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## Metaphor and Translation

Metaphor and translation enjoy an uneasy relationship: on the one hand, translation scholars are well aware of an incestuous relationship of the terms' respective etymologies, but little academic investigation of the relationship has been done. "Metaphor" derives from the Greek word *metapherein* (*meta* refers to "over" and *pherein* to "to bear" or "to carry") and means "the carrying of a meaning of one word over to another word". "Translation", very similarly, derives from the Latin term *translatus* (the past participle form of *transferre*; *trans* refers to "across" and *ferre* again to "to bear" or "to carry"), meaning "the carrying of a meaning across [a border] from one language to another". While metaphors refer primarily to change from words to words or from images to words, translation often refers more broadly to change from one language to another, to change from one medium to another, or to a change of place.

While some literary critics (I.A. Richards, Paul Ricoeur, Paul de Man) are quick to point out the overlapping conceptual domain of the terms, many translation scholars have reduced their understanding of metaphor to just another literary device. With the divorcing of literary translation from many 20th-century investigations of translational phenomena, the investigation of metaphor has suffered enormously. Eugene Nida, author of the Anglo-American "Bible" of translation, *Toward a Science of Translation* (1964), gives the matter a mere two pages; Georges Mounin, author of the French definitive study *Les Problèmes théoriques de la traduction* (1963), does not touch on the subject; and Rolf Kloepper, author of the seminal study of literary translation in German, *Die Theorie der Literarischen Übersetzung* (1967), devotes only one page to metaphor. While the pattern of neglect is widespread, a few translation scholars have begun to address the matter. M.B. Dagut has an informative piece "Can 'Metaphor' be Translated?" (1976); Raymond van den Broeck discusses some theoretical issues in "The Limits of Translatability Exemplified by Metaphor Translation" (1981); Mary Snell-Hornby points out the culture-specific nature of metaphor in "The Translation of Metaphor" section of her *Translation Studies: An Integrated Approach* (1988); Maria Tymoczko stresses the importance of metonymy to the understanding of oral tales in "The Metonymics of Translating Marginalized Texts" (1995); and Christina Schäffner, while not analyzing literary texts, makes use of work by cognitive linguists such as George Lakoff (1980; 1987) in her work analyzing the use of metaphors in everyday political speech (1996). In linguistics and literary theory, the discussion of metaphor is undergoing a kind of renaissance, with investigations from a variety of philosophical, literary, and linguistic perspectives. The 1978 symposium on "Metaphor: The Conceptual Leap" (Sacks (editor), 1979) held at the University of Chicago, with participants including Ted Cohen, Paul de Man, Donald Davidson, Wayne Booth, W.V. Quine, Max Black, and Paul Ricoeur, among others, is emblematic of this resurgence of interest.

In literary translation, metaphor is primarily considered a figurative expression by which a word or phrase is altered from its literal reference to a new and often wider field of reference.

To take one example from a fairly standard lexicon of literary terms, Henry Shaw in his *Dictionary of Literary Terms* (1972) defines metaphor as follows:

A figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to a person, idea, or object to which it is not literally applicable. A metaphor is an implied analogy which imaginatively identifies one thing with another. A metaphor is one of the tropes, a device by which an author turns, or twists, the meaning of a word.

Shaw goes on to give the example of Martin Luther writing, "A mighty fortress is our God", wherein "fortress" becomes the implied analogy for "our God", with all the imaginative associations that the word carried with it. Definitions such as Shaw's can usually be traced back to Aristotle, who talks of metaphor in *The Poetics*, for example, as the application of a name belonging to another thing (an "alien" name) to an object (chapter 21). Aristotle's thinking about metaphor is based on his dichotomized view of words in general; he categorizes them as simple or double; current or strange; common or unusual. Metaphor clearly fell into the double/strange/unusual category, usually newly coined, often ornamental, and inevitably "raised above" the common or current usage. While many critics from Plato on have used this altered state to locate metaphor in the area of deviation (from the truth), Aristotle thought such critics were in error. Metaphors, according to Aristotle, if used appropriately, could lead to a *clearness* of diction. Indeed, for Aristotle, command of metaphor was the writer's greatest achievement; he referred to it as the "mark of genius", implying an eye for resemblances previously unseen (*Poetics*, chapter 22).

While definitions of metaphor vary over the centuries and in differing cultures, the dichotomies set up by Aristotle have characterized most discussions. Generally, translation is concerned with bringing one meaning across cultures, and the complexity of carrying double meanings or new creative usages across linguistic boundaries has been especially troublesome, occasionally viewed as antithetical to the definition of translation itself. Thus, in many translation investigations, metaphor's creative and cognitive functions have been reduced to its being considered as a mere ornament. Examples chosen tend more toward the clichéd and less toward the innovative. Indeed, if empirical studies of metaphors in translations have shown us anything, it is that translators do tend to reduce the polyvalence and resonance of metaphors to more common usages, sometimes omitting the translation of metaphors entirely.

Metaphors tend to be divided by scholars into "live" (unique semantic creations) and "dead" (used by common speakers, often unknowingly) metaphors. In terms of scholars' advice regarding how to translate metaphor, opinions range from the idea that translation of metaphor is impossible to the notion of there being no problem present at all. On the one hand, as Dagut (1976) has pointed out, Nida suggests the translator avoid the problem, "metaphors must be translated as non-metaphors" (Nida, 1964); Vinay and Darbelnet agree, basing their conclusion on the structural incompatibility of the receiving language,

“la langue d'arrivée ne permet pas de traduire la métaphore littéralement” (the target language does not permit literal translation of metaphors) (*Stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais*, 1958: translated as *Comparative Stylistics of French and English*, 1995). Conversely, Kloepfer argues that the more original the metaphor is, the easier it is to translate; all one has to do is proceed word-for-word, for he argues that the “structures of fantasy” are the same for all humans (*Die Theorie der Literarischen Übersetzung*, 1967). Kloepfer's thesis has been taken up by scholars in Germany, including Katerina Reiss (*Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Übersetzungskritik*, 1971). The division of scholarship into separate camps, viewing the process as either impossible or easy, has greatly inhibited the investigations of the complex task of appealing both to shared ranges of cultural experience and to new semantic terms seldom associated with that experience.

More recent scholarship has inherited such limiting categories for investigation of translation and metaphor. Broeck (1981), for example, finds himself largely sympathetic to Kloepfer's claim. Indeed, Broeck goes so far as to say that it is easier to translate live metaphor than dead metaphor. Still, Broeck's research does demonstrate advances, the most significant of which is his use of systems theory to gain insight into the cultural network into which a metaphor is to be translated. The incorporation of social as well as linguistic data into the analysis allows Broeck to come up with a series of productive conclusions based less on unsubstantiated recommendations and more on empirical research. A summary of his findings includes: translatability [of metaphor] is high (1) when a pair of languages are of a close basic type; (2) when there is contact between the source and target languages; (3) when the cultural evolutions in the source and target languages proceed on parallel lines; and (4) when translation involves no more than a single kind of information (1981). Difficulty or ease of translating, according to Broeck, is thus based on cross-cultural connections rather than abstract universals; the possibility of success in finding appropriate metaphors depends much on the field of associations connected to equivalent terms in the receiving culture. Mary Snell-Hornby (1988) further explores the cross-cultural complexities of translating metaphors, pointing out that the metaphor's “originality” shifts with cultural developments as well as with the knowledge and experience of the receiver. Throwing out traditional “rules” for translating metaphor, Snell-Hornby stresses the complexity and creativity of the process as translators are forced to deal with issues of cognitive perception, function, and value judgements, all complicated by idiosyncrasies of language. Maria Tymoczko's insights on translation of the metonymic references of oral tales (1995) are also productively embedded in a cultural theory framework, one that juxtaposes the entire literary tradition of the source culture to that of the target culture. She argues that every telling of an oral tale evokes metonymic reference to every previous telling of that tale. Her research suggests that only seldom can all the metonymic functions of a source text be brought over to the target culture: the information overload would simply be too great. Thus all practising translators select for emphasis specific aspects of the metonymic relationship of the text to culture. She also argues that the decisions necessary for translating oral and marginalized texts often result in highly subjective versions that do not fit neatly into traditional discussions by translations scholars.

The notion that all literary language is metonymic/metaphorical is not a new one, but was advocated by many creative writers and literary translators, including Romantic poets of the 18th and 19th centuries (Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Herder, Schelling) and Symbolist poets of the 19th (Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Verlaine, Rimbaud). Literary critics (Cassirer, Richards) are quick to point out the connection: I.A. Richards, for example, devotes two of six chapters of *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1936) to the subject. Not limiting his findings to literary language, Richards views metaphor as a fundamental property of human thought in general, connecting the term metaphor to “transference” (cf. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 1900, translated 1913). Metaphors, according to Richards, thus create meanings, or provide a means for thinking, thereby shaping our very lives. The importance of metaphor for all literary signs is also integral to Russian formalist investigations of language; Roman Jakobson in *Fundamentals of Language* (1956) divides all language, including everyday speech, into either metaphor (the substitution of one term for another: similarity) or metonymy (the substitution of a part for the whole: contiguity). For example, in “Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances”, Jakobson relates the speech disorder aphasia to the blockage or restriction of the metaphoric and metonymic aspects of language. The Russian formalists expanded the field of associations for the term metaphor to include all linguistic and symbolic language and applied it to all human understanding in general: metaphor became viewed as the major trope for poetry; metonymy the major trope for prose. The same dichotomy was applied to various aspects of literary analysis, such as Symbolism versus Realism or the structure of dream versus the structure of logical thought. As the use of metaphor implies selection, substitution, and combination, so too, argued the Russian formalists, does everyday speech involve similar metaphoric/metonymic operations.

Cognitive linguistics has done considerable research on metaphors of everyday speech. George Lakoff & Mark Johnson, for example, in *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), dispute the notion that metaphor is merely a poetic trope or device that adds rhetorical embellishment, and instead demonstrate that metaphors are pervasive in everyday life, not just in language, but in thought and action. They argue that our conceptual system is fundamentally metaphorical in nature, and therefore structures metaphorically what we see, think, experience, and do. For example, Lakoff and Johnson show how we frequently use “war” metaphors in arguments; examples include “attacking” another's position; being “on target” with one's own points; using various “strategies” to improve one's position; and “shooting down” the opponent's points, etc. Indeed, the authors find it difficult to imagine an argument without the use of metaphors of war. Lakoff's work has progressed, and he has begun comparing metaphors in a cross-cultural fashion. In *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (1987), for example, he shows how metaphorical mappings tend to be motivated by cultural factors – myths, beliefs, experiences – that are fairly specific to particular cultures. He gives the example of the term *balan* from the aboriginal Australian language Dyirbal, a category that includes women, water, fire, fighting, and other dangerous things. Many birds, for example, are connected to this class because in the

culture they are believed to be the spirits of dead human females; this phenomenon is referred to by Lakoff as the "myth-and-belief principle". Lakoff's investigations tend to challenge the view of concepts of metaphor that are abstract and universal, and instead to show how they are dependent on and linked to physical and cultural experience.

To return to literary investigations, the view of metaphor as fundamental to rather than an embellishment on language has also played a major role in the Americas. The New Critics (Ransom, Warren, Tate), for example, echoed the view of the formalists; indeed for them the transaction between words and things could lead to a fusion yielding not just a decoration added to an object, but an entirely new and organically unified object – the poem itself, which then could be read as a kind of original metaphor. Mexican poet and translator Octavio Paz, in *Traducción: Literatura y Literalidad* (1971), reflects the literary translator's frustration with scholars of translation who claim that it is impossible to translate metaphor, or that metaphor falls only into the realm of the poetic and thus is not a part of translation studies proper. Paz critiques translation theorist Georges Mounin in particular for his "erroneous conception of what translation is". Instead, Paz argues that if the translator reproduces the verbal situation and the context in which the metaphor (connotative meaning) occurs, translation of metaphor is possible. For Paz, the very act of translation depends on the creation of metaphors or metonyms that both do and do not say the same thing as the original: "The original text never reappears in the new language (this would be impossible); yet it is ever present because the translation, without saying it, expresses it constantly, or else converts it into a verbal object that, although different, reproduces it: metaphor and metonym". Literary translation for Paz is less a copying and more a "transformation" or "transmutation" – a freeing of signs from language, a "dismantling", followed by a returning of the signs to another language, a "reproduction".

While the contributions of post-structuralist thinkers to translation practice in general have been fairly negligible, some recent thinking on metaphor seems useful. Drawing on work by linguists like Jakobson, many post-structuralist thinkers tend to view metaphor as something always present even in the most common words. Indeed, post-structuralist scholars tend to argue that culture's view of "reality" is dependent on the metaphorical process. Language ceases to be viewed as something reflecting reality and instead becomes understood as the medium by which an individual's conception of reality is formed. In "The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling" (in Sacks (editor), 1979), Paul Ricoeur refers to Aristotle and Jakobson when discussing the dual process of metaphor, i.e. that in which metaphors both refer and create. The use of metaphors assumes awareness of normative usage yet at the same time violates those norms. So metaphors, by nature, always have split referents. Although the new association need not be in the set of resemblances commonly associated with the word, understanding the metaphor depends on the receiver's knowledge of that field. The post-structuralist strategies of double-writing and of the interplay between identity and difference thus are effectively used in post-structuralist discussions of metaphor. While the connection to translation is also obvious – translated words too have at least double referential function (to other words and to other

language traditions), literary translators have been slow to respond to the wide corpus of material on metaphor provided by a new generation of literary theorists.

The double constitution of metaphor is perhaps best elaborated by Jacques Derrida, who in "White Mythology" (1972, translated 1982) argues that while metaphors are invariably reinscribed within an older canonical system of associations, they also displace those associations, during which process the possibility for a semantic wandering is opened. Many of the terms Derrida uses for talking about metaphor are the very same he uses for talking about translation. For Derrida, both translation and metaphor open up a space between non-meaning preceding language and meaning/truth embedded in language. For Derrida, every word functions as a metaphor, or better said, every word functions as a metaphor of a metaphor, thereby involving the reader/translator in the unlimited semiotic chain.

While on the one hand, such a literary theory of translation implies a theory of growth and originality, some critics might argue that a theory implies a continuist presupposition; that Paz's use of "mutation" implies an evolution rather than a clean break, reinscribing the metaphor in a continuous system, with its regularized and canonical repertoire of metaphors. Metaphor, as postcolonial critics argue, is invariably part of the system of mimesis and a means of knowledge that reinforces Western metaphysical thinking (Cheyfitz; Niranjana). Recently, the beginnings of a postcolonial strategy for (resisting) translating metaphor is emerging, one that challenges simplistic strategies for translating metaphors and destabilizes traditional notions of our definition of translation.

In *The Poetics of Imperialism* (1991), for example, Eric Cheyfitz devotes an entire chapter to "The Foreign Policy of Metaphor". Again, beginning with Aristotle, Cheyfitz argues that the division of words into common and unusual exerts a controlling force on the way Westerners think about language. Distancing himself from Butcher's translation of the term *xenikois* as "unusual", Cheyfitz suggests that the word also refers to "strange" or "foreign", and that in chapter 21.3 of the *Poetics* Aristotle uses *metaphoran* to refer to a word used in another country. Thus the figurative becomes the foreign, and the literal, the "proper" in Aristotle's terms, becomes the national. Translation is thus based on a certain "foreign policy" that often takes language away from the colonized people and turns it into the "proper" language of the colonizer. Using slave songs and "unmeaning jargon" as examples, Cheyfitz goes on to argue that one of the signs of a dispossessed people is their use of figurative language, a language that often escapes an overseer's translation. In *Siting Translation* (1992), Tejaswini Niranjana develops this point, arguing that translations of metaphors come into being overdetermined by religious, racial, sexual, and economic discourses and tend to fall into acceptable religious and racial fields of association: for example, many translators used Christian images to translate religious metaphors of South Indian spiritual texts (many early translators were missionaries). Niranjana shows effectively how traditional translations of such texts have assimilated certain metaphors into discourses of Christianity and/or post-Romantic New Criticism. Using Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator" (written 1923, translated 1968) as a guide, Niranjana keeps the "foreign" proper names of the colonized, avoids reducing and simplifying

verbs, and questions metaphors that tend toward (overdetermined) Western concepts.

Perhaps the leading articulation of such a "postcolonial" approach to translating metaphor comes from a group of modernist literary translators from Brazil. Haroldo and Augusto de Campos, for example, have articulated a translation strategy that questions the transparent, self-effacing role of the translator who tends to reduce metaphor to simpler and easy to understand terms, and instead advocate emphasizing difference and divergence from the norm. Terms used to refer to the translation process include "recreation", "transcreation", "transillumination", and most provocatively, "transluciferation mephistofaustica" (Haroldo de Campos, *Deus e o Diabo no Fausto de Goethe*, 1981). The strategy is deliberately not to use acceptable terms, but instead to transplant those terms, to "cannibalize" them and to allow them to take on new resonances in the receiving culture. Translation is viewed less as a medium to carry a unified and fixed meaning across cultures and instead as a medium that does not necessarily correspond with the religion, the music, or the semantic fields of the original. Indeed, translation becomes another kind of original writing, just as inventive, inspired and spontaneous. The goal, according to the de Campos brothers, is to translate not literally, but *metaphorically*, with the aim of producing analogous effects by different means. The goal is less a version, more a reversion; less a reconstitution of the signs in another language, more a reconstitution of the movement of the signs in language, even at the risk of adding phonetic, syntactic, or semantic connotations. Taking such cultural differences into consideration, Latin American translation scholars such as Else Vieira (1992; 1994) have pointed out how metaphors function differently in Latin America from the way they function in North America; rather than referring to a single, clear, unified referent, they instead often refer to multiple referents. Metaphors in Latin America are not bound by the set of discourses (Christian, philosophical, literary, colonial, scientific) used in Northern/Western discussion; rather, the translation of metaphors interweaves indigenous fields of referentiality into the imported fields. Basing research on literary translators (Haroldo and Augusto de Campos, Décio Pignatari, Ezra Pound, Octavio Paz) and literary theorists (Jorge Luis Borges, Oswald de Andrade, and Walter Benjamin), Vieira and others are beginning to trace another translation tradition that opens up a two-way flow of ideas and images. Indeed, Vieira argues that the very term "Latin America" is a metaphor for translation: Latin America has been transported into a set of images and metaphors dictated by the colonizers, metaphors that often make invisible the marks of the foreign (invaders). She argues that Latin America needs to be retranslated, this time taking on the qualities of the other while retaining aspects of its own identities (McGuirk and Vieira, editors, forthcoming).

Discussions of metaphor in translation circles is progressing through a stimulating period. Research is breaking down distinctions between literary devices and non-literary usage and is opening the way for linguists and translation scholars to rediscover what many literary translators already know. Research in this area will no doubt underscore the importance of literary translation to many other fields, including philosophy of language, cultural studies, and postcolonial studies. Certainly some re-evaluation of the vocabulary used within the field of

translation studies will be necessary in order to escape the bind of certain metaphysical assumptions about the relationship of the sign to the referent, leading to a new round of discussions over terminology in which this very encyclopedia participates. But an increased focus on metaphors will also reveal a better understanding of how literary translators practise their craft, giving insight into the nature of translation and the connection of translation to identity and cultural formation.

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