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COGNITIVE APPROACH TO PHRASEOLOGICAL VARIATION: SOME CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF MENTAL ILLNESS IN ITALIAN AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THEIR TRANSLATION INTO SPANISH AND GERMAN

APPROCCIO COGNITIVO ALLA VARIAZIONE FRASEOLOGICA:
ALCUNE CONCETTUALIZZAZIONI DELLA PAZZIA IN ITALIANO
E IMPLICAZIONI PER LA LORO TRADUZIONE IN SPAGNOLO E
TEDESCO

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Abstract

Cognitive linguistics has highlighted the tendency of human beings to understand reality through conceptual transfers between different domains, that can be conventional in the mind and create lexicalised expressions with a figurative value in every language. A cognitive approach to the study of phraseological variation will be proposed by taking into consideration a number of Italian phraseological units that refer to people whose mental faculties are in an altered condition, in order to determine their mutual conceptual correlation. Subsequently, the way in which the existence of the identified variants can influence the whole translation process will be studied, from their recognition and interpretation to their actual translation, as well as the



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translator's cognitive effort. In this phase, Spanish and German will be considered as hypothetical target languages.

Keywords: Phraseology variation. Translation process. Cognitive equivalence. Conceptual equivalence. Metaphor.

Riassunto

La linguistica cognitiva ha messo in luce la tendenza degli esseri umani a comprendere la realtà mediante trasferimenti concettuali tra domini diversi, che possono essere convenzionali nella mente e dar vita a espressioni lessicalizzate con valore figurato in ogni lingua. Nel presente lavoro si propone un approccio cognitivo allo studio della variazione fraseologica, considerando, nello specifico, alcune delle unità fraseologiche italiane usate per riferirsi a persone che si trovano in uno stato di alterazione delle proprie facoltà mentali, al fine di determinarne i reciproci rapporti concettuali. In una fase successiva, poi, si sviluppa una riflessione sulle modalità in cui l'esistenza delle varianti individuate può influire sull'intero processo traduttivo, dal loro riconoscimento e dalla loro interpretazione, alla loro vera e propria traduzione, nonché sullo sforzo cognitivo richiesto al traduttore, prendendo in esame lo spagnolo e il tedesco come ipotetiche lingue meta.

Parole chiave: Variazione fraseologica. Processo traduttivo. Equivalenza cognitiva. Equivalenza concettuale. Metafora.

1. Introduction

In the present contribution phraseological variation and translation of phraseological variants are observed from a cognitive point of view. The following section is focused on the state of the art and approaches this phenomenon from different perspectives through the description of studies (i) aimed at proposing a classification based on its linguistic dimension, (ii) related to the behaviour of phraseological units (PUs) and their potential metaphoricality, (iii) that clarify the conceptual transfers behind figurative uses in the language which are activated in the human mind to understand given realities, with examples of cognitive approaches to the phraseological variation, and (iv) carried out in the field of cognitive translation studies in order to determine the cognitive effort required in the translation process.

In the third section a set of Italian figurative lexicalised expressions concerning madness is presented with the aim to suggest their mutual possible conceptual relations. This analysis is based on the idea that we can consider variation as a cognitive phenomenon, which consists on the existence of synonymic PUs rised from different mental transfers or representing more specific conceptual transfers of a same; more general metaphor. Possible pragmatic aspects related to some of these variants are nevertheless pointed out.

The next section focuses on potential effects of the afore-mentioned cognitive variation in the translation process taking into consideration German and Spanish as hypothetical target languages: some expressions available in these two languages containing conceptual transfers related to a certain extent to those observed in Italian are examined in order to (i) detect possible cross-language direct or indirect analogies and (ii) to reflect on how the existence of cognitive variants in the source and target languages as well as their specific conceptualisations can lead to the identification and the correct interpretation of each Italian phraseological variant, as well as (iii) on how the process of searching and proposing correspondences could take place.

2. State of the art

This first part of the study is focused on the presentation of some investigations related to different research areas and concerning the concept of phraseological variation, in order to define our object of observation and analysis and to identify the differences between the approach applied here and the theories of linguistics and similarities with some cognitive tendencies.

2.1. *Phraseological variation: some models*

Variation is one of the features PUs may present. Besides, Corpas (1996: 19-32) also observes: the frequency of use and co-appearance of the constitutive components; the conventionalisation or institutionalisation, which concerns the speakers' habit of using already available combinations without the necessity of creating new ones; the consequent stability, due to the internal and the external fixation (the first one reduces the possibility

to manipulate the components of the expression, while the second one is related to its employment in given contexts) as well as to the semantic specialisation or lexicalisation, that is, the acquisition of an additional or substitutive meaning; the idiomaticity of the PU, that rejects a literal interpretation based on the meanings of each element; the gradation, namely the extent to which each feature occurs. The admission of a certain degree of variability is not inconsistent with the idea of fixation, as without stability it does not make any sense to talk about variation and alternative formulations (cf. Corpas Pastor & Mena Martínez 2003: 183), and because, in case of creative modifications, fixation is functional to achieve given communicative goals (Zuluaga 1999: 542).

With regards to the concept of variation, in Corpas (1996: 27-30, 235-250) and in Corpas & Mena (2003), a distinction between variants and modifications is proposed: the first ones are PUs connected to other fixed expressions because they are the result of lexical or morphosyntactic changes, and they are different from variations resulting from derivation and transformation, diatopic and diaphasic variations, phraseological series with opposite meanings and expressions having spaces to fill up with not fixed elements; the second ones consist in manipulations with specific communicative objectives where the speaker customises a preestablished language. These can be internal, if they affect the formal structure by involving the components of the expression through substitutions, additions, reductions, alterations on the order of the elements, or combinations of these strategies, as it happens when more PUs are combined, or external, if they only concern the meaning dimension as a result of semantic and contextual factors, related to the exploitation of polysemies, as well as pragmatic aspects.

What Corpas suggests recalls Zuluaga's theory (1980). He distinguishes between variants *stricto sensu* on the one hand, that are alternative formulations of the same PU, have analogous meaning, partial structure and components' similarity, are used in the same contexts, belong to the same functional language and to a limited and defined group of alternative linguistic realisations. On the other hand, variants *lato sensu* comprehend transformations, phraseologisms structurally different from the one they refer to, but semantically analogous to it, phraseological series, diatopic, diastratic and

diaphasic variants and PUs with empty spaces. Zuluaga (1999: 542) also observes that from a diachronic perspective certain innovative alterations can end up being fixed in the linguistic system as lexicalised variants.

Montoro Del Arco (2004: 595-598) distinguishes instead between variants and variations; both present analogous meaning, partial structural and components identity compared to the principal PU, independency from the context and fixed possible substitutions. Variants can be internal (if they present lexical alterations of the verbal and/or nominal nucleus, and morpholexical alterations, when a lexical component of the expression undergoes a morphological change) or external (if the diatopic, diastratic, diaphasic or diachronic dimension is affected). On the contrary, variations concern the structural aspect and include alterations related to lexicon or morphology, that do not influence the semantic sphere, manipulations concerning gender and number, syntax (the order of the elements), nominalisations (for example when a verbal locution becomes a nominal one), graphic variations (if some components of a PU can be written as a single word or separately), light grammatical variations (in case of interchangeable prepositions) and PUs with empty spaces.

With regards to expressions with empty spaces that allow to substitute more elements, García Page (2016) identifies and describes *variantes léxicas correlativas*, where the substitution is multiple and simultaneous, and subject to preestablished semantic restrictions, and the metaphorical meaning as well as a certain semantic consistency among the lexical components of each sequence are maintained, as it can be observed in *ese bollo no se ha cocido en su horno* and *ese garbanzo no se ha cocido en su olla*, or *ser el garbanzo negro del cocido* and *ser la oveja negra del rebaño*.

Finally, Langlotz (2006: 224) focuses on idiomatic PUs (idioms) and on the fixation grade of their possible alternative formulations and identifies a continuum of different variation levels: on one end of the spectrum, the highest crystallisation in the middle: usual variants (quite common, mentioned in dictionaries or the result of morphosyntactic changes) and casual variants (with specific communicative purposes, based sometimes on wordplays, or erroneous and unintentional), and at the other extreme pseudo-variants (which require a literal interpretation without the activation of their figurative meaning in that specific context). Langlotz (2006:

179-182) also describes how a given lexicalised expression can give rise to lexicalised or creative alternative formulations and points out possible formal morphosyntactic, syntactic and lexical transformations or semantic modifications, which have to do with the polysemantic value of an expression, with adaptations through the employment of intensifiers, specifications, antonyms or changes of perspective, or with the insertion of the PU in a new context.

2.2. *Metaphorical PUs: idioms*

If we consider that, excluding creative modifications, the phraseological variations or variants discussed so far (these two terms will be used from now on indiscriminately to refer to the same phenomenon in general) represent fully-fledged PUs, as they are preconceived alternative expressions, we can describe them with the three essential features that scholars have conferred to institutionalised expressions in general over time. This features, that not always co-occur and are not always evident, are: the stability and fixation, the idiomaticity or non-compositionality of meaning, and the motivation, related to the possibility to identify the image underlying the expression, which is high if the literal homophonic expression still exists or is still clear (*cf.* Arribas 2006: 166-168). As a consequence, some PUs and their corresponding lexicalised variants, can have a metaphorical basis with only one of their components being idiomatic (Castillo Carballo 1997-1998: 72). Furthermore, idiomaticity can show up in two different ways: through fixed combinations derived from non-fixed ones, when the meanings of the components are consistent with each other, as we can observe in archaic expressions that have lost their literal sense or in idiomatic expressions that present a possible literal interpretation, or through fixed combinations not derived from non-fixed ones, that cannot be interpreted literally because the meanings of their components are inconsistent with each other (*cf.* González Rey 1998: 61-62). To the two subcategories of the first group would belong respectively Italian PUs like *mettere alla berlina* and *tagliare la corda*, while an example for the second one could be *avere la testa fra le nuvole*. Similarly, Vega Moreno (2005: 398-399) thinks that idioms' metaphoricality may have arisen with the expression itself or at a later time. In

the first case, he refers to expressions formed as figurative uses without any possible literal interpretation, that underwent a stabilisation process, while in the second case he refers to literal expressions that have then obtained a figurative meaning, as we can observe in idioms that represent new semantic extensions of familiar sentences with an originally literal sense fixed in the linguistic system.

2.3. *Cognitive linguistics and phraseology*

Several scholars have studied the semantic-cognitive dimension of figurative PUs in order to determine the mental representations at their basis: this approach has shown an interconnection between literal and figurative dimensions of the mental lexicon in human beings, which causes that the meaning of a whole expression is highly bound to its metaphorical motivation (Corpas Pastor 2001: 32-33). Richards (1936) and Black (1962) are among the first to believe in the conceptual nature of metaphors: instead of a linguistic phenomenon with a purely aesthetic function, they conceive them as an interaction, where a source domain transfers some of its characteristics to the target domain (that is, the metaphorised one) and allows to conceptualise it. On the basis of this conception, Lakoff & Johnson (1980) develop the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, according to which metaphor is the manifestation of cognitive processes that associate different realities through structural, ontological or directional transfers and the selection of only some of their features.

The conventionality degree of conceptualisations is bound to the metaphor's cognitive dimension and concerns how common or original in thought each of them is in a given context. Kövecses (2005; 2010a; 2010b; 2010c) distinguishes between universal or almost universal conceptual metaphors, which are common in many cultures and linguistic communities as they generally derive from the physical experience of humans, and metaphors tied to (i) the global context, related to geography, landscapes, flora and fauna of a given area, to the social groups that employ them and to the history of the linguistic community they belong to, and (ii) the local context, related to physical conditions like, for example, the seasons of the year at the moment of utterance or interpretation, to the knowledge

the speaker has of the main entities involved in the discourse (himself, the listener and the concepts associated in the metaphorical transfer), to the immediate cultural context, concerning the importance of a given event for the community at the moment of utterance, the social relations between the interlocutors and their social roles, the situation of the utterance and the linguistic context, when new metaphors recall other ones already mentioned in the same discourse.

In the last twenty years, studies focusing on cognitive linguistics and phraseology have increased: on the one hand, through the analysis of PUs, scholars have examined how humans conceptualise reality and on the other hand, cognitive linguistics have often provided the grounds for the observation of idiomatic PUs and the search of their origins. In relation to phraseological variation, however, most of the studies developed are aimed at presenting definitions and classifications based on linguistic and pragmatic-contextual aspects (for example, those mentioned in paragraph 2.1.), while a probably more limited part of investigations proposes cognitive approaches, even if the figurative nature of a great number of institutionalised expressions and their alternative formulations might motivate to consider the conceptual dimension of phraseological variants. Kövecses (1986: 14) seems to confirm the importance of examining phraseological variation also from a cognitive point of view, as he recognises a mutual influence between conceptual and lexical dimensions: a metaphor in the mind can be expressed with a multitude of words or fixed formulations, and these, in turn, allow to elaborate the central conceptual metaphor. This consideration seems to suggest that alternative expressions or lexical choices for a same PU, concern not only the language sphere, but also the different ways of comprehending a given reality in thought, which recall certain mental associations in speakers, listeners or readers.

Dobrovol'skij (2016) is among the authors that propose cognitive approaches to phraseological variation. He takes into consideration some Russian PUs to explain the nature of certain regularities that characterise this phenomenon and, more concretely, he focuses on causative pairs for a same idiom; such phraseological pairs consist of an expression where the action is self-induced and another one where it is caused, as it occurs in *someone's hair stands on end* and *make someone's hair stand on end*, and in the

German pair *ans Licht kommen* and *ans Licht bringen* ('to come to light' and 'to bring to light'). The author supposes that the possibility of forming this kind of expression pairs depends on their semantic-conceptual features and he identifies different semantic areas that accept this mechanism referring to the Russian language.

On the other hand, Langlotz (2006: 11), in a thorough piece of research on the cognitive dimension of idioms' creative modification, proposes that innovative changes depend on the conceptual correspondences underlying the idiom's internal semantic structure.

Also Kövecses (2010a: 666-667) talks about variability in conceptual terms when he refers to the way in which general metaphors can be elaborated depending on contextual factors in order to form conventional as well as creative complex metaphors.

2.4. Translation process and cognitive effort in metaphor translation

A translation is not only the product represented by a target text, but also the whole process that starts with the reading of a source text and ends with its reconstruction in another language. This conception has led to the development of several studies aimed at investigating the cognitive behaviour of translators in presence of specific linguistic-cognitive phenomena. These studies are based on think-aloud protocols as well as on the use of eye-tracking and key-logging programs, which are able to measure eye movements while observing the computer screen and hand movements while typing on the keyboard, respectively. In general terms, the translation process is conceived as composed by two main phases that can be sequential or parallel: the source-text-oriented one of comprehension, and the target-text-oriented one of production (*cf.* Sjørup 2013: 60-61). In her doctoral thesis, Sjørup (2013) discusses different research aimed at determining the cognitive effort while translating metaphors: the extent of this effort in the comprehension phase is normally calculated on the basis of gaze times and gaze frequency on a given word and on regressions on previously read sections of the text, while in the source-text production phase it is measured on the basis of the pauses during the typing process. The results of the studies examined by Sjørup reveal that reading a text in order

to translate it implicates a higher cognitive effort compared to a normal reading, as the translator has to access two different mental lexicons at the same time, as well as that context helps to directly activate the figurative interpretation without analysing the literal meaning before.

Mandelblit's study (1995) is especially useful for the purpose of the present work: he calculated the time employed for the translation between French and English of some lexicalised metaphoric expressions and observed that it was shorter if the conceptual transfers and their linguistic realisations available in the two languages coincided, it increased slightly in presence of only lexical differences and considerably if the differences concerned the conceptual dimension.

3. Proposal for a cognitive analysis of cognitive phraseological variation: some lexicalised conceptualisations of madness in Italian

The idea at the basis of this contribution is that, in cognitive terms, phraseological variation can be considered as the existence of different and/or interconnected conceptualisations used to express a same meaning. With the objective of proving this theory, some Italian synonymic idioms designating a state of alteration of individuals' mental faculties are collected and classified according to their mutual conceptual relations. The later sections contain some reflections regarding the possible effects of these conceptual relations on the translation process, which consists of a phase of recognition and interpretation of the PU followed by the search and the proposal of translation solutions.

The Italian expressions selected for the analysis are *essere fuori di testa*, *essere via di testa*, *essere uscito di testa*, *non starci con la testa*, *essere fuori di capoccia*, *essere fuori di melone*, *essere fuori di cocomero*, *essere fuori di zucca*, *essere fuori di cocuzza/cucuzza*, *essere fuori di coccia*, *essere fuori di brocca*, *essere fuori di mente*, *essere fuori di senno*, *essere fuori di cervello*, *essere via di cervello*, *essere uscito di cervello*, *non starci col cervello*, *essere fuori*, *essere fuori di sé*, *essere fuori come un balcone*, *essere più di là che di qua*, *avere il cervello in fondo ai piedi*, *avere il cervello nelle scarpe*, *avere il giudizio sotto (la suola del)le scarpe*, *ragionare coi/con i piedi*, *mancare qualche rotella (a qualcuno)*, *avere qualche rotella fuori posto / non avere tutte le rotelle a posto*,

essersi bevuto il cervello, essersi fumato il cervello, mancare un venerdì (a qualcuno), (aver mandato) il cervello in vacanza, avere il cervello (andato) in pappa, essere (matto/pazzo) da legare, essere matto/pazzo da catena.

These PUs have been gathered in five possible macro groups: each group represents a cognitive variant of a general tendency to metaphorisation, while more expressions within the same macro group represent cognitive variants of a single conceptual transfer belonging to a higher level. Furthermore, for some of these variants further cognitive variations can be identified, where both the general image and the more specific one are maintained through the addition or the modification of a given conceptual transfer. The following table shows this description in detail:

A) directional metaphor:
<p>A1) directional metaphor in-out:</p> <p>a. <i>essere fuori di testa / essere uscito di testa / non starci con la testa / essere via di testa, essere fuori di capoccia</i> (Roman variant): the head is metonymically conceived as location of the brain, that regulates and controls the intellectual faculties, and mad persons are seen and perceived as being outside of their brain.</p> <p>i. head conceptualised in terms of fruit or vegetable:</p> <p>1°. <i>essere fuori di melone</i> (northern Italy variation) <i>essere fuori di cocomero</i> (southern Italy variation)</p> <p>2°. <i>essere fuori di zucca</i> <i>essere fuori di cocuzza/cucuzza</i> (southern Italy variation)</p> <p>ii. head conceptualised in terms of container:</p> <p>1°. <i>essere fuori di coccia</i> (central-southern Italy variation); 2°. <i>essere fuori di brocca</i> (Roman variant)</p> <p>b. <i>essere fuori di mente</i></p> <p>c. <i>essere fuori di cervello / essere via di cervello / essere uscito di cervello / non starci col cervello</i></p> <p>d. <i>essere fuori di senno</i></p> <p>e. <i>essere fuori</i></p> <p>f. <i>essere fuori di sé</i></p> <p>g. <i>essere fuori come un balcone</i>: the idea of someone having his brain out of the place where it should be is maintained implicit and is enriched by a simile which associates an overhanging balcony with the individual's external positioning.</p> <p>A2) The mad person is far from the speaker:</p> <p>a. <i>essere più di là che di qua</i></p>

B) the brain is situated in the lower part of the body
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>avere il cervello in fondo ai piedi</i> b. <i>avere il cervello nelle scarpe</i> c. <i>avere il giudizio sotto (la suola del)le scarpe</i> d. <i>ragionare coi/con i piedi</i>
C) the mad person lacks something or is somehow defective:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. the brain is a malfunctioning gear system where some components are missing or defective: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. <i>mancare qualche rotella (a qualcuno)</i> ii. <i>avere qualche rotella fuori posto / non avere tutte le rotelle a posto</i> b. the mad person lacks his brain and this lack is associated with a bad habit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. <i>essersi bevuto il cervello</i>: on one side an association between madness and drunkenness is perceivable, and on the other the brain is conceived in terms of a maybe alcoholic drink. ii. <i>essersi fumato il cervello</i>: on one side a possible association between madness and having allucinations probably due to drug consumption is perceivable, and on the other the brain is conceived in terms of a maybe narcotic substance that people can smoke. c. <i>aver (mandato) il cervello in vacanza</i> d. <i>mancare un venerdì (a qualcuno)</i>: the mad person appears incomplete as a week without one of its days would be.
D) the brain is in a state of decomposition:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>avere il cervello (andato) in pappa</i>
E) madness is described with references to obsolete psychiatric treatments:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>essere (matto/pazzo) da legare</i> b. <i>essere matto/pazzo da catena</i>

As stated, some of the cognitive (and linguistic) variants for *essere fuori di testa* are diatopically marked, since they seem to be used in different areas of Italy: *essere fuori di melone* in the north, *essere fuori di cocomero* and *essere fuori di cocuzza/cucuzza* in the south, *essere fuori di coccia* in central regions and in the south, and *essere fuori di brocca* and *essere fuori di capoccia* in the area of Rome. Nonetheless, as Albaladejo (2016: 181) observes in reference to phraseology in German, it is often impossible to determine from a lexicographical point of view clear geographical boundaries for given regiolectal variants.

Moreover, many of the cognitive variants and sub-variants for *essere fuori di testa* proposed, also represent diaphasic variants, since they could adapt to non-standard linguistic registers.

Finally, differences in the frequency of use have been detected, maybe due to some geographic and situational factors: *essere fuori di cocuzza/cucuzza*, *essere fuori di coccia*, *essere fuori di brocca* and especially *essere fuori di cocomero* show up in internet much less often compared to *essere fuori di testa*, *essere fuori di zucca* and *essere fuori di melone*. This phenomenon seems consistent with Kövecses' theory presented in paragraph 2.3. regarding the influence of the context in the activation of certain conceptualisations: the selection of one of the diatopic and diaphasic variants proposed could in fact depend on the global as well as local context; the first one refers to the territorial community the variant belongs to, while the second one concerns the enunciative situation, the social relations between the individuals involved in the communication and their social role.

The pragmatic differences observed in these expressions containing specific conceptualisations can also be detected in a comparison with more general mental transfers: *essere fuori di testa*, for example, is not always interchangeable with *essersi bevuto il cervello*, which in turn could not work if replaced by *mancare un venerdì (a qualcuno)* in given enunciative circumstances.

The cognitive variants *mancare qualche rotella (a qualcuno)* and *avere qualche rotella fuori posto / non avere tutte le rotelle a posto*, unlike the previous ones, do not differ from a pragmatic-contextual point of view, but only conceptually: in both cases the brain is seen as mechanical device, but while in the first variation some of its elements are missing, in the two formulations of the second variant it is complete, with all its components, but a part of them is not correctly positioned. Analogously, *essersi bevuto il cervello* and *essersi fumato il cervello* present two different specific metaphorical transfers which make reference to the same comprehension mechanism with similar pragmatic features.

On the basis of the analysis presented, in general terms and depending on each case, it is possible to identify more cognitive variation levels in the following hierarchical order: (i) completely different conceptualisations referred to the same reality (A, B, C, D, E); (ii) general conceptualisations

of the same even more general one (A.1 and A.2); more specific cognitive variations of a general conceptualisation (for example, a-g of A.1 or a-d of B); (iv) further cognitive variants of a more specific conceptualisation (all the expressions i and ii) and so on (1st and 2nd). From a cognitive point of view, the phraseological variation described here appears therefore as a special system of matryoshka dolls: they are all metaphoric and synonymic, each one of them contains a variable number of pieces, the mothers represent the general conceptualisations, while the smallest dolls represent the more specific ones: moreover, each doll is able to contain two or more pieces of the same size, should additional equally-specific alternative conceptualisations be available. Furthermore, purely linguistic alternatives can exist for a single cognitive variant (for example *essere fuori/via/uscito di cervello* or *avere qualche rotella fuori posto* and *non avere tutte le rotelle a posto*) or alternatives having pragmatical and contextual differences (*essere fuori di testa/melone/cocomero/zucca/cocuzza/coccia/brocca*). In this last case, different conventionality and lexicalisation levels are perceivable, as most of the mentioned cognitive variations are geographic, culturally and contextually marked.

4. The cognitive dimension of phraseological variation and implications for translation

This section aims at discussing the possible effects of the cognitive variation described on the translation process, that is, on the recognition of the phraseological cognitive variant, on its interpretation, on the search and proposal of a translation solution and, in general, on the cognitive effort required from the translator. This discussion is based on the previously developed analysis of the Italian expressions and on the comparison among the Italian, Spanish and German conceptual systems concerning madness.

4.1. Recognition and interpretation of phraseological variations

With reference to the recognition and the interpretation of PUs, Timofeeva (2012: 409-410) rephrases Corpas (2003) and describes the possible chronological relations between these two processes and points out that (i) the interpretation of a lexicalised expression and its identification can be

simultaneous, if the translator is familiar with it and understands its sense at the same time as he identifies it, (ii) the interpretation can precede the recognition and helps to identify the expression as PU or (iii) succeed it, when the translator recognises its lexicalised condition without knowing its meaning and needs to consult a dictionary; Timofeeva also considers that sometimes the identification of the phraseological condition might not take place. If the identification is referred to the figurative value of an idiom, highly lexicalised metaphoric expressions can also be supposed to be correctly interpreted even when their figurativeness is not perceived.

As it is impossible to predict the order and way in which recognition and interpretation occur, in the present contribution these processes are generally considered as a whole, also taking into account that translation consists of a source-text-oriented phase of comprehension and a target-text-oriented one of production, which can be developed in parallel (as stated by various authors in Sjørup 2013: 61, 96-97).

Goatly (1997) refers to metaphoric but not necessarily lexicalised uses and claims that their recognition could depend not only on formal aspects, on the grammatical category of the domain through which a given reality is conceptualised and on linguistic elections that make explicit the presence of the figurative use, such as the word *like* in similes or the expressions *in a figurative sense* or *a sort of*, but also on the semantic distance between the associate domains and on the contradictory nature of the image. This allows to suppose that a good portion of the Italian variants proposed in the previous section are likely to be identified as idiomatic, as they describe absurd scenes (*bersi/fumarsi il cervello*) or situations inconsistent with the context (for example *essere fuori come un balcone*, *essere fuori di testa* and their more specific conceptualisations), that cannot be interpreted literally.

The interpretation of metaphoric PUs normally does not derive from the meaning of each single component, even though in given contexts a metaphoric as well as a literal reading are plausible or it is possible to access the figurative meaning on the basis of the literal sense of the expression. In this regard, Vega Moreno (2005: 390, 394, 401) claims that literalism and metaphoricity cannot be clearly differentiated, but they form a continuum of different levels of mutual dependence between these two dimensions; he thinks that it is difficult to determine the opacity level of

an idiom, as the perception of how transparent its meaning is depends on the semantic aspects within the string as well as on contextual factors and on the encyclopedic knowledge of everyone regarding the words contained. Furthermore, this perception can be direct or retrospective, if it derives from the prior knowledge of the figurative sense (Vega Moreno 2005.: 405; Keysar & Bly 1995, cited in Cacciari 2001: 315). Provided that the recognition of the fixation and idiomatic conditions of an expression and its correct interpretation are highly bound to the context (various authors, in Sjørup 2013: 31), to the translator's phraseological competence (Quiroga 2006: 144), to the internal composition of the expression in case of ungrammatical expressions, and on the inconsistency between the possible literal meaning and the context (Baker 1992: 65), it can be assumed that the distance between the conceptual systems of source and target language also plays an important role, as Mandelblit's already mentioned study (1995) confirms. Consequently, translatability of the PU as well as its equivalence with the translation solution will depend on this aspect.

The idea proposed in this paper is that, at a cognitive level, in the identification and interpretation of a PU the translator could be influenced not only by his personal knowledge, but also by (i) the existence in the target language of conventional conceptual transfers to refer to a given domain, (ii) the tendency in the target language to employ the same general conceptualisation and (iii) the highest achievable grade of specificity and image correspondence with the source language.

The cognitive analysis of the phraseological variations carried out has shown a common use of conceptual transfers in Italian to refer to mental instability: given humans' tendency to associate abstract concepts to physical experiences (*cf.* Lakoff & Johnson 1980), it can be supposed that a non-native Italian speaker is likely to acceptably recognise and interpret one of the discussed PUs even without having heard or read it before, because he is surely used to thinking about madness in figurative terms; if this hypothesis is correct, German or Spanish native speakers that speak Italian could guess the sense of expressions like *essere fuori di testa*, *avere qualche rotella fuori posto* or *essersi bevuto il cervello* in certain contexts even if these are new for them, just because in their languages madness is usually associated to more concrete but not always plausible realities (individuals

cannot drink their own brain, but such scene is more physical compared to disturbed psychological conditions). The probability for this to happen is directly proportional to the level of correspondence between the prototypical conceptual transfers of the languages involved. In this regard, Kövecses (2010a: 666-667; 2010b: 199-204; 2010c: 735-736) postulates that metaphors can be universal if they derive from a physical experience shared by humans to comprehend untouchable realities, like for example emotions; such metaphors can be shared only at a more general level and the linguistic expressions to represent a more specific conceptualisation can differ from one language to another.

To give some examples, certain German PUs containing conventional conceptualisations of madness listed in dictionaries that have something in common with the Italian ones previously described are: *nicht alle Daten im Speicher haben, nicht alle Tassen im Schrank haben, ein Rad abhaben, eine Schraube locker haben, bei jemandem ist ein Rad/Rädchen locker, nicht alle Latten am Zaun haben, nicht mehr alle Nadeln an der Tanne haben, nicht mehr alle Kekse in der Dose haben, sie nicht (mehr) alle auf dem Christbaum haben, sie nicht alle haben, einen Dachschaden haben, nicht ganz dicht sein, nicht richtig ticken, einen Sprung in der Schüssel/Tasse haben, einen weichen Keks haben, einen Kopfschuss haben*. Concerning the Spanish language, without distinguishing among the peninsular and American variants, we can consider: *estar mal de la cabeza, estar mal del coco, estar mal de la olla, estar mal del tarro, estar mal del quinto piso, estar mal de la azotea, tener pájaros en la azotea, estar fuera de juicio, estar alguien fuera de su acuerdo, estar alguien fuera de sus cabales / no estar alguien en sus cabales, estar más para allá que para acá, faltarle a alguien caramelos en el frasco, faltarle a alguien palos para el puente, faltarle un tornillo a alguien, aflojarse a alguien los tornillos/ un tornillo, patinarle a alguien el embrague, tener seco el cráneo, estar podrido de la cabeza, estar loco de atar, estar alguien para encerrar / para que lo encierren*.

On the basis on what has been previously claimed, regardless of the conceptual correspondence between each one of these institutionalised expressions and the Italian ones proposed, which do not represent a complete list, it is reasonable to suppose that German and Spanish native speakers could perceive the presence and the sense of the Italian PUs selected

without having heard or used them before, especially if the context helps in the interpretation, simply because their brain is used to think metaphorically about madness. The more the conceptual transfers represented by a given Italian expression and those available in the target language correspond, the more the recognition and correct interpretation of the PU are likely to take place. Thus, while a first approach to the comprehension and the translation of the PU depends on the presence of metaphorical uses for madness in German and Spanish, a second step has to do with the existence of common general conceptualisations. More concretely, the following circumstances have been detected: (i) correspondences between Italian and Spanish in the general ones A, D and E, so that it can be supposed that for a native Spanish speaker the recognition and interpretation of expressions like *essere fuori di testa*, *avere il cervello in pappa* and *essere matto da legare* would be less difficult; (ii) correspondences with Spanish and German in the generic conceptualisation C; (iii) no correspondences with regards to the generic conceptualisation B.

The following table contains the already proposed general and specific cognitive variations and the respective interlinguistic conceptual correspondences; the indications (IT), (ES) and (DE) refer to Italian, Spanish and German variants.

A) directional metaphor: conceptualisation detected only in Spanish
<p>A.1) directional metaphor in-out:</p> <p>a. (IT) <i>essere fuori di testa / essere uscito di testa / non starci con la testa / essere via di testa / essere fuori di capoccia</i></p> <p>b. (IT) <i>essere fuori di mente</i></p> <p>c. (IT) <i>essere fuori di cervello / essere via di cervello / essere uscito di cervello / non starci col cervello</i></p> <p>d. (IT) <i>essere fuori di senno</i>: correspondence with (ES) <i>estar fuera de juicio</i></p> <p>e. (IT) <i>essere fuori</i></p> <p>f. (IT) <i>essere fuori di sé</i></p> <p>g. (IT) <i>essere fuori come un balcone</i></p> <p>h. (ES) <i>estar alguien fuera de su acuerdo</i></p> <p>i. (ES) <i>estar alguien fuera de sus cabaes / no estar alguien en sus cabaes</i></p> <p>A.2) the mad person is far from the speaker:</p> <p>a. (IT) <i>essere più di là che di qua</i>: correspondence with (ES) <i>estar más para allá que para acá</i></p>

B) the brain is situated in the lower part of the body: no correspondences detected in Spanish and German
C) the mad person lacks something or is somehow defective: correspondences in Spanish and German
<p>a. the brain is a malfunctioning gear system where some components are missing or defective: conceptualisation detected in Spanish as well as in German</p> <p>i. (IT) <i>mancare qualche rotella (a qualcuno)</i>: correspondences with (ES) <i>faltarle un tornillo a alguien</i> and (DE) <i>ein Rad abhaben</i></p> <p>ii. (IT) <i>avere qualche rotella fuori posto / non avere tutte le rotelle a posto</i>: partial correspondences with (ES) <i>aflojarse a alguien los tornillos/un tornillo</i>, (ES) <i>patinarle a alguien el embrague</i>, (DE) <i>eine Schraube locker haben</i>, (DE) <i>bei jemandem ist ein Rad/Rädchen locker</i> and (DE) <i>nicht richtig ticken</i>.</p> <p>b. the mad person lacks his brain and this lack is associated with a bad habit: no correspondences detected in Spanish and German</p> <p>c. (IT) <i>aver (mandato) il cervello in vacanza</i></p> <p>d. (IT) <i>mancare un venerdì (a qualcuno)</i></p> <p>e. (ES) <i>faltarle a alguien caramelos en el frasco</i></p> <p>f. (ES) <i>faltarle a alguien palos para el puente</i></p> <p>g. (ES) <i>tener seco el cráneo</i>: the skull seems dry because the brain inside is missing</p> <p>h. (DE) <i>nicht alle Daten im Speicher haben</i></p> <p>i. (DE) <i>nicht alle Tassen im Schrank haben</i></p> <p>j. (DE) <i>nicht alle Latten am Zaun haben</i></p> <p>k. (DE) <i>nicht mehr alle Nadeln an der Tanne haben</i></p> <p>l. (DE) <i>nicht mehr alle Kekse in der Dose haben</i></p> <p>m. (DE) <i>sie nicht (mehr) alle auf dem Christbaum haben</i></p> <p>n. (DE) <i>sie nicht alle haben</i></p> <p>o. (DE) <i>einen Dachschaden haben</i></p> <p>p. (DE) <i>nicht ganz dicht sein</i>: the non-total impermeability is probably referred to a rooftop and is caused by a defect in it</p> <p>q. (DE) <i>einen Sprung in der Schüssel/Tasse haben</i></p> <p>r. (DE) <i>einen weichen Keks haben</i></p> <p>s. (DE) <i>einen Kopfschuss haben</i>: the head doesn't work because it is hurt</p>
D) the brain is in a state of decomposition: conceptualisation detected only in Spanish
a. (IT) <i>avere il cervello (andato) in pappa</i> : correspondence with (ES) <i>estar podrido de la cabeza</i>
E) madness is described with references to obsolete psychiatric treatments: conceptualisation detected only in Spanish

- a. (IT) *essere (matto/pazzo) da legare*: correspondence with (ES) *estar loco de atar*
 b. (IT) *essere matto/pazzo da catena*
 c. (ES) *estar alguien para encerrar / para que lo encierren*

Besides the correspondences above, some hybrid ones have also been observed. These could probably support the recognition and the correct interpretation of the Italian idioms.

Spanish, for example, does not seem to have cognitive mechanisms analogous to those represented by the conceptual phraseological variations belonging to items i. and ii. related to a. of A.1; thus, the existence of alternative expressions sharing the same conceptual transfer with *estar mal de la cabeza*, such as *estar mal del coco / del tarro / de la olla* could help a Spanish native speaker to comprehend PUs like *essere fuori di melone/cocomero/zucca/cocuzza* and *essere fuori di coccia/brocca*, thanks to their reference to the vegetable world in the first case and to the container in the second one; moreover, the association of someone being out transmitted by *estar fuera de juicio* and conceptually similar expressions could also play a role in the interpretation of these Italian PUs. Furthermore, the Spanish term for pumpkin (*calabaza*) can metaphorically designate the head, and this conceptual analogy with Italian could further facilitate the interpretation process of being *fuori di zucca/cocuzza*. In general, the tendency to figuratively understand the head, which has also been observed in *estar mal del quinto piso / de la azotea* and *tener pájaros en la azotea*, by itself could help to perceive the metaphoricity of some Italian expressions.

The same would apply to the German language: even if no institutionalised expressions containing a directional conceptualisation in-out have been detected, the possible use of *Kürbis* (pumpkin) to figuratively refer to the head, could facilitate a German native translator the comprehension of *essere fuori di zucca/cocuzza* if it is new for him/her. A degree of closeness between Italian and German has also been observed with regard to the conceptualisation of the head in terms of container, even if the general transfers are different: *Schrank*, *Schüssel*, *Tasse* and *Speicher*, in fact, are designed to contain more or less tangible things. The association between head and

biscuit (*einen weichen Keks haben*) is a further evidence of the general habit of metaphorising this part of the body through the reference to food.

Anyway, it is important to consider the risk that some hybrid correspondences could entail: on the one hand, an expression like *essere fuori di zucca*, which conceptually combines *estar fuera de juicio* with the metaphoric comprehension of the head in terms of *calabaza*, could be correctly interpreted but recognised as creative phraseological variation; similarly, a German native speaker could see it as an original metaphor which contains the common conceptual association between a human head and a pumpkin. On the other hand, possible non-lexicalised variants with innovative elements at a specific conceptual level, like for example *avere una vite allentata* or *avere una vite traballante*, could be identified as fixed due to a complete conceptual correspondence with Spanish and German PUs. In such cases the translator's linguistic and phraseological competence as well as his/her documentation play an essential role.

These examples show that when phraseological variation is considered from a cognitive point of view, it is possible to identify different levels of conceptualisations, from the more general to the more specific one, and to reflect on the mutual dependency relationships among the metaphorical transfers contained in each expression, on the possible motivations behind each variant and on the evocative effect caused by them. Furthermore, from a translational perspective, a comparison between the common conceptualisations in the source language and those usual in the target language to refer to the same reality can suggest whether non-native readers or translators are likely to identify the PU and its metaphorical value and to interpret it correctly or not: besides personal factors, linguistic and contextual aspects, this could also be bound firstly to the tendency to metaphorically comprehend a given reality in the other language, secondly to the correspondence of the general conceptualisations available in the source and target language, and finally to the grade of correspondence of the most specific mental transfers.

4.2. *Translation of the phraseological variants*

This section focuses on the final stage of the translation process, that is, the reproduction of the PU in the target language, which is bound to the result of the recognition and interpretation on the one hand, and to the existence or absence, in the target language, of idioms based on the same mental transfers. The translator's cognitive effort in this phase depends on the degree of correspondence between the conceptual systems available in the languages involved (*cf.* Mandelblit 1995). Some scholars have associated the translatability of idioms also with the presence of cultural references: Van Den Broeck (1981: 80-81), for example, highlights its dependence on the availability, in the target language, of analogous traditions and on possible differences between the aesthetic and moral codes of the two languages and cultures; similarly, Steen (2014: 12, 23) observes that the translation process is less complex if the languages involved are genetically, historically and culturally close, while it is more difficult when the two cultures and languages assign different associations and values to the domain used to conceptualise a given reality.

The concept of equivalence in relation to lexicalised metaphorical expressions is not clearly defined: from a translational point of view, for example, Rabadán Álvarez (1991: 78, 284) describes a functional-relational equivalence, which is bound not only to a semantic correspondence, but also to the capability of two expressions to fulfil the same function in the source and in the target text and to interact with their readers and their cultural systems identically; this kind of equivalence is dynamic, as it responds to different parameters depending on the specific situation. From the perspective of contrastive linguistics, the studies on equivalence in relation to idioms usually do not consider the context and the communicative situation, and they just distinguish among a total equivalence (if two languages have PUs with the same structure, semantic value and content), a partial equivalence (if some of these three aspects are different) and a non-equivalence (if the PUs differ completely); nevertheless, because translation choices depend on functional, contextual and connotative factors (*cf.* Zuluaga 1999: 543, 547-548), translators sometimes recognise and

correctly interpret an idiom but consider that the PU which seems to be equivalent in the target language is inappropriate in the target context (*cf.* Corpas 2003: 219-222, in Timofeeva 2012: 413). Functional phraseological translation studies is therefore aimed at searching for phraseological equivalence by taking into consideration contexts of use and connotative, socio-linguistic and cultural aspects of PUs (Timofeeva 2012: 414).

In the present work, equivalence is conceived in cognitive terms, but without the purpose of denying the importance of the considerations presented by the functional analysis of the translation of phraseology. It is assumed that the mental transfers evoked by a given PU have a certain weight on the conceptual system of people who use, hear or read it, and it is thus important at least to try to maintain them as much as possible unaltered in the target text and to combine this objective with pragmatic and contextual requirements: considering the cognitive mechanisms underlying idioms in the source language could help to find a conceptually appropriate translation; the highest cognitive equivalence is here conceived as the achievement of the highest level of specificity of mental transfers.

Assuming that, in this last phase of the translation process, the translator has ideally identified and correctly interpreted the PU, it can be supposed that, in presence of cognitive in addition to linguistic variants, the degree of conceptual equivalence between source and target expressions depends on the degree of similarity between the matryoshka-doll systems of the involved languages for that given reality. If we take into consideration the Italian variants analysed, the steps that a translator could follow in order to offer the conceptually closest PU in the target language are: 1) to express the same meaning through conventional conceptual transfers; 2) to express the same meaning through the same general conceptual transfer; 3) to express the same meaning through the most specific possible conceptual transfer. Such hierarchy, in the comparison between Italian on one side and German and Spanish on the other, has already been described in section 4.1., but it can be useful to complete point a. of A.1 as follows:

A) directional metaphor: conceptualisation detected only in Spanish

A.1) directional metaphor in-out:

- a. *essere fuori di testa / essere uscito di testa / non starci con la testa / essere via di testa / essere fuori di capoccia*: no complete correspondences have been detected
- i. head conceptualised in terms of fruit or vegetable with (IT) *essere fuori di melone/cocomero* and (IT) *essere fuori di zucca/cocuzza*: correspondence detected in this specific conceptualisation, but beyond the limits of the generic conceptualisation with (ES) *estar mal del coco*
- ii. head conceptualised in terms of container with (IT) *essere fuori di cocchia* and (IT) *essere fuori di brocca*: correspondence detected in this specific conceptualisation, but beyond the limits of the generic conceptualisation with (ES) *estar mal del tarro*, (ES) *estar mal de la olla*, and with (DE) *nicht alle Tassen im Schrank haben*, (DE) *einen Sprung in der Schüssel/Tasse haben* and (DE) *nicht alle Daten im Speicher haben*

The scenario presented above sheds light on some hybrid or partial correspondences: in order to search for a cognitive equivalence, when a translator works on the Italian-Spanish language combination and has to translate expressions like *essere fuori di zucca* or *essere fuori di brocca*, once he/she has identified and correctly interpreted them, if Spanish has available PUs concerning madness, he/she could look for solutions liable to cover the highest possible number of conceptual transfers contained in the source PUs, without altering their pragmatic and contextual dimensions. Because Spanish speakers regularly use metaphoric lexicalised formulations to refer to madness, the previously described matryoshka-doll system is easily accessible. If we select the general directional conceptualisation in-out, we can include PUs like *estar alguien fuera de juicio / su acuerdo / sus cabales*, *no estar alguien en sus cabales* or *estar más para allá que para acá*, but things get complicated when we move forward to the most specific conceptual transfer, related to the association between head and vegetables or containers, as no expressions including the directional as well as the ontological metaphor have been detected. However, the translator could give priority either to the general figurative transfer and propose one of the mentioned directional metaphors or to the most specific one, for example with *estar mal del coco* in one case and *estar mal del tarro / de la olla* in the other, aiming at the same time at a balance between conceptual dimension and pragmatic and contextual needs. His/her choice could also depend on the possible use of

a term contained in the PU within the discourse in order to create further images. Concerning German, due to the absence of directional metaphors, the translator can select the PU that he/she considers the most suitable with regards to register, context and frequency of use or, in the case of *essere fuori di coccia/brocca* he/she can decide to maintain only the association head-container with *nicht alle Tassen im Schrank haben, einen Sprung in der Schüssel/Tasse haben* and *nicht alle Daten im Speicher haben*.

5. Conclusions

The study carried out allows to draw some conclusions concerning basically two aspects: the possibility to consider the phraseological variation from a cognitive point of view and the utility of a cognitive approach to phraseological variation in translation.

The domain of madness has been chosen in order to identify a considerable number of synonymic Italian PUs and to determine if and how they can be conceptually classified; by analysing their mutual cognitive relations, the existence of more levels of conceptual variation has been observed. Conceptual variation can thus be conceived as a special matryoshka-doll system: the most general grade of variation concerns the presence of matryoshka dolls itself, that is, of different conceptualisations to understand the same domain; the following degrees concern the conceptualisation represented by each mother, the capability of each doll to contain one or more pieces of the same size if more conceptual alternative for a same level are available, and the possibility for these to host smaller dolls; each piece contained in a bigger one represents the increasingly specific conceptualisation. The number of pieces contained in each matryoshka doll depends on the number and conceptual nature of the alternative PUs.

The cognitive analysis of phraseological variation carried out for the Italian language has been related to the translation universe, and Spanish and German have been taken into consideration as possible target languages. On the basis of the conceptual cross-language correspondences identified, it has been assumed that the cognitive origin of the Italian variations can influence their recognition, as well as their correct interpretation and the mental effort required during these two processes: because German

and Spanish native translators or readers are used to comprehend madness in figurative terms, they could be able to recognise the Italian PU and to understand its meaning, even when they have never heard it before; the chances that this happens are high if their language has available conceptualisations which share the same generic mental transfer with the Italian PU, and increase even more when they also share higher levels of specificity; it can be supposed that the closer the conceptual universes of the two languages are, the less intense the cognitive effort is.

The translation process and the mental effort required for the comprehension of the source text and for the production of the target text, will thus depend not only on personal factors such as the translator's phraseological competence in the two languages involved and linguistic factors, related to the internal composition of the PU, but also on the conceptual affinity between source and target languages in relation to a given domain. This affinity leads to the identification and the correct interpretation of the PU and then determines the most suitable translation from a cognitive point of view, which should include the greatest possible number of conceptualisations represented by the Italian expression, depending on the possibilities offered by the target language.

Under no circumstances this study is aimed at underplaying the relevance of pragmatic and contextual components, but rather its purpose is to prove the importance of obtaining a balance between such components and the original conceptual nature of an expression.

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BIONOTE

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