser known metonym that gained popularity in the United States during the 2008 financial crisis and the Presidential election campaign season. It refers to the prototypical

small town in the United States, which normally has a Main Street where most retailers and businesses are located. The metonym, however, refers not only to these small towns, but also to the working-class people and small business owners who usually reside in these towns. Therefore, the suffering of Main Street refers to the suffering of working-class Americans and provides an effective contrast to the financial giants who work on Wall Street. The scene that is ultimately activated by the mention of these two metonyms (and helped by the metaphor *suffer*) is then, in general, that the powerful financial industry cannot continue to be financially successful while the working-class and small-business owning Americans lose their jobs and businesses.

In the Spiegel Online translation, *Main Street* has been replaced with *der kleine Mann*, a common German metonym that refers to people who are considered to be average and without wealth or a great deal of societal influence. The scenes activated by *der kleine Mann* and *Main Street* are quite similar; both refer to people who lack power and influence in society. In opting to convert this metonym to a comparable one in the TT, the translator must have correctly identified the intended scene of the author, yet considered *Main Street* to be too regional (or too culturally-specific) a frame to activate the correct scene among the TT readers. While the stylistic parallelism in the listing of street names had to be forfeited, the decision to change the metonym contributed overall positively to the comprehensibility of the TT.

It can be assumed that the Amerika Dienst translator, in reproducing *Main Street* in the TT without change, believed otherwise; assuming the metonym was known the translator, he believed the German-speaking readers would be aware of the metonymy behind *Main Street*. It is true that the majority German small towns also have a Main Street (*Hauptstraße*), but these streets, while sometimes the locations of businesses, are mostly known in Germany as important transportation routes, i.e. their high volume of traffic as compared to the side streets (*Nebenstraßen*). *Hauptstraße* is not a frame that functions as a German metonym, but a German-speaking reader of the TT would in all likelihood activate the scene of a busy street, without its relation to the concept of small-town, working-class America.

This translation case highlights Peter Newmark's distinction between semantic and communicative translation (1981: 38-56, 62-69), where the former intends to recreate the style (which includes register, tone, and figurative elements, etc.) of the SS, and the latter focuses on the successful transfer of the content of the SS. It could be argued that the Spiegel Online translator opted for a communicative translation by changing the metonym to one more easily understood at the loss of parallelism in the sentence, while the Amerika Dienst translator placed more importance on the style of the text and thus opted for a semantic translation. While Newmark appears to support a semantic translation when he says, "I am writing against the increasing assumption that *all* translation is (nothing but) communicating, where the less effort expected of the reader, the better" (1981: 51), he also makes the following recommendation:

If the SL text is entirely bound up with the culture of the SL community - a novel or a historical piece or a description attempting to characterize a place or custom of local character - the translator has to decide whether or not the reader requires, or is entitled to, supplementary information and explanation. (1981: 21)

Entitlement aside, the cases above, as well as most of the cases in Obama's speech, are so culturally "bound up" that the direct transference of the metonym poses a threat to the successful understanding of the TT readers and signal the necessity of a communicative translation, i.e. the providing the information necessary to comprehend the text.

## 4.2 Metonymic reference to historical events: the buses, the hoses, a bridge and a preacher

The following cases of metonymy in Obama's victory speech were included in the description of a 104 year-old African American woman who voted for the first time in the 2008 election. To show the progress that has been made in the course of this woman's lifetime, Obama uses metonymy in a rather lengthy summary of important historical events in the past century. In one particular section, Obama references several events that occurred during the civil rights movement of the 1950's and 60's:

ENGLISH ST 4

**She was there for the buses in Montgomery, the hoses in Birmingham, a bridge in Selma, and a preacher from Atlanta** who told a people that "We Shall Overcome."

SPIEGEL ONLINE TT 4

**Sie war da – in den Bussen von Montgomery, an den Tankschläuchen in Birmingham, an der Brücke in Selma, als ein Priester aus Atlanta** den Menschen „We shall overcome“ predigte.

**Sie war da für die Busse in Montgomery, die Wasserschläuche in Birmingham, eine Brücke in Selma und einen Prediger aus Atlanta,** der einem Volk sagte “We Shall Overcome”.

The events referred to through the above list of metonymic expressions were all related to the struggles of African Americans as they fought against racial segregation and discrimination in the United States. They mark what are considered to be some of the most important events of the civil rights movement. *The buses in Montgomery* refer to Rosa Parks and her famous act of civil disobedience as she refused to sit in the back of a racially segregated bus, which spurred the Montgomery bus boycott and the eventual repeal of the bus segregation law. *The hoses in Birmingham* represent the well-documented use of fire hoses by police on African Americans as they peacefully protested their lack of rights, and *a bridge in Selma* represents the famous civil rights march that culminated on Edmund Pettus Bridge, as police were waiting to violently attack the marchers. These can all be considered THE PLACE FOR THE EVENT metonyms. Lastly, *a preacher from Atlanta* represents Martin Luther King Jr., whose famous speech only days before his death in 1968 implemented one of the most wide-spread phrases of the civil rights movement, “We shall overcome.” Every above-explained metonym is well-known in the American mainstream culture and activates a series of highly emotional scenes, even if the audience is not aware of every detail of every event (or, for that matter, of every event). The overall message is the ability of American people to persevere and succeed in times of great difficulty. Obama intended to communicate to the audience that, under his leadership, the United States, as it has overcome everything else, would be able to overcome the damage he believed had been done during the past eight years of the Bush Presidency.

As can be seen from the Spiegel Online translation, this rather complex use of metonymy posed a great challenge to the translator, and it is highly surmisable from several aspects of the TT (two of which will be addressed in the following) that the translator was unaware of the cultural events that motivated these metonyms. Firstly, instead of *being there for* these events, which is meant in the metaphorical sense of being alive and thus affected by their occurrence, the translator reformulated the sentence so that the woman was actually *there*. Instead of being there *for* the buses,

she was there *in* the buses. This small change activates a completely different scene, as the sense is no longer metaphoric but literal, activating a scene of that very woman sitting on those buses.

Secondly, the egregious translation of her being there *an den Tankschläuchen*, or *at the fuel hose*, signals the complete unawareness on the part of the translator as to which historical event was being referenced by “the hoses in Birmingham”. While the activated scenes among the TT readers can only be speculated, it can be assumed that a woman refueling her automobile at the gas station or working at the gas station herself are two of the most conjecturable scenes. This is in every respect not the scene intended by the author and can only hinder the overall understanding of the speech. The rest of the translation seems to conform to this misguided, or even complete lack of, activation of scenes on the part of the translator.

The Amerika Dienst translator brought forth a translation of this excerpt that was certainly more in sync with the ST but still ridden with possible points of incomprehension for the TT readers. Opting again for what Newmark calls a semantic translation, the translator transferred the frames as directly as possible, leading to the reproduction of *she was there for* as *sie war da für*. In German, the frame *für etwas/jemanden da sein* also carries a metaphoric meaning, yet in the sense of *to support someone/something* and not *to be alive as something occurred and therefore affected by its occurrence*. The frame *to be there for buses, hoses, a bridge and a preacher* is therefore not in harmony with a German-speaker’s way of thinking. It can be assumed that the TT readers were thus so disconcerted by the use of these frames that they knew it must be interpreted otherwise, i.e. that other scenes must be activated, yet it remains unknown if the right interpretation could be made. At least in this case, the translation of the hoses as *Wasserschläuchen*, indeed the types of hoses used by police during the peaceful demonstrations, was more accurate.

What remains to be answered, however, is whether these metonyms are recognizable by the German-speaking readers as important events in the civil rights era and thus if the simple direct translation of the ST was adequate to foster comprehension. For those TT readers who were also there for these events, which means they were also alive to hear about them on the news and in the media in general, it may be possible

that the direct translation was sufficient. For a younger reader in a German-speaking culture, this is less likely, as metonymies, especially those that are not established in a culture and thus unknown to the readers, are largely dependent on the context of the situation in which they are uttered (Gibbs 1993: 260). This is why it takes little to no effort for service personnel working in a restaurant to understand *The ham sandwich is waiting for his check*, yet the same use of frames on the street with a person not involved in the service industry may leave the listener blank as to how to interpret the sentence. While the context of this particular section of the speech was about important historical events in the United States, which, by the time Obama transitioned to the civil rights movement, had most likely become clear to readers of the TT, it is still questionable if the use of buses, hoses and bridges in lesser known American cities sufficed in cueing the readers as to the appropriate context within which the appropriate scenes should be activated. Snell-Horny stresses the importance that the translator not “activate scenes that diverge from the author's intentions or deviate from those activated by a native speaker of the source language (a frequent cause of translation error)” (1988: 81), which is what presumably occurred in the direct translation in the above metonyms. In order to provide a background of these events to foster the activation of the intended scenes, it may have been necessary to include a bit of general background by means of a paraphrase: *She witnessed the tumultuous time of the civil rights movement (Sie war Zeitzeuge von der turbulenten Zeit der US-Bürgerrechtsbewegung)*, while perhaps partly destroying the rhetorical effect of the metonymy included in the ST, could have promoted a better understanding and scenes more similar to the intended scenes for TT readers young and old.

## 5 Summary and conclusion

The cases analyzed in the previous chapter show the vast amount of difficulty in translating metonymy, especially with a speech specifically targeted for one audience that shares a belief system and history different from those of the readers of the TT. The decisions of the translators for the four cases, namely the *Scranton* case, the

*front porch* case, the *Main Street* case, and the *buses* case, can be summarized as follows:

1. The metonym was reproduced as directly as possible in the TT, leading to a linguistic incompatibility or a different activated scene in the TT as the one intended (the *Main Street* case, *Amerika Dienst* translation; the *buses* case, *Amerika Dienst* translation).
2. The metonym was reproduced as directly as possible in the speech, but the scene activated in the TT is only part of the intended scene (the *front porch* case, *Amerika Dienst* translation).
3. The metonym was generally reproduced in both TTs with a slight change in frame, presumably to activate a scene thought more suitable for readers of the TT yet with a loss of certain components of the intended scene (the *Scranton* case, both translations).
4. The metonym was changed to a metonym common in the SL that activates a similar scene in the TT readers (the *Main Street* case, *Spiegel Online* translation).
5. Lack of knowledge about the metonym led to a false interpretation and thus incorrect translation of the frame and subsequently the activation of different scenes than intended in the TT readers (the *front porch* case, *Spiegel Online* translation; the *buses* case, *Spiegel Online* translation).

The above five methods call attention to the daunting task of translating a ST that includes the use of culture-specific metonyms and prove, using a scenes-and-frames semantics approach, the following assertion from Vannerem et al. to be correct: the role of the translator entails more than being a passive actor in the translation process (1986: 203). Instead, the translator must be aware of not only the references made in the metonyms themselves, but also the extent to which the readers of the TT, who have less experience and knowledge of the ST culture, are aware of these metonyms. For cases in which this experience and knowledge does not suffice, the translator must be ready to take the appropriate measures to make the TT comprehensible for its readers. Vannerem et al. describe, in terms of scenes-and-frames semantics, the implications of this challenge by specifying characteristics and competencies that are essential for a translator, which must be particularly emphasized in the case of culture-specific metonymy:

1. Der Übersetzer/die Übersetzerin muß die linguistischen *frames*, die zu seinem/ihrem Gebiet gehören sicher beherrschen und mit ihnen arbeiten können: d.h. er/sie braucht muttersprachliche, fremdsprachliche und übersetzerische Kompetenz.
2. Er/sie braucht eine überdurchschnittliche Allgemeinbildung, sowie Lebenserfahrung und Sachwissen, um die *scenes* im Text aktivieren zu können. (1986: 203)

After analyzing the cases of metonymy, it can be said that the translator's mastery of these frames must extend beyond a surface-level meaning of words and their corresponding translations, and his background knowledge must surpass an above-average level; the translator must possess an in-depth knowledge of the cultural mindset behind the SL as well as the TL. Without this knowledge, errors in translation will occur, as in the *buses* case from Spiegel Online. The translator must constantly be aware of new metonymic expressions in the SL and be ready to activate the appropriate scenes as necessary.

3. Er/sie braucht ein sehr gutes Gedächtnis, außergewöhnliche Intelligenz, eine erhöhte sprachliche Sensibilität, sowie die Bereitschaft, Verantwortung zu übernehmen und die Fähigkeit zum kreativen, dynamischen Denken. (1986: 203)

The necessity of creative thinking during the translation process was also shown in the analysis of the metonymy in Obama's speech. Obama included a great deal of metonymy in his speech to activate scenes already known to Americans in the most concise and effective manner possible. Yet the entire scene of the American dream is comprised of a complex history and belief system so entrenched in the American psyche, that it cannot be activated by a direct translation of these metonyms for readers without this psyche. Indeed, the choice of translators to retain them risks the loss of comprehension on the part of this audience. Thus, creative thinking on the part of the translator goes hand-in-hand with the argument for a paraphrase or a more elaborate description of these metonyms to foster comprehension in an international audience. While this will result in a loss of stylistic elements in the TT, it may be necessary to avoid a loss of comprehension altogether.

4. Er/sie muß erkennen können, wo seine/ihre prototypischen *scenes* nicht mehr ausreichen und wissen, mit welchen Hilfsmitteln er/sie den speziellen Forderungen des Textes gerecht werden kann. (1986: 203)

For those metonyms that are unknown to the translator, it is important that to seek the support necessary to clarify the references so that an adequate decision can be made as to how to effectively translate these metonyms. A translation like the Spiegel Online translation in the *buses* case by Amerika Dienst is simply irresponsible and to be avoided at all costs.

5. Schließlich muß er/sie die Fähigkeit haben, Zusammenhänge zu erkennen, zu analysieren aber auch zu synthetisieren, mit anderen Worten, nicht nur den Wortlaut, sondern auch die sich ständig entwickelnde Szene hinter dem Text durch bewußt reflektierte Entscheidungen zu steuern. (1986: 204)

While it cannot be determined what exact scenes were activated by the frame chosen by the translators in their translations of Obama's victory speech from an external view of the translations, after the analysis which included the cultural aspects that may have played an important role for both the intended audience and the TT readers, it appears that the entire scene behind the text was not activated sufficiently with the direct transference of most of the culturally-specific metonyms. Translators have a large responsibility to approach the text as an entire scene, and in some cases, the reformulation of the text through, for example, paraphrasing or a metonym in the TL that activates similar scenes, is necessary to allow the readers a maximally comprehensible TT, even at the loss of rhetorical devices that may have stylistically enhanced the original text. Comprehensibility is, in the end, of greater importance.

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