

PRESENTATION OF THE GENERAL THEME

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Over the last twenty-five years some radical rethinking has taken place in linguistics, particularly on some of the basic principles in which linguistics research since the 1950s has been grounded. This radical rethinking has changed the possibilities and ways we discuss cognition, metaphor, and translation. In addition to the radical rethinking of the topic which has taken place in linguistics, a complimentary rethinking of the problems of meaning, mind, and cognition has taken place within the scientific community, particularly in the field of neurology and brain-research. It is now possible to literally map, follow, describe, analyze, and hypothesize about the neurology of the brain as it processes sensory data and turns that data into useful information the feeds into the processes of cognition, meaning-making, and other functions of the brain.

For instance, criticism gradually developed around the presuppositions of generative grammar, which see language as a biological phenomenon with innate language universals and specific parameters for specific languages. On the basis of this rethinking, Chomsky's modular view of language, which is central to generativism, was also criticized. In contrast with this autonomous view of linguistic structures, new research has returned to a different and older tradition¹. This is a tradition which has always seen language from the point of view of meaning and does not isolate meaning from the other aspects of cognition. Besides, from this perspective, language competence is not attributed to innate potentiality but derives from social interactions and the cultural context of use in which language is acquired and developed. A major finding of this research is that language faculty cannot be separated from other kinds of cognitive competence. Language is the result of a wide range of cognitive resources, which bring about a large number of connections and coordinate much information.

This viewpoint inevitably sees meaning as a central aspect of linguistic research. Meaning is not separated from syntax, as in classic American structuralism and in generative grammar, but becomes its substance. For example, in the framework of Cognitive Linguistics, both Langacker and Lakoff have foregrounded these aspects. Lakoff (1987) has argued, more than once, that the most important aspects of syntax depend on thought, since the main function of language is that of expressing thoughts. To quote Fauconnier, "... language is in the service of constructing and communicating meaning, and it is for the linguist and cognitive scientist a window into the mind" (Fauconnier 2000: 95). Langacker (1987; 1991) argued that syntax is a formal system whose purpose is to give shape to meanings. Thus grammar also acquires meaning and consists of symbolic relations between meaning and phonological structures. Grammatical units make up a continuum with lexis, setting up various levels of abstraction.

This way of looking at language can open up interesting research routes. For example, it helps us to see figurative language not as only a formal (syntactic) tool but as the manifestation of more deeply rooted, more general cognitive competence. In the frameworks of Textual Rhetoric, I have discussed in some of my works, the anthropological ability to build up representations of the world through figures. Rhetorical figures are realized on the basis of conceptual domains, creating categories. We thus have access to a kind of reality that would otherwise be indeterminate. In other words, we can say that human beings have the cognitive ability to organize the world in figurative terms. This ability allows them to categorize reality, providing it with structure. In this sense figurative activity is the ability to construct world images employed in reality.

Figurative competence can be seen as an imaginative tool allowing the construction of meaning on the basis of patterns. In other words, we can refer the phenomena that create and present figures back to cognitive processes, which I see as both anthropological and expressive. These processes are anthropological because they concern a specifically human characteristic; they are expressive because they refer to the means by which human beings organize their communicative faculties. These processes are not restricted to verbal expression. It is in this way, for example, that we can see the imaginative faculty, myth, the unconscious, and, more generally, domains linked with expressive behavior as functioning in accordance with figurative patterns. In this sense figures concern the symbolic and sign domains. Fauconnier appears to be following this line of thought when he writes:

Figure ground and viewpoint organization pervades the sentence, the Tense system, Narrative structure, in signed and spoken languages, and of course many aspects of non-linguistics cognition. Metaphor builds up meaning all the way from the most basic levels to the most sophisticated and creative ones. And the same goes for metonymic pragmatic functions and mental space connections, which are governed by the same general Access principles. Frames, schemes and prototypes account for word level and sentence level syntactic/semantic properties in cognitive and construction grammar, and of course they guide thought and

¹ Cfr. Fauconnier 2000.

action more generally. Conceptual blending and analogy play a key role in syntax and morphology, in word sentence level semantics, and higher level of reasoning and rhetoric... (Fauconnier 2000: 97)

Along these lines, we can say that figurative language is an inherent element of language and consciousness and does not divert or break up common language. The figure does not come about by adding something to the word but by means of intersections, antitheses, inclusions, nearness, suppression of conceptual areas. This approach is found in contemporary cognitive approaches. Michael Tomasello (2005), for example, has underlined the ability of children to understand figures and to use them to relate the most concrete domains in their experience to the more abstract ones linked with adult social and mental life.

From my point of view the new cognitive approaches can offer new possibilities to the broad area of studies on translation, above all in the direction to go beyond some of the limits of the discipline. The importance of the role of figurative speech is as important to translation as was the explosion of semantics in the cognitive studies and the idea that metaphors structure our world perception. Such an appreciation of figurative speech can permit us to go beyond these limits and encourage a possible rethinking of translation studies founded on a wider consideration of the kind of facts which are connected with translation.

For example concepts like rhetorical field or, in a cognition framework, concepts like domain, frame, profile, mental spaces, and similarity can be very productive in this area. The distinction between profile-frame and dominion is particularly useful in order to understand the nature of phenomenon such as the semantic differences between words and their apparent equivalent in other languages. In this case it is useful to cast light upon difficulties of translation that depend on the differences of profiling certain concepts. Even the traditional contrastive linguistic approach, which generally dealt with the style, could be rethought in cognitive terms, considering not only the profiles, but also their relation with the frames and dominions.

Even the problem of equivalence can be completely reformulated and rejuvenated, even though TS declared it, often obtusely, old fashioned. Sometimes the non-equivalence between languages depends on the type and amount of information specified in the cognitive frame (Relevance theory is particularly "relevant" here since it studies the role that implied information plays in human communication). The Italian word "casa" (house) presumes a frame that specifies some important structural characteristics. In English the word "house" has a different meaning from "home". Both "house" and "home" when translated in Italian are translated into "casa." But this translation is a false equivalence; it is only a partial equivalence that is limited to the profile. The presupposed dominions of the two terms are very different. "House" is outlined by physical objects while "home" belongs to the affective sphere. It is assumed that abstract dominions from these two various types of conceptualization are related to two various spheres of cognition: the material one and that emotional one.

Another example is the term "eat", "mangiare" in Italian, which stands for the process of consuming food. In German we have "essen" and "fressen": both describe the process of consuming food, but one is used for human beings and the other term is used for animals. Even in this case the difference is the frame. There are times where the word "fressen" can be used to describe a human action but in this case it is considered in a very different way from "essen", the word in the sentence is constructed in order to make an human action like a animal action (cfr. Croft-Cruse 2004: 20). It is a bit what happens when violating the principles of Grice.

When analyzing the nature of the meanings of the words in different languages we often don't consider the differences at the level of frame/dominion that in many cases are culturally determined. Take for example the illustration of Croft and Cruse (2004: 21). They point to the verb "to genuflect", which is a movement of the body, more or less the same as the concept of kneeling down. But "genuflect" belongs to a much more specific frame, which is Catholic liturgical use. One can actually dig even deeper since "genuflect" is really an ecclesiastical Latin word "domesticating" and translating the Greek verb "proskunein" which had the widest of usage in pagan cultic, administrative, and royal frameworks. Often the frames are very culturally specific, and the idea that translating necessarily implies a loss simply means that there is a non-equivalence of frames.

The distinction between profile and frame is very useful also for the analysis of those words that have been defined as untranslatable, another untouchable topic for the Translation Studies. We could use as an example the Japanese concept of *iki*. Kuki Shuzo, a student of Bergson, Husserl and Heidegger wrote a book about this concept (*The Structure of Iki*). What does *iki* mean? In the XVII century, with Chinese pronunciation it meant something worthy of particular attention, in successive ages it changed its meaning into someone who is expert in the art of making love. In the XIX century it stands for the behavior of the geishas, representing an ability to move in situations under pressure--the ability to deceive and to be spontaneous and elegant. Kuki considers *iki* the maximum level of the Japanese culture. It can mean elegance, but also to despise someone, and it can also stand for the best behavior and essence of someone. Therefore in order to understand the term *iki* it is necessary to comprehend an enormous portion of the Japanese culture and its way of categorize the world.

Croft and Cruse (2004: 21) take in consideration the German term *Bildung*. And they cite William Glen-Doepel, the English translator of Hans-Georg Gadamer. In the introduction of the English edition of *Truth and Method* he states that when *Bildung* is translated with “culture” it has to do with the reality of German culture between the end of the 1800s and the beginning of the 1900s. Therefore *Bildung* is outlined in a frame that refers to the German culture of the intellectual élite that goes back to two centuries ago. In other words the reason why *iki*, *esprit* and *Bildung* are not translatable is due to the specific cultural characteristics of the frame in which and against which the concept is profiled. Translating *iki* with elegance, *esprit* with *Geist* or *Bildung* with culture creates an approximate equivalence between the profiles, but absolutely not on the frame level.

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