Cognitive Approach to Metaphor Translation in Literary Discourse

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Abstract

In this paper, a cognitive approach to metaphor translation in literary discourse is used, with a reference to a collection of short stories by a famous Russian writer Vasily Shukshin (1929-1974) and their translations in English. The study presented is focused on the analysis of the anthropomorphous metaphor, in particular the conceptual mapping between MAN and NATURE concepts described contrastively in source and target texts. The theoretical framework relies on the cognitive approach to metaphor, most notably on Mandelblit’s (1995) Cognitive Translation Hypothesis.

Keywords: Anthropomorphous metaphor; conceptual mapping; literary discourse; translation procedures

1. Introduction

In the translation process we create new texts (target texts) which exist independently from their source texts not only as products of the target language (TL) but also within the target culture. Investigations into the relationship between source (the text to be translated into another language) and target texts (the translated text) were incorporated into Translational Studies (TS), the scientific discipline dealing with theoretical and practical aspects of the process of rendering information from one language into another. Metaphor has become one of the main linguistic objects of comparative investigations between source and target texts. The tasks of metaphor translation make it necessary to outline the key views on metaphor, past and present. Metaphor is for most people a device of poetic imagination and ornamental aspect of speech that is used for some artistic and rhetorical purpose. Or, as the Encyclopedia Britannica puts it: “metaphor [is a] figure of speech that implies comparison between two unlike
entities, as distinguished from simile, an explicit comparison signaled by the words “like” or “as”. Moreover, metaphor is typically viewed as characteristic of language alone, a matter of words rather than thought or action.

Up until most recently, metaphor has been primarily studied by philosophers, rhetoricians, literary critics, psychologists, linguists. Now there is a greater emphasis on situating metaphor studies within broad, comprehensive models of human cognition, communication, and culture. Lakoff and Johnson initiated a new study more than thirty years ago. In fact, it was their work “Metaphors We Live By” that changed the way linguists thought about metaphor; moreover, it partly defined cognitive linguistics itself as we know it today. Lakoff (1980) and his collaborators have provided an impressive empirical demonstration of the prominence of metaphorical thought in everyday life (i.e. our everyday concepts are structured by the conventional metaphors). Moreover, they have shown how many of the novel metaphors in poetry can be analyzed as new extensions or new combinations of conceptual metaphors (Lakoff, Turner, 1989). In general, cognitive theorists identify metaphor as a process of mapping between two different conceptual domains: the target domain (the concept to be described by the metaphor), and the source domain (the concept drawn upon, or used to create the metaphorical construction).

In recent decades, metaphor has been widely discussed within the discipline of Translation Studies, predominantly with respect to translatability (van den Broeck, 1981) and has since tackled the issues from several points of view (prescriptive, contextual, descriptive and cognitive) and in relation to different types of discourse. To put it another way, metaphor translating centers around three points: transfer procedures, text-typologies, and cultural specificity.

This paper attempts to investigate the anthropomorphous metaphor from a cognitive perspective with a reference to translation procedures and cultural adequacy in the literary discourse.

2. Methodology

The translation of metaphor has always been a source of discussion and conflict. It has been argued that metaphors can become a translation problem, since transferring them from one language and culture to another one may be hampered by linguistic and cultural differences. Different theories and approaches have been proposed with regard to metaphor translation, each has tackled this problem from a different point of view. The late twentieth century presented several papers on translation studies that touched on the subject in one way or another (Nida, 1964; Reiss, 1971; Dagut, 1976; van den Broeck, 1981; Newmark, 1988; Snell-Hornby, 1988; and others). Some contradictory views on the limits of metaphor translatability have emerged from these studies:

- Metaphors are untranslatable (Nida, 1964; Dagut, 1976).
- Metaphors are fully translatable (i.e. metaphor translation is no different than translation in general) (Reiss, 1971; Mason, 1982).
- Metaphors are translatable but pose a considerable degree of inequivalence (van den Broeck, 1981; Newmark, 1988).

An overwhelming empirical evidence of metaphor translatability makes the first viewpoint quite untenable. The second opinion is obviously ambiguous as stylistic appropriateness, cultural adequacy should be taken into account when translating metaphors that can become a challenging task for a translator. The adherents of the last realistic view are P. Newmark and R. van den Broeck. As metaphor considered as not only a stylistic rhetorical device but also a cultural phenomenon, certain types of metaphors are often predominant in specific genres. Newmark believes that choosing from among the strategies to translate metaphors is strongly contingent upon their types (scientific-technological (informative), institutional-cultural (vocative), literary texts (expressive texts) (Newmark, 1988). Newmark taxonomizes different types of metaphors in relation to their contextual factors and translation procedures. He designed ‘A Diagram of Metaphors and Their Translations’ presented in Table 1.
Table 1. ‘A Diagram of Metaphors and Their Translations’ by P. Newmark.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of metaphor</th>
<th>Translation procedure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dead</td>
<td>Same image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cliché</td>
<td>Different image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard</td>
<td>Reduce to sense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Original</td>
<td>Adapt images</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metonym</td>
<td>Sense plus image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weakened</td>
<td>Simile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redundant</td>
<td>Deletion</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The implications of Newmark’s taxonomy are meaningful in the present paper as it deals with the anthropomorphous metaphor that is considered as an original metaphor. According to Newmark, the defining feature of the original metaphor is that it contains "the core of an important writer's message, his personality, and his comment on life" (Newmark, 1988, p. 112). He deems such metaphors to be a source of enrichment in the target language. Besides, original or bizarre metaphor, being both an expressive and an aesthetic component, has to be "preserved intact in translation, i.e. ‘should be translated literally, whether they are universal, cultural or obscurely subjective’ (Newmark, 1988, p. 112). Nevertheless, he pinpoints that a translator can replace a metaphor of this kind with a descriptive metaphor or reduce it to sense if an original cultural metaphor appears to be a little obscure and not very important.

Newmark’s translation procedures have frequently been taken up in literature. These ‘advisable’ translation procedures are arranged in order of preference (Fernández, 2005, p. 61).

- Reproducing the same image in the TL.
- Replacing the image in the SL with a standard TL image which does not clash with the TL culture.
- Translation of metaphor by simile, retaining the image.
- Translation of metaphor (or simile) by simile plus sense, or occasionally metaphor plus sense.
- Conversion of metaphor to sense.
- Deletion, if the metaphor is redundant.
- Using the same metaphor combined with sense, in order to enforce the image (Newmark, 1998).

In contrast to Newmark’s prescriptive framework, van den Broeck emphasizes the possibility of generalization on metaphor translation, and suggests three modes of metaphor translation as alternative solutions to the ideal of reproducing the metaphor intact. He listed the following theoretical possibilities.

- Translation ‘sensu stricto’ (i.e., transfer of both SL tenor and SL vehicle into TL).
- Substitution (i.e., replacement of SL vehicle by a different TL vehicle with more or less the same tenor).
- Paraphrase (i.e., rendering a SL metaphor by a non-metaphorical expression in the TL) (van den Broeck, 1981, p. 77).

To van den Broeck the task of a translation theory is not prescribing how metaphors should be translated, but describing and explaining identified solutions.

Within the above mentioned approaches the argumentation is based on a traditional understanding of metaphor as a figure of speech, as a linguistic expression which is substituted for another expression (with a literal meaning), and whose main function is the stylistic embellishment of the text. It is only recently that a cognitive approach to metaphor has been applied to Translation Studies, so little has been written towards a theory or model of metaphor translating (Mandelblit, 1995; Maalej, 2008; Schäffner, 2004; Kovecses, 2005). The target ideas within a cognitive approach to metaphor translation are listed below:
Metaphor is understood as a cognitive process that conceptualizes people’s minds and thoughts linguistically in similar or different ways in languages.

Metaphor translation is the inter-cultural process, so it is too hard to translate the metaphor adequately (deep knowledge of intercultural ties is demanded).

The practical rules of translation suggested by cognitive linguistics’ researchers are the same as traditional one. A number of translation procedures have been suggested, such as substitution (metaphor into different metaphor), paraphrase (metaphor into sense), comparison or deletion.

Corpus studies on conceptual metaphor carried out by C. Schäffner on political discourse in English and German shows how translators handle metaphorical expressions, and what effects this had for the text itself, for text reception by the addressees, and for subsequent discursive development. Having analyzed different English translations of one and the same German political metaphors, the following cases (not “translation procedures” as ready-made solutions for translators”) are presented:

- A conceptual metaphor is identical in ST and TT at the macro-level without each individual manifestation having been accounted for at the micro-level.
- Structural components of the base conceptual schema in the ST are replaced in the TT by expressions that make entailments explicit.
- A metaphor is more elaborate in the TT.
- ST and TT employ different metaphorical expressions which can be combined under a more abstract conceptual metaphor.
- The expression in the TT reflects a different aspect of the conceptual metaphor (Schäffner, 2004).

On the basis of the cognitive approach, Mandelblit (Mandelblit, 1995) presents Cognitive Translation Hypothesis and considers two schemes for the translation of metaphors:

- Similar mapping conditions (SMC will obtain if no conceptual shift occurs between the metaphors of the two languages).
- Different mapping conditions (DMP will obtain in case a conceptual shift takes place the metaphors of two languages in presence).

Thus, Mandelblit believes that when the SL and TL share similar mapping conditions the translation of the SL metaphor will be simply done by choosing an equivalent TL metaphor or (in the worst conditions) a TL simile. However, if the SL follows different mapping conditions compared to that of the TL, the translation of metaphor will be more problematic and consequently time-consuming. In this case, the translator should render the SL metaphor through choosing a TL simile, or by a paraphrase, a footnote, an explanation or omission (Mandelblit, 1995).

Cultural differences between the SL and the TL, and between the source culture and the target culture, have often been mentioned as problems for the translation of metaphors. Al-Hasnawi assumes that “the more the SL and TL cultures in question conceptualize experience in a similar way, the easier the task of translation will be” (Al-Hasnawi, 2007). In other words, “since metaphors are related to different cultural domains, this implies that the translator has to do the job of conceptual mapping on behalf of the TL reader; he has to look for a TL similar cognitive equivalence in the target culture. He attempts to carry out a cognitive study of the translation of some metaphors (randomly selected examples) from English into Arabic. His ultimate goal is through the study of metaphorical expressions in a given culture “to see how the members of that culture map or structure their experience of the world and record it into their native language”. Being more interested in the outcome of Mandelblit’s research than in its methodology and objectives, Al-Hasnawi has added one scheme to Mandelblit's Cognitive Translation Hypothesis and considered three schemes for the translation of metaphors as follows:

- Metaphors of similar mapping conditions (“the cultural universal SL metaphors derived from shared human experience”).
• Metaphors having similar mapping conditions but lexically implemented differently (metaphors which are only lexically different due to the ethical system in the TL and SL).
• Metaphors of different mapping conditions (the culture-bound SL metaphors).

Lakoff and Johnson contend that "a culture may be thought of as providing, among other things, a pool of available metaphors for making sense of reality"; "to live by a metaphor is to have your reality structured by that metaphor and to base your perceptions and actions upon that structuring of reality" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 12). Thus, translation is “a mapping from one language to another language” (see ibid.). This view suggests that translators need to develop adequate cogno-cultural awareness when translating metaphoric expressions. Accordingly, metaphors root in the culture of a nation and reflect their cultural beliefs and values. Therefore, the translation of metaphors between two different languages which use to conceptualize the reality in different ways is not an easy task. In order to recognize the extent of this hardness, we just need to consider that the two cultures benefit from different traditions, life conditions, methods of representing the experience and symbols. Consequently, it can be concluded that metaphors are culture-specific due to the fact that different cultures conceptualize the world in different ways.

In recent years, some papers have delved into the essence of metaphor to present the techniques, strategies and cognitive process of metaphor translation in the cognitive linguistic framework. It is a great progress that researchers have made in metaphor translation, but no one has proposed a clear and effective criterion for metaphor translation from the cognitive approach. For instance, E.S. Fernandez highlights the necessity of “a more realistic study of metaphor translation which reflects the true nature of metaphor and the underlying regularities of its interlinguistic transfer”, as metaphor translation viewed as a type of interlinguistic communication (Fernández, 2005).

3. Research and results

Any language is anthropocentric, and in any language, there are metaphors that perceive objects, animate or inanimate, as persons. Such metaphors are defined anthropomorphous metaphors ascribing human characteristics to non-human entities. Therefore, this metaphor type is ubiquitous in language, as it seems as an unavoidable result of the human cognitive capacity of viewing surrounding world (lakes, rivers, plants, trees, natural phenomena) from an anthropocentric perspective. Anthropomorphous metaphors conceptualize the nature as something identical to a human being. Consequently, it can be seen as a linguistic way to establish some invisible ties between all the existing entities in the world.

The anthropomorphous metaphor in literary discourse is considered as one of the most productive metaphor type due to the author’s subjective perception of the surrounding world; hence, it belongs to novel / newly created conceptual metaphor type. In the study of metaphor in literature, Lakoff and Turner claim that the metaphorical expressions produced by some poets can often be seen as novel uses of the conventional conceptual metaphors that also underlie much of our everyday metaphorical language. More specifically, they identify four main modes of metaphorical creativity in poetry, namely the extension, elaboration, questioning, or combination of conventional conceptual metaphors (Lakoff & Turner, 1989). The target idea is that poets challenge and extend the ordinary ways in which we think and express ourselves by using creatively the same metaphorical tools that we all use in everyday language.

In translation, an instant positive response to a conceptualization of metaphor is anticipated by a translator into the target language, based on the two domains, the source and the target. Thus, the anthropomorphous metaphor can be viewed as a formula NATURE IS MAN, where we have NATURE for the target domain (TD), and MAN for the source domain (SD). Having recognized the ubiquity of the anthropomorphic metaphor in literary discourse, we have found out that the basic metaphorical schema NATURE IS MAN can be broken down into lower–level, specific schemas bringing to the various aspects of the concept MAN, namely appearance, traits of character, demeanor, emotions, feelings, aural perception, visual perception, intellectual functions, physical activities, age, body etc.)

The present article attempts to investigate what happens to the anthropomorphous metaphor in literary discourse while translated into another language. The corpus drawn upon in the article is a collection of short stories by a

In the light of the cognitive principles governing Mandelblit’s proposed schemes and through focusing on Al-Hasnawi’s points of concern in the translation of metaphors, the present research considers three patterns for rendering the anthropomorphic metaphors from the SL (Russian) to the TL (English). Therefore, we have a contrastive analysis of the anthropomorphic metaphor across two cultures on the basis of the following patterns:

- Metaphors with different mapping conditions.
- Metaphors having similar mapping conditions but lexically realized differently.
- Metaphors of similar mapping conditions.

All the metaphorical expressions excerpted have been analysed cognitively in both languages in terms of the two domains of conceptualization suggested above. The investigation conducted shows the following results:

- Switching the source domain – 16%.
- Saving the key formula NATURE IS MAN, with more specified source domain – 30%.
- Saving an anthropocentric perspective and the source domain – 54%.

The discussion below focuses on each pattern example and its translations.

- Metaphors of similar mapping conditions. Here we use NATURE for the target domain, and MAN for the source domain (SD) in the original and its translation. The most commonly used translation procedure is reproducing the same image in the target language. Let us exemplify.


- Metaphors having similar mapping conditions but lexically realized differently. Another metaphorical phrase with the same meaning appears.

(3) *Dolgo molchali, gljedja na bystro tekushhie volny. Oni lopotali u berega chto-to svoe, toropilis’* (Shukshin. Svetlye dushi. Ignakhapriehal. S. 168). *Dolgo molchali, gljedja na bystro tekushhie volny. Oni lopotali u berega chto-to svoe, toropilis’* (Shukshin. Svetlye dushi. Ignakhapriehal. S. 168). *For a long time, they were silent, looking at the swift, flowing waves. The waves were murmuring by the bank in their own language and seemed to be hurrying somewhere* (Stories from a Siberian Village. Translated by Laura Michael and John Givens. Ignakha’s come home. 66).

- Metaphors with different mapping conditions. Here we have translating metaphor into sense.

(4) *Vstavali v glazah zabytye kartiny. To step’ открывалас’ za rodnym selom, to berезki, то испотливая тополинная рощица припоминалась, темная и немного жуткая...* (Shukshin. Svetlye dushi. Odni. S. 175). *Vstavali v glazah zabytye kartiny. To step’ открывалас’ za rodnym selom, to
berezki, to shepolivaja topolina roshhica pripominalas’, temnaja i nemnozhko zhutkaja… (Shukshin. Svetlye dushi. Odni. S. 175).

a. Long-forgotten pictures from the past flashed through their minds: the steppe that stretched on forever beyond their native village, the riverbanks, and the dark, rustling poplar grove that was a little bit scary…(Short Stories. Translated by Holly Smith. All Alone. 40).

b. Forgotten scenes arose in their mind’s eye: the steppe opening out beyond their native village, the riverbank, the rustling poplar grove – dark and little eerie… (Stories from a Siberian Village. Translated by Laura Michael and John Givens. All by themselves. 116).

4. Conclusion

Schäffner pointed out the difficulty of verifying whether differences in ST and TT metaphors are the result of conscious and strategic decisions or simply “ignorance” on the part of the translator (Schäffner, 2004). The results of this study confirm that in general translators tend to copy the original. We singled out that translation of metaphors used in Shukshin’s stories are based on switching the source domain, saving the key formula NATURE IS MAN, with more specified source domain and saving an anthropocentric perspective and the source domain. NATURE IS MAN mapping is manifested in a frequent distribution of metaphors translated into English. The main translation models for the anthropomorphous metaphor translators follow are metaphors of similar mapping conditions; metaphors having similar mapping conditions but lexically realized differently; metaphors with different mapping conditions.

References


