

Metaphorics

Rainer Guldin

The notions of metaphor and translation are related in several ways. In European and Anglophone culture, they share a common etymology. The Greek *metaphorá* – from *metá*, meaning across, after, and *phérō*, to bear, to carry – was translated into the Latin *translatio* – from *transferre*, *translatus*, to transfer, to convey across. Besides having the same meaning, the Latin *translatio* and the Greek *metaphorá* can also be used to mean both translation and metaphor (Evans 2001). The word *translation* is thus already a spatial metaphor for the process of translation. This intimate connection between the two terms has led to a long-lasting fascination with etymology and the spatial nature of translational and metaphorical processes and become a problem that translation studies still has to contend with (Hermans 2004). According to Halverson (1999), the etymological argument is anything but compelling. In the English language, the spatial conceptualization of translation processes existed before the term ‘to translate’ was imported from Latin. The Latin *translatio*, furthermore, originally had other meanings, one of which was to change in form, appearance or substance. For Cheyfitz (1991), focusing on a politics of translation, rather than being the result of a common etymology the exchangeability of the two terms is based on the opposed notions of the literal and the figurative and their territorial interpretation in Aristotle, who linked the literal to the proper, national or normal and the figurative to the improper, foreign and strange. Because of this, both translation and metaphor were considered derivative.

Besides their common etymological origin, translation and metaphor share a comparable terminological trajectory. Their interrelated histories could be described in terms of a common pattern of emancipation leading to an empowerment and enlarging of the two theoretical fields. Thus debates on translation (Tymoczko 2007) and metaphor have now moved from the confines of linguistic analysis to a much broader understanding of these phenomena, shedding their secondary subservient role in the process (Guldin 2010). Other points of contact between translation studies and metaphor theory include the translatability of metaphors, the use of metaphors to describe translation, and the function of translation as a metaphor within the humanities and the natural sciences.

Metaphor theories

The development of metaphor theory begins with Aristotle’s *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* and Quintilian’s textbook on rhetoric, *Institutio Oratoria*, passing through semantics and reaching philosophy, scientific discourse and cognitive linguistics. According to Ricoeur (1977), this progression through the disciplines is complemented by an analogous itinerary from word-unit, to sentence, to discourse. Classical rhetoric defines metaphor as a single-word figure of speech and describes it in terms of deviation. Metaphor is a trope of resemblance operating spatially through displacement and transportation. The early rhetorical understanding of metaphor led to the formation of a substitution theory that relegated the role of metaphor to that of a mere ornament and assumed that metaphors can be completely retranslated into figurative meaning.

A radical reinterpretation of metaphor was introduced by Nietzsche, who defined truth as “a movable host of metaphors [and] metonymies” (1999:84), suggesting that our very grasp on

reality was pre-structured by language and its operative principles. In *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, first published in 1937, Richards abolishes the clear-cut border between the literal and the figurative and introduces the interrelated notions of tenor and vehicle. The tenor refers to an object, person or idea and the vehicle is that to which the tenor is compared. The co-presence of tenor and vehicle and their interaction generates the meaning(s) of the metaphor. Metaphor is no longer a simple transfer of words, but a transaction of semantic contexts (Richards 1965). Following in Richards' footsteps, Black (1954) draws a distinct boundary between the classical theory of metaphor and what he terms the interaction view. He describes the structure of metaphorical statements, which consist of a focus (one or more words considered metaphorical) and a frame (the non-metaphorical context of the statement). Meaning arises from the interaction of frame and focus. The frame of the metaphor acts on the focal word to produce new meaning, which is not reducible to simple paraphrase or literal use. In a subsequent essay, Black (1962) reinterprets metaphors in terms of models, highlighting the connection between their descriptive and heuristic function. Metaphors and models possess a common isomorphic structure and function through complex networks of statements. This new interpretation liberates metaphor from its confinement to rhetorical and linguistic understanding and significantly narrows the distance between the humanities and the natural sciences, both "an affair of the imagination" (ibid.:242). Black's view bridges the gap between earlier semantic accounts and the upcoming radical extension of the meaning of metaphor in scientific theory and cognitive linguistics.

A number of publications signal the growing recognition of the innovative potential of metaphors outside the areas of rhetoric and literary studies: Ricœur's *The Rule of Metaphor* (1977), and two seminal collections of essays, Sacks' *On Metaphor* (1979) and Ortony's *Metaphor and Thought* (1979), with contributions from philosophy, religion, pragmatics, psychology, social theory, science and education. Lakoff and Johnson's groundbreaking *Metaphors We Live by* followed in 1980. Drawing on cognitive linguistics, Lakoff and Johnson assert that everyday speech, scientific discourse and the very way we think and act are fundamentally metaphorical in nature. Thanks to metaphor, we understand and experience one thing in terms of another. This is particularly important when it comes to abstract concepts and key notions that carry an ambivalent charge of meaning and therefore call for repeated forms of metaphorization. Metaphors operate through projective mapping, which links a source and a target domain (Lakoff 2002). The relatively more concrete and physical source domain of a metaphor is mapped onto a target domain, the latter being more abstract and difficult to grasp.

Translation and metaphor

The traditional view of metaphor in translation studies treats it as an ornamental element of language, but a more sophisticated view of metaphor and its relationship to translation has emerged since the turn of the century. This is particularly evident in the theoretical reflection on the translatability of metaphor, a thorny question that has itself called for various forms of metaphorization (Monti 2010).

In the mid-1970s, Dagut (1976) pointed to the fact that although both metaphor and translation were connected to interlingual incongruence the former did not occupy the prominent place it deserved in translation theory. In the course of the 1980s, metaphor and its translatability became one of the central issues and a fertile testing ground for the new emerging

discipline of translation studies (Newmark 1980; van de Broeck 1981; Mason 1982). Nevertheless, broader interest in metaphor theory and its relevance to the translation of metaphors was slow to develop. In the mid 1990s, Mandelblit (1995) still complained about the striking asymmetry between the treatment of metaphors in translation studies and the new findings of the cognitive view of metaphor. Schäffner (2004), commenting on the options available for translating metaphor and the challenges this phenomenon poses for the translator and for translation theory, points to a persistent lack of interest in the new theoretical developments in the field of metaphor studies and their applicability to the translation of metaphors. "In most cases", she asserts, "the argumentation is based on a traditional understanding of metaphor as a figure of speech ... which is substituted for another expression (with a literal meaning), and whose main function is the stylistic embellishment of the text", pointing out that the cognitive approach has been slow to attract scholars' attention (ibid.:1254).

One of the first translation scholars to address the relevance of metaphors for translation studies was Koller (1972:40-63), although he focused on a very limited number of metaphors and adopted a largely traditional view, positing that metaphors are a pre-scientific tool that can initiate thinking and pave the way for further, more systematic reflection, but they cannot generate new knowledge. In a completely different vein, Hermans (1985) offered a broad historical overview of metaphors of translation in the Western European tradition from antiquity to modern times, emphasizing their importance in discourses on translation. In a subsequent essay, he engaged critically with the major theoretical strands of metaphor theory and their relevance for translation studies (Hermans 2004). Despite some persistent theoretical hesitations concerning the epistemological utility of metaphors of translation, metaphor is now considered an indispensable means of reflection and a common device of scientific analysis in the field. St. André's (2010) collection of essays is a clear signal of the theoretical shift that has occurred in translation studies with regard to metaphor theory. Contributors to this volume stress the importance of metaphors for theorizing translation and make use of contemporary theoretical insights of metaphor theory in their analysis.

European and Anglophone scholarship draws on five main interrelated source domains for metaphors of translation: space, art/craft, nature/body, power and gender (Guldin 2016:24-46). Spatial metaphors, especially the transfer metaphor (Martín de León 2010), are still by far the most influential in the field. However, they have increasingly met with criticism, especially the metaphor of the in-betweenness of the translator (Baker 2005, 2009; Tymoczko 2003). These source domains relate to different interlinked metaphorical levels of translation: the translation process and its different stages, the relationship between source and target text, the role of the translator, the question of (un)translatability, and the relationship of the translator to the target culture. Cross-domain connections strengthen the effectiveness of specific metaphors, creating a dense argumentative net that involves the different metaphorical levels of translation and their interrelatedness. Gender metaphors of translation, for instance, is closely related to power issues and colonial asymmetries and at the same time impinges upon the role of the translator and the relationship of source and target text. Chamberlain (1988/2000) discusses the relationship between source and target text and the role of the mother tongue in terms of female and male sexual identity, highlighting the centrality of issues of paternity and the implications of feminizing the original text. In the traditional view, the translator is torn between two irreconcilable forms of fidelity that can in some cases enter into open antagonism with each other: the source-oriented fidelity of a male author-translator to the original female text and the target-oriented fidelity to his own feminine mother tongue.

Fidelity to the mother tongue can justify abuse, rape or pillage of the other language and the translated text. Arrojo (1994) further highlights the close connection of asymmetrical gender relations to the power divide at work in colonial settings. The femininity of the translator and the supposedly reproductive side of his or her activity are directly correlated with the subaltern subject of colonization and the slave. Another metaphor from the body/nature domain which interacts with both the gender and power domains is Brazilian cannibalism (Vieira 1994). The polyvalent cannibalistic image has been a major cultural metaphor and an exemplary mode of symbolic struggle against neo-colonial dependency in Brazilian culture. The cannibal does not deny the other culture, but devours it in order to transform and absorb it. Through cannibalistic translation, the new text becomes an original in its own right. The translator likewise becomes a creator in her or his own right, negating any debt they have contracted towards the original.

Wadensjö (1993) and Roy (1993) have critically engaged with the restrictive role of the conduit metaphor (Reddy 1979) in interpreting studies. Interpreting has been generally subsumed under translation, the main difference being the focus on spoken messages. Because of this focus, the role of the interpreter – rather than the relationship of source and target text – takes centre stage. The deleterious notion of the interpreter as a simple conduit has led to an oversimplified view of interpreting processes. The conduit metaphor pays attention to the safe transfer of meaning. The interpreter is a mediator or a channel operating as an instrument that conveys messages without changing them. By positing a detached and neutral stance, this view expunges the inherent ambivalences of the interpreter's position and the need for constant adaptation to the shifting conditions of within which interpreting takes place.

Research on the metaphors of translation in China, Japan and India has highlighted a number of specificities that have encouraged a critical reassessment of metaphors of translation in the European and Anglophone context. Cheung (2005) reinterpreted the traditional Chinese notion of *fanyi* as describing translation in terms of transmission and representation, but also as change and exchange. Wakabayashi (2009) explored the etymology of the equivalent of translation in Japanese culture. Translation is described as a softening and breaking down of the text in order to make it understandable or as a flipping over of the original. In both cases, the emphasis is not on transference but on transformation. Trivedi (2006) pointed to a relevant difference between spatial and temporal metaphors of translation. The Sanskrit word *anuvad* originally meant repeating a word after someone, without carrying any spatial connotation. In the late nineteenth century, the word acquired the new, European meaning of translation as a transfer between languages. A temporal metaphor was thus translated into a spatial metaphor. Sakai (1999) makes a similar point. The new regime of translation that came about in Japan and Europe in the late eighteenth century was directly linked to the creation of nations and national languages conceived as homogeneous self-contained units. A temporal understanding of the act of translation as difference in repetition was substituted by a spatial notion of linguistic transfer that erased the transformative dimension of the process. Following the same line of thought, Batchelor reinterprets Homi Bhabha's (2006) concept of the third space as referring to a time lag between an event and its enunciation. The source text loses its spatial fixity and translation becomes a "dynamic, non-linear process of travel from source to target text" (Batchelor 2008: 66). Based on Benjamin's concept of the disruptive power of the 'now' (Benjamin 1968), Hjorth (2014) questions traditional views of translation based on fidelity to a fixed and timeless original and calling for the preservation of its stable meaning. Hjorth also contrasts the visual metaphor of translation as a mirror image of the original, predominant in

translation theories based on the notion of equivalence, with Benjamin's (2000) acoustic metaphor of translation as an echo of the original.

Translation as metaphor

The metaphoricity of translation is subject to cultural and temporal factors, which impinge on the relationship between its literal and metaphorical dimensions. Although translation is still generally viewed as involving transfer of meaning from one language to another, in Medieval Latin *translatio* was also used to refer to the symbolic displacement of practices and objects, as well as the physical transfer of a saint's remains or relics from one place to another and the relocation of a cleric from one office to another. The medieval notion of *translatio imperii et studii* implied the transfer or translation of culture, knowledge and political power or legitimacy (Stierle 1996), an understanding that has rendered the term translation amenable to being used as a metaphor in other disciplines.

A number of translation scholars have described the enlarged metaphorical view of translation that has been resurfacing across a wide array of disciplines since the turn of the century as a translation turn (Bassnett 1998; Snell-Hornby 2009). However, the metaphor of translation has a longer history and has been used independently of developments in translation theory, for instance in Freudian psychoanalysis (Mahony 1982), cultural anthropology (Asad 1986), ethnography (Clifford 1997) and media theory (McLuhan 1999). It has also been used since the 1980s in Actor-Network-Theory (Callon and Latour 1981; Callon 1986), a sociological theory that uses the metaphor of translation to describe the contradictory character of the social and the processes that generate it. Translation is either a unilateral or a reciprocal process of exchange and transformation that projects different forms of dependence and subordination. It operates within a network of heterogeneous elements and can 'translate' the wills of different individual actors into one, creating coherence or provoking displacement, dissidence and defection.

The metaphor of translation used in postcolonial theory (Cheyfitz 1991; Rafael 1993; Niranjana 1992; Spivak 2000) has led to the reintroduction of aspects that had disappeared from the spectrum of meaning of the term translation, reintegrating the dimensions of culture, language, politics, identity, religion and power and emphasizing the fundamental ambivalence of translation, always poised between liberation and coercion. The notion of cultural translation used in postcolonial discourse, especially in connection with Bhabha's (2006) highly influential concepts of hybridity and third space, has received much attention in translation studies and sparked opposing reactions (Trivedi 2007; Maitland 2016; Bennett 2012).

The metaphor of translation has also been employed in the natural sciences. Translational medicine (Wehling 2010) makes use of it to describe the difficult passage between developmental stages, from early preclinical research on animals to the commercial launch of a new drug and its use in hospitals. Translation processes are reversible and help to overcome divisions between preclinical and clinical stages, theory and practice, animal and human. Molecular genetics makes a very specific use of the metaphor of translation, differentiating it clearly from other transformative forms like transcription. In genetic translation, nucleotide sequences in DNA are translated into sequences of amino acids to generate proteins. Translation is a target-oriented, rigorous, unidirectional process monitored by an error-checking mechanism.

Metaphors of translation are used to describe complex transformation processes and to connect heterogeneous contexts by creating inner theoretical cohesion. The metaphor is mostly employed according to the theoretical necessities of the relevant discipline and generally without any explicit reference to prevailing theories of translation. Instead of focusing on the linear passage of information from source to target seen as pre-given, static and independent entities, the metaphor of translation suggests a chain of successive, interlinked, overlapping and in some cases reversible processes that lack a clear origin and a final point of arrival.

Further reading

Guldin, R. (2016) *Translation as Metaphor*, London & New York: Routledge.

Offers a comprehensive analysis of key theories of metaphor, covering both metaphors of translation and their theoretical influence in translation studies as well as the use of translation as a metaphor in the humanities and natural sciences.

St. André, J. (2010) *Thinking Through Translation with Metaphors*, Manchester: St. Jerome.

A seminal collection of essays that cover a wide range of metaphors of translation and their theoretical relevance for translation studies, as well as an annotated bibliography of works concerned with metaphors of translation.