Tradurre Figure / Translating Figurative Language

Donna R. Miller & Enrico Monti (eds) (2014)

Reviewed by: Gill Philip

Metaphor in translation seems to be coming into vogue. As a teacher of translation and of English as a foreign language, I have always noticed that metaphor is a sticking point. The first problem seems to be in realising that the problem is in fact due to metaphor (or metonymy, or whichever other form of figurative language is the culprit in question). In other words, our awareness of what is and is not *literal* in our native tongue is a deciding factor in ensuring that our attempts to convey meaning in another language accommodate lexis to the meaning that we are trying to convey. The second problem is that even once we are aware that we are dealing with a metaphor, it is often not easy to find an appropriate translation solution.

I judge *Tradurre Figure / Translating Figurative Language* to be a pretty good representation of current research in the field. It is not a groundbreaking volume, but it is certainly one which is worth taking the time to scan through if you have any interest whatsoever in cross-linguistic and translation approaches to figurative language.

I have no intention of dealing with the chapters in chronological order nor with dealing them by text type (roughly non-literary and literary): this has already been done by the editors of the volume and can be readily consulted via the free downloadable e-text edition of the book. Instead I will group the papers by three sets of criteria which are likely to be of interest to readers of this review, the first relating to the ST-TT combinations examined, the second to the analysis (if present) of the translation strategies identified, and the third to the type(s) of figurative language that the authors focus on. In this way potential readers can home in on those chapters which seem to them most relevant.

1. ST-TT combinations. I have identified six ST-TT types: (i) translation of ST into TL, (ii) translation of ST *by chapter's author* into TL, (iii) translation of ST into one TL by more than one translator, resulting in multiple comparable TTs , (iv) translation of ST into more than one TL, (v) translation of a multilingual ST, and (vi) translation of multimodal ST. Ten chapters deal with 'simple' language pairs, by which I mean that the author focuses on only one TT, in only one language. Steen is the only author not to focus on any given translation pair: he illustrates the updated version of the Metaphor Identification Procedure developed at the VU Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam (MIPVU) in a bilingual context, offering a range of illustrative excerpts, each of which features a different language pair: Italian-Dutch, Latin-English, Italian-English, English-Dutch, English-Italian). The other authors stick to two languages throughout: Schäffner (English-German), Manfredi (English-Italian), Johnson (Italian-English), Lindqvist (English-Swedish), Kamenickà (English-Czech), Tcaciuk (Romanian-English), Magagnin (Chinese-English), Godbout (French-English), and Regattin (French-Italian).

Essentially a sub-type of the first category, type (ii) involves a personal touch: there are three contributions by translators who have chosen to discuss and analyse their own translation processes and products. They are Niero (on translating repetitions in Zamjatin's novel *Noi* from Russian into Italian), Béghain (on the evocative power of sound and rhythm in the oral poetry of Troupe and Daa'ood, in translation from English to French), and Nasi (expounding on the complexities inherent in translating Liverpool 'Pop Poetry' from English into Italian).

My third category is reserved for multiple TL versions of a single ST. There are six contributions here. Two relate to experiments conducted with university students (Agorni on English-Italian translation, Spinolo on Spanish-Italian interpreting). Three others deal with literature (Swain on Italian-English translations of Verga, Nasi, who also discusses others' translations of the Pop Poets, and Masi, who introduces in interesting diachronic dimension by comparing and contrasting ten Italian-English translations of *Pinocchio*, published between 1892 and 2009). Finally, Tallarico investigates equivalence in bilingual French- Italian dictionaries.

The translation of a ST into more than one TL is the topic of six contributions. Alamán deals with English-Spanish and English-Italian translations of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*. The other five have a distinctly literary slant: Van der Heide (Africaans-Italian, Africaans-English), de

Dampierre-Noiray (Italian-French, Italian-English), Albanese (Neapolitan-Italian, Neapolitan-English) and Imposti & Marchesini (Russian-English, Russian-German, Russian-Italian) all focus on poetry, while Cosimini (Icelandic-English and Icelandic-Italian) uses extracts from a contemporary novelist to illustrate her discussion.

The remaining categories relate to specialized aspects of metaphor and are unsurprisingly represented by only one contribution each. Swennen Ruthenberg looks at the translation into English of a ST which has a multilingual element (a text in Italian with dialogue in Neapolitan dialect and in Yiddish), while Sezzi treats multimodal metaphor in her analysis of English-language children's picture books in their Italian translations.

2. Translation strategies analysis. While all the contributions discuss translation, very few can really be said to *analyse* translation. Spinolo's analysis of interpreting students focuses on their hesitations, partial/incomplete renderings, and inaccurate/inappropriate renderings of figures of speech, comparing one group who had had a small amount of focused training in figurative language with a control. Regattin investigates four strategies used by translators in their versions of works by Boris Vian: reproduction, compensation, loss, and translator's note. These strategies are compared not only across translators but also across three types of figurative language that characterize this author's narrative style, literal interpretations of conventional figures, i.e. relexicalisation, deformations or semi-creations, i.e. word-play, and creations, i.e. neologisms. The third paper to adopt analytical criteria is Tallarico's investigation of translation equivalence in bilingual dictionaries. He classifies all occurrences of metaphorical proverbs in 4 bilingual French-Italian dictionaries (looking at both directions) according to six categories: (i) the type of proverb, (ii) lexis, (iii) frequency, (iv) register, (v) literal/ figurative meaning, and (iv) rhythm and phonetic features. In addition to these, there are a few papers which offer an analysis which is not strictly related to translation practice, but is compatible with it, namely the two papers dealing with grammatical metaphor(Manfredi and Lindqvist).

3. Figurative language types. This, I must admit, is where the geeky metaphor scholar in me started to protest. Throughout, there was very little attention paid to defining and delimiting what kinds of language was being analysed. Notable exceptions are those authors who were looking at a range of different types of figures of speech, and had organized their contribution into sections dealing with each in turn (Béghain, Masi, Regattin, and Cosimini). Apart from Steen, one of the founding fathers of the Pragglejaz Group and leader of the team that refined the Metaphor Identification Procedure (or MIP, Pragglejaz Group 2007) into MIPVU (Steen et al. 2010), only two of the 'case study' paper authors (Tcaciuc, Johnson) actually mentioned how they had identified their figurative language data. The rest took a great deal for granted, some using 'metaphor' as a catch-all term, and none explicitly making a distinction between linguistic and conceptual metaphor. A few even managed to claim in the abstract and early part of their paper that they were discussing one or two particular types of figurative language but then failed to actually do so in the body text proper (I will spare them the embarrassment of naming and shaming).

Two of the theoretical papers address metaphor in general, i.e. they cover both linguistic and conceptual metaphors (Arduini, Shuttleworth). Kövecses, as one would expect, deals primarily with conceptual metaphor, while Steen focuses on linguistic metaphors in a range of translated texts, introducing his (somewhat controversial) distinction between deliberate and non-deliberate use of metaphor. The reports of student translation (Agorni) and interpreting (Spinolo) deal with a range of metaphors, again linguistic, but not restricted to particular categories of metaphors or other figures of speech. Three contributions address particular linguistic metaphors: Schäffner looks at the 'firewall' / 'umbrella' metaphor in English and German, tying in her discussion to Conceptual Metaphor Theory; Magagnin's investigation of officially-sanctioned English translations of the Chinese Communist Party conferences also makes the connection between the linguistic metaphors found in the data and the general conceptual areas that they cover, and Alamán chooses to focus on two 'theory constitutive' metaphors (Boyd, 1979/1993) from the *Origin of species* – 'natural selection' and '[mother] nature', in early English to Spanish and English to Italian translations. Tcaciuc works in the opposite direction, investigating conceptual metaphor in economics texts which she illustrates with a selection of linguistic metaphors from her data. Manfredi and Lindqvist both concentrate on Hallidayan grammatical metaphor, while de Dampierre-Noiray in her study of Ungaretti's poetry also addresses grammar in metaphor, but from a different perspective.

Swennen Ruthenberg and Van der Heide both take a more complex view of the relationship between linguistic metaphor and the overarching conceptualizations – appropriate terms would be

'systematic metaphors' (Cameron 2003) and 'metaphor scenarios' (Musolff 2004) – to be found in the literary works they examine: the former on the interplay between the multi-lingual source text and the metaphors of dryness and NAPLES IS JERUSALEM, the latter on orientation metaphors in a Haiku by the poet Noteboom. Finally, three contributions concern themselves with multi-modal metaphor: visual (Eco, Sezzi) and audio-rhythmic (Béghain). The other contributions – where a clear focus emerges – address simile (Johnson), idioms, proverbs, and sayings (Albanese, Cosimini, Tallarico), and various aspects of word-play, including puns (Imposti & Marchesini) and idiosyncratic manipulations of language (Regattin, Nasi, Béghain).

What emerges from the reading of this volume is that an interest in the theoretical seems to be more the preserve of the linguistic (i.e. text analysis and corpus/lexicographic approaches) than the literary. As we have seen, only three contributions deal centrally with translation strategies, and only a handful refer to the abundant literature on metaphor, going beyond the stock reference that is Lakoff & Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* (1980). Indeed, if we exclude these groups for a moment (plus the theoretical papers in Part 1), it would seem that – as far as theory is concerned – we are stuck somewhere around the year 1990. Can it really be the case that no progress has been made, or that no progress can be made in how to approach metaphor in translation? My own view echoes the calls made by Arduini and by Shuttleworth in their papers: that translators seem to be in need of more linguistic theory – both from the realms of metaphor studies and from traditional semantics – in order to analyse, describe and articulate clearly the phenomena that they are observing. Added to this is that the treatment of 'metaphor' lacks adequate theoretical grounding. Translators seem still to be relying on Newmark's (1985) advice on how to translate metaphor. Here, the 'image' is deemed to be of central importance, and yet recent research shows that image-rich metaphors are far from being the norm (Shuttleworth reports that in his popular science data, only 7 per cent of the metaphors belong to this type). Furthermore, very little attention is being paid to the translation of everyday metaphor (those referred to by Steen as 'non-deliberate', and by others as 'dead', 'delexical', 'semantically bleached' and so on), and to problems that have already been noted in cross-linguistic studies of metaphor – in particular the fact that non-natives tend to over-estimate the metaphoricity of figurative expressions (e.g. Littlemore et al. 2013, Macarthur 2010, Philip 2010) – and how this might inform both the analysis of translations and advice on how to approach figurative language in the translating process.

Despite these criticisms (which apply to the discipline, rather than to the volume *per se*), I have enjoyed reading *Tradurre Figure / Translating Figurative Language*. Encapsulating as it does the main aspects of the topic, it makes excellent background reading for any student or scholar of translation who is considering moving into the area of metaphor studies. Such individuals would do well to acquaint themselves with the theoretical papers, and would certainly find many of the case studies both interesting and relevant.

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