

**TRADURRE FIGURE  
TRANSLATING  
FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE**



**A CURA DI / EDITED BY  
DONNA R. MILLER & ENRICO MONTI**

**QUADERNI DEL CESLIC**



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Atti di Convegni CeSLiC - 3  
Selected Papers  
2014

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Donna R. Miller

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1) a cura di D. Londei, D.R. Miller, P. Puccini, Gli atti completi delle giornate di studio del CeSLiC del 17-18 giugno 2005: **“Insegnare le lingue/culture oggi: Il contributo dell'interdisciplinarietà”**, a <http://amsacta.cib.unibo.it/archive/00002055>

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2) a cura di Miller D.R. e Pano A., *Selected Papers* del convegno internazionale CeSLiC del 4-5 dicembre 2008, dal titolo: “**La geografia della mediazione linguistico-culturale/ The Geography of Language and Cultural Mediation**”, a <http://amsacta.cib.unibo.it/2626/>

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A questa prefazione generale, segue ora una breve introduzione al presente volume. Non ci resta a questo punto che ringraziare sentitamente tutti coloro che hanno facilitato la trasformazione di un progetto in una realtà di grande successo: in primo luogo il Dipartimento di Lingue, Letterature e Culture Moderne (LILEC) dell'Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna; poi l'ILLE, Institut de recherche en langues et littératures européennes dell'Università di Haute-Alsace (Francia), il Dipartimento di Interpretazione e Traduzione (DIT) del campus di Forlì, l'Associazione Culturale Italo-Britannica, l'editore bolognese Zanichelli, il Centro traduttori della Fiera del Libro per Ragazzi di Bologna, l'Alliance Française di Bologna, nonché la Regione Emilia-Romagna e la Provincia e il Comune di Bologna.

Ringraziamenti particolari vanno ai membri del Comitato Scientifico del Convegno, che hanno collaborato alla rilettura degli abstract prima e delle proposte di contributo al volume poi, nonché ai membri del Comitato Organizzativo e agli Assistenti, senza i quali le giornate del Convegno non si sarebbero svolte nel clima impeccabile che le ha contraddistinte.

Donna R. Miller



Responsabile Scientifico del CeSLiC

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# **Introduction**

## **Introduzione**



The volume we are pleased to present here offers 30 original contributions on the interlingual translation of figurative language. The chapters were first presented at an international conference held at the University of Bologna in December 2012 and have been selected through a double peer-reviewed process.

Why figurative language in translation? Essentially because figurative language – and the contributions in this book can be seen to prove it – may often foreground the complexities of the translation process, as well as the strong link between language and culture that this process has to renegotiate. Metaphors, similes, metonyms, synecdoches, hyperboles, personifications and proverbs are figures of speech which, far from being peculiar to literary discourse, have stylistic and cognitive functions in different types of discourse. We need only think of the importance of metaphor in scientific models, of hyperbole in advertising, metonymy in journalism, simile and metaphor in political speeches and tourist texts. Besides making different types of discourse livelier and more expressive, these figures of speech often forge a privileged relationship between addresser and addressee, based on their shared linguistic and cultural positioning.

Translating figurative language invariably implies translating the culture which is inextricably tied to that language, if we allow that any language-culture lives by its metaphors (*Bildfeld* in Harald Weinrich's terms) and that those metaphors are far from being universal. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) convincingly argued that our linguistic metaphors are often the by-product of a deeper analogical mental structure, which allows us to know and define the world around us in terms of what we know better. Their work initiated a rich field of research within the framework of cognitive linguistics, involving metaphor identification (e.g. Steen and Pragglejaz Group) and the intercultural implications of conceptual metaphors (e.g. Kövecses).

It is precisely this density of linguistic and cultural factors in figurative language which proves so challenging in the passage from one language to another: it is not by chance that some scholars (Dagut 1976; van den Broeck 1981) locate figurative language (namely metaphors) at the limits of translatability, if not beyond. Translators have the task of adapting the world-view which has produced these instances of figurative language into the cultural paradigm of the target-culture, and to do so at the same time as preserving that combination of force and levity which is a prerogative of figurative language.

This of course implies that the translator has first to establish priorities among the different functions that figurative language plays in the source text, and the associations that such images may activate in the mind of the reader. This must be done before choosing which of these to privilege in the not-so-rare cases of asymmetry between the two language-cultures involved. One may think for example of the difficulty of translating the catachreses of one language – metaphors once original and now more or less dormant as they have become an integral part of everyday language – once they are re-activated in some specific poetic or ludic context, as quite often happens in literature, as well as, for instance, in journalism and advertising.

These are only some of the issues which are dealt with in great detail in the following chapters. Written in either English or Italian, the different contributions of this volume investigate the topic from a wide range of approaches. No boundaries were set as to possible language pairs, nor on possible research frameworks (linguistic, literary, cognitive, stylistic, corpus-based, interdisciplinary approaches,

etc.), as long as the interlingual translation of figurative language was addressed. This is why the volume also offers a rich diversity of languages (as either source or target languages of the different case-studies), including Chinese, Czech, English, French, Dutch, German, Hungarian, Icelandic, Italian, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, Swedish.

The contributions are organized into three main sections, labelled as: Theory, Specialized Translation, Literary Translation. The first section is devoted to theoretical reflections on the issue of translating figurative language, and it is opened by the inaugural speech **Umberto Eco** gave on the topic of showing and seeing images in a text. The concepts of ekphrasis, hypotyposis and metaphor are tackled, as well as the translatability of such verbal visions. Metaphors are the main object of study of the four contributions in this section. **Gerard Steen** draws on the cognitive linguistic framework he has built up in his Metaphor Lab and adapts it, himself for the first time, to the aspect of interlingual translation. He wonders what the problem (if any) is in translating metaphors, through several examples ranging from literary translation to interpreting. **Zoltán Kövecses** also adapts his long-ongoing research into conceptual metaphor to the topic of translation: bringing together various reflections he has made on the intercultural aspect of conceptual metaphors, he ponders the possible effects this may have on translation practices. **Stefano Arduini** adopts a translation-studies stance to draw a historical trajectory of the treatment of figurative language in translation. In the end, he advocates a more ‘courageous’ treatment of metaphors in translation, in an effort to enlarge our encyclopaedia. **Mark Shuttleworth** closes this section, drawing a parallel between the two scientific domains at stake here, namely metaphor studies and translation studies, arguing for a collaborative interchange that can only be advantageous to both – which is indeed what this volume and the conference itself had as their aim.

Sections 2 and 3 contain a series of applied studies on the translation of different kinds of figurative language and they are organized in terms of the (sub)genre involved. Section 2 is devoted to specialized translation, with two subsections: one on *Economics and Politics* and the other on *Science and Popularisation*.

**Christina Schäffner** – whose seminal paper on the implications of a cognitive approach to metaphor translation (1994) is much quoted throughout this volume – deals with the translation of conceptual metaphors within European political-economical discourse, in particular within the English-German language pair. Economics is also the subject of **Mirella Agorni**’s paper, albeit from a more pedagogical perspective, since she offers a case-study of a group of MA students involved in the challenges of translating the ambiguities and ironies of figurative language in specialized journalism, focussing especially on terminology. **Sabina Luciana Tcaciuc** analyses the treatment of metaphors in a corpus of the European Central Bank’s translated texts (English-Romanian), investigating two recurrent conceptual metaphors through corpus analysis. **Paolo Magagnin** carries us beyond Europe to explore the images employed by Chinese leader Hu-Jintao in his 2012 address to the National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party. He examines its official English translation, identifying a general tendency to neutralize or undertranslate the figurative language of the source-text. The section closes on another contribution to the translation of political discourse, offered by **Nicoletta Spinolo**, who draws on an experiment she carried out with Masters’ students on the treatment of metaphors in interpreting political speeches. The constraints also seen in



other papers are enhanced, in this specific case, by the time-constraints and other idiosyncrasies of interpreting.

The following section, *Science and Popularisation*, is opened by **Ana Pano Alamán**'s paper on the early translations of Darwin's *Origin of Species* into Italian and Spanish. She focuses on the handling of personifications and analogies, arguably two of the most salient features of Darwin's rhetoric. Scientific translation, albeit of a more popular type, is also investigated in **Marina Manfredi**'s paper, which analyses the treatment of lexical and grammatical metaphors in the Italian version of the periodical *National Geographic*. She adopts the framework of systemic-functional grammar to analyse the translation of the paratexts of such articles. Hallidayan 'grammatical metaphors' are also the aim of **Yvonne Lindqvist**'s paper, which sees them as regulators of social distance in the Swedish translation of popular Anglophone kitchen books.

The third section of the book is devoted to chapters dealing with the translation of figurative language in literary texts. Canadian literature is represented by **Patricia Godbout**'s paper, investigating metonymy and metaphors in the translation of the contemporary novelists Anne Hébert and the Nobel-prize laureate Alice Munro. **Fabio Regattin** deals with the Italian translation of Boris Vian's 'langage-univers', a language rich in creative revitalisations of idiomatic expressions and, as such, particularly challenging to translate. Two Italian translations of Vian's novel *L'écume des jours* are compared in this respect. **Renata Kamenická** deals with two opposite tendencies (standardisation vs dynamisation) she could observe in a corpus of contemporary translated literature (Czech-English) as to the treatment of figurative language. The three following papers deal with Italian literature in English translation. **Myriam Swennen Ruthenberg** deals with how the richly figurative language of Erri De Luca's *Montedidio* – and its biblical subtext – are rendered in English translation. Her focus is on polysemy, personification and similes, and in line with De Luca's statements on translation, she calls for an "obedient" and "admirative" stance on the part of the translator. Similes are the main object of study of **Jane Helen Johnson**, who exploits corpus stylistics to investigate the treatment of similes in the English translation of a selection of novels by the Nobel-prize laureate Grazia Deledda. A different framework and a different figure are examined in **Elizabeth Swain**'s paper, which deals with the different English translations of Giovanni Verga's short-stories. She focuses on metaphor translation and analyses it through the lens of Jay Lemke's semantically-based theory of intertextuality. **Alessandro Niero** deals with repetition in his own Italian translation of Zamjatin's *We (Mi)*, illustrating through numerous examples the salience of such feature in the source-text and in its translation. Russian literature is also the topic of the joint effort of **Gabriella Elina Imposti** and **Irina Marchesini**, who focus their analysis on wordplay as a 'manifestation of figurative poetry'. Palindromes and other instances of wordplay are analysed in the prose (and poetry) of 20<sup>th</sup> century-Russian authors such as Chlebnikov, Sokolov and Nabokov.

Such incursion into poetry and wordplay marks the transition to the next subsection (*Poetry*), which opens on **Franco Nasi**'s chapter on the re-creation of verbal playfulness. He analyses how Liverpool-poet Roger McGough brings dead metaphors back to life in his children poems, and offers his own translation of such outbursts of creativity. **Véronique Béghain** also deals with poetical creativity (and her own translations of it), but in relation to the American poets Quincy Troupe and

Kamau Daa'ood. Several instances of figurative languages (from idioms to neologisms) are taken into account in relation to their orality and literacy bonding. **Ève de Dampière** deals with the idea of a 'figurative grammar' in Ungaretti's poetry, and its implications for the translations that other poets (French and English) have made. **Herman van der Heide** closes the poetry section with an incursion into the Dutch tradition: a stylistic analysis of the English and Italian translations of a poem by Cees Noteboom is provided, focusing on the metaphor of the journey.

A final subsection is devoted to fairy-tales and folklore. **Silvia Masi** has chosen one of the most-widely translated classics of children's literature, *Pinocchio*, to show how its rich use of similes, metaphors, metonymies etc. was variously reproduced in a corpus of 10 English translations. **Annalisa Sezzi** also explores the world of children's literature, dealing more specifically with the subset of picture books. Focussing on an English-Italian corpus of 15 of these, she analyses the implications of multimodality in the translation of creative uses of figurative language. Metaphors and proverbs are the focus of **Angela Albanese** as they appear (and quite widely so) in Basile's *Cunto dei cunti*, a 17th-century collection of fairy-tales in Neapolitan dialect. A corpus of English and Italian translations of this collection is analysed, highlighting the effects of the translation project in the treatment of figurative language. **Silvia Cosimini** deals with an often neglected – and endangered – literary tradition, that of Iceland, shedding light on the folklore backgrounds of formulaic language. Idioms are a key element of the Icelandic tradition, and the paper dwells on their treatment in the English and Italian translation of Nobel-Prize laureate Halldór Laxness' novels. **Giovanni Tallarico** closes this section and the volume with the folklore of proverbs. From a lexicographical perspective, he offers a comparative study of different French-Italian dictionaries concerning their capability to provide useful tools for translators.

We are confident that these stimulating and wide-ranging chapters will contribute to casting new light on the practice of translators around the world when dealing with the manifold implications and challenges that figurative language cannot help but pose.

Donna R. Miller & Enrico Monti  
Bologna, May 20, 2014

# **Theory**

# **Teoria**



## Ekfrasi, ipotiposi e metafora

UMBERTO ECO

Alma Mater Studiorum, Università di Bologna

Questo mio intervento nasce da un equivoco. Quando tempo fa ho ricevuto l'invito per questo convegno il titolo era soltanto in italiano e suonava *Tradurre figure*. Nei mesi a seguire ho continuato a pensare che si trattasse di un convegno sulla capacità che il linguaggio verbale ha di tradurre immagini, e mi sono soffermato sul problema dell'ipotiposi e dell'ekfrasi. Solo giorni fa quando mi è pervenuto il programma definitivo con il titolo anche in inglese, *Translating Figurative Language*, ho capito che le figure del titolo italiano erano figure retoriche e il termine non stava specificamente per *immagini* perché sono figure retoriche, che so, anche l'iperbole, l'epanalepsi o l'anadiplosi, l'aferesi o l'anafora, l'allitterazione, il chiasmo e la diafe, l'eufemismo o l'epifonema, l'ironia e via sino allo zeugma, e al massimo si potrebbero trovare esempi di visualizzazione nell'allegoria e nell'ystron proteron, oltre che, come dirò, nell'ipotiposi.

A quel punto avevo solo la possibilità di cestinare il mio intervento e darmi malato come gli sbalzi stagionali avrebbero giustificato.

Ma poiché le corse migliorano le razze e la necessità aguzza l'ingegno (e in queste due mie espressioni si celano più di due figure retoriche) ho voluto vedere se si poteva partire dal rapporto del linguaggio verbale con le immagini per arrivare a come alcune metafore possano indurre a vedere immagini, e come il difficile rapporto tra *verba* e *imagines* diventi ancor più problematico quando si tratti di tradurre in una lingua X le immagini suscitate da una metafora espressa nella lingua Y.

I passaggi da un sistema semiotico all'altro sono problematici. Nei sistemi verbali è possibile tradurre (se si intende *tradurre* in senso lato, e quasi metaforico, nel senso di *interpretare*) all'interno dello stesso sistema, come avviene con la sinonimia, la definizione, la parafrasi e addirittura il riassunto. Si è sostenuto che la lingua verbale sia onnieffabile, ovvero che il linguaggio verbale sia il sistema modellizzante primario di cui gli altri sono derivazioni, per cui non solo ogni esperienza umana, ma ogni contenuto esprimibile per mezzo di altri artifici semiotici, dovrebbe poter essere tradotto in termini verbali, senza che sia possibile l'inverso. Tuttavia sappiamo che vi sono molti contenuti espressi da complesse unità *non* verbali che non possono essere tradotti da una o più unità verbali, se non per mezzo di vaghe approssimazioni. Risulterebbe assai difficile dire attraverso parole quali siano i contenuti (fossero essi anche soltanto pulsioni emotive) veicolati dalla Sesta di Beethoven.

Parimenti si veda come sia difficile all'interno di un sistema di segni visivo tradurre una immagine attraverso un'altra immagine, se non scendendo da un lato nella copia e dall'altro nella parodia o nella caricatura; ancora nel XIX secolo sui libri si riproducevano affreschi di Raffaello o miniature medievali attraverso incisioni in bianco e nero dove ogni donna aveva il viso di una fanciulla di Hayez, e mi chiedo se un pittore che non avesse mai visto Raffaello fosse capace dalla traduzione ottocentesca di riscoprire l'opera originale, colori compresi.

D'altra parte i sistemi visivi sono molto limitati nel riprodurre enunciati verbali. Certo è possibile esprimere lo stesso contenuto di *il sole sorge* con il disegno composto di una linea orizzontale, un semicerchio e una serie di linee diagonali che irraggiano dal centro del semicerchio. Ma sarebbe ben più difficile asserire per mezzo di artifici visuali l'equivalente di *il sole sorge ancora*. E nel saggio di Sol Worth *Pictures can't say ain't*<sup>1</sup>, si mostrava che le immagini non riescono a dire *io non sono* (e per dire che una pipa, raffigurata, non era una pipa, Magritte ha dovuto far ricorso a una didascalia verbale), e se per immagini si volesse rendere l'inizio della *Recherche* proustiana ci si troverebbe imbarazzati a rendere Proust (poniamo) a fumetti: dopo averci mostrato quattro vignette in cui il giovane protagonista non riesce a prendere sonno, si sarebbe perduto tutto il ritmo, il suono e la potenza evocativa di quel *longtemps je me suis couché de bonne heure*.

Proust è riuscito a creare l'impressione di tradurre in parole quasi tutta la serie di percezioni, sentimenti e valori 'presentati' dalla pittura di Elstir: ma accortamente ha deciso di analizzare l'opera di un pittore immaginario, per impedirci di fare confronti sull'originale presunto. Certamente Proust fa una operazione coraggiosa, perché di Elstir vuole descriverci verbalmente anche la forma dell'espressione. Non se la cava male, perché noi non abbiamo difficoltà a individuare lo stile di un pittore impressionista. Ma di quale? Proust ci descrive la forma dell'espressione di un genere, e non di un individuo.

È che sovente un'immagine, per precisa che sia, è sempre anzitutto generica (la Fornarina ci rappresenta anzitutto *una donna*) mentre l'oggetto è specifico (*questa tale donna*) e, mentre una specie rinvia necessariamente al suo genere (*questo cane* è certamente un cane), un genere può rinviare a molte specie diverse.

Cosa accade di una espressione verbale che voglia permetterci di riconoscere una immagine? Nasce qui il problema dell'ekfrasi, termine di derivazione greca tradizionalmente usato per indicare la descrizione verbale di un'opera d'arte visiva, un dipinto, una scultura o un'opera architettonica.

Di fatto l'ekfrasi ha rappresentato nell'antichità la forma maggiore di critica d'arte, specie se si pensa che non vi era altra maniera, per analizzare un'opera visiva, che di parlarne, visto che non esistevano sistemi di riproduzione se non la copia uno a uno. Di qui l'esaltazione che era stata fatta delle buone ekfrasi. Ancora nel rinascimento, quando per esempio la statua del Laocoonte era stata trovata a Roma scavando in una vigna sul colle Oppio (e allo scavo aveva assistito di persona persino Michelangelo), il figlio di Giuliano da Sangallo aveva testimoniato che gli astanti erano riusciti a capire che si trattava del celebre Laocoonte grazie alla descrizione che ne aveva data Plinio. Miracoli dall'ekfrasi! Ma andiamo a vedere cosa Plinio avesse realmente detto in *Historia naturalis* 36.37. Egli aveva semplicemente detto che il celebrato Laocoonte era costruito da un solo blocco marmoreo (il che non corrispondeva alla statua ritrovata) e mostrava Laocoonte coi figli, avvolti da un nodo inestricabile di serpenti. E basta. Che era quello che poteva sapere chiunque conoscesse la storia di Laocoonte, e la descrizione di Plinio poteva applicarsi a qualsiasi altra rappresentazione del mito. Essa descriveva il contenuto dell'immagine (la storia, il soggetto, la fabula) ma non l'espressione. Descriveva *un* Laocoonte ma non *quel* Laocoonte.

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<sup>1</sup> Sol Worth, 'Pictures can't say ain't', *Versus* 12, 1975.

E così è accaduto per tutte le ekfrasi classiche, e si leggano le *Imagines* di Filostrato. Per ogni statua o raffigurazione pittorica Filostrato si diffonde in descrizioni non solo del soggetto, ma delle emozioni che l'immagine gli suscitava. Però, quando ci accade di poter confrontare una sua descrizione con un reperto archeologico che probabilmente gli corrisponde, ci accorgiamo che alla luce della descrizione di Filostrato non saremmo mai riusciti a ricostruire l'originale. Tal che i suoi commentatori odierni, come Arthur Fairbanks, il curatore della edizione delle *Imagines* nella Loeb Classical Library, sono costretti ad ammettere che Filostrato descrive le pitture come se fossero oggetti di arte verbale, facendone per così dire il riassunto, descrivendo che cosa rappresentano, e dunque il contenuto, senza saperci dire quasi nulla dei pregi estetici, poco sulla tecnica, niente sul colore.

Così che, presi dal fascino dell'ekfrasi, si tende sovente a definire come capolavori di ekfrasi apparati verbali che di un oggetto visivo non dicono assolutamente nulla, come per esempio (e lo trovo in *Wikipedia*) l'*Ode sopra un'urna greca* di Keats, che ci dice tutto, compreso che verità è bellezza e bellezza è verità, ma non come diavolo fosse fatta quell'urna.

Oserei dire che le ekfrasi più riuscite sono quelle di oggetti mai esistiti, come lo scudo di Achille descritto da Omero, che ci pare così eideticamente preciso, e lo è quanto ai contenuti. Eppure (esercizio che potete compiere su Internet) basta andare a vedere alcune delle realizzazioni visive dello scudo, specie in epoca neoclassica, per accorgersi quanti modi ci fossero per 'vedere' quanto Omero aveva descritto. La descrizione omerica non fornisce istruzioni operative all'orafo.

Ci sono ekfrasi che quasi ci paiono evocare con precisione allucinatoria un oggetto, ma quando si viene al dunque scopriamo che appunto di allucinazione (nostra e dell'autore) si tratta. Si veda una descrizione famosa, quella del tempio di Salomone fatta da Ezechiele (40, 5-49 e 41, 1-26). Per ragioni di tempo non la riporto tutta ma essa cita delle misure in cubiti ("ogni stanza misurava una canna di lunghezza e una di larghezza, da una stanza all'altra vi erano cinque cubiti"), situa le stanze secondo i punti cardinali ("le stanze della porta a oriente erano tre da una parte e tre dall'altra, tutt'e tre della stessa grandezza, come di una stessa misura erano i pilastri da una parte e dall'altra"), fornisce la larghezza dell'apertura del portico, precisa la distanza dalla facciata della porta d'ingresso alla facciata dell'atrio della porta interna, e via dicendo. Sembra che su questa base un architetto possa disegnare una pianta. Ebbene, non si può. I medievali avevano tentato di ricostruire un modellino del Tempio senza riuscirci, come se il tempio gli si sfarinasse tra le mani man mano che cercavano di visualizzarlo. Nel XII secolo Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac ammetteva che nessuno potesse comprendere alcunché sulla disposizione delle camere settentrionali, dove iniziassero a ovest e quanto si estendessero a est, e i Padri della Chiesa osservavano che le misure dell'edificio erano inconcepibili in termini fisici, perché a esempio le porte avrebbero dovuto essere più larghe dei muri. D'altra parte lo stesso Ezechiele non dice di aver visto una costruzione vera e propria ma un "quasi aedificium": la sua non è la descrizione di un oggetto, ma il racconto abbastanza confusivo di una visione onirica, e potremmo benissimo sospettare che il profeta scrivesse sotto l'influenza di qualche sostanza allucinogena.

La più antica e più celebrata delle ekfrasi ci affascina ma non ci fa vedere nulla.

L'ekfrasi (in quanto descrizione di opere d'arte visive) è una sottospecie di ipotiposi, l'artificio retorico che dovrebbe suggerirci mediante il linguaggio verbale una immagine delle cose tal quali sono – e Fontanier diceva che essa "dipinga le cose

in modo così vivo ed energico da metterle in un certo senso sotto gli occhi e fa di un racconto di una descrizione una immagine, un quadro, quasi una scena vivente”. La storia della letteratura è ricca di ipotiposi e tutte le regole antiche e medievali per la *descriptio loci*, per esempio, ci parlano di bellissime ipotiposi.

Ma facciamo l’analisi di una delle più belle ipotiposi della storia della letteratura. Tutti abbiamo letto tante volte l’incipit dei *Promessi sposi* e, magari per disattenzione o mancanza d’immaginazione, non ci siamo mai veramente rappresentati quel ramo del lago di Como. Ma una mattina io, levandomi a volo dalla Malpensa, ho guardato per caso dal finestrino e ho avuto un sobbalzo perché sotto di me appariva realmente quel ramo del lago di Como, con Lecco e il Resegone, e tutto quello che Manzoni aveva descritto – salvo che non aveva raccontato solo quello che si vede camminando a terra ma anche quello che si sarebbe potuto vedere scendendo dall’alto.

Se provassimo a leggere questo brano tenendo sotto gli occhi una carta geografica, vedremmo infatti che è come se la ripresa fosse fatta da un elicottero che sta atterrando lentamente. E non ditemi che un autore del XIX secolo non conosceva la tecnica cinematografica. Manzoni poteva benissimo immaginare come il mondo sarebbe apparso a un angelo che planava verso la terra, e del resto la visione dall’alto gli era suggerita, e da secoli, dalle carte geografiche e topografiche. E basterebbe vedere le immagini della creazione del mondo nella *Cronaca di Norimberga*, che quasi 400 anni prima ci aveva mostrato (attraverso una serie di immagini successive, in una sorta di mistico fumetto) la creazione come discesa dall’alto verso il basso.

Pertanto il primo movimento del testo manzoniano procede dall’alto al basso secondo una visione “geografica”:

Quel ramo del lago di Como, che volge a mezzogiorno, tra due catene non interrotte di monti, tutto a seni e a golfi, a seconda dello sporgere e del rientrare di quelli, vien, quasi a un tratto, a restringersi, e a prender corso e figura di fiume, tra un promontorio a destra, e un’ampia costiera dall’altra parte [...]

Ma poi la visione abbandona la dimensione geografica per entrare lentamente in una dimensione topografica, là dove si può iniziare a individuare un ponte e distinguere le rive:

[...] e il ponte, che ivi congiunge le due rive, par che renda ancor più sensibile all’occhio questa trasformazione, e segni il punto in cui il lago cessa, e l’Adda ricomincia, per ripigliar poi nome di lago dove le rive, allontanandosi di nuovo, lascian l’acqua distendersi e rallentarsi in nuovi golfi e in nuovi seni.

Sia la visione geografica che quella topografica procedono da nord verso sud, seguendo appunto il corso di generazione del fiume; e di conseguenza il movimento descrittivo parte dall’ampio verso lo stretto, dal lago al fiume. E come ciò avviene, la pagina compie un altro movimento, questa volta non di discesa dall’alto geografico al basso topografico, ma dalla profondità alla lateralità: a questo punto l’ottica si ribalta, i monti vengono visti di profilo, come se finalmente li guardasse un essere umano:

La costiera, formata dal deposito di tre grossi torrenti, scende appoggiata a due monti contigui, l’uno detto di san Martino, l’altro, con voce lombarda, il Resegone, dai molti suoi cocuzzoli in fila, che in vero lo fanno somigliare a una sega: talché non è chi, al primo vederlo, purché sia di fronte, come per esempio di su le mura di Milano che guardano a settentrione, non lo discerna tosto, a un tal contrassegno, in quella lunga e vasta giojaia, dagli altri monti di nome più oscuro e di forma più comune.



Ora, raggiunta una scala umana, il lettore può distinguere i torrenti, i pendii e i valloncelli, sino all'arredamento minimo delle strade e dei viottoli, ghiaia e ciottoli, descritti come se fossero "camminati," con suggestioni non solo visive, ora, ma anche tattili.

Per un buon pezzo, la costa sale con un pendio lento e continuo; poi si rompe in poggi e in valloncelli, in erte e in ispianate, secondo l'ossatura de' due monti, e il lavoro dell'acque. Il lembo estremo, tagliato dalle foci de' torrenti, è quasi tutto ghiaia e ciottoloni; il resto, campi e vigne, sparse di terre, di ville, di casali; in qualche parte boschi, che si prolungano su per la montagna.

Siamo a Lecco, e qui Manzoni compie un'altra scelta: dalla geografia passa alla storia, inizia a narrare la storia del luogo ora descritto geograficamente. Dopo la storia verrà la cronaca, e finalmente incontriamo per uno di quei viottoli don Abbondio che si avvia al fatale incontro coi bravi. Manzoni ha *disegnato* una carta, ha messo in scena uno spazio.

Ma perché di solito si scorre sulla pagina manzoniana senza cogliere la pregnanza di questa ipotiposi e a un tardo d'ingegno come me per riconoscerla è stato necessario pagare il prezzo di un volo transcontinentale? Perché anche con la più splendida delle ipotiposi possiamo al massimo riconoscere il soggetto descritto, non le sue caratteristiche individuali. Manzoni non ci dice nulla sulla tonalità cromatica dei prati, sul colore del cielo, sui riflessi del sole sui ciottoloni. Ci dice molto sulle forme (per esempio descrive bene il profilo del Resegone) ma nulla sui colori – e se avesse dovuto descriverci un quadro non sapremmo come ricostruirlo. L'ipotiposi ci ha mirabilmente descritto il tipo ma non l'occorrenza.

Tuttavia c'è una differenza tra l'ipotiposi e quella sua sottospecie che è l'ekfrasi. Nell'ekfrasi l'espressione verbale dovrebbe descrivere una esperienza visiva (e abbiamo visto che non ci riesce) mentre nell'ipotiposi, che intende descrivere non un'opera d'arte ma un aspetto della realtà, l'espressione verbale rinvia a un contenuto percettivo. L'ekfrasi non ci dà la sicurezza di riconoscere un quadro o una statua, mentre l'ipotiposi (vedi la mia esperienza dall'aereo) può circoscrivere in modo soddisfacente, anche se non completo, il risultato di una nostra percezione di un aspetto del mondo. Ovvero, nell'ekfrasi abbiamo un artificio semiotico che vuole esprimere un altro oggetto semiotico (l'opera d'arte) mentre nell'ipotiposi un artificio semiotico esprime una esperienza percettiva.

Che cosa hanno a che vedere queste considerazioni con la natura della metafora e delle sue traduzioni?

La definizione più forte della metafora ci è stata data da Aristotele, sia nella *Poetica* che nella *Retorica*, e il punto di forza di quella definizione consiste nel sottolineare il valore cognitivo della metafora. Come si dice in *Poetica* (1459a 8) la metafora è il migliore di tutti i tropi perché capire metafore vuole dire "sapere scorgere il simile" o "il concetto affine". Il verbo usato è *theōreîn*, che vale per scorgere, investigare, paragonare, giudicare. Aristotele fornisce esempi di metafore banali, come quella da genere a specie (*qui sta la mia nave*) o da genere a specie (*Odisseo ha fatto diecimila buone imprese*), ma già elenca metafore poeticamente più interessanti quando parla della metafora da specie a specie (*attingendo la sua vita con la lama*). E individua certamente una bella e originale espressione poetica in *seminando la divina fiamma* detto del sole, e *vidi un uomo che ad un uomo con il fuoco il bronzo incollava*, detto della ventosa. Nella *Retorica* si dice che la metafora

si manifesta (*pháínesthai*) quando si esamina (*skopeîn*) una possibile convenienza o analogia; e si veda come i due verbi suggeriscano un atto di visione. Nella comprensione della metafora *gnōsis gínetai*, sorge una conoscenza. E come sorge? La metafora *ci fa vedere* le cose all'opposto di quanto si credeva, e sembra che la nostra mente dica: "Così era, e prima mi sbagliavo".

Le metafore pertanto "mettono la cosa sotto gli occhi" (*tō poieîn tò pragma prò ommátōn*). La metafora *produce* una evidenza immediata, inattesa e grazie alla quale *si vedono* le cose mentre agiscono (1410b 34). Così accade quando si chiamano le triremi come *mulini variopinti* e le taverne come *banchetti attici*.

E certamente anche nel caso di una metafora banale e usurata come quella che chiama *cigno* una donna flessuosa siamo portati a evocare un collo quasi modiglianesco, movenze placide e aggraziate, estrema bianchezza dell'incarnato – e in tal senso la metafora *mette sotto gli occhi*, e del pari accade persino con certe catacresi come *collo della bottiglia* e *gamba del tavolo*, che non funzionerebbero (o almeno non avrebbero funzionato alla prima apparizione della catacresi) se non ci immaginassimo e bottiglia e tavolo in qualche forma antropomorfa.

Già a questo punto intravediamo una differenza tra ekfrasi, ipotiposi e metafora. I primi due artifici obbligano un apparato verbale a rendere un fenomeno visivo (che esisterebbe anche senza la sua descrizione verbale) con tutti gli impacci che il verbale pare dimostrare quando si tratta di descrivere non un tipo ma un'occorrenza, un *unicum*. Nella metafora invece l'apparato verbale si assume il compito di stimolare il destinatario a *concepire* una immagine, che non esisteva come tale prima che la metafora la producesse – e che potrebbe essere simile eppure diversa per ciascun interprete della metafora, nel senso che infiniti sono i modi in cui ciascuno di noi vedrebbe la donna cigno e persino la bottiglia col suo collo.

Ma veramente ogni metafora produce una immagine? Quando di una persona si dice che è una volpe e di un'altra che è di onestà cristallina, le due metafore paiono comunicarci quello che concettualmente si sospettava già, l'astuzia dell'una e la trasparenza dell'altra, senza che ci venga in mente di immaginare l'uno che fugge davanti ai cani e l'altro ritto a mo' di parete di cristallo. Queste sono metafore che ci dicono quello che in principio già si sapeva, che qualcuno è astuto come sono astute le volpi, o che il cristallo è chiaro e trasparente. Le chiamerò metafore *prosastiche*, del tutto traducibili – e se nella lingua di arrivo, in qualche cultura altra, la volpe non fosse proverbialmente astuta o non esistesse, il traduttore accorto non avrebbe che a cambiare animale, e potrebbe accadere che Rommel diventasse, che so, lo scoiattolo o la biscia del deserto.

Talora sembrano facilmente traducibili anche alcune metafore che ci inducono a immaginare una scena, come, a esempio, *serpente monetario*, che certamente ci induce a immaginare una certa modificazione serpentina tra una moneta data e la moneta di riferimento, ma è chiaro che chiunque potrebbe immaginare questa fluttuazioni in modo diverso, addirittura sostituendo le linee con l'immagine di un serpente vero e proprio.

Pertanto l'espressione verbale non intende *riprodurre* una immagine preesistente quanto *produrre* una serie indeterminata di immagini, vorrei dire, a seconda della vivacità dell'immaginazione del destinatario. Quindi non sarà difficile rendere la stessa immagine in lingue diverse, e l'espressione sarà sempre in qualche modo adeguata al proprio scopo.

Traducibile sarà forse l'esempio aristotelico di chi con *l'arma di bronzo attinge a qualcuno la vita*, dove si raffigura la lama che quasi beve il sangue che sprizza dalla ferita mortale mentre il ferito si accascia esanime. Ma già quando si parla di una bibbia *fiorita di miniature gotiche*, la metafora non solo ci dice che il manoscritto è illustrato ma evoca i viticci e le decorazioni floreali dei marginalia e delle iniziali, e il loro moltiplicarsi sulla pagina – e potremmo addirittura supporre che la metafora non funzioni per chi non ha mai visto una bibbia gotica.

Infine ci troviamo di fronte a quelle che chiameremo metafore *poetiche* che, per veicolare un contenuto eminentemente visivo, richiedono che sia rispettata la forma dell'espressione, e mi rifaccio a una mia vecchia idea per cui in prosa *rem tene et verba sequuntur*, come a dire che quel che conta è il contenuto, a cui le parole possono essere in qualche modo adattate, così che se il problema è l'astuzia posso anche permettermi di sostituire la volpe con l'armadillo, mentre nel linguaggio poetico *verba tene et res sequuntur*, e pertanto il problema dell'espressione emerge in primo piano ed è essenziale perché il contenuto possa sfavillare.

Ed ecco che veniamo, almeno in fine, al tema di questo convegno. La prova della traduzione è quella che ci permette di dire quanto la forma dell'espressione contribuisca a produrre il contenuto visivo di una metafora che mette qualcosa sotto gli occhi. La teoria della traduzione non ha mai tremato di fronte ad espressioni letterali che, malgrado la differenza linguistica, esprimono fenomeni universali che paiono anteriori ad ogni segmentazione semiotica del continuum dell'esperienza; così come espressioni come *it rains, il pleut, es regnet, piove* sono benissimo traducibili a vicenda senza che ciò che viene comunicato cambi. Ma in altri casi pare di trovarsi nella situazione della storiella di quel danese che aveva imparato tecnica della fotografia alla New York University apprendendo a dire *say cheese* e che, rientrato in patria, aveva tentato il suo primo ritratto dicendo *sig ost*. Esperienza che ha provato ogni traduttore che abbia tentato di rendere il volto e lo sguardo di Silvia parlando in altra lingua degli *occhi tuoi ridenti e fuggitivi*, senza avere a disposizione tutti gli *i* che gli avrebbero permesso con splendida allitterazione di mettere sotto gli occhi la mobilità ilare e fuggiasca di quello sguardo.

Basti pensare a tre metafore dantesche: *l'aiuola che ci fa tanto feroci, dolce colore d'oriental zaffiro, conobbi il tremolar della marina*. Il contenuto che ci viene rivelato dalla prima non è che l'uomo sia lupo all'uomo, ché non avevamo bisogno di Dante per accorgercene, ma la visione quasi galattica della piccolezza del luogo in cui e su cui viviamo, e per cui, senza percepirne le miserabili dimensioni, siamo disposti a ucciderci a vicenda. Il passaggio dal letterale *pianeta* al metaforico *aiuola* ci fa per così dire zummare all'indietro e percepire l'inermità della nostra ferocia – vedendo la terra come da un satellite. Quanto al colore di zaffiro, qui accade qualcosa di più: dire che il mare era verde come lo zaffiro non era difficile e la similitudine era stata già usata, almeno quanto quella omerica del mare color del vino. E nemmeno quel che ci cade sotto gli occhi è che il colore sia dolce, che è semplice sinestesia. Il baluginio che afferra il nostro sguardo è dovuto alla forma dell'espressione, tal che non saprei quanto una traduzione possa rendere questo fascino. Infine il tremolar della marina suggerisce vuoi un effetto visivo (il sole che fa scintillare le increspature del mare) sia un richiamo quasi tattile, il movimento vero e proprio di piccolissime onde, ed è difficile scegliere l'immagine più appropriata.

Si veda per il dolce colore d'oriental zaffiro la povera traduzione inglese di Dorothy Sayers, *Color unclouded, orient-sapphirine*, che ai miei occhi fa saltellare

quel mare come un pinocchietto, e quella francese di Jacqueline Risset, *douce couleur de saphire oriental*, dove fatalmente si perde l'allitterazione sulle L iniziali e direi la brillantezza di quell'accento sulla I di zaffiro.

Per il tremolar della marina, Sayers risolve con *I recognized the shimmering of the sea*, dove certamente *to shimmer* è luccicare e scintillare, e quindi si salva solo il richiamo visivo, e Risset traduce *Je reconnus le frémissement de la mer*, che al contrario evidenzia l'aspetto quasi tattile di quel mare. Entrambi perdono quell'effetto di cosa gelatinosa che è suggerito dal *tremolare* italiano, dove lo stesso verbo, come è stato osservato, tra onomatopea e sinestesia tremola a metà del verso.

Passando alla aiuola che ci fa tanto feroci, ricordiamo che per Dante *aiuola* non significava piccolo spazio fiorito ma *piccola aia*, cosa da nulla. Per cui hanno certo ragione Reynolds e Risset a tradurre *The threshing-floor, whereon fierce deed are done* oppure *La petite aire qui nous rends si féroces*. Ma non riesco a evitare il senso di perdita rispetto al verso italiano che inevitabilmente mi fa vedere noi poveri insetti dilaniarci in uno spazio angusto ma in fondo, se ci accontentassimo, fiorito. E qui nasce inevitabilmente un piccolo problema traduttorio. Bisogna rendere il testo originale così come poteva essere percepito dai contemporanei o come viene percepito dal lettore d'oggi? È certo che il lettore italiano d'oggi sente quell'aiuola come un piccolo spazio, ma istintivamente lo adorna di fiori, così che la ferocia dei suoi abitanti appare ancor più insensata. Avrebbero dovuto Reynolds e Risset tradurre *Le petit jardin* invece della *petite aire* e *flower bed* invece di *threshing-floor* – e in entrambi i casi, si noti, avrebbero certamente salvato l'endecasillabo francese e il dubitevole endecasillabo inglese (*The flower-bed, whereon fierce deed are done / Le petit jardin qui nous rend si féroces*)?

Affido la discussione a chi mi seguirà, visto che qui sono in questione la scelta tra una traduzione non solo *source* o *target oriented*, ma anche tra arcaicizzazione e modernizzazione.

In conclusione, che cosa hanno in comune ekfrasi e ipotiposi con la metafora e la sua traduzione? Ekfrasi e ipotiposi vorrebbero farci *vedere* qualcosa di visivo che preesiste alla sua descrizione, e vorrebbero rendere quell'*unicum* che non abbiamo sotto i nostri occhi – ma ci riescono malamente, abbiamo visto, perché ci danno un tipo piuttosto che un'occorrenza. La metafora invece pone il problema di come in due diverse lingue si possa obbligare a *vedere le stesse cose*, che verbali non sono. Se si proponesse di evocare semplicemente un tipo, come accade nella metafora prosastica della volpe, non sorgerebbero problemi per i suoi traduttori. Dire che un uomo astuto è una volpe evoca un concetto più che una cosa. Ma la metafora poetica da un lato vorrebbe realmente evocare una immagine precisa e tuttavia non può porsi il problema di evocare un *unicum*, perché ciascuno reagisce alla sollecitazione metaforica a modo proprio e può concepire l'immagine inedita in modo diverso; noi non sapremo mai come sia il cigno che si è portati a immaginare dalla metafora che lo cita, se in un lago, se di profilo, se di fronte, se alla luce del giorno o a quella della luna.

In *conobbi il tremolar della marina* la strategia dantesca mirava a produrre infinite possibilità di conferire un ritmo e una dinamica a quell'incresparsi di onde sotto diversi riflessi del giorno o della notte, sapendo che milioni di lettori futuri avrebbero concepito marine diverse, tutte messe sotto gli occhi eppure tutte occorrenze di un tipo inesistente.

Nella metafora poetica l'espressione ci sollecita a vedere un contenuto di cui non prescrive a chiare lettere il tipo (altrimenti il poeta avrebbe detto *vidi il mare leggermente mosso*) e non pretende a ogni costo che l'immagine che produce ci sia chiara e definitiva, anzi talora fa del proprio meglio per non raggiungere questo effetto. E questo fa sì che, quando rileggiamo per una seconda o ennesima volta il verso dantesco, possiamo vedere ogni volta un mare diverso, e possiamo torturarci nello sforzo di vedere finalmente quello che l'espressione poetica ci fa desiderare di vedere senza che noi riusciamo mai ad appagare pienamente questo desiderio. Ed è il caso in cui la metafora poetica diventa veramente opera aperta.

L'espressione mira a suscitare come proprio effetto infinite possibili occorrenze – e il suo successo nasce da una collaborazione interpretativa tra testo e destinatario.

Nel manipolare l'espressione in modo tale da sollecitare la nascita di una immagine, senza porsi problemi di fedeltà a una immagine che non le preesiste, la metafora poetica è assai liberale circa quel contenuto che invece ossessionava l'ekfrasi e l'ipotiposi, ma assai severa e precisa come un orafo quanto alla strategia dell'espressione che deve conseguire il proprio effetto.

Per i traduttori la sfida si svolge allora sul versante dell'espressione, quel versante che ekfrasi e ipotiposi potevano trascurare. Essi debbono lavorare in modo che due espressioni diverse in lingue fatalmente diverse producano una rosa di possibili risposte del destinatario, in qualche modo simili o equivalenti a quelle che essi avevano avvertito nel leggere l'originale.

Questo, immagino, è problema per i molti che mi seguiranno in questo convegno, ma vorrei terminare con un gesto di ottimismo e citare un caso, che per me è esemplare, di traduzione di metafore e allegorie poetiche in cui la nuova espressione produce egregiamente l'effetto dell'originale. Mi riferisco alla traduzione dantesca di quel grande poeta del nostro tempo che è stato Haroldo de Campos, e mi pare che il modo in cui riesce a parlare in portoghese della candida rosa ci faccia splendidamente vedere quello che Dante voleva vedessimo, anche se ciascuno si porterà nella mente e nel cuore la sua propria rosa.

A forma assim de uma cândida rosa  
 vi que assumia essa coorte santa  
 que no sangue de Cristo fez-se esposa;  
 [...]
 como enxame de abelhas que se enflora,  
 e sai da flor, e unindo-se retorna  
 para a lavra do mel que doura e odora,

descia à grande rosa que se adorna  
 de tanta pétala, e a seguir subia  
 ao pouso que o perpetuo Amor exorna.

Nas faces, viva chama se acendia;  
 nas asas, ouro; as vestes de um alvor  
 que neve alguma em branco excederia<sup>2</sup>.  
 [...]

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<sup>2</sup> *Dante-Paraíso (seis cantos)*, tr. H. de Campos, São Paulo: Instituto Culturale Italiano, 1978.



# Translating metaphor: What's the problem?

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***Abstract:** Translating metaphor is a complex area of research that can be approached from a multitude of perspectives. Exploiting the encompassing contemporary approach to metaphor that was independently developed in language and discourse research may help to throw these issues into relief. It is the aim of this paper to address the role of metaphor in translation from this perspective and ask whether there indeed is a specific problem that is due to metaphor. For, given the ubiquity of metaphor in language, and its relatively comparable spread across related languages, it might be surprising that there even is a problem: most metaphor in translation appears to behave fairly civilly. Perhaps the alleged problem of metaphor for translation has to do with a very specific, limited class of metaphors. Perhaps this class is erroneously seen as representative of all metaphor. These are the questions that will be addressed in this paper.*

***Keywords:** metaphor, language, thought, communication, translation.*

## 1. Introduction

At the end of chapter seven of Sandro Veronesi's successful novel, *Caos Calmo*, we find the following sentences:

Da quella sera abbiamo cominciato a discutere davanti a Boesson, e anche pubblicamente: mai **a farci la guerra**, ma a contraddirci sì, a dissentire, a discutere. A **dar** l'impressione a **quel pezzo di merda** che fossimo **divisi**, che *les temps des outsiders c'étaient finis*. Ma era per finta, capisci Pietro? Era tutto simulato. In realtà **lavoravamo** tutti e due per **fottere** Boesson. Sapevamo, Pietro, che una **fusione** di quelle proporzioni **genera** un **dio molto debole**, cioè Boesson, e un **esercito** di frustrati, umiliati, rimossi, trasferiti, licenziati [...].

All words in bold can be qualified as displaying metaphorical uses: there is no question of a real war that is being made (*farci la guerra*); the impression is not being manually transferred (*dar*) from one owner to somebody else; there is no concrete piece of shit (*pezzo di merda*), and the interlocutors are not physically divided (*divisi*) into two parts. Also, no genuine labor (*lavoravamo*) or fucking (*fottere*) is going on; the fusion (*fusione*) is not a chemical but a business one, and there are no real births (*genera*), gods (*dio*) or armies (*esercito*) on the scene. All of these expressions are instead used to project metaphorically related referents into the text world.

The Dutch translation, by Rob Gerritsen, displays almost the same structure:

Vanaf die avond zijn we begonnen te discussiëren in het bijzijn van Boesson, en ook in het openbaar. **We voerden geen strijd**, we spraken elkaar wel tegen, we verschilden van mening, we discussieerden. Om **dat stuk stront** de indruk te **geven** dat we **verdeeld** waren, dat *les temps des outsiders c'étaient finis*. Maar het was nep, begrijp je, Pietro? Het was allemaal geveinsd. In werkelijkheid waren we allebei bezig om Boesson te **verneuken**.

We wisten dat een **fusie** van een dergelijke **omvang** een **zeer zwakke god voortbrengt**, t.w. Boesson, en een **leger** van gefrustreerden en vernederden die uit hun functie waren ontheven.

The first paragraph has the same metaphorically used words as the Italian, except for *waren bezig*, ‘were [...] busy’, which offers a non-metaphorical rendering of *lavoravamo*. The second paragraph, by contrast, adds one metaphorical use in comparison with the original text, *omvang*, ‘girth, circumference, size’, for *proporzioni*. In spite of these minor differences, however, the overall use of metaphor is highly comparable between the Italian source text (henceforth ST) and the Dutch target text (henceforth TT).

This comparability is as expected. Since the launch of the cognitive-linguistic approach to metaphor by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), linguists have acknowledged the ubiquitous presence of metaphor in the lexico-grammatical structure of language as well as of discourse (e.g., Kövecses 2010). For languages that are genetically, historically and culturally as close to each other as Italian and Dutch, the distribution of metaphor across various semantic domains has been shown to be fairly comparable (e.g., Kövecses 2005). As a result, there is an overall comparability between source language (SL) and target language (TL) that accounts for a great deal of the parallel use of metaphor in the above ST and TT, and, more generally, in most texts and their translations.

However, the correspondences are not complete. Some ST metaphors have not been translated as TT metaphors, and the question arises as to why. Is there no equivalent metaphorical rendering for *lavoravamo*? And is there no equivalent non-metaphorical rendering for *proporzioni*? The Dutch language does have *properties*, so that cannot be the problem. As for *lavoravamo*, however, the verb *werken* is available in Dutch too, but it can be argued that *werken* does not comprise the suitable conventionalised metaphorical sense that is needed for capturing the Italian text’s use. The Italian metaphorical sense does not appear to be fully conventionalised either, so that the Dutch rendering may be due to the fact that the metaphorical use of *lavorare* in this context is somewhat novel, while at the same time the Dutch equivalent verb does not have a suitable figurative sense nor feels right as a novel metaphorical use.

This is therefore part of the answer to the question why we have some differences between ST and TT: they are caused by differences between SL and TL regarding the availability of conventionalised metaphorical senses across the lexicon. Another part of the answer may have to do with particular properties of the overall discourse of the ST and TT, apparently leading the translator to prefer a non-metaphorical rendering for a metaphorical original or the other way around. Whether these considerations are due to the fact that we are specifically dealing with translating metaphor or not, however, is a moot point.

These reflections lead us to the question as to whether all of these are metaphors in the first place, or not. Not every translator, translation scholar or linguist will accept that all of the above items in bold are to be classified as metaphorical. Their metaphorical status depends on the cognitive-linguistic conceptualisation of metaphor as a matter of thought, ‘understanding one thing in terms of something else’, which has given rise to the postulation of conventionalised so-called conceptual metaphors in our conceptual systems. Conceptual metaphors may be reflected in various ways in the structures of a language, and somewhat differently in the structures of different languages (Lakoff, Johnson 1980; Kövecses 2005). They may also give rise to slightly diverging applications of these conceptual and linguistic systematic patterns in concrete cases of situated metaphorical meaning.



And when this cognitive-linguistic starting point is adopted, the way in which these proposals can be operationalised for reliable metaphor identification also requires close attention (Pragglejaz Group 2007; Steen 2007; Steen *et al.* 2010), just like the novel extensions of these proposals into a three-dimensional model for the subsequent analysis of metaphor in language, thought, and communication (Steen 2008, 2011).

Translating metaphor is hence a complex area of research that can be approached from a multitude of perspectives. Exploiting the encompassing contemporary approach to metaphor that was independently developed in language and discourse research (Steen 2011) may help to throw these issues into relief. It is the aim of this paper to address the role of metaphor in translation from this perspective and ask whether there indeed is a specific problem that is due to metaphor.

Given the ubiquity of metaphor in language, and its relatively comparable spread across related languages, it might be surprising that there even is a problem. As illustrated above, a random sample of a translated text shows that a great deal of metaphor in translation appears to behave fairly civilly. Perhaps the alleged problem of metaphor for translation has to do with a very specific, limited class of metaphors. Perhaps this class is erroneously seen as representative of all metaphor. These are the questions that will be addressed in this paper.

## 2. The contemporary theory of metaphor: Metaphor in language and thought

In order to stay close to our Italian grounds, let's now consider the following excerpt from Cicero's *Sullius*, 76 (quoted in Gildenhard 2011: 102):

**Perspicite** etiam atque etiam, iudices—nihil enim est quod **in** hac causa dici possit vehementius—**penitus introspicite** Catilinae Autroni Cethegi Lentuli ceterorumque mentes: quas vos in his libidines, quae flagitia, quas turpitudines, quantas audacias, quam incredibiles furores, quas **notas** facinorum, quae indicia parricidiorum, **quantos acervos** scelerum **reperietis!** **Ex magnis et diuturnis at iam desperatis** rei publicae **morbis ista** repente vis **erupit**, ut ea **collecta et eiecta convallescere** aliquando **et sanari** civitas posset; neque enim est quisquam qui arbitretur **illis inclusis in** re publica **pestibus** diutius haec **stare** potuisse.

The English translation may be helpful:

**Look** discerningly over and again, judges—for there is nothing **in** this trial, which one could say with greater emphasis – **look deeply into** the minds of Cataline, Autronius, Cethegus, Lentulus, and all the rest: what desires, what enormities, what indecencies, how much impudence, what unbelievable madness, what **marks** of misdeeds, what indications of murder, **how large the heaps of** crimes you will **find within** them! **Out of severe, chronic, and already incurable maladies of** the state **that** violent force suddenly **burst forth**, so that our civic community, once the violent force **had been gathered together and ejected**, was finally able to **regain its strength and health**. For no one, surely, believes that our commonwealth could have **survived any further** while **these agents of disease were enclosed inside**.

These two text excerpts may serve as useful materials for a brief introduction to the most important ideas about metaphor in contemporary metaphor research in language and discourse (Steen 2011).

Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) cognitive-linguistic approach to metaphor in language and thought became famous because of its wealth of linguistic examples suggesting that we do not only talk about, e.g., understanding as seeing (*look, find*), the state as a person or a body (*incurable maladies, regain its strength and health*), and emotions as hot fluids in containers (*burst forth, gathered together and ejected*), but that we also think about them in these ways. This holds across all languages and

is crucial for translation: both Latin and English use ‘seeing’ words to talk about understanding: *perspicite*, *introspicite* and *reperietis* as well as *look* and *find*. Concomitant preposition *in*, adverb *penitus* and morpheme *intro-* also all have exact equivalents in English: *in*, *deeply*, and *into*. Roughly the same parallelism holds for the other metaphors in the text as well.

The cognitive-linguistic approach holds that metaphor in language is a reflection of metaphor in thought: we need metaphor in thought to project conceptual structures from relatively more concrete, simple and better known domains, like seeing, bodies/people, and fluids in containers, to conceptualise more abstract, complex and less known domains, like understanding, states, and emotions. There are important theoretical questions about the precise application of this proposal to ‘thought’ (Steen 2007, 2011; Gibbs 2011), some theories suggesting that metaphor requires mandatory online mapping in people’s individual minds, others seeing metaphor mainly as a matter of micro-social or even macro-social and cultural processes of ‘thought’ in discourse. For our present purposes, I posit that this macro-social process of metaphorical mapping is clearly observable across many discourse events, happens across all cultures and is hence found in all languages, which, as a result, display massive amounts of metaphorically motivated polysemy in their lexico-grammar in fairly comparable ways. Moreover, the history of language contact can add to this inter-language parallelism, an observation which forcefully applies to the relation between Latin and English.

Extensive linguistic analysis (for a comprehensive overview, see Kövecses 2010) has suggested that there may be conceptual metaphors that are conventionalised systematic mappings between source and target domains in our knowledge systems, facilitating the conceptualisation of important categories and domains by means of metaphorical projection. The excerpt from Cicero above displays no fewer than four of the conceptual metaphors that have become familiar to many linguists: UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING, MORE IS UP, THE STATE IS A PERSON/BODY, and (BAD) EMOTIONS ARE HOT FLUIDS IN A CONTAINER. What is important is that their translations into English look just as natural, illustrating the idea that these conceptual metaphors may be fairly stable and valid across time and cultures, at least among closely related cultures. This is a proposal that has had an effect on translation theory as well (e.g., Lakoff 1987; Mandelblit 1995; Al Hasnawi 2007): translation of metaphor varies according to whether two languages display similar mapping conditions or different mapping conditions for that particular metaphorical projection.

The study of these conceptual metaphors, conceptual systems and mapping conditions is fraught with theoretical and methodological difficulties (Steen 2007), a discussion of which would take us too far afield in the context of the present argument. What is more important is that it always requires the identification of metaphors in STs for translation, and STs and TTs for translation studies. Two questions hence arise: (a) which criteria need to be applied to collect all metaphors from a text, and (b) which criteria can be applied to test whether each of these metaphors can be connected to some presumably underlying conceptual metaphor?

The past decade has seen the development of the first reliable variant of a metaphor identification procedure, called MIP (Pragglejaz Group 2007). The method is not dependent on the assumption of conceptual metaphors and does not necessarily aim at identifying them. It offers an operational definition of linguistic metaphor that

is intended to be completely compatible, however, with the cognitive-linguistic definition of metaphor as indirect meaning based on cross-domain mapping. MIP has been statistically tested for reliability and the output of the procedure can be easily connected to conceptual metaphor research.

MIP comprises the following steps:

1. Read the entire text to understand the general context.
2. Decide about lexical units.
  - 3a. Establish the contextual meaning of the examined lexical unit, i.e. its application in the situation evoked by the text, taking into account the words surrounding the examined lexical unit.
  - 3b. Determine the basic meaning of the word on the basis of the dictionary. The basic meaning is usually the most concrete, human oriented, specific (as opposed to vague) and historically older meaning.
  - 3c. Decide whether the basic meaning of the word is sufficiently distinct from the contextual meaning.
  - 3d. Decide whether the contextual meaning of the word can be related to the more basic meaning by some form of similarity.
4. If the answers to 3c and 3d are positive, the lexical unit should be marked as metaphorical.

When we apply this procedure to the above examples, it is clear that all of them are bona fide metaphorical uses. To illustrate, let us consider *esercito* from our first excerpt:

Step 3a Contextual meaning

In this context, the noun *esercito* indicates a host of people

Step 3b Basic meaning

The basic meaning of the noun *esercito* is ‘a military army’

Step 3c Contextual meaning vs. basic meaning

The two senses are distinct: the contextual sense of *esercito* in this sentence differs from the basic sense of the noun. The dictionary lists these two senses as two separate descriptions.

Step 3d Contextual meaning vs. basic meaning

The two senses are related by similarity: a host of people is like a military army.

Step 4 Metaphorically used or not?

Yes, the contextual sense of *esercito* is distinct from the basic sense of this noun but they are related by similarity.

MIP has since been refined and developed by Steen *et al.* (2010), leading to a 16-page manual that can cover all manifestations of metaphor in discourse, including simile, explicit comparison, analogy, and so on. This is important, also for translation, because linguistic manifestations of metaphor are not restricted to plain metaphor when metaphor is theoretically defined as a conceptual cross-domain mapping, as has widely happened since the launch of the cognitive-linguistic approach.

Metaphor identification is crucial for assessing the quality of metaphor research, also for translation: if researchers cannot agree on what counts as an instance of a particular phenomenon by independent observations, then their findings are not much more than personal constructions and interpretations. Yet reliable metaphor identification is not ‘just’ an important methodological issue, but also involves the heart of the matter of the cognitive-linguistic approach to metaphor: its validity. Some psychologists have denied that many of the linguistic illustrations of conceptual metaphor, including many of the ones adduced above, are metaphorical. They argue that their polysemy may be motivated by metaphor but does not require resolution by on line metaphorical mapping. Instead, their polysemy may presumably be handled in language processing by general lexical disambiguation processes,

therefore not involving any online cross-domain mapping. Let me give a concrete illustration.

When a word like *esercito* in the above example is accessed by the reader, both its metaphorical ('host') and non-metaphorical ('military army') sense are automatically activated in the first moments of lexical access. Then, during lexical integration, the metaphorical sense may simply be retained and used in the context of the rest of the sentence (cf. Giora 2008). It follows that there would be no need for a mapping across two conceptual domains from the allegedly privileged non-metaphorical sense to the metaphorical one to establish the metaphorical meaning of *esercito*: it is already available in the mental lexicon of the language user. This is presumably even more so for those words where the metaphorical sense is more salient than the nonmetaphorical one (Giora 2008). A case from our examples might be the English word *malady* from the translated Cicero excerpt, where the non-metaphorical 'illness' sense represents an old use of *malady* while the metaphorical contextual sense of 'a serious problem in society' would be the most salient, familiar and frequent sense. As a result, some psychologists argue, words like *esercito* and *malady* do not function metaphorically.

This conclusion elicits an essential question for translation: if many metaphors do not function metaphorically, why would it be important to translate them as metaphors? If metaphors are not always recognised as metaphors by readers, that is, if metaphors do not always cause readers to set up cross-domain mappings in their minds, then not every metaphor in a ST requires a metaphor in a TT. In other words, some metaphors may be more metaphorical than others. Which metaphors might these be? The next section will attempt to give an answer to this question.

### 3. Extending the contemporary theory: Metaphor in communication

The idea that many metaphors are based in polysemy lies at the basis of the cognitive-linguistic approach to metaphor. It has revolutionised the study of metaphor but now also appears to have revealed a paradox of metaphor (Steen 2008): precisely because of this metaphorically motivated polysemy, many if not most metaphors ('in language') may not be processed as metaphors ('in thought'), that is, by triggering the online creation of cross-domain mappings. Instead, they may simply be handled by general lexical disambiguation processes, pre-empting the need for any genuine conceptual access and use of the conceptual source domain for understanding the target domain.

To illustrate, what happens every time a spatial preposition like *in* is used metaphorically to designate a temporal relation, such as *in 1999*? Would people activate the lexeme and discard the spatial sense in order to integrate the temporal concept and referent (lexical disambiguation)? Or would they activate the conceptual domain of space and build a metaphorical cross-domain mapping to the target domain of time in order to derive the relevant concept and referent that are conventionally available as part of the lexeme already (cross-domain mapping)? Posing the question seems tantamount to answering it.

It is difficult to judge the psychological evidence for either the strong cognitive-linguistic position that sees metaphor as a matter of psychological cross-domain mapping or for the paradox of metaphor that sees much metaphor as a matter of lexical disambiguation (Gibbs 2011; Steen 2011). However, because of this unclear overall situation, there is good reason to look at both proposals as alternative

hypotheses that require further research. The paradox of metaphor has revealed an awkward issue that needs addressing: we have just discovered the ubiquity of metaphor in all language and thought, but we now seem forced to allow that most of this metaphor ‘in thought’ does not really count as metaphor ‘in thought’, if that is taken in its psychological sense of language processing.

Acknowledging this problem has led to the formulation of a new, alternative position (Steen 2008, 2011). It has led to a reevaluation of the fact that there is a substantial group of metaphors that clearly are used *as* metaphors ‘in thought’ and that do need to be processed via cross-domain comparison after all. These are, at the least, all metaphors that are linguistically expressed as cross-domain mappings, that is, all similes and analogies and their more extended versions. My favourite examples are Shakespeare’s *Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?* and Neil Young’s *You are like a hurricane*. Expressions like these do require cross-domain mappings to be understood as they are intended. Moreover, all novel metaphors, that is, those metaphors that do not have a conventionally available metaphorical sense in the dictionary, presumably also require online cross-domain mapping: otherwise the novel metaphorical use of the lexeme in question cannot get integrated into the encompassing mental representation of the utterance. Both of these suggestions can be supported by psycholinguistic evidence, which has shown that similes as well as novel metaphors are processed by comparison, as opposed to a large amount of conventional metaphor when it is not expressed as a simile (Gentner, Bowdle 2008). The linguistic characteristics of these clearly metaphorical metaphors have been addressed in the extended version of the metaphor identification procedure, MIPVU (Steen *et al.* 2010).

I have suggested that the metaphors that are used *as* metaphors in this way, and that presumably require processing by cross-domain mapping, may be called “deliberate metaphors” (Steen 2008, 2011). These are metaphors that have been deliberately used as metaphors by their producers and need to be taken up as deliberately used metaphors by their addressees, in the sense that their linguistic construction signals a demand for cross-domain comparison, as with the Shakespeare and Neil Young examples. These are the metaphors that do not only count as metaphors in language and thought, but also in communication, between producers and receivers. These are the metaphors that are recognised as the typical metaphors by a lay audience, too – they are the metaphors that have been studied since classical antiquity as displaying a specific rhetorical purpose, which involves the genuine adoption of another standpoint (in the source domain) to re-view the relevant referent or topic in the target domain (Steen 2008: 222).

All of these metaphors in communication, therefore, are presumably processed metaphorically. Metaphor in communication is the dimension at which there does not arise a paradox of metaphor: all ‘metaphors in communication’ do indeed count as metaphors. Its interaction with the dimensions of metaphor in language and thought is complex and requires an encompassing theory of metaphor in discourse.

Most metaphors in language and thought, including most of the metaphors discussed above, do not function as metaphors in communication. They are not deliberate metaphors. They do not ask people to see time as space, or argument as war. They just use language that is technically (probably historically) metaphorical to talk about time or argumentation in the conventionally available terms. In communication, they function as non-deliberate metaphors and their metaphorical

status seems to be irrelevant and a superfluous technicality. I would think that these are the metaphors that do not necessarily require a metaphorical translation if the target language does not have a corresponding conventionalised metaphorical sense available.

However, for deliberate metaphors, the situation is different, I would say. Deliberate metaphors have a linguistic and rhetorical structure of comparison that is functional in the source text. It is these metaphors that most likely require a translation by metaphor in the TT as well. So let us examine how professional translators have dealt with a variety of these deliberate metaphors and contrast that with their treatment of non-deliberate metaphors.

Let us begin with an extreme, spectacular example from Italian fiction, the second and third page from Italo Calvino's novel *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*, translated into English as *If on a winter's night a traveler* by William Weaver.

Già nella vetrina della libreria hai individuato la copertina col titolo che cercavi. Seguendo questa **traccia** visiva **ti sei fatto largo** nel negozio **attraverso il fitto sbarramento** dei Libri Che Non Hai Letto che ti **guardavano accigliati** dai banchi e dagli scaffali **cercando d'intimidirti**. Ma tu sai che non devi lasciarti mettere in soggezione, che tra loro **s'estendono per ettari ed ettari** i Libri Che [...] E così **superi la prima cinta dei baluardi** e ti **piomba addosso la fanteria** dei Libri Che [...] **Con rapida mossa li scavalchi e ti porti in mezzo alle falangi** dei Libri Che [...]. **Sventando questi assalti, ti porti sotto le torri del fortilizio, dove fanno resistenza** i Libri Che [...].

**Ecco che ti è stato possibile ridurre il numero illimitato di forze in campo a un insieme certo molto grande ma comunque calcolabile in un numero finito, anche se questo relativo sollievo ti viene insidiato dalle imboscate dei Libri Letti Tanto Tempo Fa Che [...].**

**Ti liberi con rapidi zig zag e penetri d'un balzo nella cittadella delle Novità [...]. Anche all'interno di questa roccaforte puoi praticare delle breccie tra le schiere dei difensori dividendole in Novità D'Autori O Argomenti [...]** e definire l'attrattiva che esse esercitano su di te in base ai tuoi desideri e bisogni di nuovo e di non nuovo (del nuovo che cerchi nel non nuovo e del non nuovo che cerchi nel nuovo).

Tutto questo per dire che, percorsi rapidamente con lo sguardo i titoli dei volumi esposti nella libreria, hai diretto i tuoi passi verso una pila di *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* **freschi** di stampa, ne hai afferrato una copia e l'hai portata alla cassa perché venisse stabilito il tuo diritto di proprietà su di essa.

Hai **gettato** ancora un'occhiata smarrita ai libri intorno (o meglio: erano i libri che ti **guardavano con l'aria smarrita dei cani che dalle gabbie del canile municipale vedono un loro ex compagno allontanarsi al guinzaglio del padrone venuto a riscattarlo**), e sei uscito.

Contemporary research on metaphor might say that this text is organised by one underlying cross-domain mapping: BUYING A BOOK IS FIGHTING A BATTLE. Metaphor in thought and communication does not only emerge as metaphorically used words in minimal linguistic environments like clauses, as we've seen above. It can also organise a longer stretch of text and set up a content frame that helps to organise the narrative type and structure of the text. In the case of Calvino, there is a metaphorical 'battle' scenario (cf. Musolff 2006) that generates a series of utterances that are all metaphorical in the same way, that is, by consistently projecting aspects from the source domain of fighting a battle to the target domain of buying a book. The large discrepancy between the two domains is clearly intended to have a humorous effect on the reader (cf. Dynel 2009). The extended BATTLE metaphor may be based on a metonymy (authors are intimidating, see the first paragraph), which may be based on another metonymy (Culture with a capital C is intimidating), which may have been the motive for coming up with a humorously intended WAR metaphor (there's a lot of

Culture I don't need, have to resist, fight...). This may also have been extended across two pages to emphasise the hyperbole and the humour.

All of these emboldened expressions therefore count as examples of deliberate metaphor use. They are used *as* metaphors in order to change the reader's perspective by making the reader adopt the standpoint of the source domain and re-view the target domain from that angle. One would expect that this metaphorical use of the source domain in the ST would have to be transferred as metaphorical into the language of the TT.

In the shop window you have promptly identified the cover with the title you were looking for. Following this visual **trail**, you have **forced your way through** the shop **past the thick barricade** of Books You Haven't Read, which were **frowning at you from** the tables and shelves, **trying to cow** you. But you know you must never allow yourself to be awed, that among them **there extend for acres and acres** the Books You Needn't Read [...]. And thus you **pass the outer girdle of ramparts**, but then you **are attacked by the infantry** of the Books That [...] **With a rapid maneuver you bypass them and move into the phalanxes** of the Books [...] **Eluding these assaults, you come up beneath the towers of the fortress, where other troops are holding out** [...].

**Now you have been able to reduce the countless embattled troops to an array that is, to be sure, very large but still calculable in a finite number; but this relative relief is then undermined by the ambush of the Books Read Long Ago** [...].

**With a zigzag dash you shake them off and leap straight into the citadel** of the New Books Whose Author or Subject Appeals To You. **Even inside this stronghold you can make some breaches in the ranks of the defenders, dividing them into** New Books [...] for you or in general and New Books [...], and defining the attraction they have for you on the basis of your desires and needs for the new and the not new (for the new you seek in the not new and for the not new you seek in the new).

All this simply means that, having glanced over the titles of the volumes displayed in the bookshop, you have turned toward a stack of *If on a winter's night a traveler* **fresh** off the press, you have grasped a copy, and you have carried it to the cashier so that your right to own it can be established.

You **cast** another bewildered look at the books around you (or, rather: it was the books that **looked at you, with the bewildered gaze of dogs who, from their cages in the city pound, see a former companion go off on the leash of his master, come to rescue him**), and out you went.

It turns out that the global picture is indeed as one might expect. Yet here, too, details are different. In the first paragraph, for instance, *cercando d'intimidirti* has been translated as *trying to cow you*, whereas the English verb *intimidate* would have been an option too. Similarly, *ti piomba addosso la fanteria* gets rendered as *you are attacked by the infantry*, whereas the Italian literally means something like 'the infantry falls heavily on (rushes at) you'. The following sentence has *ti porti in mezzo alle falangi*, where the English translation omits any reference to the middle or centre of the phalanxes. Yet there really does not seem to be any reason in the language or thought about the source domain of battle and the target domain of books that would prevent any translator from staying closer to the text.

All in all then, somewhat surprisingly, the situation does not seem to be very different for the Calvino excerpt with the extended deliberate metaphor than for the previous excerpts that were based on more local metaphors, more of which were not deliberate. Nor is it the case that other properties of the text would force the translator to avoid these options and go for the preferred alternatives. Therefore it simply looks as if translators occasionally take liberties with translations of metaphors that are not necessarily caused by any difficulties with the metaphors themselves, whether these are deliberate or non-deliberate. This may make their

motivation for unexpected choices at other moments a little lighter as well. Whether there is any difference in appreciation on the part of readers between ‘missed’ non-deliberate metaphors versus deliberate metaphors would be an interesting question for future work.

Of course, Calvino is just one example of such translation, albeit by a respected translator, but it cannot serve as an adequate basis for drawing very far-reaching conclusions. Let us check another case, where there may be more forceful contextual factors at work – ones that may influence how a translator handles metaphor. Here is the translation of the first quartet of Shakespeare’s famous *Sonnet 18* into Dutch, by one of our best appreciated literary translators, Peter Verstegen.

Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?  
 Thou art more lovely and more temperate.  
 Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
 And summer’s lease hath al too short a date;

Vind ik jou als een zomerdag zo mooi?  
*Find I you like a summer’s day so beautiful?*  
 Nee, lieflijker en milder nog ben jij.  
*No, lovelier and milder still are you.*  
 De tere meiknop valt aan storm ten prooi,  
*The tender Maybud falls to storm a prey,*  
 En al te snel verloopt het hemeltij;  
*And all too fast goes by the heaven-tide*

There are a few striking differences. The opening line, itself a classic way to set up a metaphorical comparison, is changed from one explicitly announcing a comparison, the ground of which is still to be determined, to one presenting a specific correspondence within that comparison, focusing on the notion of ‘beautiful’ as the ground and asking whether the two compared entities display that quality in equal measure. This deviant rendering is related to what happens in line three, with the last word *mooi* (‘beautiful’) in line 1 rhyming with the last word *prooi* (‘prey’) in line 3. Line 3 itself, too, fundamentally changes the original, from rough winds that shake in the original to storms that hunt their prey in the translation (changed into an inverse situation where the bud ‘falls prey’ to the storm). This does not only add hyperbole but also adds another metaphor, ‘prey’.

The difficulties of translating these lines comprise a combination of factors. First of all, English and Dutch have different preferred word orders, with Dutch having the verb in final position. Secondly, and in relation to this, the words in final position in lines 1 and 3 have to rhyme. Thirdly, and again in relation to preferred word orders, the words in final position as well as the rest of each of the two lines have to exhibit a functional meter and rhythm. And fourthly, and again in relation to this, Dutch verbs typically end on a de-stressed morpheme *-en*, as would be the case for *vergelijken*, ‘compare’.

A natural solution with *vergelijken* for line 1 would still be possible: *Zal ik je vergelijken met een zomerdag?* But this would force a solution for line 3 that would end on the sound *-ag*. This is indeed what has happened in previous translations: *Storm beukt wat ik in Mei als knopjes zag* (‘Storm bashes what I in May as bud saw’, Jan Jonk) or *De meiwind striemt de knoppen slag op slag* (‘The Maywind lashes the buds blow by blow’, W. van Elden). It is not as if a translator of this poem cannot stay close to the original.



But the translator here has apparently opted for a solution in which he could try something new. This is of course part of his job, to offer a fresh translation that is presumably closer to the spirit and language use of our own days. As a result, he has also added the interactive and lively ‘No’ in line 2, denying the newly introduced same level of beauty between the beloved and the summer’s day from line 1. But all of these alterations have clearly removed us from a close translation to a more overt display of re-textualisation of the same metaphorical comparison. Whether the novel metaphorical Dutch lines are more effective and beautiful than their possible alternatives that are closer to the original is a moot point, which might in fact be subjected to empirical study.

When we adopt a communicative perspective on metaphor and examine whether there is a difference between the translation of deliberate versus non-deliberate metaphors, we do not immediately see a clear pattern. In Calvino’s novel, small details of deliberate metaphors were omitted or changed for no obvious reasons, and in Shakespeare’s sonnet, more important aspects of deliberate metaphors were changed for reasons that may have to do with the cultural role of a translator in making classic texts available to a modern audience. As noted before, these are just two cases but they do suggest that translating metaphor may involve more considerations than just the complexity of translating a cross-domain mapping from one source language and one source text into another language and text. These considerations may in the final analysis require a full-blown genre-analytical perspective on what it is for a translator to translate a specific text into a specific target language and culture.

To widen the scope of our discussion, let us finally take a look at the translation of metaphor in an important political speech televised as an important media event. Here is a section from US President Obama’s victory speech in 2008, starting at minute 7:30 (downloaded from [www.dotsub.com](http://www.dotsub.com), with no producer of the subtitles acknowledged).

I know you didn’t do this just to **win** an election and I know you didn’t do it for me. You did it because you understand the enormity of the task that **lies ahead**. For even as we celebrate tonight, we know the challenges that tomorrow **will bring** are the greatest of our lifetime – two wars, a planet in peril, the worst financial crisis in a century. Even as we stand here tonight, we know there are brave Americans waking up in the deserts of Iraq and the mountains of Afghanistan to risk their lives for us. There are mothers and fathers who will lie awake after their children fall asleep and wonder how they’ll **make** the mortgage, or pay their doctor’s bills, or save enough for college. There is new **energy** to **harness** and new jobs to be created; new schools to build and threats to **meet** and alliances to **repair**.

**The road ahead will be long. Our climb will be steep. We may not get there** in one year or even one term, but America – I have never been more hopeful than I am tonight **that we will get there**. I promise you – we as a people **will get there**.

Io so che non avete fatto ciò solo per **vincere** una elezione, e so che non l’avete fatto per me. Voi l’avete fatto perché conoscete l’enormità del compito che **ci attende**. Anche stanotte mentre festeggiamo, noi conosciamo le sfide che domani **giungeranno** sono le più grandi del nostro tempo. Due guerre, un pianeta in pericolo, la più grande crisi finanziaria del secolo. E mentre noi siamo qui stanotte, sappiamo che ci sono americani coraggiosi che si svegliano nel deserto in Iraq e nelle montagne dell’Afghanistan per rischiare le loro vite per noi. Ci sono madri e padri che rimangono svegli mentre i loro figli dormono e pensano a come **pagare** il mutuo, o come pagare la parcella del medico o come risparmiare per pagare gli studi dei figli al college. Ci sono le nuove **fonti energetiche** da **sfruttare** e nuovi posti di lavoro da creare, nuove scuole da costruire e minacce da **affrontare** e alleanze da **ricostruire**.

**Il cammino da compiere sarà lungo. La nostra salita sarà ripida. Possiamo non arrivarci** in un anno o anche in un mandato, ma America, non sono stato più fiducioso di quanto lo sono ora **che noi ci arriveremo**. Ve lo prometto: noi come popolo **arriveremo lì**.

There is a whole list of minimal changes to metaphorically used words: *lies ahead* ≠ *ci attende*, *will bring* ≠ *giungeranno*; *make* ≠ *pagare*; *energy* ≠ *fonti energetiche*; *harness* ≠ *sfruttare*; *meet* ≠ *affrontare*; *repair* ≠ *ricostruire*; *ahead* ≠ *da compiere*. However, here is the beginning of a pattern that might be found more often if researched more extensively. Almost all of the words in the list of deviations belong to the first paragraph, which contains hardly any deliberate metaphors, while the second paragraph has a rather long and extended deliberate metaphor that is almost completely rendered verbatim. Thus, it may be more idiomatic in Italian to speak of tasks that lie waiting than of tasks that lie ahead, and since the metaphorical source domain will probably not be realised as an independent domain for comparison, this difference does not make a difference. Similarly, the fact that tomorrow will bring hopes in American English is different than the fact that hopes will arrive tomorrow in Italian, but these metaphorical expressions are not deliberately metaphorical, their sources do not play a semantic role of their own, and their diverging preference between the two languages may make the text semantically adequate for the target domain and pragmatically adequate for the appropriate use of register.

This pattern should be contrasted with what happens in the second paragraph. The English is all in the language of the source domain of journeying or travelling:

**The road ahead will be long. Our climb will be steep. We may not get there [...], but [...]**  
 – I have never been more hopeful than I am tonight **that we will get there**. I promise you – we [...]  
**will get there**.

And almost all of these expressions are rendered in exactly the equivalent source domain language in Italian. The only exception is *il cammino da compiere* for *the road ahead*, which is like the situation with the tasks that lie waiting above. My suggestion is that this nearly verbatim translation can be explained by the fact that we are dealing here with deliberate metaphor, expressly representing and exploiting the source domain of the metaphor as a different, ‘alien’ perspective on the local topic of the text, the political agenda for the coming years.

The Obama text then displays the pattern that I think might be more widespread: deliberate metaphor might be translated more often as verbatim metaphor than non-deliberate metaphor. This is also possible because deliberate metaphor often involves talking about the source domain in its own right, as an independent domain from which the target domain is then to be reconceptualised by the addressee. However, there also appear to be other factors, such as other demands imposed by poetry, or the tradition of innovating translations of classic texts, which may play a role too. Moreover, apparently it is not really a problem when some small aspects of STs are omitted or altered in TTs, for whatever reasons. Even if such translations might be criticised as imperfect, the differences appear to be so small that they do not seem to justify seeing metaphor as the major culprit or as a major problem.

#### 4. Conclusion

Is there a problem about translating metaphor? And if there is one, is it one problem or are there several problems? The extended contemporary theory of metaphor has been invoked in addressing these questions. There are several aspects that have been made explicit.

First of all, with the ubiquitous and relatively comparable presence of metaphor across languages, which is due to the ubiquitous and relatively general need for metaphor in thought, there is much prior parallelism of metaphorical vocabulary between source and target languages. On the one hand, one can therefore note small discrepancies that might be highlighted as theoretically and empirically interesting. On the other hand, however, our modest examination of translation practice suggests that when it *is* possible to produce verbatim translations of metaphorical uses, translators sometimes opt to leave these aside. Apparently, translating metaphor is not always a big deal.

Secondly, some metaphors are more important than others to the reader. Those metaphors that are used *as* metaphors may typically require more faithful translation as a metaphor in the TT. Since these are often novel or unconventional metaphors, they merely need verbatim rendition of the language of the source domain in the Source Text into language of the source domain in the TT. This may become problematic only if the source domain terms have different associations or values in the original culture and language than in the target culture and language, but I have no space to elaborate on this suggestion. Instead, some deliberate metaphors do not get translated as closely as in theory might be possible, for more encompassing considerations that have to do with, for instance, the status of the text or the tradition of a series of translation, as with our Shakespeare example. However, even details of deliberate metaphors may be treated with equal lack of close interest as non-deliberate metaphors. It will be interesting to see how more encompassing and quantified research can develop these proposals in the future.

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# Conceptual metaphor theory and the nature of difficulties in metaphor translation

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***Abstract:** It has become more or less a commonplace that whenever we translate from one language into another, there are two different conceptual systems involved. Many difficulties in translation arise from such differences between conceptual systems. And since conceptual systems emerge and are used in context, contextual differences may also lead to problems in translation. In my paper, I focus on metaphorical concepts and characterize the metaphorical conceptual system in general. I also discuss how context plays a role in shaping the metaphorical mind. I point out that a number of problems in translation arise from differences in metaphorical conceptual systems and the contexts in which they emerge.*

***Keywords:** cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor theory, conceptual system, context, difficulty in translation.*

## 1. Introduction

In recent years more and more scholars have turned to the topic of metaphor translation from a cognitive semantic perspective. (See, e.g., work by Ahrens and Say 1999, Maalej 2008, Mandelblit 1995, Monti 2006 and this volume, Samaniego Fernández et al. 2005, Schäffner 2004, 2012 and this volume, Steen this volume, and others.) The burgeoning literature indicates that all of these scholars find that cognitive semantics, and conceptual metaphor theory within it, has something to contribute to the study of translation. I will continue in the same direction but my focus will be on the issue of the difficulties we experience when we translate texts from one language to another. My major goal here is to point out some of the problems, and the possible reasons for the difficulties, that the process of translation involves from a cognitive semantic perspective.

In order to do this, I first provide a global picture of the main components of the meaning making enterprise. This necessarily involves bringing together three large systems: the general conceptual system, the set of cognitive, or construal, operations, and a number of various contextual factors, because, in my view, one of the difficulties in the translation of metaphors is the heavy influence of contextual factors on metaphorical conceptualization. Second, I look at some systematic patterns of metaphor translation to show that such patterns provide a considerable degree of flexibility and variation – a further source of complications. Third, I will argue, taking what may seem a somewhat radical view, that abstract meanings can only be translated into abstract meanings in another language. Finding such abstract meanings in the target language is a further significant challenge in metaphor translation. Finally, I propose some additional ‘matching conditions’ for ‘optimal’ metaphor translation. Complying with these conditions may present translators with considerable difficulties, the nature of which I try to capture in a cognitive semantic framework.

In the paper, I will rely heavily on my previous work. At the same time, I try to press relevant findings from the earlier work into the service of responding to, and hopefully elucidating, the main issue here: *What makes the translation of metaphors such a challenging task?* and do so from a cognitive semantic perspective.

## **2. Conceptual systems, cognitive operations, contextual factors**

If we think of CMT (conceptual metaphor theory) as a view of metaphor that conceives of metaphors as highly conventional static conceptual structures (the correspondences, or mappings, between a source and a target domain) based on universal bodily experience, it would follow that such conceptual structures result in highly conventionalized, deeply entrenched, and universal metaphorical linguistic expressions (like the words and phrases for metaphorical meanings in a dictionary). If correct, the CMT view would not easily lend itself to an account of metaphorical creativity and variation. But, clearly, we often do come across novel and non-universal metaphorical expressions in real discourse. If all there was to metaphor were static conceptual structures resulting from universal bodily experience that are matched by highly conventional linguistic expressions (words and phrases), CMT would have difficulty accounting for the many unconventional and non-universal expressions we find in real discourse. This mistaken view would make translation easier, but it would go against the reality of conceptual and linguistic variation and creativity.

In this section, I demonstrate the dynamics between the conceptual system, cognitive operations, and context in relation to metaphorical concepts.

### **2.1. The organization of the conceptual system**

I will now briefly discuss two kinds of organization that characterize the conceptual system: (1) ‘vertical’ organization, which, essentially, provides for a thematic structure in the system and (2) ‘horizontal’ organization, which, essentially, consists of smaller domains, or frames.

#### **2.1.1. Vertical organization: thematic structure**

Superordinate-level concepts define large thematic groups in the system (such as VEHICLE, FURNITURE, EMOTION). The concepts in such groups belong to particular hierarchies because they share features with a higher-level conceptual category. Thus, people set up the thematic groups on the basis of perceiving similarities between levels. For example, CAR would be assigned to VEHICLE on the basis of sharing with other prototypical vehicles such features as ‘transportation’ and ‘motion’ and JOY would be regarded as belonging to EMOTION because sharing with other prototypical emotions such features as ‘a cause producing certain facial expressions’ and/or ‘a generalized arousal.’

We can think of these thematic groups as hierarchical taxonomies, which probably exist both for entities and relations – the basic conceptual units in Langacker’s (1987) cognitive grammar. Thus, verbs of MOTION at the highest level would include WALK, RUN, LEAVE, SWIM, SKI, DRIVE, and many others at the basic level, as well as many additional ones at the subordinate level.

Clearly, such thematic groups are numerous in the conceptual system and provide a wide range of potential themes, or topics, in the conceptual universe of

conceptualizers (speakers). However, it is also clear that the ‘entity system’ is closely connected with the ‘relation system.’ After all, users of conceptual systems want to conceptualize such situations as the motion (relation system) of vehicles (entity system). This means that the system must allow for an organization of concepts other than the thematic groups in the form of hierarchical taxonomies.

### 2.1.2. The horizontal organization of the system

In addition to their vertical, or hierarchical, organization, concepts are organized ‘horizontally’ into frames, or domains. The horizontal organization of concepts in the form of frames, or domains, may cross-cut several dimensions (entity-relation) and thematic groups. The most explicit proposal to this effect in cognitive linguistics was made, once again, by Langacker (e.g., 1987, 2008).

The notion of frame came into cognitive linguistics through Fillmore’s work, who views frames as organized assemblies of concepts (from different thematic groups) corresponding to coherent organizations of experience (Fillmore 1982). This idea was further developed by Lakoff (1987), but especially by Langacker (1987), who suggests that a concept represented by a frame evokes several additional frames, or, as Langacker prefers to call them, “domains”. Such domains constitute the “domain matrix” of a concept. Let us take the concept of EMOTION as an example (Kövecses 2000). The schematic frame for EMOTION can be given as follows:

Cause → Emotion (Person) → Attempt at Control over Emotion (Person) → Action (Person)

This frame represents a language-based folk theory of emotion (i.e., not a scientific theory), in which a situation (Cause) causes a person to be in an emotional state that manifests itself in a variety of ways (Emotion); the person tries to control the emotion (Control), but eventually performs an action related to the emotion (Action).

In this folk theory, a situation is conceptualized as a forceful entity that leads to the emotion and the emotion itself is conceptualized as another forceful entity that produces some kind of action or set of actions. In other words, the conceptualization of emotions relies on one of our most fundamental image schemas: the FORCE schema, in which two forceful entities are in interaction. The schema applies twice in the case of emotion: a cause (one forceful entity) affecting a person (another forceful entity) as a result of which emotion comes about, on the one hand, and emotion (one forceful entity) affecting the same person (another forceful entity) who tries to control it as a result of which actions are produced, on the other. Thus, the most fundamental component of our understanding of emotion is this force-dynamic pattern<sup>1</sup>.

## 2.2. Cognitive operations

In my view, the most salient idea that distinguishes cognitive linguistics from other kinds of linguistics is the attempt to describe and explain language use with reference to a number of cognitive operations – commonly called construal operations. Some of the cognitive, or construal, operations that cognitive linguists use in their accounts of language are common knowledge in cognitive psychology and cognitive science, while others are more hypothetical in nature (see Gibbs 2000).

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<sup>1</sup> On force dynamics in general, see Talmy 1988.

All of these cognitive operations serve human beings to make sense of their experience, including language.

Cognitive, or construal, operations play an essentially dual role in our mental life. On the one hand, it is through such operations that we build or acquire a conventional conceptual system in terms of which we conceptualize experience. The second role of cognitive, or construal, operations is that, given that conceptual system, the operations help us further interpret or conceptualize (new) experience, an ever-changing world, as a result of which the conceptual system also changes.

The conceptual system can be regarded as the way in which the brain organizes knowledge about the world, most of which is unconscious. The conceptual system is not something transcendental. It is based on the brain, and the brain supports all the cognitive, or construal, operations we utilize in the process of conceptualizing the world. It is the brain's neurons and the functioning of neurons that create such systems.

Below is a list of construal operations that cognitive linguists typically work with (based on Langacker 2008):

- Schematization/abstraction
  - Image-schemas
- Attention/focusing
  - Figure-ground
  - Scope of attention
  - Scalar adjustment (granularity; fine-grained – course-grained conceptualization)
  - Dynamic and static attention (sequential and summary scanning (fictive motion))
- Prominence/salience
  - Profile – base
  - Trajector – landmark alignment
- Perspective
  - Viewpoint
  - Subjectivity - objectivity
- Metonymy
- Metaphor
- Mental spaces
- Conceptual integration

I will say very little about these construal operations, except for the ones that contribute directly to the establishment of abstract concepts. My concern is with abstract concepts that make up a part of the conceptual system and the general ways in which the concepts are related to each other in such a system, since it is abstract concepts that are conceptualized by means of the cognitive process of metaphor.

### 2.2.1. Abstract concepts and metaphor

Traditionally, concepts are divided into two basic kinds: concrete and abstract. On the traditional view, concrete concepts are those that have to do with tangible aspects of reality, that is, they can be experienced by means of sensory-motor processes. In contrast, abstract concepts are those connoting intangible aspects of reality, that is, ones that cannot be experienced through sensory-motor processes.

Metaphor is a cognitive process that is commonly used to create fictive entities and events (Lakoff, Johnson 1980, 1999; Kövecses 2002/2010). When we think of meanings as objects, words and sentences as containers for those objects, and communication as sending container objects from one container to another (Reddy 1979), it is clear that human communication by means of language is conceptualized



in a very special way: through what is known as the CONDUIT metaphor. In a similar vein, the conceptualization of – for instance – theories as buildings (Lakoff, Johnson 1980; Grady 1997a, b), emotions as forces (Kövecses 2000), or time as motion or a resource such as money (Lakoff, Johnson 1999) creates fundamental and powerful conceptions for these target domains – so fundamental that it would be difficult to imagine what, for example, the concept of TIME would be like without conceptualizing it in terms of MOTION.

### **2.3. The contextual grounding of metaphorical concepts**

In this section, I will be concerned with the interplay between the conceptual system and context. My focus will be on metaphorical aspects of the conceptual system.

#### **2.3.1. The pressure of coherence in metaphor**

In Kövecses (2005), I show that there is both universality and variation in the conceptual metaphors people produce and use. I argue, furthermore, that both the universality and the variation result from what I call the “pressure of coherence”. People tend to be coherent both with their bodies and the surrounding context when, in general, they conceptualize the world or when they conceptualize it metaphorically. Since the body and its processes are universal, many of our conceptual metaphors will be (near-)universal. And, in the same way, since the contexts are variable, many of our conceptual metaphors will also be variable. In other words, the principle of the pressure of coherence takes two forms: the pressure of the body and the pressure of context.

Cognitive linguists have paid more attention to the role of the body in the creation of conceptual metaphors, supporting the view of embodied cognition. In my own work, I have attempted to redress the balance by focusing on what I take to be the equally important role of context. In particular, I suggest that there are a number of questions we have to deal with in order arrive at a reasonable theory of metaphor variation. The questions are as follows:

- What are the dimensions of metaphor variation?
- What are the aspects of conceptual metaphors that are involved in variation?
- What are the causes of metaphor variation?

The first question has to do with ‘where’ metaphor variation can be found. My survey of variation in conceptual metaphors indicates that variation is most likely to occur cross-culturally, within-culture, or individually, as well as historically and developmentally. I call these the “dimensions” of metaphor variation. Conceptual metaphors tend to vary along these dimensions.

The second question assumes that conceptual metaphors have a number of different aspects, or components, including the following: source domain, target domain, experiential basis, relationship between the source and target, metaphorical linguistic expressions, mappings, entailments (inferences), non-linguistic realizations, blends, and cultural models. These either produce metaphor variation (e.g., blends) or are affected by it (e.g., source domain, metaphorical linguistic expressions, entailments).

The third question is the crucial one for my purposes here. It asks what the factors, or ‘forces,’ are that are responsible for variation in conceptual metaphors. I propose two distinct though interlocking groups of factors: “differential experience” and “differential cognitive styles.”

I find it convenient to distinguish various subcases of differential experience: awareness of context, differential memory, and differential concerns and interests. Awareness of context includes awareness of the physical, social and cultural context, but also of the immediate communicative situation. Differential memory is the memory of events and objects shared by a community or of a single individual; we can think of it as the history of a group or that of an individual. Differential concerns and interests can also characterize either groups or individuals. It is the general attitude with which groups or individuals act or are predisposed to act in the world. Differential experience thus characterizes both groups and individuals, and, like context, it ranges from global to local. The global context is the general knowledge that the whole group shares and that, as a result, affects all group members in using metaphors. The local context is the specific knowledge that pertains to a specific situation involving particular individuals. More generally, it can be suggested that the global context is essentially a shared system of concepts in long-term memory (reflected in conventional linguistic usage), whereas the local context is the situation in which particular individuals conceptualize a specific situation.

By contrast, differential cognitive styles can be defined as the characteristic ways in which members of a group employ the cognitive processes available to them. Such cognitive processes as elaboration, specificity, conventionalization, transparency, (experiential) focus, viewpoint preference, prototype categorization, framing, metaphor vs. metonymy preference, and others, though universally available to all humans, are not employed in the same way by groups or individuals. Since the cognitive processes used can vary, there can be variation in the use of metaphors as well.

In sum, the two large groups of causes, differential experience and differential cognitive styles, account for much of the variation we find in the use of conceptual metaphors.

The principle of the “pressure of coherence” makes the user of language adjust his or her metaphors to the surrounding context. The principle can explain a large amount of metaphor variation in naturally occurring discourse on the basis of the interplay between universal embodiment, differential experience, and the changing context of communication. In this view, even universal embodiment can be seen as a special case of the pressure of coherence. That is to say, if there are no overriding factors, people can use certain universal metaphors for particular targets. However, in most cases of metaphor use there seem to be overriding factors that lead groups of people and individuals to employ non-universal metaphors.

Thus, given conceptual metaphor theory, it appears that we can have two research interests, one primarily concerned with universality and another primarily concerned with variation. Taking into account the causes of universality (embodiment) and variation (context), we get two general lines of research:

- Embodiment – Universality
- Context – Variation

The dominant line was the former one: the study of universal embodiment resulting in universal metaphors. My own work has been an attempt to balance this with the study of how variable context accounts for variation and flexibility in metaphorical conceptualization.

To see how context can trigger, or prime, the selection of metaphors, let us bring in a further factor that plays a role in producing differential experience, and hence novel metaphors, one which involves what I call differential concerns, or interests (Kövecses 2005: 244-245). This contextual factor can influence the choice of metaphor in discourse, as can be seen in the example below. The example (a letter to the editor of a Hungarian daily) has to do with Hungary's new relationship with Europe in the late 1990s and was written by a Hungarian electrical engineer concerning the issue:

*Otthon vagyunk, otthon lehetünk Európában. Szent István óta bekapcsolódtunk ebbe a szellemi áramkörbe, és változó intenzitással, de azóta benne vagyunk – akkor is, ha különféle erők időnként, hosszabb-rövidebb ideig, megpróbáltak kirángatni belőle. (italics in the original; Magyar Nemzet, [Hungarian Nation] June 12, 1999)*

We are, we can be at home in Europe. Since Saint Stephen we have been *integrated/ connected* to this intellectual/ spiritual *electric circuit*, and *with varying degrees of intensity*, but we have been in it – even though various powers, for more or less time, have tried to yank us out of it (my translation, ZK)

Various professionals often choose their source domains for a particular target from the field of their expertise. In the passage above, the source domain for Hungary's new relationship with Europe as target seems to be electricity and its functioning in electric circuitry. This is clear from the use of words and phrases such as “integrated/ connected”, “electric circuit”, “with varying degrees of intensity”. In all probability, the electrical engineer, the author of the passage, chooses his area of expertise to conceptualize the country's relationship to Europe because of his interest in and concern with his profession; in a way, he is ‘preoccupied’ with it. It is this preoccupation that motivates the selection and use of electricity as a source domain, which is not evident at all for the target. In other words, the electrical engineer seems to be primed for using a source with which he is preoccupied.

In sum, what we find in this instance is that when people use metaphors they tend to adjust them to various aspects of the communicative situation; they try to be coherent with the contextual factors that characterize the situation. In other words, people's choice of metaphor seems to be influenced and thus primed by what I have called the principle of “the pressure of coherence”.

### 2.3.2. Cultural differences in metaphorical expression

The issue I address in this section is how particular *cultural contexts* in which conceptual metaphors are embedded influence the linguistic expression of these metaphors. If the linguistic expression of a conceptual metaphor that exists in two languages is influenced by differences in cultural context, we have an important source of difficulties in translations involving the corresponding linguistic expressions.

Based on an informal experimental study involving English-speaking graduate students with an excellent command of English (Kövecses 2003, 2005), I found that subtle differences in the cultural context can affect the linguistic formulation of metaphorical expressions in the target language, even though the same conceptual

metaphor exists in the two languages (English and Hungarian). The conceptual metaphor that was studied is LOVE IS A JOURNEY (Lakoff, Johnson 1980).

For example, and speaking in general, the way Hungarians can be seen to put the metaphorical linguistic expressions of this conceptual metaphor seem to be related to a more fatalistic attitude to life than in the case of speakers of (American) English. It seems that in this variety of English internal considerations of external conditions cause people in a love relationship to act in certain ways, whereas, in Hungarian, external conditions directly force the lovers to act in certain other ways. One example is the following:

We can't turn back now.			
*Nem	fordulhatunk	vissza.	
[Not turn-can-1 <sup>st</sup> PERS PL	back]		
(Innen)	már	nincs	visszaút.
[(from-here)	already	none	back-way]

The person using the (American) English sentence, also on behalf the addressee, considers a situation and comes to the conclusion that there is no way back for them, whereas in the Hungarian sentence the speaker seems to present this as a direct consequence of the external situation involving them. Thus, in the English LOVE IS A JOURNEY metaphor we have agents who make decisions internally (mentally, conceptually), unlike the Hungarian metaphor that has agents who see themselves as being externally forced to make decisions about their relationship. Additional differences in cultural traits between (American) English and Hungarian, such as different degrees of being success-oriented in the two cultures, were revealed by the actual phrasing of the roughly corresponding metaphorical expressions.

All of this seems to indicate that two languages may share the same conceptual metaphor but the linguistic expression of the conceptual metaphor may be influenced by differences in cultural-ideological traits. This is a potential source of difficulty in rendering the 'same' meaning in two languages and cultures.

### 3. Patterns of metaphor translation

I argued in previous work (see Kövecses 2005) that when we study similarities and differences in the metaphorical expression of a conceptual metaphor, we need to take into account a number of factors, or parameters, including: the literal meaning of the expressions used, the figurative meaning to be expressed, and the conceptual metaphor (or, in some cases, metaphors) on the basis of which figurative meanings are expressed.

Given these notions, we can expect different patterns that characterize the differences in metaphorical expression, such as different literal meanings giving rise to the same figurative meaning, the same conceptual metaphor giving rise to the same figurative meaning, or different conceptual metaphors giving rise to the same conceptual meaning. Thus, in the case of each particular metaphorical expression used in the translation process, we need to check whether the literal meaning is the same or different; whether the figurative meaning is the same or different (this is kept the same in an accurate translation); and whether the conceptual metaphor is the same or different. Divergent patterns in different languages potentially lead to certain difficulties in translation.

### 3.1. Different translation patterns

Consider as an example the English metaphorical expression *spend one's time*. This is an instance of the conceptual metaphor TIME IS MONEY. The same group of advanced Hungarian students of English as mentioned above with reference to LOVE IS A JOURNEY agreed on some likely and unlikely translation equivalents of the idiom in Hungarian. This can be given as follows (taken from Kövecses 2005: 135):

How do you *spend* your time these days?

- (a) \*Hogyan költöd az idődet mostanában?  
 What-LOC spend-2<sup>nd</sup> PERS the time-POSS-ACC present-in?
- (b) Mivel/hogy(an) töltöd az idődet mostanában?  
 What-INST/how fill-2<sup>nd</sup> PERS the time-POSS-ACC present-in?

The Hungarian literal equivalent of *spend*, *költ*, cannot be used in reference to time (see sentence (a)). The Hungarian equivalent of the English metaphorical expression (b), which is *tölt* (literally *fill* in English), is based on a different conceptual metaphor: TIME IS A CONTAINER. The time-container is filled with actions; hence the conceptual metaphor at work here is ACTIONS ARE SUBSTANCES THAT GO INTO THE TIME-CONTAINER. In this case, we have a certain conceptual pattern for the translation: the literal meaning of the English expression is different from that of the Hungarian one, whereas the figurative meaning that is expressed is the same, and there are two different conceptual metaphors.

More generally, on the basis of the experimental study of the translation of the TIME IS MONEY conceptual metaphor into Hungarian, the following translation patterns or possibilities were identified:

Pattern/ Possibility for...	Literal meaning	Figurative meaning	Conceptual metaphor
(1)	same	same	same
(2)	different	same	same
(3)	different	same	different

Though space restrictions don't allow me to illustrate them all, the main significance of these translation possibilities for present purposes is that the same figurative meaning can be expressed in several different ways in different languages. If this suggestion is valid, it accounts for a large degree of flexibility or uncertainty and, hence, potential difficulty, in the translation of metaphors.

### 3.2. Abstract meaning translated as literal meaning?

Can figurative abstract meaning be expressed by literal meaning? If it can, the table above is obviously lacking an important possibility or pattern. It is taken to be common sense that any metaphor can be translated by means of a literal equivalent. However, in previous work (Kövecses 2005: 147), I argued that abstract meaning *cannot* be expressed literally. My argument was based on examples, such as the one below:

We're just spinning our wheels.

- (a) ?\*Csak pörgetjük a kerekeinket.  
[Only spin-1st PERS-PL the wheel-PL-POSS-ACC]  
(b) Ez (már) csak fölösleges erőlködés/kínlódás.  
[This (already) only superfluous effort]

The acceptable equivalent in (b) could be seen as literal; on the face of it, there is nothing metaphorical about the Hungarian phrase *fölösleges erőlködés* ('superfluous effort'). However, I claim that it is both metaphoric and metonymic. From a translation theory point of view, the question is: if the metaphor in American English cannot be translated by either a metaphor or a literal expression into Hungarian, then how *is* it translated?

I suggest that the Hungarian equivalent is partly metaphoric and partly metonymic. The use of the word *fölösleges* (*superfluous*) to actions (i.e., a set of efforts) is based on the conceptual metaphor ACTIONS ARE SUBSTANCES, or, more specifically, ACTIONS ARE VALUABLE RESOURCES. In the same way as we can have more than enough of a substance or valuable resource, we can have more than enough actions, given a goal. I also suggest that the translation equivalent is also based on metonymy. Interestingly, the metonymy made use of in the Hungarian sentence is entailed by the meaning of the American English sentence: since spinning the wheels does not make motion forward possible, it is unnecessary or superfluous to keep doing it. The Hungarian sentence captures the situation through the RESULT of the total situation (i.e., it is superfluous to act), while the American English sentence captures it via the CAUSE (i.e., the mere spinning of the wheels corresponding to psychological and emotional efforts that do not lead to progress in the relationship.) Thus, speakers of Hungarian find a translation equivalent for the sentence above via the metonymy RESULT FOR CAUSE.

Such examples of translation equivalents seem to indicate that many (most? all?) abstract metaphoric meanings are expressed by figurative means in English and Hungarian, and presumably in other languages as well. The problem that this situation presents to translators is which construal operations to choose for the expression of an abstract metaphoric meaning and, even more fundamentally, how to decide what the meaning intended as a translation equivalent could be.

#### 4. Matching conditions for the translation of metaphor

The discussion above provides us with some of the conditions that must optimally (but maybe not ideally)<sup>2</sup> be met for the translation of metaphors. These "matching conditions" between a piece of text and its translation include the use of the same source and target domains and the same literal and figurative meanings. We can also think of the 'sameness' of the cultural background as a factor that facilitates the process of translation between languages. But various types of meaning are additional factors that play key role in good translation. I distinguish three types: general, specific, and connotative meaning (Kövecses and Szabó 1996; Kövecses 2001). I will demonstrate their potential importance for the translation process by examining metaphor-based idioms. I want to suggest that metaphor-based idioms can be characterized by at least three distinct kinds of meaning: (a) general meaning, (b)

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<sup>2</sup> By "optimal" I mean a solution that takes into consideration compromises of various kinds, as opposed to "ideal," which does not require such compromises.

specific meaning, and (c) connotative meaning. As we will see, the matching conditions function, essentially, as ‘mappings’ at various levels of generality.

#### 4.1. General meaning

In previous work (see, for example, Kövecses 2002/2010), I showed that a single source domain, such as FIRE for ANGER, LOVE, IMAGINATION, CONFLICT as target, can conceptually motivate the use of words, such as *spark off*, *fire*, *go out*, *burn the candle*, *fan the flames*, etc., in the idioms in which they occur. Given these conceptual metaphors (such as ANGER IS FIRE), we can see why the idioms (such as *kindle one’s ire*) have the general meaning that they do; that is, why they have to do with anger (or love, imagination, etc., respectively). The reason is that these conceptual metaphors exist and they serve as links between two otherwise independently existing conceptual domains. Because of the connections they make in our conceptual system, the conceptual metaphors allow us to use terms from one domain (e.g., FIRE) to talk about another (e.g., ANGER and LOVE). Given any metaphor-based idiomatic expression (i.e., one that reflects a particular source) and given our knowledge of the range of target domains to which the source domain of this expression applies, we will have a limited range of potential general meanings for the idiom in question. If we know nothing else in connection with an idiom but its source domain and the scope of the targets to which that source applies, we will know that the idiom will be about one (or several of these) target(s), but not about targets outside the scope of the source. This is the knowledge that I call the “general meaning” of an idiom.

#### 4.2. Specific meaning

In addition to their general meaning, however, idioms also have a more specific meaning. This is based on the more specific mappings, or correspondences, that make up the particular conceptual metaphors above, such as ANGER IS FIRE, LOVE IS FIRE, etc., and their generalized version: A(N INTENSE) SITUATION IS FIRE:

a(n intense) situation is fire  
 the thing burning → the person in a state/event  
 the fire → the state/event (like anger, love, imagination)  
 the cause of the fire → the cause of the state/event  
 the beginning of the fire → the beginning of the state/event  
 the existence of the fire → the existence of the state/event  
 the high degree of the (heat of) fire → the intensity of the state/event  
 the end of the fire → the end of the state/event

These mappings explain the more precise meaning of a large number of idioms based on the domain of fire. It will explain why, for example, “*setting fire to one’s imagination*” means ‘causing one’s imagination to function splendidly’; why “*extinguishing the last sparks of the uprising*” means ‘ending the uprising’; why “*spitting fire and smoke coming out of one’s ears*” mean ‘more intense anger’ than merely “*burning with anger*”; and so on.

As can be seen, such mappings function as further matching conditions in translation. An optimal translation of the fire-related idioms cannot disregard the more specific meanings that are based on the mappings, as shown above.

### 4.3. Connotative meaning

What is generally referred to as connotative meaning can also be captured by the concept of mapping as used in CMT. Let us take the example of the metaphorical idiom *to spit fire*. The special idiomatic meaning of *to spit fire* is more than just ‘to be very angry’. To account for this, we need to a distinction between two kinds of metaphoric mapping: “ontological” and “epistemic” (see Lakoff, Kövecses 1987; Lakoff 1993). Ontological mappings are correspondences between *basic constituent elements* in the source domain and constituent elements in the target (such as the mappings in the previous subsection). The epistemic mappings, on the other hand, carry over *knowledge about* the elements in the source domain onto elements in the target domain. Speakers using particular conceptual metaphors will apply epistemic mappings, or inferences, from one domain to another. The expression *spit fire* is associated with the knowledge that when the fire is intense and it is not under control, it is dangerous—both for the thing burning and other objects nearby. Speakers habitually make the same inference about anger employing fire as the source domain: when anger is intense and out of control, it is dangerous both for the angry person and others (for more examples of this kind of metaphorical inference, see Lakoff 1993; Gibbs 1994; Kövecses 2000b).

It is the same metaphorical inference pattern that helps us explain subtle differences in the meaning of *spit fire* and other related idioms with similar ‘denotative’ meaning (i.e., the meaning that several related idioms share). Thus, for example, the idioms *smoke coming out of one’s ears* and *be burned up* share the meaning with *spit fire*: ‘be very angry’, which is based on the ANGER IS FIRE metaphor and its ontological correspondence ‘intensity of the (heat of) fire → intensity of the anger’. These idioms, however, carry very different inferences (i.e., connotations) for speakers.

Idiom	Inferences
to spit fire	The anger is intense but out of control and thus dangerous to the angry person and others
smoke coming out of one’s ears	The anger is intense but essentially under control, however, it is potentially dangerous
to be burned up	The angry person has completely lost rational control

In sum, the obvious challenge for translators is to find translation equivalents that meet all three matching conditions above: general meaning, specific meaning, and connotative meaning; that is, to find the translation equivalents that are characterized by the same mappings (general, specific and connotative). Clearly, this is a major source of difficulty in metaphor translation.



## 5. Conclusions

My main goal in this paper was to identify the nature of some of the systematic difficulties in the translation of metaphors. I identified several areas of difficulties from the perspective of conceptual metaphor theory.

I noted that a narrow conception of conceptual metaphor theory would lead us to believe that universal embodiment produces the same universal metaphors. These would in turn be easy to translate. However, this would be a mistaken view of conceptual metaphors and it would lead to the wrong assumption regarding metaphor translation. For better or worse, we live in a cognitively more complicated universe.

First, context plays a major role in both the production and comprehension of metaphors. A variety of contextual factors are responsible for variation in the use of metaphors. As a result, since the contexts in which different languages are used vary, the translation of metaphors inevitably poses a challenge: How do we render a metaphor in one language in another if the metaphors in the two languages emerge in different contexts?

Second, even if two languages share a conceptual metaphor, there are at least three (maybe even four) different possibilities for translating a metaphor from one language to another. The translator has to choose the most adequate possibility. This is not always an easy choice, and so represents a further source of difficulties.

Third, I argued that expressions denoting abstract concepts in one language can in many cases be translated into another by metaphor or metonymy<sup>3</sup>. It is an open question whether this is the case all of the time. If so, this would go against the commonly held view that the translation of such metaphoric expressions can be accomplished by means of a literal expression. This accounts for an additional difficulty in metaphor translation: If there is no obvious metaphorical or metonymic choice, what should be the apparently literal expression that corresponds to the metaphor that needs to be translated?

Fourth, and finally, I identified three “matching conditions” that correspond to three types of metaphor mappings: the scope of a source domain (the set of targets to which it applies); the set of specific mappings (or conceptual correspondences) that obtain between a source and a target, and the knowledge that pertains to the elements of a source that (can) get carried over to the target domain. In the ideal case, all of them should be met for the best translation. In many cases, it is not possible to comply with all three conditions. This is a major obstacle to metaphor translation.

These sources of the difficulty in the translation of metaphors are systematic ones that derive from major tenets of one version of conceptual metaphor theory. The tenets and what follows from them for a theory of metaphor translation are of course open to debate. In addition, I assume that there are many other issues that pose problems for metaphor translation. However, my goal was to outline the systematic difficulties that emerge from the foundational ideas of conceptual metaphor theory, as I see them at present.

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<sup>3</sup> It is an open question whether this is the case all of the time. There are theoretical reasons to think that it is the case (see Kövecses, 2006).

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# Metaphor, translation, cognition

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**Abstract:** *Towards the mid-seventies, two new research paradigms appeared on the international cultural scene, focusing on languages and texts in different ways. In Europe the works of James Holmes, André Lefevere, Susan Bassnett and others generated a new approach to translation. It was then that the concept of Translation Studies was first introduced. Around the same time in the United States post-generative linguists deemed it necessary to introduce a different cognitive approach to language. Cognitive Linguistics challenged the idea that linguistic structures are an independent module of our mind and proposed new research paradigms that consider language dependent on meaning and do not separate it from other aspects of cognition. This article combines the two perspectives recognizing that traditional approaches to the translation of the metaphor did not recognize many central aspects of translation. They depend on a specific translation ideology which has long prevailed in the Western world and today is called into question. Translation is essential to creating cultures and identity; it is essential for the life itself of cultures and for the creation of values. In this sense, translation is involved in the existence and transformation of cultures. When we translate a metaphor we have to consider these aspects because a metaphor creates a conceptual universe and permits us to act on it. It is not simply the fact of transferring a metaphor into a conceptual universe that implies a different encyclopedia. To translate a metaphor means to stand face to face with the kind of reality that the metaphor has construed.*

**Keywords:** *cognitive linguistics, metaphor, conceptual, culture, research paradigms.*

## 1. Introduction

Towards the mid-seventies, two new research paradigms, Translation Studies and Cognitive Linguistics, appeared on the international cultural scene; these focused on languages and texts in different ways.

In Europe, in 1972, James Holmes published 'The Name and Nature of Translation Studies'; this was followed shortly after, in 1975, by André Lefevere's *Translating Poetry: Seven Strategies and a Blueprint* and, in 1980, by Susan Bassnett's *Translation Studies* and Gideon Toury's *In Search of a Theory of Translation*. These works generated a new approach to translation, which became more and more predominant in the scientific research arena. It was then that the concept of Translation Studies was first introduced.

Translation Studies developed in time. Initially, the purpose of TS was to describe translation processes; then the approach took a cultural turn, followed by an ideological, power and sociological turn, which took us to present times in which we now speak of post-translation studies (Arduini-Nergaard 2011).

The main aspects which TS studies have focused on in the last forty years are:

- The translation of texts;
- Translation as rewriting;
- Translation as manipulation;

Translation influenced by dominant ideologies;  
Translation transforming cultures;  
In translation, meaning does not remain unaltered when it 'travels' from one culture to another.

Around the same time that Translation Studies disciplinary approach focusing on translation was coming to the fore in Europe, in the United States post-generative linguists deemed it necessary to go beyond the limits imposed by Generative Grammar in order to introduce a different kind of discourse.

Ronald Langacker wrote his doctoral thesis in 1972; at the same time authors such as Charles Fillmore (1975) and William Labov (1973, translated into Italian in 1977 by Luigi Heilmann) began moving outside the generativist paradigm. Around the midseventies, George Lakoff considered the experiment of generative semantics to be completely outdated.

As Fauconnier (2000) notes, Cognitive Linguistics challenged the idea that linguistic structures are an independent module of our mind and proposed new research paradigms that would rehabilitate an older tradition, namely the one that considered language dependent on meaning and did not separate it from other aspects of cognition.

The focal points of this second research paradigm could be summarised as in the following statements:

Language ability is not autonomous but is connected to other cognitive abilities;  
Grammar is conceptualisation;  
Language is used to convey meaning;  
Meaning is given by use;  
Figures of speech are used to conceptualise;  
Metaphor is not a substitute for a literal expression;  
Metaphors build reality.

Is there anything in common between these two approaches? This could well be the case, even though these two traditions have never come together. I would like to remind us that one of the places where Translation Studies were born was the University of Leuven – the same place where some of the European founders of Cognitive Linguistics worked. But there was apparently little or no mutual respect or even exchanges between the two groups. Be that as it may, bringing together Translation Studies and Cognitive Linguistics in the study of figurative language and its translation could, I suggest, produce new research directions.

## **2. Translation strategies**

It is curious therefore that the two fields have never interacted, except in very recent times. Or, better, it is only curious if we forget that Translation Studies, at least the beginning of its history, did everything it could to avoid contact with linguistic approaches to translation. From the Translation Studies perspective the linguistic approaches tried to reduce translation to a series of norms that one accepted or rejected, and did so without any concern for the ideas and concepts that were behind those norms. It is therefore reasonable to think that inside Translation Studies there existed a systemic distrust towards linguistics.

For example, scholars who come from a formal linguistic background have traditionally tackled the issue of translating metaphors from a perspective which restricted the study of metaphor to linguistic problems, forgetting that all metaphors have aspects outside of linguistic analysis. Eva Samaniego Fernández (1996) has perfectly summarised this framework.

A poignant example is that of Eugene Nida and Charles Russell Taber (Nida and Taber 1969) who dedicated a whole chapter of their book *The Theory and Practice of Translation* to “the Problem of Figurative Meaning”. The two authors identify a primary or central meaning, a literal meaning and a figurative meaning. From this perspective, the idea that metaphors have a cognitive value is lost. The figurative meaning is something which is added to the central meaning on the basis of some similarities. Consequently the solutions proposed by Nida and Taber are excessively simple: remove the metaphor (paraphrasing it) or change it.

Peter Newark’s viewpoint (1982) is very similar to Nida’s and ignores most of the literature concerning metaphor. He defines metaphor as follows:

Metaphor is in fact based on a scientific observable procedure: the perception of a resemblance between two phenomena, i.e. objects or processes. Sometimes the image may be physical (e.g. ‘battery’ of cameras), but often it is chosen for its connotations rather than its physical characteristics (e.g. in ‘she is a cat’) (Newmark 1982: 84-85)

On this basis Newark, from a source-oriented approach, proposes some convenient formulas to translate metaphors. What these solutions have in common, however, is the failure to grasp that metaphor is not simply the capacity to perceive similarity between two aspects, but is rather a fact of cognition as well as one of the means that a culture has to represent and build reality.

What each point of view assumes is the idea that meaning can shift from one culture to another without suffering too much damage. It is as if meaning were an invariable element whose central nucleus remains intact. This is an approach to meaning that is disembodied and implies a semantics that has the structure of a dictionary.

In their different ways, all the approaches that have not problematised the issue of metaphor, and generally the approaches that have not problematised the issue of the meaning, adopt similar attitudes, although sometime they are more sophisticated – as happens for example in Menachem Dagut (1976; 1987) and Raymond Van den Broeck (1981).

It does not seem to me that the attitude changes very much when we pass to Translation Studies. I refer to Schäffner (2004), and again to Samaniego Fernández (1996), for a complete exposition of all the perspectives in this framework.

Snell-Hornby (1988), for instance, touches upon the topic of metaphors in a chapter of her work, *Translation Studies*. The author stresses an obvious fact: metaphors are texts. This means that any approach which attempts a word-by-word comparison will inevitably lead to partial results. But even if we cast aside the fact that in 1988 Snell-Hornby’s attention had not been drawn to the extensive literature which had already been developed in Cognitive Linguistics, Neorhetoric, Semiotics and Philosophy of Language, there is the bald fact that one of the founders of textlinguistics, János Petöfi, had already made the connection between textuality, cognition and translation at Bielefeld in 1972 (Petöfi 1991). As a matter of fact, even Eugene Nida said the same thing, albeit using different words. In translation, a similar approach means that the way a metaphor can be translated, and even *if* can be

translated, does not depend on an abstract set of rules, but rather on the structure and on the function of a certain metaphor in a certain text. Even if we consider here the textual component, the cognitive aspect is completely lost, an aspect extensively developed by Petöfi's textual model (cf. also Van den Broeck 1981).

Nor is Gideon Toury's contribution (1995) of great help. Toury belongs to the first generation of Translation Studies scholars, and he comes from a perspective which is predominantly descriptive; therefore the only thing he can do from his perspective is present a list of ways in which metaphors can be translated. Although he presents an interesting viewpoint, his list is not that different to the one suggested by Newark from a prescriptive perspective.

Christina Schäffner was the first to productively bring together the Translation Studies and Cognitive Linguistics approaches in an article entitled "Metaphor and translation: Some implications of a cognitive approach" (Schäffner 2004), in which she suggested that cognitivist studies on metaphors can provide fresh insight into how metaphors are analyzed from a translation point of view. Schäffner is particularly important because she underlines, for example, that all past solutions for translating metaphors should be reassessed if we believe that metaphors deal not only with language but also with concepts.

### 3. A cognitive perspective on translation?

But what does translating metaphors from a cognitive perspective mean and how can this perspective interact with recent developments in Translation Studies?

I take an example from Classic Greek literature. The example is the metaphor of the ship-town in Alcaeus, the Greek poet of the sixth century BC. Alcaeus doesn't use this metaphor as a merely formal instrument. On the contrary, metaphor here presents a vivid passage of the history of Mytilene between the seventh and sixth centuries BC. We could say that Alcaeus represents, and not only in a descriptive way, the Indian summer of the old Mytilenese aristocracy. In a similar circumstance, with armed conflicts between adverse factions, metaphor becomes the conceptual instrument strategically more adequate to represent a changing world (Gentili 1989: 278-79).

What is the relation between the metaphor of the ship-town and a world which was losing the possibility of being understood and needed to be reconceptualised? What does it mean to translate these metaphors? In other words what happens to our conceptual universe when it enters in contact with that of Classical Greece?

If, in translation, we believe that a metaphor is an element that implies knowledge and reality construction, as sustained by Schäffner, this leads us in a very different direction to traditional approaches. For instance, the ideologies that lay behind the construction of certain metaphors are immediately put into question. This has been clearly shown by George Lakoff (1996) in the case of American politics. To consider another aspect, we know that all the concepts created by metaphors are structured, which means that a metaphor is never isolated but is placed within a group of beliefs and the knowledge that determine a set of values. These values are of crucial importance when addressing the translation of metaphors.

This is very important, for instance, when creating metaphors in the political sphere. In one of my previous works (Arduini 2011), I tried to demonstrate that structural metaphors – both orientational and ontological – correspond to different



moments in politics, allowing political parties to create different and alternative images of the world.

Structural metaphors are essentially the instrument of *politics* and are used in the construction of identity. They are necessary to build a perspective against a group of already-known concepts. The use of metaphors in this case seems to say: my political program is already in line with your views. As a matter of fact, a political program must be innovative, but new additions must find a cognitive space which is deemed acceptable by the interlocutors. It is therefore a matter of presenting proposals as if they already belong to the audience's sphere of beliefs.

Oriental and ontological metaphors are instruments used to articulate *policy*, that is to say when proposals are transformed into political actions. They pertain to more tangible spheres which go from the body to objects and therefore they try to give to political actions the semblance of 'matters of fact' (above, under, etc.); questioning policies would obviously receive a negative reaction from those in power. Therefore the best tool is to show the *mise-en-place* of *policies* as being something which is inevitable, attached to concrete data such as spatial or ontological references. All metaphors referring to the state as a living body, and therefore as something natural, fall into this category.

So, if behind the construction of a metaphor there is the idea of a world, what does this mean from a translation point of view? A lot, at least in the sense that translating a metaphor entails not only putting into question an entire encyclopedia, but also the comparison and contrast of such encyclopedias.

#### 4. Cognitive Linguistics

Cognitive Linguistics is the final point of a long reflection on the cognitive value of metaphor. The cognitive viewpoint of metaphor represents an idea that belongs to a tradition within Western thought. We can mention, for example, Emanuele Tesauro, Giambattista Vico and Friederich Nietzsche. More recently, Umberto Eco has reminded us that the cognitive value of metaphor has been central in the development of Linguistics and the Philosophy of language in the past century (Eco 1980: 212-213). Moreover, Emile Benveniste (1966) and Roman Jakobson (1956) both asserted the fact that rhetoric figures constitute a sort of cognitive structure common to different areas like literature or the interpretation of dreams. Eco (1980) stressed the cognitive value of metaphor from a semiotic perspective. He noted that that it is produced on the basis of a universe of content which is organised into a net of interpretants that determine the similarity of characteristics. Paul Ricœur has noted that metaphor has a truth value, in the sense that it is a sort of experience of reality. This is an experience, writes Ricœur (1975: 49), that doesn't oppose to invent and to discover and that describes reality through the deviation represented by the heuristic function.

However, the studies inaugurated by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (Lakoff, Johnson 1980; 1999) contributed to an alternative to a formalistic conception of mind and meaning, by interpreting metaphor as, foremost, a fact of thought and not of language. Metaphor in this sense is considered as a way to structure concepts that permit us to understand abstractions such as 'life', 'love' or 'friendship'.

As claimed by William Croft and David Alan Cruse (2004: 194), Cognitive Linguistics refuses the idea that a metaphor substitutes a given literal expression which has the same meaning. Furthermore, they also state that, for this specific

reason, metaphors have a quality that no literal expression possesses and, consequently, that they cannot be paraphrased. A paraphrase is a kind of rewriting. If metaphors cannot be paraphrased, it means that they cannot be rewritten and so, if we adopt the Translation Studies idea that every translation consists in rewriting, metaphors are not translatable.

The model of Lakoff and Johnson had different developments (Steen 2007). One of these, and the most interesting, is the model proposed by Joseph Grady, Todd Oakley and Seana Coulson (1999), drawing on the concept of ‘blending’ theorised by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner (1996). These scholars maintain that a metaphor, rather than matching two different domains, tends to *merge* them. This fusion is fundamental, in the sense that the result in any case is something new which cannot be linked to a hypothetical literalness.

### **5. Metaphor and perception: to thrust against the limits of language**

But what is this something new? Wittgenstein once said that humans have the urge to thrust against the limits of language (Wittgenstein 1965: 12). In a way, this is exactly what a metaphor does.

I have tried to show in some works on metaphor in science and philosophy that metaphors allow us to build and transfer concepts from one perceptive sphere to another, concepts which would otherwise remain not only abstract, but which would not even exist. What I mean is that the role of metaphor is to render a concept that we are not able to grasp without the metaphor accessible, that is, a metaphor grants access to a concept which we would otherwise be unable to see and to touch. That is, thanks to metaphor we experience something that before metaphor did not exist.

This function is highly ‘inventive’ – in the traditional rhetorical sense of the word. It is important to insist on this creative aspect; the process is not one in which we have some abstract concept in our heads and metaphors simply help us to give it form. When we build a metaphor we create a tool which allows us to construe reality. The procedure is more similar to one through which we produce an image or an object in which the elaboration of the form, and its grammar and content are all strictly connected. We could even go as far as saying that a new metaphor is a product of creativity, as it allows the different spheres of our cognitive faculties to interact.

It is very helpful to look at research on the function of the neuronal system that oversees the metaphorical process. Although research on which of the two cerebral hemispheres plays a more important role in the elaboration of metaphors has often been complicated by antithetic positions, today it is generally accepted that the elaboration of metaphorical meaning happens in the right hemisphere as well as in the left one but that each plays a different role. The two hemispheres typically process semantic information in different ways, utilising different means to interpret metaphor (Kacirik, Chiarello 2007). Therefore metaphors don’t simply describe our perceptions but create them, building, as Lakoff actually affirms, our conceptualisation of reality. In non neurological terms, we could therefore say that a new metaphor is creative/inventive because it allows different areas of our cognitive capacities to interact. I would stress here that this idea of creativity is a sort of way to “see with evidence”, or a way to bring a concept to light. Here the history of words can also be of some help.

“See with evidence” actually means “see clearly”. In Latin the word is *mirari* or *admirari* (Indo-european \**smirari* which forms the Sanskrit *smay-e*, that is, *smile*) meaning *to wonder*. “Wonder” in classic Greek is *thaumazein*, that is “amazement”. We can also refer to *Theaetetus* where *Thaumazein* is the principle of philosophy, connected to Iris. The genealogy of Iris is interesting. She is the daughter of Taumas who (being Gaea’s son) is directly associated to the first cause of existence. The name Iris means rainbow and therefore Iris is the personification of the rainbow which connects the earth and sky, what is up above and what is below, and, therefore, men and the Gods.

I am reminded here of the Italian rhetorician of the sixteen century, Emanuele Tesauro. According to Tesauro (*Il canocchiale aristotelico*, 1670), metaphor is the rhetorical figure par excellence as it manages to grasp reality by connecting distant phenomena through analogy. Metaphor is seen as a witty and ingenious subject which leads to amazement. Metaphor ruptures the conventions which regulate the connections between signifiers and signified. Through metaphor we pave the way for renewal and enrichment of the significant potential of individual terms. Tesauro uses the word *argutezza*: that is, an expression which is “*lusinghiera e sollecitante*” (gratifying and stimulating), one that is achieved when the mind penetrates into things, discovering what is not usually visible. Tesauro says that its characteristics are rarity and originality and that its effect is wonder. What Tesauro calls “*argutezza*” will be called in Spain in the 17<sup>th</sup> century “*argudeza*” by Baltasar Gracián (*Argudeza y arte del ingenio*).

We find this connection even in modern times: to see, to marvel, to understand.

## 6. Translation strategies: Going back to Schleiermacher

What happens if we combine this perspective with the ideas circulating in TS? For example, if we start from the premise that translation is always a transformation and that it is always a form of rewriting? What if we combine this idea with the idea that a metaphor is not something which is purely linguistic, but that it is also a tool with which we construe reality?

Today those who work in the framework of Translation Studies consider translation as that activity which transforms cultures and individuals. In this sense, it is interesting what Edwin Gentzler says when he writes that translations in the Americas are something that have constituted the different cultures (2008). I think that translation is constitutive, and not only in the case of Americas.

Translation is essential to creating cultures and identity; it is essential for the life itself of cultures and for the creation of values, even financial values. In this sense, translation is involved in the existence and transformation of cultures, even in the sphere of values which become constitutive.

Traditional approaches to the translation of the metaphor – which in some way did not or could not consider the observations of Cognitive Linguistics, Semiotics and Hermeneutics – did not even recognise these central aspects of translation. They depend on a specific translation ideology which has long prevailed in the Western world and today is called into question.

According to Antoine Berman (1999), the prevailing translation ideology in the Western world is that of an ethnocentric and hypertextual translation.

“Ethnocentric”<sup>1</sup> is the approach according to which a culture tends to interpret a connection with other cultures by placing its own at the centre and seeing the foreign culture as being something to reject, or to adapt and camouflage within the target culture. An ethnocentric approach inevitably leads to a position in translation which is “Hypertextual”. Ethnocentrism in translation first appeared in the Latin works of Cicero and Jerome. Berman stresses that, for Cicero, translation is essentially a question of grasping an original meaning which goes beyond the form.

Such an ideology gives language the status of a semiotic means which is privileged as untouchable. Meaning should enter the language without doing any damage. According to this stance, foreign works should be translated in a way in which translation is not ‘perceived’; the product has to give the impression that it is what the writer would have written had he/she been writing directly in the translated language. Berman stresses how this desire leads to certain “deforming tendencies” underlying translation ideology in the Western world. The identification of these deforming tendencies is not enacted to suggest an alternative methodology, but rather to show that these are common in any Western translation and correspond to a precise cultural and ideological choice. For example, as we have seen in Nida and Newmark, this is the idea that meaning can ‘travel’ without modification. And we also find here the ideology that considers the relation with the foreigner, the ‘other’, in terms of appropriation and conquest.

With regard to this topic, Berman (1984: 27) quotes the German philosopher, Friederich Schleiermacher. According to Schleiermacher, there are only two possible options in translation: the translator either leaves the writer in peace as much as possible and moves the reader towards him, or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the writer towards him. Berman is in favor of an approach which highlights the difference, and which therefore moves towards the foreign text – even when it comes to metaphors.

This refusal of the “annexation” approach can be found also in Henri Meschonnic (1999), who stresses that usually, faced with the choice between showing the translation for what it is or hiding it, translators much rather prefer the second option, and therefore prefer to look for as many devices as possible to obtain a natural sounding effect in the target language. This is particularly evident when the metaphorical network is broken down, a process that entails the suppression of differences between languages. Meschonnic calls this effect *annexation*, in other words, the annulment of the textual relationship between the two texts involved, and the encapsulation of the source text in the receiving culture, which annuls differences pertaining to culture, time, and linguistic structure. Meschonnic pits *decentralisation* against annexation, which is to view translation not as the carrier of the source text into the target language but as the fusion of two distinct poetics.

In line with Schleiermacher is Lawrence Venuti (1995; 1998) who distinguishes between *domestication* and *foreignization*. Domesticating means creating a translation which tries to avoid giving readers the impression they are reading a foreign text; therefore a fluid and transparent style is adopted. Foreignising means deliberately violating the rules of the target language, and therefore the translator highlights the source of the text, clearly identifying the source language and culture, in order to maintain some of this diversity.

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<sup>1</sup> On the concept of ethnocentrism cfr. Derrida 1967; Spivak 1988.

These observations all have a bearing on the translation of metaphors because the history of such translation has been constantly marked by the idea that wherever possible translators should domesticate the difference brought about by metaphorical thought.

## 7. Between immeasurability and decentralisation

Let's reconsider what Croft and Cruse (2004) wrote when they said that metaphors could not be paraphrased or translated. Metaphors are not translatable because they are a means which make concepts real, and in a way, visible; there is an integration between what is considered to be linguistic and what belongs to another sphere of perception. This is the way in which our minds operate and, through this process, create not only representations but also fragments of reality. We consequently adopt certain behaviors in relation to that reality.

But by saying that metaphors cannot be paraphrased, Croft and Cruse are saying they are immeasurable. In other words, different cultures have different metaphors and consequently different realities. And these are, in the sense that Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend use the word, immeasurable.

In a way, the same thing happens for images which construct a culture. A good example is given by the methods of figurative representation which characterise the proto-archaic Greek era. The German classic philologist Bruno Snell (1953) explained that they are not only the consequence of the technical limits of the artists and of specific artistic interests, but they are strictly linked to the way in which the world is conceptualised. The philosopher, Paul Feyerabend (2002: 181), used this concept to support the idea that paratactic structures of figurative production – just like the literary creation of Ancient Greece (Homer, for example) which produced clear-cut metaphors – give back the concept of a man devoid of physical and mental unity. His body is made up of myriad, disparate parts and his mind formed by a variety of unrelated events, some of which are not even properly definable as 'mental', inhabiting as they do the puppet-body as supplementary components or even inserted from outside of it. Therefore in Ancient Greece, events were not seen as being shaped by individuals; rather they were seen as a complex arrangement of separate parts in which the body-puppets were fittingly located.

Feyerabend adds (2002: 181) that this way of representing the world is unique: it cannot be compared with subsequent ways of meaning because one way of representing reality, through a certain conceptualisation of the world, suspends the principles at the root of another representation.

Let's go back to Antoine Berman, Henri Meschonnic and Lawrence Venuti. What is their argument based on? According to these authors, translations cannot be simply intended as the transformation of something unfamiliar into something known. It is necessary to face the immeasurability, taking it as a constituent of a specific relationship created in translation.

How? As we've seen, Meschonnic speaks of *decentralisation* – accepting what is different or alien and allowing it to enter into our language, e.g., introducing strange and peculiar metaphors, and so introducing new concepts and new worlds. If a metaphor is the image through which a culture defines itself and sets itself apart from others, its decentralisation is not an easy task: it needs to be looked at from multiple angles which lead to continuous semantic drifts.

We may now go back to the metaphor of the ship-town in Alcaeus mentioned above. The ship, in the famous poem of the vessel being tossed by the tempest (Fr. 208A V), stands for the town of Mytilene and the tempest emblematises the civil discord that crushed the town. The wave is the warriors' assault, with the same figure we find in the *Iliad* and in *Seven against Thebes* of Aeschylus. The water too, again as in *Seven against Thebes*, stands for the warriors that enter the town. Rudders and sails are the solidity of the town that is crushed by the conflict. The ship's cargo that is devastated by the waves represents the goods of the faction of Alcaeus that is in danger. This poem belongs, as others, to the period before Alcaeus' exile. The metaphor visually construes the incumbent danger and the almost certain victory of the enemy. But during his exile, the metaphor changes, the meaning of the ship is transformed and the fighting spirit of the previous metaphors vanishes. By now the poet is no longer in the town, the goods have been usurped by the rivals. We find a further change in a fourth metaphor as well (P. Oxy 2307, fr. 14 col. II = 306i col. II V.). The ship has become old and has been beached and the town of Mytilene is in a state of destruction.

Here, as in other passages, the metaphor creates a conceptual universe and permits us to act on it. It is not simply the fact of transferring the metaphor of the ship into a conceptual universe that implies a different encyclopedia, however. To understand this ship metaphor means to stand face to face with the kind of reality that the metaphor has construed.

We can translate a metaphor by annexing it to our encyclopedia and therefore eliminating that piece of reality, or we can choose to amplify our encyclopedia, even if we do not fully understand it. It will change our world, by introducing different concepts. New concepts for a new world.

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# Translation studies and metaphor studies: Possible paths of interaction between two well-established disciplines

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**Abstract:** *The objects of study of these two disciplines are etymological cognates, the meaning that lies at the heart of both translation and metaphor being that of transfer. The study of metaphor in translation therefore involves tackling the complexities of a double act of transfer through the use of methodologies that are correspondingly subtle. The article aims to investigate what the disciplines of translation studies and metaphor studies have in common and what the potential for interdisciplinary research might be. As argued by Israel (2011), having absorbed numerous research models and approaches from other disciplines over the last few decades, translation studies is in a strong position to share its insights and perspectives with these same disciplines. In the case of research into metaphor in translation, although the centres of gravity of translation studies and metaphor studies are rather different there is great potential for a two-way interaction between these two disciplines. On the one hand, it is now virtually inconceivable that a study of metaphor in translation should not take full account of work by scholars specialising in metaphor studies. On the other hand, translation studies can provide metaphor scholars with mono-, bi- and even multilingual data from its case studies to supplement their own descriptive work. There do of course exist a number of caveats regarding the compatibility of material from the two disciplines. However, in many cases the result of such research has been work worthy of the attention of scholars working within both disciplines. The article focuses specifically on text-based research but is of relevance to other approaches as well.*

**Keywords:** *translation, metaphor, interdisciplinary translation studies, metaphor studies.*

## 1. Introduction: the metaphoricity of metaphor and translation

Metaphor and translation, the two main keywords of this article, have etymologies that are very similar: both convey the meaning of movement from one place to another, of transfer. Thus anyone unwise enough to write about metaphor in translation has to think simultaneously in terms of two separate types of meaning transfer.

The origin of the word *metaphor* is Greek (*meta-* “change (of place, order, condition, or nature)” and *pherein* “to bear/carry”), while *translate* comes from Latin (*translātus*, the past passive participle of *transferre* “to transfer”, from *trans-* “across, to or on the farther side of, beyond, over” and *ferre* “to bear/carry”) (*The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*). The idea of transfer is also reflected in the terminology of both metaphor and translation studies, as evidenced in the twofold use of the terms *source* and *target*. In the former discipline, these two terms respectively refer – in one major theory of metaphor at any rate – to the two domains of experience brought together in a metaphor, the one providing the words and concepts in terms of which the other is spoken, written or (possibly) even thought about, while in the latter

discipline they denote the original and receptor texts, languages or cultures between which the act of translation takes place.

It should of course be emphasised that in other languages the etymologies of these two words may be totally different, and indeed not related to each other (see for example Tymoczko 2007: 68-77, for a discussion of words for translation). However, in the case of many of the languages in the Indo-European language group at least, the notions of metaphor, transfer and translation are closely related etymologically as well as conceptually. Along similar lines, the concept of literalness can easily take on a double meaning: privileging source-text wording over sense in relation to translation, and non-figurative over figurative meanings in relation to metaphorical language. It is against this background that we will be discussing possible interaction between translation studies and metaphor studies.

## 2. The discipline of translation studies

The discipline that is now known as translation studies properly originated in about the early 1960s. Up until that time the study of translation had been largely non-systematic and sporadic, and had focused largely on normative questions of quality, accuracy, translatability and the correct way to translate, almost invariably with reference to either literary or religious texts. Much has changed in the last 40-50 years, however, and translation studies has formed itself into a fully-fledged discipline complete with theoretical paradigms and a non-prescriptive approach to the investigation of translation as both process and product, and of its function in a particular social, cultural or political context. In line with this, translation is now seen as an act of communication situated within a concrete linguistic and cultural context and influenced, for example, by genre conventions, audience expectations and the translator's own manipulative activity, whether this be unknowing or intentional (see Hermans 1985: 11). This is indeed a very different – and more highly nuanced – vision from that which was generally current in the 1960s, at the time when translation studies was still relying on paradigms that had been developed within the context of other disciplines.

These days it hardly needs to be pointed out that translation studies is not simply contrastive linguistics by another name (nor, indeed, is it merely a branch of applied linguistics). To understand one of the main reasons for this we must look at a distinction made by the early twentieth-century Swiss linguist Saussure. According to Saussure, within the general concept of language it is necessary to distinguish two separate notions, those of *langue* and *parole* (Saussure 1986: 9-10, 15). This is a distinction that has been highly influential in twentieth-century linguistics. *Langue* represents the theoretical, abstract concept of a language as a rule-governed system, while *parole* denotes instances of specific language usage that are produced in response to a particular set of stimuli. Thus for example formal grammar, lexical semantics and contrastive linguistics are predicated on *langue* while discourse analysis and pragmatics take *parole* as their main object of study. Translation studies, which focuses on analysing real acts of communication and on language use within authentic contexts, is also a discipline that is primarily dependent on the study of *parole*. Metaphor studies – or, at any rate, cognitive linguistics – arguably concerns itself with both but is ultimately interested in building up our understanding of how metaphor functions as part of a language system (i.e. *langue*) and, indeed, of human

psychology. This fundamental distinction is therefore important for understanding the different focuses of these two disciplines.

Metaphor is of course only one of many possible objects of research within translation studies. In a highly programmatic article originating from the early 1970s, which has played a very significant role in lending the discipline its current shape, Holmes defines translation studies as consisting of three branches, the theoretical, the descriptive and the applied (1971/2004: 184-191). Holmes' overall vision of the discipline is often presented visually as a map (see for example Toury 1995: 10). While purely theoretical work is certainly being carried out – either on a “general”, all-encompassing theory or on more specific partial ones (1971/2004: 186) – most of the research that is not of an applied nature takes place within the descriptive branch, the aim of which is to investigate translation as both a product and a process, and also the functions of translation within a given cultural, social or political context (1971/2004: 184-185). The term “descriptive translation studies” implies a non-prescriptive approach to researching a wide range of topics, firmly oriented towards the target rather than the source text and context (Toury 1995: 23-39), and committed to the analysis of unpredictable, messy real instances of translation rather than basing theoretical arguments on neat, invented examples. Furthermore, since the “cultural turn” the discipline has greatly diversified and now largely concerns itself, for example, with translation norms (see Hermans 1999), rewriting and manipulation (Lefevere 1992), postcolonial contexts (Niranjana 1992; Robinson 1997), gender issues (Simon 1996; von Flotow 1997), questions of translators' visibility (Venuti 1995) in the texts they produce and the application of narrative theory (Baker 2006) to acts of translation. Holmes' map has been extended too, most notably perhaps by van Doorslaer (2007).

Interestingly, many fascinating insights into translation have been gained through the deliberate exploitation of old metaphors, or the intentional introduction and exploration of new ones. St. André (2010) offers a collection of articles that present a wide range of these (see for example Tyulenev 2010 for translation as smuggling; see also Hönig 1997 for translation as bridge-building; Johnston 1999 for translation as simulacrum; Vieira 1999 for translation as cannibalism and vampirism; Hermans 2007 for translation as transubstantiation; Evans 1998 for a general discussion).

There are in fact a wide range of different areas that form the objects of text-based research that focuses chiefly on matters of language. However, instead of analysing translated material against a particular “correctness notion” (Hermans 1991: 166), translation is seen as a process of decision-making that leads to both loss and gain. There are not considered to be any “right” or “wrong” translations – just degrees of appropriateness. Mistranslations and mistakes are not of significant interest to the discipline. In line with this, a move has occurred away from focusing on translation shifts – that is, minor rewordings – that are caused by small incompatibilities of grammar and lexis, the situation that we see in Catford's understanding of the notion (1965: 73-82) and that was presumably caused by the influence of paradigms derived from contrastive linguistics. Instead, what we see now is a focus on shifts that are optional and reflect conscious decisions made by translators in an attempt to produce a viable solution to a real translation problem. In other words, what is now often of interest is the target context: what the translator chose to say as opposed to what could have been said. In addition, translation studies no longer places its exclusive attention on studying single words, phrases and sentences in isolation but now also

examines what happens to higher-level entities – such as an extended section of discourse, a whole metaphorical structure, a line of narrative, an authorial voice or an entire text – when translated into a different language.

### 3. The discipline of metaphor studies

The academic discipline that focuses on the study of metaphor does not have a universally accepted name – with metaphor scholars frequently referring to themselves more specifically as cognitive linguists, pragmatists or whatever – although if a term is to be used then “metaphor studies” is probably the one that enjoys the greatest currency. Unlike translation studies, however, as far as I am aware metaphor studies possesses no founding document or “map” to rival that of Holmes (1971/2004) in terms of its programmaticity.

Like translation studies, contemporary metaphor studies can in many ways be described as an interdiscipline, with metaphor scholars drawn from a wide range of different disciplines, including cognitive linguistics, pragmatics, psychology, anthropology, literary studies, philosophy and rhetoric. At the same time, the discipline can informally be considered to have the same three broad divisions as were proposed by Holmes with reference to translation studies. Much of the theoretical work is centred around a number of different theories (Gibbs 1999: 29, for example, lists nine other than the conceptual metaphor theory). Within conceptual metaphor theory (see for example Lakoff, Johnson 1980; Lakoff, Johnson, 1999), in which broad framework most work is now probably situated, theoretical work would include the detailed elaboration of the nature of conceptual metaphors (see for example Kövecses 2006: 116-126), theoretical approaches to metaphor identification (Steen 1999; Pragglejaz Group 2007), the concept of embodiment (Lakoff, Johnson 1999; Gibbs 2005), the interrelation between metaphor and culture (Kövecses 2005, 2006) and a range of newer theoretical concepts such as mental spaces (Fauconnier 1994) and conceptual blends (Grady, Oakley, Coulson 1999; Fauconnier, Turner 2002). Descriptive studies focus on the following topics and approaches, among others: metaphor within a particular subject area or discourse type (e.g. science, education, politics or literature: Semino 2008); description of a particular metaphor or group of metaphors (see for example Kövecses 2000, 2008 on the subject of metaphors of emotion); non-verbal types of metaphor (Forceville, Urios-Aparisi 2009); the textual or psychological aspects of metaphor (Musolff, Zinken 2009; Gibbs 1994); and the use of corpora in metaphor research (Deignan 2005, 2008; Semino 2008). Finally, applied studies are concerned with topics such as metaphor in language learning (Littlemore, Chen, Koester, Barnden 2011), the role of metaphor in psychotherapy (McMullen 2008) and the development of automatic metaphor identification systems (Hardie, Koller, Rayson, Semino 2007), to name but three.

### 4. Metaphor in translation

The more traditional way of referring to this area of study, “the translation of metaphor”, now sounds prescriptive and somewhat old-fashioned. The formulation “metaphor in translation” places the emphasis on metaphor and locates the discussion of it precisely where it should be – firmly in the broader context of general metaphor research. The alternative term “metaphor *and* translation” would be another possibility, and one that is more neutral in terms of the disciplines to which it is appealing. Interestingly, in the Subject Index to *Descriptive Translation Studies and*

*Beyond* Toury refers to this research topic as “metaphor in/and translation” (1995: 304).

Since the discussion of metaphor in translation was initiated more than forty years ago by Kloepfer (1967) much has been written on the topic and a number of important debates have been pursued. One of the earliest of these concerned the extent to which metaphor constituted a problem for translators (whether there was “no problem” or “no solution”: see Dagut 1976: 25) and the fallout from Kloepfer’s controversial remark that “the bolder and more creative the metaphor, the easier it is to repeat it in other languages” (1967: 116; translation taken from Snell-Hornby 1995: 57). As discussed below, many writers have even proposed lists of procedures for translating metaphor. In addition, there has been a gradually awakening awareness that metaphors can play a vitally important structural role in texts rather than appearing simply as isolated expressions (see for example Crofts 1982).

In the last thirty years or so the situation has been rather different, with questions of metaphor in translation attracting growing interest within the discipline. The articles by Dagut and Newmark were fairly quickly joined by others – most notably those of van den Broeck (1981) and Mason (1982) – while since that time an increasing number of papers have been appearing in various translation studies journals, more and more of which have taken the interesting work carried out on metaphor in other disciplines (such as cognitive linguistics) as their starting-point. This steadily increasing flow has served to keep the subject on the agenda, and in line with this development at least another three important and widely-discussed works – Gutt (1991), Toury (1995) and Snell-Hornby (1995) – include passages discussing the area in some detail.

In view of the considerable upsurge in interest in the area seen in recent years it is understandable that these days writers on metaphor in translation no longer complain that their subject has always been somewhat neglected. As of February 2013 there are sixty articles listed in the St. Jerome Publishing Translation Studies Abstracts Online (Harding, Saldanha, Zanettin 2013) that were published between 1981 and 2012 and that contain the word *metaphor* in their title. (There are of course many more – 151, in fact – that have this term as a keyword.) Interestingly, only a minority of the sixty refer to metaphor theory in their abstracts: fifteen mention the word *conceptual*, fifteen the rather less polysemic *cognitive*, six *pragmatic*, five *Lakoff* and two *relevance* (as in *relevance theory*), for example. This indicates that, while much has been achieved, much remains to be done to establish a firm link between translation scholars and the ideas of academics working on metaphor.

While there are a relatively large number of translation scholars with an interest in metaphor, there seems to have been less interest shown by metaphor scholars in translation. In terms of major works, Kövecses (2005: 133ff.) offers one of the few detailed discussions of metaphor in translation by a metaphor scholar, while another extended treatment is provided by Knowles and Moon (2006: 61-72). The special issue of the *Journal of Pragmatics* (issue 36 (7)) on “Metaphor across Languages” is for the most part only tangentially about translation. Newmark (1985) offers one of the first discussions of metaphor in translation to have appeared in a major work devoted to metaphor rather than to translation, although his article has more recently started to be joined by others (for example, Schäffner 2004; Samaniego Fernández 2011). To date, almost nothing of relevance to translation has appeared in *Metaphor and Symbol*.

Over the years, much effort has been devoted to constructing classifications to account exhaustively for the procedures that translators employ when translating metaphorical expressions. Newmark's classification of the procedures that translators use to translate what he terms *stock* metaphors, for example, is very representative of the type of scheme that has been proposed. In all he identifies eight procedures, which he lists in order of preference:

- Reproducing the same image in TL, "provided the image has comparable frequency and currency in the appropriate register"<sup>1</sup>
- Replacing the image in SL "with a standard TL image which does not clash with the TL culture"
- Translating the metaphor by a simile, "retaining the image"
- "Translation of metaphor (or simile) by simile plus sense (Mozart method)." (I.e. the addition of explanatory material: for Mozart, a piano concerto had to please "both the connoisseur and the less learned".)
- Conversion of the metaphor to sense
- Modification of the metaphor
- Deletion
- Using the same metaphor combined with the sense  
(Newmark 1985: 304-311)

What such lists try to achieve, while it clearly is of great value, does not coincide with the aims of descriptive translation studies as such taxonomies are essentially prescriptive. Furthermore, as a result of the considerable work already devoted to producing classifications of this type, this area is probably quite well charted; few if any further significant strategies have been proposed, any minor modifications or additions being little more than footnotes to Newmark's scheme.

By way of a contrast to Newmark's proposals Al-Harrasi's list of procedures uses conceptual metaphor theory, hinging to a large extent on the interplay between image schemas and rich images. In this way it sites itself totally within the bounds of descriptive translation studies:

- Instantiating the Same Conceptual Metaphor
- Same Image Schematic Representation
- Concretising an Image Schematic Metaphor
- Instantiating in the TT only a Functional Aspect of the Image Schema
- Same Image Schema and Rich Image Domains
- Same Rich Image Metaphor but Alerting the Reader to the Mapping
- Using a Different Rich Image that Realises the Same Image Schema Realised by the Rich Image in the Source Text
- From the Rich Image Metaphor to Image Schematic Representation
- Same Mapping but a Different Perspective
- Adding a New Instantiation in the Target Text
- Using a Different Conceptual Metaphor
- Deletion of the Expression of the Metaphor  
(Al-Harrasi 2001: 277-88)

As far as I am aware, this is one of the most detailed attempts to date to produce an alternative taxonomy based on metaphor theory, and one that opens up a whole new possible direction for research.

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<sup>1</sup> The abbreviations SL and TL stand for 'source language' and 'target language' respectively. Similarly, ST and TT denote 'source text' and 'target text'.

## 5. Translation studies and metaphor studies: Possibilities and limitations

In spite of the interesting work that was being conducted by translation scholars within their own discipline, in the mid-1990s Mandelblit stated that the treatment of metaphor in translation studies was “thoroughly at odds with the findings of the Cognitive Linguistics research on metaphor” (1995: 485). Indeed, several years later Samaniego Fernández was still commenting that the translation of metaphors was “one of the main stumbling blocks within the scope of Translation Studies today” (2002: 47), in the sense that it was an area that needed to catch up with the descriptive and theoretical work that was being carried out in metaphor studies. Whether or not these are totally fair assessments, some scholars interested in metaphor in translation have been attempting to draw increasingly systematically on the insights of this other discipline, recognising the great scope for further interaction that exists between the two fields.

With this in mind, it should be expected that any proper metaphor in translation research that has absorbed significant insights from metaphor studies should be in a position to feed findings and results back into that discipline, even if that is not the primary aim of the research and such findings and results are only a kind of by-product. It is true, however, that some of the claims made by translation scholars as to the centrality of translation to the study of metaphor will probably strike most metaphor scholars as somewhat overstated. For example, Dagut declares that “it is translation theory that holds the key to a deeper understanding of metaphor” (1976: 32). For van den Broeck metaphor is, more realistically, “a pivotal issue in translation”, but one that has, however, received “only random attention” (1981: 73). More concretely, Guldin lists three “points of contact” between the two disciplines: the use of specific metaphors to describe how translation functions, the use of the concept of translation as a metaphor for exchange and transformation in different types of discourse, and the question of developing procedures for the translation of metaphors (2010: 161-162). To these he adds a fourth, that of the structural similarities and etymological parallels that exist between the concepts of translation and metaphor (2010: 162), as noted in Section One above. In addition to Guldin’s valid observations, it is likely that translation studies can provide many case studies – mono-, bi- and even multilingual – to supplement the descriptive work of metaphor scholars.

The conceptual metaphor theory as presented by Lakoff and Johnson is not perhaps the most ideal framework for translation studies research, firstly because of its downplaying of the extent of interlingual and intercultural variation in metaphor (see for example Engstrøm 2000: 268), and secondly because in the form in which it was originally formulated it does not recognise the importance of basing arguments on authentic rather than made-up, idealised examples. However, the way in which this theory has been implemented by a large number of other metaphor scholars, who recognise the importance of language and culture and analyse metaphor in authentic texts, provides a much more promising starting-point for metaphor in translation research (see for example Gibbs 1999; Dobrovolskij, Piirainen 2005; Kövecses 2005, 2006). Similarly, the highly data-driven approach employed by many contemporary metaphor scholars (see for example Charteris-Black 2004; Deignan 2005) contrasts sharply with the dependence on invented examples that is seen in a number of core works on cognitive linguistics (Lakoff, Johnson 1980, 1999). In this

differently interpreted form it becomes far more germane to translation studies, and seems in fact to be the most frequently adopted theoretical framework for research into metaphor in translation, the relevance theory of Sperber and Wilson (1986) coming a very distant second.

Translation scholars are generally not only bilingual but also bicultural, and they can provide an excellent source of data regarding interlingual and intercultural variation to counterbalance these universalist tendencies of the conceptual metaphor theory, which still survive in some parts of the discipline. However, it needs to be borne in mind that the kind of data that their work offers is fundamentally different from that supplied, for example, by a *langue*-based discipline. This is because translation studies data cannot be relied on to reflect target language norms in an unbiased manner, influenced as it is by the source language, by the translator's preference for a particular set of solutions, and so on, all of which factors not only place this data firmly in the domain of *parole*, as argued above, but also mark it out as having a twofold provenance and therefore running the risk of offering mixed or confusing insights. In other words, as instances of mediated discourse examples of translated metaphorical expressions cannot always be used as evidence of native target language patterns for mainstream metaphor studies research.

That said, translation-related data can potentially serve as a test-bed for measuring the validity of metaphor studies categories and concepts: one may reasonably argue that, if certain factors influence speakers of a particular language (or of language in general), then they must do the same for translators as they make decisions regarding wording and so forth – whether such factors are universal in nature or bound to a particular language. This fact may of course make data from process-based translation studies research of great interest to metaphor scholars with a particular interest in the psychological aspects of metaphor.

It is, however, vital that the study of metaphor in translation take into consideration theoretical work on metaphor. In practice, this means, for example, using already-existing definitions and taxonomies of metaphor types rather than reinventing them for the purposes of translation studies. If this approach is adopted then new translation studies case studies – at least in their monolingual aspect – will potentially throw further light on these concepts. In addition, translation scholars would be well advised to use existing methodologies for identifying metaphorical expressions in texts and for conducting corpus-based research (see for example the Pragglejaz Group 2007).

The longstanding understanding of translation studies as an interdiscipline referred to above does indeed need to be made to work in both directions: not only should translation scholars absorb concepts and approaches from neighbouring disciplines, but they should in their turn make their theoretical insights and practical findings available to their colleagues from these other disciplines. This point is forcefully argued by Israel, who proposes a practical plan of action for demonstrating the credentials of translation studies as a discipline capable of making a contribution in the context of other fields of research. Her first recommendation, which is broadly in line with what is proposed in this article, is to situate research in the “overlaps” between translation studies and other disciplines and thus approach these other subject areas with new questions (2011: 18). Israel also suggests engaging with other disciplines through book reviews, interdisciplinary conference panels and publishing in non-translation studies journals (2011: 19). Finally, she recommends that



translation scholars who are not based in a translation department should capitalise on this position by organising joint research initiatives that will take advantage of areas of common interest (2011: 19).

The possible benefits of these practical measures should be evident. In addition to them, however, it is possible to envisage particular proposals more specific to the particular pair of disciplines involved. In the case of translation studies and metaphor studies, these might fall into one of three categories: firstly, contributions to the development of existing frameworks for analysing metaphorical expressions and/or the proposal of possible new research methodologies; secondly, the reporting of individual insights gained from descriptive case studies; and thirdly, a possible extension to the applied wing of metaphor studies.

What is meant by the first of these is that it is possible to develop or construct detailed methodologies for analysing metaphor in translation that are designed to make use of metaphor studies concepts while operating within the normal paradigms of descriptive translation studies. One obvious way of achieving this is to use dimensions for categorising metaphorical expressions as the parameters (or variables) according to which modifications in the translation process are measured (for possible lists of these see for example Cameron 1999: 123-130; Dickins 2005: 265; Shuttleworth 2013: 40-62). In such descriptive case studies the questions to be asked would include: can a particular parameter be used to produce an innovative or insightful list of translation procedures? to what extent might such parameters exert an influence on translators' decision-making? do the answers to the previous two questions serve to confirm, qualify or perhaps invalidate the theoretical or psychological significance of a particular metaphor studies concept or parameter?

The second specific proposal for interdisciplinary collaboration is that many insights of interest to metaphor scholars can be obtained by drilling down into the monolingual source-language data (but not, perhaps, the translated data for the reasons discussed above) obtained from the case studies arising from the application of the research strategy proposed in the previous paragraph.

Many examples could be given but for reasons of space I will limit myself to a few points arising from my own work (Shuttleworth 2013) by way of illustration. One of the most interesting, to my mind, concerns image-schematic metaphorical expressions, as it transpires that this type of metaphorical expression, which is considered to be of great importance in conceptual metaphor theory, is in fact very rare, in the popular science texts that I studied at any rate. Only very few metaphorical expressions (around 3.5% of the total) are in fact based on image schemas to any significant degree (2013: 130). On the other hand, while not accorded significant theoretical attention, the category of metaphorical expression known as rich images occurs in an approximate ratio of 40:60 as against non-rich images, which means that in this respect too this work of translation research offers a brief case study on an under-researched topic that is also underplayed in terms of theory (2013: 185). The situation with image metaphors is similar: once again, while these represent a category of metaphor that is downplayed in the literature, they are in fact relatively more frequent at around 7% (2013: 218). Indeed, although the treatment is not as detailed as that of the monolingual studies conducted by Caballero (see for example 2002), I would argue that the findings nonetheless represent an important contribution to the very sparse metaphor studies literature on this topic.

The third and final specific proposal regarding possible paths of collaboration consists of the observation that works on metaphor in translation should be recognised as belonging to the applied branch of metaphor studies that was discussed briefly in Section Three. In the event that the different areas of metaphor studies were to be formally mapped out along the lines of Holmes' proposals for translation studies (1971/2004), metaphor in translation certainly deserves to be included here alongside other topics that have hitherto received greater recognition among metaphor scholars.

## 6. Conclusion

The aim of this article has been to examine the commonalities that exist between the disciplines of translation studies and metaphor studies and to consider how these can be built on for the purposes of developing collaboration in the area of research. Starting with observations about the conceptual and etymological relatedness of their central concepts, what has been discovered is that there is considerable scope for mutual influence and collaboration between the two disciplines, although also some significant differences in emphasis and approach. In the past, cross-disciplinary influence tended to be from metaphor studies to translation studies, although this article has argued that the latter discipline also has much to offer to the former. In the light of this, the article proposes pathways of collaboration that could lead to the enrichment of both disciplines concerned.

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# **Specialised Translation**

## **Traduzione specializzata**

**Economics and politics**  
**Economia e politica**





# **Umbrellas and firewalls: Metaphors in debating the financial crisis from the perspective of translation studies**

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***Abstract:** Since summer 2011, European politicians and journalists alike have commented on the economic crisis and the related financial crisis in the euro zone, and rescue packages and bail-out funds have been agreed upon. The language used in such debates is largely metaphorical in nature, which makes these political debates of interest to linguists, metaphor researchers, and Translation Studies scholars. This paper explores metaphorical expressions used in such discourse with reference to English and German texts. It analyses culture-specific differences in the use of such expressions and the way they have been dealt with in translation. In German political and journalistic texts, the metaphorical expression 'Rettungsschirm' (literally: 'rescue umbrella') is frequently used. In UK mass media, the metaphorical expression 'firewall' has been used frequently and has found its way into German journalistic discourse as well. In this paper, these metaphorical expressions are investigated from the perspectives of conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff, Johnson 1980) and Translation Studies, tracing the role of translation in cross-cultural communication.*

***Keywords:** conceptual metaphor, translation strategies, journalistic discourse, political discourse.*

## **1. Introduction: conceptualising and constructing the European Union**

On the homepage of the official website of the European Union we read:

The European Union is based on the rule of law. This means that every action taken by the EU is founded on treaties that have been approved voluntarily and democratically by all EU member countries. ([http://europa.eu/eu-law/treaties/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/eu-law/treaties/index_en.htm))

What is immediately obvious to a metaphor analyst is the use of the metaphorical expressions 'based on' and 'founded on'. In line with conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), we can say that these expressions are sanctioned by a conceptual mapping between a more concrete source domain (a building) and a more abstract target domain (the European Union). In analysing discourse related to the European Union, a whole interrelated network of conceptual metaphors has been identified. For example, Musolff (2000, 2004) gives the following conceptual metaphors, with metaphorical expressions which are sanctioned by them in parentheses:

THE EU IS A BUILDING (in, out, constructing Europe, the European house, etc.)

THE EU IS A FAMILY (father, mother, kids, sit around the table, etc)

THE EU IS A CLUB (rules, play a game, etc)

EU POLITICS IS MOVEMENT (path, step, a treaty is a milestone, etc)

THE EU IS A SICK / HEALTHY PERSON (recovery, sick economy, etc)

The interconnection of such metaphors is evident in several respects, at least in a vertical and a horizontal sense. In the vertical sense, we can see relations at hierarchical levels, such as THE EU IS A HOUSE as a subcategory of BUILDING, which in turn is subordinate to a conceptual metaphor THE EU IS A CONTAINER. In the

horizontal sense, conceptual metaphors are often combined, for example movement and health (e.g. ‘on the path to recovery’), which in this case needs to be understood as moving towards health as an abstract goal.

There is a significant amount of research into metaphors which has been conducted within Critical Discourse Analysis and Pragmatics which is interested in analysing the intentional and/or argumentative use of metaphor in context (cf. Chilton’s reference to the interpersonal function of metaphor in addition to the cognitive function, Chilton 1996, also Charteris-Black 2004). Among the genres that have most often been subject to empirical studies into metaphors in political discourse are news reports, editorials, speeches, interviews with politicians. These discourse types are usually interrelated and form ‘orders of discourse’ (Fairclough 1995), with relationships of complementarity, inclusion or exclusion leading to forms of intertextuality (i.e. links between texts belonging to the same genre), interdiscursivity (i.e. links between texts belonging to different genres), recontextualisation (i.e. any re-use of texts/extracts in another context).

Very often, however, discursive events are mediated and involve translation and/or interpreting. For example, discursive events such as meetings of EU politicians are conducted bi- and multilaterally, leading to discourse types such as treaties or policy documents which exist in several languages (as a matter of routine due to the language policy of multilingualism of the European Union). Politicians can be interviewed by journalists from abroad and the interview can be conducted with the help of an interpreter. International press conferences often make use of interpreting too, either simultaneous or consecutive interpreting. Interviews and press conferences thus become triadic exchanges (Mason 2001). Whenever journalists report about political meetings, speeches, or press conferences in the mass media and quote from translated or interpreted discourse, we have cases of intertextuality, interdiscursivity, and recontextualisation across linguistic and cultural (and often also ideological) boundaries (Schäffner 2012a).

This paper addresses metaphors in political and journalistic texts above all from the perspective of Translation Studies. The examples are chosen from texts that deal with the financial crisis in the euro zone, a topic that has frequently dominated political and media discourse about European Union politics since summer 2011. The questions I wish to address in this paper are the following:

- How is the financial crisis in the euro zone conceptualised metaphorically in German and in English political and journalistic discourse?
- What happens in processes of translation and/or interpreting in respect of conceptual metaphors and metaphorical expressions?

This paper will focus on two metaphorical expressions, which are used very frequently in British and German mass media: ‘Rettungsschirm’ and ‘firewall’.

## 2. Comparative analysis of texts in mass media

One question which has been explored in metaphor research is whether conceptual metaphors are universal, overlapping cultures, or culture-specific. For example, Kövecses (1995, 2005, 2006) has identified cross-cultural and within-culture variation in metaphor use. His argument is that this variation in linguistic expressions for the same conceptual metaphor may account for variation in

conceptualisation registered in languages. Analysing authentic texts in various languages is one method of identifying such potential variation. In view of my interest in the metaphorical expressions used in the context of the financial crisis in the euro zone, original German and English texts in mass media were analysed. My data come predominantly from the weekly magazines *The Economist* and *Der Spiegel* and a few other newspapers. For the translation analysis, *Spiegel International* and transcripts of speeches, interviews, and press conferences were added. The texts were gathered more or less at random from publications in 2011/2012. Since the aim is to qualitatively illustrate the use of metaphorical expressions and the role of translation, no specialised corpus has been created and no statistical analysis has been attempted.

For dealing with financial aspects of the European Union and the euro zone, several mechanisms have been set up by the EU institutions. Of particular importance among them are the European Financial Stability Facility ('Europäische Finanzstabilisierungsfazilität' in German), often abbreviated as EFSF, and the ESM, the European Stability Mechanism ('Europäischer Stabilitätsmechanismus' in German). The EFSF was established in June 2010 as a temporary financial assistance facility, and provided financial support to Ireland, Portugal and Greece (see <http://www.efsf.europa.eu/about/index.htm>). It is to be replaced by the ESM, which is an intergovernmental institution based in Luxembourg. It was set up to "provide financial assistance to eurozone member states experiencing, or being threatened by, severe financing problems, if this is indispensable for safeguarding financial stability in the euro area as a whole" (<http://www.esm.europa.eu/>). It came into force on 1 July 2012, but continues to coexist with the EFSF.

In German political and journalistic texts, the term European Financial Stability Facility is very frequently accompanied or even replaced by the metaphorical expression 'Rettungsschirm' (literally: 'rescue umbrella'), or by 'Rettungsfonds' or 'Rettungspaket'. In English texts, 'bail-out fund', 'rescue fund' dominate, and with particular frequency in the period analysed, 'firewall'. More recently, the metaphorical expression 'firewall' has been used in German discourse as well. I will illustrate the use of these expressions with examples from German and English texts.

## 2.1. 'Rettungsschirm' in German texts

The metaphorical expression 'Rettungsschirm' can be said to reflect a mapping from the source domain (umbrella) onto the target domain (European Financial Stability Facility and/or European Stability Mechanism), resulting in the conceptual metaphor THE EFSF / THE ESM IS AN UMBRELLA (I will use the abbreviations EFSF and ESM for ease of reference). This mapping is also visible in a document made available by the German government to explain these mechanisms (bold in the extracts are mine):

- (1) Die Europäische Finanzstabilisierungsfazilität (EFSF) ist ein weiteres Element des bis Mitte 2013 begrenzten Euro-Schutzschirmes.<sup>1</sup>  
 ([http://www.bundesregierung.de/Webs/Breg/DE/Themen/Euro/EFSFundESM/esm\\_efsms\\_efs/\\_node.html](http://www.bundesregierung.de/Webs/Breg/DE/Themen/Euro/EFSFundESM/esm_efsms_efs/_node.html))

<sup>1</sup> "The European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) is another element of the euro rescue umbrella which is limited till mid 2013". Unless otherwise indicated, all translations into English are mine and attempt at reproducing the ST closely. All online sources last accessed on 4 January 2014.

If we look at the contexts in which ‘Rettungsschirm’ is used in mass media, we notice two main areas which are linked to implicature. One is related to the function of an umbrella, and the other one to its size. In respect of the function, we can visualise an open umbrella, covering people (in this case, countries, based on the conceptual metaphor COUNTRIES ARE PERSONS) who are under it (the typical prepositional phrase bold in the extracts below literally means ‘under the rescue umbrella’). This spatial element, however, is often combined with verbs of movement which denote an action of a somewhat dubious intention (‘schlüpfen’ - ‘to slip’, but with the connotation ‘furtively’, ‘flüchten’ – ‘to flee, escape’).

(2) Rechnen Sie damit, dass auch Portugal und Spanien **unter den Rettungsschirm schlüpfen** müssen? (*Spiegel* 21/3/2011, p. 82)

Irland **geht unter den Rettungsschirm** / Portugal will **unter den Rettungsschirm** (*Spiegel* 28/11/2011, p. 66f)

[Spanien] Muss das Land **unter den Rettungsschirm flüchten**? (*Spiegel* 23/4/2012, p. 80)

Once under the umbrella, countries are protected and thus safe (the entailment related to the function). With more and more countries in need of protection, the umbrella needs to get bigger in order to be able to provide sufficient cover (the entailment related to size). In the extract below, this element of size is reflected in adjectives (‘immer größer’ – ‘ever larger’) and the verb ‘(auf)spannen’ (open) (see also Schäffner 2012b).

(3) Bisher haben die Regierungen das Gemeinschaftsgeld zu sichern versucht, indem sie **immer größere Rettungsschirme** über die Euro-Zone **spannten** (*Spiegel* 15/8/2011, p. 23)<sup>2</sup>

The image of the umbrella is also creatively used in cartoons and in combination of text and image. For example, when the German Constitutional Court agreed to approve the ESM, an article in *Der Spiegel* on 17 September 2012 was accompanied by a cartoon showing an umbrella with the letters ESM written onto it and mounted to the German Basic Law (represented as a book). Next to it we see a smiling Chancellor Merkel and a judge. The article is entitled ‘Die Regierung freut sich über das Urteil des Verfassungsgerichts zum Rettungsschirm ESM’<sup>3</sup>. The extract below is also taken from this text and includes the familiar collocations:

(4) Der **Rettungsschirm kann aufgespannt werden** [...] (*Spiegel* 17/9/2012, p. 32)<sup>4</sup>

An article in the daily newspaper *Die Welt* (6/8/2012) was accompanied by a photo which showed a group of people (of which only one was named as the Spanish Prime Minister) walking in the rain and protected by their umbrellas. The article was entitled ‘Spanien spart sich unter den Rettungsschirm’ (‘Spain makes savings to get under the rescue umbrella’) and started by making the link to the photo explicit:

(5) Am Wochenende musste Spaniens Ministerpräsident Mariano Rajoy schon mal **unter einen Schirm flüchten**. Sein erster Urlaubstag fiel buchstäblich ins Wasser. Missmutig stapfte Rajoy unweit seiner Heimatprovinz Pontevedra durch den Wald, während einer seiner Getreuen dienstefrig **einen Regenschirm aufspannte**. Das Bild ist symbolträchtig. [...] Die

<sup>2</sup> “Till now the governments have tried to safeguard the common currency by opening ever larger rescue umbrellas over the euro-zone”.

<sup>3</sup> “The government is happy about the Constitutional Court’s decree on the rescue umbrella ESM”.

<sup>4</sup> “The rescue umbrella can be opened [...]”.

Idee, dass das ganze Land **unter den Rettungsschirm kriechen** muss [...] (*Die Welt* 6/8/2012, p. 10)<sup>5</sup>

## 2.2. 'Firewall' in English texts

In English journalistic texts (predominantly selected from the weekly *The Economist*), the frequently encountered metaphorical expression 'firewall' is sanctioned by the conceptual metaphor THE EFSF/ESM IS A FIREWALL. In the contexts, it is combined with verbs which refer to building the wall ('create', 'erect') and adjectives, verbs, and nouns that are related to properties of size, strength, and the function of a wall, as illustrated in the extracts below:

(6) **Create a credible firewall to protect** endangered but still-solvent countries like Spain and Italy (*Economist* 22/10/2011, p. 52)  
So the overall **size** of the eurozone's **protective firewall** will be €700bn, [...] (*European Voice* 22/3/2012, p. 3)

The function of the firewall is described as preventing other countries from contagion, which is linked to metaphors of sickness. The size of the firewall is essential for the degree of protection, with the size being conceptualised either in a horizontal dimension ('thicker') or in a vertical dimension ('higher', 'raise'), as illustrated in extract (7).

(7) [...] a **thicker financial firewall to protect** the weaklings on the periphery **from contagion** [...] (*Economist* 12/5/2012, p. 10)  
Finance ministers are rushing to **erect** the €1 trillion (\$1.4 trillion) **firewall** [...]. But with markets already in panic, it may not be **strong** enough. (*Economist* 5/11/2011, p. 56)  
Yet European finance ministers were busy congratulating themselves last weekend **for creating a robust "firewall" to keep the debt crisis from spreading**, [...] Even **the highest firewall** created by a **big bailout fund** can just buy time to address the euro zone's underlying problems, [...].  
(*New York Times* 3/4/2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/04/opinion/an-insufficient-firewall.html>)

The health and sickness metaphor was creatively elaborated in a commentary in the *Economist*, entitled 'Still sickly', of which I provide extracts in (8) below.

(8) The euro zone's **illness** is returning. A **cure** requires more integration, but Germany isn't keen  
[...] This "powerful **drug**" may have **side-effects** [...] The **fever has been rising** again in Spain [...] the Spanish **illness** might harm [Mario Monti's] own country's **convalescence**. [...] As fear returns, so have calls to **boost the euro zone's rescue funds**. "The **mother of all firewalls should be in place, strong enough, broad enough, deep enough, tall enough – just big**", says Angel Gurría [...] to **raise the firewall** somewhat [...] **Raising the firewall** and ratifying the compact will address only some of the **symptoms**. A **cure** requires "treating the whole patient" [...] (*Economist* 31/3/2012, p.44)

This commentary also includes a direct quote by Angel Gurría, the head of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), in which the size of the firewall is extended into several dimensions (in addition to a wordplay as an intertextual reference to a speech by Saddam Hussein). This quote was taken up by various newspapers at that time. The text of the statement made available on the

<sup>5</sup> "Last weekend Spain's Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy had to flee under an umbrella. His first day of holidays was literally rained off. Sullenly, he trudged through the forest near his home province Pontevedra, with one of his trusted aides zealously opening an umbrella for him. This photo is full of symbolism [...] The idea that the whole country will have to sneak under the rescue umbrella [...]"

official OECD website in advance of its delivery is, however, less elaborate, as seen in extract (9) below, and marked by the addition of the comment ‘As prepared for delivery’.

(9) The absolute priority must be to stabilise the most fragile euro area sovereigns. We call on the informal ECOFIN later this week to expand the available stability funds further to provide a credible level of support. **The ‘mother of all firewalls’ should be in place – strong enough and broad enough** to ensure that it does not need to be used.

Remarks by Angel Gurría, OECD Secretary-General, delivered at the launch of the OECD Economic Surveys of the Euro Area and the European Union, Brussels, 27 March 2012 (As prepared for delivery)

(<http://www.oecd.org/fr/economie/theunfinishedbusinessofmakingeuropework.htm>)

It is very possible that Gurría was more elaborate when he actually delivered his remarks. What this quote also shows is that the metaphorical expression of the ‘firewall’ is not just a convenient label for journalistic purposes, but that it is in fact part of the official political discourse. This can be seen as well in extract (10) below from the Statement of the euro group, which also introduces another metaphorical expression, i.e. ‘ceiling’, thus adding another perspective to the vertical dimension (MORE IS UP).

(10) [...] we have reassessed the adequacy of the overall EFSF/ESM lending **ceiling** of EUR 500 billion [...] The current **overall ceiling for ESM/EFSSF lending**, as defined in the ESM Treaty, **will be raised** to EUR 700 billion such that the ESM and the EFSF will be able to operate, if needed, as described above. [...] All together the euro area is **mobilising an overall firewall** of approximately EUR 800 billion, more than USD 1 trillion. [...] Finally, **robust firewalls** have been established. [...]

([http://eurozone.europa.eu/media/368036/psi\\_statement\\_30\\_march\\_12.pdf](http://eurozone.europa.eu/media/368036/psi_statement_30_march_12.pdf))

### 2.3. ‘Firewall’ in German texts

Official statements by bodies such as the euro group or the OECD are reported on in the mass media, and politicians too refer to them in new contexts. This phenomenon of intertextuality and recontextualisation is evident in extract (11), which is part of a speech delivered by the German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble on 29 March 2012 in the German Parliament, outlining the discussion within the euro-zone group a few days before the adoption of the statement.

(11) Mit den Gesetzentwürfen zur Schaffung einer Fiskalunion und eines **dauerhaften Stabilitätsmechanismus** schaffen wir einen weiteren wichtigen **Baustein** [...] eine zentrale Maßnahme zur **Bekämpfung von Ansteckungsgefahren**. [...] Das ist die **Funktion des Rettungsschirms oder der Firewall** – die **Bekämpfung von Ansteckungsgefahren** im Euro-System als Ganzem. [...] Wenn wir eine Struktur für die Stabilitätsunion erreichen, die wir in den 90er Jahren nicht zustande gebracht haben, dann muss die **Firewall nicht mehr so hoch** sein. [...] **Vermeidung der Ansteckungsgefahr** im Euro-System [...] <sup>6</sup>

(<http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Bulletin/2012/03/32-1-bmf-bt.html>)

What this extract also shows is that ‘Rettungsschirm’ and ‘firewall’ are indeed treated as synonyms, although it is somewhat difficult to imagine how an umbrella

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<sup>6</sup> “With the draft treaties for creating a fiscal union and a permanent stability mechanism we put another important building stone in place [...] a central measure for fighting the danger of contagion [...] This is the function of the rescue umbrella or of the firewall – fighting the danger of contagion in the whole euro-system. [...] If we achieve a structure for the stability union which we didn’t achieve in the 1990s, then the firewall does not need to be that high [...] preventing contagion in the euro-system [...]”.

could prevent contagion spreading from one country to another! Moreover, the discourse which links firewalls to preventing contagion gets mixed up with building metaphors ('Baustein' is a brick, a building stone, which can be seen as part of a wall). What we also see is that Schäuble used the English term 'firewall' in his speech. In example (12) from *Der Spiegel* below, the extract of the euro-group statement has been rendered into German, using the German equivalent labels 'Brandschutzmauer' and 'Brandmauer'. However, what is also interesting is that in the argumentation which follows, reference is made again to the umbrella image.

(12) "Die Euro-Länder **mobilisieren eine Brandschutzmauer** von 800 Millionen Euro, mehr als eine Billion US-Dollar", trommelte die Euro-Gruppe, die Versammlung der Finanzminister aus der Währungsunion, in die Finanzwelt. [...] Monatelang hatten sich die Deutschen gegen derart **hohe Brandmauern** gestäubt [...] Einsatzfähigkeit der **Rettungsschirme** [...] verliere der **Rettungsschirm** seine Wirkung [...] Funktionsfähigkeit des **Schirms** [...] Sie hatte sich von den **aufgestockten Rettungsschirmen** Entlastung versprochen. (*Spiegel* 2/4/2012, p. 29ff)<sup>7</sup>

Such a combination of the two metaphorical expressions is also evident in extracts (13) and (14), resulting in a conflation of the two conceptual domains. Extract (13) is from a joint press conference between Chancellor Merkel and the French President Sarkozy in Cannes on 11 November 2011, in which the English and the German word are used side by side together with a term morphologically built on the umbrella image.

(13) Merkel: [...] Das betrifft insbesondere die Möglichkeit der **Abschirmung, der Firewall, der Brandmauer**. [...] (<http://www.bundesregierung.de/ContentArchiv/DE/Archiv17/Mitschrift/Pressekonferenzen/2011/11/2011-11-03-merkel-sark-cannes.html>)

Extract (14) is from an interview which the weekly *Handelsblatt* conducted in June 2012 with Minister Schäuble, in which the synonymous use of the two terms is again very explicit.

(14) *Handelsblatt*: Brauchen Sie denn für die **Rettungsschirme** möglicherweise irgendwann noch mehr Geld vom Steuerzahler für die Zukunft?  
Schäuble: [...] Der **Rettungsschirm** ist ja vor allem eine **Brandmauer**, um Zeit zu gewinnen.<sup>8</sup> (<http://www.bundesregierung.de/ContentArchiv/DE/Archiv17/Interview/2012/06/2012-06-05-schaeuble-handelsblatt.html>)

In the political and journalistic discourse, both 'Rettungsschirm' and 'firewall' are presented as tools, the main function of which is providing protection from dangerous situations: here, specifically, a country becoming financially vulnerable. It is interesting to see that neither the element of fire nor the element of rain are used frequently and explicitly in the argumentation (or mainly for rhetorical purposes, as in extract 5 above, and also extract 17 below). The comparative analysis of authentic German and English texts thus shows that different conceptual metaphors are used, but not exclusively. As seen in extracts (11) and (12), the metaphorical expression 'firewall' is also used in German discourse. This discursive awareness is due to

<sup>7</sup> "The euro countries mobilise a firewall of 800 billion euros, more than 1 trillion US Dollars", announced the euro group, the assembly of finance ministers of the currency union, to the world of finance. [...] For months the Germans had opposed such a high firewall. [...] availability of the rescue umbrellas [...] the rescue umbrella may lose its effect [...] function of the umbrella [...] It had hoped for relief from the increased rescue umbrellas".

<sup>8</sup> "Will you need more money from the tax payers for the rescue umbrellas?  
Schäuble: [...] The rescue umbrella is above all a firewall in order to gain time".

politicians' (and journalists') own exposure to official EU discourse (for example, minister Schäuble attending meetings of EU finance ministers). Intertextuality across genres is thus a regular phenomenon, as is intertextuality across official documents and statements by politicians, as illustrated in extracts (11) above and (15) below, which both use the image of the cornerstone. Extract (15) is from the statement by Jean-Claude Juncker, the ex-President of the euro group, on the entry into force of the ESM Treaty.

(15) The ESM is now the **cornerstone** of the European **firewall** and an integral part of our comprehensive strategy to ensure financial stability in the euro area.  
(<http://www.eurozone.europa.eu/newsroom/news/2012/09/statement-jcj-esm-27-09-2012/>)

Since the topic of the financial crisis concerns the multinational euro zone, communication and negotiation is multilingual. Intertextuality across genres is thus also intertextuality across languages. In this context, translation (and interpreting) play a significant role, which is also of relevance to metaphors. This issue will be addressed in the next section.

### 3. Metaphor and translation

#### 3.1. Translation studies on metaphor

In the discipline of Translation Studies, scholars were traditionally concerned with the translatability of metaphors and with translation procedures (see also Schäffner 2004). In respect of translatability, questions such as the following ones were asked: [How] can metaphor be translated? Can metaphor be transferred intact from source language to target language? What gets lost in translating metaphor? (e.g. Dagut 1976). Various scholars have put forward lists of procedures for metaphor transfer (e.g. Newmark 1981, van den Broeck 1981), usually starting from a metaphor (more precisely: a metaphorical expression) identified as a translation problem in the source text and suggesting methods for rendering it into the target text. Among the most frequently cited procedures are the following:

- (i) metaphor into same metaphor - direct translation
- (ii) metaphor into different metaphor - substitution of the image in the source text by a target language metaphor with the same or similar sense
- (iii) metaphor into sense - paraphrase, shift to a non-figurative equivalent
- (iv) deletion of metaphor

Starting from the perspective of the target text, Toury (1995: 81ff.) suggested two additional procedures:

- (i) use of a metaphor in the target text for a non-metaphorical expression in the source text (non-metaphor into metaphor),
- (ii) addition of a metaphor in the target text without any linguistic motivation in the source text (0 into metaphor)

Such a target-oriented perspective is in line with Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) which emerged in the late 1970s (Holmes 1972/2004). The focus of DTS is no longer on what a translation should look like and what translators should do, but rather on analysing what authentic translations actually do look like and what translators actually have done.



In the majority of cases, however, all these translation procedures were devised with reference to a more traditional understanding of metaphor. Conceptual metaphor theory has gradually been applied in Translation Studies as well (with Stienstra 1993 probably one of the first studies in this respect). Based on a descriptive analysis of authentic source texts and their translations, scholars have also identified translation procedures in a different way. The following very extensive list of translation procedures was suggested by Al-Harrasi (2001: 277-288), based on the analysis of authentic English translations of Arabic political speeches.

- 1. Instantiating the Same Conceptual Metaphor
  - 1.1. Same Image Schematic Representation
  - 1.2. Concretising an Image Schematic Metaphor
  - 1.3. Instantiating in the TT only a Functional Aspect of the Image Schema
  - 1.4. Same Image Schema and Rich Image Domains
  - 1.5. Same Rich Image Metaphor but Alerting the Reader to the Mapping
  - 1.6. Using a Different Rich Image that Realises the Same Image Schema Realised by the Rich Image in the Source Text
  - 1.7. From the Rich Image Metaphor to Image Schematic Representation
  - 1.8. Same Mapping but a Different Perspective
- 2. Adding a New Instantiation in the Target Text
- 3. Using a Different Conceptual Metaphor
- 4. Deletion of the Expression of the Metaphor

Al-Harrasi's list of translation procedures is significantly different from previously produced ones, as it is based on the theoretical categories of conceptual metaphor theory. It opens up a new direction for research, although the viability of his procedures remains to be tested further.

### 3.2. 'Rettungsschirm' and 'firewall' in translation

In order to see how the metaphorical expressions 'Rettungsschirm' and 'firewall' have been handled in translation, and what consequences this has for the conceptual metaphors by which they are sanctioned, I have looked at authentic translations. Good sources for such an analysis of translations are *Spiegel International*, an online English-language medium which provides translations of some texts published in the print version of the weekly magazine *Der Spiegel* (see Schäffner 2005). Another good source is the English language website of the German government which provides English translations of speeches, interviews, press releases and other texts.

The first three examples below are extracts from interviews *Der Spiegel* conducted with foreign politicians, published both in the print version and online on *Spiegel International*. In the interview with Austria's Chancellor Werner Faymann (16a) we see a coherent use of 'Rettungsschirm' by the *Spiegel* journalist, compared to a coherent argumentation making use of the firewall metaphor (with the German label 'Brandmauer') in Faymann's response. In the English translation (16b), only the metaphor of the firewall has been recreated (which would be an example of strategy 1.1 in Al-Harrasi's typology), whereas the image of the umbrella has

disappeared and been rendered by the more neutral terms ‘bailout package’ and ‘backstop fund’ (which would be an example of Al-Harrasi’s strategy 1.3). The same procedure can be seen in the interview with Jean-Claude Juncker (17), although in his answer he himself switches between the two metaphorical expressions.

(16a) Werner Faymann, über größere **Rettungsschirme**, [...]

Spiegel: [...] der **Euro-Rettungsschirm ESM** müsse mit mehr Geld ausgestattet werden, [...]

Faymann: [...] Meine Regierung stellt sich darauf ein, dass der bisherige **Rettungsfonds** EFSF und der ESM so miteinander verschachtelt werden, dass wir eine **höhere Brandmauer errichten**. [...]

Spiegel: Wollen Sie, dass die Milliarden, die noch im Rettungsfonds liegen, dem permanenten **ESM-Schirm** zugeschlagen werden?

Faymann: [...] Die Finanzmärkte beobachten uns ganz genau und machen an der **Höhe der Brandmauer** fest, wie stark wir sind. Ist sie **zu niedrig**, liefern wir den Märkten einen Grund, gegen uns zu spekulieren. (*Spiegel* 30/1/2012, p. 23)

(16b) [...] Austrian Chancellor Werner Faymann, [...] discusses the potential need for a **larger Greek bailout package**

Spiegel: [...] that the permanent euro **backstop fund**, the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), be enlarged. [...]

Faymann: I [...] My government is prepared for the present EFSF **bailout fund** and the ESM to overlap in a way that we **erect a higher firewall**. [...]

Spiegel: Do you want the billions that remain in the European Financial Stability Facility to be combined with the **ESM**?

Faymann: [...] The financial markets are observing us very closely, and judge our strength by the **height of the firewall**. If it’s **too low**, then we give the markets a reason to speculate against us. (<http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/interview-with-austrian-chancellor-faymann-don-t-overestimate-the-fiscal-pact-a-812299.html>)

(17a) Spiegel: Auch Italien und Spanien sind längst nicht aus der Gefahrenzone. Muss der **Rettungsschirm aufgestockt** werden?

Juncker: Ich will nicht über Zahlen sprechen, sondern über das Prinzip: Die **Brandmauer muss so hoch sein**, damit das **Feuer, das in Griechenland brennt**, nicht auf **andere europäische Häuser übergreift**. Wir haben ja den bisherigen **Rettungsschirm** EFSF [...] (*Spiegel* 6/2/2012, p. 27)

(17b) Spiegel: Italy and Spain are also by no means out of the danger zone. Does the **EU’s backstop fund need to be boosted**?

Juncker: I don’t want to talk about figures, but about the principle instead. The **firewall needs to be high enough to stop the fire** that is **burning** in Greece from **setting other European houses ablaze**. We have of course the **current EFSF (European Financial Stability Facility) bailout fund**, [...] (Translated from the German by Josh Ward.

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/euro-group-president-jean-claude-juncker-if-greece-doesn-t-reform-it-can-t-expect-solidarity-a-813524.html>)

It can only be speculated whether Juncker used ‘Rettungsschirm’ in order to establish an explicit link to the journalists’ question, but he may simply be more used to a discourse of the firewall metaphor due to his role as the president of the euro group (see extract 15 above). As a citizen of Luxembourg, Juncker is competent in German, and it may thus well be that the interview was held in German. The interview with the Italian prime minister Mario Monti, however, is more complex. Monti does not speak German himself, which means that the interview may have been conducted in Italian, or in German and Italian with the help of an interpreter. We see the same strategy in rendering ‘Rettungsschirm’ into English (18b), whereas the use of ‘Rettungsschirm’ by Monti himself may well be the choice of the journalists (or the interpreter) to establish coherence (the umbrella image is not used

in authentic Italian texts on the crisis in the euro zone). There is no explicit indication of translation and the translator in (18), compared to some of the other extracts.

(18a) Spiegel: [...] gemeinsam mit den europäischen **Rettungsschirmen** Staatsanleihen von Schuldnerländern zu kaufen [...]

Monti: Nein. Wenn Sie die Auflagen der europäischen **Rettungsschirme** lesen würden [...]  
(*Spiegel* 6/8/2012, p. 44)

(18b) Spiegel: [...] possibly together with European **bailout funds**, to buy sovereign bonds from indebted member states

Monti: No. If you read the requirements of the European **bailout funds** [...]

(<http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/interview-on-the-euro-crisis-with-italian-prime-minister-mario-monti-a-848511.html>)

The examples below from news reports and commentaries show the same procedure of rendering the metaphorical expression ‘Rettungsschirm’ as a more general term (even varying between ‘rescue fund’ and ‘bailout fund’ in extract 19). The collocations with the verbs (‘schlüpfen’, ‘aufspannen’) have equally been turned into more general and factual formulations.

(19a) Spanien, [...] wann es **unter den Rettungsschirm schlüpfen** muss. (*Spiegel* 25/6/2012, p. 18)

(19b) Spain, [...] is forced to **ask for a bailout**, [...]

(Tr. Ch. Sultan, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/debt-crisis-threatens-the-european-way-of-life-a-840643.html>)

(20a) Künftig kann die Zentralbank Anleihen der Krisenländer aufkaufen, sofern diese vorher **unter den europäischen Rettungsschirm flüchten**. [...] der **dauerhafte Rettungsschirm ESM** [...]. (*Spiegel* 10/9/2012, p. 24)

(20b) In the future, the ECB will be able to **purchase sovereign bonds** from crisis-ridden countries, provided these member states have already **requested aid from the euro-zone rescue fund** [...] the **European Stability Mechanism (ESM), the permanent successor to the current rescue fund** [...].

(Tr. P. Cohen, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/spiegel-commentary-on-ecb-bond-purchase-program-a-854851.html>)

(21a) Der **Rettungsschirm kann aufgespannt werden** [...] Bei einem Telefonat am vergangenen Montag fragte Seehofer Merkel, ob die neue EZB-Politik bedeute, dass **ein Land unter dem Rettungsschirm** unbegrenzt Hilfe bekommen könne. [...] Bislang sollen 22 Milliarden Euro beim **Rettungsschirm** eingezahlt werden, [...] (*Spiegel* 17/9/2012, p. 32)

(21b) The **ESM can now be ratified**, [...] During a telephone call last Monday, Seehofer asked Merkel if the ECB’s new policy meant that a **country that applied for assistance with the permanent rescue fund** could secure unlimited aid. [...] Germany must pay €22 billion in cash into the **permanent bailout fund**.

(<http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/unlimited-liability-legal-hurdles-ahead-in-effort-to-save-euro-a-856226.html>)

It seems that the metaphorical expression of the ‘Rettungsschirm’ is used more frequently in German journalistic texts than in official policy documents, political speeches, and interviews. A search on the website of the German federal government in the section providing speeches showed interesting differences in the frequency of terms. Searching for ‘Rettungsschirm’ brought up 14 speeches, 18 speeches for ‘Firewall’, 4 for ‘Brandmauer’, compared to 370 links to speeches for ‘ESM’ and 317 for ‘EFSF’. These texts are translated into English by the translation department of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which also caters for the translation needs of the Federal Chancellor and the Federal President. The illustrative examples below also show consistency in the rendering. Extract (22) comes from a speech by

Chancellor Angela Merkel to the European Parliament in Brussels, delivered on 7 November 2012, extract (23) from her speech at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in Davos on 25 January 2012, and (24) from an interview she gave in January 2012 to several European newspapers.

(22a) [...] durch den neuen **dauerhaften Rettungsschirm ESM**.  
(<http://archiv.bundesregierung.de/ContentArchiv/DE/Archiv17/Reden/2012/11/2012-11-07-merkel-eu.html>)

(22b) [...] through the **new permanent rescue package, the European Stability Mechanism**.  
(<http://archiv.bundesregierung.de/ContentArchiv/EN/Archiv17/Reden/2012/2012-11-07-merkel-eu.html>)

(23a) [...] inwiefern die Länder bereit sind, füreinander Haftung zu übernehmen und **sich mit einer „firewall“, wie man so schön sagt, zu umgeben**. [...] Wir haben einen temporären **Rettungsschirm**, die EFSF [...] Wir haben **diesen Schirm flexibilisiert**.  
(<http://archiv.bundesregierung.de/ContentArchiv/DE/Archiv17/Reden/2012/01/2012-01-25-bkin-davos.html>)

(23b) [...] the extent to which countries are prepared to assume each other's liabilities and to **surround themselves with a firewall**. [...] We have a temporary **rescue package**, the EFSF, [...] We've made **this package** flexible.  
(<http://archiv.bundesregierung.de/ContentArchiv/EN/Archiv17/Reden/2012/2012-01-25-bkin-rede-davos.html>)

What is also of interest in extract (23) is Merkel's metacommunicative comment 'wie man so schön sagt' (roughly: 'as may be said'). The use of scare quotes for 'firewall' is an additional signal that the label is not commonly used in German discourse. The kind of distancing is also reflected in Merkel's continuation of her speech where she uses the more familiar umbrella image again. In the English translation, these metacommunicative signals have not been reproduced.

For Merkel's media interview, the French version has been included in my analysis as well.

(24a) *Süddeutsche Zeitung*: Bei allen Milliardenhilfen und **Rettungsschirmen** müssen auch wir Deutsche aufpassen, dass uns am Schluss nicht auch die Kraft ausgeht, [...]

(24b) *The Guardian*: Amid all the billions in financial assistance and **rescue packages**, we Germans also need to watch that we don't run out of steam. [...]

(24c) *Le Monde*: Vu les milliards d'aides et les **fonds de secours**, nous, Allemands, devons nous aussi faire attention si nous ne voulons pas, un jour, être à bout de forces [...]

'Fonds de secours européen' is the official term used in French, which is also formally equivalent to the English 'rescue fund'. In terms of translation strategy, this rendering too leads to the disappearance of the umbrella image. The comparison of multilingual texts reveals even more interesting findings if we go beyond the specific focus on the metaphorical expression 'Rettungsschirm'. In the German extract, Merkel uses an idiomatic expression ('die Kraft ausgeht', roughly: lose one's strength). The French text is very similar to the German one, whereas in the English translation, a metaphorical expression is used ('run out of steam'). This would be an example of Toury's strategy of non-metaphor into metaphor.

#### 4. Conclusion: metaphor in translation

The textual analysis showed that ‘Rettungsschirm’ is the label most frequently used in German political and journalistic texts. In the context of debates on increasing the amount of money available to the EFSF and ESM, ‘firewall’ became a key term in English journalistic and political texts, which also entered the German discourse, both as a loanword and as the German equivalent terms ‘Brandmauer’/‘Brandschutzmauer’. An article in the *European Voice* looking back at the events in the euro zone in 2012, states:

(25) In March, eurozone countries agreed to increase **what was then called the firewall** – the money available for fighting the crisis – to €800 billion [...] (*European Voice* 10/1/2013, p. 6)

This evaluation (‘what was then called’) seems to imply that the term ‘firewall’ may have been short-lived. In German discourse, ‘Firewall’ or ‘Brandmauer’ did not replace the existing term ‘Rettungsschirm’, but very frequently both terms were used side by side, as seen in several extracts above. Both ‘Rettungsschirm’ and ‘firewall’ can be seen as vivid metaphors, which easily allow for a visualisation and which are thus helpful to conceptualise abstract concepts such as facility or mechanism which are used in the official names of the funds (European Financial Stability Facility and European Stability Mechanism).

In discussions on metaphor translation (e.g. Newmark 1981), it has often been argued that creative and innovative metaphors would be easier to translate directly due to their boldness and vividness. Although both ‘Rettungsschirm’ and ‘firewall’ are creative and innovative metaphors, only ‘firewall’ has sometimes been rendered into German literally as ‘Brandmauer’ or ‘Brandschutzmauer’. The image of the umbrella, however, is not used in English texts, neither in original English texts nor in translations into English. When I conducted research for an earlier paper (Schäffner 2012b), I did indeed find some texts where a literal translation ‘rescue umbrella’ had been used. Upon closer inspection, however, it emerged that these texts were produced by less language conscious journalists, incautious editing, or machine translation.

In terms of translation strategies, rendering ‘firewall’ as ‘Brandmauer’ could be described as metaphor into same metaphor. From a descriptive comparison of source texts and target texts and from the perspective of conceptual metaphor theory, we could say that we have the same image schematic representation (based on Al-Harrasi’s model) in both texts as instantiations of the same conceptual metaphor (although these conceptual metaphors can clash if the EFSF/ESM is conceptualised both as an umbrella and as a wall in one and the same text, as in extract 14 above).

Most frequently, ‘Rettungsschirm’ has been rendered as ‘rescue fund’, or ‘bailout fund’. More traditionally, this translation strategy can be described as metaphor into non-metaphor. From a conceptual perspective, it could be said that only a functional aspect of the image schema has been instantiated in the target text, i.e. the aspect of rescuing. However, in such a rendering, a reader of the English translation would not be able to activate a conceptual metaphor of umbrellas – but does this matter? It would matter only if we define translation more narrowly as meaning transfer and expect the target text to be an equivalent reproduction of the source text. Translation Studies has long since moved away from such a view. The descriptive analysis of authentic translations has raised awareness of socio-cultural aspects which impact the

translation event, and translation is now increasingly investigated as a socially regulated practice.

For comparative metaphor analysis interested in discovering whether conceptual metaphors are universal or culture-specific, the analysis of authentic texts in several languages is a useful method. But even if this comparative analysis discovers that in two languages and cultures the same conceptual metaphor and equivalent linguistic expressions exist, or that the same conceptual metaphor but different linguistic expressions occur, this does not necessarily mean that the analysis of translations will lead to the same results as the analysis of authentic texts in the two languages. Metaphor in translation is a matter of discourse and a matter of social context. This means that translation strategies are not only determined by the availability of a corresponding conceptual metaphor and/or a metaphorical expression in the target language.

The analysis of translations is useful for various reasons. One of them can of course be to discover whether translators make use of corresponding metaphorical expressions (if they exist) or whether they create new metaphorical expressions modeled on the source language. Whether translators are conscious of their decisions, and whether they are indeed aware of conceptual metaphors when opting for a specific linguistic manifestation would necessitate more empirical research into the actual translation process (Schäffner, Shuttleworth 2013). Analysing translations, however, also makes us aware of the link between linguistic properties and social contexts (as also mentioned by Mauranen 2002).

The translations illustrated in this paper above show more consistency in the English translations of the German political texts which were done by the translation department of the German government and more variability in the translations done by media institutions. This points to institutional practices and policies. The translation department of the German government operates a very thorough system of checking and revision, and translators make systematic use of previously translated texts and are supported by a terminology section. These procedures ensure consistency in the renderings. Translations for the media institution *Spiegel International* need to be done quickly, and the main goal is for the texts to be as understandable as possible to the broadest international audience possible, as argued by the head of the translation office (personal communication). For that reason, translators survey the English press, predominantly the *Financial Times*, the *Economist* and the *Guardian*, to follow their usage. This practice explains the use of ‘bailout fund’ or ‘backstop fund’ instead of borrowing ‘Rettungsschirm’ into English or inventing some other new label.

As we have seen above (e.g. in extracts 14 and 23), politicians are not consistent in their use of language, which is more obvious in spontaneous speech, such as that which takes place in press conferences. In the context of EU politics, topics such as the financial crisis are not only a national issue. Politicians attend multilingual meetings and are thus exposed to different languages (and are often able to communicate in other languages as well). Politicians (and also journalists who report on political debates) are thus part of the discourse and are more or less consciously aware of the terms in use. A combination and mixing of metaphors may thus be quite normal (as also argued by Kimmel 2010 in respect of metaphor clusters in journalistic texts). Translators and interpreters too are part of the discourse, being exposed to discussions in several languages, and also to noticing terms used by their

fellow interpreters. Extract (26) is from the joint press conference between Chancellor Merkel and the French President Sarkozy, held in Berlin on 9 January 2012. It was interpreted consecutively.

(26a) Frage: Herr Präsident, Frau Bundeskanzlerin, sind die **Brandschutzmauern**, die Sie jetzt in Europa hochgezogen haben, **stark genug bzw. hoch genug**, um eine Insolvenz Griechenlands auszuhalten, ohne dass es dann zu Verwerfungen auf dem Finanzmarkt kommt oder weitere Länder aus dem Euroraum ausscheiden müssten?<sup>9</sup>  
(<http://archiv.bundesregierung.de/ContentArchiv/DE/Archiv17/Mitschrift/Pressekonferenzen/2012/01/2012-01-09-merkel-sarkozy.html>)

The website of the French government provides the transcript of this press conference in French, and we can see how this question had been rendered from German into French by the interpreter.

(26b) QUESTION: Monsieur le président, Madame la chancelière, les **pare-feu** que vous avez construits suffisent-ils pour **protéger** d'une faillite de la Grèce et éviter toute **contagion** à d'autres pays de la zone euro?<sup>10</sup>  
([http://www.rpfrance.eu/IMG/pdf/09\\_01\\_Conference\\_de\\_presse\\_conjointe\\_A-Merkel.pdf](http://www.rpfrance.eu/IMG/pdf/09_01_Conference_de_presse_conjointe_A-Merkel.pdf))

The generalisation to protection and the further elaboration around contagion can be interpreted as evidence of the interpreter's familiarity with the discourse used by the politicians and his/her own active involvement in the previous discussion. This final example also makes us aware of the wider context in which translation and interpreting are embedded. We are just at the start of exciting and much-needed transdisciplinary research into the interplay between institutional practices, the policies by which they are determined, the situational context in which a particular instance of translation or interpreting occurs, and the linguistic and discursive features evident in the product (for news translation and political institutions see Schäffner and Bassnett 2010, Schäffner 2012c). As we have seen, such investigations, conducted from the perspective of modern Translation Studies, can make a vital contribution to metaphor research as well.

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<sup>9</sup> "Mister President, Madam Chancellor, are the firewalls which you have erected in Europe strong or high enough to stop an insolvency of Greece and without risking disruptions on the financial market and other countries being forced to leave the euro zone?"

<sup>10</sup> "Mister President, Madam Chancellor, are the firewalls which you have erected sufficient to protect an insolvency of Greece and to avoid contagion to other countries in the euro zone?"

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# Translating figures in the domain of business and economics: A rhetorical role for terminology?

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**Abstract:** *In recent years scholars have shown renewed attention to the notion of translators' agency. Translators adjust texts to a new communicative situation and the choices they make at linguistic and textual level are the evidence of their mediation. In this article I will analyse a translation assignment completed by a class of advanced students of English for Specific Purposes enrolled in a postgraduate Degree Course in Foreign Languages and Literatures in Italy. The students were asked to translate an unsigned article from The Economist, which is a complex discussion of management practices in post-apartheid South Africa, displaying the use of figurative language in a subtly ironic way. Rhetorical devices play an important role in the popularised literature of Economics (Herrera-Soler; M. White 2012; Charteris-Black 2000, 2001, 2004; Henderson 2000, etc.). In the case of the text considered here, translators could choose to clarify or iron out some of the ambiguities of the ST, thus creating a more coherent specialised TT than the original. On the other hand, they may decide to highlight and reinforce rhetorical devices, making it hard for the reader to identify with some of the positions offered by the ST. This article focuses on the translation of terminology, which is given a peculiar figurative value in the ST. Technical terms are translated with comparable terminology, rather than substituted by paraphrases or more accessible terms. The reason behind this choice is strictly connected with the persuasive and evaluative role terminology is called to play in this text.*

**Keywords:** *metaphor studies; translation studies; LSP; economics and business discourse.*

## 1. Theoretical premise

The constant movement and contacts of people from different countries and cultures is producing changes in the way communication is structured and discourse is regulated. Changes affect the role translators are asked to perform: they produce 'mediated' types of discourse, in the sense that their knowledge and loyalties are split between different linguistic and cultural systems. Not only are translators called to adjust to the large variety of settings which correspond to varied contemporary forms of professionalism, but they must also provide diverse solutions for the specific conditions they have to work under. Such a diversification of translators' tasks and roles has brought about discussions about the kinds and degrees of mediation implied in given translation acts. The notion of translational 'mediation' has been defined as "the extent to which translators intervene in the transfer process, feeding their own knowledge and beliefs into their processing of a text" (Hatim, Mason 1997: 147). David Katan (2004) has stressed the cultural component of the act of mediation: discourse must be adjusted to new communicative situations by working on the discursive and pragmatic dimension of cross-cultural transfer. Questions of agency and accountability have become an integral part of the translator's task, and, conversely, decision-making processes have been debated both in methodological and theoretical terms. Discussions about mediation and degrees of translatorial

intervention have also posed the question of whether or not to limit, or at least define, the translator's space of manoeuvre, and often associated this problem with the limited nature of the very act of translation.

Dynamic conceptualisations of equivalence, dating back to Nida (1964), have demonstrated the impossibility for translation projects to reproduce all the components and nuances of their so-called originals. Functionalists have brought forward the argument that only certain aspects of the Source Text (henceforth ST) can be reproduced in accordance with specific translation goals, or *skopos* (Reiss 2000; Nord 1997; House 1997). Also André Lefevere's (1992: 7-8) early notion of translations as "slanted images" (standing for their source-texts), subject to discursive and cultural pressures, reminds us of the partial or metonymical nature of translation.

In my view these developments share a distrust in metaphorical models of representation, which are equated with the logic of substitution or replacement, that is, with the vertical, or paradigmatic dimension of language, in Jakobson's terms. Such a negative view seems to be based on a deep-rooted rejection of a traditional notion of equivalence, conceived as a symmetric process of signification, and reminiscent of structural models of language. Furthermore, metaphorical modes of translation appear to be incorrectly associated with prescriptive approaches, which limit the translator's autonomy and decision-making capacity; as a consequence, the applied dimension of translation may risk not taking into adequate consideration the crucial role of metaphorical processes.

## 2. Metaphor studies and LSP applications

Metaphor studies have been subject to a series of radical developments in the last decades. Traditionally considered figures of speech with a mere aesthetic function, metaphors have been better explained as fundamental cognitive processes, lying at the basis of the relation between thought and linguistic expression (Lakoff, Johnson 1980; Cameron and Low 1999; Dirven, Frank, Pütz 2003). According to Lakoff and Johnson, "the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one type of thing in terms of another" (1980: 5); in other words, metaphor is a process in which a source domain is mapped onto a target domain (Lakoff 1993). Normally, knowledge about concrete concepts is mapped onto knowledge about more abstract ones. According to Lakoff, ontological correspondences determine source and target combinations of elements but this perspective has been recently challenged by the definition of metaphors as "flexible dynamic processes" (Mouton 2012: 71), that is, elements created or modified in response to the emergence of new concepts in time.

The link between figurative language and specialised discourse has been thoroughly investigated in recent years. In this respect, the domain of Business and Economics appears to be a particularly rich field of research, and the pivotal role of metaphors has been highlighted by several studies (Boers 2000; Charteris-Black 2000, 2001, 2004; Henderson 1994, 2000; Lindstromberg 1991; McCloskey 1998). Metaphors have been observed to cover a variety of functions in this specific domain, which can be divided into the following categories:

- a communicative function;
- a discourse-constitutive function;
- a pedagogical function;
- a terminological gap-filling function.

The communicative function is not discourse-specific, and is strictly linked to the traditional view of metaphors as aesthetic devices. Its relevance in contemporary discourse analysis should not be undervalued: metaphors are not only employed in order to entertain readers, but also to influence and persuade them, by carrying attitudes and evaluations. Furthermore, the way in which figurative language, and specifically metaphors, are consciously or unconsciously used for conveying ideology has been explored by several scholars (Dirven *et al.* 2003; Goatly 2007). This function will be further delineated in the following paragraphs, and particularly in the section dedicated to the terminological gap-filling role of metaphors. In the meantime, it should be understood that the classification of different functions and roles of metaphors is a necessarily arbitrary act, employed exclusively for systematic purposes in this research. The different functions outlined here demonstrate in fact a high degree of overlapping.

The discourse-constitutive function is a characteristic trait of the language of scientific and social domains, as metaphors are used as vehicles to construct knowledge (Herrera-Soler; White 2012: 7-8). Human thought works analogically, and structures models and theories in the same way. Successful metaphors are those that encode abstract concepts in terms of concrete vehicles. For example, in the field of Business and Economics, images are taken from the domains of war, mechanics and biology, and are used to conceptualise Economic notions. These figures do not only permeate, but actively produce economic thinking: indeed, theories have been developed and enriched by means of metaphorical association (Resche 2012: 79-81). As already pointed out, metaphors are dynamic processes and this has conceptual consequences, since images reflect changing reality, depending on the state of knowledge of the time. For example, recent economic developments cannot be adequately illustrated with the adoption of metaphors belonging to the dominion of early biology, such as models of growth and the life cycle. Today these images are supplemented by concepts taken from developments in biomedical research or molecular biology, such as DNA structures (Mouton 2012: 70-71).

The pedagogical function of metaphors is especially apparent in the area of LSP, where these figures have become helpful teaching devices, not only in order to develop and expand vocabulary, but also to explain the concepts they refer to. Metaphors help students understand what is unknown by means of what is already familiar. The first step for LSP didactics is work on terminology, as terms correspond to scientific concepts and are usually structured in conceptual networks. As Resche has recently noticed, by uncovering these networks teachers help students discover the meaning relations among different concepts, and this is especially important for so-called theory-constitutive metaphors, which effectively outline the history of the evolution of Economic thought (2012: 78). As Charteris-Black has put it: “Teaching the names given to concepts – motivated by metaphor as they are – is more than simply a question of style: it necessarily entails the teaching of these concepts themselves and the basic assumptions which underlie them” (2000: 164).

Finally, the terminological gap-filling function of metaphors in LSP is one of the most interesting aspects in the field of metaphor studies. The fact that these figures often grow into technical terms is not news for terminologists, who have pointed to a lexical-supplementary function (cfr. Richardt 2005: 28; Goatly 2011: 154-177) whenever metaphors are employed to fill the void left by a lack of correspondence at terminological level (van Rijn-van Torgeren 1997; Temmerman 2000; Bowker

2000). The iconological dimension of these figures helps synthesise a notion or a conceptual area that could only be represented through a long description otherwise. Temmerman makes a distinction between two roles played by metaphors in the LSP fields: a didactic role, in which these figures are employed as illustrating tools (see the previous paragraph), and a “creative” function, in which metaphors are found to originate “neolexicalisations” (2000: 125), which, in a diachronic process of lexicalisation, are eventually accepted as technical terms.

Yet, the terminological gap-filling function of metaphors is not independent from the other functions mentioned above, and interactions may become problematic in some cases, such as translation activities.

### **3. Metaphor in translation: The case of business and economics specialised discourse**

The pervasiveness of metaphoric expressions in the discourse of business and economics has already been highlighted. Henderson (1982: 147) distinguished three types of metaphors in this domain: those functioning as stylistic devices (“image metaphors”); those to be found in normal language usage (“generic-level metaphors”); those displaying a heuristic function and instrumental for extending the domain of economics thinking (“specific-level metaphors”). Phenomena such as the lexicalisation of metaphors or their lexical-supplementary function, mentioned in the previous section, have been described as central features of this specific discourse, because of their relevance and frequency in comparison with other specialised types of discourse. As Smith has demonstrated, a large number of metaphorical terms and expressions have been accepted as technical terms in this domain: “Such terms as equilibrium, float, inflation, leakage, boom, liquidity and slump are now so familiar in the jargon of the subject that their metaphorical etymology is not immediately obvious” (1995: 45).

However, boundaries between the different typologies are not always so clear-cut and metaphors may serve different purposes at one and the same time, i.e. when “image metaphors” take on a specific terminological gap-filling function. Fuertes-Olivera and Pizarro-Sánchez (2002) discuss the double function of metaphors in economics textbooks, where they are discovered to play a crucial role as technical terms and rhetorical devices with aesthetic value at one and the same time. According to the authors, the aesthetic value of these figures increases readers’ motivation and helps them deal with their terminological specificity.

However, this becomes a complicated issue in specialised translation, since translators “[...] must cope with rendering the same or similar metaphorical scenario to perform [...] metaphors’] function as terms and, at the same time, with preserving their aesthetic role, thus surprising, delighting and interesting interactants” (Fuertes-Olivera, Pizarro-Sánchez 2002: 44). This is not just an instance of overlapping among different metaphorical functions. Rather, this is a case in which both referential and pragmatic meanings of metaphorical words or expressions must be captured and adequately transferred.

According to Fuertes Olivera (1998), translators of economics discourse tend to look for an exact equivalent of the original metaphor, rather than finding another metaphorical expression with a similar meaning, or replacing the original figure with an approximate literal paraphrase. Fuertes Olivera investigated this practice in two articles (published respectively with Velasco Sacristán 2001 and Pizarro-Sanchez

2002), concentrating on the effects produced on the target pole. They argued that literal equivalents of metaphorical expressions are deliberately singled out by translators as a strategy to reproduce at one and the same time the two main functions of metaphors, that is the technical and the stylistic functions. The new metaphorical expressions generated by this procedure are similarity-creating metaphors (Indurkha 1992), which in fact create a new similarity between the target and the source domains, and, at the same time, reproduce the novelty and vividness of the original metaphor.

Indurkha's distinction between similarity-based metaphors and similarity-creating metaphors plays a crucial role in these works. Similarity-based metaphors "[...] invite the reader to make a comparison between the source and the target, as the transference of meaning is based on some existing similarity between the two" (Indurkha 1992: 2), whereas similarity-creating metaphors include cases in which "[...] there are no similarities between the source and the target when the metaphor is first encountered. Yet, after the metaphor is assimilated [...], there are similarities between the two" (Indurkha 1992: 2). The first type of metaphors are used in order to highlight features which are already present in a certain source area, but which can be associated in different ways. Similarity-creating metaphors, on the other hand, create new links between domains displaying no previous similarities.

In other words, this use of metaphors focuses on a generative mechanism capable of producing new insights. Thanks to the high competence of translators in the specialised discourse of economics, new conceptual mappings are introduced into the target language – mappings which could not be originally produced by the target system itself, but could be introduced by means of a creative strategy of translation, capable of reproducing both the aesthetic and the referential function of specialised terms. In the long run, the result of this procedure may be the formation of new terms, or metaphorical neologisms, which integrate specific terminological areas.

These new terms appear to be particularly effective: literal and metaphorical meanings are simultaneously activated, readers perceive their figurative value, and yet recognise their terminological function. Readers' expectations are flouted, as these words produce a defamiliarisation effect. Against this background I shall argue that terminology may be called to play a significant rhetorical role in specific specialised discourses such as popular business discourse, which makes frequent use of an ideology-charged language, and persuasive and evaluative discourse markers. This opens up a series of problematic issues in translation, requiring a high degree of translatorial intervention, or mediation.

At this point I would address the applied dimension of translation, analysing a semi-specialised text published in 1995 in the Business and Economics section of the periodical *The Economist*, and submitted for translation to a class of advanced students of English for Specific Purposes in a Postgraduate Degree Course in Foreign Languages in Italy. In a previous article, which was more pedagogy-oriented, I analysed translators' choices, and concluded by pointing to the necessity of a more detailed investigation of the function of terminology in the ST and its rendering in translation (Agorni 2008: 200-201). A quick examination suggested that the technical terms employed in the ST were used not only in a referential sense, but also figuratively, in order to contribute to the text's ideological value. Significantly, terms were translated with comparable terminology, rather than being substituted by means of paraphrases or by employing more accessible terms for a semi-specialised

readership. Now I would like to argue that the reason behind this strategy has to do less with the semantics of these terms than with their covert persuasive and evaluative role, which contributes to the overall text's ideological value.

#### 4. A case study: Translation and metaphorical processing in a business and economics semi-specialised text

As said, the ST to be analysed is taken from a British semi-specialised periodical, *The Economist*. It would be reductive to consider it simply as 'specialised press' in the Business and Economics fields, as *The Economist* goes well beyond this: it spans several "culture and society" areas, covering politics, current affairs, science and technology world-wide. Its readership would seem to be heterogeneous in age and background, though it can be described as made up mainly of professionals working in the fields of Business and Economics as well as non-specialists readers with an interest in the above-mentioned subjects.

Texts taken from *The Economist* have been often employed for analysing specialised language in the field of Economics, although the degree of specialisation of popular economic discourse is not easy to define<sup>1</sup>. The aim of the magazine is to inform, and, at the same time, entertain readers, and this is the reason why investigation of metaphor use has proved extremely productive, as Skorczynska Sznajder and Piqué-Angordans have noticed:

The role that metaphor plays in this type of discourse has been described from both a linguistic and a cognitive perspective, concentrating on the variety of conceptual metaphor underlying the discourse, on its specific communicative functions and ideological import, on its importance as a cohesive device and its variance across different languages and cultures (2005: 113).

Thus we posit that figurative language plays a fundamental role in the pages of *The Economist*, and this is especially the case of the Business and Economics section, where metaphors are basic ingredients of a witty journalistic style, which exploits them as vehicles to popularise specialised concepts. The ST under scrutiny, published anonymously under the title "Ubuntu and other management tips", is no exception: irony pervades this text, and is accurately conveyed through stylistic and semantic choices, and a subtle use of figurative language.

The subject of the article is a discussion of what is presented as a new management practice in post-apartheid South Africa, which eventually will reveal itself as rather controversial. The author's refusal of racist ideology is never made explicit, but rather revealed by means of a series of distancing devices, such as irony, exaggeration, a characteristic use of quotations, etc. Further details will be provided in the next sections.

Translating this text was not an easy task for students who were native speakers of Italian. Starting from the assumption that the ideological position of the ST is

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<sup>1</sup> Skorczynska and Deignan (2006: 95-101) argued that the intended readership of a text and its primary purpose are fundamental factors in metaphor choice, probably as relevant as subject matter. Corpus analysis enabled them to identify the most important functions of metaphors in popular economic and business texts, so as to classify them as "generic metaphors" (those which are not genre-specific, but are general in the language, functioning as a "central organising device") and those filling terminological gaps. A third type of metaphors, playing a modelling role (those used to explore or extend economic thought) are not so numerous in this kind of text, whereas they are central devices in scientific Business and Economics discourse.

realised through a distinctive use of figurative language, I became interested in the ways in which translators could work on the degree of “specialisation” of their own target text (henceforth TT): students had several options depending on the type of ideological/cultural filters they decided to adopt, but first of all they had to decide whether or not to highlight the TT’s specialised function in the domain of Business and Economics. In other words, they had to choose either to reduce or reinforce the distancing or defamiliarising effect produced by the strategic use of rhetorical devices realised by the ST – particularly in all those cases in which terminology featured a strong metaphorical connotation. A single TT was eventually created for didactic purposes with the help of the teacher. ST and TT will be reproduced below in an attempt to analyse the strategies used to translate terminology. Paragraphs are numbered for ease of reference.

#### 4.1 The source text

##### Ubuntu and other management tips

1 South Africa’s quest to dignify black culture has reached white business. “*Ubuntu*” is the latest buzzword dreamt up by management theorists to describe what they say is a uniquely South African fusion of tribal tradition and modern management techniques. “If the social and oral vitality of black South Africans can be married to northern rationalism, in a high-performance *ubuntu*, a powerful new way to do business could emerge”, argues Nick Binedell, director of the Wits university business school in Johannesburg, in a recent issue of *Transformation*, a magazine published by Gemini Consulting.

2 *Ubuntu*, explains Mr Binedell rather opaquely, means: “I can only be me through your eyes.” A literal translation from the Xhosa and Zulu is a little more enlightening: the word means humanity, or dignity. The term *ubuntu* actually comes from the phrase “*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*”, which means “A human is human because of other people”. In short, the word implies the startling observation that if you treat people well they will perform better.

3 Which, given South Africa’s history of racial oppression, seems an odd concept to spring from the place. Still, South African managers, white as well as black, are keen to put the past behind them. Long rigidly hierarchical and paternalistic, South African companies have started to experiment with new management methods such as performance-related pay and decentralisation. Political pressure to increase the proportion of black managers from the current 2% or so has coincided with a realisation in management circles that blacks might know a thing or two about motivating their fellow blacks.

4 Reg Lascaris, who runs a big advertising agency, and Mike Lipkin, a marketing consultant, who have written a book on business lessons from Africa, point to a few examples. Pick’n Pay, a supermarket chain, has decentralised into 20 regional business units, with blacks in about half the management positions. Premier Group, a food company, has introduced “awareness programmes” to help employees bridge the divide created by apartheid; its former chairman, Peter Wrighton, introduced the idea of meetings to explain equity ratios and trading margins to his factory workers. Nampak, the country’s biggest packaging firm, now “mentors” black workers to help them into management jobs.

5 The trouble is that *ubuntu* seems to mean almost anything one chooses. According to Mr Binedell, it implies both a “customer-focused” organisation and the view of a company as an “integrated system”: South Africans, he thinks, “have an intuitive understanding of the essentially circular shape of holism.” Other advocates suggest it means “the importance of perception as opposed to reality” in managing change; or affirmative actions; or simply working together in teams. A cynic might say that it just means treating blacks less badly.

*The Economist*, March 18<sup>th</sup> 1995

## 4.2 The target text

### Ubuntu ed altri consigli per i manager

1 Il sogno sudafricano di rivalutare la cultura nera è penetrato fin nel mondo degli affari dei bianchi. ‘*Ubuntu*’ è l’ultima trovata che si sono inventati gli aziendalisti per descrivere ciò che, a loro dire, sarebbe una miscela tipicamente africana fra tradizione tribale e moderni principi di gestione aziendale. “Se la vitalità tipica della società e della cultura orale dei neri sudafricani potesse coniugarsi ad un razionalismo di tipo nordico, e dar vita ad un *ubuntu* ad alto rendimento, si potrebbe ottenere un nuovo e rivoluzionario modo di fare affari,” sostiene Nick Binedell, direttore della scuola di direzione aziendale della Wits University a Johannesburg, in un numero recente della rivista *Transformation*, pubblicata da Gemini Consulting.

2 *Ubuntu*, spiega in modo alquanto enigmatico Mr Binedell, significa “posso essere me stesso solo attraverso i tuoi occhi”. Una traduzione letterale dalla lingua Xhosa e Zulu è forse più comprensibile: la parola significa umanità o dignità. Il termine *ubuntu* deriva originariamente dalla frase “*Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu*” che significa “Un essere umano è umano grazie agli altri”. Per farla breve, l’espressione suggerisce la brillante scoperta del fatto che se le persone vengono trattate bene, rendono di più.

3 Data la storia di oppressione razziale in Sudafrica, sembra strano che un’idea del genere sia nata proprio qui. D’altra parte, i manager sudafricani, sia bianchi che neri, hanno una gran voglia di lasciarsi il passato alle spalle. Dopo esser state a lungo gerarchiche e paternaliste, le compagnie sudafricane hanno iniziato a sperimentare nuove strategie aziendali, come i premi di rendimento ed il decentramento. La pressione politica ad aumentare la percentuale di manager neri rispetto all’attuale 2% circa, è coincisa con l’intuizione geniale da parte dei gruppi dirigenti che i neri possono saperne qualcosa di come motivare la propria gente.

4 Reg Lascaris, che dirige una grande agenzia pubblicitaria, e Mike Lipkin, esperto di marketing, hanno pubblicato una raccolta di lezioni di economia dall’Africa, e indicano alcuni esempi. Pick’n Pay, una catena di supermercati, ha operato un decentramento in 20 unità regionali, in cui i neri occupano circa la metà delle posizioni manageriali. Premier Group, una compagnia di prodotti alimentari, ha iniziato dei “programmi di sensibilizzazione” per aiutare i dipendenti a superare le barriere create dall’apartheid; l’ex-presidente del gruppo, Peter Wrighton, aveva già introdotto dei seminari per illustrare i concetti di indice di redditività e margine operativo agli operai. Nampak, la principale società d’imballaggi del paese, oggi offre un vero e proprio “servizio di assistenza” per aiutare i dipendenti neri a raggiungere posizioni dirigenziali.

5 Il guaio è che sembra che *ubuntu* possa voler dire qualsiasi cosa. Secondo Mr Binedell, la parola implica sia un’organizzazione “a misura di cliente”, che il concetto dell’azienda come “sistema integrato”: a suo parere, infatti, i sudafricani “hanno una concezione intuitiva della forma essenzialmente circolare dei sistemi olistici”. Altri fautori dell’*ubuntu* suggeriscono significati diversi: “l’importanza dell’intuizione di contro alla realtà” nella gestione dei cambiamenti, le cosiddette azioni positive, o anche soltanto il lavoro di squadra. Cinicamente, si potrebbe dire che questo significa semplicemente trattare un po’ meno male i neri.

## 4.3. Comparative analysis

At first glance the article may appear to be an objective description of the new management technique called ubuntu. By reading it more carefully, however, it becomes clear that the new approach in fact carries with it an implicit racist attitude, and that the author is distancing himself/herself from its advocates.

Two main discourse types are juxtaposed in this text:

1. the overt discourse of Business and Economics, signalled by the presence of specialised terminology and by the use of “objective” stylistic choices (a frequent employment of nominalisation techniques, impersonal forms, quotations from authoritative sources, etc.).
2. the covert discourse of liberal humanism, or democracy. Its presence is manifested by the adoption of a subtle ironic argumentation that cuts through



the text, and is conveyed by a series of “subjective” stylistic and lexical choices (cfr. Agorni 2008).

Here, I am particularly interested in the way in which the use of terminology which goes beyond its conventional, referential function is rendered in translation.

The text is structured around the word *ubuntu*, which creates the most important lexical chain. *Ubuntu* is technically a loanword, and as such it is consistently printed in italics throughout the article – the same rule applies to the phrase this word has apparently been taken from: “*Umuntu, ngumuntu, ngabantu*” (paragraph – henceforth P. – 2, line 4-5).

The meaning of this word, however, is deliberately left ambiguous from the beginning to the end of the article, with an overall *crescendo* effect: from the apparently unquestioned introduction of *ubuntu* in the first paragraph, through a series of ambiguous definitions, eventually reaching a climax in the openly cynical final section, which demonstrates that this word does not bring new ideas to the table, rather, it is an empty sign.

Definitions are numerous and heterogeneous, alternatively provided by the anonymous author herself/himself, and through a series of quotations reported from (white) businessmen and experts in the field. The polyphonic effect is important, as it represents a relevant part of the distancing strategies characterising the whole text.

The term *ubuntu* is evidently used in a figurative way, in fact it is a good example of metaphor playing a terminological gap-filling role. Yet, the point of the author is to emphasise the ambiguity of the concepts lying behind this “specialised term”, which becomes clear only at the end of the article. Hence, this enigmatic metaphor becomes the main vehicle for the author’s irony – and carries her/his argument in favour of a more democratic view of economic/business relationships between black and white communities.

This term does not represent a problem in translation: its status as loanword is maintained (the word being italicised also in the Italian version), and so is its ambiguous connotation, highlighted by the use of reported speech to provide seemingly authoritative, but in fact enigmatic, definitions, as is the case in the ST. Further clarification does not appear to be necessary in translation. Hence, the TT solution confirms the terminological gap-filling role of the term *ubuntu*, capable of bringing together both the stylistic and the referential function of specialised terms, in a successful example of similarity-creating metaphor.

A detailed analysis of terminology demonstrates that *ubuntu* is not the only example of the way in which terminology is used as a vehicle of the ST author’s ideological stance. It will be demonstrated that this effort is not lost in translation; on the contrary, in a few examples the persuasive and evaluative value attached to technical terms even appears to be somehow reinforced.

For example, in P. 1 a certain number of terms which have to do with business and management are to be found: “white business” (line 1-2); “management theorists” (line 2-3); “management techniques” (line 4), and “to do business” (line 6-7). They belong to the same semantic area, are easy to understand and frequently used in specialised and non-specialised discourse. Their meaning can be taken at face value, and is translated through comparable terminology in Italian. The fact that the TT does not adopt loanwords to translate the concept of business and management – frequently used in the Italian domain of Business and Economics – contributes to laying further emphasis on the loanword *ubuntu*, and its central role in this text.

A series of terms dealing again with the concept area of management are found in P. 3: “South-African managers” (line 5); “new management methods” (line 4); “companies” (line 4); “black managers” (line 7), and “management circle” (line 8). Translators opt consistently for comparable Italian terminology. However, in the middle of the paragraph, terms which do not strictly belong to the same semantic chain are introduced, e.g., “performance-related pay” (line 6) and “decentralization” (line 6). Although they are not so complex as to represent a serious obstacle for a semi-specialised readership, they require a certain degree of effort, simply because they are not contextualised. Translators opt for corresponding Italian terms, “i premi di rendimento” and “il decentramento”, and do not introduce further contextual clues. These expressions are also accessible to an uninitiated Italian reader, who is given the impression of following an increasingly specialised argument, just as in the ST.

P. 4 displays another two cases of non-contextualised terminology: “equity ratios” (line 8) and “trading margins” (line 9). These terms, unlike the previous ones, are more difficult to understand for a non-specialised readership, further discouraged by the lack of an adequately disambiguating co-text, which could have signalled a particular use of terminology, but doesn’t; this strategy appears to sanction an overt figurative exploitation of terminology.

Thus, in spite of the fact that specialised terminology is increasingly used in a figurative way in the second part of this text, drawing a clear-cut line between literal and figurative meaning appears to be extremely difficult. Specialised terms provide an ambiguous “technical flavour”, which eventually produces a defamiliarisation effect that contributes to the overall ironic tone of the article. The denotative meaning of these terms is not discarded, but seems to acquire a sort of metaphorical connotation, and the two meanings, literal and figurative, appear to be simultaneously active. Once again, translators choose comparable terminology belonging to the area of Business and Economics: “indice di redditività” and “margine operativo”. Uninitiated readers will not be able to entirely grasp the concepts behind these terms, but will appreciate their technical “flavour” and connotative substance. The case of the expression “awareness programmes” (P. 4, line 6) is very similar, in spite of the fact that the phrase belongs to the domain of human rights and equal opportunities, which seems to be rather removed from the Business world. Translators maintain the same level of ambiguity, emphasised by the use of brackets: “programmi di sensibilizzazione”.

At the end of the paragraph, the word “mentor” (P. 4, line 10) is given special emphasis, and its metaphorical weight is signalled by the use of inverted commas. The Business world has revived this term, giving it the meaning of career advice rather than moral and personal support. In other words, “mentor” has been taken out of its original domain (Education), and applied to the context of new management theories through a metaphorical process, according to the term formation practice illustrated above. The result is a similarity-creating metaphor, particularly effective because it creates a new perspective by associating two fields, Economics and Education, which do not share much common ground. The unexpected view which opens up before the reader is in line with the defamiliarisation process already at work in the manipulation of the function of specialised terms. The TT solution, “un vero e proprio servizio di assistenza”, is interesting because it is the only case in which the translators decide to focus only on the referential meaning of this metaphor, the result being a long phrase which provides a fully contextualised

explanation of the ST expression. No comparable terms are available in the Italian domain of Economics, and the translators probably judged that the introduction of such an obscure (similarity-creating) metaphor would not be comprehensible for the Italian reader. They decided to reproduce the pragmatic meaning of the ST by means of a paraphrases and the result is a more coherent argumentation, the loss in terms of the evaluative weight of the original term being not only compensated, but also made more explicit by the addition of the adjectival cluster “vero e proprio”.

The final paragraph includes another two examples of technical expression: “‘customer-focused’ organizations” (P. 5, line 2-3) and “company as [...] integrated systems” (P. 5, line 3-4), whose metaphorical value and semantic indeterminacy is explicitly stressed by the use of inverted commas. Specialised terms increasingly perform a connotative function: here, they are used to qualify nouns (organisation; company), which are easy to understand, but become obscure once they are connected with such decontextualised qualifiers. Even if the specialised nature of these words is clearly perceived by readers, the terms become more and more difficult to define, a phenomenon in contrast with the fundamental function of terminology. The effect is a sense of defamiliarisation and displacement, which serves to highlight the emptiness of the definitions of *ubuntu*. The translators aim at reproducing the same effect, and opt for comparable specialised expression: “a misura di cliente” and “azienda come ‘sistema integrato’”.

Finally, another conventional expression, which can be considered part of the specialised Equal Opportunities area, rather than the Business and Economics domain, is “affirmative actions” (P. 5, line 7). Together with a number of other similar set phrases, it has recently entered Italian through direct transposition of the English formula. The translators’ hedging with “cosiddette” points to a non-literal, reinforced ironic effect: “le cosiddette azioni positive”.

It can be concluded that technical terms are gradually emptied of their specialised meaning, and end up becoming pure icons. The translators found strategies to reproduce this effect, which is the principal instrument of the text’s ideological message. They opted mainly for “literal transposition” of specialised terms, exploiting Italian comparable terminology. This strategy does not originate novel metaphorical expressions into the T culture, in the sense that the terms selected in the Italian translation are in fact conventional technical terms. Yet, it is the metaphoric use they are made of which is “novel”: it produces a defamiliarisation effect, flouting readers’ expectations, and it expands the interpretive possibilities of terminology by introducing figurative connotations.

## 5. Conclusion

A more extensive analysis of translatorial choices at textual/linguistic level has demonstrated elsewhere the extent of mediation necessary in the case of this complex, ideology-charged ST (Agorni 2008). The translators had to go through a delicate decision-making process, as they were called to take up a position even in those cases in which they chose to reproduce the ST author’s ideological stance, i.e. a systematic refusal of racism, expressed in a variety of ways.

Two main options were available for the translation of this text: either to stress the ironic and distancing components of figurative language, so as to make it difficult for the reader to identify with some of the (racist) positions offered by the ST, or

reducing irony and other distancing devices, so as to create a more coherent specialised TT than the original.

Choosing this second option, however, translators would have run the risk of subscribing to the racist ideology which still appears to be a (marginal) possibility implied by some traits of the ST, that is, those connected with the advocates of *ubuntu*. The strategy adopted in the TT is based on the decision to make it even harder for the Italian readership to identify with a potential racist position. The result is a maximal degree of translational mediation, coexisting with a minimal incidence of interventions: the structural components of the ST have been accurately reproduced, since translators privileged solutions which allowed for a high degree of uniformity between the ideological stance of the two texts. Discursive markers of irony have been not only maintained, but rather reinforced and even the characteristic polyphonic effect of the ST – created by reporting field experts opinions – has been reproduced, even if it could be argued that the TT's coherence and cohesion would have benefited by transforming a number of quotations into more conventional indirect speech.

The present article focuses on the translation of terminology. It has tried to demonstrate that this area cannot be considered in isolation, as if specialised discourse were exempt from overall textual considerations. Technical terms are an essential part of the textual practices characterising the ideological import of this text, and as such they have been treated in translation. The translators produced literal renderings of specialised terms by using comparable Italian terminology, rather than looking for more general and accessible terms, although this strategy does not seem to be in line with considerations about text reception. An article taken from the Business and Economics section of *The Economist* is intended for a readership made up of both experts and non-experts in the field of Economics; in fact, it has been classified as a semi-specialised text. Hence, the reason why terminology has been reproduced has more to do with the pragmatic dimension of the text as a whole, and therefore with its ideological value, than with denotative accuracy. Terminology plays a distinctively figurative function in this text, and translators have found ways to reproduce the two dimensions – rhetorical and 'specialised' – at one and the same time.

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# The conceptual metaphors MONEY IS A LIQUID and ECONOMY IS A LIVING ORGANISM in Romanian translations of European Central Bank documents

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***Abstract:** Metaphor is often associated with literature and less with specialised texts. Yet, according to Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory, our conceptual system is fundamentally metaphorical in nature and we can find metaphors in all types of texts. The texts translated in the European Union institutions, despite their specialised nature, contain a lot of metaphors, as metaphors structure our whole understanding of the world and are pervasive elements of thought and speech. The aim of this paper is to investigate the strategies for translating metaphorical expressions belonging to the conceptual metaphors MONEY IS A LIQUID and ECONOMY IS A LIVING ORGANISM in a corpus of texts translated at the European Central Bank. The corpus used comprises economic documents translated at the European Central Bank from English into Romanian (specialised documents such as monthly bulletins, annual reports, but also brochures and information material, totalling about 1,000,000 words for each language version). Using corpus analysis (the WordSmith software), the most frequent metaphorical expressions are identified in the source language and the target language. The most prevalent translation strategies that have been discovered during the course of the present study are retaining the metaphor, image shift and demetaphorisation. These findings are in line with the research on translating metaphor: Deignan et al. (1997), Pecican (2007a, 2007b). In Romanian, the conceptual framework of the examined metaphors is quite similar to the one in English. It has been noticed that in Romanian there is sometimes a tendency to demetaphorise the English economic metaphors, to add explanations or to replace them with other metaphors due to their novelty and cultural implications and the lack of a well-established economic vocabulary in Romanian, as is also noted by Dobrotă & Maftai (2002), Pârlog (2011), Pecican (2007a, 2007b).*

***Keywords:** conceptual metaphor theory, European Central Bank, Romanian, economic texts.*

## 1. Introduction

It has long been acknowledged that metaphors do not belong exclusively to the domain of literature: they are an integral part of both our everyday speech and professional discourse. Using corpus analysis, this paper explores strategies for translating metaphor in documents produced and translated at the European Central Bank (ECB). Using Lakoff & Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory, it focuses on two economic conceptual metaphors prevalent in the corpus of ECB texts – MONEY IS A LIQUID and ECONOMY IS A LIVING ORGANISM. The source and target languages chosen for the analysis are English and Romanian respectively. Romanian was chosen because it is a fairly new language in the European Union discourse; it is also a language with relatively little experience in developing its own economic vocabulary, having entered the global market in the 1990s. Therefore, the purpose was to explore what translation strategies ECB translators would adopt when dealing

with the figurative language of economics. The study is descriptive: it focuses purely on the translation product, without referring to the institutional requirements of the ECB regarding translation.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1. Conceptual metaphor theory

In this study, Lakoff & Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory will be employed. Unlike the traditional point of view, which states that metaphor is a linguistic phenomenon occurring at word level, whose function is predominantly rhetorical and aesthetic (e.g. Deignan 2005), Lakoff & Johnson's theory suggests that metaphor is a cognitive phenomenon and our entire thinking is organised metaphorically. Within the conceptual metaphor theory, Lakoff & Johnson (1980: 5) define metaphor as understanding and experiencing one concept in terms of another: an abstract, unfamiliar notion ("target domain") is referred to in words used to describe a familiar, concrete one ("source domain"). Those "domains of experience" are not isolated notions, but rather broad, holistic concepts that can be conveyed using a wide range of metaphorical expressions:

INFLATION IS AN ENTITY (AND AN ADVERSARY): "deal with inflation", "combat inflation" (Lakoff, Johnson 1980: 3).

ECONOMIC GROWTH IS HEALTH; CRISIS IS SICKNESS: "thriving industry", "economic paralysis", "crippling strike", "healthy economic climate", "economic revival" (Boers 1999).

GEOGRAPHICAL REGIONS ARE CONTAINERS FOR INDIVIDUALS. For example, "in the Euro area", "outside the Euro area", "non-euro area", "across the Euro area" (Muntigl 2002).

Therefore, this theory allows us to explore metaphors at textual level instead of word level, which suits the purpose of this study.

### 2.2. Economic metaphors in Romanian

The literature on metaphors in Romanian economic texts is scarce. However, there is budding research, especially in the context of the economic crisis, which has been a fruitful source of metaphors. Some of the authors who focused on metaphor in economic texts or on translating metaphor in Romanian are Dobrotă & Maftai (2002), Pârlog (2011), Pecican (2007a, 2007b).

Pecican (2007a) analysed, from a cross-linguistic perspective, conceptual metaphors in reports from the Romanian National Bank and the Bank of England. The author states that the "categories of conceptual metaphors are roughly the same in [both English and Romanian]: metaphors that conceptualise economy as a living organism and metaphors related to movement on a vertical axis, upwards or downwards" (Pecican 2007a: 85). She also noticed that economic processes are described in metaphoric terms in English more often than in Romanian (pp. 81-82). In another article, analysing conceptual metaphors in Romanian and English financial news reports, Pecican (2007b: 239) also reports similar findings.

Pârlog (2011) identified and explored metaphorical representations of the economic crisis in English and Romanian newspaper articles and her results prompted her to claim that:

Many metaphors are common to both the English and the Romanian economic discourse, [due to] significant resemblances in the conceptual metaphorical systems of the two languages. The authors of the English texts, however, often seem to take a grimmer view of the situation, and,



consequently, use more powerful language, creating more terrifying, depressing images than their Romanian peers.  
(Pârlog 2011: 70)

Therefore, according to the quote above, metaphors are subjective and culture-bound. Pârlog (2011) also found instances when some metaphorical patterns in one language do not have a correspondent in the other language. This poses a challenge when translating into languages which do not share the same conceptual framework.

Dobrotă & Maftai (2002), in the perspective of translation studies, analysed the translation of economic metaphors from English into Romanian, in order to examine the structure and different types of economic metaphors and to establish strategies for their accurate translation into Romanian. Their conclusions are that:

[i]t is obvious that in the Romanian translation the metaphorical terms were slightly ‘cooled down’, preserving more of their function of enlivening the usually plain specialized language rather than their form, which appears as too informal to be suitable in the context.  
(Dobrotă, Maftai 2002: 313)

The scholars claim that the specialised language of economics is unequally developed in the two languages: whereas English has a “soundly established vocabulary in the field, Romanian has just engaged on the path to integrating its economy, and therefore its specialized vocabulary, into the European and global economic system” (Dobrotă, Maftai 2002: 313). The most frequently used translation strategy encountered is the paraphrase or the conversion of metaphor to sense, “as such a safe approach ensures the appropriate perception of the ST message” (Dobrotă, Maftai 2002: 320).

The authors also observe that MONEY IS A LIQUID is one of the most widely used conceptual frames. This is relevant in the context of the present study, as in the selected corpus of texts from the European Central Bank this is a very frequently occurring metaphor. According to the findings of their study, the metaphorical expressions that they analysed were translated in two ways:

1. Same conceptual metaphor and equivalent linguistic expression:

*liquid assets* – *bunuri lichide* (“liquid goods”); *cash flow* – *circulația lichidităților* (“circulation of liquidities”), *flux de numerar* (“flow of cash”); *price freeze* – *înghețarea prețurilor* (“the freezing of the prices”);

2. Metaphor rendered into Non-Metaphor:

*keep your head above water, financially* – *a se menține la suprafață din punct de vedere financiar* (“keep oneself on the surface from the financial point of view”); *We pooled our funds for the venture* – *ne-am pus banii la comun* (“we put the money together”)

(Dobrotă, Maftai 2002: 315-316)

Several conclusions can be drawn from the research on metaphors in English and Romanian economic texts. Firstly, scholars have identified certain similarities between English and Romanian conceptual metaphors. However, since the Anglo-American economic system is currently the most influential one, the language used to describe this system is much richer and better developed than in the countries that opened their markets for international trade as recently as twenty years ago. According to the researchers’ findings, the English language has a larger stock of economic metaphors, whereas in the Romanian language stronger expressions are “toned down”, making them less emotional. The results of the literature review furnish clues to potential findings of the present study, and how to interpret them.

The fact that Romanian needs to invent terms and search for equivalents is likely to influence translation strategies and the translators' choices.

### 2.3. Strategies for translating metaphors

One of the aspects investigated by scholars is what strategies to adopt for translating metaphors. Deignan, Gabrys and Solska (1997: 354) suggest a classification of strategies for translating metaphors. This classification was adapted for the present study with examples taken from Pecican's (2007a: 75) work with the language pair English-Romanian.

- Same conceptual metaphor and equivalent linguistic expression: e.g. *economic growth* – *creștere economică*;
- Same conceptual metaphor but different linguistic expression: e.g. *a robust growth* – *o creștere viguroasă* (“vigorous growth”);
- Different conceptual metaphors and, consequently, different linguistic expressions: e.g. *to wind up* (a bankrupt company) – *a lichida* (o companie falimentară) (“to liquidate a company”);

The last strategy is added by Ennis (1998), cited in Pecican (2007a: 76):

- Metaphorical expressions in the source language rendered non metaphorically in the target language and vice versa: e.g. *to rocket* (prices, value of shares) – *a crește brusc* (“to grow suddenly”); *to plummet* (prices, value of shares) – *a scădea brusc/puternic* (“to decrease suddenly/strongly”)

These strategies have been identified and analysed in the corpus of texts from the European Central Bank.

### 2.4. Ideological and culturally-defined metaphors

There are two reasons why metaphor translation at the ECB was chosen as the focus of the present study. First of all, metaphors can be ideological: they have the potential to communicate and create meaning as well as to shape our perception of the world, to “express ideological and socio-cultural values” (Schäffner 2001: 215-216). Deignan (2005: 131), Erturk *et al.* (2011), Herrera Soler (2008) and Musolff (2000) argue that metaphor is biased and is used to present a particular ideological stance. Secondly, metaphor translation in the context of the European Union has cultural implications because some metaphors are culturally constrained (Barcelona 2000; Kövecses 2005; Lakoff, Johnson 1980). Bielenia-Grajewska (2009) analysed the metaphors in texts on investment banking and worked with English, German, Spanish and Polish. She states that metaphors play a very important role in this field, but they can vary from culture to culture. Moreover, as shown in Section 2.2., the speed with which economic vocabulary is evolving in the Anglo-American and Romanian cultures is very different. Ennis (1998: 24) states that in the field of economics there is a continuous process of developing new metaphors, which appear first in English (as the international language of finance). Drawing on this, it can be said that since the source and target cultures may not share the same conceptual

domains, retaining the conceptual metaphor and the metaphorical expressions will not always be possible.

Therefore, the main research question of this study would be the following: if political and economic texts contain a large number of metaphors, and if metaphors can be ideological and culture-bound, what strategies do translators use to produce accurate and clear translations in the multilingual and multicultural environment of the EU in which those documents will be read?

### **3. Corpus and methodology**

Since the objective of this paper was to gain an insight into the practices of dealing with figurative language at the ECB, a corpus of source and target texts produced and translated in the institution was compiled. The corpus comprises English and Romanian language versions of forty-five texts freely available online (<http://www.ecb.int/pub>) – monthly bulletins and annual reports for a specialist audience, as well as brochures for the general public. The sub-corpus of English source texts comprises about 1.25 million tokens and the sub-corpus of Romanian target texts contains about 1.34 million tokens. Since these are economic documents, they contain many figures, which were excluded from the corpus, bringing the total number of words in the sub-corpora down to 895,780 for English and 978,750 for Romanian.

The methodology used in the study combines quantitative methods (identifying word frequencies, occurrences of metaphors and translation strategies, and comparing patterns and trends) and qualitative methods (analysing translation strategies on the basis of a comparison between source and target texts). The corpus analysis method was employed as the main research method, to investigate the translation product; source and target texts were analysed to see how translators dealt with metaphors. Then, the translation strategies were classified using labels already established by scholars in the existing literature (see Section 2.3). For this research, the WordSmith software was used in order to identify occurrences of certain metaphorical expressions and their concordances and collocations.

#### **3.1. Advantages and disadvantages of using corpus analysis software**

Corpus-based Translation Studies is a widely-used area of research explored by many scholars such as Baker (1993; 1996); Kenny (2001); Laviosa (2002); Olohan (2004). It involves using computerised corpora to study translation. In this way, patterns, generalities, regularities are identified, and they can increase the global understanding of the researcher. However, before commencing the analysis, it is important to point out the main advantages and disadvantages of using corpora in studying the translation product. The advantages of using corpus analysis software are that it is more time-efficient and it offers functions that would not be possible to perform without computational tools – word frequency lists, collocations, etc. However, there are also some limitations: the researcher cannot easily identify metaphors because a particular conceptual metaphor can be instantiated by a large number of different lexical items and, thus, metaphors have to be identified manually, by using intuition, guessing: identifying figurative language implies the researcher's own understanding of metaphors (see Deignan 2005 for a discussion on educated guesses of an experienced researcher). Moreover, metaphors cannot be identified by external features and the “concordance” function does not tell us that

particular expressions have a metaphorical meaning. Thus, the researcher has to establish certain criteria and interpret the data thereby (see the next section for more details).

### 3.2. How to identify metaphors?

This is a question addressed by many scholars. Musolff (2004: 8) identifies two difficulties: 1) how to *find* metaphors in collections of linguistic data; 2) what to *count* as metaphors. He states that the researcher has to establish parameters and interpret the data. An approach would be to look for identifiable expression units that have metaphoric potential. Along the same lines, Deignan (2005: 9) speaks of the researcher's own understanding of metaphors. The Pragglejaz Group (2007: 2) mention the "lack of agreed criteria for metaphor identification" and the "lack of precision about what counts as a metaphor". They propose a method for identifying metaphors, comprising the following steps:

1. Read the entire text;
2. Determine the lexical units in the text;
3. Follow these steps:
  - a. For each lexical unit in the text, establish its meaning in context;
  - b. For each lexical unit, determine if it has a more basic contemporary meaning in other contexts than the one in the given context;
  - c. If the lexical unit has a more basic current-contemporary meaning in other contexts than the given context, decide whether the contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning but can be understood in comparison with it;
4. If yes, mark the lexical unit as metaphorical.  
(Pragglejaz group 2007: 3)

According to the Pragglejaz group, this method can be a reliable tool for identifying metaphorically used words in discourse. This method was employed during the research process.

## 4. Analysis and discussion

In this section, the most prevalent strategies adopted by the ECB translators when translating metaphors were identified and analysed, with examples from the texts. Metaphorical expressions belonging to the conceptual metaphors MONEY IS A LIQUID and ECONOMY IS AN ORGANISM are among the most frequent in the corpus of texts, which justifies them being chosen for analysis. They are also related to the economic crisis, which has triggered the creation of a large number of metaphorical expressions. It has been found that expressions belonging to the same conceptual metaphor have been translated using different strategies. The most common translation strategies used will be outlined below, together with examples from the corpus. They are: (1) retaining the conceptual metaphor and the metaphorical expression, (2) retaining the conceptual metaphor but changing the metaphorical expression, (3) demetaphorisation, (4) addition and (5) changing the conceptual metaphor and the metaphorical expression.

#### 4.1. Retaining the metaphor and the metaphorical expression

The metaphorical expressions and the conceptual metaphor (the same concept) are retained in the target text.

##### Example 1

The increase in **liquidity** as a result of the bond purchases made in the context of the Securities Markets Programme is fully **sterilised** by means of specific operations to **reabsorb** it, as it is not the aim of the programme to **inject** additional **liquidity** into the banking system.

Volumul suplimentar de **lichiditate** generat de achizițiile de obligațiuni efectuate în cadrul Programului destinat piețelor titlurilor de valoare este **sterilizat** în totalitate prin operațiuni specifice de **absorbție a lichidității**, dat fiind faptul că programul nu are drept obiectiv **injectarea de lichiditate** suplimentară în sistemul bancar.

(*Annual Report 2010*)

*Back translation:* The supplementary volume of **liquidity** generated by the bond purchases in the framework of the Programme dedicated to the securities markets is fully **sterilised** by specific operations of **absorbing liquidity**, having in view the fact that the programme's objective is not to **inject supplementary liquidity** into the banking system.

The word *liquidity* is one of the most prominent examples of the conceptual metaphor MONEY IS A LIQUID, together with the metaphorical expressions that derive from it (e.g. *flow, absorb, drain*, etc.). This first example is particularly interesting because, even if it is a short extract, it contains five instances of metaphorical expressions, demonstrating the dominance of metaphors in economic texts. In the example above, the metaphorical expressions belonging to the conceptual metaphor MONEY IS A LIQUID have been retained in the TT (*liquidity – lichiditate; sterilised – sterilizat; reabsorb – absorbție and inject – injectare*). In general, retention is the most prevalent strategy for this metaphor, as also demonstrated by Dobrotă & Maftai (2002).

##### Example 2

To a large extent, these developments reflect increased market concerns about the **health of the banking sector** and the stability of the financial system.

Aceste evoluții reflectă în mare măsură temerile sporite ale operatorilor în ceea ce privește **sănătatea sectorului bancar** și stabilitatea sistemului financiar.

(*Monthly Bulletin December 2008*)

*Back translation:* These evolutions greatly reflect the increased fears of operators regarding the **health of the banking sector** and the stability of the financial system.

The metaphorical expression *health* belongs to another frequently occurring conceptual metaphor in the corpus – ECONOMY IS A LIVING ORGANISM. The example above shows that the conceptual metaphor and the metaphorical expression are retained in the target text. However, throughout the corpus, this is not a frequent strategy when it comes to this particular metaphor (retaining the metaphor but changing the expression is more frequent).

Example 3

This section recalls the importance of **sound public finances**.

Această secțiune prezintă o nouă analiză a importanței **politicilor fiscale sănătoase**...  
(*Monthly Bulletin June 2008*)

*Back translation:* This section presents a new analysis of the importance of **healthy fiscal policies**...

In English, soundness is an aspect of health, which in the source text is exemplified by the metaphorical expressions *sound policies*, *sound growth*, *sound public finances*. In the Romanian texts, retaining this particular metaphorical expression is not a frequent strategy, as *sound* is mostly translated as *solid* (see section 4.2. below). However, despite the different translation strategies, the conceptual metaphor INSTITUTIONS / THE ECONOMY ARE LIVING ORGANISMS is retained at macro-level because *solidity* (*firmness*) is another aspect of health.

#### 4.2. Retaining the conceptual metaphor but changing the expression

This strategy implies that the conceptual metaphor is retained throughout the text, but the metaphorical expression is different in the source text and target text (there is an “image shift”, according to the typology established by Kurth 1997).

Example 4

Allowing the Member States a large degree of autonomy [...] offers scope for the beneficial effects of **healthy policy competition**.

Un grad înalt de autonomie decizională acordat statelor membre [...] permite manifestarea efectelor benefice ale unei **concurențe solide între politicile economice**.

(*How Euro Became Our Money*)

*Back translation:* A high degree of decision-making autonomy granted to member states [...] allows the manifestation of the benefic effects of a **solid competition between economic policies**.

Example 5

The ECB may make regulations, to ensure efficient and **sound clearing and payment systems** within the Community and with other countries.

BCE poate adopta regulamente în vederea asigurării eficienței și **solidității sistemelor de compensare și de plăți** în cadrul Comunității și în raporturile cu țările terțe

(*ECB - History, Role and Functions*)

*Back translation:* The ECB can adopt regulations to the view of ensuring the efficiency and **solidity of compensation and payment systems** in the framework of the Community and in the relations with third countries

The phrases *healthy policy competition* and *sound clearing and payment systems* reflect the conceptual metaphor ECONOMY IS A LIVING ORGANISM. In the Romanian target texts, the metaphorical expression used is *soliditate* (“solidity”), which could be understood in two ways. On the one hand, solidity can be viewed as an aspect of health: in English *firmness* is an aspect of health and *infirm* also means “unhealthy”.

Therefore, the conceptual metaphor is the same but the “image” or the expression to illustrate it is different. On the other hand, the metaphorical expression *solid* can be seen as an example of the conceptual metaphor ECONOMY IS A STRUCTURE, implying the “solidity” of a building.

Example 6

**Sound balance sheets, sound risk management**, and transparent as well as robust business models are key to strengthening the **financial soundness of banks** and their resilience to shocks

**Poziții bilanțiere solide, un sistem funcțional de management al riscurilor** și modele de afaceri transparente și viabile sunt esențiale pentru consolidarea **sănătății financiare a sistemului bancar** și a rezistenței acestuia la șocuri

(*Monthly Bulletin October 2009*)

*Back translation:* **Solid balance items, a functional system of risk management** and transparent and viable business models are essential for the consolidation of the **financial health of the banking system** and of its resistance to shocks.

With a few exceptions of metaphor retention (see above) the conceptual metaphor of SOLIDITY is consistent throughout almost all the target texts in both general and specialised corpora. However, inconsistencies can occur, sometimes even in the same document. In Example 6 it can be noticed that *sound* is translated in three different ways: *solid* (“solid”), *funcțional* (“functional”) and *soundness* is translated as *sănătate* (“health”), which points out the lack of consistency. This shows that there is no set and widely applicable way to translate either economic terminology or economic metaphors.

Example 7

On 7 December the ECB launched a **liquidity-absorbing fine-tuning operation** for an amount of up to €8 billion with a maturity of five days. [...] On the last day of the maintenance period, the ECB restored **balanced liquidity conditions** by conducting a **liquidity-draining fine-tuning operation** for an amount of €21 billion with a rate of 4.00%.

La data de 7 decembrie BCE a lansat o **operațiune de reglaj fin (ORF) cu scopul de a absorbi excedentul de lichiditate** pentru o valoare de 8 miliarde EUR cu scadență de cinci zile. [...] În ultima zi a perioadei de constituire, BCE a restabilit **condiții relativ echilibrate de lichiditate** prin efectuarea unei **operațiuni de reglaj fin cu scopul de a absorbi excedentul de lichiditate** pentru o valoare de 21 miliarde EUR și la o rată a dobânzii de 4,00%.

(*Monthly Bulletin March 2008*)

*Back translation:* On 7 December the ECB launched a **fine-tuning operation (ORF) with the aim of absorbing the surplus of liquidity** for a value of 8 billion EUR with a maturity of five days. [...] On the last day of the maintenance period, the ECB restored **relatively balanced liquidity conditions** by conducting a **fine-tuning operation with the aim of absorbing the surplus of liquidity** for a value of 21 billion EUR and for an interest rate of 4.00 %.

In Example 7 above, when it comes to the conceptual framework, the Romanian target text exhibits coherence at text level (the English expressions *absorb* and *drain* are translated as *absorb*). The conceptual framework (MONEY IS A LIQUID) is retained throughout the Romanian text and, as a whole, is present at macro-level. However, in the source text two different metaphorical expressions are used: *drain* and *absorb*, which in the target text are both rendered as *a absorbi* (“to absorb”). Thus, at linguistic level, there is an image shift.

Example 8

Over the next few days, the ECB **absorbed** around €150 billion on a daily basis through a series of **liquidity-absorbing fine-tuning operations**.

În următoarele zile, BCE **a drenat** aproximativ 150 miliarde EUR zilnic prin intermediul unor **operațiuni de reglaj fin cu scopul de a absorbi excedentul de lichiditate**.

(*Monthly Bulletin March 2008*)

*Back translation:* In the next days, the ECB **drained** approximately 150 billion EUR daily through **fine-tuning operations with the aim of absorbing the surplus of liquidity**.

Example 9

On the last day of the maintenance period the ECB **launched a liquidity-absorbing fine-tuning operation and absorbed** €23.5 billion.

BCE **a inițiat o operațiune de reglaj fin pentru a drena excedentul de lichiditate, absorbind** 23,5 miliarde EUR în ultima zi a perioadei de constituire a RMO.

(*Monthly Bulletin June 2008*)

*Back translation:* The ECB **initiated a fine-tuning operation to drain the surplus of liquidity, absorbing** 23.5 billion EUR on the last day of the maintenance period of the RMO.

The metaphorical expression *to absorb liquidity* is retained in the TT most of the time; hence, the strategy used in examples 8 and 9 is rare but important. The expression *absorb* in English is translated both as *a absorbi* (“to absorb”) and *drena* (“to drain”) at the same time in the Romanian language version, often in the same sentence. Just like with the metaphorical expression *sound* that was translated as both *healthy* and *solid*, this is an example of image shift – the conceptual metaphor remains the same (MONEY IS A LIQUID), but the metaphorical expressions seem to be “interchangeable” in the target text, even at text level in the same document.

### 4.3. Metaphor into non-metaphor/ Demetaphorisation

This strategy consists in replacing the source text metaphor with a non-metaphoric expression in the target text (the conceptual metaphor and metaphorical expressions are not retained) and using a paraphrase (a phrase without metaphoric potential).

Example 10

Specific operations will be conducted to **reabsorb the liquidity injected** through the Securities Markets Programme.

derularea unor operațiuni specifice vizând **reabsorbția lichidității furnizate** prin intermediul programului destinat piețelor titlurilor de valoare.

(*Annual Report 2010*)



*Back translation:* the performance of specific operations targeting the **reabsorbtion of the liquidity provided** through the programme dedicated to the securities markets.

In the example provided above, there is one instance of non-retention of the metaphor – when the metaphorical expression *injected* is translated by *furnizate* (“provided”). In this particular instance, the conceptual metaphor MONEY IS A LIQUID is not retained and the metaphorical expression is demetaphorised. However, at text level, it can be noticed that the conceptual framework is the same in the source text and the target text (reflected by the metaphorical expressions *sterilise – steriliza, reabsorb – reabsorbþie, liquidity – lichiditate*). Thus, it can be said that in only one instance the metaphor is demetaphorised, but only from a linguistic point of view, thus at micro-level.

#### Example 11

The ongoing “**health check**” of the EU common agricultural policy.

**evaluarea** politicii agricole comune a UE, aflată în prezent în plină desfășurare [...]  
(*Monthly Bulletin June 2008*)

*Back translation:* **the evaluation** of the common agricultural policy of the EU, currently in full swing [...]

This excerpt reflects the conceptual metaphor POLICY (which is a part of the broader economy) IS AN ORGANISM or HEALTHY IS GOOD. In the example above, the Romanian translation does not have inverted commas around the expression, because the metaphor is demetaphorised. The English *health* metaphor is simply replaced by the word *evaluarea* (“evaluation”). In the Romanian target text a non-metaphorical solution was adopted because in this case, if the metaphor were retained, it would not be perceived as belonging to the economic field in Romanian and the figurative language is not deemed appropriate in this context.

#### 4.4. Addition

This strategy implies retaining the metaphor and adding elements to it, in order to provide a further explanation.

#### Example 12

The positive flow of loans in the second half of the year may have enabled firms to rebuild their **liquidity buffers** towards the end of the year.

Fluxul pozitiv al împrumuturilor din semestrul II 2010 a permis probabil firmelor să își reînnoiască **rezervele de lichiditate cu rol de tampon** spre sfârșitul anului  
(*Annual Report 2010*)

*Back translation:* The positive flow of loans in semester II 2010 probably allowed firms to renew their **liquidity reserves with a buffer role** towards the end of the year.

In this excerpt two conceptual metaphors are present: MONEY IS A LIQUID and INSTITUTIONS ARE BUILDINGS. The former is kept in Romanian (*lichiditate*), but there is an addition: *liquidity buffers – rezerve de lichiditate cu rol de tampon* (“liquidity reserves with a buffer role”). The additions are *rezerve* (“reserves”) and *cu rol de* (“with the role of”). An explanation for the use of this strategy is that in the target

culture the word *tampon* has connotations which would make it sound inappropriate without additional information (especially if used in the plural – *tampoane*, which is an item of female hygiene), so it has to be accompanied by another term in order to sound adequate for the specific context (this is why *rezerve* and *cu rol de* have been added).

#### 4.5. Different conceptual metaphors and metaphorical expressions

This translation strategy refers to the fact that in some cases, the conceptual metaphor and the metaphorical expression are not retained; they are translated by different metaphorical expressions, resulting in (or due to) different conceptual metaphors.

##### Example 13

Suppose that a central bank **drops** a certain amount of “**helicopter money**” (i. e. money distributed evenly to everyone)

Să presupunem că o bancă centrală **injectează** pe piață o anumită sumă de „**bani-cadou**” (adică bani distribuiți în mod egal tuturor) (*Monthly Bulletin September 2009*)

*Back translation:* Let us suppose that a central bank **injects** on the market a certain amount of “**money-gift**” (that is money equally distributed to everybody).

The metaphorical expression *helicopter money* is new in English as well (it is also explained in English and placed between inverted commas). A different image (*bani-cadou* – “gift money”, “money offered as a gift”) was used. The translator opted for a particular expression which led to a change in the conceptual metaphor – not necessarily because the two languages/cultures conceptualise things differently, but because a literal translation would not trigger the same associations as the metaphor triggers in the source text for the source readers. Thus, in the target text another image was used, that better renders the meaning and connotations of the metaphorical expression in the source text. Another metaphor that can be noticed in this extract is MONEY IS AN OBJECT (**drops a certain amount of money**), which in the target text is replaced by another conceptual metaphor, MONEY IS A LIQUID (**injectează pe piață o anumită sumă de bani** – literally, “injects on the market a certain amount of money”). A reason for adopting this strategy is that, according to Dagut (1976), a metaphor that is effective in a language can become unusual, even unintelligible in another language if it is translated literally and not adapted to the target culture. Moreover, it can be observed that MONEY IS A LIQUID is a prevalent metaphor in the corpus of texts and operates at text level.

##### Example 14

minus future predetermined **net drains on foreign currency holdings** owing to repurchase and forward transactions.

minus **tragerile nete viitoare din deținerile în valută** datorate operațiunilor reversibile și forward

(*Annual Report 2009*)

*Back translation:* minus **net future drawings from holdings** in foreign currency owing to reversible and forward operations.

##### Example 15

The recovery was supported mainly by exports, on the back of robust external

Revirimentul a fost susținut în principal de exporturi, datorită cererii externe robuste, și

demand, and the rebuilding of inventories after a **significant drain on inventory levels** in 2009.

de refacerea **stocurilor** după **scăderea substanțială** a acestora în anul 2009 (*Annual Report 2010*)

*Back translation:* The recovery was mainly supported by exports because of the robust external demand and the remaking of **stocks** after their **substantial decrease** in the year 2009.

In Examples 14 and 15, the metaphorical expression *drain*, with the underlying conceptual metaphor MONEY IS A LIQUID, is not retained at sentence level. It is replaced by a different conceptual metaphor: MOVEMENT ALONG A VERTICAL LINE. In Example 14 *drain* is translated as *trageri* (“drawings”) and in Example 15 as *scădere* (“decrease”). These are two different meanings of the term *drain* and both metaphorical expressions reflect the underlying conceptual metaphor related to MOVEMENT (UP/DOWN).

## 5. Conclusion

This paper has examined strategies that translators at the European Central Bank use for translating economic metaphors from English into Romanian. Using Lakoff & Johnson’s conceptual metaphor theory and corpus analysis, it focused on two dominant conceptual metaphors – MONEY IS A LIQUID and ECONOMY IS A LIVING ORGANISM. It has been found that five strategies were the most frequent: retaining the metaphor and the metaphorical expression, retaining the metaphor but changing the expression (image shift), demetaphorisation, addition and changing the conceptual metaphor and the metaphorical expression. The most prevalent ones among these five are retaining the metaphor and image shift. This might suggest that generally, the conceptual frameworks of both languages for the analysed metaphors are similar, but English economic terminology is more developed and sometimes different metaphorical expressions are used in the source text and target text. Inconsistencies in translating metaphorical expressions were found even at sentence level, which points out that the economic vocabulary in the Romanian language is still evolving. Moreover, some metaphors were weakened, changed or demetaphorised because of their novelty and the cultural implications.

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# **“Tenere alta la bandiera del socialismo con caratteristiche cinesi”: Discorso politico cinese e linguaggio figurato in un’ottica traduttiva**

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***Abstract:** La progressiva costruzione di una nuova realtà politica, socio-economica, culturale e militare nella Cina post-maoista (1976-), insieme al superamento o alla rielaborazione di alcuni istituti del recente passato, ha innescato inevitabilmente la formazione di un nuovo linguaggio e di nuove strategie retoriche nel discorso politico. Uno dei piani di analisi più interessanti del discorso politico cinese contemporaneo è rappresentato dall’uso del linguaggio figurato, soprattutto della metafora, in cui strategie retoriche tipiche del discorso marxista-leninista si affiancano alla significativa ripresa di riferimenti e stilemi tradizionali (tratti soprattutto dal pensiero confuciano), nonché all’apertura verso il più moderno linguaggio della globalizzazione. La specificità di tale linguaggio e dei suoi strumenti retorici emerge in modo particolarmente evidente nella traduzione verso le lingue occidentali (Zhang 2008, 2009). Utilizzando come case study la prolusione di Hu Jintao al XVIII Congresso Nazionale del PCC, il presente contributo si propone di individuare le parole chiave metaforiche, i principali domini concettuali e le metafore concettuali (Lakoff, Johnson 1980/2003) osservabili nel discorso politico cinese contemporaneo, per poi commentare alcuni esempi significativi di metafora ed esaminarne le funzioni discorsive. In ultima analisi, il presente contributo si propone di delineare un possibile modello di processo traduttivo alla luce di fattori quali tipologia e funzione testuale, dominante e lettore modello (Osimo 2004).*

***Parole chiave:** discorso politico, linguaggio figurato, metafora, Hu Jintao, traduzione.*

## **1. Il discorso politico cinese: lo stato dell’arte**

Nella critica occidentale lo studio del linguaggio e del discorso politico è un filone di ricerca ampiamente sperimentato (Fairclough 1989; Wilson 1990; Feldman, Landtsheer 1998; Chilton, Schäffner 2002; Chilton 2004, ecc.). L’interesse per questo ambito entra a pieno titolo anche in numerosi studi sul linguaggio figurato, in particolare sulla metafora (Kövecses 2002; Charteris-Black 2004, ecc.), nonché in relazione ai *translation studies* (Schäffner 2004; Schäffner, Bassnett 2010, ecc.). In tempi relativamente recenti, inoltre, sono apparsi lavori che mettono al centro della riflessione proprio l’impiego del linguaggio metaforico nella sfera pubblica (Musolff 2004; Beer, Landtsheer 2004; Carver, Pikalo 2008, ecc.).

Per quanto riguarda gli studi dedicati specificatamente all’ambito cinese, se da un lato esiste una vastissima letteratura sulla retorica classica, dall’altro lo studio del linguaggio e del discorso politico moderno e contemporaneo rappresenta un campo di ricerca piuttosto recente. Gli studi in lingua cinese vengono pressoché unanimemente fatti iniziare con i lavori pionieristici di Tian Hailong 田海龙 (2002), proseguiti da Li Dekun 李德昆 (2010). Ciononostante, si inserisce in questo contesto anche un certo numero di studi in lingua inglese, soprattutto il lavoro di Hodge e Louie (1999), una parte del quale analizza il discorso politico cinese contemporaneo

(di seguito DPCC) in una prospettiva semiotica, e quello di Ji Fengyuan (2004), che enuclea le caratteristiche dell’“ingegneria linguistica” del periodo maoista (1949-1976). Salem e Wu (2007) hanno operato un’interessante applicazione degli strumenti di analisi testometrica allo studio delle prolusioni dei congressi del PCC. Meritano una menzione gli articoli di Qian Gang (2012) sulla natura e sull’evoluzione delle “parole d’ordine” tipiche del DPCC, pubblicati a ridosso del XVIII Congresso nell’ambito del *China Media Project*. Nel settore sinologico italiano si segnalano gli studi di Lavagnino (2001), Stafutti & Ajani (2008) e Bulfoni (2010). Il linguaggio figurato nel dibattito politico cinese, così come lo studio dei problemi che emergono nella sua traduzione, rimane per il momento un ambito pressoché interamente trascurato: un’eccezione è costituita dagli studi di Zhang Li 张犁 (2008, 2009), il cui merito risiede proprio nell’attenzione per le questioni relative alla traduzione (in questo caso verso l’inglese) del linguaggio politico cinese, con particolare riferimento alla resa di alcune figure retoriche.

## 2. Case study, metodologia e obiettivi

Il testo utilizzato nel presente studio è la trascrizione integrale del rapporto pronunciato l’8 novembre 2012 da Hu Jintao 胡锦涛 – all’epoca Segretario Generale del Comitato Centrale del Partito Comunista Cinese (PCC) e Presidente della Repubblica Popolare Cinese – all’inaugurazione del XVIII Congresso Nazionale del PCC (8-14 novembre 2012), e intitolato *Jian ding bu yi yanzhe Zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi daolu qianjin, wei quanmian jiancheng xiaokang shehui er fendou* 《坚定不移沿着中国特色社会主义道路前进，为全面建成小康社会而奋斗》 (Avanzare senza esitazione lungo la strada del socialismo con caratteristiche cinesi, lottare per la costruzione di una società del moderato benessere sotto ogni aspetto) (Hu 2012). Il Congresso Nazionale si è tenuto a intervalli irregolari fin dalla fondazione del PCC nel 1921, ma solo a partire dal XI Congresso del 1977 – il primo dopo la morte di Mao Zedong 毛泽东 (1893-1976) e la fine della Rivoluzione Culturale (1966-1976) – iniziò a essere convocato con cadenza quinquennale. Sempre dall’XI Congresso in poi, inoltre, il rapporto (*baogao* 报告) introduttivo pronunciato dal Segretario Generale del Comitato Centrale assunse una lunghezza pressoché fissa, intorno ai 30.000 caratteri cinesi (Qian 2012). La prolusione riassume il lavoro svolto a vari livelli dal Partito nel quinquennio appena conclusosi e fissa le linee guida del suo operato nell’immediato futuro. Oltre a rivestire un significato cruciale sul piano politico, questa particolare forma di discorso ufficiale presenta importanti implicazioni sul piano linguistico. La scomparsa o la rielaborazione di espressioni convenzionali legate a uno specifico discorso politico, nonché l’emergere di espressioni nuove, costituiscono infatti altrettanti segnali dell’evoluzione della linea politica del PCC e dello spostamento degli equilibri in seno al Partito stesso.

Prendendo spunto in particolare dallo studio di Musolff (2004) e riprendendo il concetto di dominio concettuale (*conceptual domain*) di Lakoff e Johnson (1980/2003), si è proceduto innanzitutto a un’attenta lettura del testo al fine di individuare le parole chiave (*keywords*) appartenenti a vari domini concettuali, registrandone le occorrenze (*tokens*) ed effettuando una successiva verifica, ovvero selezionando tra queste ultime soltanto quelle utilizzate in funzione metaforica. In questa analisi critica della metafora (Charteris-Black 2004), la fase successiva

all'*identificazione* è stata quella dell'*interpretazione*, ovvero l'individuazione delle metafore concettuali (*conceptual metaphors*) (Lakoff, Johnson 1980/2003), per poi passare alla fase di *spiegazione*, con l'identificazione delle funzioni discorsive, anche alla luce dello studio di Hodge & Louie (1999). Di seguito saranno quindi selezionati e commentati alcuni passi del prototesto<sup>1</sup> contenenti espressioni metaforiche particolarmente significative, accompagnati dalla traduzione ufficiale in inglese. Saranno esplorate, infine, le fasi preliminari della riflessione traduttologica attraverso l'identificazione di tipologia e funzione testuale, dominante e destinatario dell'atto comunicativo di prototesto e metatesto (Osimo 2004), al fine di delineare un possibile modello di processo traduttivo.

### 3. Discorso politico cinese contemporaneo e linguaggio metaforico

Prima di esaminare alcuni esempi di metafora contenuti nel testo analizzato è opportuno soffermarsi brevemente sui tratti caratteristici del DPCC. Innanzitutto, tale linguaggio pone particolare enfasi sulla propaganda attraverso l'uso di espressioni standardizzate (*tifa* 提法), che fungono anche da segnali politici e che ne rispecchiano la natura spiccatamente formulare, a livello sia lessicale che segmentale (v. la regolare ripetizione di determinati schemi sintattici) (Qian 2012). In confronto al linguaggio estremamente prescrittivo tipico dell'epoca maoista, inoltre, si nota un uso più cauto degli slogan (*kouhao* 口号), mentre è frequentissimo il ricorso a espressioni di quattro caratteri (*sizi jiegou* 四字结构) – soprattutto *chengyu* 成语 e costruzioni VOVO – e costruzioni classicheggianti, nonché, in misura leggermente minore, neologismi semantici e prestiti da linguaggi settoriali (Bulfoni 2010). Particolarmente rilevante ai fini del presente lavoro, infine, è l'uso massiccio della metafora, che rispecchia la predilezione per un linguaggio evocativo (*yihui* 意会), così come il ricorso a dispositivi retorici quali antitesi e parallelismo (Zhang 2009).

L'individuazione delle parole chiave utilizzate in funzione metaforica e il loro successivo raggruppamento in domini concettuali ha permesso di tracciare la seguente classificazione:

- viaggio/navigazione<sup>2</sup>: *luxian* 路线 (percorso), *daolu* 道路 (strada), *zou* 走 (percorrere), *fangxiang* 方向 (direzione), *fangzhen* 方针 (orientamento), *zhidao* 指导 (guidare, guida), *jinbu* 进步 (avanzare, avanzamento), *jiakuai* 加快 (accelerare), *maishang* 迈上, *qianjin* 前进, *tuijin* 推进 (avanzare), ecc. (74 parole chiave per un totale di 414 occorrenze<sup>3</sup>);
- costruzione: *jianshe* 建设, *jiancheng* 建成 (costruire), *jianli* 建立 (fondare), *jichu* 基础 (fondamento), *jidi* 基地 (base), ecc. (23 parole chiave, 362 occorrenze);

<sup>1</sup> In questo contributo, seguendo la terminologia proposta da Popović (2006), saranno utilizzati i termini “prototesto” e “metatesto” in luogo di “testo di partenza” e “testo di arrivo”.

<sup>2</sup> Benché nei testi cinesi che riprendono il concetto di dominio concettuale i domini “viaggio” e “navigazione” siano generalmente tenuti distinti, si è deciso per comodità di farli confluire in un'unica categoria.

<sup>3</sup> Data la lunghezza relativamente contenuta del testo in esame (29.067 caratteri cinesi) è stato possibile procedere alle rilevazioni utilizzando semplicemente gli strumenti offerti dal programma di trattamento testi Pages, invece di ricorrere a software per le concordanze impiegati nell'analisi testometrica di testi cinesi (ICTCLAS, ecc.).

- guerra: *qizhi* 旗帜 (bandiera), *dailing* 带领 (condurre), *qianlie* 前列 (prima linea), *shengli* 胜利 (vincere, vittoria), *fendou* 奋斗 (lottare, lotta), *zhanlüe* 战略, *jiefang* 解放, ecc. (41 parole chiave, 181 occorrenze);
- corpo umano: *liliang* 力量 (forza), *shengming* 生命 (vita), *shengmingli* 生命力 (vitalità), *jiaqiang* 加强 (rafforzare), *jingli* 精力 (energia), *huoli* 活力 (vigore), *jiankang* 健康 (salute), ecc. (23 parole chiave, 252 occorrenze);
- pianta: *ben* 本, *genben* 根本 (radice), *chengguo* 成果 (frutto), ecc. (9 parole chiave, 45 occorrenze);
- casa/famiglia: *tongbao* 同胞 (compatriota), *jiayuan* 家园 (casa, madrepatria), *ernü* 儿女 (figli e figlie), *pengyou* 朋友 (amico), ecc. (8 parole chiave, 31 occorrenze);
- macchina: *dongli* 动力 (potenza), *jizhi* 机制 (meccanismo), *yunxing* 运行 (essere in moto), *gongneng* 功能 (funzione) (4 parole chiave, 57 occorrenze);
- gioco degli scacchi: *quanju* 全局 (situazione generale), *jumian* 局面 (fase), *buju* 布局 (posizione), ecc. (6 parole chiave, 32 occorrenze);
- altro: *taijie* 台阶 (scala), *shishi* 史诗 (epica), *huida* 回答 (risposta), ecc. (14 parole chiave, 32 occorrenze).

#### 4. Il linguaggio metaforico nella relazione di Hu Jintao al XVIII Congresso del PCC

Già nella frase di apertura della prolusione, in cui il Segretario Generale Hu Jintao enuncia sinteticamente il tema del XVIII Congresso, è possibile individuare chiaramente alcuni dei principali domini concettuali sopraelencati:

高举中国特色社会主义伟大旗帜，以邓小平理论、“三个代表”重要思想、科学发展观为指导，解放思想，改革开放，凝聚力量，攻坚克难，坚定不移沿着中国特色社会主义道路前进，为全面建成小康社会而奋斗。

The underlying theme of the congress is to hold high the great banner of socialism with Chinese characteristics, follow the guidance of Deng Xiaoping Theory, the important thought of Three Represents and the Scientific Outlook on Development, free up the mind, implement the policy of reform and opening up, pool our strength, overcome all difficulties, firmly march on the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and strive to complete the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects<sup>4</sup>.

Le espressioni *gaoju... qizhi* 高举……旗帜 (tenere alta la bandiera), *jiefang* 解放 (liberare) *gongjian* 攻坚 (assaltare) e *fendou* 奋斗 (lottare) si riferiscono tutte all'ambito militare; il dominio concettuale del viaggio è rappresentato da *zhidao* 指导 (guida), *yanzhe* 沿着 (seguire), *daolu* 道路 (strada) e *qianjin* 前进 (avanzare); *jiancheng* 建成 (costruire) rientra nel dominio della costruzione; *liliang* 力量 (forza), infine, in quello del corpo umano. Si può notare come queste poche righe contengano un'elevatissima densità di metafore concettuali (rispettivamente IL PARTITO È UN ESERCITO; LA REALIZZAZIONE DEL SOCIALISMO È UNA STRADA; IL PARTITO È UN

<sup>4</sup> La traduzione inglese dei passi qui riportati è tratta dalla versione inglese ufficiale della relazione di Hu Jintao. Il testo cinese e la sua traduzione inglese sono stati pubblicati entrambi sul sito web dell'Agenzia di Stampa Xinhua (*Xinhua tongxunshè* 新华通讯社), principale agenzia di informazione governativa della PRC. L'autore della traduzione inglese è anonimo, mentre rimane poco chiaro il ruolo dell'"editor" Yang Lina, che figura nella pagina web della versione inglese.



ESSERE VIVENTE; LA SOCIETÀ È UN EDIFICIO) che strutturano profondamente il discorso di Hu. La rilevanza di tali metafore è testimoniata dal fatto che una parte di esse compare già nel titolo della prolusione, e le stesse espressioni si ripresentano pressoché identiche nelle battute conclusive della relazione:

让我们高举中国特色社会主义伟大旗帜，更加紧密地团结在党中央周围，为全面建成小康社会而奋斗，不断夺取中国特色社会主义新胜利，共同创造中国人民和中华民族更加幸福美好的未来！

Let us hold high the great banner of socialism with Chinese characteristics, rally more closely around the Party Central Committee, strive to complete the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects, continue to win new victories for socialism with Chinese characteristics, and make joint efforts to create an even brighter future for the Chinese people and nation.

In questo passo conclusivo, alle metafore riconducibili all'ambito militare già individuate si aggiunge l'espressione *duoqu... xin shengli* 夺取……新胜利 (conquistare nuove vittorie). È interessante notare come in questo caso – a differenza del passaggio precedente, in cui il soggetto delle varie azioni non è esplicitato – la frase sia formulata come esortazione a uno *women* 我们 (noi) che comprende sia chi parla (e quindi il Partito di cui Hu è rappresentante) sia chi ascolta (i membri del PCC a ogni livello, destinatari diretti del discorso, come probabilmente, per estensione, il popolo cinese nel suo complesso). Il tentativo di avvicinare i due gruppi si può osservare anche nel seguente passaggio:

党的基层组织是团结带领群众贯彻党的理论和路线方针政策、落实党的任务的战斗堡垒。

Community-level Party organizations play a key role in rallying and leading the people in implementing the Party's theories, line, principles and policies and in carrying out its tasks.

Nel testo cinese i livelli di base (*jiceng zuzhi* 基层组织) del PCC sono definiti *zhandou baolei* 战斗堡垒 (fortezza di lotta), immagine sottolineata dal verbo *dailing* 带领 (guidare in battaglia). Anche qui – come nel caso dell'esempio precedente – è evidente come la metafora bellica non sia limitata all'operato del Partito ma coinvolga direttamente il popolo, qui assimilato alle truppe condotte in battaglia: in questo modo, alla metafora concettuale IL PARTITO È UN ESERCITO già individuata si affianca IL POPOLO CINESE È UN ESERCITO. Il riferimento alla “fortezza”, inoltre, costituisce un'interessante variante della metafora bellica: nella traduzione ufficiale inglese, tuttavia, la metafora è neutralizzata e sostituita con l'espressione “(to) play a key role”.

Se nei passi succitati il linguaggio figurato ha essenzialmente la funzione di chiamare all'azione e alla soluzione di problemi (particolarmente evidente nelle metafore militari), altri domini concettuali emergono allorché è necessario coltivare intimità e fare leva sull'esperienza emotiva, come nel seguente passaggio:

要发挥人民主人翁精神 [...].

We should ensure that the people are the masters of the country [...].

In questo caso il popolo (*renmin* 人民) viene identificato con un padrone di casa o un capofamiglia (*zhurenweng* 主人翁) in virtù della metafora concettuale LA NAZIONE È UNA FAMIGLIA. L'enfasi sulla posizione di rilievo conferita al popolo cinese attraverso tale metafora non è una novità nel linguaggio politico cinese: la si ritrova, infatti, anche nell'espressione *wei renmin fuwu* 为人民服务 (servire il

popolo), già pilastro della propaganda maoista e presente anche in questo discorso del 2012. In una prospettiva concettuale molto simile, nell'esempio seguente, al dominio della casa/famiglia si affiancano quelli della pianta e del corpo umano:

坚持以人为本、执政为民，始终保持党同人民群众的血肉联系。

Put people first, exercise governance for the people and always maintain close ties with them.

L'espressione *yi ren wei ben* 以人为本 (lett. fare delle persone la radice), una delle "bandiere" di Hu Jintao, sfrutta la metafora concettuale LA NAZIONE È UNA PIANTA (ma anche IL PARTITO È UNA PIANTA). Nella retorica pubblica della Cina moderna e contemporanea il concetto confuciano di "popolo come radice" (*min ben* 民本), così come altre espressioni legate al "popolo" – nel corso della loro evoluzione non sempre connotate positivamente – acquisisce un valore univocamente positivo e viene sfruttato in virtù del suo enorme potere sul piano emotivo. Come fa notare Sabattini a proposito del concetto di *min ben*, infatti:

[s]uch is the emotive content packed into this expression that it is still used for effect today and although it does not apply to true people-oriented politics, it does offer a convenient formula that can be adapted to serve the needs of intellectuals and policies of any period (Sabattini 2012: 188).

Nell'estratto citato poco sopra, l'intima relazione che il popolo intrattiene con il Partito è ulteriormente messa in rilievo attraverso l'espressione *xuerou lianxi* 血肉联系 (lett. legami di sangue e carne), fondata sulla metafora IL POPOLO E IL PARTITO SONO UN ESSERE VIVENTE. In entrambi i casi, tuttavia, le immagini risultano neutralizzate nella versione inglese.

È possibile osservare, inoltre, che le funzioni essenziali fin qui identificate (richiamo all'azione ed enfasi sul piano emotivo) vengono spesso accostate e fatte confluire in un'unica prospettiva concettuale:

全党必须牢记，只有植根人民、造福人民，党才能始终立于不败之地 [...].

The whole Party must bear in mind that only by taking root among the people and delivering benefits to them can the Party remain invincible [...].

Anche in questo caso la metafora concettuale IL PARTITO È UNA PIANTA si specifica nell'espressione *zhi gen* 植根 (mettere radici), mentre IL PARTITO È UN ESERCITO trova espressione nel sintagma classicheggiante *li yu bu bai zhi di* 立于不败之地 (lett. stare in una posizione in cui non si può essere sconfitti).

In ultima analisi, per interpretare le funzioni discorsive di queste istanze di linguaggio figurato è utile riprendere la dicotomia tra "ideologia P" (*P-ideology*) e "ideologia S" (*S-ideology*) proposta da Hodge e Louie (1999: 51). La prima forma, fondata su un rapporto di potere, funziona secondo il principio di opposizione binaria, e pertanto si rivela particolarmente efficace quando la funzione discorsiva punta alla soluzione di problemi, alla rimozione di ostacoli, all'eliminazione o al superamento di situazioni presentate come negative. Le metafore belliche già discusse ne costituiscono un esempio lampante: ciononostante, questa forma di ideologia può permeare anche metafore legate ad altri domini concettuali<sup>5</sup>. La

<sup>5</sup> Si pensi, per esempio, al dominio concettuale del viaggio e in particolare alla metafora concettuale LA REALIZZAZIONE DEL SOCIALISMO È UNA STRADA, cui si collegano espressioni metaforiche come *zhang'ai* 障碍 (ostacolo), riferite a fenomeni negativi la cui rimozione è presentata come obiettivo

seconda forma, che opera secondo il principio di solidarietà, tende a offuscare o dissimulare le differenze: rientrano in questo piano tutte le espressioni metaforiche che mirano a creare intimità, ridurre i dislivelli gerarchici, presentare come condivisi gli obiettivi desiderati e così via. I domini concettuali legati alla sfera familiare, botanica, anatomica, ecc. si prestano agevolmente a esprimere tale funzione (come nell'espressione *xuerou lianxi* analizzata sopra), che tuttavia può essere convogliata anche ricorrendo ad altre sfere metaforiche<sup>6</sup>. Negli esempi analizzati poco sopra si è osservato come queste due forme di ideologia, pur svolgendo nello specifico funzioni diverse, convivano e concorrano alla stessa macrofunzione discorsiva.

## 5. Un modello di processo traduttivo

Dal punto di vista della *tipologia testuale*, la prolusione di Hu Jintao rientra in una particolare forma di discorso politico tipico del contesto cinese – la relazione introduttiva al congresso del PCC, appunto – che, come si è visto, ha la funzione di enucleare gli obiettivi raggiunti (nonché le criticità ancora irrisolte) nel quinquennio trascorso e annunciare il corso politico cui il Partito intende attenersi negli anni a venire. Se la *funzione* testuale di questa forma di discorso politico, quindi, è largamente *referenziale* (nella terminologia jakobsoniana *referential function*, ovvero incentrata sulla realtà extralinguistica), è evidente fin dal titolo che essa presenta anche una spiccata componente *conativa* (*conative function*), focalizzata cioè sul destinatario (Jakobson 1960). Il testo, quindi, è caratterizzato da un chiaro intento proattivo: favorire la coesione, creare consenso, convincere della bontà dei risultati conseguiti e degli obiettivi futuri. In tale ottica si comprende perché, nel prototesto, il linguaggio figurato – e in particolare la metafora – giochi un ruolo fondamentale e sia utilizzato in misura tanto pervasiva. Una delle funzioni del linguaggio metaforico, infatti, è proprio quella di impostare e trasformare la prospettiva concettuale del destinatario, nonché di spingere all'azione o alla soluzione di problemi (Goatly 1997: 149). Nel discorso politico in particolare, per riprendere il titolo dello studio di Carver e Pikalo (2008), la metafora non serve semplicemente a *interpretare* il mondo, bensì a *cambiarlo*. Alla luce di queste considerazioni è evidente che la *dominante* del prototesto – per riprendere il concetto elaborato da Jakobson (1987) – combina informatività e carica emotiva: anzi, è ragionevole postulare che la componente centrale del prototesto, quella che “rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components” e “guarantees the integrity of the structure” (Jakobson 1987: 41), sia proprio la costruzione o il rafforzamento di un sentimento di coesione nazionale.

Strettamente legata all'identificazione della dominante è quella del *destinatario* dell'atto comunicativo (il *lettore modello*, nel caso della trascrizione del discorso). Nel caso del prototesto, il destinatario diretto è facilmente individuabile nei quadri del PCC e degli organismi governativi a ogni livello: considerata la rilevanza della

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dell'azione del Partito e della collettività tutta; o ancora al dominio concettuale del corpo umano, con la frequente contrapposizione dicotomica tra forza (*liliang* 力量) e debolezza (*ruanrui* 软弱), ecc.

<sup>6</sup> Ad esempio, il dominio concettuale della costruzione – soprattutto nella metafora concettuale LA SOCIETÀ È UN EDIFICIO, che struttura la prolusione di Hu già a partire dal titolo – compare spesso in passaggi contenenti esortazioni a un “noi” che comprende e pone sullo stesso piano emittente e destinatario del messaggio (cf. il passo conclusivo della prolusione sopracitata): nella prospettiva concettuale così definita, un obiettivo è presentato come raggiungibile soltanto attraverso gli sforzi congiunti del Partito e del popolo cinese.

prolusione di Hu nel contesto politico cinese e la massiccia copertura garantita dai media nazionali, tuttavia, è chiaro che il discorso si rivolge a un pubblico decisamente più vasto, virtualmente identificabile con la popolazione cinese nel suo complesso<sup>7</sup>.

Una volta identificata questa rete di fattori è possibile analizzare il rapporto tra il ruolo e la posizione del prototesto in seno alla sua lingua/cultura di origine e il ruolo e la posizione del metatesto nella lingua/cultura ricevente. Nel processo traduttivo verso una lingua/cultura diversa da quella cinese – quella italiana, per esempio – si osserva innanzitutto che, se la tipologia testuale rimane essenzialmente invariata, il mutamento del destinatario determina inevitabili modifiche sul piano della funzione e della dominante testuale. Se si postula la pubblicazione del metatesto in un canale quale una rivista cartacea o elettronica di geopolitica, infatti, lo spettro dei destinatari può spaziare dagli specialisti e agli studenti in ambito sinologico fino agli analisti e politologi privi di una formazione sinologica, arrivando anche ai lettori non specialisti ma interessati alla politica cinese. Di conseguenza, nel processo traduttivo, la funzione del prototesto subisce una significativa trasformazione: non possedendo l'intento proattivo dell'originale, il metatesto vede sensibilmente diminuita la sua funzione conativa, per via del divario che separa il lettore modello del prototesto da quello del metatesto sul piano della percezione. La dominante che il traduttore si prefigge per il metatesto, quindi, è completamente scissa dalla creazione del sentimento di unità nazionale che caratterizza in maniera così evidente l'originale. La componente referenziale e informativa, invece, si conserva in misura maggiore: il lettore del metatesto, oltre ad acquisire informazioni sul corso politico del PCC, può utilizzarle per lo studio di continuità e discontinuità della leadership cinese, metodi di creazione del consenso e pratiche di *soft power*, ecc.

Alla luce di questa analisi, quindi, è possibile che il ridimensionamento dell'elemento vocativo (convogliato essenzialmente dal linguaggio metaforico) si traduca nella parziale neutralizzazione delle espressioni metaforiche del prototesto o nella loro resa attraverso forme di linguaggio non figurato, come si è osservato in alcuni passi della versione inglese commentati sopra. Il traduttore può essere portato ad adottare una microstrategia di questo tipo nei casi in cui percepisca la metafora come troppo stridente o straniante sul piano estetico: gli esiti della neutralizzazione, tuttavia, sono tanto più significativi nei casi in cui l'espressione eliminata sia legata a domini e metafore concettuali che strutturano profondamente l'impianto retorico e ideologico del prototesto (es. il concetto di "popolo come radice"). In altri punti l'eliminazione di espressioni metaforiche ritenute troppo violente (come nella traduzione inglese del passaggio in cui i livelli di base del PCC sono assimilati a una "fortezza di lotta") può rispondere all'esigenza di trasmettere al destinatario del metatesto un'immagine più rassicurante del "gigante cinese". L'anonimo traduttore che ha stilato la versione inglese della prolusione di Hu ha operato, con ogni probabilità, anche in base a considerazioni di questa natura. Poiché la traduzione letterale di metafore concettuali assenti o meno frequenti nella lingua d'arrivo rischia di produrre, in quest'ultima, un effetto eccessivamente amplificato, il traduttore

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<sup>7</sup> Nell'esigenza di ampliare il pubblico dei destinatari del messaggio e abbattere le barriere nella comunicazione rientra anche il processo di semplificazione del linguaggio politico cinese avviato negli ultimi anni. Li (2010: 54), infatti, considera lo "stile colloquiale nel linguaggio politico" (*zhengzhi baihua feng* 政治白话风) un tratto peculiare proprio della guida di Hu Jintao (Segretario Generale dal 2002), nonché un riflesso della democratizzazione della politica cinese.

potrebbe aver deciso di procedere in questo senso al fine di mitigare tale effetto. Inoltre, dal momento che anche la traduzione ufficiale è stata commissionata a livello istituzionale e si rivolge a un pubblico internazionale, è ragionevole supporre che dal metatesto dovessero essere espunte tutte le espressioni suscettibili di evocare minacciose manifestazioni di aggressività da parte del governo cinese e dei suoi rappresentanti.

In una prospettiva opposta, attraverso la conservazione del linguaggio metaforico il traduttore può fornire al lettore del metatesto – soprattutto se provvisto di un certo bagaglio di conoscenze in ambito sinologico – gli strumenti per cogliere la natura e gli stilemi retorici del DPCC. Il lettore della traduzione potrebbe quindi riconoscere i domini e le metafore concettuali prevalenti nel linguaggio politico cinese e identificare tali elementi come caratteristici della sfera ufficiale, distinti dal registro della comunicazione ordinaria, e in cui è possibile osservare strutture, articolazioni e meccanismi di funzionamento specifici. In questo modo, pur perdendo la sua funzione conativa e l’impatto emotivo originari, la metafora viene ricontestualizzata acquisendo quasi valore referenziale, trasformandosi in un elemento testuale che i membri della cultura ricevente possono osservare “dall’esterno” e di cui, nei limiti degli interventi traduttivi descritti più sopra, possono apprezzare l’utilizzo e – necessariamente entro una certa misura – l’impatto sulla cultura di origine.

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# La resa del linguaggio figurato in interpretazione simultanea: Una sperimentazione didattica

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**Abstract:** *La traduzione del linguaggio figurato è, da sempre, uno dei grandi scogli del processo traduttivo. Le naturali difficoltà insite nel processo di traduzione delle espressioni figurate (fra le tante, interpretazione del significato, conoscenza interlinguistica, implicazioni culturali) diventano ancora più difficili da sormontare se applicate al processo dell'interpretazione simultanea, in cui l'interprete ha solo frazioni di secondo per decidere che strategia utilizzare nella resa di una data espressione figurata (Turrini 2004, Spinolo e Garwood 2010). Il presente studio consiste in una proposta didattica sperimentale valutata con uno studio caso-controllo condotto su studenti del secondo anno della Laurea Magistrale in Interpretazione di Conferenza della Scuola di Lingue, Letterature, Traduzione e Interpretazione dell'Università di Bologna (sede di Forlì) e della Scuola Superiore di Lingue Moderne per Interpreti e Traduttori dell'Università di Trieste. Al gruppo-caso è stata somministrata la sperimentazione didattica, mentre del gruppo-controllo si è monitorata l'evoluzione. La base teorico-pratica per l'elaborazione dell'unità didattica è costituita dai contenuti e l'analisi del corpus IMITES (Interpretación de la Metáfora entre ITaliano y ESpañol), costruito nell'ambito di un più ampio progetto di dottorato di cui fa parte il presente studio e contenente conferenze (e relative interpretazioni) ospitate in seno alla Commissione Europea, allo scopo di analizzare prestazioni e strategie di interpreti professionisti alle prese con linguaggio figurato nelle combinazioni linguistiche italiano-spagnolo e spagnolo-italiano. Obiettivo ultimo dello studio è indagare l'insegnabilità dei processi interpretativi applicabili al linguaggio figurato in interpretazione simultanea e l'efficacia dell'unità didattica proposta, valutando l'eventuale progresso degli studenti rispetto al gruppo-controllo, e verificando così l'applicabilità didattica dell'analisi eseguita su IMITES.*

**Parole chiave:** *linguaggio figurato, interpretazione simultanea, didattica dell'interpretazione, IMITES.*

## 1. Il linguaggio figurato e la cabina di simultanea

Numerosi autori, nell'ambito dei *Translation Studies*, hanno affrontato le questioni della traducibilità e delle modalità traduttive della metafora, in maniera più o meno trasversale o sistematica; quasi tutti sono concordi nel riconoscere che la resa del linguaggio figurato sia, spesso e in varia misura, un problema da risolvere nel processo traduttivo (Álvarez 1993; Azar 1989; Dagut 1976; Dagut 1987; Dickins 2005; Dobrzyńska 1995; Menacere 1992; Newmark 1988; Pliego Sánchez 1993; Prandi 2010; Samaniego 2011; Schäffner 2004; Van Besien, Pelsmaekers 1988; Van den Broeck 1981).

Mentre, per la dinamica traduttiva, le questioni sollevate dal linguaggio figurato sono principalmente di trasmissione delle connotazioni emotive della figura in questione (Ogden, Richards 1923), di comprensione e interpretazione della figura nella lingua originale (Dagut 1976), oltre che, ovviamente, di *culture-boundedness* (Dagut 1976) e di creatività da parte del traduttore nella ricerca di una soluzione

(Rabadán 1991), per l'interprete simultaneo irrompe prepotentemente la variabile-tempo: indipendentemente dalla complessità dell'espressione figurata originale, un simultaneista ha solo frazioni di secondo per decidere come renderla, e pochissimo o nessun tempo per documentarsi e consultare le risorse (Spinolo, Garwood 2010).

## 2. Il progetto IMITES

Il progetto di dottorato IMITES (*Interpretación de la Metáfora entre Italiano y Español*) riguarda l'interpretazione simultanea del linguaggio figurato nelle combinazioni italiano-spagnolo e spagnolo-italiano (Spinolo, in preparazione). Prevede l'analisi di un set di dati creato a partire da conferenze tenutesi presso la Commissione europea, dalle quali sono stati selezionati i discorsi pronunciati in italiano o spagnolo e le relative interpretazioni (in spagnolo o italiano). Le espressioni figurate contenute nei discorsi originali sono state estratte e allineate con le rese degli interpreti, con il duplice scopo di capire quali espressioni causino maggiori problemi agli interpreti e di analizzare le strategie interpretative applicate da interpreti professionisti quali quelli della Direzione Generale Interpretazione (DG SCIC) della Commissione Europea, alla resa del linguaggio figurato. Nell'ambito dello stesso progetto si è inoltre somministrato un questionario agli interpreti delle cabine spagnola e italiana della DG SCIC, al fine di sondare la loro percezione della difficoltà di interpretazione del linguaggio figurato, la (eventuale) formazione ricevuta a riguardo e le strategie che ritengono di applicare nella pratica professionale.

Il progetto include poi, da ultimo, una sperimentazione didattica eseguita sugli studenti del secondo anno della Laurea Magistrale in *Interpretazione di Conferenza della Scuola di Lingue, Letterature, Traduzione e Interpretazione* dell'Università di Bologna (sede di Forlì) e della *Scuola Superiore di Lingue Moderne per Interpreti e Traduttori* dell'Università di Trieste, il cui obiettivo è quello di indagare l'insegnabilità di tecniche interpretative applicabili all'interpretazione simultanea del linguaggio figurato. Quest'ultima sperimentazione didattica è l'oggetto del presente studio.

## 3. La sperimentazione didattica

### 3.1. Metodologia

La sperimentazione è stata costruita sul modello caso/controllo. Un gruppo era costituito da 5 studenti del secondo anno della Laurea Magistrale in *Interpretazione di Conferenza della Scuola di Lingue, Letterature, Traduzione e Interpretazione* dell'Università di Bologna-sede di Forlì, e un altro era costituito da 5 studenti della *Scuola Superiore di Lingue Moderne per Interpreti e Traduttori* dell'Università di Trieste<sup>1</sup>.

A entrambi i gruppi è stata somministrata la stessa prova iniziale (un discorso in spagnolo da interpretare in simultanea in italiano), al fine di valutare il livello di partenza degli studenti e la loro effettiva comparabilità. La prova iniziale è stata presentata ai due gruppi nel corso della stessa settimana, affinché gli studenti si

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<sup>1</sup> Un sentito ringraziamento va alla Prof.ssa Mariachiara Russo della facoltà di Forlì e al Prof. Marco Rucci della facoltà di Trieste per aver reso possibile la sperimentazione con i propri studenti, e un altro ugualmente sentito va ovviamente agli studenti per avere partecipato.



trovassero allo stesso punto dell'anno accademico, e quindi allo stesso punto della loro formazione come interpreti.

Si è poi proceduto a somministrare al gruppo-caso un mini-corso (articolato su cinque incontri di circa 90 minuti ciascuno) con lezioni teoriche e pratiche sulle strategie interpretative da applicare al linguaggio figurato<sup>2</sup>.

Alla fine del mini-corso, 8 settimane dopo la prova iniziale, ad entrambi i gruppi si è presentata una prova finale, costituita da un altro discorso in spagnolo da interpretare simultaneamente in italiano, al fine di analizzare le performance del gruppo-caso (Ca) e del gruppo-controllo (Co), individuare eventuali differenze e testare così l'efficacia dell'unità didattica proposta con il mini-corso sperimentale. La prova finale non costituiva, per gli studenti, un esame, e non hanno ricevuto alcun voto sulla loro prestazione; i due gruppi, inoltre, non erano a conoscenza del coinvolgimento nella sperimentazione di un altro gruppo proveniente da un'altra facoltà.

### 3.2. Materiali

Il discorso utilizzato per la prova iniziale era stato originariamente pronunciato da José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, Primo Ministro spagnolo all'epoca del discorso, in occasione della cerimonia per la firma del *Patto dei Sindaci 2010*<sup>3</sup>, tenutasi presso la Commissione europea a Bruxelles. La trascrizione del discorso è stata estratta dal corpus IMITES; il testo del discorso è stato poi modificato sostituendo, con la supervisione di un consulente nativo, alcune espressioni non figurate del testo con altre espressioni figurate oltre a quelle già presenti nell'originale<sup>4</sup>. Sebbene questa procedura possa apparire ingiustificata dal punto di vista metodologico, davanti alla necessità di valutare le prestazioni degli studenti su varie tipologie di espressioni figurate (cioè, con diversi gradi di creatività o lessicalizzazione), si è deciso di apportare tali modifiche affinché la prova contenesse un numero significativo (almeno 50) delle varie tipologie di metafora, cercando di mantenere le proporzioni fra metafore lessicalizzate e metafore creative esistenti nell'originale (cfr. par. 4.4). Il discorso modificato è stato poi registrato in laboratorio da un parlante nativo. La durata della registrazione era di circa 13 minuti, con una velocità di eloquio di 130 parole al minuto. Le espressioni figurate prese in considerazione per lo studio sono in totale 55.

Il discorso utilizzato per la prova finale era un discorso pronunciato in originale da Ramón Luis Valcárcel Siso (presidente della Comunità Autonoma di Murcia e del Comitato delle Regioni), anche questo pronunciato in occasione della cerimonia 2010 del *Patto dei Sindaci*. Anche in questo caso il testo originale, tratto da IMITES, è stato modificato con l'inserimento di ulteriori espressioni figurate oltre a quelle contenute nell'originale, e il discorso modificato è stato registrato in laboratorio dallo stesso parlante nativo. La durata della registrazione era di circa 14 minuti, con una velocità di eloquio di 100 parole al minuto e un totale di 58 espressioni figurate.

La scelta di eseguire l'esperimento su due gruppi geograficamente così lontani è motivata dalla volontà di ridurre al minimo il rischio di "contaminazione", di

<sup>2</sup> I contenuti del corso sono descritti in maggiore dettaglio al paragrafo 3.2.

<sup>3</sup> Il *Patto dei Sindaci* è un patto firmato dai primi cittadini delle città europee che vogliono aderire all'impegno di ridurre del 20% le emissioni di CO<sub>2</sub> entro il 2020. Per maggiori informazioni: <http://www.pattodeisindaci.eu>.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. opere di consultazione in bibliografia.

contatto e scambio di materiali fra i due gruppi stessi. Per quanto riguarda, invece, la tipologia testuale scelta per le due prove, ci si è volutamente orientati su discorsi di tema politico-ambientale, genere conosciuto ai più nei contenuti e ampiamente trattato dai media nazionali e internazionali (effetto serra, strategia 20-20-20, inquinamento, ecc.). Prima della somministrazione delle prove, entrambi i gruppi hanno ricevuto un rapido *briefing*, per illustrare loro il contesto e la situazione in cui i discorsi originali sono stati pronunciati, e fornire loro i nomi degli oratori e degli altri personaggi politici citati nei discorsi.

Il minicorso, somministrato solamente al gruppo-caso, si è articolato su cinque incontri. In occasione del primo incontro, dopo la somministrazione della prova iniziale, si è proceduto ad esporre in una breve panoramica le principali teorie della metafora e ad analizzare con gli studenti il discorso interpretato per la prova iniziale, soffermandosi sulle espressioni figurate in esso contenute e sulle possibili soluzioni traduttive.

Il secondo incontro è iniziato anch'esso con una parte teorica, durante la quale si è presentata agli studenti un'analisi pilota svolta su IMITES, illustrando loro quali espressioni figurate risultano più problematiche per gli interpreti secondo i dati preliminari estratti dal corpus e con quali strategie queste vengono affrontate dagli interpreti professionisti della DG SCIC. Si è poi passati alla pratica, con un'esercitazione simultanea dallo spagnolo all'italiano, utilizzando un discorso tratto da IMITES. Infine, si è analizzato nel dettaglio il discorso appena interpretato, soffermandosi sulle espressioni figurate in esso contenute, su come gli studenti le avessero rese nella loro interpretazione, e su possibili rese alternative.

Il terzo incontro è stato di carattere esclusivamente pratico, con un'esercitazione in simultanea dallo spagnolo all'italiano, un'analisi a posteriori del testo interpretato, come per l'incontro precedente, e con esercizio di traduzione a vista dallo spagnolo all'italiano. La traduzione a vista è stata definita da Herbert (1952:7) come:

[...] cas particulier où l'interprète prend un texte qui lui était jusqu'alors inconnu et, soit directement, soit par téléphone, le «lit» dans une langue autre que celle dans laquelle ce texte est écrit, à la cadence d'une lecture normale sans traduction<sup>5</sup>.

Si è pensato alla traduzione a vista come esercizio utile per due motivi principali: innanzitutto, per la sua efficacia come attività propedeutica all'interpretazione simultanea (Kalina 1994: 222). In secondo luogo, si è pensato di scegliere per l'esercizio di traduzione a vista testi giornalistici d'opinione ed economici, con una densità di linguaggio figurato maggiore rispetto a quella di un testo orale, proprio per stimolare il più possibile negli studenti la rapidità di analisi e ricerca di soluzioni.

Il quarto incontro è stato speculare al terzo, ma con la combinazione linguistica inversa: gli esercizi di interpretazione simultanea e traduzione a vista sono stati fatti a partire da testi italiani da volgere allo spagnolo. Si è deciso di lavorare su questa combinazione, nonostante sia la prova iniziale che quella finale fossero sulla combinazione spagnolo - italiano, per la convinzione che l'esercizio verso la propria lingua straniera fosse utile ad allenare e fissare nella memoria le espressioni figurate incontrate negli esercizi svolti durante gli incontri precedenti.

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<sup>5</sup> “Caso particolare in cui l'interprete prende un testo che fino a quel momento non ha mai visto e, direttamente o al telefono, lo ‘legge’ in una lingua diversa da quella in cui il testo è stato scritto, con la cadenza di una lettura normale, senza traduzione”.

Il quinto incontro è servito principalmente alla somministrazione della prova finale, eseguita dopo un breve esercizio di traduzione a vista dallo spagnolo all'italiano.

#### 4. Analisi dei risultati

Le prestazioni degli studenti sono state trascritte e le rese delle espressioni figurate sono state allineate con il corrispettivo frammento nel testo originale. Si è poi proceduto all'estrazione delle “rese problematiche”, cioè contenenti:

(i) esitazioni e riformulazioni (in corsivo nell'esempio che segue):

[...] para nosotros está claro que el nivel local importa, y está claro que trabajando juntos y **desde la arena** podremos conseguir más<sup>6</sup>. (prova finale, testo originale)

[...] *per noi è imp- noi siam convinti del fatto che il ehm livello locale le relazioni locali ehm sono pronte per lavorare e da proprio grazie alla nostra vicinanza ai cittadini possiamo ehm avere buoni risultati* (prova finale, studente Ca1)

(ii) rese parziali o incomplete (in corsivo nell'esempio):

A todos aquellos ciudadanos que **tienen depositadas tantas esperanzas y tienen depositada tanta confianza** en ese proyecto que llamamos Unión Europea<sup>7</sup>. (prova iniziale, testo originale)

A tutti quei cittadini che ehm ... *hanno riposto tanta fiducia* in questo progetto che denominiamo Unione europea (prova iniziale, studente Ca2)

e (iii) rese improprie<sup>8</sup>:

Hay un dato que **pongo de manifiesto** en cada ocasión que abordamos el debate sobre el cambio climático.<sup>9</sup> (testo originale, prova iniziale)

E ogni volta che affrontiamo il dibattito climatico *ho una convinzione*. (prova iniziale, studente Co5)

Fra le rese improprie, sono state conteggiate anche le omissioni che alterano i contenuti o lo stile del testo originale:

[...] en muchos países europeos los costes energéticos son una carga más fuerte que los costes laborales y **le cortan las alas** al desarrollo económico<sup>10</sup> (testo originale, prova iniziale)

... (prova iniziale, studente Co1)

#### 4.1. Gruppo-controllo

Le prestazioni del gruppo-controllo per la prova iniziale sono riassunte nella Tabella 1:

<sup>6</sup> Traduzione letterale: “per noi è chiaro che il livello locale importa, ed è chiaro che lavorando assieme e **dall’arena** potremo ottenere di più”. *Desde la arena*, “dall’arena” è un’espressione idiomatica proveniente dal mondo della corrida, che significa “lavorando sul campo, in pratica e non in teoria”.

<sup>7</sup> Traduzione letterale: “A tutti quei cittadini che **hanno riposto tante speranze e hanno risposto tanta fiducia** in questo progetto che chiamiamo Unione Europea”

<sup>8</sup> Per “rese improprie” si intende, in questo caso, ciò che Russo e Rucci (1997) definiscono come “resa imprecisa di parole” (traduzioni errate, scelte di registro lessicale inadeguato e calchi lessicali).

<sup>9</sup> Traduzione Letterale: “C’è un dato che **metto in evidenza** in ogni occasione in cui affrontiamo il dibattito sul cambiamento climatico”.

<sup>10</sup> Traduzione letterale: “In molti paesi europei, i costi energetici sono un carico più forte dei costi del lavoro, e **tarpano le ali** allo sviluppo economico”.

	<b>Co1</b>	<b>Co2</b>	<b>Co3</b>	<b>Co4</b>	<b>Co5</b>	<b>TOT</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Esitazioni</b>	43	34	33	25	18	153	55%
<b>Rese parziali / incomplete</b>	4	5	3	8	3	23	8%
<b>Rese improprie</b>	13	12	7	13	7	52	19%

Tabella 1: Prova iniziale – prestazioni gruppo-controllo

Le prestazioni dello stesso gruppo per la prova finale sono invece riassunte nella Tabella 2:

	<b>Co1</b>	<b>Co2</b>	<b>Co3</b>	<b>Co4</b>	<b>Co5</b>	<b>TOT</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Esitazioni</b>	11	20	16	19	33	99	34%
<b>Rese parziali / incomplete</b>	7	5	6	3	4	25	8%
<b>Rese improprie</b>	10	18	15	14	15	72	24%

Tabella 2: Prova finale – prestazioni gruppo-controllo

#### 4.2. Gruppo-caso

Le prestazioni del gruppo-caso per la prova iniziale possono riassumersi nella Tabella 3:

	<b>Ca1</b>	<b>Ca2</b>	<b>Ca3</b>	<b>Ca4</b>	<b>Ca5</b>	<b>TOT</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Esitazioni</b>	21	20	15	31	26	113	41%
<b>Rese parziali / incomplete</b>	3	7	8	4	2	24	10%
<b>Rese improprie</b>	4	7	8	2	7	28	8,5%

Tabella 3: Prova iniziale – prestazioni gruppo-caso

Le prestazioni dello stesso gruppo per la prova finale sono invece riassunte nella Tabella 4:

	<b>Ca1</b>	<b>Ca2</b>	<b>Ca3</b>	<b>Ca4</b>	<b>Ca5</b>	<b>TOT</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Esitazioni</b>	15	16	12	17	15	75	26%
<b>Rese parziali / incomplete</b>	3	2	5	3	1	14	5%
<b>Rese improprie</b>	4	7	3	5	4	23	8%

Tabella 4: Prova finale – prestazioni gruppo-caso

### 4.3. Analisi comparativa dei dati

Vediamo ora i dati riguardanti le performance degli interpreti in chiave comparativa:

#### 4.3.1. Esitazioni

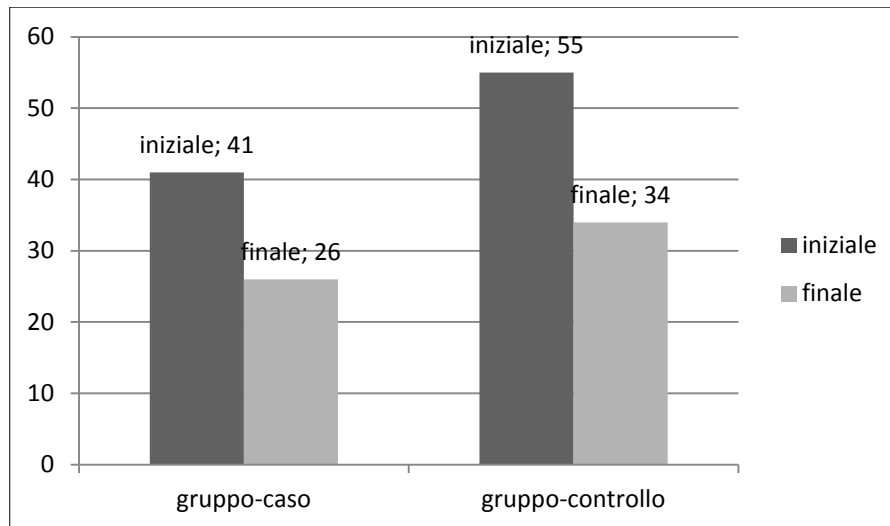


Grafico 1: Esitazioni

Come mostra chiaramente il Grafico 1, sia il gruppo-caso che il gruppo-controllo hanno riportato un miglioramento nelle prestazioni per quanto riguarda le esitazioni: il gruppo-controllo passa dal 55% nella prova iniziale al 34% in quella finale, mentre il gruppo-caso passa dal 41% al 26%. Si ipotizza che tale miglioramento in entrambi i gruppi si possa spiegare con il fatto che, nelle otto settimane intercorse fra la prova iniziale e quella finale, entrambi i gruppi abbiano continuato la loro formazione come interpreti, indipendentemente dal mini-corso somministrato al gruppo-caso, e che quindi abbiano affinato e migliorato la loro tecnica generale.

#### 4.3.2. Rese parziali

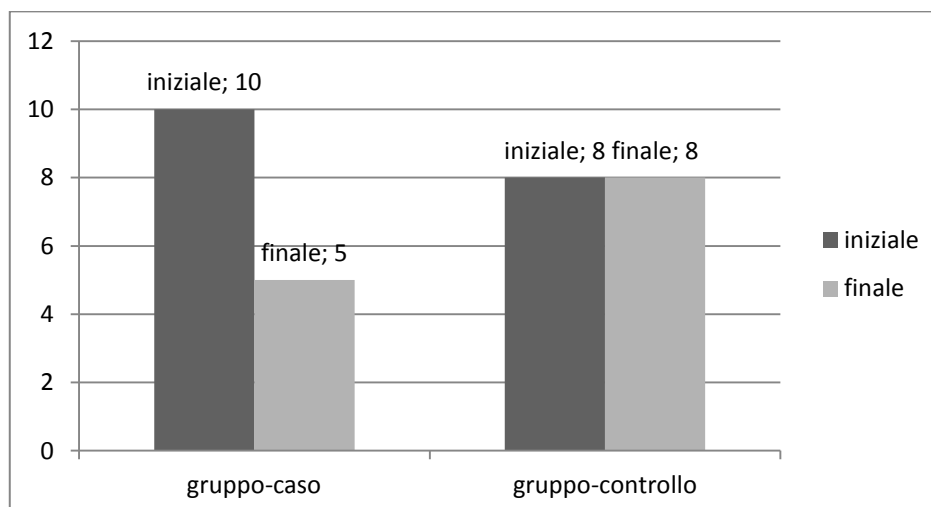


Grafico 2: Rese parziali

Per quanto riguarda le rese parziali, mentre per il gruppo controllo non si registrano né miglioramenti, né peggioramenti, e la percentuale rimane stabile all'8%, il miglioramento è notevole per il gruppo-caso, che passa dal 10% al 5%.

#### 4.3.3. Rese improprie

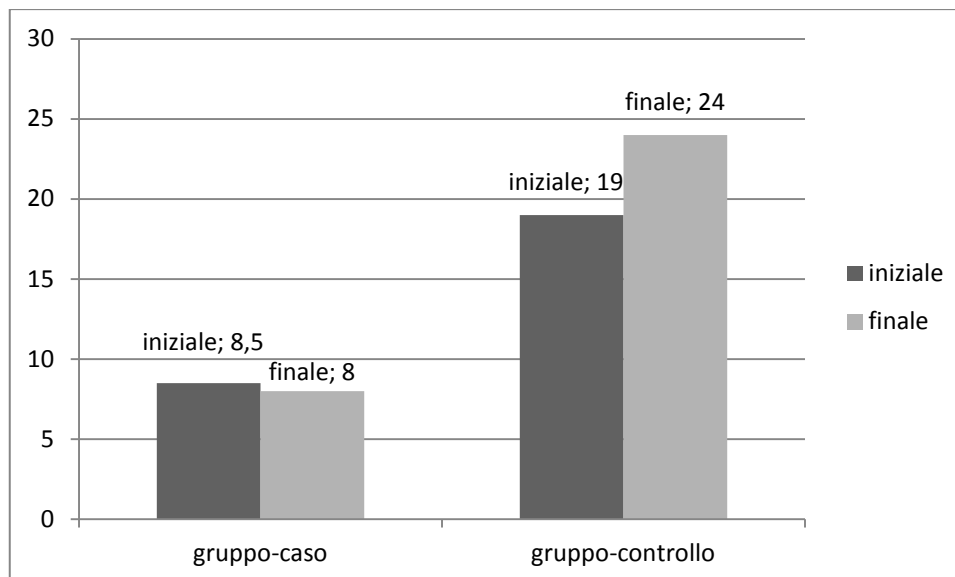


Grafico 3: Rese errate

Per quanto riguarda, invece, le rese improprie, le performance dei due gruppi sono decisamente discrepanti: mentre per il gruppo-controllo si registra un peggioramento (dal 19% al 24%), per il gruppo-caso si registra un, seppur lieve, miglioramento, a partire comunque da una performance già molto buona per la prova iniziale: dall'8,5% all'8%. Sia il peggioramento del gruppo-controllo che il lievissimo miglioramento del gruppo-caso potrebbero essere, forse, spiegati da una diversa percezione livello di difficoltà dei discorsi scelti per la prova iniziale e finale.

#### 4.3.4. Espressioni figurate problematiche

Analizzando in maniera comparata le rese degli studenti, si è cercato di individuare le espressioni figurate più problematiche, intendendo come tali quelle espressioni che hanno causato difficoltà (esitazioni, rese improprie, rese incomplete) ad almeno 6 studenti (il 50% + 1), sul campione totale di 10 (gruppo-caso e gruppo-controllo). Emergono così, in totale, 47 espressioni figurate problematiche, 30 nella prova iniziale, 17 nella prova finale, considerando le prestazioni di entrambi i gruppi.

Delle 47 espressioni figurate problematiche, 33 (su 61 totali presenti nelle due prove) sono espressioni idiomatiche più o meno frequenti della lingua spagnola, 10 (su 42 presenti nelle due prove) sono proiezioni di quelli che Prandi (2010: 313) chiama "metaphorical concepts": sono cioè espressioni linguistiche di metafore concettuali consolidate nella lingua di partenza; 4 (su 10 presenti nelle due prove) sono metafore creative.

Delle 33 espressioni idiomatiche problematiche, 6 presentavano la difficoltà aggiunta di avere una formulazione sintattica piuttosto lunga e complessa, e 2 apparivano in quella che si potrebbe definire una 'catena di metafore', cioè una serie

di espressioni figurate in successione nello stesso periodo; dei 10 concetti metaforici problematici, inoltre, 3 avevano una formulazione complessa e 5 appartenevano ad una catena di metafore; delle 4 metafore vive problematiche, infine, 3 erano complesse e 3 appartenevano ad una catena.

Usando lo stesso criterio del 50% + 1, si sono estratte le metafore risultate problematiche per il gruppo-controllo e per il gruppo-caso, nella prova iniziale e in quella finale (Tabella 5):

	Gruppo-controllo	Gruppo-caso	Totale espressioni figurate nel testo
<b>Prova iniziale</b>	36 (65%)	23 (41%)	55
<b>Prova finale</b>	29 (50%)	19 (32%)	58

Tabella 5: Rese problematiche

Per quanto riguarda la prova iniziale, la metafora risultata maggiormente problematica (per tutti e 10 gli studenti) per entrambi i gruppi è:

[este dato] Quiere decir que **la situación necesita una vuelta de tuerca**<sup>11</sup>.  
(prova iniziale, testo originale)

Si tratta di una metafora “complex”, utilizzando la definizione di Newmark (1984: 85) che distingue fra “one-word metaphors”, come “a sunny girl” (ibid.), e metafore, appunto, complesse. Si tratta, poi, di un’espressione idiomatica metaforica (Prandi, 2010: 311) altamente lessicalizzata nella lingua spagnola (139 occorrenze nel CREA<sup>12</sup>).

Alcuni studenti (segnatamente, quelli del gruppo-caso), riconoscendo l’espressione idiomatica nel testo di partenza, sono tentati dall’utilizzarne una a loro volta nel testo di arrivo, ma fanno la scelta sbagliata:

Beh ehm ovviamente questo significa che è **necessario cambiare rotta**. (prova iniziale, studente Ca1)

Questo significa che la **situazione ha ehm bisogno di una svolta radicale**. (prova iniziale, studente Ca2)

Beh [questo dato] rappresenta **la necessità di un cambiamento di una svolta**. (prova iniziale, studente Ca3)

Questo dato vuol dire che la **situazione ha bisogno di ehm una svolta significativa**. (prova iniziale, studente Ca4)

Vuol dire che la **situazione adesso necessita un giro di boa**. (prova iniziale, studente Ca5)

La maggioranza del gruppo-controllo, invece, sceglie di parafrasare:

Vuol dire ... che **la situazione deve cambiare in maniera radicale**. (prova iniziale, studente Co1)

[queste cifre] **significano che la situazione ... ha bisogno di un cambiamento importante**. (prova iniziale, studente Co2)

Significa che la situazione **deve essere cambiata in maniera ehm drastica**. (prova iniziale, studente Co3)

Significa che la situazione **deve cambiare radicalmente**. (prova iniziale, studente Co4)

Questo significa dire che ... **la n- la situazione richiede una svolta**. (prova iniziale, studente Co5)

<sup>11</sup> Traduzione letterale: “[questo dato] significa che la situazione ha bisogno di un giro di dado”; il corrispondente italiano è però la variante “giro di vite”.

<sup>12</sup> *Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual* della Real Academia Española.

In nessun caso, però, e nonostante esista un'espressione idiomatica equivalente in italiano (cfr. nota 11), gli studenti colgono la vera sfumatura di significato data dall'espressione figurata al discorso. Nel contesto, l'oratore parla dell'enorme quantità di denaro spesa dai paesi europei per l'acquisto di energia e spiega che, appunto, la situazione ha bisogno di un giro di vite: spendendo meno per l'energia infatti, si guadagnerà in competitività economica, anche se questo comporterà tagli e sacrifici.

Un'altra espressione figurata della prova iniziale che ha messo in difficoltà, in diversa misura, tutti gli studenti è:

es para mí un honor y una satisfacción estar nuevamente en esta institución que representa a todos los ciudadanos europeos. **Aquí está el alma, la savia europea**<sup>13</sup>. (testo originale, prova iniziale)

In questo caso, ben 8 studenti traducono l'espressione figurata solo parzialmente: si tratta, infatti, di due immagini nello stesso segmento (*anima* e *linfa*), e molti studenti scelgono di trasporre solo una, applicando una strategia utilizzata in molti casi anche dagli interpreti professionisti analizzati in IMITES (Spinolo, in preparazione). Tutti gli studenti che optano per la resa parziale scelgono *alma/anima* e omettono *savia/linfa*. Alcuni esempi:

Proprio qui infatti si trova l'**anima europea** (prova iniziale, studente Ca1)

In questa sede si trova infatti l'**anima ehm dell'Europa** (prova iniziale, studente Ca2)

Qui ... c'è ehm l'**anima dell'Europa** (prova iniziale, studente Co1)

Qui risiede l'**anima dell'Europa** (prova iniziale, studente Co4).

Lo studente Ca3 omette completamente la metafora, mentre lo studente Co5 la rende in maniera impropria, traducendo "savìa" con "saggezza":

... (prova iniziale, studente Ca3)

Qui è possibile trovare l'**anima e la saggezza europea** (prova iniziale, studente Co5)

Per quanto riguarda, invece, la prova finale, l'espressione figurata che mette in difficoltà tutti gli studenti è:

**Sentimos el calor del problema en nuestra propia puerta**, y recogemos el guante<sup>14</sup>. (testo originale, prova finale).

Sono due i principali elementi di difficoltà presentati da questa espressione figurata: innanzitutto, si trova in una frase che contiene due immagini: la prima, quella presa in considerazione per questo esempio, è *sentiamo il calore del problema sulla nostra porta*, e la seconda è *raccogliamo il guanto di sfida*. Nello stesso lasso di tempo, quindi, l'interprete si trova a dover affrontare due figure totalmente diverse fra loro. In secondo luogo, l'oratore usa un gioco di parole, parlando di *calore del problema* in riferimento al problema del surriscaldamento globale. Nessuno degli studenti riesce a rendere questa sfumatura nella propria versione. Alcuni esempi:

Sentiamo che è **un problema ehm importante ehm proprio alle nostre porte** (prova finale, studente Ca2).

**Il problema è alle nostre porte** quindi accettiamo il guanto di sfida (prova finale, studente Ca3).

<sup>13</sup> Traduzione letterale: "è per me un onore e una grande soddisfazione essere di nuovo presso questa istituzione che rappresenta tutti i cittadini europei. **Qui c'è l'anima, la linfa europea**".

<sup>14</sup> Traduzione letterale: "**Sentiamo il calore del problema sulla nostra porta**, e raccogliamo il guanto (di sfida)".



**Sentiamo ehm in maniera molto vicina questo problema** e raccogliamo il quanto di sfida (prova finale, studente Ca4).

Infatti... **viviamo sulla nostra pelle questo problema** e cerchiamo di rispondere a questa sfida (prova finale, studente Co1).

**Ehm sent- percepiamo il problema** e dobbiamo agire e lo faremo (prova finale, studente Co3).

Un'ultima, interessante, metafora rivela una problematica per tutti gli studenti è un'espressione idiomatica proveniente dal mondo della *corrida*:

Las fuentes no renovables están, cada vez más, **de capa caída** (testo originale, prova iniziale)<sup>15</sup>.

Anche questa espressione figurata è fortemente lessicalizzata in spagnolo, sebbene meno frequente delle precedenti (60 occorrenze nel CREA). È anche registrata nel *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*, alla voce *capa*, in cui si indica che *andar de capa caída* è una locuzione verbale colloquiale che significa “padecer gran decadencia en bienes, fortuna o salud”<sup>16</sup>. La figura si riferisce alla *capa*, il mantello del torero; un torero con il mantello figurativamente caduto è un torero, appunto, in decadenza.

Non tutti gli studenti, apparentemente, conoscono questa espressione idiomatica, anche se in alcuni casi sembrano intuirne il significato dal contesto:

**Le fonti non rinnovabili sono ehm sempre più ehm antiquate** (prova finale, studente Ca4).

**Le fonti non rinnovabili ... sono sempre più ehm vengono abbandonate sempre di più** (prova finale, studente Ca4).

**Le fonti non rinnovabili infatti ... risultano sempre più ridotte** (prova finale, studente Co1).

Altri, invece, la rendono in maniera più adeguata, ma non senza riformulare ed esitare:

**Le fonti non rinnovabili ehm stanno ehm decadendo sempre di più** (prova finale, studente Ca2).

**Le fonti non rinnovabili sono stanno ehm sono sempre più in declino** (prova finale, studente Co5).

## 5. Conclusioni

Prima di trarre le conclusioni, è necessario premettere che il piccolo campione di studenti utilizzato per l'analisi non permette di generalizzare, ma solo di avanzare ipotesi che si potrebbero confermare solo con studi svolti su più ampia scala.

Ad ogni modo, a giudicare dalle difficoltà registrate dagli studenti nelle prove a loro sottoposte, sembra in primo luogo che possa essere utile dedicare una parte della loro formazione al fenomeno del linguaggio figurato e a come affrontarlo in interpretazione. Tale conclusione è corroborata anche dai risultati del questionario sottoposto agli interpreti professionisti della DG SCIC (cfr. paragrafo 2 e Spinolo, in preparazione).

Come si è potuto evincere dal paragrafo 4, il piccolo studio caso-controllo svolto sembra indicare che l'unità didattica somministrata al gruppo-caso abbia avuto un effetto positivo sugli studenti coinvolti, soprattutto nel ridurre il numero di rese improprie; si ritiene però, che un migliore risultato si potrebbe ottenere anche sulle rese parziali e le esitazioni svolgendo con gli studenti un lavoro più approfondito e

<sup>15</sup> Traduzione letterale: “le fonti [di energia] non rinnovabili hanno, sempre più, il mantello caduto”.

<sup>16</sup> Traduzione letterale: “soffrire una grande decadenza nei beni, nella fortuna o nella salute”.

dilazionato nel corso dei due anni della Laurea Magistrale. Per avere una conferma dell'efficacia dell'unità didattica proposta, sarebbe inoltre necessario sia, da una parte, ripetere l'esperimento su un altro campione di studenti, possibilmente più ampio, sia, dall'altra, replicare l'esperimento modificando il materiale utilizzato per uniformare il più possibile il livello di difficoltà delle due prove.

Inoltre, i dati ottenuti con il presente studio, uniti a quelli risultanti dall'analisi di IMITES, possono costituire un'indicazione per i docenti di interpretazione riguardo a quali espressioni figurate sembrano essere più problematiche per gli interpreti. Come già supposto da Prandi (2010) per la traduzione, i risultati della sperimentazione didattica infatti, sebbene il campione sia ridotto, sembrano indicare che gli studenti incontrino maggiori difficoltà nell'interpretare espressioni idiomatiche altamente lessicalizzate, oltre alle metafore vive più complesse e articolate.

Un futuro ulteriore sviluppo, infine, potrebbe essere quello di correlare le scelte strategiche degli studenti al tipo di metafora presente nell'originale, e comparare i risultati con i dati ottenuti da IMITES.

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**Science and Popularisation**  
**Scienza e divulgazione**



# **Analogia e personificazione nelle prime traduzioni italiana e spagnola dell'*Origin of Species* di Darwin**

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**Abstract:** *Gli studi pubblicati sulla ricezione del libro The Origin of Species (1859) di Charles Darwin hanno dimostrato che le strategie retoriche adottate dall'autore per elaborare la teoria della selezione naturale sono elementi di forza della teoria stessa. Tuttavia, il ruolo preponderante delle figure, in particolare dell'analogia e della personificazione, spiegherebbe in parte alcune delle critiche mosse al modello, fondato per molti scienziati dell'epoca più sulla persuasione che su prove scientifiche. Sebbene esista un numero crescente di analisi sulle metafore presenti nel testo e sulle controversie legate alla sua ricezione in Europa, mancano studi sistematici sulla traduzione delle figure contenute in quest'opera complessa. Sulla base dei principali studi sulle figure nella scienza e sulla traduzione della metafora, in questo articolo esploriamo i meccanismi di analogia e di personificazione dei concetti di selezione naturale e di natura nelle prime traduzioni italiana e spagnola dell'Origin.*

**Parole chiave:** *analogia, personificazione, selezione naturale, Darwin, origine delle specie.*

## **1. L'importanza delle figure nell'*Origin***

Appena uscito dalle stampe dell'editore Murray di Londra nel novembre 1859, *The Origin of Species* di Charles Darwin diventò subito un *best seller*, riuscendo a vendere 1.250 copie in una sola giornata (Beer 1992: 49). Poco dopo la pubblicazione, l'opera iniziò a circolare in Europa in inglese e nelle diverse traduzioni apparse nell'arco di pochi anni, portando così ad un'ampia ricezione (Glick, Engels 2008). Come evidenziano i numerosi studi dedicati all'impatto del libro tra gli scienziati e il pubblico dell'epoca, il successo di vendite dell'opera non si spiega soltanto dalla novità della teoria della selezione naturale, ma risponde anche alle reazioni a volte virulente contro le prospettive inedite che apriva sulla natura, l'uomo, la filosofia e la religione. Di fatto, la necessità di dare risposta alle reazioni suscitate dal libro portarono l'autore e l'editore a pubblicare ben sei edizioni corrette e ampliate tra il 1859 e il 1876. Gli studi sulla ricezione dell'*Origin* hanno anche segnalato le interpretazioni discordi, talvolta contraddittorie dell'opera:

*The Origin of Species* has at the time been interpreted in many different and often contradictory ways. Some considered it an excessively speculative work of fantasy while others regarded it as a paragon of scientific procedure. Still others felt that it supported their belief in the one Creator, while others jumped at it as the decisive proof that there was no question of a creation but that nature as we know it sprang from mechanical processes. Where do all the interpretations come from? Was Darwin's language unclear? (Bulhof 1992: 23).

Un aspetto forse dovuto all'uso frequente del linguaggio figurato da parte dell'autore. Darwin si serve, ad esempio, di diverse metafore concettuali basate sui campi della lotta, la famiglia, l'albero e il viaggio per descrivere, spiegare e sostenere la sua teoria. Ma non solo, il suo *one long argument* poggia su un discorso in cui si fa un uso costante di comparazioni e di immagini poetiche:

Darwin [...] addresses himself directly to his readers in many ways: asking them to pass judgement, flattering them, talking to them, asking rhetorical questions. He argues in favour of his proposition, but rhetorically rather than logically. He slips in amusing anecdotes, uses poetic images and wonderful comparisons. In order to explain his meaning, he personifies realities like nature and the struggle for existence in wondrous ways (Bulhof 1992: 3-4).

Young (1985) e Beer (2000), principalmente, sottolineano in diversi gradi l'importanza delle strategie retoriche adottate dall'autore nell'esposizione della sua teoria. In particolare, indicano la forza dell'analogia stabilita da Darwin tra *selezione artificiale* e *selezione naturale* e l'uso frequente della personificazione come meccanismo argomentativo. Ma, per questi autori il metodo analogico adottato potrebbe spiegare in parte le critiche mosse a un modello teorico che per alcuni scienziati dell'epoca poggiava più sulla persuasione che su prove scientifiche evidenti. Così, il geologo Adam Sedgwick obiettò all'uso metaforico del termine *natural selection* contrapponendovi *development*, termine che secondo lui era già in uso dai biologi e dalle "persone di buon senso" (cit. in Bulhof 1992: 64). Allo stesso modo, nel suo libro *Contributions to the Theory of Natural Selection*, Alfred R. Wallace dedica un intero capitolo alle metafore utilizzate da Darwin per concludere che "Mr. Darwin has laid himself open to much misconception, and has given to his opponents a powerful weapon against himself, by his continual use of metaphor in describing the wonderful co-adaptations of organic beings" (1871: 270).

Attento alle critiche ricevute in questo senso, Darwin riconosce che il linguaggio figurato possa generare equivoci per cui, nella terza edizione dell'*Origin* (1861) e in relazione al concetto di selezione naturale, spiega:

In the literal sense of the word, no doubt, natural selection is a misnomer; but who ever objected to chemists speaking of the elective affinities of the various elements? [...] It has been said that I speak of natural selection as an active power or Deity; but who objects to an author speaking of the attraction of gravity as ruling the movements of the planets? Every one knows what is meant and is implied by such metaphorical expressions; and they are almost necessary for brevity. So again it is difficult to avoid personifying the word Nature (1861, 3<sup>a</sup> ed.: 63).

In questo frammento, che verrà mantenuto con poche differenze nelle edizioni successive, Darwin giustifica nel nome della brevità e dell'efficacia comunicativa l'uso dell'analogia e della personificazione. Due figure che, come vediamo in seguito, hanno un ruolo di primo ordine non solo nell'esposizione della teoria ma anche nella sua stessa elaborazione.

## 2. L'analogia e la personificazione nella teoria della selezione naturale

La struttura dell'analogia o della metafora per analogia è, secondo Mortara Garavelli (2010: 61-62), quella di una proporzione esprimibile con la formula "A sta a B come C sta a D". Si tratta dunque di una somiglianza di rapporti tra due insiemi, e quello rappresentato dai termini A e B è il tema a proposito del quale si vuole trarre una conclusione. Un'analogia riuscita può arrivare a dare forma stabile a concetti nuovi, il che può essere molto produttivo nella scienza, ma, allo stesso modo, i procedimenti analogici si prestano a volte a confondere le carte, come sa lo stesso Darwin quando afferma "analogy may be a deceitful guide" (1859: 484).

Tuttavia, come hanno segnalato Gross (1996) e Fahnestock (1999), l'analogia è un valido meccanismo euristico attivo nella costruzione di ipotesi nonché un veicolo efficace di dimostrazione di teorie (cfr. Freddi 2011). Nell'*Origin*, l'analogia consente a Darwin di stabilire un'ipotesi basata sulla somiglianza di rapporti tra la



selezione artificiale o in stato domestico, fatta da giardinieri e allevatori, e la selezione naturale, le cui regole o leggi operano nella natura (Largent 2009). L'uso di un modello come analogo materiale gli permette di associare il meccanismo naturale sconosciuto e il processo reale noto supponendo che si comportino in un modo simile. Montuschi (1993: 91) riassume lo schema analogico di costruzione dell'ipotesi evolutiva considerando: la descrizione di A, ovvero il fatto che richiede una spiegazione; la descrizione di B, che è il fatto che appare analogo al fatto da spiegare; e una serie di enunciati che determinano la rilevanza del fatto analogo rispetto al fatto da spiegare e che associano il primo al secondo in termini potenzialmente esplicativi. Nell'analogia darwiniana A è la variazione naturale e B è il fatto familiare, ovvero la variabilità delle specie ottenuta artificialmente attraverso la selezione domestica, in questo modo la rilevanza di B rispetto ad A può essere esplicitata nei termini di una serie di effetti apparentemente comuni ai due domini di confronto. Ed è in questo spazio di identificazione dei due domini che si inserisce l'ipotesi esplicativa.

Gli abbondanti dati forniti sul primo tipo di selezione nella ricerca di varietà diverse di piante ed animali permettono a Darwin di avanzare delle spiegazioni su come la natura agisca nella produzione di svariate specie, ma allo stesso tempo obbligano la natura ad assumere l'aspetto di un agente senziente, cioè un'entità personificata. Un'operazione che poggerebbe, secondo Montuschi (1993: 94), sulla metafora dell'allevatore cosmico o *cosmic breeder*, figura ipoteticamente simile a quella dell'allevatore umano ma che agisce in natura, introdotta da Darwin negli *Essays* pubblicati nel 1842, e poi sostituita dal concetto di *selezione naturale*. Così, nello sviluppare la teoria, lo scienziato passa dall'analogia alla personificazione.

Se per Mortara Garavelli (2010: 53), questa è una figura di pensiero che permette di umanizzare essere viventi e cose inanimate, per Lakoff e Johnson è una metafora ontologica la cui forza risiede nella sua capacità di spiegare una gran varietà di esperienze con entità non umane in termini di motivazioni, caratteristiche ed attività umane (1980: 34). Come l'analogia, anche la personificazione è un meccanismo che può sia chiarire un significato che oscurarlo (Paxson 1994). Ma, pur ammettendo in diverse parti del libro che le figure possono costituire in questo senso armi a doppio taglio, Darwin mantiene l'analogia per dare coerenza al modello senza evitare di presentare la *selezione naturale* come un agente attivo, e questo per il seguente motivo: "He was [...] restricted by the resources of his language and by the anthropocentric perspective fossilized in it" (Drogosz 2011: 67).

Infatti, dalle analisi condotte sulle strategie retoriche contenute nell'opera (Depew 2009), appare evidente come l'uso di queste figure fosse in qualche modo inevitabile per diverse cause: a) il concetto di variazione richiedeva un agente, interno o esterno; b) la posizione del soggetto in inglese era generalmente associata a un agente e ad un'azione intenzionale; c) le leggi stabilite dall'uomo e le leggi naturali – come il principio di *selezione naturale* di Darwin o la legge di gravità, la quale fa cadere gli oggetti – erano caratterizzate come agenti; d) anche la metafora *madre natura* era fossilizzata; e) infine, la creazione e la selezione artificiale, modelli analoghi a quello della selezione naturale, presupponevano un agente intelligente (Drogosz 2008: 64-65). Dunque, se l'analogia e la personificazione, essendo metafore di grande forza espressiva, permettono a Darwin non solo di presentare un'ipotesi scientifica in modo leggibile e interpretabile ma di fornire un nuovo quadro possibile attraverso cui ordinare il mondo (Arduini 2007), esse pongono anche alcuni problemi di

interpretazione. Da un lato, sono metafore d'accesso che introducono a un dominio di esperienza ancora inesplorato benché, nel caso darwiniano, l'analogia tra uomo e natura non fosse del tutto nuova, come ha evidenziato Dennett partendo dai *Dialogues* (1779) di Hume:

The curious adapting of means to ends, through-out all nature, resembles, exactly, though it much exceeds, the productions of human contrivance—of human design, thought, wisdom, and intelligence. Since therefore the effects resemble each other, *we are led to infer, by all the rules of analogy*, that the causes also resemble, and *that the Author of Nature is somewhat similar to the mind of man* (cit. in Dennett 1995: 29, corsivo nostro).

Dall'altro, la loro capacità di fare interagire significati diversi e relazioni tra domini noti e domini inediti può complicare il pieno accesso alla nuova realtà che descrivono. In questo modo, attraverso le sei edizioni del libro, Darwin insegue le implicazioni di una terminologia messa alla prova dalla nuova teoria e riformula ogni volta i confini tra il significato scientifico, apparentemente più preciso, e gli echi innovativi del linguaggio in cui articola la teoria. Nel testo, spesso si tende più all'espansione che non alla stabilizzazione del senso, così "Il linguaggio della teoria non è un linguaggio di definizioni date e di postulati 'a senso unico', ma un linguaggio di significati trovati, a tessitura aperta" (Montuschi 1993: 101). Un aspetto che avrà notevoli implicazioni per la traduzione dell'opera.

### 3. Tradurre figure nell'*Origin*

Dal punto di vista della traduzione della metafora, Van Besien e Pelsmaekers hanno gettato nuova luce su quelle metafore della scienza che Boyd (1979 [1993]) chiama "pedagogiche" e "costitutive di teorie". Per questi autori, la loro funzione primordiale è quella di fornire un'alternativa alla terminologia scientifica classica tramite il loro adattamento a nuove ipotesi, ma, mentre le prime offrono una migliore comprensione dei concetti allacciando i loro significati ad altri già noti, e possono, nella traduzione, essere riformulate tramite delle parafrasi, le seconde, costitutive di teorie, sono alla base del modello teorico e non accettano riformulazioni. Il lettore, attraverso questo tipo di metafora "is invited to explore similarities and analogies between the two subject matters, including aspects of the new subject matter that have not yet been discovered or fully understood. The metaphor thus acts as an invitation for further research" (1988: 143).

Si è già detto che nell'*Origin*, l'analogia e la personificazione appaiono come costitutive della teoria nella misura in cui permettono di stabilire un'ipotesi esplicativa basata sulle relazioni di somiglianza tra il mondo della selezione artificiale, ben noto a Darwin e a gran parte dei suoi lettori inglesi, e quello della selezione naturale, ancora da esplorare. L'analogia tra azione umana e azione della natura spiega che la selezione naturale e la natura si presentino nel testo con caratteristiche umane tramite aggettivi come "niggard", "rigorous" o "prodigal" e verbi come "act", "destroy", "produce" o "lead", che sembrano dotare i concetti di una coscienza (Young 1985: 125). Di fatto, nonostante le espressioni metaforiche siano per Darwin meccanismi esplicativi efficaci e i meccanismi descritti non possano avere un comportamento cosciente, nel testo c'è "a pervasive feeling that selection of any kind implies consciousness" (Ruse 1999: 208).

Di fronte alle caratteristiche delle figure contenute nel testo di partenza, per quanto riguarda la traduzione, bisogna dunque considerare il ruolo dell'analogia

come funzionalmente rilevante e dunque l'obbligo per il traduttore di renderla in modo coerente nel testo ai fini comunicativi cercati dall'autore (Samaniego 1996). Il traduttore, oltre che dalla sua competenza linguistica e, in questo caso, scientifica, è anche vincolato dalla necessità di restituire nella lingua-cultura di arrivo i molteplici significati che interagiscono in quella metafora d'accesso che è l'analogia tra i due tipi di selezione, al fine di fornire al lettore<sup>1</sup> un testo accessibile e una teoria comprensibile e convincente.

### 3.1. La prima traduzione italiana

In Italia, il libro fu tradotto nel 1864 da Giovanni Canestrini (1835-1900) e Leonardo Salimbeni (1830-1889) a partire dalla terza edizione inglese del 1861. La traduzione venne pubblicata a Modena "col consenso dell'autore" dalla casa editrice Zanichelli, fondata da appena cinque anni. Canestrini era uno dei principali naturalisti italiani dell'epoca anche se al momento della traduzione era un giovane biologo che muoveva i primi passi nell'ambito accademico. Sul secondo traduttore, Salimbeni, si sa che negli anni della traduzione era docente di Geografia e Storia naturale presso il Collegio San Carlo di Modena e che pubblicava sui giornali locali articoli di tema naturalistico (Pancaldi 1983: 158-159).

Il volume contiene una breve nota indirizzata "Al Lettore" in cui i traduttori affermano le due necessità a cui desiderano far fronte: in primo luogo, divulgare in Italia l'opera di Darwin; in secondo luogo, rettificare alcuni malintesi a cui potrebbero essere andati incontro i lettori che avessero letto l'*Origin* nella versione francese di Clémence A. Royer (1862). Infatti, essi dichiarano che se il lettore crede di valersi della traduzione francese non acquisterà un'idea precisa e inalterata del testo, dato che secondo i traduttori essa è in molti punti erronea e troppo libera e inesatta. Allontanandosi dunque da Royer, dichiarano:

Noi non vogliamo prevenire il giudizio del lettore con intempestive annotazioni e ci asteniamo dall'espone il nostro avviso sui punti principali di questa dottrina; solamente noi osserveremo, che essa porta dei cambiamenti più o meno profondi in quasi tutte le scienze naturali; che essa cerca di spiegare alcuni termini astratti fin'ora incompresi e tuttavia continuamente applicati; che in fine essa tende a ridurre ai limiti i più ristretti l'ingerenza immediata della forza soprannaturale (Canestrini e Salimbeni 1865, s.n.).

### 3.2. La prima traduzione spagnola

La prima traduzione completa in spagnolo, di Enrique Godínez y Esteban (1845-1894), fu pubblicata nel 1877 a Madrid dalla casa editrice Biblioteca Perojo e realizzata a partire dalla sesta edizione inglese. Godínez era un ufficiale della Marina che negli anni sessanta aveva effettuato diversi viaggi tra la Spagna e il continente americano. Nel 1871 abbandonò la Marina e iniziò una carriera da giornalista e traduttore di saggi filosofici e di testi letterari (Gomis, Josa 2009). Nel 1876 cominciò a tradurre l'*Origin*, un progetto che avrà anche in questo caso il consenso dell'autore. Il volume non contiene alcuna nota o introduzione del traduttore ma nella pagina VIII vi sono trascritte, in inglese e in spagnolo, due lettere inviate da Darwin a Godínez: la prima è una risposta positiva alla richiesta di autorizzazione a portare a termine la traduzione; la seconda, una nota di buon augurio per proseguire con il

<sup>1</sup> Non è facile determinare quale fosse all'epoca il lettore dell'*Origin* poiché sappiamo che il libro circolò tra scienziati di discipline diverse e in ambienti non scientifici in cui acquistò un significato più politico e filosofico che scientifico (Bulhof 1992: 51).

lavoro. Sappiamo inoltre che questa traduzione apparve dopo una prima versione incompleta realizzata da un traduttore anonimo a partire dalla traduzione francese di Royer. In questa versione del 1872, il traduttore avverte il lettore: “Para ella [Royer] la naturaleza lo constituye todo. Conviene que esto se tenga presente para [...] leer con prevención sus temerosas afirmaciones” (1872, x).<sup>2</sup> Anche se non è possibile provarlo con i dati a disposizione, è probabile che Godínez conoscesse questa versione pubblicata presso la *Biblioteca social, histórica y filosófica* dallo stampatore Luengo, così come la dichiarazione del traduttore contenuta nel testo, simile per certi versi all’avvertenza di Canestrini e Salimbeni.

In ogni caso, possiamo pensare che l’obiettivo dei primi traduttori italiani e spagnolo fosse quello di allontanare i rispettivi lettori da una traduzione, quella francese, che portava le tematiche del libro troppo oltre gli intenti dell’autore e applicava concetti come “lotta per l’esistenza” al di fuori dell’ambito strettamente scientifico. Possiamo supporre che il loro intento fosse quello di ridare voce all’autore, e che dunque le strategie di traduzione adottate siano prevalentemente *source-oriented*.

#### 4. Analisi delle traduzioni

Questa prima analisi esplorativa è incentrata sulla traduzione dei verbi utilizzati per descrivere l’azione della *selezione naturale* e della *natura*. Tramite i verbi Darwin descrive, compara, fa interagire i domini della selezione artificiale e della selezione naturale, per questo motivo, l’analisi grammaticale appare utile per capire in che modo i traduttori italiani e spagnolo abbiano rielaborato le metafore d’accesso che sottostanno alla teoria darwiniana.

Nei primi esempi riportati sotto, estratti dalla terza (1861, fonte per la traduzione italiana) e dalla sesta (1876, fonte della traduzione spagnola) edizione dell’opera e dalle traduzioni italiana (1864) e spagnola (1877), notiamo innanzi tutto che i verbi sono mantenuti senza che ci siano riformulazioni, aggiunte o altre strategie finalizzate a chiarire il senso metaforico dell’azione della natura o della selezione naturale. Queste sono metafore costitutive di teoria per cui, anche nella traduzione debbono veicolare la stessa forza esplicativa e invitare il lettore a esplorare i significati o le prospettive legate ai nuovi concetti:

(1a) whether Nature does not **reveal to us** her method of work (p. 246)  
se la Natura non **ci riveli** il suo metodo di operare (p. 179).

(1b) whether nature does not **reveal to us** her method of work (p. 220).  
si la naturaleza no **nos revela** su método de trabajo (p. 286).

(2a) natural selection **destroying** any which depart from the proper type (p. 110)  
l’elezione naturale **che distrugge** tutti gl’individui che si allontanano dal loro tipo (p. 76).

(2b) natural selection **which will destroy** any which depart from the proper type (p. 81).  
la seleccion natural, **que destruirá** á todos los individuos que se separen del tipo conveniente (p. 115).

(3a) natural selection **will always act** with extreme slowness (p. 115).  
l’elezione naturale **agisce sempre** con estrema lentezza (p. 79).

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<sup>2</sup> “Per lei [Royer] la natura è tutto. Conviene che ciò si tenga presente per [...] leggere preventivamente le sue affermazioni temerarie”.

(3b) natural selection **generally acts** with extreme slowness (p. 84).  
la selección natural **obra en general** con lentitud extrema (p. 118).

(4a) natural selection **will pick out** with **unerring skill** each improvement (p. 209).  
l'elezione naturale **coglierà** qualunque perfezionamento con **infallibile abilità** (p. 149).

(4b) natural selection **will pick out** with **unerring skill** each improvement (p. 146).  
la selección natural **entresacará** con **habilidad indefectible** cada mejora (p. 196).

(5a) natural selection **always ready to adapt** the slowly varying descendants (p. 506).  
l'elezione naturale **è sempre pronta ad adattare** i discendenti lentamente variabili (p. 372).

(5b) natural selection **always ready to adapt** the slowly varying descendants (p. 414).  
la selección natural **está pronta siempre para adaptar** á sus descendientes (p. 527).

Tuttavia, notiamo alcune variazioni quasi impercettibili, seppur significative, tra la prima e la sesta edizione e tra le versioni italiana e spagnola. Ad esempio, in (2a) il gerundio “destroying” dell’edizione precedente diventa “which will destroy”, il che dà alla selezione naturale un carattere più attivo (2b). In (3b) la formula iniziale “which will act” passa invece al più neutro e meno predittivo “generally acts”, il che sembra riflettere la volontà di Darwin di bilanciare da un’edizione all’altra le implicazioni semantiche derivate dalla personificazione.

Nelle traduzioni si osserva un’aderenza quasi totale al testo anche se, ad esempio, in (2a) e (3a) i traduttori italiani, i quali parlano di “elezione naturale” evitando il calco e dunque il neologismo “selezione” (Pancaldi 1983), usano in tutti i due casi il presente “distrugge” e “agisce”, quasi anticipando la forma generalizzata del presente della sesta edizione inglese. Vediamo un altro frammento:

(6a) a clear insight into the **means of modification and coadaptation** (p. 4)  
un concetto chiaro dei **mezzi di modificazione e di adattamento impiegati dalla natura**  
(p. xiii)

(6b) a clear insight into the **means of modification and coadaptation** (p. 3)  
una clara percepción de **los medios de modificación y coadaptación** (p. 16)

In generale, Godínez tende a tradurre più letteralmente rispetto a Canestrini e Salimbeni. Così, mentre il primo rispecchia l’originale (6b), gli italiani aggiungono “impiegati dalla natura” (6a), volendo forse esplicitare il concetto di mezzi naturali ed evitare la confusione con i mezzi artificiali che verranno esposti subito dopo nel Capitolo I. Per descrivere l’attività dell’uomo nella selezione artificiale, in (7a e b) Darwin utilizza il verbo “select” che rimane implicito nella frase seguente, ma con il soggetto *Nature*.

(7a) **Man selects** only for his own good; **Nature only** for that of the being which **she tends**  
(p. 88)  
**L’uomo sceglie** colla sola vista del proprio interesse; **la natura opera esclusivamente** pel bene dell’essere **di cui si occupa** (p. 60).

(7b) **Man selects** only for his own good; **Nature only** for that of the being which **she tends**  
(p. 66).  
**El hombre escoge** sin más miras que su propio bien, mientras que **la naturaleza busca solamente** el bien del ser **á quien atiende** (p. 95).

La scelta operata dai traduttori in entrambe le versioni è quella di esplicitare l'attività della natura associando altri verbi al soggetto. Ma, in (7a) i traduttori italiani ricorrono al verbo "opera", che contrariamente al letterale "seleziona" appare più meccanico e senza un'intenzione esplicita. Godínez cerca invece di rafforzare la portata espressiva della personificazione con "busca" (7b), "cerca" in italiano, che denota un'azione intenzionale per ottenere il bene degli esseri. In modo simile, nel frammento che segue, i verbi "scrutinising", "rejecting", "preserving", "adding up" e "working", associati metaforicamente alle azioni della selezione naturale, sono tradotti in italiano con la perifrasi continuativa "va scrutando" e i gerundi "rigettando", "conservando" e "acumulando", forme non personali che grammaticalmente indeterminano il soggetto attivo, ma che dal punto di vista semantico non limitano l'aspetto intenzionale delle azioni descritte:

(8a) It may metaphorically be said that **natural selection is daily and hourly scrutinising** [...]; **rejecting** that which is bad, **preserving** and **adding up** all that is good; silently and insensibly **working** (p. 89).

Metaforicamente può dirsi che l'elezione naturale **va scrutando** ogni giorno e ogni ora [...]: **rigettando** ciò che è cattivo, **conservando** e **acumulando** tutto ciò che è buono; **essa lavora** insensibilmente e silenziosamente (p. 61).

(8b) It may metaphorically be said that **natural selection is daily and hourly scrutinising** [...]; **rejecting** those that are bad, **preserving** and **adding up** all that are good; silently and insensibly **working** (pp. 66-67).

Puede decirse metafóricamente que la **selección natural está haciendo diariamente, y hasta por horas** [...] **el escrutinio** de las variaciones más pequeñas; **desechando** las que son malas, **conservando** y **acumulando** las que son buenas, **trabajando** insensible y silenciosamente (pp. 95-96).

In (8a), dopo una pausa, si formula una nuova frase dove si dice che "essa lavora", rompendo il ritmo dell'originale forse per sottolineare il procedere insensibile e silenzioso della selezione naturale. Godínez si scosta appena con la formula "va haciendo el escrutinio", ma mantiene gli stessi verbi e il gerundio per riprodurre lo stesso ritmo del testo di partenza e il carattere imperturbato dell'azione della natura.

Nel frammento che segue, Darwin chiede il permesso al lettore per poter personalizzare il concetto di natura, soggetto del verbo "cares", verbo che esprime una coscienza e un sentimento tipicamente umani.

(9a) Nature (if I may be allowed thus to personify the natural preservation of varying and favoured individuals during the struggle for existence) **cares nothing** for appearances (p. 87)

la natura (ove mi si permetta di personificare così la preservazione naturale degli individui variabili e favoriti durante la lotta per l'esistenza) **non s'inquieta** delle apparenze (p. 60)

(9b) Nature, if I may be allowed to personify the natural preservation or survival of the fittest, **cares nothing** for appearances (p. 65)

la naturaleza, si se me permite personificar la natural conservacion y supervivencia de los más aptos, **para nada se cuida** de las apariencias (p. 97).

Se la traduzione spagnola mantiene lo stesso verbo inglese con "cuida", "curarsi di", senza modificare il senso primario del verbo, in italiano si sceglie il verbo "inquietarsi" che sembra aggiungere un senso di preoccupazione. In questo modo, l'espressione negativa veicola l'idea che la natura non solo non si cura delle apparenze ma che esse non la preoccupano affatto.

Altri frammenti mostrano i leggeri scostamenti sintattici e semantici del testo in italiano:

(10a) In the literal sense of the word, no doubt, **natural selection is a misnomer**; [...]; Every one knows what is meant and is implied by such **metaphorical expressions**; and they are almost necessary for brevity. So again **it is difficult** to avoid personifying **the word Nature** (pp. 85-86).

[...] nel senso letterale della parola l'Elezione naturale è un **controsenso**: [...]; Tutti sanno quale significato racchiudano queste **espressioni metafisiche**, le quali sono pressoché indispensabili per la brevità del dire. È anche **estremamente difficile** lo evitare la personificazione **della parola "Natura"** (pp. 58-59).

(10b) In the literal sense of the word, no doubt, **natural selection is a false term**; [...]; Every one knows what is meant and is implied by such **metaphorical expressions**; and they are almost necessary for brevity. So again **it is difficult** to avoid **personifying the word Nature** (p. 64).

En el sentido literal de la palabra sin duda es un **falso término** el de la selección natural; [...] Todo el mundo sabe lo que significa y se quiere decir por semejantes **expresiones metafóricas**, y son casi necesarias por su brevedad. Por lo mismo **es difícil** evitar la personificación de la **palabra naturaleza** (pp. 94-95).

In questo frammento, mentre Darwin dice nella terza edizione che il termine *selezione naturale* in senso letterale è “misnomer” ovvero “improprio”, Canestrini e Salimbeni usano il più energico, seppur non adatto, “controsenso”. Godínez traduce invece “falso término” usando lo stesso termine apparso nella sesta edizione e calcando la struttura inglese. Dove il testo parla di “metaphorical expressions”, oppure “expresiones metafóricas” nella traduzione letterale spagnola, troviamo in italiano il curioso “espressioni metafisiche”, un sintagma che di fatto apre la porta a molti dei presupposti filosofici impliciti nel libro. Infine, quando Darwin afferma “it is difficult to avoid personifying”, Godínez traduce senza modifiche “es difícil” mentre gli italiani, consapevoli in quanto scienziati dei rischi di abbondare nella personificazione derivata dall’analogia, aggiungono l’avverbio *estremamente* ed evidenziano la parola *Natura*, in maiuscola e tra virgolette, per sottolineare, cosa che non fa il traduttore spagnolo, che si fa qui allusione al termine e non alla natura che agisce nella variazione delle specie.

Se nei primi esempi i traduttori italiani sembrano rafforzare ciò che la figura evoca, ovvero una natura i cui meccanismi di selezione operano senza sosta con intenzione di fare il bene degli esseri “di cui si occupa”, nei frammenti che seguono essi cercano di attenuarne la forza espressiva attraverso una restrizione d’uso del significato dei termini al campo della scienza.

(11a) Why, if man can by patience select variations most useful to himself, **should nature fail in selecting variations useful** [...]. What limit can be put to this power, **acting** during long ages and **rigidly scrutinising** the whole constitution, structure, and habits of each creature,—**favouring** the good and **rejecting** the bad? (p. 503).

Perché **la natura non potrà giungere a scegliere** le variazioni vantaggiose [...] quando l’uomo è in facoltà di prescegliere colla pazienza le variazioni che gli recano qualche utilità? Qual limite possiamo noi assegnare a questo potere che **opera** per lunghe epoche e **scruta rigorosamente** l’intera costituzione, la struttura e le abitudini di ogni creatura, - **favorendo** il buono e **rigettando** il dannoso? (p. 371).

(11b) [...] should **not variations useful to nature’s living products often arise**, and be preserved or selected? What limit can be put to this power, **acting** during long ages and **rigidly scrutinising** the whole constitution, structure, and habits of each creature,—**favouring** the good and **rejecting** the bad? (p. 412).

[...] ¿por qué [...] **no han de nacer variaciones** para los productos vivos de la naturaleza, que sean conservadas por medio de la seleccion? ¿Qué límite puede ponerse á este poder, **que obra**

datante largas edades y que hace **un rígido escrutinio** de toda la constitucion, estructura y hábitos de cada criatura, **favoreciendo** lo bueno y **desechando** lo malo? (p. 539).

Così, in (11a), mentre la natura nel testo di partenza “[is] rigidly scrutinising” e nella traduzione spagnola “hace un rígido escrutinio” (11b), nella versione italiana “scruta *rigorosamente*”, un avverbio che oltre a significare che si fa qualcosa in modo inflessibile, è spesso legato all’agire meticoloso e con metodo o coerenza logica nei dizionari dell’epoca (*Vocabolario della lingua italiana*, 1833 e *Vocabolario dell’Accademia della Crusca*, 1729 e 1863). Dal canto suo, Godínez opera una sorta di modulazione in cui si elimina un aggettivo importante. La domanda “should nature fail in selecting variations useful”, che in italiano diventa “la natura non potrà giungere a scegliere le variazioni che gli recano qualche utilità”, viene tradotta in spagnolo con “porqué no han de nacer variaciones para los productos vivos de la naturaleza”, spostando il soggetto da *natura* a *variazioni* e rimuovendo senza motivi apparenti l’aggettivo *useful* relativo ad esse. E ancora, nel seguente frammento:

(12a) As natural selection **acts solely by accumulating** slight, successive, favourable variations [...]; it can act only by very short and slow **steps**. Hence the canon of “Natura non facit saltum,” which **every fresh addition to our knowledge tends to make truer**, is on this theory simply intelligible... (pp. 505-506).

Siccome l’elezione naturale **agisce soltanto accumulando** delle variazioni [...]; essa non può operare che **per gradi** molto brevi e molto lenti. Perciò il canone “Natura non facit saltum” che viene **confermato da ogni nuova conquista della nostra scienza** [...] (p. 372).

(12b) As natural selection **acts solely by accumulating** slight, successive, favourable variations [...]; it can act only by short and slow **steps**. Hence, the canon of “Natura non facit saltum,” which **every fresh addition to our knowledge tends to confirm**, is on this theory intelligible (pp. 413-414).

Como la seleccion natural **obra solamente acumulando** variaciones [...]; solamente puede obrar a **pasos** cortos y lentos; y por esto es inteligible, según esta teoría el cánon *Natura non facit saltum*, que tiende a **confirmar todo progreso que hacemos en nuestros conocimientos** (p. 527).

Darwin dice “[natural selection] can act only by slow steps”, che letteralmente diventa in spagnolo “a pasos lentos” (12b), mentre in italiano “opera per *gradi*”, termine che si collega in modo più preciso alla terminologia scientifica.

(13a) And as natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being (p. 525).

Se riflettiamo che l’elezione naturale agisce soltanto per il vantaggio di ogni essere (p. 387).

(13b) And as natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being (p. 428).

Y como la seleccion natural obra solamente por y para el bien de cada sér (p. 545).

In (13a), infine, la selezione naturale “works by and for the good of each being”, ovvero in spagnolo “obra por y para el bien de cada sér” (13b), e in italiano “agisce per il *vantaggio* di ogni essere”. Qui la struttura preposizionale composta “by and for” si semplifica con “per” e si propone un termine ritenuto più idoneo forse perché più in uso tra gli scienziati e perché evita le possibili connotazioni morali del concetto di *bene*.

## 5. Conclusioni

Da questa prima analisi, che richiederà senz’altro nuove ricerche – per indagare ad esempio se la versione italiana ricorra più spesso e in modo sistematico all’esplicitazione – possiamo affermare già che entrambe le traduzioni mantengono



la funzione costitutiva di teoria delle figure. Tuttavia, nella traduzione italiana sembrano alternarsi due tipi di procedimenti: da un lato, si amplifica la forza espressiva dell'analogia e della personificazione e il carattere antropomorfo del concetto di selezione naturale attraverso un uso frequente del presente indicativo e tramite strutture come "opera esclusivamente", che l'originale formula tramite un futuro con valore modale ipotetico o con degli avverbi più neutri come "only". Dall'altro, si cerca di limitare la natura poetica di alcune espressioni adottando termini volti a sottolineare il carattere scientifico del testo. Così, in (12a) il passaggio particolarmente evocativo *which every fresh addition to our knowledge tends to make truer*, che Darwin modificherà in seguito, diventa "viene confermato da ogni nuova conquista della nostra scienza". Ricordiamo che entrambi i traduttori sono scienziati, uno professionista e l'altro appassionato, il che potrebbe spiegare la tendenza nel loro testo a equilibrare la funzione euristica delle figure, da una parte, e la loro portata espressiva, dall'altra, precisando ove necessario e proponendo termini più consoni a un testo scientifico, bilanciando cioè i significati inediti e quelli già noti per facilitarne la comprensione, come si evince dalla loro nota introduttiva: "[l'opera che si presenta] cerca di spiegare alcuni termini astratti fin'ora incompresi e tuttavia continuamente applicati". Quanto alla traduzione spagnola, abbiamo visto che Godínez mantiene invece una più chiara aderenza al testo, ricorrendo ai calchi semantici e sintattici, proponendo neologismi e significati da scoprire, con poche modifiche dovute più che altro alle differenze strutturali tra inglese e spagnolo, come in (10b). Essendo giornalista e traduttore letterario, Godínez rende bene il tono a volte enfatico del testo originale e rafforza la natura antropomorfa dei concetti, vedasi ad esempio "el ser a quién atiende" (7b) fedele al "tends" inglese, evitando anche di allontanarsi forse per non incorrere in errori di interpretazione. Questo lo porta a ridurre i procedimenti di esplicitazione e di chiarimento di alcuni concetti, ma anche a eliminare elementi importanti come l'aggettivo *utile* in (10b).

Possiamo concludere, in ogni caso, che queste traduzioni contengono una serie di strategie che rispecchiano la volontà dei traduttori di presentare la teoria nei termini voluti dall'autore, consapevoli che le figure presenti nel testo sono inscindibili dal modello teorico proposto da Darwin e dall'inedito e complesso mondo che inaugura nella scienza.

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# Translating lexical and grammatical metaphor in popular science magazines: The case of *National Geographic (Italia)*

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**Abstract:** *This paper aims at exploring the translation of metaphor, both 'lexical' and 'grammatical' (Halliday 1985/1994), in popular science texts, dealing with the language pair English-Italian. In particular, it will focus on the paratext, or rather peritext, made up of headlines and their most typical subdivisions, i.e., subheads, the so-called 'upper-decks', 'straplines' and 'nut-graphs', where metaphor plays a major role. The analysis is based upon a corpus of articles from the popular science magazine, National Geographic, in its American print version and in its corresponding Italian one. The theoretical background of the study is mainly rooted in linguistics and translation studies, but it also draws on journalism. The paper will start with a cursory illustration of the domain of popular science discourse, followed by a presentation of the goals of this study. It will then move on to briefly explain the notion of 'grammatical metaphor' as introduced by systemic functional linguistics (Halliday 1985/1994) and to show a taxonomy of functions of titles and headings as presented by Nord (1995, 2012) within the framework of translation studies. The second part of the paper will be more practical and will focus on the discussion of a selection of illustrative examples from the corpus under scrutiny. It will conclude with a brief overview of results and some future prospects for further investigation. The final aim of the paper, despite the narrow perspective of the case study, is to establish whether the translation of headlines, and of the interconnected peritextual elements, generally results in a process of 're-metaphorisation' or if a tendency towards 'de-metaphorisation' prevails.*

**Keywords:** *lexical metaphor, grammatical metaphor, de-metaphorisation, re-metaphorisation, popular science.*

## 1. Introduction

As linguists, philosophers, psychologists have repeatedly observed, metaphor is pervasive in our everyday life, in language and thought. As a cognitive tool, it makes connections between unfamiliar domains and more familiar ones, making abstract concepts easier to understand. It is thus not surprising that metaphor plays an important role in the domain of popular scientific discourse, where issues related to science and technology are conveyed to a lay audience. If we consider headlines in popular scientific press in particular, metaphor is also aimed at persuasion and is thus closer to advertising.

As Gotti (2012: 145) notes, the concept of popularisation has been widely discussed and different definitions have been put forth. It has often been referred to the spread of specialised knowledge for the purpose of education or information, without providing further insight. However, text-types such as the review article and the abstract also share the same features, i.e., do not offer 'conceptual innovation', thus such a definition is not totally adequate (Gotti 2012: 145). Another distinguishing feature has been said to be the kind of audience, made up of non-specialised readers. Nevertheless, this would not offer a clear differentiation between

‘instructive’ texts and popularised ones. A sharp distinction between popular science and other types of non-specialised discourse is rather based on two aspects, i.e. both the kind of audience and the function(s) of the text. This third definition proposed by Gotti will be at the basis of our study.

In the case of popular scientific texts, an addresser, specialist in the field, shares scientific discoveries or specialised issues with a non-specialist addressee, i.e., a wide audience of educated, and interested, laypeople. As regards functions, the first function of popularised discourse is that of informing readers. But while ‘instructive’ texts aim at ‘training’ a non-specialist reader in terms of topic, concepts, specific terminology – as is typical of instruction manuals or textbooks – popularised texts aim at offering specialised information to non-specialised readers by using general language: it is the case of popularised books, films and documentaries, and popularised magazines. The second function of popularised texts, as of mass media in general, is that of entertaining their readers.

To fulfil both functions, popularised texts make use of figurative language, in particular of metaphors. On the one hand, as Gotti (2012: 148) reminds us, metaphors are often employed to establish a more concrete relationship between a specialised term and everyday language. On the other hand, it is claimed that the function of entertainment also entails an ample use of metaphors. In headlines in particular, metaphors help engender the reader’s curiosity (Papuzzi 2010: 196). Given this special function, in the world of journalism, headlines are usually written by editors, who act like advertising copy-writers: if a reader is attracted by effective headlines, s/he will most probably engage with the reading.

If headlines play such a crucial role, what happens when metaphors cross linguistic and cultural borders and need to achieve similar functions in translation?

In this paper we aim at investigating what happens when metaphorical headlines in popular science press are translated from one source language (henceforth SL) into a target language (henceforth TL), in particular from English into Italian. It is possible that also translated headlines are not dealt with by translators, but rather by editors, although this is not an issue of the present study. Our purpose is rather to see whether the function(s) of the metaphor in the source text (henceforth ST) is/are lost, conveyed or even reinforced in the target text (henceforth TT). As van den Broeck states in his pivotal study on metaphor translation, it is the function of metaphor, “[...] i.e., the communicative purpose it serves”, that determines its need for translation (1981: 76). Ultimately, as Halliday makes clear, the use of metaphor “does represent a choice” (Halliday 1994: 349), hence requires careful consideration on the part of the translator.

## **2. Aims of the paper**

In the literature on translation, many scholars have focussed on the simplification of TTs with respect to the STs, from Levy (1969) and his assumption that lexical impoverishment and explicitation are tendencies of translated texts, to Toury and his well-known ‘law of growing standardisation’ (1995), according to which TTs tend to be standardised with respect to their STs. The notion of ‘explicitation’ in particular was exploited within translation studies (henceforth TS) by Blum-Kulka (1986) and Baker (1996), the former positing the ‘explicitation hypothesis’, which “[...] postulates an observed cohesive explicitness from SL to TL texts regardless of the increase traceable to differences between the linguistic and textual systems involved’

(Blum-Kulka 1986: 19); the latter arguing for “[...] an overall tendency to spell things out rather than leave them implicit in translation” (Baker 1996: 180). This hypothesis was tested in particular with reference to the domain of literary translation, where a tendency to neutralise metaphorical expressions has been often accounted for (cf. Laviosa 2009).

More recently, applying a systemic functional linguistics (henceforth SFL) approach to translation, Steiner (2002) has explored the ‘explicitation hypothesis’ to establish properties of translated texts, with special reference to the language pair English-German and to the rendering of grammatical metaphor. It should be pointed out that unpacking a grammatical metaphor – which means de-metaphorising it – can prove useful for a translator faced by the difficulty to recast it in a TT (see Steiner 2002<sup>1</sup>; Manfredi 2011).

In our case study, we wished to explore whether a general trend to ‘de-metaphorisation’ was at issue, or, given the multiple function of headlines in popular scientific press, if they were in some way reproduced, or rather ‘re-metaphorised’, in the Italian TTs.

To investigate this aspect, we did not only consider traditional ‘lexical’ metaphors, but also ‘grammatical metaphors’ as proposed by Halliday (Halliday 1985/1994; Halliday and Matthiessen 1999), in the conviction that they contribute to the whole metaphorical character of a given text.

Before turning to the specificity of the case study, we will briefly describe the theoretical framework on which this paper is based.

### 3. Theoretical framework

We hold that a multidisciplinary approach can help analyse a multi-faceted phenomenon like translation of headlines in popular scientific press nowadays.

Our study essentially draws on SFL and TS, with some insights from journalism. SFL offers us the analytical tool to examine metaphors, both ‘lexical’ and ‘grammatical’. TS give us the theoretical framework to explore the much-discussed concept of ‘explicitation’ and, through Nord’s work in particular (1995; 2012), a tool to categorise the functions of headlines from a ‘functional’<sup>2</sup> perspective. However, since we are dealing with a text-type firmly grounded on the professional domain of journalism, also some notions from that area are, we believe, vital for a more thorough understanding.

#### 3.1. Lexical and grammatical metaphor

Within the framework of Hallidayan linguistics, metaphor is seen as “variation in the expression of a given meaning” (Halliday 1994: 342). Let us introduce the concepts of ‘lexical’ and ‘grammatical’ metaphor through the revealing words of Halliday and Matthiessen:

[t]he traditional approach to metaphor is to look at it ‘from below’ and ask what does a certain expression mean. [...] But we could look ‘from above’ [...]. Once we look from above [...], we can see that the phenomenon under discussion is the same as metaphor in its traditional sense except that what is varied is not the lexis but the grammar. [...] Lexical and grammatical

<sup>1</sup> For more insights into grammatical metaphor and translation, see also Steiner (2004).

<sup>2</sup> ‘Functional’ (or ‘functionalist’) refers here to ‘*skopos* theory’ of translation (*Skopostheorie*), where it concerns the ‘purpose’ of the TT.

metaphor are not two different phenomena; they are both aspects of the same general metaphorical strategy by which we expand our semantic resources for construing experience. (Halliday, Matthiessen 1999: 232-233)

From an SFL perspective, human experience is modelled through a series of processes involving people and things, i.e. participants, and it is embodied in the grammar of the clause (Halliday 1994: 106). Each utterance has a more ‘congruent’ realisation (i.e., non- or rather less, metaphorical), and more ‘incongruent’ ones. More typically, i.e. congruently, processes are encoded as verbal groups, qualities as adjectival groups, etc. If and when they are realised through different grammatical resources, they will be instances of less congruent realisations. A typical instance of grammatical metaphor is nominalisation, occurring when a process is encoded as a nominal group.

In line with Halliday’s view, we will not base our analysis on a simple dichotomy between ‘congruent’ and ‘incongruent’, in other words ‘non-metaphorical’ vs. ‘metaphorical’. Rather, we will consider metaphoricity along “a continuum whose poles are ‘least metaphorical’ and ‘most metaphorical’” (Halliday and Matthiessen 1999: 235). In particular, we will focus on ideational grammatical metaphor, without dealing with the interpersonal one<sup>3</sup>, in order to explore the domain of experience construed in popular science headlines.

### 3.2. Function(s) of headlines

From a journalistic point of view, as Papuzzi (2010: 192) explains, the primary function of a headline is that of condensing news and information, thus reducing the time for reading. Its second function is that of introducing and commenting the topic of the article. For doing so, the journalist/editor can employ different strategies. Papuzzi (2010: 194) notes that Eco distinguishes between ‘informative’ and ‘emotive’ headlines, while he himself proposes a distinction between ‘enunciative’ and ‘paradigmatic’ headlines<sup>4</sup>. Clearly, such an alternative is between ‘plain’ and ‘effective’ headlines, the latter similar to slogans aimed at attracting the reader’s attention. Moreover, as Papuzzi remarks (2010: 195), a ‘paradigmatic’ headline presupposes symmetry between addresser and addressee, in terms of language and culture.

From the perspective of TS, Nord (1995, 2012) classifies titles and headlines according to their function, or rather functions, since they can be fulfilled contemporarily. The scholar, linking to language functions, identifies six different functions of titles and headlines, namely: ‘distinctive’, ‘metatextual’ (which the scholar has recently renamed ‘metacommunicative’: see Nord 2012: 69), ‘phatic’, ‘informative’ (or ‘referential’), ‘expressive’ and ‘appellative’. According to Nord, the ‘distinctive’ function aims at distinguishing a headline from others, while the ‘metatextual’ function makes it recognisable as an instance of a specific text-type, since it conforms to its conventions. The ‘phatic’ function serves the scope of “attracting the attention of, and establishing a first contact with, any prospective reader” (Nord 1995: 264). When any piece of information with regard to the topic is

<sup>3</sup> The Hallidayan model identifies three main functions that speakers/writers use language for and calls them ‘ideational’, ‘interpersonal’ and ‘textual’ ‘metafunctions’. The ‘ideational’ concerns the representation of experiences, while the ‘interpersonal’ deals with the relationship between interactants.

<sup>4</sup> Papuzzi talks about ‘titoli enunciativi’ and ‘titoli paradigmatici’ (2010: 194).

offered, the ‘informative’ (or ‘referential’) function is at work, while when the author’s attitude or emotion is conveyed, in Nord’s taxonomy, we are dealing with the ‘expressive’ function. Finally, “to evoke the attention and interest” of readers, the ‘appellative’ function is achieved (Nord 1995: 264). As Nord clearly points out from her functionalist perspective, the function(s) of the target text may be different from the one(s) of the source text, according to the specific cultural context (Nord 1995: 263).

Nord also distinguishes, within a given text-type, between ‘essential’ and ‘optional’ functions. In her corpus (composed of titles and headings from fictional, nonfictional and children’s books, short stories, poems, and articles from scholarly journals), the essential functions are distinctive, metatextual and phatic. We will look at whether, and how, these functions are marked in the headlines comprised in our case study.

#### 4. Materials and methods

*National Geographic* (henceforth *NG*) is the official journal of the American National Geographic Society and contains articles dealing with nature, geography, ecology, science and technology. It is published in various languages in different countries, such as Italy, Germany, Spain, France, Greece, Poland, etc. Given that translation plays such a major role, the magazine can be considered a good source of investigation for linguistic and translational issues.

*National Geographic Italia* (henceforth *NGI*) is composed, up to 80 %, of translations from the American issue. Only very culture-specific articles are omitted, and replaced by texts more appealing for the Italian public.

The study is based on the analysis of a small corpus of articles, i.e., the feature articles included in the American press edition of *NG*, in the 6 issues from January to June 2012, which we find translated in the corresponding Italian version, *NGI*. The corpus consists of 33 STs and their TTs. Out of 37 articles included in the English STs, 33 are translated in the Italian TTs. 5 articles in the TT are original new texts, and we will consider them separately as ‘parallel texts’ (see § 6). Although the corpus is limited in size, we hope that it can set some working hypotheses for further studies.

From a methodological point of view, we have carried out a manual analysis of the 33 headlines in their source and target versions, examining the translation. We have taken into account the main headlines and, when present, also their subdivisions, optional elements that, in the journalistic and editorial jargon, are known as: ‘over-lines’ (or ‘upper-decks’), subheads (or ‘lower decks’) and ‘straplines’ (cf. e.g., Halan 2009: 116, <http://www.thenewsmanual.net/Resources/glossary.html>). The ‘over-line’ and the subhead refer to the lines placed immediately above or below the main headline respectively; a ‘strapline’ is a further headline following the main one. On some occasions – although not systematically – we have also examined the so-called ‘nut-graph’, i.e. a paragraph that summarises the essential elements of an article briefly, i.e. ‘in a nutshell’. While the main function of a headline is expository, the optional ‘over-line’ is introductory and the ‘nut-graph’ is supposed to clear up (Papuzzi 2010).

Our small corpus of investigation (33 articles) is made up of 33 main headlines, 5 of which also contain an ‘over-line’ or ‘upper-deck’, 3 a ‘subhead’, 4 also a ‘strapline’; most of them also include a ‘nut-graph’. As the chart below shows

(Fig. 1), 68 % of articles only contains a main headline, while 8 % also features a subhead and 13 % an ‘upper-deck’, along with the main headline. Moreover, 11 % of articles also has a ‘strapline’.

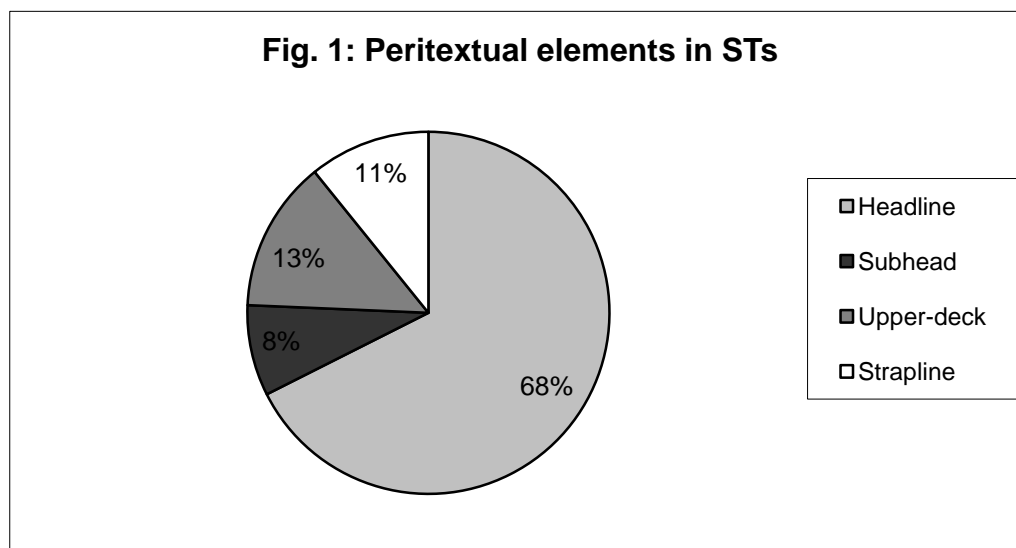


Fig. 1: Peritextual elements in STs

Following Nord, we consider headlines as a distinct text-type (Nord 1995: 262). Assuming that the communicative situation of ST and TT is similar and that source and target reader share the same cultural background, we did not make any distinction between translations and adaptations, or rather ‘versions’. For the purpose of this study, we have considered a ‘translation’ what House most probably would label a ‘covert version’, i.e., an unjustified application of the ‘cultural filter’ (House 1997: 71).

In the following sections, we will offer some empirical examples in order to see how this theoretical and methodological approach can be put into practice.

## 5. Analysis of the case study: *NG vs NGI*

Before moving on to the analysis, we wish to highlight the object of our investigation, i.e., metaphor translation and the possible strategies to cope with it. Then, after illustrating the kinds of metaphors we have examined, we would like to offer an overview of our study by selecting practical examples from our corpus.

Van den Broeck, exclusively referring to traditional metaphor, classifies three methods of translation: (1) *translation ‘sensu stricto’* – when the SL ‘tenor’ and the SL ‘vehicle’ are transferred into the TL; (2) *substitution* – when the SL ‘vehicle’ is replaced by a different TL ‘vehicle’ with a similar ‘tenor’ and (3) *paraphrase*, which occurs whenever an SL metaphor “[...] is rendered by a non-metaphorical expression in the TL” (1981: 77). In order to include both lexical and grammatical metaphor, we will rather classify our examples on the basis of their degree of metaphorisation, analysing when the ST metaphor has been lost or is simply ‘less incongruent’ in the TT (‘de-metaphorisation’), when it has been recast in the TL (‘re-metaphorisation’) and when it appears in the TT, while it was absent, or at least ‘less incongruent’, in the ST (‘metaphorisation’).



Given that rendering metaphors is linked to their function, let us start with an illustration of the main function(s) of ST headlines in our corpus.

While Nord's case study had shown that the 'essential' functions were distinctive, metatextual and phatic (see § 3.2), the analysis of our corpus material revealed that the phatic function is featured by most headlines, to establish a first contact with the potential reader, while the other two essential functions are the appellative and the referential/informative, which were optional in Nord's classification. Such a discrepancy can easily be related to the different text-types under discussion: while Nord's corpus comprised titles from fictional, nonfictional and children's books, short stories, poems, where distinctive and metatextual functions are basic, ours pertains a popular science magazine, whose headlines seem to have the primary aim of persuading "[...] the title recipient (a) to read (or, at least, buy) the co-text and/or (b) to read and interpret it in a specific way", in her words a kind of 'advertising' function and an 'instructive' one" (Nord 1995: 278).

Observation of data in the 33 cases examined (only main headlines) leads us to the following graph:

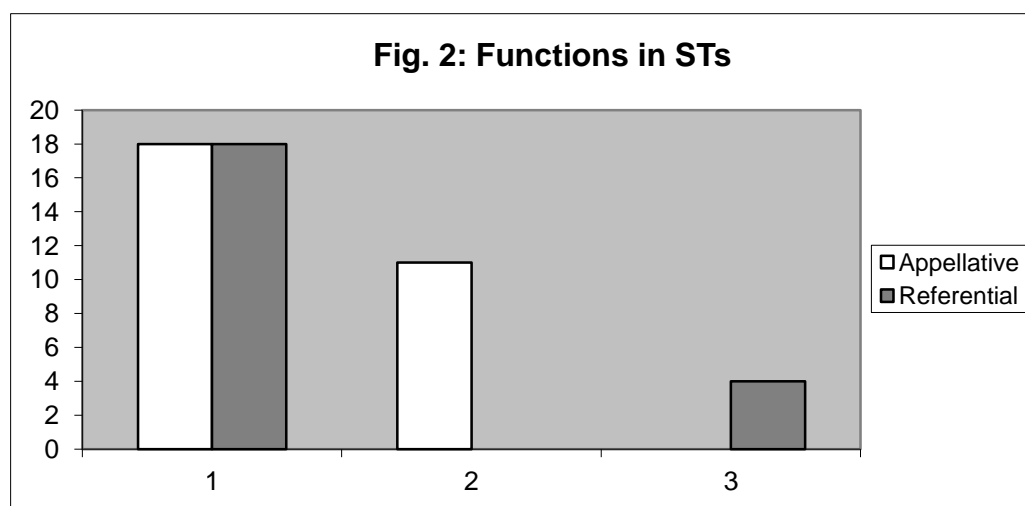


Fig. 2: Functions in STs

The results in Fig. 2 show that a combination of the appellative and referential function is dominant, being featured in 18 out of 33 articles. It is interesting to notice that 11 headlines perform an appellative function, without any reference to the subject matter. In 1 of these cases, the referential function appears in the subhead. Only 4 instances display a mere referential function, without any appealing character. Not surprisingly, the appellative function is most often achieved through metaphors, either lexical or grammatical. Let us now move on to illustrate some practical examples.

### 5.1. Which Metaphors?

Van den Broeck (1981: 75) categorises metaphors in 'lexicalised', 'conventional' and 'private'. From a translational point of view, he claims that the translator needs to translate them according to their functions, privileging the 'creative' ones and even ignoring the merely 'decorative' ones (van den Broeck 1981: 76).

In our study, we have taken into account all instances of metaphor, both lexical and grammatical, and, following Lakoff and Johnson (1980), both ‘conventional’ and ‘new’. The former “[...] structure the ordinary conceptual system of our culture, which is reflected in our everyday language” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 139). Since we deal with translation, cultures at issue are obviously different, however we identified conventional metaphors in both languages and cultures. ‘New’ metaphors, on the other hand, are defined by Lakoff and Johnson as “imaginative and creative” and “capable of giving us a new understanding of our experience” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 139).

As an example of a ‘conventional’ metaphor, we may offer the following:

ST (1)	TT (1)
In the Footsteps of the Apostles (NG 3)	<i>Viaggio sulle orme degli apostoli</i> (NGI 3)

ST (1) shows a typical example of conventional lexical metaphor, where “to follow or walk in a person’s footsteps” (*OED*<sup>5</sup>) has the figurative meaning of following his/her example or guidance. Indeed the headline introduces an article about the capacity of the apostles to proselytise, even after 2,000 years. The conventional metaphor has been maintained and reproduced in the TT, since Italian has a similar expression as well. However, the target version is more explicit, with the addition of the noun *viaggio*.

Or, to cite one more example:

ST (2)	TT (2)
In China’s Shadow (NG 6)	<i>All’ombra della Cina</i> (NGI 6)

In an article about Hong-Kong residents and their worries about losing their identity and freedom after the handover to China, the conventional lexical metaphor of ‘shadow’ is used to refer to “[s]omething of opposite character that necessarily accompanies or follows something else, as shadow does light” and is rendered in the TT through the equivalent metaphorical expression *all’ombra di*.

The corpus also includes instances of ‘new’ metaphors, like:

ST (3)	TT (3)
Unseen Titanic (NG 4)	<i>Luce sul Titanic</i> (NGI 4)

In ST (3), the focus is on Titanic, sunk and thus concretely “not seen, unperceived, invisible” and metaphorically ‘unknown’. Through what Vinay and Darbelnet (1958/2004) would consider an instance of ‘modulation’, entailing a change in the point of view, TT (3) has become *[l]uce sul Titanic*, to introduce the main topic of the article, i.e., the fact that new technologies ‘revealed’ images of Titanic, which ‘came to light’ and experts knew what really happened. We can consider the TT [++metaphorical] not only thanks to the lexical, but also to the grammatical metaphor, realised through a nominalisation (‘enlighten’ > ‘light’, *luce*).

ST (4) presents an interesting case of lexical metaphor, reinforced by alliteration (‘m’):

<sup>5</sup> All definitions of items are borrowed from *OED* (online edition: [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com)).

ST (4)	TT (4)
Mix Match Morph (NG 2)	<i>E l'uomo creò il cane (NGI 2)</i>

In particular ‘morph’, with the meaning of “to change (a person or thing) into something different”, is used to refer to the manipulation of dog breeds. The Italian TT is much more explicit, featuring a clause where the process and the participants in the action are explicitly instantiated. Examples of ‘explicitation’, and consequently of ‘de-metaphorisation’, are rather frequent in the corpus of investigation.

## 5.2. De-metaphorisation

In line with research within TS concerning the ‘standardisation’ hypothesis, our analysis has revealed several cases of de-metaphorisation, both lexical and grammatical.

Let us focus on a typical example:

ST (5)	TT (5)
The Healing Fields Land mines once crippled a war-ravaged Cambodia. Today the nation is a model for how to recover from this scourge. (NG 1)	<i>Un futuro senza mine Devastata dalle guerre, la Cambogia è tuttora disseminata di mine. Ma oggi è anche un modello per tutti i paesi che vogliono debellare questo flagello. (NGI 1)</i>

In the headline of an article on Cambodia and the danger caused by land mines, the metaphoric ‘[t]he healing fields’ has been explicated and has become in TT (5) *[u]n futuro senza mine*. In ST (5) also the nut-graph reinforces the metaphorical lexical domain of ‘health’, represented by ‘healing’, ‘crippled’ and ‘recover’. The verbal group ‘crippled’, indeed, has the figurative meaning of ‘damage’, but also alludes to the people mutilated by mines. Such a metaphorical character is completely lost in the TT, which has been ‘de-metaphorised’.

The same general tendency is illustrated in:

ST (6, 7, 8)	TT (6, 7, 8)
A time to run (NG 2)	<i>Perché corri? (NGI 2)</i>
Egypt in the moment (NG 5)	<i>Egitto il futuro è adesso (NGI 5)</i>
The Golden Chiefs of Panama (NG 1)	<i>L'oro degli antichi sovrani di Panama (NGI 1)</i>

Examples 6, 7 and 8 demonstrate that the TTs are definitely more explicit. The nominal groups of ST (6) and (7) become finite clauses in TT (6) and (7), typical instances of ‘paraphrase’ (van den Broeck 1981: 77). As regards ST (8), where ‘golden’ metaphorically refers to the ‘chiefs’ rather than to ‘gold artifacts’, in the TT it is clearly explicated and de-metaphorised.

## 5.3. Re-metaphorisation

However, we have not only found instances of explicitation and in general of de-metaphorisation. On the contrary, in our corpus we have also identified lexical metaphors in the ST that have been reproduced in the TT, like the following:

ST (9)	TT (9)
Tomorrowland (NG 2)	<i>Futurlandia (NGI 2)</i>

The metaphorical neologism ‘Tomorrowland’, referring to Astana, the new capital of Kazakhstan, which is “brash and grandiose and wildly attractive” to young people seeking success, is effectively rendered into *Futurlandia*, through an equivalent lexical metaphor.

Likewise, we have found instances of grammatical metaphors that have been maintained in the TT, such as:

ST (10)	TT (10)
The calm before the wave (NG 2)	<i>La quiete prima dell’onda (NGI 2)</i>

In ST (10), the nominalisation ‘calm’ – instead of a more congruent realisation like ‘everybody is calm’ – has been rendered in the TT as *la quiete*. Also ‘the wave’, metaphorical for ‘tsunami’, has been carried over the TT through a direct equivalence, or, to borrow van den Broeck (1981: 77), a translation ‘*sensu stricto*’.

Let us now look at an example where both ST and TT are metaphorical, but the TT displays even [+metaphoricity], realised by grammatical metaphor through a typical instance of nominalisation:

ST (11)	TT (11)
Where Slaves Ruled Escaped slaves in Brazil created thousands of hidden societies, or <i>quilombos</i> , in the heart of the country. Today these communities are winning rights to their land – and helping protect it. (NG 4)	<i>Il regno degli schiavi In Brasile gli schiavi fuggiaschi fondarono migliaia di comunità segrete, i quilombos. Solo oggi il paese comincia a riconoscere i loro diritti. E il loro contributo alla salvaguardia del territorio. (NGI 4)</i>

ST (11) includes the lexical metaphor of ‘rule’, meaning “to exercise sovereignty or authority over a person, a place” and referring to African escaped slaves that, in Brazil, secretly organised communities at the time of colonialism. In the TT, a verbal nominalisation (*regnare* > *regno*) increases the metaphoricity. If we also look at the ‘nut-graph’, we can see that the TT is even [+metaphorical], thanks to a double nominalisation: in SFL terms, the verbal group complex ‘helping protect it’ – functioning as causative Process – has been replaced by a nominal group – functioning as Phenomenon – that is post-modified through an embedded prepositional phrase: *il loro contributo alla salvaguardia*.

The illustration of these select examples demonstrates that through the process of translation metaphors can be maintained and even reinforced.

#### 5.4. Metaphorisation

Analysis also revealed interesting cases where the TT is [++metaphorical], and consequently [++appellative]. Let us consider the following example as illustrative:

ST (12)	TT (12)
Rhino Wars (NG 3)	<i>La guerra del corno (NGI 3)</i>

The main headline of the ST, ‘Rhino wars’, to describe killing of rhinoceroses by poachers to get their horns, features a ‘conventional’ metaphor, of ‘war’. The corresponding TT conveys the same kind of lexical metaphoricity, but also

introduces a metaphor, or rather a metonymy, since ‘rhino’ is replaced by a part of its body – the horn, *cornio*. It is true that the African animals are actually killed in order to concretely get their horns, but in terms of effect on the reader, the TT seems more ‘appellative’.

Another interesting case of [++metaphorisation] can be seen in:

ST (13)	TT (13)
Marseille’s Melting Pot As more European countries become nations of immigrants, is the multicultural city of Marseille a vision of the future? (NG 3)	<i>Mélange Marsiglia</i> <i>In molti paesi europei, il numero di immigrati è in continuo aumento. È Marsiglia la città multiculturale che anticipa il futuro? (NGI 3)</i>

The ST headline features a metaphor, of the ‘conventional’ kind: indeed, ‘melting pot’ is commonly used to refer to “a place where different peoples, styles, theories, etc., are mixed together”. The translator/editor could have maintained the same ‘conventional’ metaphor even through a borrowing, since the lexical item ‘melting pot’ entered the Italian dictionary (see, e.g., Devoto, Oli 2007) and would most probably be understood by the lay reader of *NGI*. On the other hand, a translation ‘*sensu stricto*’, like *crogiolo*, would have caused the loss of the alliteration (‘m’). The ‘substitution’ and rendering with *Mélange Marsiglia* has not only re-metaphorised, but also rendered [++metaphorical] the TT, through a ‘new’ metaphor like *mélange*, usually referred to a mixture of colours in materials, which also reproduces the alliteration.

Let us conclude with an example where the TT, following Papuzzi (2010), has become more ‘paradigmatic’ than the ST, and thanks to the employment of a grammatical metaphor:

ST (14)	TT (14)
Sun Struck (NG 6)	<i>Colpi di sole (NGI 6)</i>

Interestingly, in an article centred on solar storms, the verbal nominalisation in the TT (*struck* > *colpi*, ‘strokes’) helps create an effective kind of metaphor, from both a lexical and grammatical point of view. In Italian, *colpi di sole*, hints at a ‘sun stroke’ and, although it seems not relevant to this analysis, it also describes a special kind of ‘coiffure’.

## 6. Summary of Findings

Our findings partly confirmed the general hypothesis of explicitation in translation. However, before drawing any conclusions about properties of translated texts, any possible reason for it has to be taken into account.

Firstly, we need to consider whether cultural factors could have influenced the translators/editors’ choices. To this respect, an examination of the corpus showed that most articles focus on topics and places ‘foreign’ to both the source and target readers. The only obvious case of ‘cultural filter’ (House 1997) seems the following:

ST (15)	TT (15)
Lady with a Secret (NG 2)	<i>La nuova Monna Lisa è lei? (NGI 2)</i>

The mysterious ‘lady’ of the ST is explicated in the TT, becoming Monna Lisa, part of the Italian reader’s heritage. Actually in both cases the metonymy is maintained, since they both refer to the famous Leonardo’s painting, although the TT is definitely more explicit, with the nominal group that has turned into an interrogative full clause.

Secondly, we need to see whether some form of explicitation can account for registerial features in Italian ‘parallel texts’, i.e., directly written in Italian by Italian writers. Let us consider, in the small corpus we analysed, the headlines of the five articles that are new Italian texts and not the result of a translation process:

TT (16): *La civiltà del libro* (NGI 1)

TT (17): *Cronaca di un capolavoro annunciato* (NGI 2)

TT (18): *Le stanze della memoria* (NGI 3)

TT (19): *Quando Neandertal aveva le penne* (NGI 4)

TT (20): *Antartide, Italia* (NGI 6)

None of these headlines is openly explicit and some of them also make use of figurative language. For example, the first Italian title can be seen as a case of synecdoche, since *la civiltà del libro* refers to a library, the Biblioteca malatestiana in Cesena. Also *memoria* in TT (18) is an instance of metaphor, referring to the secret archive in Vatican that contains historical documents.

With respect to this small corpus, therefore, the tendency to explicate as typical of translated texts seems to be confirmed, as argued in translation literature (cf. § 2). Nevertheless, the study also revealed evidence of metaphoricity through the process of translation. In particular, if we follow Halliday and Matthiessen (1999) and consider lexical and grammatical metaphor two sides of the same process, also our TTs show a high degree of metaphoricity and in some cases they are even [+metaphorical] than the STs they are derived from.

To sum up, we can state that main headlines, despite a tendency to explicitation, remain metaphoric in the process of translation and the TTs even display a wider use of grammatical metaphor. Also subheads show a general tendency to re-metaphorisation. On the other hand, we noticed that metaphor use, even in STs, is rather marginal in other subdivisions of headlines, such as the ‘upper-deck’ or the ‘strapline’. Limiting ourselves to the main headlines, we can see (Fig. 3) how metaphors occur in about 90 % of the STs examined and also, contemporarily – as we said, at various degrees – in more than 80 % of STs and TTs. The data even show a small percentage of metaphoricity newly introduced in the TTs.

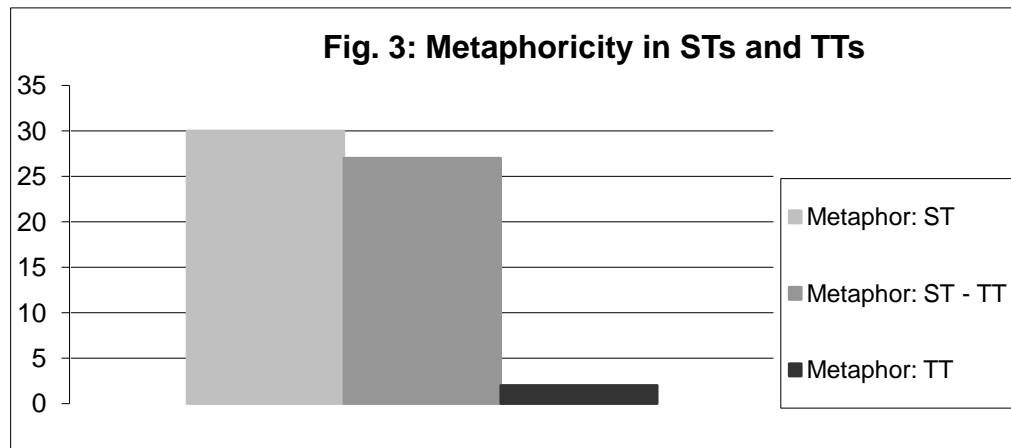


Fig. 3: Metaphoricity in STs and TTs

The study thus shows that metaphor, both lexical and grammatical, also plays an important role in translated texts.

### 7. Concluding Remarks

In this paper, focussing on the process of translation in popular scientific press in contemporary world, we have examined headlines as a distinct text-type and have attempted to show the role of metaphor in STs and in their corresponding TTs. An interdisciplinary approach – drawing essentially on TS and SFL, but also in part on media studies – has been found to be useful for the purpose of our investigation.

Results of our case study show that metaphoricity in headlines plays a major role in both STs and TTs. In terms of effect towards the target audience, we can affirm that, despite more referentiality, they have globally maintained their ‘paradigmatic’ traits and most often function like ‘slogans’ that catch the reader’s attention (Papuzzi 2010).

It is evident that the small size of the case study does not permit definitive conclusions and further research is required. For a wider understanding of (re-)metaphorisation in headlines of *NG* magazine translated into Italian, for example, these early results could be followed by an investigation of a larger corpus. Furthermore, the analysis could be extended to include subheadings within the body of the article, and also the ‘lead’. It would also be interesting to compare our findings from the print editions with those from the electronic versions, to study any possible differences. Finally, larger-scale research might include other popular science magazines, in order to see whether there is a correspondence and establish whether our findings can be said to be typical of the text-type and of its translation.

We are perfectly aware that our results may be partly dependent on the type of participants involved in this communicative act: for 33 articles, four translators and the same editorial staff were involved<sup>6</sup>. Further exploration is hence desirable, with *new* texts, *new* human subjects and, for the scope of objectivity, also different researchers.

<sup>6</sup> Translators of articles in the 6 issues are: B. Cerminara; P. Gimigliano; I. Insera (Scriptum); C.V. Letizia (Scriptum). The editorial staff includes: M. Conti (managing editor); M. Gravino; S. Martorelli; M. Pinna.

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<sup>7</sup> All sources are from *National Geographic* and *National Geographic Italia*, respectively vol. 221 and 29 (2012). Therefore, only the issue number will be specified.



# Grammatical metaphors in translation: Cookery books as a case in point

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***Abstract:** This paper deals with the translation of grammatical metaphors (GMs) from English into Swedish in non-fiction literature. The GMs are considered as a semiotic resource regulating social distance in cookery books. The study examines the paratexts of *The Naked Chef* (1999/2001), *Nigella Bites* (2001/2002) and Kylie Kwong's *Heart and Soul* (2003/2004) and their translations into Swedish. It is shown that congruent translations of the GMs dominate the strategies of the Swedish translators, thus confirming their expected global adequate translation strategy. Concerning local strategies the Swedish translators reword grammatical metaphors into clauses in approximately 20 per cent of the studied cases, thereby shortening the social distance in the target text and influencing the reader's perception of the Persona constructed in the cookery books. It is hypothesised that in Swedish, regardless of genres, GMs more manifestly signal social distance than in English.*

***Keywords:** translation, grammatical metaphors, systemic functional linguistics, cookery books, descriptive translation studies.*

## 1. Introduction

This paper deals with the translation of grammatical metaphors in cookery books translated from English into Swedish. Grammatical metaphors within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which is part of the theoretical framework of this study, seem at first glance to have little in common with the definition of metaphors within traditional stylistics or cognitive approaches to metaphors (cf. Lakoff, Johnson 1980; Steen 1994; Kövecses 2005). In fact, stylistic researchers and cognitive linguists would probably not consider grammatical metaphors (GMs henceforth) within SFL as metaphors at all. Nevertheless, several features of SFL grammatical metaphors are shared with metaphors with more traditional definitions, for instance change of category in some way, which alters the style of the text and the impact on the reader.

However, studies related to GMs have grown rapidly in number since the introduction of the concept in Halliday's first edition of *Introduction to Functional Grammar* (1985) and Halliday's and Martin's analysis of the use of GMs in scientific and technical texts (1993). This growing interest in GMs is probably connected with the equally rapidly growing attention directed towards non-literary texts. Thus the previously dominant study of metaphor as a stylistic trope common in literary texts has in recent years largely been replaced by investigations of other kinds of metaphoric language (Stålhammar 2006: 99).

In this paper, grammatical metaphors<sup>1</sup> are studied as one semiotic resource among many regulating social distance in cookery books, thus influencing the reader's perception of the so called Persona in these books. The Cookery Book Persona is

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<sup>1</sup> The grammatical metaphors of the study are ideational metaphors (cf. Halliday, Matthiessen 2004: 636-639).

constructed by means of various degrees of intimate wordings when addressing the reader, for instance using inclusive pronouns such as ‘we’ and ‘us’ more or less frequently, and gendered and social class slang expressions, for example ‘pukka’, ‘funky’ and ‘wicked’ (Lindqvist 2011a; 2011b; 2012). The use of GMs in this genre is, however, a semiotic resource for expressing social distance and abstraction. Therefore, the chosen translation strategies by the Swedish translators to omit, change or to keep these GMs in the target text are crucial for the impact on the reader in the target culture. The aim of the study is thus to establish whether the Swedish translators have worked according to an adequate translation strategy, i.e. a source-oriented strategy, or an acceptable translation strategy, i.e. a target-oriented strategy (cf. Toury 1995: 57; Lindqvist 2002: 42-45) when translating grammatical metaphors in the source text into Swedish.

But before presenting the findings of the study, we need a short background of the importance of the cookery book genre in general and in Sweden in particular, an understanding of the central and peripheral positions of the English and Swedish languages in the global translation field and the characteristics of the Swedish literary system. The study presented in this paper will thus be seen and explained within its broader research context.

## 2. Cookery books – an important non-fiction genre

Within the literary category of culinary literature, approximately 1.5 million books are sold globally each year (Granquist 2005: 1). And Sweden is the nation in the world where the largest amount of cookery books per capita is published; three times the amount published in Germany and four times the amount in France (Cointreau 2005: 1). In Sweden, more than one cookery book is published every day. Swedes seem to love cookery books.

However, this love does not imply that Swedes cook more than other nationalities do. On the contrary, a recent survey of Swedish cooking habits shows that Swedes put less than 15 minutes a day into cooking (Burstedt *et al.* 2006: 5). The ‘cookery book boom’ often discussed in Swedish magazines and newspapers does not coincide with the fact that Swedish people spend more time in their meticulously renovated kitchens than other nationalities do. On the contrary, it probably coincides more with the changing functions of this kind of literature – a literature turned into flashy lifestyle books instead of practical manuals for cooking. Some researchers are even calling this kind of literature food pornography (Josephsson, Melander 2003: 132-133) or ‘gastroporn’ (Brownlie *et al.* 2005: 15-17). Together with lifestyle magazines and TV shows, cookery books help insecure middle class readers to construct their identity by offering lifestyle narratives. In this way, cookery books do not simply reflect the taste of a given society at a given time or the change of taste over time, but they are also actually an important force in creating prevailing tastes. Thus, cookery books are constructing and maintaining the kind of lifestyle through which the middle classes distinguish themselves (Bourdieu 1984). And this literature is globally and nationally in Sweden an important genre. Far too little research attention has been devoted to translated culinary literature until recently<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The research project *Swedish Non-Fiction Literature 1750 – 2000* includes 3 works on culinary literature by Karin Mårdsjö (cf. 2001a; 2001b; 2001c). However none of the works considers the translation perspective opted for in the present paper.

### 3. The Swedish literary system and the reasons for studying culinary literature translated from English into Swedish

Within the Swedish literary system – an open system in polysystemic terms (Even-Zohar 1990: 45-51) when it comes to translations – culinary literature is quantitatively the most important subgenre of non-fiction literature (Granqvist 2005: 4). The openness of the Swedish literary system is shown by the high percentage of translated literature within each literary category during the period of the study in Table 1. The translation rate for fiction amounts to approximately 40%, for children's literature to approximately 23% and for non-fiction to approximately 36%. The openness of the Swedish literary system indicates that translational norms within the system favour the adequate translation strategy<sup>3</sup>. Acceptability to foreign influences in translated texts is consequently at a high level. And within the culinary literary field, translation rates amount to approximately 20% of all publications during the period 2003–2006 (National Bibliography 2007).

Category/ Year	2000 N (%)	2001 N (%)	2002 N (%)	2003 N (%)	2004 N (%)
Fiction	1029 (39%)	1036 (40%)	1055 (42%)	1093 (43%)	1145 (38%)
Children's literature	653 (25%)	613 (24%)	540 (22%)	548 (22%)	724 (24%)
Non-fiction	965 (36%)	945 (36%)	877 (35%)	901 (35%)	1106 (37%)
Total	2647 (100%)	2594 (100%)	2472 (100%)	2542 (100%)	2975 (100%)

Table 1. Published translated works in Sweden 2000–2004 (Swedish Arts Council 2005)

Table 2 shows the relatively open system when it comes to translation rates within the culinary literary field in Sweden. The percentage of translated culinary literature varies from the lowest level – 16% to the highest – 24% during the five-year period accounted for. Hence approximately one fifth (20%) of all publications within the culinary literary field consist of translations. Within the overall open Swedish literary culture (cf. table 1), this relatively open culinary system probably favours influences from abroad to develop its repertoire (cf. Even Zohar 1990: 45-51). New themes and techniques in the genre are likely to find their way into the Swedish culture by means of translation.

There are several reasons for studying cookery books translated from English in Sweden. First, it is important to study non-fictional texts within Translation Studies in Sweden, since most of the research carried out during the last 20 years has dealt with literary translation (Englund Dimitrova 2007: 21). Second, approximately 40%-50% of published translations worldwide use English as their source language (Heilbron 1999: 434; Sapiro 2008: 68-72), and in Sweden as much as 71% of all

<sup>3</sup> In GB and the USA, less than 5 per cent of all published literature consists of translations. France and Germany have a translation rate of 10 to 12 per cent of all published books, Italy and Spain 12–20 per cent and Sweden and the Netherlands more than 25 per cent (Heilbron 1999: 439). Thus the British and American systems favour the acceptable translation strategy, with low tolerance for foreign influences in translated texts, and with 'fluency' and 'transparency' as hallmarks of a good translation (cf. Venuti 1995: 2).

published non-fiction consists of translations from English (National Bibliography 2007).

Year/Category	Swedish works	Translations	Total Swe. W. + Translations	% Translations
2003	256	48	304	16
2004	308	91	399	23
2005	276	88	364	24
2006	259	73	332	22
2007	271	62	333	19

Table 2. Published Swedish culinary literature and translated culinary literature in Sweden 2003–2007 (The Swedish Gastronomic Academy 2003–2007).

Third, therefore it is very plausible that the total dominance of English as a source language influences Swedish translation norms (cf. Toury 1995: 49)<sup>4</sup>. And last but not least, cooking using recipes from the latest cookery book by the most popular TV chef of the moment is an important cultural practice today. This practice helps knowledge-seeking home-made chefs to construct their taste, prestige and identity. Thus, the cookery book does not simply reflect the new tastes and trends in cooking and home styling in society, but it also legitimises the search for the perfect lifestyle by the new middle class – a lifestyle largely imported by means of translation.

#### 4. The texts of the study and the aim of the overall project

The study presented in this paper focuses on the translation of grammatical metaphors and includes the following cookery books:

1.  
Nigella Lawson, 2001, *Nigella Bites*, Random House  
Nigella Lawson, 2002, *Nigella – Kort och gott* [Nigella – Short and Good/Tasty]<sup>5</sup>,  
Bokförlaget Forum, Translation by Kerstin Törngren
2.  
Jamie Oliver, 1999, *The Naked Chef*, Penguin Books Ltd.  
Jamie Oliver, 2001, *Den nakna kocken* [The Naked Chef], Bonniers Förlag AB,  
Translation by Kerstin Törngren
3.  
Kylie Kwong, 2003, *Heart and Soul*, Penguin Books Ltd Australia  
Kylie Kwong, 2004, *Kylies kök* [Kylie's kitchen], Natur och Kultur/Fakta  
Translation by Tove och Johan Janson

The study of grammatical metaphors in translation forms part of a larger project entitled *The Social Practices of Translation, Translated Non-Fiction Literature within the Swedish Culture, Culinary Literature, specifically Cookbooks as a Case in Point*.

The source and target texts of the project are chosen from the “A la Carte – Best Chef Book” category of the yearbook of the Swedish Gastronomic Academy – a publication presenting the annual output of culinary literature in Sweden divided into

<sup>4</sup> But Toury dealt with relations in and between the Israeli and Russian cultures.

<sup>5</sup> The texts within brackets [...] are back translations of the Swedish translation solution.

39 different categories. The definition of the chosen category reads: “Professional cooks writing for non-professional readers” (Måltidsakademien 2008: 105).

In order to structure the analysis of the cookery books, the study draws on the Jungian concept *Persona*. Constructing a *Persona* signifies emphasising some particular personal traits within a complex personality and minimising others in order to vary and develop different traits of a given identity (Mral 1999: 17). The activity in the cookery books of the study is called *Persona cooking*, since the construction of a *Persona* in this kind of literature is an asset in addressing the intended readership: “*Persona* gives authority to a text it would otherwise lack” (Hart 1997: 213).

The constructed *Persona* offers the readership an opportunity for identification. The *Persona* resembles a dear friend, with whom you can chat by flicking through the book. Consequently, *Persona* and person are not the same thing (Mral 1999: 213).

The aim of the overall project is twofold. On the one hand, the way the *Persona* of the Grand Chef Cookery Book Category is constructed in the material of the study is examined. On the other hand, the project studies the translation strategies of the Swedish translators in order to find out whether or how the translation alters the interplay of textual and visual semiotic resources constructing this *Persona* in the Swedish context.

Since cookery books are multimodal products, where text, images and design interact to construct the meaning, the project outlines a multimodal model for translation analysis<sup>6</sup>. It further examines whether the interaction of visual and textual modes change when the text in the source book is translated. The visual mode is not altered since these cookery books are sold in similar formats throughout the world. An important step in this analysis is to determine the kind of translation strategy according to which the translators work. The choice of an adequate or an acceptable translation strategy will be crucial for the reader’s conception of the cookery book. This background leads into the specific topic of the paper – the translation of grammatical metaphors (GMs) in the cookery books of the project.

Grammatical metaphors can probably be used as a semiotic resource to express social distance in texts.

This kind of nominalizing metaphor probably evolved first in scientific and technical registers, where it played a dual role: it made it possible on the one hand to construct hierarchies of technical terms, and on the other to develop an argument step by step, using complex passages ‘packaged’ in nominal forms as themes. It has gradually worked its way through into most varieties of adult discourse, in much of which, however it loses its original *raison d’être* and tends to become merely a mark of prestige and power. [...] So this kind of highly metaphorical discourse tends to mark off the expert from those who are uninitiated (Halliday, Matthiessen 2004: 657).

In my view then a text with a high percentage of GMs is probably more socially distant and abstract than a text with a low percentage. And an acceptable translation strategy substituting GMs with clause translations or omitting them completely might change the reader’s perception of the chef in question in the target culture.

## 5. Definition of grammatical metaphor

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<sup>6</sup> So far, three papers outlining this model based on SFL and Kress; van Leuven (2006) have been published (cf. Lindqvist 2011a, 2011b, 2012). A monograph dealing with translated culinary literature in Sweden is planned.

A meaning in language may be realised by a selection of words that is different from that which in some sense is typical or unmarked. Within SFL the typical or unmarked wordings are considered *congruent*. Processes are for instance considered congruently realised as verbs and “things” as nouns. The principle of congruence is important because of the potential for departing from it, which is a way of adding to the overall meaning potential (Halliday 2003: 20).

Departing from the congruent is what Halliday (2003: 20) refers to as metaphor. Metaphor is an inherent property of higher-order semiotic systems and a powerful meaning-making resource. The process of metaphor is one of reconstructing the patterns of realisations in a language – particularly at the interface between the grammar and the semantics. A meaning that was originally construed by one kind of wording comes instead to be construed by another (Halliday 2003: 21). The general idea is that any given meaning in language will have a congruent expression encoding that particular meaning. Metaphorical expressions, on the other hand, are structures representing extended meanings (Nordrum 2007: 24). The definition of grammatical metaphor according to Halliday and Matthiessen (1999: 243) reads as follows:

[A grammatical metaphor] is a fusion, or a junction, of two semantic elemental categories [...] *development* is a ‘process-thing’. The congruent instantiation of the dynamic process *develop* as a verb and the incongruent ‘process-ting’ *develop+ment* as a noun.

The grammatical metaphor is in fact a condensation of information expressing both processes and actors as one unit, typically a nominalisation. Consider the ‘process meaning’ turned into a ‘thing meaning’ in the following simplified example, where only c) qualifies as a grammatical metaphor (cf. Nordrum 2007: 22).

a) Clause (Congruent mental process realised as verb)

**He loves me** and this is no secret

b) Clausal nominalisation (finite)

That he loves me is no secret

c) Lexical nominalisation (Grammatical metaphor)

**His love for me** is no secret.

All realisations are functionally and semantically motivated and thus meaningful instantiations of the meaning potential. In order for a construction to qualify as a GM in this study, some trace of the meaning from the ‘old’ element must be present in the re-categorised item. In the simplified example above this relation is very explicit.

How far we go in pursuing metaphorical forms of discourse in any given instance will depend on what we are trying to achieve. In the most general terms, the purpose of analysing texts is to explain the impact that it makes: why it means, what it does, and why it gives the particular impression that it does. [...] sometimes a note on the effect that the expression is metaphorical is all that is needed, whereas at other times we may want to trace a whole series of intermediate steps linking the clause to a postulated ‘most congruent’ form (Halliday, Matthiessen 2004: 658).

The definition of the GMs used in this study is not exhaustive and can naturally be refined and more complex, but it serves our purpose to examine whether social distance in the prefaces of the cookery books studied is altered by translation.



## 6. Translation of GMs

Grammatical metaphor may be used in both the English and Swedish language, but linguistic research has shown that GM seems to be considerably less frequent in Swedish (Stålhammar 2006). In a study of translated popular science for example, as much as 20 percent of the source GMs were turned into clauses in Swedish (Nordrum 2007: 200). However, Nordrum (2007: 4) stresses that when a lexical nominalisation is translated by another structure, a variety of factors can explain the change. Some changes may be related to the grammatical function of the lexical nominalisation or its syntactic structure, whereas others are of a more pragmatic nature related for instance to different genre conventions in the two languages.

In this way, previous research seems to suggest that Swedish prefers clauses where English uses lexical nominalisations. Such might be the case in the genres studied so far: scientific texts, popular science texts (Nordrum 2007), legal texts (Stålhammar 2006) and technical manuals (Lassen 2003).

One question asked in this paper is whether grammatical metaphor translation functions differently in more congruent genres, where the unpacking of dense lexical content is not as necessary for comprehension as in scientific texts. Another question is whether GMs have different functions in the source and target texts within the same genre. Forewords or prefaces to cookery books form good examples of more congruent text genres. Do they follow the same pattern when it comes to the function and translation of grammatical metaphors as previous research has claimed? The following sections in the paper will try and answer these research questions.

## 7. Congruent and non-congruent translations of GMs

The methodology of this restricted study is rather straightforward. The GMs in the source text are marked and then compared with the structures of the target text and counted. The analytical question was if the GMs in the ST were translated congruently as GMs in the TT or if the translator had chosen to reword them as clauses producing a so called non-congruent translation (cf. Nordrum 2007: 5, 2007: 13)<sup>7</sup>. In other words, are the grammatical metaphors translated in a congruent or non-congruent form into Swedish?

Congruent translations in this aspect can be considered as closer to a generally adequate translation strategy than non-congruent translations, which in their turn point in the direction of a generally acceptable translation strategy. Substituting GMs with clauses in the translation is in this study considered a way of shortening the social distance expressed in the source text – a way of intimising the relationship between the source text Persona and the target text reader.

The following sections, 7.1 and 7.2, show congruent and non-congruent translations of GMs in the source text with text examples from each of the cookery books in the study: Jamie Oliver, Nigella Lawson and Kylie Kwong.

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<sup>7</sup> Note that the term congruent in ‘congruent translations’ is used in a different way in the analysis of the translations (cf. Nordrum 2007: 13) from the way it is used in the analysis of grammatical forms in the Halliday tradition.

## 7.1. Congruent translations

Examples 1–3 below illustrate the realisation of congruent translations, when a grammatical metaphor in the source text is translated as a grammatical metaphor in the target text. The GMs are marked in italics in the example. Each example is followed by an approximate back translation from Swedish to English within brackets.

### Example 1

ST, Jamie Oliver, *The Naked Chef*

*My interest in cooking* began after I said to my dad one day [...]

TT, Jamie Oliver, *Den nakna kocken*

*Mitt intresse för matlagning* började när jag sa till min pappa [...]

[*My interest in cooking* began when I said to my dad: [...]]

Example 1 exhibits the closest rewording possible of a grammatical metaphor in translation when ‘*My interest in cooking*’ is translated as ‘*Mitt intresse för matlagning*’. The structure of the GM in the source as well as in the target text is identical in form and function.

Example 2 shows a slightly more complex relation, when ‘*their scribbled comments and amendments*’ is reworded as ‘*de kommentarer och tillägg de skrivit*’ [‘*comments and amendments they had written*’]. The grammatical metaphors ‘*comments and amendments*’ are translated congruently, but the attributive ‘*scribbled*’ is reworded as a relative clause with deletion of the relative pronoun ‘*som*’ [who/that] in Swedish – a slightly more verbal rewording.

### Example 2

ST, Nigella Lawson, *Nigella Bites*

[...] I found I learnt as much from reading *their scribbled comments and amendments*; it’s what made the food come alive to me.

TT, Nigella Lawson, *Nigella – kort och gott*

Jag upptäckte att jag lärde mig mycket av att läsa *de kommentarer och tillägg de skrivit* i böckerna, det var så matlagningen blev levande för mig.

[I discovered that I learnt very much from reading the comments and amendments they had written in the books, that was the way cooking came alive to me]

Example 3 reveals the difference in the genitive construction of English and Swedish. The GM in the source text ‘*pleasure of cooking*’ is translated congruently as ‘*matlagningens fröjder*’, where the genitivistic preposition ‘of’ is replaced by the idiomatic genitivistic ‘s’ in Swedish. The attentive reader will also discover that an extra plural ‘s’ has been added to the Swedish translation of ‘*pleasure*’ to ‘*fröjder*’ [pleasures]. This solution is optional for the Swedish translator; it is not necessary but slightly more idiomatic. It has no effect, however, on the way the analysis of congruent or non-congruent translations is carried out in this study.

### Example 3

ST, Kylie Kwong, *Heart and soul*

Some recipes are complex [...] They require that you become completely absorbed – lost in the art and *pleasure of cooking* – [...]

TT, Kylie Kwong, *Kylies kök*

Vissa av recepten kan verka krångliga [...] De kräver att du går upp i det du gör, låter dig absorberas av *matlagningens fröjder*.

[Some of the recipes may seem difficult [...] They demand that you become one with what you do, that you let yourself be absorbed by the *pleasures of cooking* ]

Examples 1–3 all showed the realisation of congruent translations, when a grammatical metaphor in the source text is translated by a grammatical metaphor in the target text. This translation strategy is source-oriented, opting for an adherence to source-textual norms rather than target-textual norms. This adequate translation strategy is the unmarked choice of translators operating within an open literary system (Even-Zohar 1990) such as the Swedish one (Lindqvist 2002: 30-38).

## 7.2 Non-congruent translation

Examples 4–6 below illustrate the realisation of non-congruent translations, when a grammatical metaphor in the source text is translated as a clause in the target text. The notation system is the same as in the previous section.

Example 4

ST, Jamie Oliver, *The Naked Chef*

[...] so I knew only too well the restrictions of a small kitchen with only basic cooking equipment.

TT, Jamie Oliver, *Den nakna kocken*

Därför vet jag bara alltför väl hur begränsad man blir när man ska laga mat i ett litet kök som bara har den allra nödvändigaste utrustningen.

[That is why I know only too well how restricted one becomes when one is about to cook in a small kitchen which only has the most necessary equipment.]

Example 4 shows a case when an elaborated grammatical metaphor ‘*the restrictions of a small kitchen with only basic cooking equipment*’ is translated by three subordinate clauses; two nominal clauses: (1) ‘*hur begränsad man blir*’ [how restricted one becomes], (2) ‘*. som bara har den allra nödvändigaste utrustningen.*’ [which only has the most necessary equipment.] and an adverbial clause (3) ‘*när man ska laga mat i ett litet kök*’ [when one is about to cook in a small kitchen]. This translation solution unpacks the information in the source text and presents it to the Swedish reader in a less nominal and thus less socially distant form.

Example 5

ST, Nigella Lawson, *Nigella Bites*

But most of all, this idea came to me out of *the various book signings* I’ve done.

TT, Nigella Lawson, *Nigella – kort och gott*

Men det var *när jag var ute och signerade böcker* som jag verkligen förstod att det var en bra idé.

[But it was when I was out signing books that I really understood that it was a good idea.]

Example 5 consists of a less elaborate grammatical metaphor in the source text ‘*the various book signings*’, which is – as in the preceding example – translated by an adverbial subordinate clause ‘*när jag var ute och signerade böcker*’ [when I was out signing books] – a rewording emphasising a more congruent form of discourse.

Example 6

ST, Kylie Kwong, *Heart and soul*

I want to show you *the intricacies and delicacy of real Chinese cuisine* and to show you how these same skills and techniques can be applied to Western cooking.

TT, Kylie Kwong, *Kylies kök*

Jag vill visa *hur välavvägt och läckert det rikiga kinesiska köket är* och hur man i det västerländska köket kan tillämpa samma teknik och knep.

[I want to show you *how intricate and delicate the real Chinese cuisine is* and how you in the Western kitchen can use the same technique and tricks.]

Example 6 reveals an acceptable translation strategy translating the grammatical metaphor consisting of adjectives turned into nouns ‘*the intricacies and delicacy of real Chinese cuisine*’ by a nominal clause ‘*hur välavvägt och läckert det rikiga kinesiska köket är*’ [*how intricate and delicate the real Chinese cuisine is*]. The examples of non-congruent translations above form part of an acceptable translation strategy, opting for adherence to target-textual norms rather than source-textual norms. The next section will show the results of the study.

## 8. The results of the study

In this section, an overview of the percentage of grammatical metaphors (GMs) in relation to the number of words in the source texts of the study is presented in Table 3. Table 4 then presents the occurrences of congruent and non-congruent translations of grammatical metaphors in the introductory metatext of the *The Naked Chef*, *Nigella Bites* and *Kylie Kwong – Heart and Soul*.

Source Text	Tokens	Words	Sentences	GMs	GMs/words
<i>The Naked Chef</i>	5764	1047	54	26	2%
<i>Nigella Bites</i>	3923	685	30	31	4%
<i>Heart and Soul</i>	4978	864	32	33	3%

Table 3. Tokens, words, sentences, grammatical metaphors (GMs) and the percentage of GMs/words in the source texts.

Table 3 reveals a very low percentage of grammatical metaphors in the prefaces to the books of the study. Jamie’s preface has the lowest percentage (2%), Nigella’s the highest (4%) and Kylie’s falls in between the other two (3%). These results are expected, since forewords in this genre do not favour social distance and abstraction – features common in scientific and technical texts, where the percentage of GMs is normally substantially higher. Prefaces and introductions in ‘Persona cookery books’ often, on the other hand, serve the purpose of gaining the reader’s confidence by intimising, addressing and including him or her in their narration.

Chef	GMs in ST	Congruent GMs in TT	Non-congruent GMs in TT
Jamie	26	20	6
Nigella	31	27	4
Kylie	33	24	9
Total	90	71	19

Table 4. The occurrences of congruent and non-congruent translations of grammatical metaphors in the introductory metatext of the *The Naked Chef*, *Nigella Bites* and *Kylie Kwong – Heart and Soul*.

Table 4 shows that congruent translations of the GMs dominate the strategies of the Swedish translators. Out of 90 GMs in the source text, 71 are translated congruently (79%). The Swedish translators chose to reword the grammatical metaphors into clauses in 19 out of 90 possible cases (21%). These results verify the overall global adequate translation strategy adopted by the translators in the Swedish open literary system.

Nevertheless, concerning local translation strategies, in 21 per cent of possible instances, the Swedish translators reword grammatical metaphors into clauses, thereby shortening the social distance expressed in the source text. The results in the table confirm previous research into less congruent text genres that Swedish prefers reworded clauses where English uses grammatical metaphors in approximately 20 per cent of cases. The genre seems thus not to influence the results.

## 9. Closing discussion

The introductory text in cookery books cannot, as we have seen, be qualified as highly specialised texts in the sense of Halliday, Matthiessen (2004: 657). Grammatical metaphors do not prevail in this genre. Concerning the grammatical metaphors, the translations can be qualified as being generally adequate, i.e. source-oriented translations, since the vast majority of the GMs are translated congruently. Grammatical metaphors are, however, less frequent in the Swedish target texts than in the English source texts, even though these solutions are not conditioned by the language system or the genre in question. A conclusion then comes to mind that the function of the grammatical metaphor in English and Swedish perhaps differs. In Swedish, grammatical metaphors probably more manifestly signal social distance.

One plausible explanation could be that the Swedish government for the last 50 years has quite successfully devoted special resources to language planning with the intention of simplifying bureaucratic language in order to strengthen democracy. Lawyers, administrators, writers and translators are thus working towards more transparent, generally reader-friendly forms of language (Stålhammar 2006: 111). In fact, this work has a long history, which began in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when King Gustav Vasa ordered civil servants to use plain Swedish and not German, Danish or Latin in official writing. The tradition can be followed up to the recently passed Swedish Language Act (2009, Section 11) stating that official documents should be written in a straightforward and comprehensible language. The *Black List* – a language policy

document published on the government's website is an expression of this tradition. *The Black List* contains suggestions for how complex legal language can be substituted by expressions in plain language.

In Sweden, there is also a strong normative tradition in favour of an 'oral' or 'verbal' style administered by for instance the Swedish Language Council. This oral style favours finite clauses and short noun phrases over the 'nominal' or 'written' style with a high number of complex phrases and abundance of nouns. In the 1960s, the Swedish Mail Services started a campaign called *Skriv som du talar!* [Write in the same way as you talk!] encouraging the public to simplify their way of writing. This campaign can be seen as an important step towards democracy in the construction of the (Social) Democratic Welfare State. During the same decade and in the same spirit the 'Du-reform' [The You Reform] was implemented – a reform opting for a levelling out of formal address in social life by disregarding titles and using the Swedish informal pronoun 'du' [you [in the singular]]. There is a very famous scene in a documentary by the Swedish filmmaker Vilgot Sjöman, when the young and rebellious actress Lena Nyman during an interview constantly addresses the former Prime Minister of Sweden Olof Palme with the informal 'you'. This form of address to high-ranking officials was impossible in the 1950s.

Moreover on the government website (<http://www.regeringen.se>), several links to works by 'Klarspråksgruppen' [the Swedish equivalent of the Fight the Fog movement] can be found. It is even possible to 'fog test' texts on their website.<sup>8</sup> Most of the language policy manuals listed there contain advice on how to deal with complex language structures and how to unpack their information in a simpler way. One recommendation is to rewrite complex grammatical metaphors (nominalisations in their writing) as clauses. Possibly this official language policy is spilling over from the writing of bureaucratic language to writing and translating in general. Maybe such a change could be seen as a cultural grammatical metaphor – a change of meaning and social distance instantiated in non-congruent translation.

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# **Literary translation**

## **Traduzione letteraria**

**Fiction**  
**Romanzi e racconti**



# Translated figures of speech in Anne Hébert and Alice Munro

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**Abstract:** *This text examines the way metonymy and metaphor are used in the work of two important Canadian writers, Anne Hébert (1916-2000) and Alice Munro (born in 1931). Two of their works are examined in English or French translation: a short story called “Chance” published in 2004 in Munro’s case, and the novel *Les fous de Bassan* by Anne Hébert (1982). The specific use of metaphor and metonymy by these two writers, both at the macro- and micro-textual levels, calls for special attention on the part of the translators. The discussion of those translations is also put in the Canadian literary context.*

**Keywords:** *metaphor, metonymy, Anne Hébert, Alice Munro.*

*The development of a discourse may take place along two different semantic lines: one topic may lead to another either through their similarity or through their contiguity. The METAPHORICAL way would be the most appropriate term for the first case and the METONYMIC way for the second, since they find their most condensed expression in metaphor and metonymy respectively. (Jakobson 2002: 90)*

## 1. Introduction

Discussing metaphor and metonymy, Roman Jakobson stressed that “in normal verbal behaviour both processes are continually operative, but careful observation will reveal that under the influence of a cultural pattern, personality, and verbal style, preference is given to one of the two processes over the other” (Jakobson 2002: 90).

My aim in this text is to see how this applies to the Canadian literary and translational contexts by looking more specifically at two works by Anne Hébert and Alice Munro in the original as well as in English or French translation. The first book I’ll be examining is Anne Hébert’s novel *Les fous de Bassan*, published in French in 1982; the second is *Runaway*, published in 2004 by Alice Munro.

In a chapter of his book called *Configuration*, Canadian critic, poet and translator E.D. Blodgett examines how the two central tropes of metaphor – which consists in seeing an image through a real object, and substituting one for the other – and metonymy – which is more akin to a wilful confusion between appearance and reality – function in the work of Hébert and Munro. Reminding us, as Gérard Genette does in *Figures II*, that the rhetorical figure is “le symbole même de la spatialité du langage littéraire dans son rapport au sens” (Genette 1969: 47), Blodgett looks at the representation of the house in the work of both writers. He notes that characters in several of Anne Hébert’s novels are not metaphorically linked to the house they live in. They rather tend to be sketching its contours: the reader will find them, for instance, lying on a bed or sitting by the window (a recurrent image), as is the case for Élizabéth in the novel called *Kamouraska* (1970). Hébert rarely allows the house to be seen from more than one angle: only one element will generally be made visible (the façade, or a wall, a mirror, a window) in an iconographic and bi-

dimensional fashion. But if the part is a way of referring to the whole, as in a synecdoche, in this particular instance, the whole is a void, an absence. Moreover, the character and the house being in a contiguous position in relation to one another, any metaphorical association is made more difficult by the absence of distance. Blodgett also sees this metonymical figure in linguistic acts performed by many of Hébert's characters, condemned to repeat the same words which end up imprisoning them. Thus, fatality – in its horizontal syntagmatics – eventually overcomes the ontological advent of metaphor.

On the other hand, Blodgett notes that the house in Alice Munro's work, in particular in a short story collection entitled *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968), is not used primarily as a structure or device aimed at telling us more about the personality of the protagonist. Instead of Hébert's linearity, Blodgett notes a tendency on Munro's part to explore concentric structures. For example, on the theme of childhood present in the work of both writers, Munro has childhood coming back and interfering with the present, whereas in Hébert it's very frequently associated with sterility and death. Even the flashback technique used by the latter in *Kamouraska* does not as a result mix together the past and the present in the same way as Munro does in some of her short stories (as in "Something I've been meaning to tell you", taken from the book of the same name).

When he is generally associating Anne Hébert and metonymy, on one hand, and Alice Munro and metaphor, on the other, Blodgett doesn't corroborate an idea often expressed in relation to Quebecois and Canadian literatures, a thesis articulated among others by the Canadian poet, translator and critic D.G. Jones (1984: 42). According to this approach, the French tradition that Quebec literature stems from is characterised by a "vertical" or symbolist vision which brings it closer to the sphere of poetry, whereas the tradition at the basis of English-Canadian literature would be more reality – and thus "horizontally" – oriented. To conform to this pattern, the general rhetorical orientation of Hébert's work would 'normally' be more metaphor-oriented, since analogical associations are more vertical than the horizontal contiguity Blodgett has found in her novels. Blodgett argues in fact that "exchange, transformation, revelation do not occur in Hébert because the house, no matter what its semantic value may be, does not permit another scene to open" (Blodgett 1982: 77). However, the critic also suggests that the road leading to oneself is perhaps to be found more on the side of metonymy, which is a way, for the lyrical *I*, to say, with Lacan: "je me décide à n'être que ce que je suis" – a better manner of accessing truth, perhaps, than the "signifying quest" of metaphor, which is turned toward what will come to be – "venir à l'être" (Lacan 1966: 517 qtd. in Blodgett 1982: 76-77).

Perhaps that's what led Hébert to shift to prose and metonymy after having started out with poetry in her literary career. In her verse, she does tend to use more metaphors and similes, as in the first lines of her poem "Le tombeau des rois", which reads as follows:

J'ai mon cœur au poing  
Comme un faucon aveugle

In a first draft of his English translation of that poem, poet-translator Frank Scott had written:

I hold my heart in my clenched hand  
Like a blind falcon

In the course of an exchange of letters between the two concerning that translation, Anne Hébert pointed out to him that the image wasn't the 'right' one, because what she had in mind was an image of falconry, when the bird is actually on the hand, or the fist, of the falconer.

This correspondence was presented in a book published in 1970<sup>1</sup> called *Dialogue sur la traduction*, for which the Canadian critic Northrop Frye wrote a very penetrating foreword. In it, Frye refers to Gerard Manley Hopkins to make a point about poetry:

Gerard Manley Hopkins draws a distinction between a poet's "overthought" or explicit meaning, and his "underthought", or the meaning given by the progression of images and metaphors. But it is the "underthought" that is the real poetic meaning, and the explicit meaning must conform to it. [...] There have been many arguments over whether a translation should be slavishly literal or faithful only to the general spirit of the original, but these arguments are usually based on the wrong kind of meaning. Of course the translation of any poem worth translating should be as literal as the language will allow, but it should be a literal rendering of the real and not of the superficial meaning." [...] A translation, when thorough enough, may be a critical elucidation of its original as well as a translation." (Hébert 2013: 590)

If translating Anne Hébert's poetry amounts, to a great extent, to paying attention to the succession of her images and metaphors, translating her prose involves being attentive to her treatment of metonymy. She won the Prix Fémina in 1982 for *Les fous de Bassan* – a novel which was published in the English translation of Sheila Fischman the following year. In that novel, Hébert utilises a number of speakers to tell her tale. The story is set in the fictional community of Griffin Creek, in the province of Quebec, whose founders were British loyalists who fled north during the American Revolution.

## 2. *Les fous de Bassan*

The novel begins with "The Book of the Reverend Nicholas Jones." This leader of a vanishing flock reflects on the past, on his barren wife, and on his violent desire for the two Atkins girls, who were murdered in 1936. The second section of the novel consists of a series of letters written to a friend by Stevens Brown, who has returned to his native community in 1936 after a five-year absence. "The Book of Nora Atkins," which follows, reveals the innocence of the fifteen-year-old writer, who has just discovered her power over men but has no idea how dangerous it can be to arouse their desires. Her seventeen-year-old cousin Olivia Atkins is more wary, and the men in her family are determined to protect her. However, they cannot keep her away from Nora, and her association with her will prove disastrous. In "The Book of Percival Brown and of Several Others", dated 1936, Hébert deals more specifically with the crime, or rather the discovery that the Atkins girls have disappeared, the subsequent investigation, and the search for their remains. In "Olivia of the High Seas," Olivia describes her death and explains how her body was washed out to sea.

In a way, translation is built into that novel, the story taking place in a protestant community of British descent in the Gaspé peninsula, but being told in French by Hébert. Sheila Fischman, who has translated a few of Hébert's novels, has said that it's the one she enjoyed translating the most (Fischman 2001: 17). She mentions

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<sup>1</sup> This dialogue is included in the critical edition of Anne Hébert's poetry recently published by Presses de l'Université de Montréal (2013).

having taken particular pleasure in translating the very first sentence of the book, which goes like this:

La barre étale de la mer, blanche, à perte de vue, sur le ciel gris, la masse noire des arbres, en ligne parallèle derrière nous. (Hébert 1982: 13)

In this incomplete sentence (having no finite verb) which reads like a haiku, the horizontal plane is very much emphasised. Here is Fischman's translation:

A strand of sea poised between tides, white, as far as the eye can see, and against the gray sky, in a parallel line behind us, the black bulk of trees. (Hébert 1983: 9)

In English, we also have an incomplete sentence, but the choice of "as far as the eye can see" to render "*à perte de vue*" brings in a finite verb, albeit in a prepositional phrase. Pauline Sarkar, translator of *Les fous de Bassan* into Dutch, has written about the problem posed to her by that same sentence. She was confused by the fact that for her, a "barre" goes from left to right, so in the present case, is parallel to the beach, whereas "*à perte de vue*" refers to the distant horizon. She ended up using the Dutch word for surface (Sarkar 2001: 8).

The second paragraph of Hébert's novel reads like this:

Au loin une rumeur de fête, du côté du nouveau village. En étirant le cou on pourrait voir leurs bicoques peinturlurées en rouge, vert, jaune, bleu, comme si c'était un plaisir de barbouiller des maisons et d'afficher des couleurs voyantes. Ces gens-là sont des parvenus. Inutile de tourner la tête dans leur direction. Je sais qu'ils sont là. (Hébert 1982: 13)

Here we have a juxtaposition of the village and its festivities and the severity of Reverend Jones' rectory. Thus, difference is stressed from a contiguous angle. In the English translation, we find more personal pronouns (two "you's for one "on", and a "they" – *they took pleasure* – where the French has "*c'était un plaisir*"), which tends to diminish the aloofness effect of the original:

In the distance, from the new village, the hum of festivities. If you craned your neck you could see their shacks, daubed with red, green, yellow, blue, as if they took pleasure in smearing houses with garish colors. They're upstarts, those people. Unnecessary to look in their direction. I know they're there. (Hébert 1983: 9)

But the two worlds of the village and the rectory cannot coexist unbeknownst to one another: the wind and the music make perfect insularity impossible, as is made plain in the third paragraph:

Leur fanfare se mêle au vent. M'atteint par rafales. Me perce le tympan. M'emplit les yeux de leurs fauves stridentes. Ils ont racheté nos terres à mesure qu'elles tombaient en déshérence. Des papistes. Voici qu'aujourd'hui, à grand renfort de cuivre et de majorettes, ils osent célébrer le bicentenaire du pays, comme si c'étaient eux les fondateurs, les bâtisseurs, les premiers dans la forêt, les premiers sur la mer, les premiers ouvrant la terre vierge sous le soc. (Hébert 1982: 13)

Here Anne Hébert eliminates the grammatical subject in certain sentences: "M'atteint par rafales. Me perce le tympan. M'emplit les yeux de leurs fauves stridentes". This creates an effect of rapidity (thoughts swiftly going by in the minister's head), emphasised by the pace imposed by the succession of short sentences. In the translation, we note the presence of the pronoun I. The rhythmic pattern is transferred onto the assonances and alliterations, the grammatical parallelism of the English version being also noteworthy:

Their brass band is drowned by the wind. I hear spurts of music. Earsplitting. Glittering, savage and strident. They have bought up our lands as they reverted to the Crown. Papists. Today,

with quantities of instruments and majorettes, they dare to celebrate the country's bicentennial as if they were the ones who had founded it, built it, they who first came to the forest, the sea, they who had broken the virgin soil with their plows. (Hébert 1983: 9)

The question of who “first came” to that part of the New World cannot but be read as being an ironic inversion: apart from the fact that neither the French Catholics nor the English Protestants were there first (the Natives – or First Nations – were), the minister resenting the presence of the papists in his neck of the woods is a reversal of the historical situation of Quebec where francophone settlers of New France saw some of their “ancestral” territories taken over by British colonists following 1763's Treaty of Paris.

Hébert functions in a metonymical mode most of the time, with little touches of metaphors here and there, for instance when the blue wall paper in the Reverend's house is described as “revealing, in places, the brown skin of wood” (Hébert 1983: 15) [le papier bleu du parloir en loques qui “laisse voir, de place en place, la peau brune du bois” (Hébert 1982: 23)]. For the translator, many simple choices on the syntactic level add up to create the same effect, but can at times ostensibly move the text away from its general movement. On the whole Sheila Fischman manages to keep this metonymic prose laced with metaphor accessible to her readers in translation, except perhaps for the title of the novel (*In the Shadow of the Wind*, in English, and *Les fous de Bassan* in French).

The *fou de Bassan* is a bird found on the seaside in very few places in Québec, in particular on an island called Bonaventure, off the Gaspé peninsula. The “*fou*” (“mad”) in “*fou de Bassan*” is due to the violent way in which it plunges into the sea to catch its prey. The name of the bird is often mentioned in the novel, which comes to stand, as a synecdoche, for the craziness of Griffin Creek.

The Dutch translator Pauline Sarkar explains that in one Dutch dialect, there's a sea bird called a “*zeezot*”, which literally means “sea idiot” (or “*fou marin*” in French), and even though the Dutch don't normally accept regionalisms in the official or literary language, she suggested using that in the title and the publisher agreed (Sarkar 2001: 11).

I think this Dutch translation of Anne Hébert's title works better than the English version, the main reason being that *In the shadow of the wind* introduces a metaphor which transfers the emphasis away from metonymy.

### 3. “Chance”

From the production of the 2013 Nobel Prize for Literature, Alice Munro, I'll be looking briefly at one short story from her collection *Runaway* – for which she had won the Giller Prize. *Runaway* was published in 2004 by McClelland & Stewart. Some of the stories in that collection were originally printed in *The New Yorker*. The French translation of Alice Munro's book, by Jacqueline Huet and Jean-Pierre Carasso, came out in 2008. It was co-published in France by Les Éditions de l'Olivier, and in Québec by Boréal.

Three short stories in Munro's book are connected with one another. This triptych – which amounts in fact to a novella – is centred on the character of Juliet, who, in the first short story entitled “Chance”, is a 21-year-old teacher of Latin in Vancouver. The year is 1965 and Juliet is crossing Canada from East to West by train – a very meaningful trip in symbolic terms in Canada, whose railway, built *ad mari usque ad mare* in the late nineteenth century, had indeed been constructed as the backbone of

the country's identity. On that train, Juliet meets Eric, the man who'll later become her husband. This chance encounter that the title refers to, among other things, is in itself of limited interest. What is really the centre of the story is the way Juliet relates to herself and to the outside world. The way she keeps assessing and reassessing what happens to her and around her. A lot of things are fraught with uncertainty, and a lot of guesswork goes on.

This imprecision partakes of an aesthetic proposition at the basis of the story – a particular way of connecting form and content – which Munro hints at in “Chance” when the narrator states that while Juliet is looking out the train window, she is “drawn in” by “the very indifference, the repetition, the carelessness and contempt for harmony, to be found on the scrambled surface of the Precambrian shield” (Munro 2004: 54). By means of Munro's pen, indifference, repetition, carelessness and contempt for harmony form the *pattern* of her prose, rhetorical ways she uses in order to transfer – almost in a seismographic fashion – the fundamental features of the territory that Juliet is crossing by train, as well as the mapping of her mind, the two being closely linked to form part of Munro's aesthetics of the Canadian North. One could say that this is her own way of revisiting or even challenging a traditional English-Canadian discursive approach which E.D. Blodgett assimilates to an Adamic desire to claim the landscape through language (Blodgett 2012: 119)<sup>2</sup>. This is usually done in a metonymical mode since metonymy is specifically concerned with the relation between language and the reality it refers to<sup>3</sup>. But Munro doesn't convey a desire to claim or possess the land (man versus nature) so much as she situates the human presence *in* nature, as a part of a whole.

Translating Munro into French would therefore entail looking closely at a certain number of stylistic traits that tend to partake of her aesthetics, in other words, to pay attention to certain elements which play a part in the creation of her work as a whole. One of those rhetorical devices is repetition. The English language doesn't handle repetition the way French does<sup>4</sup>. In French, there is a stronger reticence to repeat words. Iteration as a figure of speech is not always present in Munro's prose, but at times it does play an important role, such as in “Chance”. So when one comes across repeated words in that story, like the word “house” in another passage, one feels that there is an added meaning to them:

The towns where the bus stops are not organized towns at all. In some places a few repetitive houses — company houses — are built close together, but most of the houses are like those in the woods, each one in its own wide cluttered yard [...]. (Munro 2004: 50)

Here, the French translation typically decided against repetition:

Les villes où le car s'arrête ne sont pas organisées du tout. Par endroits, quelques maisons répétitives – appartenant à une compagnie – sont bâties les unes près des autres, mais la plupart

<sup>2</sup> Here's what he writes: “Les grands poètes anglophones actuels [...] considèrent la poésie comme l'acte de faire une carte du pays à travers la langue, projet adamique, pour ainsi dire” (Blodgett 2012: 119). Although Blodgett's remarks, written on the occasion of the centenary of Québécois poet Hector the Saint-Denys Garneau's birth, deal more specifically with poetry, they can be said to also apply to English-Canadian prose.

<sup>3</sup> As Michel Le Guern explains, “Le mécanisme de la métaphore s'oppose [...] nettement à celui de la métonymie par le fait qu'il opère sur la substance même du langage au lieu de porter seulement sur la relation entre le langage et la réalité exprimée” (Le Guern 1972: 16-17).

<sup>4</sup> Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet, authors of the *Stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais*, write: “on sait que l'anglais ne craint pas les répétitions, au contraire” (1977: 252).



des habitations ressemblent à celles qu'on voit dans les bois, dressées chacune au milieu d'une vaste cour encombrée [...]. » (2008: L'Olivier 55; Boréal 57)

Another occurrence of repetition concerns the consecutive use of the conjunction “and” in English. Here’s an example taken from “Chance”:

The bus takes Juliet from downtown Vancouver to Horseshoe Bay *and then* onto a ferry. *Then* across a mainland peninsula *and* onto another ferry *and* onto the mainland again *and* so to the town where the man who wrote the letter lives. (Munro 2004: 50; emphasis added)

The French version reads like this:

Le car amène Juliet du centre de Vancouver jusqu’à Horseshoe Bay *où il embarque* sur un bac. *Puis* à travers une péninsule *et* sur un autre bac *et* de nouveau sur le continent jusqu’à la ville où habite l’homme qui a écrit la lettre. (Munro 2008: L'Olivier 54; Boréal 56)

Here, the translators managed to stay pretty close to Munro’s style, even to the point of choosing to put two “*et*” in a row, which is normally frowned upon in French. The repetitive use of “and” creates the effect of putting all the elements on the same level, not emphasising one in particular. It is, as we know, one of the distinctive features of Ernest Hemingway’s style, which is not always transposed in a satisfactory manner in French translation<sup>5</sup>.

Among the signs of punctuation, the exclamation mark signals an emphasis on what Jakobson calls the “emotive function” (1963: 214). One notices that such a punctuation sign is conspicuously absent from Munro’s prose, even where one would expect it, as in the following passage:

Whale Bay. And how quickly – even before Horseshoe Bay – you pass from city to wilderness. (Munro 2004: 50)

In French, the use of an exclamation mark adds a tinge of emotion that the original doesn’t convey:

Whale Bay. Et que l’on passe vite – avant même Horseshoe Bay – de la ville à la nature sauvage! (Munro 2008: L'Olivier 54; Boréal 57)

Even though in French, as in English, the sentence structure typically calls for an exclamation mark, the translation could easily have done without it, just like the original text did. The impact of having decided to include it is not to be underestimated in view of the fact that this slightly greater stress in the target language on an affective rapport with the landscape is not in line with a sort of ontological ‘indifference’ Munro is emphasising in relation to Juliet’s journey and fate.

Word choices also come to play in part in the way emotion is or is not expressed. For instance, in French, the word “*maisonnette*” is a bit old-fashioned; it conveys an element of quaintness that is not contextually appropriate:

Occasionally a trail of smoke from some damp and battered-looking little house, with a yard full of firewood, lumber and tires, cars and parts of cars, broken and usable bikes, toys, all the things that have to sit outside when people are lacking garages and basements. (Munro 2004: 50)

De temps à autre, une mince fumée montait d’une *maisonnette* d’aspect humide et délabré, la cour pleine de bois de chauffage, de poutres et de pneus, d’autos et de pièces détachées, de

<sup>5</sup> Jean-Marc Gouanvic has aptly shown, in his *Pratique sociale de la traduction*, that by doing away with this repeated conjunction and reorganising the whole punctuation system of the original, the French translator of Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms* “détruit l’agencement stylistique de la phrase” (Gouanvic 2007: 74).

bicyclettes cassées ou encore entières, de jouets, de toutes les choses qui doivent rester dehors quand les gens n'ont ni garage ni sous-sol. (Munro 2008: L'Olivier 55; Boréal 57; emphasis added)

Here a verb is added in the translation (“montait”), the word “car” is not repeated, and “maisonnette” seems to be juxtaposed in an oxymoronic manner with the adjectival syntagm “d’aspect humide et délabré”. I’m drawing attention here to stylistic features that matter to Munro’s aesthetics, even though in any particular instance the impact on the target text reader is not that important. The idea is to examine what effects the translation produces at the micro-textual level, and to try and determine whether or not this corresponds to the general thrust of Munro’s text.

#### 4. Two competing forces

According to Michael Edwards, French is centripetal; it strives for order beyond confusion, and has a hard time dealing with the centrifugal nature of English which allows for a tendency to multiplicity, to lushness. Here’s how he puts it in his book *Racine et Shakespeare*:

On dirait, pour employer des termes rébarbatifs auxquels je ne vois pas de synonymes plus aimables, que la poésie française est centripète et la poésie anglaise centrifuge. Pourrait-on ajouter que le français est déjà une langue centripète, qui gallicise les mots étrangers pour qu’ils rejoignent les formes et les sonorités senties comme indigènes et qui accepte [...] d’être régie par le centre? [...] L’anglais serait plutôt centrifuge. Il va continuellement chercher des mots à l’étranger, il en invente toujours de nouveaux, et si nous parlons *the Queen’s English*, l’anglais de la Reine, nous n’en sommes pas les sujets, nous exerçons notre liberté dans une sorte de monarchie constitutionnelle linguistique. (Edwards 2004: 67)

In the context of Canada, a country where French and English are the official languages, those two opposing forces at times compete for the reader’s attention in the source texts and in their translations, a “competition” which may end up sending him or her conflicting and confusing signals.

The way those metonymical and metaphorical processes work at the sentence level both in the original and in translation may create slightly different effects on a micro-textual level, even if the general functioning of the work isn’t fundamentally altered, as is the case in the two works in translation examined here. However, the first job of the translator is to identify which of the two processes of metaphor or metonymy is given preference over the other in the author’s verbal style. This will help the translator pay attention to minor details at the sentence level – details which nevertheless add up to create the overall, macro-textual effect of the translation.

There is no more thorough reading of a literary work than the one effected by the translator-to-be. That specific reading operation often allows him or her to pinpoint the figures of speech that need to be attended to in the translation process. In turn, *reading translations* is a way of going beyond the mere coexistence of texts in the original and the ‘other’ language, and of examining the various stylistic configurations. As Arno Renken explains in *Babel heureuse*, when one lends an ear to translation, one hears that the texts aren’t just ‘side by side’: “ils parlent aussi l’un ‘chez’ l’autre [...]. Ils interviennent, interfèrent, semblent *se lire* lorsque nous les lisons. Ils vivent ensemble” (Renken 2012: 12). If that is true of the act of reading a source text alongside its translation, it should also apply to the reading of translations of Alice Munro and other English-Canadian writers (into French) and Anne Hébert as well as other Québécois writers (into English): it is an invitation to go beyond the

‘side by side’ cohabitation of texts, and to listen to what the coming and going of metaphors and metonymies in translation is telling us about Canadian literature in particular, and literature more generally.

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# Il “langage-univers” di Boris Vian in due traduzioni italiane: *Schiuma di giorni*, *La schiuma dei giorni*

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**Abstract:** *Tra quelle che sono state evidenziate come caratteristiche tipiche dello stile di Boris Vian (1920-1959), spicca ciò che Jacques Bens (1963) ha definito “langage-univers”. Con questo termine, Bens indica la capacità vianesca di creare mondi e situazioni con e attraverso il linguaggio, in particolare attraverso la presa alla lettera di locuzioni ed espressioni idiomatiche ormai non più percepite nel loro significato compositivo. Tale uso rimette prepotentemente in discussione l’illusione di una corrispondenza tra realtà e linguaggio, riportando quest’ultimo e, attraverso di esso, la materialità del testo costantemente in primo piano. Tale stile è, per di più, fortemente radicato nella lingua di partenza e nei suoi idiomatismi, un fatto che rende la sua traduzione alquanto problematica. L’articolo analizza le strategie di traduzione del “langage-univers” in due traduzioni italiane del più celebre romanzo vianesco, L’Écume des jours (1947). Di particolare interesse risulta la distanza cronologica tra i due testi, uno (A. Donaudy) realizzato a metà degli anni sessanta e mai più ristampato, l’altro (G. Turchetta) pubblicato a quasi trent’anni di distanza, nel 1992, e costantemente riproposto dall’editore. Una breve introduzione al testo di Vian e al suo linguaggio verrà seguita dalla presentazione delle due traduzioni italiane e dalla loro rispettiva collocazione nel panorama editoriale; si passerà poi all’analisi vera e propria della resa del “langage-univers” nei due testi, per cercare di capire se e come la presa alla lettera del linguaggio figurato sia stata colta e riprodotta.*

**Parole chiave:** *Boris Vian, L’Écume des jours, langage-univers, ritraduzione.*

Fino a non molto tempo fa, in Italia Boris Vian doveva ancora essere presentato a chiunque non facesse parte della ristretta cerchia dei francesisti, o dei letterati più eclettici: è piuttosto celebre la storiella (forse apocrifa) di quell’editore che, vedendo una pila di volumi invenduti del nostro autore in una libreria, esclamò sconcolato: “Niente da fare, questi russi non vendono proprio!”. Poco a poco, tuttavia, la nebbia che circonda questo eclettico protagonista della Parigi del dopoguerra sembra diradarsi: le opere che vengono pubblicate anche nel nostro paese sono sempre più numerose e diversificate<sup>1</sup> e, ormai da diverso tempo, non mancano neppure le ritraduzioni. Proprio di ritraduzioni, e di una ritraduzione in particolare, quella dell’*Écume des jours* (1947), forse il più celebre romanzo dell’autore francese, ci occuperemo in questa occasione.

Prima di immergerci nei testi, però, dobbiamo rispondere a una domanda: che cosa lega *L’Écume des jours* alla resa del linguaggio figurato? A farlo è un aspetto stilistico: Boris Vian è, infatti, unanimemente reputato come uno degli autori francesi che hanno saputo sfruttare nel modo più originale le possibilità formali della lingua francese, attraverso un uso sapiente e costante di giochi di parole e prodezze formali di vario genere. Tra quelle che sono state evidenziate come caratteristiche tipiche dello stile vianesco, spicca in particolare ciò che Jacques Bens (1963) ha potuto definire “langage-univers” (“linguaggio-universo”). Con questo termine, Bens vuole

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<sup>1</sup> Si veda il breve panorama bibliografico tracciato in Regattin 2012: 20-21.

indicare anzitutto la capacità vianesca di creare mondi e situazioni *con* e *attraverso* il linguaggio, in modo particolare (ma non solo) tramite la presa alla lettera di locuzioni ed espressioni idiomatiche ormai non più percepite nel loro significato compositivo. Tale uso, riportando il linguaggio e la materialità del segno linguistico costantemente in primo piano, rende la traduzione dei testi di Vian spesso problematica.

Nelle pagine che seguono non analizzeremo le ritraduzioni del romanzo di Vian sotto ogni aspetto, ma ci limiteremo alla resa del suo linguaggio-universo. Per farlo, è necessario tuttavia compiere ancora due operazioni preliminari: descrivere le due traduzioni di cui *L'Écume des jours* è stata oggetto in Italia e approfondire la definizione di quel linguaggio-universo che, pur caratterizzato sommariamente, resta forse, ancora, un elemento alquanto vago.

Primo romanzo pubblicato a proprio nome da Boris Vian<sup>2</sup>, *L'Écume des jours* è edito da Gallimard nel 1947. Questa la succinta descrizione che ne offre il suo autore: “Un uomo ama una donna. Lei si ammala. Poi muore”<sup>3</sup>. Nonostante il patrocinio di Raymond Queneau, che lo definirà entusiasticamente “il più toccante dei romanzi d’amore contemporanei”<sup>4</sup>, il testo – come tutte le successive opere a firma Vian – sarà un insuccesso e verrà sostanzialmente oscurato dalla reputazione del nostro come autore di polizieschi all’americana firmati con lo pseudonimo di Vernon Sullivan<sup>5</sup>.

L’Italia sembra scoprirlo con un certo ritardo: la prima traduzione segue l’uscita dell’opera originale di quasi vent’anni, e viene pubblicata nel 1965. Un volume Rizzoli, intitolato solamente *Sterpacuore*, raccoglie due romanzi del nostro autore, quello che ci interessa (intitolato in questa versione *Schiuma di giorni*) e *L'Arrache-cœur* (pubblicato da Vian nel 1953), *Sterpacuore* appunto. Nonostante il ritardo relativo, il volume Rizzoli costituisce la prima traduzione italiana edita di un testo di Boris Vian, un fatto che non fa che confermare la consacrazione tardiva dell’autore francese, riscoperto anche in patria soprattutto a partire dalla *fine* degli anni sessanta, in coincidenza con il Maggio francese.

*Schiuma di giorni* occupa la prima parte del grosso volume Rizzoli (pp. 5-179) ed è opera di Augusto Donaudy, prolifico traduttore dal francese attivo dai primi anni quaranta fino ai settanta inoltrati; Donaudy lavora in particolare sulla narrativa, dai classici ottocenteschi (*Il giro del mondo in ottanta giorni* di Jules Verne, *I tre moschettieri* di Alexandre Dumas) ad autori contemporanei quali Émile Ajar, Françoise Sagan o Jean d’Ormesson, ma gli si devono anche alcune traduzioni più tecniche, specialmente nel campo della medicina<sup>6</sup>. Negli anni che seguono questa traduzione, mai ristampata e di cui si può quindi immaginare un successo piuttosto limitato, Rizzoli tenterà nuovamente di imporre Vian in Italia con *L'autunno a Pechino* (1969), anche in questo caso con scarse fortune.

<sup>2</sup> Lo precede di alcuni mesi la pseudotraduzione dall’inglese *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes*, pubblicato sempre nel 1947, sotto pseudonimo, per le Éditions du Scorpion.

<sup>3</sup> “Un homme aime une femme. Elle tombe malade. Elle meurt” (cit. in Bens 1976: 30; salvo dove diversamente indicato, le traduzioni sono nostre).

<sup>4</sup> “Le plus poignant des romans d’amour contemporains” (cit. in Bens 1963: 184).

<sup>5</sup> Su questi romanzi il lettore interessato potrà consultare Arnaud 1974, Fakra 2001 e Schoolcraft 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Lavoro compiuto specialmente per l’editore Richter e C. di Napoli, nel corso degli anni cinquanta, con testi quali *Il vostro fegato* (1954), *La vostra tensione arteriosa* e *Il vostro intestino* (1955).

Perché l'*Écume* torni disponibile al pubblico italiano sarà poi necessario attendere diversi anni: la seconda e, per il momento, ultima traduzione del romanzo sarà pubblicata nel 1992 dall'editore milanese Marcos y Marcos, e ristampata costantemente fino a oggi. Va segnalata la presenza di diversi paratesti: dal 1996 viene introdotta, in guisa di prefazione, un'intervista di Fabio Gambaro a Daniel Pennac, mantenuta nella posizione originale fino al 2005; a partire da questa data, viene aggiunta una prefazione di Ivano Fossati, a sua volta uno dei primi scopritori di Vian con la sua interpretazione del *Déserteur* (1992, tr. Giorgio Calabrese), e l'intervista a Pennac scivola a fine volume. In questa occasione il testo è tradotto da Gianni Turchetta, italianista di fama, specialista di Campana e D'Annunzio e professore di letteratura italiana presso l'Università di Milano, nonché traduttore dall'inglese, dal francese e dal serbo-croato.

Veniamo al “langage-univers” di cui parla Bens: la cosa migliore da fare è forse lasciargli direttamente la parola. Secondo Bens (1963: 175-177),

les écrivains ont toujours évolué à l'intérieur d'un même ensemble logique, ensemble régi, à peu de choses près, par les lois aristotéliennes, et dans lequel le système des causes et des effets ne souffre aucune contestation. [...] Ce monde est d'une cohérence extrême [...], mais ses lois, fondamentalement différentes des nôtres, ne nous sont pas toutes connues. [...] Ce monde de Boris Vian est entièrement fondé sur le langage, c'est-à-dire: naît de lui, et trouve en lui chacune de ses justifications [...] à l'aide de trois méthodes différentes. La première consiste à refuser toute figure de style et à prendre le langage au pied de la lettre. [...] Une deuxième démarche conduit à des “demi-crétions” de mots. Il s'agit, soit de mots existant déjà et utilisés dans un sens détourné [...] soit de mots subissant des déformations légères [...]. En troisième lieu, enfin, Boris Vian se livre à des créations totales<sup>7</sup>.

Presa alla lettera del linguaggio figurato, semi-neologismi e neologismi veri e propri dunque, queste tre strategie sfociando nella creazione di un mondo dove non valgono le nostre regole, ma soltanto quelle del linguaggio<sup>8</sup>.

Guardiamo qualche esempio<sup>9</sup>, cominciando dalla prima tipologia evidenziata da Bens, che può essere a sua volta suddivisa in due diverse categorie: in primo luogo

<sup>7</sup> “Gli scrittori si sono sempre mossi all'interno di uno stesso insieme logico, insieme retto, con pochi scarti, dalle leggi aristoteliche, e nel quale il sistema delle cause e degli effetti non riceve alcuna contestazione. [Il mondo dell'*Écume*, invece] è di una coerenza estrema [...] ma le sue leggi, fondamentalmente diverse dalle nostre, non ci sono tutte conosciute. [...] Questo mondo [...] è interamente fondato sul linguaggio: nasce da esso, e in esso trova ognuna delle sue giustificazioni [...] attraverso tre metodi diversi: il primo consiste nel rifiutare qualsiasi figura di stile, prendendo la lingua alla lettera [...]; un secondo procedimento porta a una serie di “semi-creazioni” di parole: si tratta o di parole esistenti e utilizzate in un senso traslato o di parole che subiscono deformazioni leggere [...]; la terza strategia, infine, è quella delle creazioni totali.”

<sup>8</sup> A scanso di equivoci, segnaliamo che ci accontenteremo qui di fare nostra la definizione di Bens, senza interessarci agli aspetti più poetici della scrittura e della “creazione di universi”, più vicina per certi versi al fantastico o al meraviglioso, di Vian. Un brano come “Le soleil cuisait doucement les pommes tombées et les faisait éclore en petits pommiers verts et frais qui fleurissaient instantanément et donnaient des pommes plus petites encore. À la troisième génération, on ne voyait plus guère qu'une sorte de mousse verte et rose où des pommes minuscules roulaient comme des billes” (Vian 1998: 71), pur trasportandoci decisamente in un mondo *altro* rispetto al nostro quotidiano, non presenta nessuna delle caratteristiche elencate da Bens e non sarà quindi preso in considerazione in questo studio.

<sup>9</sup> La scrittura di Vian è sempre in bilico tra gioco e serietà, tra linguaggio e *langage-univers*. È per questa ragione che abbiamo deciso di avvalerci del lavoro di analisi di chi ci ha preceduti. Particolarmente utili sono risultati i suggerimenti (tutti parziali, dato che non esiste alcuno spoglio

quella, prototipica, della lettura compositiva delle espressioni idiomatiche, e poi quella delle espressioni che potremmo definire “locuzioni valigia”, la cui seconda parte viene trascinata, per così dire, da locuzioni realmente esistenti. Quest’ultimo caso è testimoniato da espressioni quali “velours marron à côtes d’Ivoire” (Vian 1998: 87<sup>10</sup>), crasi di *velours à côtes*, “velluto a coste”, e *Côte d’Ivoire*, “Costa d’Avorio”. Vediamo invece alcuni esempi del primo tipo, forse più interessanti: data l’esistenza della locuzione *manger avec un lance-pierre* (letteralmente “mangiare con una fionda”, espressione che significa mangiare con grande voracità e rapidità – potremmo dire “a quattro palmenti”, se volessimo usare a nostra volta un’espressione idiomatica), Vian decide, coerentemente, di provvedere i suoi protagonisti di un’apposita credenza in cui le fionde trovano posto accanto a bicchieri, stoviglie, posate e così via (p. 25). Oppure, dato che in una ricetta è necessaria una *pointe d’ail* (p. 24), una “punta d’aglio”, avremo bisogno di uno strumento che possa temperarla. Ancora, poiché in francese una ricetta medica si *exécute* (ossia “si spedisce”), termine che viene usato anche per le esecuzioni capitali, per il farmacista non c’è nulla di più naturale che compiere il gesto relativo con una piccola ghigliottina portatile (p. 168).

La seconda categoria evidenziata da Bens, quella delle leggere modifiche o dell’utilizzo traslato di termini esistenti, può essere esemplificata da termini e locuzioni quali “Membre de l’Institut” (p. 40), con una *r* parassita che ricorda il *merdre* su cui si apre *Ubu roi* di Jarry, “doublezons” (l’unità di misura monetaria del romanzo, creata modificando il termine *doublon*, “doblone”) o ancora la serie di giochi paronimici sui termini legati al culto (“sacristoche” per *sacristie*, “bedon” per *bedeau*, “chuique” per *suisse*, “chevêche” per *archevêque*, “béniction” per *bénédiction* e così via, p. 94).

Terza e ultima categoria, quella dei neologismi veri e propri. Vi abbiamo riunito tre diversi tipi di operazione: termini inventati (pur plausibili in francese), parole-valigia (composte cioè dalla crasi di due o più parole esistenti) e polirematiche, spesso usate per designare oggetti o animali (i primi prevalentemente nella forma verbo-sostantivo, sul modello di “apriscatole”, i secondi prevalentemente del tipo sostantivo-sostantivo o sostantivo-aggettivo, sul modello di “tigre del Bengala” o “topo muschiato”). Un esempio per categoria dovrebbe essere sufficiente: abbiamo così un ipotetico insetto, il “brouzillon” (p. 102); un’invenzione del protagonista, il “pianocktail” (p. 28), pianoforte che, opportunamente suonato, permette di ottenere ottime bevande alcoliche; un animale come la “taupe de neige” (“talpa della neve”, p. 222); infine, un’arma come il “lance-mort” (“lanciamorte”, p. 243).

Due traduttori, un “professionista puro” e un universitario, a trent’anni circa di distanza l’uno dall’altro, si confrontano con questo considerevole scoglio traduttivo (e il termine “considerevole” dipende proprio dal fatto che il lavoro sul significante non è, qui, una semplice aggiunta puntuale, ma *costituisce* la stessa logica del testo e della narrazione). Con quali strategie viene approcciato il langage-univers? E con quali risultati? Per vederlo, confronteremo le due traduzioni nelle tre categorie linguistiche già evidenziate, e in due maniere diverse: attraverso uno spoglio

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sistematico) contenuti in Bens 1963, nella postfazione anonima a Vian 1998 e in Charras e Landi 2009.

<sup>10</sup> D’ora in avanti, per le citazioni dal testo originale, faremo riferimento soltanto al numero di pagina di questa edizione.



sistematico delle espressioni in questione e delle loro versioni italiane, per capire quanto del *langage-univers* vianesco sia riprodotto anche nei due testi che qui raffrontiamo, e tramite un'esposizione di alcuni dei casi e delle strategie salienti.

Prima dell'esposizione di alcune cifre è necessaria una rapida discussione relativa allo stabilimento del corpus e alla pertinentizzazione delle diverse forme di resa riscontrate. Nel primo abbiamo inserito tutti i casi di *langage univers* repertoriati da chi ci ha preceduto (cf. nota 9 *supra*) e che abbiamo potuto scovare personalmente<sup>11</sup>; ne sono stati esclusi, forse in modo arbitrario, soltanto i riferimenti parodistici ai titoli di opere di Jean-Paul Sartre (del genere *Le Vomi* per *La Nausée*), che ci sembravano appartenere a un altro tipo di postura. Il corpus si compone così di un totale di 85 occorrenze, suddivise in maniera piuttosto equa: 28 appartengono al primo tipo, e sono anche le più estese dal punto di vista testuale; 30 sono riferibili al secondo tipo; 27, infine, quelle relative alla terza categoria.

Nell'analisi delle traduzioni abbiamo suddiviso i tipi di resa in quattro categorie: (1) riproduzione del gioco formale del testo francese (per esempio, “velours marron à côtes d’ivoire” tradotto con “velluto marrone a coste d’avorio”; ma sono qui considerati anche i casi, più significativi perché presuppongono una ricerca esplicita, in cui un allontanamento dalla corrispondenza formale serve proprio a riprodurre il *langage-univers*<sup>12</sup>); (2) mantenimento di una qualche forma di connotazione, pur in assenza di attenzione esplicita alla forma (casi di *nonsense* derivanti da una traduzione letterale, casi in cui è difficile stabilire se un tentativo di riproduzione sia stato messo in atto o meno, casi di riproduzione con un indebolimento della forza del gioco originale<sup>13</sup>); (3) casi di perdita completa del linguaggio-universo (traduzione letterale sfociante in un linguaggio non connotato, oppure normalizzazione del riferimento, come nella scelta di tradurre il neologismo “brouzillon”, p. 102, con “moscone”, Vian 1965: 58); (4) una soluzione che si aggiunge alle prime tre, quella della nota a piè di pagina, sia in aggiunta (+), sia in sostituzione (x) a una traduzione *adeguata* (cf. Toury 1980 e, per l'utilizzo in un contesto simile al nostro, Delabastita 1993).

Le tabelle che seguono riportano i risultati dell'analisi compiuta sulle due traduzioni. Sull'asse orizzontale della prima trovano posto i diversi tipi di *langage-univers* definiti da Bens, e i due traduttori; su quello verticale le diverse strategie di traduzione che abbiamo appena definito:

<sup>11</sup> Senza che questo spoglio abbia pretesa di esaustività: come si afferma nella già citata nota anonima all'edizione francese dell'*Écume*, a ogni lettura di questo testo le sue scoperte (cf. Vian 1998: 310).

<sup>12</sup> Per esempio, “le plus clair de mon temps [...] je le passe à l’obscurcir” (p. 211) tradotto con “la parte più grande del mio tempo [...] la passo a rimpicciolirla” (Vian 1992: 169).

<sup>13</sup> È il caso dei “sons de trompe d’éléphant” (p. 135) che precedono l’arrivo a una conferenza del filosofo Jean-Sol Partre, portati evidentemente dalla crisi tra *son de trompe*, “squillo di tromba”, e *trompe d’éléphant*, “proboscide di elefante”; una delle traduzioni (Vian 1965: 78) recita “squilli di tromba d’elefante”, in cui resta evidente il riferimento alla proboscide ma se ne perde l’idiomaticità.

	Prese alla lettera del ling. figurato (28)		Deformazioni, semi-creazioni (30)		Creazioni (27)	
	<i>Donaudy</i>	<i>Turchetta</i>	<i>Donaudy</i>	<i>Turchetta</i>	<i>Donaudy</i>	<i>Turchetta</i>
Riproduz.	8	15	12	12	18	22
Compensaz.	5	4	2	2	3	3
Perdita	15	9	16	16	6	2
Note (+)	1	2	1	1	0	1
Note (x)	0	3	0	2	0	1

Tabella 1. Strategie di traduzione

La seconda tabella riporta invece solamente le percentuali globali di resa dei due traduttori, rispetto al totale del testo francese:

	Donaudy	Turchetta
Riproduz.	38 (44%)	49 (58%)
Compensaz.	10 (12%)	9 (11%)
Perdita	37 (44%)	27 (31%)
Note (+)	2	4
Note (x)	0	6

Tabella 2. Percentuali di resa

Già da questa prima esposizione sintetica dei dati emergono diversi elementi degni di interesse. Quello che salta agli occhi con maggiore forza è forse la *quantità* di elementi riprodotti efficacemente da entrambi i traduttori: non lontana dalla metà per Donaudy, si innalza fin quasi al 60% per Turchetta; a queste cifre vanno aggiunte quelle della seconda riga, che offrono comunque al lettore italiano un elemento di sorpresa, e portano le percentuali globali di resa al 56% per il primo testo e al 69% per il secondo. Balza agli occhi anche la dipendenza della riuscita traduttiva dal tipo di strategia adottato da Vian: il linguaggio-universo del terzo gruppo, in particolare, mostra percentuali di resa molto più alte rispetto agli altri due. Un altro dato interessante riguarda il rapporto tra le strategie dei due traduttori: sembra che sia soprattutto il linguaggio-universo del primo tipo a differenziare la resa nei due testi, mentre il secondo e il terzo tipo sono grossomodo uniformi. Una scelta di esempi permetterà probabilmente di chiarire il perché di queste differenze:

Tipo 1:

1.a. V, 155 *Dans la chambre, il y avait des soucis qui s'accumulaient...*

D, 91 Nella camera, si accumulavano preoccupazioni...

T, 120 Nella camera, le preoccupazioni si ammucchiavano...

1.b. V, 209 *Je voudrais me retirer dans un coing. A cause de l'odeur...*

D, 124 Vorrei ritirarmi in una cotogna. Per l'odore...

T, 167 Vorrei nascondermi in un cantuccino. Perché ha un odore buonissimo...

1.c. *V, 219 Coupons la poire en deux [...] Mais qu'est-ce qu'on va faire des deux moitiés de cette sacrée poire?*

D, 131 Senta, tagliamo la pera a metà [...] Ma, adesso, che ne facciamo delle due metà di questa benedetta pera?

T, 175 tagliamo la testa al toro [...] Ma che cosa ce ne facciamo della testa di questo benedetto toro?

Tipo 2:

2.a. *V, 35 portecuir en feuilles de Russie*

D, 19 portacuioio di fogli di Russia; T, 12 portacuioio in foglio di Russia

2.b. *V, 40 membre de l'Institut*

D, 22 membro dell'Institut T, 25 membro dell'Istituto

2.c. *V, 105 doublezons*

D, 59 doppisuoni; T, 77 dobloncioni

2.d. *V, 215 antiquitaire*

D, 128 antiquario; T, 172 antiquario

Tipo 3:

3.a. *V, 102 brouzillon*

D, 58 moscone; T, 76 zambrone [nota]

3.b. *V, 159 trousse à doctoriser*

D, 95 borsa; T, 123 borsa da sdottoreggiamento

3.c. *V, 222 taupes de neige*

D, 132 talpe della neve; T, 178 talpe delle nevi

Per tradurre Vian è necessaria non solo la scontata competenza nella lingua di arrivo, ma anche, più che altrove, una eccellente capacità di maneggiare, fin nei suoi aspetti più intimi, la lingua e la cultura di partenza. Il primo passo per tradurre il *langage-univers* di Vian è, infatti, quello apparentemente scontato della sua comprensione. In questo senso emerge con più chiarezza – specie se ricordiamo di trovarci di fronte a traduzioni di qualche anno fa, con tutto ciò che questo comporta in termini di accesso alla documentazione, a testi paralleli e così via – la difficoltà di *capire* le deformazioni vianesche laddove queste siano minime o giochino su ambiguità linguistiche non facili da reperire. È il caso degli esempi 1.a, dove *souci* è un termine polisemico, che significa tanto “preoccupazione” quanto “calendula”, ma la seconda accezione non viene considerata dai traduttori<sup>14</sup>; di 2.b, dove abbiamo la semplice aggiunta di una “r” parassita, probabilmente sfuggita a Donaudy e Turchetta; di 2.d, dove il termine *antiquitaire*, molto simile al corretto *antiquaire*, può anch'esso essere sfuggito ai traduttori/lettori.

Non causano grandi problemi, poiché il meccanismo di formazione può essere riprodotto, le modifiche formali come 2.a o i neologismi polirematici come 3.c; questi ultimi, molto comuni nella terza categoria, ne spiegano l'alto tasso di traducibilità.

I neologismi assoluti composti da una sola parola vengono quasi sistematicamente annullati da Donaudy, laddove Turchetta non si priva della possibilità di reinventare: è il caso, per esempio, di 3.a e di 3.b, che rispecchiano abbastanza fedelmente l'atteggiamento dei due traduttori di fronte a problemi di questo genere. Il secondo traduttore sembra dimostrare maggiore attenzione alle sonorità e alle deformazioni del linguaggio anche in 2.c, dove il termine *doublezon* può essere segmentato come *double-zon* (è il caso del primo traduttore) o, più correttamente, come *doubl-ez-on*.

<sup>14</sup> Ricordiamo, a chi non conoscesse il romanzo, che la protagonista femminile, Chloé, si ammala e che l'unica cosa capace, in apparenza, di farla stare meglio è la presenza costante di fiori nella propria stanza.

La maggiore fedeltà alla lettera, la minore attenzione alla funzione di un determinato sintagma in contesto (la sua sinfunzione, se vogliamo: si veda Tynjanov 1971) sembra caratterizzare il lavoro di Donaudy anche nei casi del primo tipo: l'esempio 1.b gioca sull'omofonia tra *coing*, "mela cotogna", e *coin*, "angolo"; il primo traduttore non sembra accorgersene (o pare ritenere che la denotazione sia comunque fondamentale), laddove il secondo, anche al prezzo di un allontanamento dalla lettera, mantiene il gioco dell'originale grazie alla polisemia del termine "cantuccino" ("angolino" e "biscotto"); l'1.c fa riferimento a un modo di dire che può effettivamente trovare un equivalente nell'italiano "tagliare la testa al toro": con coerenza da *langage-univers* e allontanamento dalla lettera, Turchetta sceglie quest'ultima espressione, laddove Donaudy traduce letteralmente, annullando l'effetto del gioco vianesco.

Maggiore attenzione alla riproduzione del *langage univers* presso Turchetta, dunque<sup>15</sup>; un fatto che sembra dimostrato anche da altri indizi, che non appaiono dalle tabelle precedenti. C'è, innanzitutto, la questione delle note: tre nell'edizione Rizzoli (due appena segnalano giochi di parole considerati intraducibili), sono 29 in quella Marcos y Marcos. Di queste, ben 15 sono dedicate alla spiegazione di ambiguità o invenzioni lessicali, di cui si è tentata o meno una riproduzione in italiano. L'attenzione di Turchetta per il gioco lo porta talvolta a farsene trascinare, a cercare un dialogo, spesso informale, con il lettore e a vedere invenzioni lessicali anche dove non ve ne sono: è il caso del farsi scuro in volto come un *octavon* di Vian (p. 185), interpretato dal traduttore, in un'apposita nota, come "un ipotetico ottavino di grosse dimensioni" (Vian 1992: 146) – laddove il termine, esistente, indicava un meticcio con un ottavo di sangue nero. L'esempio non interessa certo per l'errore in sé, quanto per l'indicazione che ci offre sulla postura del traduttore, qui senz'altro alla ricerca costante delle invenzioni lessicali vianesche, considerate un elemento del testo da riprodurre prioritariamente.

Proviamo a trarre, da questi dati, un bilancio. Per prima cosa è possibile opporre le due traduzioni all'occasione che le ha suscitate. Sembra innanzitutto che le tipologie rilevate da Bens abbiano una qualche validità oggettiva, poiché la percentuale di resa cambia sensibilmente da categoria a categoria. Come era lecito aspettarsi, il terzo tipo – meno legato al significante – mostra una maggior percentuale di realizzazione; allo stesso modo, la prossimità tra italiano e francese consente una buona resa anche sulle locuzioni idiomatiche, a patto che, come fa Turchetta, si sia disposti ad allontanarsi da una stretta letteralità. Sarebbe interessante vedere come altri traduttori si siano confrontati a questo testo, in lingue-culture vicine al francese ma anche più distanti, dove magari l'esperienza raccolta in certi adagi e proverbi tradizionali non sia presente – servirebbe però una conoscenza estremamente estesa delle lingue d'arrivo coinvolte, proprio perché la comprensione del gioco sul lato formale del linguaggio richiede una competenza non alla portata di tutti. Andrebbero inoltre valutate – cosa che in questa occasione non abbiamo fatto –

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<sup>15</sup> La differenza percentuale nella resa è già di per sé significativa, ma lo diventa ancora di più se si decide di "fare la tara" su quei casi che, tradotti letteralmente, avrebbero già permesso di mantenere il linguaggio-universo vianesco. Le rese che hanno richiesto uno sforzo di riproduzione cosciente e attivo da parte del traduttore sono infatti 14 per Donaudy e 25 per Turchetta – si tratta di un aumento del 78% circa delle traduzioni "inventive" tra la prima e la seconda versione!

le eventuali compensazioni in altro luogo testuale<sup>16</sup>; non avendo riletto integralmente le due traduzioni, abbiamo necessariamente lasciato fuori da questo studio tutti gli eventuali casi di linguaggio-universo prodotti laddove l'originale non ne presentava alcuno. In questo caso, è lecito aspettarsi che, se dovesse esistere una forma di compensazione di questo genere, essa possa venire soprattutto dalla traduzione di Gianni Turchetta, molto più pronto del suo predecessore ad allontanarsi, per fini superiori, dalla resa letterale<sup>17</sup>.

Infine, è possibile opporre le due traduzioni tra loro. È innegabile una maggiore attenzione alla riproduzione del *langage-univers* da parte di Turchetta; se a questo fatto uniamo – pur sapendo che stiamo giocando con uno stereotipo, visto che non siamo di fronte a un campione rappresentativo ma a due traduttori, con tutte le loro personali idiosincrasie – la provenienza sociale dei due traduttori, sembra trovarsi confermata l'idea, esposta da Dirk Delabastita in un ambito affine, quello della traduzione dei giochi di parole (cf. Delabastita 1993), secondo la quale la traduzione *adequate* (tendenzialmente filologica, tendenzialmente *sourcière*) è quella che cerca di riprodurre il gioco di parole, mentre la strategia *acceptable* (più vicina a una resa che da francesisti definiremmo *cibliste*, e che sarebbe lecito aspettarsi da un traduttore professionista) è quella che lo elimina. Non è però possibile fare astrazione di diversi elementi contestuali e sociali. Può giocare, in primo luogo, lo status del traduttore: un universitario, che ha entrate economiche certe, potrà decidere autonomamente di tradurre solo quelle opere che sente affini alle proprie capacità, e potrà dedicare al compito un tempo non infinito ma comunque ampio; viceversa, un traduttore professionale, che deve vivere del proprio lavoro, potrà più difficilmente permettersi di rifiutare lavori che sente stilisticamente meno vicini, e avrà, per portare a termine la propria traduzione, un monte ore più risicato, dettato in primo luogo dal compenso pattuito. Non si può nemmeno dimenticare l'aspetto diacronico, l'epoca in cui i testi sono stati redatti. Trent'anni di differenza hanno il loro peso, specie se tra le due traduzioni ci sono stati il Maggio '68 e la fantasia al potere, nonché, innegabilmente, una migliore conoscenza dell'opera e della poetica del nostro autore.

Per capire quanto conti l'indole del singolo traduttore e quanto invece l'evoluzione delle norme traduttive della cultura di arrivo, sarebbe forse possibile analizzare altre traduzioni: in questo senso, tre dei quattro grandi romanzi di Boris Vian sono stati tradotti in due occasioni. Oltre all'*Écume des jours*, come si è detto

<sup>16</sup> Possiamo considerare compensazioni anche le strategie – già studiate – di traduzione del *langage-univers* con un linguaggio altrimenti connotato. La differenza tra esse e le compensazioni a cui facciamo riferimento in questa occasione consiste soltanto nella posizione. Una volta rilevata l'importanza del *langage-univers* nel romanzo di Vian, una strategia traduttiva possibile consisterebbe in effetti nel cercare di produrne alcuni esempi anche laddove il testo originale non ne mostrasse, per compensare le perdite avvenute in altro luogo testuale.

<sup>17</sup> Questo allontanamento, forse alla ricerca di una certa forma di colloquialità che compensasse la perdita degli elementi più pirotecnici del linguaggio vianesco, va anche oltre i casi di *langage-univers*. Basti un esempio a definire una strategia traduttiva onnipresente: nella descrizione del suo "pianocktail", Vian riporta, nella voce del protagonista Colin, un fantasioso problema riguardante il tasto che permette di aggiungere uovo alle preparazioni. "Lorsque l'on joue un morceau trop hot, il tombe des morceaux d'omelette dans le cocktail" (1998: 30), e Donaudy traduce "quando si esegue un pezzo troppo 'hot' cadono pezzetti di omelette nel cocktail" (1965: 16), mantenendo il gioco dell'originale. Turchetta (1992: 17) riproduce a sua volta il gioco, "tutte le volte che si suona un brano troppo 'hot', finisce che ti cascano dei pezzi di frittata nel bicchiere" ma con un'espansione tipica del suo stile traduttivo, segnalata in corsivo.

*L'Arrache-cœur* viene pubblicato da Rizzoli in un volume unico, interamente tradotto da Donaudy nel 1965. Una seconda traduzione dello stesso testo, *Lo strappacuore*, viene pubblicata da Marcos y Marcos nel 1993, un anno dopo *La schiuma dei giorni*, sempre per la traduzione di Gianni Turchetta. *L'Automne à Pékin*, pubblicato da Vian nel 1947, viene tradotto una prima volta sempre per Rizzoli, nel 1969, da Massimo Binazzi e Michele Maglia, con il titolo *L'autunno a Pechino*. *Autunno a Pechino* viene invece pubblicato nel 1999 da Sellerio, nella traduzione di Doriana Comerlati.

Con tutta evidenza, senza nemmeno scomodarsi a cercare altri autori o altri generi, il materiale su cui lavorare non manca; a queste e altre ipotesi, future verifiche.

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# Descriptive clashes: Between standardisation and dynamisation of translated description

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***Abstract:** This paper explores the translational poetics of descriptive passages in translations of fiction from English to Czech made in the past few decades, with a focus on figurative language and its transformations. These passages are expected to be the locus of two opposing tendencies: a more general tendency called ‘standardisation’, and ‘dynamisation of description’, and a tendency more specific to the current Czech literary system, both frequently involving shifts between figurative and non-figurative ways of expression. ‘Standardisation’, a process believed to characterise translation in general whereby textemes tend to be converted to repertoremes (Toury 1995) – and whereby figurative elements are often rendered in their (more) literal meanings – has been postulated in theory as well as studied empirically. Fedrová and Jedličková, two Czech literary scholars, have recently evidenced and discussed a widespread tendency in Czech literary scholarship to underestimate description as a fictional text type: largely due to the legacy of functional approaches to literary style, pure forms of (realistic) description are systematically viewed as inferior to “modern” forms of description with attributes such as “evocative”, “subjective”, “contextualised” and “dynamised”. This dynamisation often involves an increase in figurativeness. This paper presents the results of a study made on a corpus of fictional descriptive passages (namely descriptions of place taken from 20<sup>th</sup> century British, American and Canadian novels) and explores the interaction of these two opposing tendencies and relates the findings to the concepts of figurativeness, functional approach, and translator habitus.*

***Keywords:** description, literary fiction, standardisation, dynamisation, English-Czech.*

## 1. Introduction

This paper is an exploratory study in the poetics of descriptive passages in fictional narrative translated from English to Czech in the past few decades, with a focus on strategies relating to the use of figurative language in source and target texts. The assumption underlying the decision to investigate descriptive passages in fictional narratives was that in English-to-Czech literary translation, descriptive elements of the narrative can be expected to reflect two opposing tendencies discussed in translation studies discourse and literary discourse respectively. Firstly, translation studies has conceptualised ‘standardisation’, or ‘normalisation’, i.e. a trend of textemes in source texts – including foremost figurative language elements – to be converted into repertoremes in target texts, occurring so frequently that it can be considered as one of the candidate ‘translation-specific tendencies’, formerly termed ‘translation universals’. It is also believed to characterise translations in contrast to comparable non-translated texts in the same language. Secondly, literary scholarship tends to implicitly regard description as of little interest compared to other aspects of narrativity in modern fiction. Within the framework of this general disinterest in descriptiveness in modern fictional narratives, two Czech scholars, Fedrová and Jedličková (2011) discuss a particularly consistent and univocal

discourse within Czech literary scholarship in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which undervalues description in favour of other fictional text types. Figurative, “dynamised” descriptions are then encouraged and considered superior to classic “static” descriptions. Projecting the observation by Fedrová and Jedličková into literary translation, one may assume that literary translators familiar with this discourse will feel encouraged to “liven up” descriptive passages translated by them by upholding and enhancing their figurativeness to make them fit with the – simplified – idea of what “good literature” is. This paper claims that the operation of these two rather general tendencies in literary and translational scholarship makes fictional descriptive passages an interesting domain inviting the study of how these two strategic attitudes intersect in reality and which variations of their joint operation arise under specific conditions involving parameters such as genre, translator habitus etc. The exploratory study also attempts to provide some preliminary mapping of these “descriptive clashes”.

## 2. Standardisation versus dynamisation of description

Toury (1995) noted that standardisation (understood as conversion of ST textemes into TL repertoremes) is such a widespread tendency in translation as to merit the status of a probabilistic law and the phenomenon (also referred to as conventionalisation or normalisation) has been studied extensively, especially in literary translation. Replacement of original metaphors by stock metaphors or non-figurative language has been among the chief operations observed to contribute to standardisation in translation (Laviosa-Braithwaite 1998: 290; Øverås 1998: 17-18).

While the concept of standardisation in translation is generally known and widely researched, Fedrová and Jedličková’s (2011) observations regarding the attitudes to description in modern Czech literary scholarship, presented and evidenced by ample material in their 2011 paper published in Czech, whose title might be translated as “The end of literary spinach, or Description from an intermedial perspective”<sup>1</sup>, deserve more explanation.

The two authors are concerned about the general disrepute of description as a text type, evidenced by statements such as this one, from a still influential major book on Czech stylistics: “Description is not very popular with readers. It poses considerable demands for the reader’s imagination while only characterising a state which attracts attention much less than the plot” (Bečka 1948: 344; qtd. in Fedrová, Jedličková 2011: 26). The implicit prototype of literary description is based on long descriptive passages found in 19<sup>th</sup> century fiction and the drawbacks perceived as inherent in this text type: descriptions are believed to be lengthy, immaterial for plot development, static, and list-like; they may also contain expressions contemporary readers have no reference for, Fedrová and Jedličková observe. In practical stylistics taught in schools, description is presented as an easy text type which can be handled relatively competently even by average and below-average pupils while narration and argumentation are viewed as more challenging (Fedrová, Jedličková 2011: 26). These stereotypes have been encouraged by the fact that description has long been studied mainly by literary historians while being consistently marginalised by literary

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<sup>1</sup> The reference to spinach in the title alludes to the assumed unpopularity of spinach among vegetables, in parallel to the relative unpopularity of description among the textual types the authors discuss.



theory (Fedrová, Jedličková 2011: 27). A juxtaposition of “old-style description” and “modern description” has emerged, the former being conceptualised as static, enumerative, insufficiently contextualised, plot-retarding, and lacking subjective perspective and the latter as evocative, subjective, contextualised and dynamised (Fedrová, Jedličková 2011: 27). Overcoming the static nature of description by its dynamisation has become a mantra of both serious literary criticism and stylistic handbooks and it is relevant in the context of this paper that the ideal of dynamisation of description often implies an increase in figurativeness. What is objectively rather static is preferred to be viewed “as if in motion”, or “with a life of its own”.

Fedrová and Jedličková argue that the *basic model* of description – which allows us to distinguish description as a text type from other text types, as a means of identifying the object of description by linking it to its distinctive features – is often confused with description *per se*. Similarly, narratology has worked with the concept of *minimal narrative*. But narratologists do not claim this basic model is to be surpassed, dynamised etc., as happens with description. While descriptions are often seen as retarding the plot, no one usually observes that “the narrative intrudes into the description” (Fedrová, Jedličková 2011: 29).

Fedrová and Jedličková claim (2011: 29) that assigning the basic model of description the status of a “phase” on the journey towards stylistic perfection can be seen as associated with the connection of Czech stylistics to formalism and structuralism, with their high esteem for Jakobsonian literariness. In the context of applying the implications of Fedrová and Jedličková’s research to translation, it is also worth considering the absolutely crucial role played by Jiří Levý, the structuralist literary and translation scholar working within the best tradition of Czech dynamic structuralism (see e.g. Doležel 2000), in forming attitudes to literary translation in the Czech Republic since the 1960s. It is however necessary to point out that through his consistently functional approach to translation, most comprehensively expressed in *The Art of Translation* (2012/1963/1983), he hardly encourages dynamisation of description. Levý, on the contrary, emphasises the importance of the creative and the selective capacity being balanced in a translator and warns – both explicitly and through his commented examples – against the danger of diverting from the reproductive task by letting oneself be carried away by an appealing expressive stylisation (2012: 75). If, therefore, dynamisation of description turns out to be an empirically proved trend in Czech translations of fiction, Levý’s role is bound to be only accidental and mediated by misinterpretation of his other recommendations.

Fedrová and Jedličková are in implicit agreement with Levý by pointing out that what distinguishes fictional description from simple description need not necessarily be its internal properties (such as its complexity) but more importantly its function within the greater whole (Fedrová, Jedličková 2011: 30). The two scholars go on to present evidence contrary to the general perception that embedding elements of description within the narrative is exclusive to modernist literature. Although the rest of their paper details very interestingly the various functions of description in realistic prose, the above summary of their main argument should suffice as a starting point for exploring the double pull of standardisation and dynamisation of descriptions in translation.

### 3. Material and findings

The corpus was shaped by several factors, the first of which was the need to restrict the exploration of translated fictional descriptions to a manageable body of material which would nevertheless provide a meaningful picture of the consequences of the interplay of the potentially opposing tendencies acting in translation. Another consideration was that narrative fiction is largely centred around people – fictional characters are essentially linked to the plot. The decision to focus on descriptions of places rather than people – i.e. on textual elements not central to the “essence” of narrative fiction – seemed more suited to reveal superficially “plain” and “unattractive” descriptions being “upgraded” by enhancing their figurativeness. Among various descriptions of places, descriptions of natural environments were selected as potentially attracting figurative uses.

The corpus of descriptive extracts referring to natural environments is based on a set of seven novels and pieces of short fiction and their Czech translations, including both older and more recent source texts. The older source texts were represented by Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* and Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* while the recent texts included two works of postcolonial literature – *The Autobiography of My Mother* by Jamaica Kincaid and *The Inheritance of Loss* by Kiran Desai – as well as *Love Medicine* by Louise Erdrich and *The Stone Diaries* by Carol Shields. The years of publication of the translations ranged between 1962 (*The Scarlet Letter*) and 2008 (*The Inheritance of Loss*). Each work was translated by a different translator, some of whom – particularly Jan Zábřana, (*Heart of Darkness*), but also Jarmila Fastrová (*The Scarlet Letter*) and Alena Jindrová-Špilarová (*Love Medicine*) – are rather canonical translators, while the rest of the translators are somewhat less prominent players in the field of literary translation. The corpus thus included two male and four female translators.

Even in the process of excerpting descriptive parallel segments (of source and target text) from the full novels, several things became readily apparent. Firstly, narrowing the focus down to the descriptions was rather an atypical way of working with fiction which highlighted very clearly the roles of referencing natural environments and phenomena in these translations as well as the specific ways description was structurally and functionally used in the individual texts. Secondly, even a preliminary overview of the corpus revealed that figurative language was suppressed to varying degrees in the target texts. A third observation about the corpus was that describing landscape included describing weather and light perhaps even more frequently than one would expect. Indeed, the corpus revealed weather and light as typical means of introducing temporal phenomena into descriptions of otherwise more or less static landscapes.

Size-wise, the corpus amounted to several normative pages of parallel descriptive excerpts per novel. Specifying the exact size of the corpus or its parts is beside the point because even though separating the descriptions from other textual elements was attempted, it was more successful in some cases (e.g. *Heart of Darkness*, *The Autobiography of My Mother*) than in others, where the excerpts are less “pure” descriptions (*The Scarlet Letter*). Generally, an attitude of inclusiveness was adopted. The same reason precluded quantitative analysis; therefore the following discussion will focus on the *kinds* of phenomena typically encountered rather than dealing with frequencies.

#### 4.1. Patterns of figurative use in translation

The specific patterns of figurative language use the descriptive passages involved, clearly apparent in the process of working with the corpus, were frequently diluted in the translations as will be demonstrated using two extended examples.

In Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother*, descriptions by the female narrator in search of her own identity, frustrated since her early childhood by lack of love for herself and even around herself, stand in sharp contrast with the rest of the narrative, rendering nature as possessing identity, sovereign and with a purpose – endowed with qualities young Xuela implicitly desires for herself:

I loved the face of a gray sky, porous, grainy, wet, following me to school for mornings on end, sending down on me soft arrows of water; the face of the same sky when it was a hard, unsheltering blue, a backdrop for a cruel sun, the harsh beat that eventually became a part of me, like my blood; the overbearing trees (the stems of them the size of a small trunk) that grew without restraint, as if beauty were only size, and I could tell them apart by closing my eyes and listening to the sound the leaves made when they rubbed together; and I loved the moment when the white flowers from the cedar tree started to fall to the ground with a silence that I could hear, their petals at first fresh, a soft kiss of pink and white [...] (Kincaid 1996: 17)

Nature is further characterised for instance by “ferociousness that no hand yet attempted to restrain”, as “unrelenting”, “itself”, and “with a purpose not yet known to me” (Kincaid 1996: 26).

The parallel between the essence of nature perceived by the first person narrator and an abstract mother, whom Xuela, whose mother died in childbirth, is forever looking for, is supported by a delicate net of personifying figurative meanings. The translator, although not deleting the figurativeness entirely, uses less innovative metaphors statistically more likely to be encountered in any other description of natural scenery than those actually used in the source text. Here the network of weakly implied meanings communicated through the figurative occurrences builds up a link between nature on the one hand and liveliness, individuality, autonomy and determinedness on the other.

**ST:** Around each bend was the familiar dark green of the trees that grew with a **ferociousness** that no hand had yet attempted to restrain, a green so **unrelenting** that it attained great beauty and great ugliness and yet great humility all at once; it was itself: nothing could be added to it; nothing could be taken away from it. (Kincaid 1996: 25-26)

**BT<sup>2</sup>:** By each bend familiar, dark dense green of the trees growing so **wildly** that human hand had not yet attempted to restrain, green so **unyielding** that it had kept immense beauty and immense ugliness and yet immense humility at the same time. It was itself, nothing could be added to it or taken away from it. (Kincaidová 2001: 24)

Here, for instance, “ferociousness”, a human quality attributed to the trees, becomes mere “wildness” within a collocation quite commonly used in Czech to describe uncultivated plants and the green is no longer “unrelenting” like humans but merely “unyielding”.

Elsewhere in the novel, Xuela is observing plants, looking obstinately for meaning and purpose in her life:

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<sup>2</sup> Back-translation. In Czech: U každé zatáčky známá, temná hustá zeleň stromoví, které rostlo tak **divoce**, že se je lidská ruka ještě nepokusila zkrotit, tak **nepoddajná** zeleň, že si uchovala nesmírnou krásu a nesmírnou ošklivost, a přesto zároveň i nesmírnou pokoru. Byla sama sebou, nedalo se k ní nic přidat ani z ní nic ubrat.

**ST:** And each climb up was followed by a slope down, at the bottom of which was the same choke of flowering **plants, each with a purpose not yet known to me.** (Kincaid 1996: 26)

**BT<sup>3</sup>:** And each climb was followed by a slope down, at the end of which the road found itself again in a choke of wildly flowering **shrubs, whose purpose remained unknown to me.** (Kincaidová 2001: 24)

While in English an individual purpose is attributed to each of the plants projected as animate beings, the Czech version mentions only one summary purpose, resulting in a rather non-transcendental interpretation. Similar partial or full deletions of figurativeness in descriptions of place can be found throughout the Czech translation.

The descriptions of majestic mountain sceneries in the foothills of Nepal in *The Inheritance of Loss* by Kiran Desai, usually presented with a touch of gentle loving irony, are used to build up contrast with the small human fates, such as that of the main character Sai, an orphan girl stranded among people with whom she has little in common. Liquids and liquid-like substances play an important role in the novel, both at the metaphorical level and at the level of the plot. In the beginning of the novel, Sai is reading an old copy of *National Geographic* and pondering the sad fate of the giant squid<sup>4</sup>:

**ST:** No human had ever seen an adult giant squid alive, and though they had eyes as big as apples to scope the dark of the ocean, theirs was a solitude so profound they might never encounter another of their tribe. The melancholy of this situation **washed over Sai.** (Desai 2006: 3)

**BT<sup>5</sup>:** An adult giant squid had never been seen by anyone; they live in solitude so complete that even though they have giant eyes the size of an apple to better scope the darkness of the ocean, it can easily happen that they never see any [other] individual of their own species. Sai **was deeply touched** by their sad fate. (Desai 2008: 10)

The translation disregards the important metaphoric domain of “washed over Sai”, through which Sai, immersed in melancholy, is likened to the giant squid – although metaphors preserving the domain were easily available – and a different, more lexicalised metaphor is used.

#### 4.2. Standardisation of one-off metaphors

We have seen that in both translations consistent patterns of figurative meanings were disrupted by standardisation of metaphorical elements in the descriptions into renderings closer to the stock-metaphor end of the continuum. Similar standardisation was revealed in one-off metaphors such as the following ones: The metaphor in “Its many flowers were small and a deep pink, with long deep throats and **short flared lips for petals**” (Kincaid 1996: 104) was, for instance, diluted into a simile: “short bell-like petals **reminding of/like** little lips”<sup>6</sup> (Kincaidová 2001: 73). In the translation of Desai, “Gradually **the vapour replaced everything with itself,**

<sup>3</sup> Cz: A za každým výstupem následoval sestup, na jehož konci se silnice opět ocitla v sevření divoce kvetoucích **keřů, jejichž účel mi zůstal utajen.**

<sup>4</sup> I am aware that the example is rather marginal to the corpus focusing on descriptions of natural environments. It was included due to the reference to the ocean-dwelling animal and is quoted here as a good example of disruption of figurative networks.

<sup>5</sup> Cz: Dospělou krakatici ještě nikdy nikdo neviděl; žijí v tak naprosté samotě, takže i když mají obrovské oči velikosti jablka, aby jimi lépe obsáhly temnotu oceánu, může se klidně stát, že nikoho svého druhu nikdy nespátí. Sai se jejich smutný osud **hluboce dotkl.**

<sup>6</sup> Cz: Měl mnoho drobných tmavě růžových kvítků s podlouhlými hlubokými hrdly a **krátkými zvonkovitými lístky jako rtíky.**

solid objects with shadow, and nothing remained that did not seem molded from or inspired by it”, (Desai 2006: 2) the action taken by the originally personified vapour is expressed by a lexicalised metaphor: “the mist gradually **swallowed** everything” (Desai 2006: 10). A replacement by simile was used in translating “The caress of the mist through her hair seemed human, and when she held her fingers out, **the vapour took them gently into its mouth**” (Desai 2006: 2) with “**she felt as if the mist took them gently into its mouth**”<sup>7</sup> (Desai 2006: 10).

This phenomenon was actually the most frequently represented one in the corpus from among those we have been dealing with. The following examples are from novels/translations not quoted thus far:

**ST:** So we went. It was a long enough walk, and the road was hot when we came out of the woods. I had my dress on, so I did not let myself sweat. The hill was covered with dust. Dust hung gray, in shifting bands, around the white convent walls. There had been no rain that fall, and **the fields were blowing through the town**. But we walked. We passed the place on the road where Nector had tried to throw me. We had passed this place many times before without me thinking of Nector, but today I was remembering everything. (Erdrich 1985: 114)

**BT<sup>8</sup>:** So we went. It was a long enough walk and the road was burning hot when we came out of the woods. I did not want to sweat for the sake of the dress. The hill was covered with a layer of dust. The grey dust was floating in bands next to the white walls of the convent. There had been no rain that fall and **wind was dispersing mould from fields throughout the town**. But we walked with determination. We passed the place on the road where Nector had tried to get me to the ground. We had passed this place innumerable times and I had never thought of Nector but today I was remembering everything. (Erdrichová 1995: 125)

The *totum pro parte* synecdoche in the source text is translated by the non-figurative meaning even though the context would enable the correct interpretation of the image in Czech just as effectively as in English.

**ST:** All these giant trees and boulders of granite seemed intent on making a mystery of the course of this small brook; fearing, perhaps, that, with its never-ceasing **loquacity**, it should whisper tales out of the heart of the old forest whence it flowed, or mirror its revelations on the smooth surface of a pool. (Hawthorne 1963: 179)

**BT<sup>9</sup>:** As if these giant trees and granite boulders were guarding attentively the secret places through which the brook was flowing, perhaps out of fear that its constant **gurgling** might betray some of the mysteries of the forest or reveal them like in a mirror on the surface of one or another of its pools. (Hawthorne 1962: 206)

The natural sceneries in *The Scarlet Letter* such as the vicinity of the brook by which Heather and Arthur Dimmsdale meet are generally depicted as alternately full of light and shadow, joyful or sombre, reflecting the changing sentiments of the humans who take refuge in them and mirroring their liveliness or lack of it. The brook in this scene is personified – in this and other segments – through the actions and processes attributed to it. The degree of personification, easy to render through lexicalised verbs in Czech, seems to have felt redundant to the translator, who opted

<sup>7</sup> Cz: Jemný dotyk mlhy ve vlasech se Sai zdál úplně lidský, když roztáhla prsty, **měla pocit, jako by** si je opar strčil něžně do úst.

<sup>8</sup> Cz: A tak jsme šly. Byla to dost dlouhá cesta a silnice rozpálená, když jsme vyšly z lesa. Kvůli těm šatům jsem se nechtěla zpotit. Kopec pokrývala vrstva prachu. Šedivý prach se vznášel v pásech kolem bílých stěn kláštera. Ten podzim vůbec nepršelo a **vítr roznášel prst' z polí po městě**. Ale šlapaly jsme statečně. Minuly jsme místo na cestě, kde se mě Nector pokusil povalit. Předtím jsme tudy přešly nesčetněkrát a ani jsem si na Nectora nevzpomněla, ale dnes se mi vybavovalo všechno.

<sup>9</sup> Cz: Jako by ty obrovské stromy a žulové balvany bedlivě střežily tajná místa, kudy potůček protékal, snad ze strachu, aby ustavičným **bubláním** nevyzradil něco z tajů pralesa nebo nevyjevil je jako v zrcadle na hladině některé tůňky.

for a literal one instead. Notice also the shift in meaning in the other (underlined) personification.

**ST:** The Fletts' large, rather ill-favored brick house is **nested in a saucer of green**: front, back, and sides, a triple lot, rare in this part of the city, and in spring the rounded **snouts** of crocuses poke through everywhere. (Shields 1994: 142)

**BT<sup>10</sup>:** The big and little pleasing brick house owned by Fletts **is literally surrounded by green** from all sides – the lot is a triple one, which is rare in this part of the city, and little oval **heads** of crocuses are poking out everywhere. (Shieldsová 1998: 142)

The last example, from *The Stone Diaries*, is neither a deleted personification (which might potentially be a static or dynamic one) nor does it reduce dynamic figurativeness in the source text in another way: two static images are rendered more literally (the reference to “little heads” of young plants sprouting in the spring is a common one in Czech).

### 4.3. Dynamised descriptions

The above – necessarily selective – account might make one believe that it is especially the less canonical translators who succumb to standardisation of figurative meanings in descriptions. The translation of *Heart of Darkness* by Jan Zábřana, a canonical translator (and poet), famed for his literary approach, provides counterexamples. To share at least one, the images highlighted in the vivid description by Conrad, conveying an atmosphere of violence and threat surrounding the journey of the steamer into the heart of the continent, are rendered by verbs not implying these meanings: “invaded” becomes “washed/sapped” and “writhe at us” becomes “beckon to us”<sup>11</sup>.

**ST:** We called at some more places with farcical names, where the merry dance of death and trade goes on in a still and earthy atmosphere as of an overheated catacomb; all along the formless coast bordered by dangerous surf, as if Nature herself had tried to ward off intruders; in and out of rivers, streams of death in life, whose banks were rotting into mud, whose waters, thickened into slime, **invaded** the contorted mangroves, that seemed to **writhe at us** in the extremity of an impotent despair. (Conrad 1902: 20-21)

We have so far seen that although some descriptive figurativeness is preserved in translations, replacements with similes and shifts towards more conventional images and metaphors characterised by a higher degree of lexicalisation are rather common, often resulting in significant loss of metaphoric networks and isolated metaphors. These observations, confirming the standardisation hypothesis, however all concern descriptions marked by figurativeness in the ST. The question remaining to be asked is whether the opposite situation, where a translator dynamised the description by enhancing its figurativeness, is equally common. Even though statements about their general frequency would be speculative, the corpus did provide examples of this trend, for instance in the translation by Jan Zábřana quoted above:

<sup>10</sup> Cz: Velký a nepříliš půvabný cihlový dům Flettových je doslova **ze všech stran obklopen zelení** – parcela má trojnásobnou rozlohu, což je v této části města velmi vzácné, a na jaře všude vykukují oválné **hlavičky** šafránu.

<sup>11</sup> Cz (shortened): [...] do těch proudů smrti uprostřed života, jejichž břehy zahnívaly a měnily se v bahno, jejichž voda zhoustla ve sliz a **podmílala** pokroucené mangrovníky, které jako když **na nás kývají** v bezmoci krajního zoufalství.

**ST:** As we had plenty of wood, and caution was the word, I brought up in the middle of the stream. The reach was narrow, straight, **with** high sides like a railway cutting. (Conrad 1902: 56)

**BT<sup>12</sup>:** [...] I stayed with the steamer still in the middle of the stream. The river was narrow and straight here, **gripped by/in the grip** of high slopes on both sides, reminding of railway banks. (Conrad 1981: 149)

The very plain description by Conrad is indeed dynamised by the use of a metaphor into a more dramatic depiction of the place. Dynamisation of description is nevertheless not limited to translators with a markedly writerly attitude such as Zábřana, as the following examples from *The Stone Diaries* by Carol Shields (translated by Josef Hanzlík) show. The peach metaphor in “**The moon will have risen**, a pale round peach at their windows” (Shields 1994: 164) is supported with another personifying metaphor when the segment is rendered (back-translated into English) as “The moon **is looking/taking a peek into** their windows, a giant round peach”<sup>13</sup> (Shieldsová 1998: 121).

Another example from the same novel:

**ST:** It [the limestone] comes in two colors, a tight buff mixed with brown, and (my favourite) a pale gray **with** darker gray mottles. (Shields 1994: 25)

**BT<sup>14</sup>:** The limestone comes in two color variants – buff mixed with brown in one of them, dark gray speckles **interweaving/lacing through** the light gray basis in the other (my favourite). (Shieldsová 1998: 30)

The feature these last three examples share is that they all transform plain description into “moderate figurativeness”: none of the metaphors introduced by the translator is a truly innovative one; the grip metaphor in *Heart of Darkness* as well as the interweaving metaphor in *The Stone Diaries* are both metaphors exhibiting a certain degree of lexicalisation and the metaphor personifying the moon as a subject looking into the windows is not very innovative by virtue of relying on the moon personification cliché. There is another thing the examples have in common and that is the fact that the label ‘dynamisation’ describes them very aptly. Let us remind ourselves that the target text solutions, apart from being more figurative than the corresponding source text segments, also transform the static ST attributes ascribed to objects and situations – the high banks of the reach; the speckles in the grey stone; the moon that will have risen, i.e. is in the sky – into dynamic attributes which are marked with an action/process, as predicted by Fedrová and Jedličková (2011: 34, translation by RK), who say that “[the objects being described] are often of a static and special nature and are characterised especially by visual qualities; this however does not preclude temporal phenomena from descriptions”. Gripping something, interweaving through a material, taking a peek are actions/processes happening in time.

## 5. In conclusion

The exploratory study conducted on a small corpus of parallel descriptive passages excerpted from six novels in English and their Czech translations provided

<sup>12</sup> Cz: Zůstal jsem s parníkem stát uprostřed proudu. Tok řeky tu byl úzký a rovný, z obou stran **svíraný** vysokými svahy, připomínajícími železniční násep.

<sup>13</sup> Cz: Do oken jim **nahlíží** měsíc, obrovská bledá broskev.

<sup>14</sup> Vápenec se vyskytuje ve dvou barevných variantách – u jedné se žlutohnědá mísí s hnědou, u druhé (mé oblíbené) **protkávají** světle šedý základ tmavošedé skvrnky.

evidence that in descriptions of landscape and natural environment both standardisation of figurative meanings and figurative dynamisation of static meanings are processes shaping the target texts. Standardisation was by far more prominent: it most often involved deletion and dilution of one-off novel metaphors, cutting across dynamic as well as static figurative source text images. Besides standardisation of individual figurative meanings, the corpus revealed that standardisation and disruption of figurative networks embedded within descriptive passages is unfortunately a rather regular phenomenon impairing the communication of weakly implied meanings at the centre of the literary work to the reader. Evidence testifying to the opposing tendency predicted on the basis of Fedrová and Jedličková's (2011) observation that Czech literary scholarship undervalues plain static descriptions over dynamised ones, was much scarcer in the corpus. However, individual examples of this tendency were found, mainly in the translation by Jan Zábřana, whose habitus is most closely connected with the polysystem of indigenous Czech literature. It is perhaps significant in this context that all occurrences whereby non-figurative meanings were shifted towards more figurativeness *did involve* dynamisation, i.e. no figurative usages which involved just static meanings were supplied by the translators. This seems to support the hypothesis that introducing figurative meanings into descriptive passages by the translators, where it happens, is indeed motivated by the desire to uphold the dynamic nature of the description rather than by a need to enhance the figurativeness of the text as such.

An evaluation of the findings has to take into account the limited scope of the corpus, as well as the low number of translators and examined texts with their individual specifics. Another factor complicating assessment of the identified imbalance between standardisation and dynamisation is the fact that the present corpus contained more opportunities for reducing the level of figurativeness than largely static descriptions which might attract dynamisation – something that future research may try to remedy.

We have seen that some traces of descriptive dynamisation can be found, and that the findings of this study do not contradict the idea that translators more active in the field of non-translated target-language literature may be more prone to dynamising descriptions they are translating, even though the resulting figurativeness is a moderate one, based on relatively conventional metaphors. The present corpus however does not allow for a more conclusive statement in this respect. The scope and role of descriptive passages and fragments relating to landscape and nature varied across the corpus and extending the corpus keeping the same inclusion criteria might run into problems (because including fiction where landscape and nature plays a major role is highly desirable if the observed tendencies are to testify not only about what generally happens in translation but also about what affects the translations in a manner which is not insignificant). Shifting the focus of the corpus in further research might therefore be considered. One opportunity for securing a bigger corpus would be focusing on descriptions of urban settings. This would guarantee ample inclusion of fiction from before the 20<sup>th</sup> century – e.g. in a subcorpus of Realist prose – in order to provide ground for dynamisation to take place, as well as modern fiction conforming to similar parameters. Complementing the research with a comparable corpus of description retrieved from original Czech fiction to provide a benchmark would be another avenue to attempting a more comprehensive view of implicit norms in translating descriptive passages.



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# Translation as desecration: From *Montedidio* to *God's mountain*

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**Abstract:** *The English translation of figurative language in Erri De Luca's 2001 novel, Montedidio is here examined through the lens of linguistic-philosophical characteristics of Ancient Hebrew, notably its consonant-vowel relationship that might have influenced De Luca's "compact" fiction. An overarching double simile (Naples is like Jerusalem, and Neapolitan is like Yiddish) which conditions the novel's form and content, will also determine De Luca's other uses of figurative language: our emphasis will be on polysemy – especially for the title "Montedidio" which denotes the colorful and noisy neighborhood in Naples as well as the Temple Mount in Jerusalem; examples of personification and simile employing imagery borrowed from the sea and from land will furthermore confirm their role as metaphors for an underlying vowel-consonant dynamic. De Luca's figurative language contributes to the novel's "desiccation" and its aspiration to explore what Benjamin had called "pure language". If Montedidio's figurative language is indeed so deeply rooted in a sacred subtext, to what extent is its translatability compromised? How does a translator establish "cultural equivalency" if there is more than one source text or source code, specifically when the source language itself partakes in a hermeneutic discourse? De Luca's own theoretical statements on translation seem to offer a compromise by allowing the translator to blend the need for "obedience" to the sacred text and "admiration" for any text to be translated.*

**Keywords:** *Erri De Luca, Montedidio, Bible, personification, simile.*

*The Apostle tells us that in the beginning was the Word.  
He gives us no assurance as to the end.  
(Steiner 1998: 12)*

Erri De Luca's 2001 novel, *Montedidio* draws attention for its allegorical and metaphorical power, conditioned by linguistic philosophical concerns present in Biblical Hebrew, whose written repository, the Bible, became the author's material for multiple hyper-literal translations<sup>1</sup>. The 2002 English translation of *Montedidio* under the title *God's Mountain* by Michael Moore is therefore worthy of close attention, the more since Italy's most unique writer has not reached the shores west of West with the intensity and enthusiasm with which he has conquered Europe. The issue of "translatability" that, as Lawrence Venuti rightly states (2004: 111), seems to have dominated the world of translation theory for almost a generation, inevitably pushes itself to the fore: indeed, translating De Luca's literary language is not merely the creation of a metatext over a prototext, i.e. a re-writing of an underlying construct from a precise socio-cultural optic, as André Lefevere argues (1977: 7) or a re-writing *tout court* that allows for "the study of the manipulative processes of

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<sup>1</sup> For Feltrinelli's "Classici" series, De Luca edited and translated *Esodo/Nomi* (1994), *Giona/Iona* (1995), *Kohelet/Ecclesiaste* (1996), *Libro di Rut* (1999), *Vita di Sansone* (2002) and *Vita di Noè/Noah* (2004).

literature as exemplified by translation” as a tool to attain “greater awareness of the world in which we live” (Gentzler 1993: ix); it also involves more than a “recoding” of “two equivalent messages in two different codes”, as Roman Jakobson suggests (Venuti 2004: 113). De Luca’s language is uniquely “other”: it involves a third sub-code that demands consideration. One could argue, with Derrida, that all text is derivative, including the source text and the target text, since both consist of diverse linguistic and cultural materials. However, rarely is that source text or source culture, including its linguistic culture, so much part of a novel’s text as in *Montedidio*: if the Neapolitan writer’s language has been called “dry”, “compact”, “stony”, “ambiguous” and in one instance even “skinny”<sup>2</sup>, it is so under the influence of formal characteristics and philosophical considerations embedded in Biblical Hebrew<sup>3</sup>. However, *Montedidio*’s figurative language is cleverly and unobtrusively articulated in function of these characteristics and considerations: De Luca’s writing’s compact, dry, stony, and ambiguous nature derives from and is a felicitous manipulation of biblical Hebrew’s consonant-vowel relationship, a relationship that also affects the author’s use of spoken Yiddish and the Neapolitan dialect alike<sup>4</sup>.

In light of De Luca’s unique linguistic preferences for writing *Montedidio*, I shall focus on some examples of figurative language that must have posed particular challenges to the translator. They involve an overarching double simile that occupies a central place in the novel’s linguistic subtext (Naples is likened to Jerusalem and Neapolitan to Yiddish), with the premise that its translation is in turn complicated by the difficulties in conveying in English – a consonant-driven language – a literary text such as *Montedidio* which was written in Italian – a “voweled” language<sup>5</sup>; this study also examines a noteworthy case of polysemy (God’s Mountain as both the Temple Mount and a Neapolitan neighborhood), as well as a selection of examples of translation of personifications that force the use of an active over a passive voice, as well as three similes. Commentary on the highlighted examples of translation issues in *Montedidio*’s figurative language is informed by previous studies on De Luca’s peculiar narrative techniques and stylistic choices in his own translations of and commentaries on sacred texts, as well as by studies on the relevance of a discourse on the vowel-consonant relationship embedded in some of his writings, including

<sup>2</sup> See: Claudio Magris, ‘La Bibbia: una cura dimagrante’, *L’indice dei libri del mese*, 11/12/1992, 7. See also: Sergio Quinzio: “Alla ricerca della lingua sacra. La Bibbia secondo De Luca”, *Il Corriere della Sera*, 14/5/1994, 31.

<sup>3</sup> This thought has been central to my published and forthcoming research on Erri De Luca, including, in chronological order: ‘Erri De Luca, il “Libro” e la lingua’, *Il Velcro* 40 (3-4), 1996, 311-315; ‘Prove di domanda: Intervista silenziosa con Erri De Luca’, *Gradiva* 1 (7), 1998, 51-62; ‘From water to dust: A dehydrating essay on Erri De Luca’, *Differentia: A Review of Italian Thought* 1 (1-2), 1999, 51-59; ‘Eccomi’ sulla spiaggia-confine di *Tu, mio*: Erri De Luca, il mare e l’asciutto’, *Narrativa* 20-21, 2001, 169-180; *Scrivere nella polvere: Saggi su Erri De Luca*, Pisa: ETS, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> If the name of Eugene Nida seems inevitable with regards to De Luca’s own Bible translations as influencing his prose, I wish to immediately join Lawrence Venuti (2002: 17) in arguing against the proselytizing tendencies in Nida’s writings, particularly with regards to the notion of “dynamic equivalence” in translation (Nida, de Waard 1986: vii, viii, 9) Venuti detects in Nida the missionary who “himself has promoted a reception of the [biblical] text centered in Christian dogma” (2002: 18).

<sup>5</sup> The tension between Neapolitan and Italian is established from the first page of *Montedidio* when the narrator’s father is said to be struggling with Italian which he is learning to read and write. Because for him Italian is not for speaking, the national language sits quietly in books (7), such as the one being written on a scroll by the young narrator. See also the first chapter, “Napòlide”, of De Luca’s homonymous collection of essays, *Napòlide* (5-34).

*Montedidio*. Indeed the metaphorical qualities of biblical Hebrew and their implications for the act of writing are central to my argument.

### 1. The desiccation of *Montedidio*

Against the backdrop of the densely populated Neapolitan neighborhood of Montedidio, a thirteen-year old boy and carpenter's apprentice tells the story of his coming of age on a scroll, left-over sheet of paper from a neighborhood print shop. His prized possession is a boomerang, a present from his father who in turn received it from a sailor. The narrative I befriends a red-haired, freckled Jewish cobbler, nicknamed Rafaniello formerly known as Rav Daniel, who had landed in Naples on his way to Jerusalem after World War II and who, seeing all the barefoot children, had promised to stay until all had shoes. He speaks an impeccable Italian although his native language is Yiddish, and he is growing a pair of wings from the hump on his back. From a neighborhood carpenter, Mast' Errico, the narrator learns all about wood, but for matters of love he is the apprentice of Maria, a young girl prostituted by her mother to their landlord. The young lovers frequently meet on the highest rooftop terrace in Montedidio where boomerang and "piscitiello" alike are practiced in concert. On New Year's Eve the narrator throws the boomerang, and Rafaniello spreads his wings and flies off to Jerusalem.

*Montedidio*'s style follows the speech pattern of its thirteen-year old narrator who alternates short, staccato-sentences with occasional iterations, interspersed with exclamations, Neapolitan proverbs ("A iurnate e 'nu muorzo" with which the book begins), or occasional Yiddish words and expressions. Imagery borrowed from the sea and from land prevail, not antithetically, but as semantically linked: the boomerang comes from an Australian acacia tree but had belonged to a sailor; Mast' Errico lives off the sea and the land as "ebanista-pescatore"; in the carpenter's workshop the smell of the sea mixes with that of wood and sawdust; net fishing is equated with pulling sea on land, and the catch pulled on dry land with "vita scippata alle onde" (2001: 61); in addition, the very city is compressed between the fiery Mount Vesuvius and the soothing Tyrrhenean, so much so that the story's space is literally pushed upward from the suffocating chaos of the street below to the quiet, windswept, and clean rooftop terrace where among the drying laundry the narrative I learns to love, and to write.

Figurative language denoting liquidity and aridity is prominently present in relation to bodily functions underscoring the body's mineral quality and its essentially liquid substance: liquids flow in the form of sperm, menstrual blood, saliva, tears, and vomit, as though its inhabitants need to continuously unload their liquid cargo; Naples releases its underground pressure as sulfuric gasses and vapor, making it ever more compact, dense, and dry. People and things alike moreover possess a combustible quality: the boomerang sends electrical shocks into the hands of those who hold it, and Rafaniello's hump gives him a burning sensation that prompts him to liken it to Mount Vesuvius. The energy accumulated inside people and bodies also slowly escapes through a gradual increase in the volume of the voices emerging from street vendors, shop keepers, or even the protagonist's breaking voice and final scream, leaving the Neapolitan dialect "dry" with consonants only, as in the determined three-consonantic "ntz" with which Maria wards off her lewd landlord's advances. It resembles Yiddish that is "zigheklept mit shpàiecz" (95), "glued with spit" (Moore 2002: 108). Only on New Year's Eve

which coincides with the end of the novel, does Naples open its release valve as it calls in the new at midnight by emptying its bowels under fireworks, loud shouting and the deafening noise of shattering objects of old, and under the scream that accompanies the narrator's orgasm, his launch of the boomerang, and the rabbi's rocket-like take-off for Jerusalem's Temple Mount. It is at the intersection of the horizontal and vertical coordinates drawn by the four elements as they relate to what essentially constitutes the dehydration of Montedidio that the story unfolds on a scroll. Rolled up in a scroll, the story of Montedidio is the story of its own dehydration. If the aridity-liquidity dichotomy seems essential for the writing of *Montedidio*, so is the biblical Hebrew's vowel-consonant relationship that it allegorizes.

## 2. The sacred space of *Montedidio*

Summarized, as a language originally written without vowels meaning is conveyed by thinking or speaking vowels into the interconsonantic spaces, constituting that language's compactness; it is also an underlying concern in De Luca's writings, as on another occasion I argued for the case of *Tu, mio*, where vowels are the "liquid" needed to add meaning to the desert between consonants whose semantic power depends on them (Swennen Ruthenberg 2001: 179). One word can have multiple, related meanings: the consonants that spell the word "kedem", for instance, can be read as meaning both "East" and "beginning". Of particular interest to De Luca, as to scholars of biblical translation such as Naomi Seidman (1991: 188) or Susan A. Handelman (1982: 4), is that Hebrew is the only language where the word for the thing and the spoken coincide, i.e. the three consonants spelling the word for the spoken ("daber") are the same as those for what it denotes, "the thing" ("davar"). It is in fact the only moment in language where we could say that the De Saussurian "signifiant" and "signifié" overlap; it is the linguistic moment that precedes metaphor. The coincidence of word and thing through the coincidence of the consonants for speaking and doing is, in fact, what prompted De Luca to undertake the study of the Bible in the original (De Luca 1991: 29). The word makes the world. "It was precisely this original unity of word and thing, speech and thought, discourse and truth that the Greek Enlightenment disrupted. And this cleavage determined the subsequent history of Western thought about language" writes Handelman (1982: 4). God, by speaking, creates text. Writing is metaphorical by its very nature and an act of desecration, in as far as it constitutes a distancing from a pure, original linguistic moment where doing and saying coincide – and the Italian proverb that "fra il dire e il fare c'è di mezzo il mare" takes on a new meaning. The metaphorical nature of writing constitutes its own liquification in an attempt to pulverize itself, i.e. metaphor is language's epistemological search for meaning.

As a biblical translator and a reader of Benjamin, De Luca is likely to have the Benjaminian notion of "reine Sprache" in mind, or in the very least finds in Benjamin the confirmation for his own views on language (and translation). In his famous 1919 essay "On language as such and the language of man", Walter Benjamin had uttered the thought of a divine "reine Sprache" (pure language) that was only self-referential, i.e. devoid of communicative or transmitting abilities, an essential characteristic shared by all languages. In "The task of the translator" he further defines pure language on the premise of the existence of kinship between all languages, and therefore between the language of the translated text and the text translated, at a very basic level, i.e. at the level of intention:

[...] all suprahistorical kinship of languages rests in the intention underlying each language as a whole—an intention, however, which no single language can attain by itself, but which is realized only by the totality of their intentions supplementing each other: pure language. (Benjamin 1999: 78)

Benjamin exemplifies this theory by arguing that the French translation of the German word “Brot” (bread) as “pain” highlights the identical nature of the intended object in both languages but their difference in their mode of intention. If the “kinship” between all languages exists at the level of intention, Benjamin’s conclusion that languages are therefore ultimately translatable might strike one as contradictory; it justifies, however, De Luca’s own relationship to translation: awe and admiration are what De Luca-translator experiences in front of the prose he himself translates, i.e. the Hebrew Bible, and what condition his loyalty to that text to such an extent that he prefers word-for-word translations even at the expense of readability<sup>6</sup>. The translator’s choices might need to be equally conditioned by these factors. After all “il traduttore ha tutti i diritti” only “se agisce lealmente” (Berman 2000: 77).

### 3. Figurative language and translating the sacred

All this seems a necessary detour allowing me to establish the very framework for arguing that *Montedidio* as a book was conceived as a sacred space of sorts, a space that purges itself continuously ensuring its “dryness”. Hence De Luca’s attempt, at a purely linguistic level, to dehydrate what is otherwise a very “liquid”, vowel-driven language, Italian, by interspersing his prose with utterances and expressions borrowed from the Neapolitan and Yiddish oral traditions, both of which are consonant-driven. In this way he enhances the semantic power of a text that the adolescent narrator condenses by scrolling up what he has written creating a tightly packed language in the tightly packed container that is the book. The two overarching similes, that Naples is a city of blood, “like Jerusalem”, the Holy City, and that Neapolitan is like Yiddish, a spoken, consonant-driven language in the mouth of a holy man, i.e. “chi ha le mani innocenti e il cuore puro” (De Luca 2001: 64), the only one, in fact, allowed to ascend Jerusalem’s Temple Mount, “Montedidio”, the “God’s Mountain” of the title.

If it is true that biblical Hebrew’s consonant-vowel relationship is at work in the pages of *Montedidio*, and if polysemy is one of its salient features, the translation of this “loaded” title demands attention.

#### 3.1. Polysemy

Brigitte Nerlich in *Polysemy: Flexible Patterns of Meaning in Mind and Language*, which examines the interdependency of polysemy and metaphor, establishes polysemy as both consequence and cause of figurative language use; she furthermore argues that the close relationship between polysemy and figurative language use can be justified in view of the fact that “[M]any of the extra, polysemous meanings that a word develops begin as metaphorical extensions of a

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<sup>6</sup> I reiterate the case of De Luca’s translation of the book of Jonas (1995) *Giona/Ionà* (Milano: Feltrinelli), where the story of Jonas is translated word for word and not only by resorting to an interlinear translation, but also by placing the Italian text from right to left, following the direction of the Hebrew original.

primary meaning of that word” (2003: 325). Nerlich subsequently provides the example of “head” in the sense of “chief person” that presumably originated as a metaphorical extension of head in its primary sense of upper part of the body.’” One can make the same claim for “Montedidio”: the title of De Luca’s novel contains both the primary meaning of the biblical God’s Mountain in Jerusalem that is the final destination of the Ark of the Covenant; its “extended” meaning is the neighborhood that took that holy mountain’s name. Raffaniello explains the displacement of meaning from sacred to profane: “Al mio paese leggevo i salmi, dove sta scritta la domanda: ‘Chi salirà nel *monte di Dio*?’ e la risposta dice: ‘Chi ha le mani innocenti e il cuore puro’” (64), and after having explained how he survived the war (by hiding from the enemy under piles of cow dung, pavements, and an abandoned lime stone quarry, while stealing honey from bee hives and drinking his own urine mixed in with snow for his survival) he states: “[I]a guerra mi ha pulito il cuore e lavato le mani con la calce. Quand’è finita ero pronto a salire nel *monte di Dio*” (64). He subsequently relates the story of his attempted emigration to the Holy Land, made impossible by the English Blockade that had prompted the following thoughts: “Tientelo il tuo *monte*, tieniti gli Inglesi a Gerusalemme, pigliati quello per popolo” (64). Then, reflecting on God’s twisted sense of humor, he continues:

Così lui ci ripensa, leva gli inglesi e a me dà un castigo sotto la specie della presa in giro: *monte di Dio*, sì, ma a Napoli. È vero che qui sanno rifare tali e quali i mobili antichi, gli orologi di lusso e i pacchetti di sigarette americane, ma rifare *il monte di Dio* è troppa imitazione, quello sta solo a Gerusalemme. Qua in cima alla salita dove si vede la gobba del vulcano ci può stare una terrazza panoramica, non lo sgabello dei piedi di Dio. E invece hanno voluto chiamare questa collina *Montedidio* e già che c’erano, quella vicina la vanno a chiamare *Montecalvario*, e così fa due. (65)

Rafaniello then echoes the novel’s title one last time: “Con il dovuto rispetto, la terrasanta non ha succursali. Intanto io sono rimasto qui, sulla salita di un altro *Montedidio*, come un turista che ha sbagliato prenotazione” (66).

After choosing “*God’s Mountain*” for the novel’s English title, the translator opts for the following formulation in his translation of the above passages:

In my town I was reading the Psalms where you find the question, ‘Who shall ascend *the hill of the Lord*?’ and the answer says, ‘He that hath clean hands and a pure heart’ ... The war cleansed my heart and washed my hands with lime. When it ended I was ready to ascend into *the hill of the Lord*” (67)

‘You can keep your *hill*, keep your Englishmen in Jerusalem, make them your chosen people’. So he changes his mind. He takes away the English and plays a joke on me for punishment. He takes me to *the mount of the Lord*, but it’s in Naples. It’s true that here they know how to make perfect copies of antique furniture, luxury watches, and packs of American cigarettes. But copying *the mount of the Lord* is going too far. It can only be in Jerusalem. Here on top of the *hill* where you could see the sea and the peak of the volcano, you could fit a panoramic terrace, not the footstool for the feet of God. But they called it *Montedidio*, *the hill of the Lord*, and while they were at it, they called the hill next door *Montecalvario*, so that makes two. (68-69)

Moore subsequently translates what in the Italian original is the last echo of the title as follows: “With all due respect, the Holy Land doesn’t have franchises. In the meantime I’ve stayed here, on the slopes of another *hill of the Lord*, like a tourist who made the wrong booking” (69).

The semantic load of the title “Montedidio” has been dispersed; in the translation the word surfaces once in Italian referring to the neighborhood, while the reference



to the Temple Mount from the Book of Psalms has been translated as “who shall climb the hill of the Lord”, rather than “Who shall climb God’s mountain”, the homonymous mountain of the title. While “hill of the Lord” is a more commonly found translation of the passage in question, as a quick on-line search confirms, the novel’s title has lost its connection to the sacred destination of Rav Daniel, Jerusalem’s Temple Mount, a place where an angel has told him he shall fly to simultaneously with a piece of wood from the Ark of the Covenant. While it is true that the Italian separates the words *Monte di Dio* in three components to indicate the Temple Mount, the translator might have attempted to convey the graphic difference between the two spellings of the Italian *Montedidio* by alternating *Montedidio* and “hill of the Lord/Mount of the Lord”. Unfortunately, the “God’s Mountain” of the title remains eerily absent in the novel’s epicenter. The tightness and compactness created by bundling the three words into one for the *Montedidio* neighborhood, graphically reflects that area’s spatial characteristics as a tightly packed container of sorts – indeed like the container for God’s word, the Ark of the Covenant of acacia wood – but this graphic signifier could not be replicated. The English title is at this point meaningless, and the very key to the novel’s uniqueness as a tightly packed “sacred” repository of sorts for two compact, “sacred” languages of sorts, Neapolitan and Yiddish, is quite literally lost in translation.

Neapolitan, like the sacred language of the Bible, is polysemous in nature as well: for example, it has only one word for sleep and dream, “suonno,” as the narrator informs us. De Luca’s attachment to polysemy furthermore illuminates his use of the following subtle metaphor combined with a personification of the sun, which through its articulation in dialect expresses awareness its own ambiguous nature, as is hinted at in the following example: “È *asciuto*, ’o pate d’e puerielle’ dice Mast’Errico, è uscito il padre dei poveri” (58). And the translation: “È *asciuto*, ’o pate d’e puerielle’, says Master Errico. The father of the poor has come out” (59). The father of the poor is subsequently explained as “il sole dei mesi freddi che mette la sua coperta addosso a quelli che non la tengono” (58) (“In the cold months the sun places its own blanket over the shoulders of those who don’t have one”, 59). What strikes this reader is the impossibility of conveying in English what the Italian text cleverly hints at: the past participle of the verb “uscire” in Neapolitan is “asciuto”, and therefore one consonant away from the adjective “asciutto”; (and to underscore the significance of the word play the Italian for the Neapolitan “puerielle”, “poveri” is one consonant away from the plural of “polvere”, “dust”). Moreover, the personification of the sun as “father of the poor” and the subject of the verb “asciuto” that conjures up the dryness of “asciutto” establishes a semantic link between poverty as a state of “not having” as an economic “dryness”, so to speak. This is no coincidence if we have earlier highlighted the importance of dryness in the lexical build-up of *Montedidio*; the translator is limited to re-writing the Neapolitan and translating the Italian translation without recourse to an equivalent stylistic device.

### 3.2. Personification

Earlier we had suggested that the pages of *Montedidio* compress the city’s energy, including its people and its objects. Personifications, in fact, contribute to that overall dynamic, further intensified by the triumph of the active over the passive voice. Objects and body parts have a will of their own: light goes for a stroll, draws lines and works itself inside the dark corners of Naples’s *bassi*; a boomerang quivers in

fresh air, throbs under its owner's coat, and pushes up against the sky; the narrator's left eye is sly, fast, and understands things in a heartbeat, so it is Neapolitan; Italian is quiet and sits still in books, houses are deaf, the wind plays tricks; the bloods of San Gennaro and Santa Patrizia alike liquefy and coagulate spontaneously, etc. The ideal translation would attempt to respect De Luca's stylistic manipulations aimed at conveying Montedidio's spontaneous, self-propelled energy that does not need an agent to exist.

Dopo un poco vedo che la [mano] destra è più grossa della sinistra. Cambio mano. Così una parte del corpo raggiunge l'altra, pareggia sveltezza, forza e stanchezza. Gli ultimi lanci fermati hanno più spinta a volare, *il polso soffre di più a trattenere*, allora smetto. (11)  
 After a while I can see that my right hand's getting bigger than my left, so I change hands. This way one side of my body keeps up with the other, equal in speed, strength and exhaustion. My last few unreleased throws really want to fly. *It hurts my wrist to hold them back*, so I stop." (7)

The translation is certainly plausible if readability is of concern, but it is at the expense of a displacement of the agent from the body part, the pulse, to the implied first person. "Il polso soffre", "My wrist "suffers" or "is in pain", would miss the mark.

Elsewhere opportunities for obeying De Luca's use of personifications have been lost in favor of conveying "the general sense": "Al fuoco dello stoppino il bicchiere di vino nel vetro piglia luce dentro, l'olio splende, il pane sente il fuoco e si mette a profumare" (44) has become: "From the flame, the glass of wine in the window absorbs the light, the oil shines, the bread becomes fragrant" (42).

An attempt to avoid the repetition of the English "glass" for the Italian "bicchiere" and "vetro" alike by letting the glass of wine capture the candle's light via a window rather than the glass, is understandable. However, to convey the luminosity captured in the glass our translator has preferred a more scientific "absorbs the light" thereby depriving himself of an opportunity to personify it and equipping it, as De Luca does in the Italian, with the ability to pull light from the candle wick to it; it attracts it. Similarly bread can smell the fire, and the fragrance it emits results from its olfactory abilities. Animating otherwise inanimate substances is often part of a narrative discourse in counterpoint that characterizes much of De Luca's prose.

In some instances, however, the translator has opted to bypass the difficulty entirely: The sentence: "Rafaniello sentiva e teneva le lacrime dentro gli occhi tondi, ma non uscivano, si affacciavano e tornavano indietro"(83), has become a rather bland and conventional "Rafaniello listened with tears in his eyes" (93) a translation that fails to convey Rafaniello's awareness of his emotional state and, more importantly, that de-personalizes the rabbi-cobbler's tears depriving him, a holy man, of an attribute that confirms his "holiness": he remains "dry" so to speak. "Rafaniello felt the tears well up in his round eyes, but they did not come out; they peaked through the window and went back inside" while more "faithful" to the original would also respect the personification without sacrificing readability.

The sentence that follows a paragraph that creates an atmosphere of emptiness after the passing of the narrator's mother when only "spiriti" roaming around the kitchen are his companions, the sentence "I grandi vanno dietro ai loro guai e noi restiamo nelle case sorde che non sentono più un rumore" (75) has morphed into: "Grown-ups withdraw into their troubles and leave us behind in houses that don't make a sound" (81). While the active voice is maintained in translation, and the sentence's personified houses still seem to reflect the loneliness that fills the space, the houses have not stopped *producing* sounds, but are *deaf* and *hear* no more

sounds, because one of its inhabitants has died and the others have been muted and immobilized by her absence.

What earlier I had called the desiccation of Montedidio is prevented: the translation of the following sentence: “[...] il vapore della solfatara ferma la pioggia, *l’asciuga in aria*. Fanno rumore solo le scarpe sul terreno” (86) in translation becomes: “The steam from the solfatara stops the rain. The only sound is of shoes touching the ground” (97). The fact that the translator has opted for entirely omitting sulfuric vapors’ unique quality of preventing rain from touching the ground as it dries it on its way down compromises the meaning of the sentence in two ways: first, without it one has the impression that it stops raining on behalf of the vapors; second, the novel’s figurative language works in tandem with De Luca’s stylistic choices that favor semantic opposites, notably aridity and liquidity. The translation misses the mark.

In this last example too, liquidity and aridity dwell in each other’s textual vicinity: “Ai lavatoi a dicembre il vento fa il guappo, spazza la polvere in terra, lucida la notte in cielo, si porta via il caldo dalle case. Il bumeràn è scatenato [...]” (91) finds its English equivalent in “At the washbasins in December the wind gets all blustery, sweeping up the dirt on the ground, polishing the nighttime sky, drawing off the heat from the houses. The boomerang is going wild” (103). In Italian the playfulness of the wind is rendered by personifying it as a “guappo” who sweeps the dust; “polvere” is again a highly significant noun; when the author uses it, it is deliberate, and it is never dirty. The wind loses some of its power through the replacement of the active voice of the conjugated verb by a less effective gerund.

### 3.3. Simile

If personifications contribute to the energy of *Montedidio*, and are indeed functional to the overall meaning of the novel as a compact space where meaning is possible only by “voweling” or “liquifying” in an attempt to contradictorily “dry” language to its most essential parts, similis partake in the textual tour de force: “[...] quando spazzo il suo angolo mi fa un sorriso e si muovono le rughe e le lentiggini, pare il mare quando ci piove sopra” (17), felicitously rendered in English as “When I sweep up his corner he smiles at me, making his wrinkles and freckles ripple like the sea in the rain” (12). The following simile too, “[...] sfilata e riinfila i cassetti senza rumore, come la lenza in mare, dice, che sale e scende muta in mano a lui” (21) finds an equally plausible English equivalent in “[...] until the drawers don’t make a sound when he pulls them out and slides them back in. He says it’s like dropping a fishing line in the sea. They rise and fall silently in his hands” (17).

Let us finally also consider an example that, according to Gerard Steen (1994: 27), ought to be considered a simile, because, while technically it is not, it is implied and is an integral part of figurative language use that is typical in literary discourse:

“È venuto a Napoli per sbaglio, voleva andare a Gerusalemme dopo la guerra. È sceso dal treno e ha visto il mare per la prima volta. Una sirena di bastimento ha suonato e lui s’è ricordato di una festa al paese suo che comincia con un suono uguale” (25).

Implied is the comparison of the sound of the ship’s horn and the sound of the shofar made of a rams’ horn that is blown on the Jewish High Holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The English translation reads:

“He came to Naples by mistake. He had wanted to go to Jerusalem after the war. He got off the train and saw the sea for the first time. A ship blew its whistle and he remembered a festival in his hometown that began with the same sound” (21).

This is an example of “domestication” – to use a Schleiermacher-inspired term coined by Venuti (2002: 5) – that has failed to provide the cultural background of one of *Montedidio*’s protagonists: the rabbi-cobbler’s roots in a Jewish tradition-infused pre-war *shtetl* seems clear from the immediate context where subtle references to a Bashevis-Singer-like environment betray the humble, Eastern-European, orthodox Jewish past of a man who practiced the cobbler’s trade by day and studied the Talmud by night (63).

Scrutinizing the Moore translation of figurative language in *Montedidio* must allow for mitigation in light of the author’s own take on the translation of prose narrative:

Quando si traduce la narrativa è importante acciuffare il tono di voce, il ritmo, il timbro del racconto. Se si ammira la prosa non è troppo difficile acciuffare il tono. È importante poi trasferirlo e mantenerlo nel nuovo testo. Si deve mantenere anche ciò che è dialettale, l’acre di un racconto sarcastico, la lingua divertita di una storia che mentre descrive punge, la lingua asciutta di chi narra fatiche. In prosa bisogna amare la punteggiatura. (De Luca 2001: 31)

In the same essay, De Luca furthermore accepts the subordination of the source text to the translator who “transports” the text from one place to another: “Traduzione è un termine carcerario” he claims, “è lo spostamento di un detenuto da un istituto ad un altro” (De Luca 2001: 31). However, what to do with a prose translation of a text where the referent is culturally and linguistically Italian but with a Jewish, biblical subconscious? I propose to simultaneously, but to a point, respect De Luca’s observations about the translation of biblical language where he argues in favor of a very literal approach. This does not place a demand on the translator to go to the extent of obeying even the biblical original’s word order, its use of prepositions – “Dio parla verso Mosè e non a Mosè” (De Luca 2001: 33), etc., provided that the source text warrants it (De Luca gives the example of the multiple names for God). However, obedience to the original might be needed in this case where the linguistic subtext is clearly biblical. De Luca suggests for Bible translation that “una volta che si stabilisce di obbedire al testo, allora il resto viene di conseguenza, anche se poi l’italiano diventa non lingua d’arrivo, ma solo *di servizio*” (2001: 34, emphasis mine). The translator is *at the service of* the source text. At all times, however, “tradurre è sempre un esercizio di ammirazione verso il testo” (2001: 34). “Ammirazione” implies a vertical relationship to the source text, a “looking up to” it. For the translation of *Montedidio* in general and its figurative language in particular, then, my suggestion is, in addition to “obedience”, a respectful “ammirazione”. After all, like the reader, the translator too – and the translator is first and foremost a reader – is positioned at the textual periphery, if we believe De Luca. Still speaking about Bible translation, the author argues that:

“[G]li incontri dentro quel libro [the Bible] avvengono presso un confine, in un deserto. Lo stesso succede con ogni lettore, quando sta in una condizione di periferia, di estremità della propria vita. È un libro incandescente per chi è pronto a diventare combustibile. Non è per quieti in poltrona, ma per esseri scossi” (De Luca 2001: 35).

This last quote strikes us for the presence of the image of the combustible reader – and translator – confirming, perhaps, the combustible nature of all writing that ultimately is an epistemological search for meaning. If the above holds water – no pun intended – the translator of *Montedidio* has the impossible task not of “domesticating” a text that underneath its surface conceals a biblical-linguistic subtext, but to resist domestication and instead “admire” and “obey” the original behind the original. Since figurative language in *Montedidio* has been articulated

with a biblical-linguistic philosophy in mind, its translation becomes an exercise in admiration and obedience. The translator must be willing to throw himself on the pyre of *Montedidio*'s pages only to rise from its ashes, along with the book he has just translated.

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# “...like reeds in the wind”. Exploring simile in the English translations of Grazia Deledda using corpus stylistics

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***Abstract:** A preparatory search for the salient linguistic features of a text or texts can represent a vital part of the process of translation, particularly of creative writing, thus enabling the translator to make conscious, informed decisions on how to achieve functional equivalence in the translation text when appropriate. A corpus stylistic approach may prove useful for this purpose since quantitative data may be generated and subsequently examined qualitatively to gain information about stylistic features (e.g. Mahlberg 2009). Previous research into Grazia Deledda's authorial style (Johnson 2009) using corpus stylistics techniques showed that the lemmas 'parere'/'sembrare' were particularly frequent. Besides constructing a particular point of view (Johnson 2010), this frequency was possibly also due to the salience in Deledda's works of figurative language such as simile. Unlike metaphor, simile has overt lexical markers and thus it is hypothesised that corpus stylistics may enable us to focus on this distinctive stylistic feature in both source and target texts, with a view to assessing functional equivalence. This paper explores the figurative device of simile in a corpus of selected novels by Deledda in Italian and English for the purpose of testing this hypothesis.*

***Keywords:** simile, corpus stylistics, literary translation, style.*

## 1. Introduction

One of the elements that makes a literary work distinctive is its style, the set of linguistic characteristics which help to create its unique character (Leech, Short 1981: 12). 'Style markers' — “[f]eatures which are significantly more frequent, or rarer” in the text than another (Enkvist 1985: 20) may become more visible by sorting and displaying linguistic data by computer so that patterns of recurrent language become more visible (e.g. Ho 2011: 202). Tools typical of corpus linguistics such as frequency wordlists and keyword lists may be used to do this, in preparation for a qualitative analysis of the findings. Bringing together elements of stylistics and corpus linguistics, this approach is known as ‘corpus stylistics’, focussing on the “functional and aesthetic association of linguistic patterns” (Biber 2011: 21), while adding a quantitative dimension to qualitative linguistic analysis (e.g. Ho 2011: 6).

A number of corpus stylistics studies have been published on different aspects of literary writing (e.g. Semino, Short 2004; Mahlberg 2007a, 2007b, 2009, 2012; Fischer-Starcke 2009; Culpeper 2002; Toolan 2009; O'Halloran 2007; Ho 2011). However, little has so far been done in exploiting corpus stylistics with a view to assisting the translation process (though see Malhberg 2007c).

This article explores certain stylistic features and their function in literary texts in order to provide insights into how these findings may be useful for the purposes of the translation process, moving between corpus analysis and close reading of the text. It focuses on the work of the Italian novelist and Nobel Prize winner Grazia Deledda (1871-1936), whose authorial style was the subject of earlier corpus-based

research (Johnson 2009) into keywords and clusters in a purpose-built corpus of her work<sup>1</sup> in comparison with a specially compiled reference corpus of nineteenth-century Italian novels<sup>2</sup>. Findings suggested that certain lexical items such as ‘parere’ and ‘sembrare’ (‘seem’ or ‘appear’), emerging as key in two of her most popular novels, *Canne al vento* and *La madre*, contributed to creating a particular point of view (Simpson 1993). The salience of these lemmas seems to confirm previous non-corpus-based literary criticism of Deledda’s work (e.g. Dolfi 1979: 61) suggesting that particular focus is placed on the perception of reality. Subsequent exploration of these findings showed that the point of view conveyed in the Target Texts (henceforth TT) did not always correspond to that in the Source Texts (henceforth ST) (Johnson 2010, 2011).

Besides marking point of view, however, the frequency of ‘parere’/ ‘sembrare’ may also point towards a predilection for a certain type of figurative language such as simile, while representing an idiosyncratic tendency of the author to express this lexicogrammatically through the Mental process of perception, as in example 1:

- (1)  
 egli guardava il cielo d’un azzurro struggente e **gli pareva** d’esser coricato su un bel letto dalle coltri di seta [*Canne al vento*]  
 [...] and **it seemed to him** to be lying..... [Interlinear Translation<sup>3</sup>]  
 Giacinto looked at the sky of overwhelming blue and **felt as if** he had stretched out on a beautiful bed covered with silk. [*Reeds in the Wind*]

As defined by Wales (2001), simile is “a figure of speech whereby two concepts are imaginatively and descriptively compared” (2001: 358), a comparison overtly marked by a fairly finite number of lexical signals. Our hypothesis is that, unlike metaphor, which has no overt lexical marker, a distinctive feature of style such as simile may be highlighted successfully and subjected to a corpus stylistics analysis, even in raw, ‘untagged’ files, thus revealing idiosyncrasies in style which may then be focussed on in translation.

In this article we use corpus tools to identify key lexical markers of simile in a corpus of literature by a single author, investigate the main semantic domains covered by these similes, and discuss possible problematic issues in translating simile, using examples from three novels by Grazia Deledda – *Canne al vento*, *La madre* and *Elias Portulù* – both in Italian and in their English translations, to illustrate our discussion. Details of the texts are given in Table 1.

ST	published	tokens	TT	Published	translator	tokens
<i>Canne al vento</i> [CV]	1913	60,508	<i>Reeds in the Wind</i> [RW]	1999	Martha King	64,407
<i>La madre</i> [MA]	1920	36,973	<i>The Mother</i> [MO]	1923	Mary Steegman	44,538
<i>Elias Portulù</i> [EP]	1903	46,090	<i>Elias Portulu</i> [PO]	1995	Martha King	49,889

Table 1: Details of the source texts and target texts discussed

<sup>1</sup> The Deledda corpus consisted of sixteen novels published between 1892 and 1937.

<sup>2</sup> The reference corpus consisted of thirteen novels by Giovanni Verga, Luigi Capuana, Matilde Serao and Emilio De Marchi, published between 1871 and 1893.

<sup>3</sup> Where the TT differs greatly from the ST, a near-literal or Interlinear Translation (IT) is given.



It is worth noting that two of the novels investigated here were translated by the same person, a point to which we shall return in section 4.4.

The following section describes our methodology, after which we shall move on to a discussion of simile in the STs, and then address the issue of simile in English in general and in the English translations of Deledda's novels.

## 2. Methodology

WordSmith 5.0 (Scott) and AntConc 3.2.4 (Anthony) concordancing software was used to highlight salient stylistic features. Frequency lists were first made of key words and clusters in comparison with the reference corpus, used to provide "evidence of language norms" (Wynne 2006: 224). The resulting words and phrases, key by definition because they appeared with unexpected frequency in Deledda, were thus taken to be typical of Deledda's own style. Among these, words and phrases were identified which could be possible markers of simile.

Keyword lists focus on differences but not similarities, so that they can suggest what is distinctive of Deledda (how her style *differs* from others) but will not highlight to what extent Deledda's style *shares* features with others in the reference corpus. In order to extract this information, the plain frequency lists of words and clusters in the ST and TT were also examined for evidence of markers of simile.

To investigate the semantic domains connected with the similes, collocates of the lexical markers of simile were extracted to give a better idea of "the company that words keep" (Firth 1957: 11). A qualitative analysis of concordance lines was made to put the collocates into semantic categories to find out *what* was compared with *what*.

Lastly, specific concordances in the ST aligned with the corresponding sections in the parallel translation corpus were examined in order to focus on figurative language in translation.

## 3. Simile in the Source Language and in the Source Texts

In this section we shall address the issue of simile in Italian and in the STs. After describing lexical markers of simile, we use corpus tools to present the quantitative evidence for these in our corpora, and then focus on the semantic domains identified through corpus enquiry.

### 3.1. Lexical markers of simile in the ST

Besides 'parere'/'sembrare' used in a clausal construction, one of the most common lexical markers of simile in Italian is the preposition 'come' (often translated as *like*). While it was the keyness of 'parere'/'sembrare' in the Deledda corpus in relation to the reference corpus which first led to further investigation, 'come' appeared with similar frequency in the reference corpus and the Deledda corpus and thus was not a keyword. It did however appear particularly frequently in the plain wordlists of certain novels, as can be seen in Table 2, which shows figures per thousand words (ptw) for both 'come' and all wordforms of 'parere'/'sembrare' in the Deledda corpus, the reference corpus, and the 3 STs.

Corpus	'parere'/'sembrare' (ptw)	'come' (ptw)
Reference corpus	1.72	6.74
Deledda corpus	3.68	7.53
CV	4.63	10.71

MA	4.62	8.98
EP	2.91	4.90

Table 2: Frequency of possible simile markers across the corpora

Table 2 shows that occurrences of ‘parere’/ ‘sembrare’ are more frequent throughout the Deledda corpus than in the reference corpus, particularly in CV and MA. Incidence is slightly lower in EP, though it is still higher than in the reference corpus, suggesting that the predilection for this particular lexicogrammatical marker of mental perception is typical of Deledda.

Occurrences of ‘come’ are particularly frequent in both CV and MA and indeed ‘come’ appears among the top keywords of CV in relation to the rest of the Deledda corpus. The same word is actually a negative keyword in EP, meaning that it is less frequent than would be expected when compared with the rest of Deledda. This, together with the lower relative frequency of ‘parere’/ ‘sembrare’ in EP, might suggest that simile has less of a part to play in the style of this novel. However, given the multifunctionality of ‘come’ in Italian, careful reading of concordances of ‘come’ was required in order to identify and eliminate meanings of the word ‘come’ which did not involve simile (an example in *Canne al vento* is “io come faccio, allora? Grixenda si sposa e se ne va”, where ‘come’ is translated ‘what’ as in the TT: “What would I do? Grixenda will get married and move away”).

Following this qualitative analysis, the percentages of ‘come’ occurring as simile or otherwise in each of the three novels were calculated and the results appear in Table 3.

	CV	MA	EP
‘come’	(648 occurrences) 10.71 ptw	(332 occurrences) 8.98 ptw	(226 occurrences) 4.90 ptw
‘come’ as simile	86%	90%	75%
‘come’ as non simile	14%	10%	25%

Table 3: Proportions of the functions of ‘come’ across the three novels

The figures in this table confirm our original impression, that some sort of comparison in CV and MA played a greater part stylistically than in EP. We should note here that we have not distinguished between different types of simile such as literal or (quasi) literal, precision similes or metaphorising similes (Goatly 1997: 185). We are however attesting the presence of some sort of comparative structure, and examination of concordances of ‘come’ in the Deledda novels suggests indeed that it is comparison *tout court* that is typical of her style, as in example 2:

(2)

Anche Noemi si stancherà della sua croce d’oro e vorrà andare lontano, come Lia, **come la Regina Saba** [CV]

Noemi will also get tired of her gold cross and will want to go far away, like Lia, **like the Queen of Sheba** [RW]

A simple comparison is drawn here between Noemi and her sister Lia, but the comparison with the Queen of Sheba is clearly a metaphorising simile.

So far we have focussed on whether or not simile is salient to Deledda’s style. Having established that this is so, let us now move on to an investigation of the semantic fields of the lexis in these expressions, using corpus tools to work with

simile markers in order to extrapolate stylistic features such as metaphorical concepts.

### 3.2. The semantic domains of simile in Deledda

In order to identify the element of comparison intrinsic to simile and give some indication of the context in which they occur, the Collocate tool was used to highlight words occurring in the vicinity of ‘come’. Previous research (Johnson 2009) showed that the lemmas ‘parere’/ ‘sembrare’ often collocated closely (within a span of 5 words to the left and 5 to the right) in the Deledda corpus with lexical items belonging to the semantic domain of natural elements (such as sky, earth, wind, sea, and sun), suggesting that either the topic or the vehicle of the simile might be connected with this domain.

While the clausal nature of similes using ‘parere’/ ‘sembrare’ meant that both topic and vehicle could extend over many words to both sides of the node word, the vehicle in similes marked by ‘come’ could often be identified by focussing on collocates occurring to the right of the node word ‘come’, as in example 3:

(3)

Si”, egli disse allora, “siamo proprio **come le canne al vento**, donna Ester mia. Ecco perché! Siamo canne, e la sorte è il vento.” [CV]

“Yes,” he then said, “we’re just **like reeds in the wind**, Donna Ester. That’s why! We are reeds, and fate is the wind.” [RW]

In example 3, a metaphorising simile is used in the direct speech<sup>4</sup> of the ‘narrator’ character Efix to draw a parallel between a natural feature, the reeds so typical of that landscape, and human destiny, using the conceptual metaphor FATE IS A NATURAL FORCE.

To identify the vehicle domains, collocates were extracted and investigated five words to the right of ‘come’ and the concordances carefully read. Most of the vehicle domains in concordances of ‘come’ as simile in CV, for example, could be fitted into specific semantic categories. These are listed below, together with a concordance exemplifying each one:

NATURAL ELEMENTS (weather, landscape): *siamo proprio **come le canne al vento*** [...like reeds in the wind]

ANIMALS: *la fame e la febbre di malaria la perseguitavano **come cani arrabbiati*** [...like mad dogs]

PEOPLE (named) *Anche Noemi si stancherà della sua croce d’oro e vorrà andare lontano, come Lia, **come la Regina Saba*** [...like the Queen of Sheba]

PEOPLE (role): *ha perduto i genitori nel peggior tempo per lui, ed è rimasto **come un bambino solo nella strada*** [...like a little boy alone in the street]

RELIGION: *anche se entrano trovano solo cenere e chiodi, povera **come Cristo*** [...poor as Christ]

BODY PARTS: *ridendo ma con gli occhi vaghi **come quelli del cieco*** [...like the eyes of the blind man]

SOUNDS: *e col canto del fanciullo **come l’ansito di un ferito abbandonato in un bosco*** [...like the sobbing of someone left wounded in the woods]

LOCAL ELEMENTS: *fumano **come carbonaie coperte*** [...like covered charcoal heaps]

<sup>4</sup> Critics (e.g. Gagliardi 2010) have commented that simile is not only present in the narrative structure of Deledda’s novels but is also mirrored in the characters’ own speech, as in this example.

The semantic categories thus extracted clearly relate to major themes in Deledda's work such as religion, nature, and the forces of destiny (as also described by non-corpus based critics of Deledda such as Miccinesi 1975, Gagliardi 2010).

To conclude this section, then, we first listed lexical markers for simile in Italian, quantified them using corpus software, and compared relative frequencies in order to make some initial comments about the representation and significance of simile. We then used the Collocate tool to extract lexis indicating the source domains, after which concordances were carefully read to identify the semantic categories. Given how crucial simile can be in conveying meaning and stylistic idiosyncrasies, it is evident that simile is an issue requiring particular attention in translation.

#### 4. Simile in the Target Language and in the Target Texts

In this section we shall focus on the issue of simile in English in general, with reference to translation issues, before giving some specific examples from our three TTs in order to evaluate the choices made in translating examples of simile.

First of all, what lexical options are available? Wikberg (2008:128) describes simile as “a figurative expression used to make an explicit comparison of two unlike things by means of the prepositions *like*, (*as*)...*as* or the conjunctions *as*, *as if*, *as though*”; Miller (1993: 371) also includes *resembles*, *reminds me of*, *is the same as*, *is similar to*, and *the same way*; Partington (2006: 281) adds *seems like*, *sounds like*, (*is*) *more like*, *gives the impression of/that*, *not unlike* and *unlike* as well as *might have been*. All in all, a fair number of expressions are available to express simile in English.

Let us first consider whether it needs to be translated at all. Given that the translator needs to recreate predominant stylistic features of the ST to maintain stylistic or translational equivalence (Popovic 1976), it follows that when these features include a particular type of figurative language, an equivalent translation should normally be made. By ‘equivalence’ we mean the “functional equivalence of elements in both original and translation aiming at an expressive identity with an invariant of identical meaning” (Popovic 1976: 6). We also follow Baker's (1992) categories of equivalence at word level and above word level, as well as considering her notion of pragmatic equivalence.

As regards translation strategies, both Newmark (1981) and van den Broeck (1981) list strategies for metaphor of which some seem to be particularly relevant for translating simile, for example reproducing the same image in the TL (van den Broeck's ‘sensu stricto’ (1981: 77)); translating the image in the SL with a standard TL image in keeping with the TL culture (Newmark 1981: 89); translating as simile plus sense (ibid: 90); and converting simile to sense (ibid.). Newmark also adds deletion where the metaphor (or simile) is redundant, but only in the case of non-expressive texts. Thus we may presume that this would generally be inappropriate when producing an equivalent translation in the case of a literary work (though see section 4.3 below).

Let us now consider various practical issues concerning the translation of simile. These include translating simile in the form of cultural stereotypes, as well as conventionalised simile, extended metaphor, and the significance of stylistic repetition. Once again we use concordance lines of ‘come’ from CV, MA and EP aligned with their translations in the TT to illustrate our discussion.

#### 4.1. Cultural stereotypes

By cultural stereotype, we intend the use of an image whose connotations and denotations would be familiar to readers of the ST, thus requiring no explicitation of the grounds for comparison for them to ‘make sense’ (Baker 1992: 217) to the reader of the TT. As Nowattny points out: “[s]imile (when simple) does not indicate the respect in which one thing is like another thing. It says the things are alike; it is up to us to see why” (1962: 66). The Target Reader (TR) however may not share the same background knowledge and thus not realise where the similarity lies. One example is where the grounds for comparison contain local references typical of early twentieth-century Sardinian culture, as in example 4, where a translation ‘sensu stricto’ might not be appropriate:

- (4)  
 I monticelli sopra i paesetti sparsi per la pianura, dopo il Castello, fumano come **carbonaie** coperte. [CV]  
 The little hills...smoke like covered **charcoal heaps** [IT]  
 The little hills behind the villages scattered over the plain beyond the Castle smoked like smothered **coals**. [RW]

Here, the translator has substituted the local element of the charcoal heaps with a more general reference, thus undertranslating the ST. The same strategy is used in example 5:

- (5)  
 sostò in una cantoniera della valle, ma non poté dormire...un uomo malato gemeva nella cantoniera triste come **una stalla**, e il dolore umano turbava la solitudine. [CV]  
 [...] a sick man groaned in the road keeper’s house sad **as a stable**...[IT]  
 stayed in a road keeper’s house in the valley, but he couldn’t sleep .....a sick man groaned in the run-down house and that human pain disturbed the solitude. [RW]

Here, the simile describing the roadkeeper’s house, *sad as a stable*, is omitted and simple premodification with *run-down* does not fully convey the idea of sadness and misery expressed in the ST, thus significantly weakening the metaphor in the last clause.

Another strategy has been used in example 6. Here, the word *tanca*, a Sardinian geographical feature meaning a large expanse of enclosed land for grazing, is italicised in CV, marking it as a regionalism. This was typical of the literary style of ‘verismo’, with its emphasis on the regional problems of Italy, as well as the reproduction of dialects (Ferroni 1991: 404). The TT features the foreignising strategy (Venuti 1995) of retaining the SL word:

- (6)  
 lontani, con sfondi misteriosi come **una tanca** di notte. [CV]  
 with the walls far away, with the mysterious background like **a tanca** at night [RW]

However a word query shows us that *tanca* occurs just twice in CV, whereas the *tanca* is much more of a feature of EP (55 occurrences). This difference makes the foreignising element much more intrusive in the TT and the translator compensates for this by adding a glossary note of her own in the TT for *tanca*. We may conclude then that sensitivity to the number of occurrences has led to the diversification in strategy here.

Besides elements typical of rural geography, cultural features such as references specific to the Catholic religion were more familiar to both contemporary and modern-day readers of the ST than to the TR. We might thus expect the translator to

make use of explicating strategies on these occasions to provide an equivalent translation. Religious references form the source domains of a number of similes in CV but are particularly frequent in MA, with its story of a priest. However one singular strategy is that of deletion, as in example 7:

(7)

quando consacrò l'ostia gemette tra sé: «Dio mio, vi offro la mia carne, vi offro il mio sangue». E gli parve di veder la donna, anche lei col foglietto in mano **come un'ostia consacrata** [MA]  
 when he consecrated the host he groaned to himself: «My God I offer you my flesh I offer you my blood». And it seemed to him that he saw the woman, she too with the paper in her hand **like a consecrated host** [IT]

In the ST, the comparison of the letter with the host picks up the literal reference in the first line, as Paulo performs the religious rites of consecrating the host in church. Reference to the simile is omitted in the TT, thus failing to reproduce one of the novel's key figurative elements:

as he raised his hands in consecration his secret prayer was that the offering of his own flesh and blood might be accepted. And he seemed to see the woman reading his letter. [MO]

This strategy goes against Newmark's recommendation that deletion is rarely appropriate in an expressive text.

Instead, it is not the religious significance of the Host but its appearance which provides the grounds for comparison in example 8 from CV:

(8)

Ester fece il pane apposta, un pane bianco e sottile **come ostia**, quale si fa solo per le feste [CV]  
 [...] a bread white and thin **as a host** [IT]

A satisfactory functional equivalent is given in the form of an explicating translation, *holy wafer*, instead of Host, with the premodifying adjective added here providing the religious element:

Ester made bread just for the occasion, white and thin **as a holy wafer**, the kind usually made only for festivities [RW]

Another strategy has been used to render a simile from the semantic domain of religion in MA:

(9)

E lo nascose in un ripostiglio, con religione, **come il calice della Messa**. [MA]  
 And he hid it in a cupboard, with religion, **like the chalice of the Mass**. [IT]  
 Then he hid it away in a secret cupboard of his own with as much reverence **as if it had been the chalice of the Mass**. [MO]

Here the relation between the simple preposition 'come' and the Nominal Group has been explicated with the use of a clausal simile. What is the effect of this elaborate paraphrase? According to Goatly (1997: 186, 239), the use of clausal simile certainly adds precision but is also associated with subjective metaphors, especially of the Phenomenalistic variety, which were not present in the ST. Burke (2011: 129) adds on the use of clausal simile that it is "not just a matter of grammar, but also one of cognition and emotion", since the idea of desirability and remoteness of a certain reality in the mind of the reader in relation to the original is increased. As Burke (ibid.) goes on to say, "[s]uch grammatical aspects of distance, particularly when combined with the notion of desire, can form a powerful concoction". So this

solution perhaps creates more emotional involvement on the part of the TR than the SR, though such an effect is difficult to measure.

#### 4.2. Extended metaphor

As has been noted (e.g. Gagliardi 2010), Deledda tends to use simile rather than metaphor, perhaps because, as Nowattny (1962: 66) points out, “suggestion is usually better done by simile”. However, extended concordances of ‘come’ as a metaphorising simile (Goatly 1997: 185) often include a metaphor sharing the same topic/vehicle to highlight particularly significant elements in the narration (Gagliardi 2010: 51). Deledda often creates extended imagery through parallels expressed between the physical world and other source domains, juxtaposing the literal with the figurative, and using lexis shared by both topic and vehicle. The effect of the shared lexis in the TL is not always entirely satisfactory:

(10)

Le monete intanto **fruttavano: fruttavano** tutti gli anni sempre più come i melograni che ella vedeva laggù verdi e rossi intorno al cortile di don Predu Pintor. [CV]

.....the coins **bore fruit: they bore fruit** every year, more and more like the pomegranates she saw down there ..... [IT]

In the meanwhile the money **grew: it grew** more every year like the green and red pomegranates she saw inside Don Predu Pintor’s courtyard. [RW]

The shared grounds in the conceptual metaphor MONEY IS A FRUIT TREE in example 10 are that both bear fruit. The shared lexis in the ST is *fruttare* [lit. *bear fruit*], rendered in the TT as *grow*, which is not in our view quite as effective as *fruttare*.

Though there are fewer occurrences of ‘come’ in Elias Portulù, they are often part of metaphorising similes. An important element of the story is the pale, weak unmanliness of Elias himself, a theme picked up on different occasions as the source of his problems, also through the use of conceptual metaphor such as WEAK MEN ARE CHEESE, as in example 11:

(11)

Un uomo **di cacio fresco** sei diventato tu, Elias figlio mio. Eccolo che diventa pallido come una femminuccia per ogni piccola cosa [EP]

A man **of fresh cheese** you’ve turned into, Elias, my son. Here he is, turning pale like a little woman for every little thing [IT]

You’ve turned into a man **soft as fresh cheese**, Elias, my son. You turn as pale as a silly woman over every little thing. [PO]

Collocates of *cheese* in the TL include *fresh* and *soft* and the translator on various occasions modifies the cheese reference by adding one of these, often rendering the metaphor as a simile as in example 11. *Soft* is particularly appropriate since it also carries the idea of effeminacy required here. Unfortunately the translator inexplicably changes the vehicle of the ‘cheese statue’ metaphor in example 12:

(12)

Uomo sei tu? Un fuscello sei, **una statuetta di cacio di vacca!** Non vedi che non puoi stare in gambe, e che il tuo viso è verde come una rana? [EP]

A man you are? A twig you are, **a little statue of cow’s cheese**..... [IT]

Are you a man? You are a twig, **a little cow made of cheese!** Don’t you see you can’t stand on your two legs, and that your face is as green as a frog’s? [PO]

Presumably this was a lapsus on the part of the translator or the editor, since the creation of a different metaphor is not justified in the co-text. However, closer attention to the figurative language here might have made this error easier to spot.

#### 4.3. Conventionalised simile

A conventionalised simile is one which has become almost ‘dead’ due to long usage. There may not be a similarly conventionalised equivalent in the TL and indeed the translator’s focus should be on representing the function of the simile rather than the form (Bassnett-McGuire 1980: 118; Ulrych 1996: 142). This could mean substituting, paraphrasing or even omitting the conventionalised simile, since it does not add to the creative force of a literary work.

Example 13 contains a simile which has become conventionalised in Italian as a description of a humble, good, simple person:

- (13)  
 Il tuo padroncino. Buono **come il pane**, e affabile: [CV]  
 Your little padroncino. **Good as bread**, and pleasant. [RW]

The TT reproduces the conventionalised simile ‘sensu stricto’, but the common ground is lacking in the TL and thus a literal translation is unsatisfactory, being unnecessarily foreignising. *Bread* rarely collocates with *good* in the TL except in the sense of ‘tasty’ and ‘delicious to eat’, which is inappropriate here. The function of the simile in the ST could be fulfilled by using alternative options to expand the grounds: *as good and simple as bread*; or even by omitting the comparison element entirely and paraphrasing: *a good man*.

The translator has used another strategy for the conventionalised simile in example 14:

- (14)  
 La botteguccia era piccola ma piena zeppa **come un uovo** [CV]  
 The shop was small but full stuffed **as an egg**. [IT]  
 It was a small shop, but **crammed tight**. [RW]

The SL simile is omitted, and paraphrasing has been used to create equivalence in function. As we noted, this type of simile is not used to add creative effect, so this may be described as an adequate translation strategy.

#### 4.4. Repetition of stylistic features

Finally let us consider the importance of repeating the simile markers themselves. Sometimes it is the recurrence of certain lexis (e.g. ‘come’ and ‘parere’/ ‘sembrare’) which highlights a certain stylistic effect. We shall recall that ‘come’ was high in frequency both in MA and CV and further qualitative exploration in CV showed that it was predominantly used as a marker of simile. As mentioned above, *as* or *like* are frequently used to translate ‘come’, but a comparison of the frequency of *as/like* in the 3 different TTs showed that, whereas both *as/like* had similar frequencies in RW (6.97 ptw/ 8.36 ptw) and PO (4.83 ptw/ 3.95 ptw) (both translated by Martha King), in Mary Steegman’s translation of MO, *as* (9.73 ptw) was much more frequent than *like* (3.20 ptw). Why should this be?

One possibility is that the translator of MO has used clausal simile (e.g. *as if/as though* + clause) even where the ST had a ‘simple simile’, as we saw in example 9. If it were found that the translator of MO had *consistently* – as a number of the



concordances suggest – used clausal simile in translating ‘come’ + Nominal Group to make the grounds explicit, rather than translation ‘sensu stricto’ or substitution as a translation strategy, the resulting TT could not be described as equivalent to the ST, in which a certain form of figurative language was salient. The reader of MA would be exposed to the frequent repetition of a certain lexical marker for simile, whereas the reader of MO would not. Whether or not this is appropriate depends on how we rate the importance of the repetition of the simile markers themselves.

In this section, after introducing the issue of simile in the Target Language, we looked at possible problematic areas for translators including cultural stereotypes, extended metaphor and conventionalised simile, commenting on the equivalence achieved in the TTs. We then addressed the issue of the repetition of lexical markers themselves as a stylistic feature. In the final section we offer some concluding remarks.

## 5. In closing

After looking at the product of translation in the form of examples from our TT corpus, let us return now to the process of translation to bring into perspective what we have said. When approaching the translation of a literary work, literary translators need to be aware of the predominant stylistic features vital to the meaning and perceptual outline of the work to be translated (Cluysenaar 1976: 49). Though a reliable automatic identification of figurative language would seem utopistic (van Peer 1989: 302-303), corpus stylistics may be useful in detecting idiosyncrasies of authorial style such as the prominence of figurative language through looking at wordlists of works by the same author and moving back and forth between statistical and qualitative methods. Corpus stylistics may also be useful in highlighting the recurrence of images from particular semantic domains. In Deledda these include particular focus on natural elements, religion, and local regional references. Some of these might create problems for the translator due to unfamiliarity of the grounds for comparison, or because the figurative language extends further, or because conventionalised similes have been used. The issue of repetition of the stylistic elements in themselves may also be addressed through corpus stylistics.

A preparatory search for the salient linguistic features of a text or texts can represent a vital part of the process of translation, particularly of creative writing. In this way, the translator is in a far better position to make conscious, informed decisions on how to achieve functional equivalence in the translation text when this is deemed appropriate.

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# Translating metaphor in literary texts: An intertextual approach

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**Abstract :** *The translation of metaphor in literature is approached in this paper from an intertextual perspective not widely used in literary or translation studies. The paper argues for the value of Lemke's semantically-based theory of intertextuality (1995) as a framework for the analysis of metaphor for literary translation purposes and for orienting metaphor translation choices. The value of the Lemkean framework lies in its focus on meaning and the intertextual environment: the meaning potential of metaphor can be systematised in three functionally-based categories (Halliday, Matthiessen 2004), each with an intertextual dimension. Adopting a broad view of metaphor, and illustrated with reference to English language versions of the metaphorically challenging short stories by Italian writer Giovanni Verga (1880; 1884), the analysis points out the advantages of considering metaphors as part of a shared intertextual environment and of describing their connotative meanings or entailments as a function of different types of relationship with that environment. The discussion highlights the potential of metaphors for establishing thematic, interpersonal and textual links within and across texts, and the important implications that these have for the stories' coherence and for their translation.*

**Keywords:** *intertextuality, metaphor, literature, translation.*

## 1. Introduction

In dealing with literary metaphor translation, this paper addresses a gap in the literature on a complex topic (Gentzler 2000). It approaches the subject from a relatively new perspective on metaphor in translation studies: Lemke's semantically-based theory of intertextuality (1995). The paper suggests that this theory can go some way to systematizing the complexities of metaphorical meaning, a problem less adequately addressed by other meaning-based approaches to translation, e.g. communicative, functional, cognitive or variously integrated approaches. The thematic, interpersonal and textual meanings of metaphors can play a key role in shaping the identity and coherence of a literary text through the intra- and intertextual relationships they realise. This key role is clearly brought into focus by considering metaphor in the Lemkean intertextual perspective. The resulting insights serve an informative purpose in pre- and post-translation analysis and evaluation, providing new parameters along which 'equivalence' can be assessed. The analysis and discussion are illustrated with reference to Giovanni Verga's two collections of short stories about life in rural Sicily – *Novelle Rusticane* (1880) and *Vita dei Campi* (1884) – and English language translations (Lawrence 1928; Cecchetti 1962; McWilliam 2000) of all or selections from them. These literary texts were chosen for their wealth and variety of metaphors, and for the notable translation difficulties which these present, largely on account of the remoteness in time and space of the represented context.

The paper is organised as follows. After grouping views on metaphor in literature according to their particular focus (section 2.) and providing a brief overview of concerns in metaphor translation (3.), a selective account is provided of two approaches to intertextuality – text-linguistic and semiotic – which deal directly or indirectly with metaphor, before describing Lemke’s conceptualisation of intertextuality (4.). Section 5 gives a brief overview of metaphor types in Verga’s stories (5.1) followed by analysis of their role in building narrative themes, characterisation, setting and authorial worldview and in shaping the identity and status of the stories, and of how Lemke’s theorisation of intertextuality can bring these contributions into focus. In section 5.2 the insights from this analysis are discussed from the perspective of translation, before concluding (6.) with an evaluation of the strengths and limits of a Lemkean intertextual approach to metaphor translation in literary texts.

## 2. Perspectives on metaphor in literary texts

Although metaphor is found in many discourse domains, its use in literature has historically attracted more scholarly attention than in other registers, on account of the higher prestige and status traditionally enjoyed by literary texts. Experience, and survey of the vast literature (see Steen, Gibbs 2004) suggest that approaches in literary studies to metaphor (and figurative language generally) fall into three broad groups: writer- and text-centred approaches; reader-centred approaches, and variously ‘intertextual’ approaches. Both writer-/text-centred and reader-centred approaches may refer explicitly or implicitly to notions of intertextuality in their discussion of metaphors.

Writer- and text-centred approaches are concerned above all with the aesthetic, poetic and expressive functions of metaphors. They have a longer tradition and find adoption in school and university literature programmes and in literary criticism generally. Metaphors are seen as manifestations of the individual writer’s creativity and originality. They confer value and prestige on the literary text, playing an important role in distinguishing a literary from a non-literary work: hence the common opposition between ‘literary’ metaphors, which are seen as original and creative, and ‘non-literary’ metaphors, which may be conventional, ‘dead’, or just not very exciting. Newmark endorses this distinction and prescribes that ‘original metaphors’ in literary works must be translated because they “contain the core of an important writer’s message, his personality, his comment on life” (1981: 112). In writer- and text-centred approaches, an aspect of the intertextuality of metaphors may emerge in references to their allusive capabilities: metaphors are often discussed in terms of their power to evoke other authors (shakespearian/dantesque metaphor), literary genres (bucolic/gothic metaphors) or works (e.g. biblical metaphors). These allusions however are considered as being ‘in the text’ and/or the expression of a writer’s imaginative mind.

Reader-centred approaches are more recent and may be seen as a development of the cognitive approach to metaphor launched by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). They are empirically concerned with how metaphors are interpreted and understood by readers. Literature and art are rich sources of metaphors and provide a wealth of readily available material for such studies (see e.g. Steen 1994; Semino, Steen 2008; Shonoda 2012, and in cartoon art, El Refaie 2003, 2009). Though focused on reader interpretation of metaphor, this shift away from the artist and text generally involves

addressing otherwise largely unexplored contextual and intertextual issues in metaphor. El Refaie's work (2003, 2009) on viewer/reader interpretation of metaphors in cartoons emphasises the role of sociocultural background and discourse context and explores the extent to which comprehension of different types of conceptual metaphor is general or individual. Much earlier, Steen's empirical study of reader understanding of metaphors in literature found that "intertextuality-oriented operations were used often and consistently" by readers (Steen 1994: 113). The importance of intertextual considerations in understanding metaphor leads Shonoda (2012) to use models of metaphor interpretation to account for reader interpretation of intertextuality in children's fictional works. These reader-centred studies variously refer to sociocultural and discourse context, but use the term intertextuality – if at all – without reference to any descriptive model. Drawing on Lemke's theorisation of intertextuality, in section 4. below I will develop further the notion of intertextuality in relation to metaphor, and suggest how looking at metaphor in this perspective may be useful for pre-translation analysis and translation practice.

Both the above approaches draw on various more or less generalised modes of metaphor classification (Prandi 2010) and description. Common classificatory terms used in discourse on literature are based on criteria such as novelty (dead/stock/conventional, creative/original metaphor), inferrability (implied/absolute metaphor), complexity (mixed metaphor), extent (extended/mega- metaphor) or quality of either the figurative term (natural/animal metaphor) or the thing or idea described (conceptual metaphor). Reader-centred, cognitive approaches may use Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) three-part distinction of conceptual metaphors into orientational, ontological or structural types. Descriptions of metaphor in either camp concur in seeing it as a more or less familiar, non-literal transfer of meaning from one semantic domain to another. Richards' (1936) classic distinction of metaphor's component parts into the *tenor*, or 'literal subject' and the *vehicle*, or 'figurative subject' may be used, or the later terms of *figure* and *ground*, or (in cognitive approaches) *source* and *target domains*. I will use Richards' terminology in this paper. Following other authors who variously include under 'metaphor' one or more other traditionally distinguished rhetorical figures (e.g. Broeck 1981: 74-76; Newmark 1988: 104; Deignan, Potter 2004; Monti 2006: 119; Shen 2008) I will adopt a broad view of metaphor covering various types of figurative or non-literal language expressing a resemblance relation, and which Verga's stories abound in: similes, synecdoche, metonyms, idioms, proverbial expressions and stock or conventional metaphors.

Finally, a number of works in literary studies – too many to list here – deal with metaphors in a sometimes loosely defined intertextual perspective, inspired by Bakhtin's work on heteroglossia and Kristeva's (1980) development of his ideas. Frameworks for discussing intertextuality are outlined in section 3 below. This section also develops the two component parts of metaphor – tenor and vehicle – in relation to intertextuality.

### 3. Concerns in metaphor translation

Given their task as mediators between languages and cultures, we might expect that translators would have the advantage over literary scholars where investigations of contextual and intertextual aspects of metaphor are concerned. Instead, translation scholars over time have continued to express surprise at the limited amount of work done in translation studies on metaphor in general (Dagut 1976; Snell-Hornby 1988;

Gentzler 2000). Gentzler regrets the tendency of translators to consider metaphor as “mere ornament” and “reduce the polyvalence and resonance of metaphors to more common usage, sometimes omitting the translation of metaphors entirely” (Gentzler 2000: 941) pointing to a lack either of semantic awareness, or time, skill and daring.

Schäffner (2004: 1254-1258) and Monti (2006: 118-119) provide more recent overviews of the different schools of thought on metaphor translatability. The translation difficulties these schools describe reflect the particular translation approach being adopted (linguistic, text-linguistic, functionalist, cognitive, or an integration of two or more of these). Much of the discussion about translatability turns on the degree of novelty of metaphors (their *informativity* in Beaugrande and Dressler’s textlinguistics); the degree of culture-boundedness; the complexity of the meanings they express; their functionality in the text, and the problem of translation equivalence.

Ideas about feasibility and procedures to be followed in translating metaphor vary somewhat. For Broeck (1981: 84), for example, the more original and less culture-bound a metaphor, the easier it is to translate: idioms and clichés or stock metaphors present a more complex translation task than creative ones. Snell-Hornby (1988: 55-63) by contrast like Dagut (1976: 32-33) refutes the notion of generalising rules for metaphor translation and advocates a more *ad hoc* approach, emphasising the need for cross-cultural sensitivity and flexibility. Newmark prescribes seven, oft-cited procedures for translating stock metaphors (1981: 87-91): reproduction; replacement by TL metaphor; replacement by TL simile; paraphrase; deletion; transfer and supplement with sense. Though his procedures are language-based, Newmark acknowledges intertextuality in one sense, when he says that transferring original metaphors will provide “a source of enrichment for the target language” (1981: 112).

#### 4. Metaphor and intertextuality

Intertextuality is generally agreed to be about relationships between texts, though accounts vary in focus and the degree of descriptive detail. This section briefly outlines two perspectives on intertextuality alluding to the intertextual status of metaphor, and acknowledges some analyses of metaphor and metaphor translation framed within some more or less specified notion of intertextuality. The section then describes Lemke’s account of intertextuality and argues for its value in the analysis and translation of metaphor.

Intertextuality is seen as an essential property of all texts in the textlinguistic approach of Beaugrande and Dressler (1981)<sup>1</sup>, who widen the scope of inquiry beyond the literary focus of work by Bakhtin (1935) on heteroglossia, and Kristeva (1980). Beaugrande and Dressler focus on the mental procedures by which readers/listeners recognise texts through their resemblance to other, similar texts. Their brief discussion (1981: 200-201) of how mental imagery facilitates the recall and retelling of events through foregrounding highlights how an important textual (organising) function of metaphor is fulfilled through intertextual associations. A widely accredited, text-centred view of intertextuality in stylistic or literary analyses focuses instead on discrete elements in texts – *intertexts* – which trigger intertextual

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<sup>1</sup> For Neubert & Shreve (1992: 117) intertextuality of a text is “a property of being like other texts of its kind” and “may be the most important aspect of textuality for the translator”.



relationships. As categories of intertexts Sebeok (1986) proposes reference, cliché, allusion, self-quotation, conventionalisms and meditation (reflection on a prior work). Metaphors can be considered intertexts in that they are allusive, and may also be conventional. Metaphors have been discussed in relation to intertextuality by authors who often use the term synonymously with allusion and ‘influences’, or who see intertextuality as something in the mind of translators/readers (Schäffner 2004: 1261-1264; Federici 2007, and Shonoda 2012, who uses an intertextuality-based variant of cognitive metaphor interpretation).

Lemke’s model of intertextuality (Lemke 1995) is valuable because it provides a semantically based typology of intertextual relationships. These relationships, as I will show, are pertinent to metaphor description and translation. Lemke’s model like some others draws on the Bakhtinian notion of heteroglossia (1935), and sees intertextuality as a social phenomenon, rather than as something in the text or in the mind of the reader/writer/translator:

[...] authors may make meaning in the context of production of a text, but readers do this work in the context of interpreting it. Similarities in the meanings made on these two occasions are characteristics of the community’s meaning-making practices, and not characteristics of authors, readers, or texts as such. (Lemke 1995: 37)

In Lemke’s view, any unit of grammar, text or discourse – morpheme, word, group, clause, paragraph – can cohere with other discourses. *Intertexts* are other texts in the intertextual system, rather than discrete items in texts. Lemke takes inspiration also from Halliday’s semantic grammar (Halliday, Matthiessen 2004) with its three language metafunctions: the experiential (language as representation), the interpersonal (language as interaction) and the textual (language as organisation). Lemke postulates three types of intertextual relationship based on these different types of meaning. Thematic ties are set up between texts with shared experiential meaning (texts about the same topic): such texts are said to be *co-thematic*. Orientational ties pertain when texts share a particular standpoint or attitude towards some experiential topic: such texts are *co-orienting*. Generic ties occur where texts belong to the same genre: texts related in this way are said to be *co-generic*. A fourth kind of tie related to the third (because it is organisation-based) refers to links between parts of the overall organisation of text: such ties are called *co-actional*<sup>2</sup>. Texts sharing one or more of these types of intertextual relation are said to belong to abstract patterns of semantic relations which Lemke terms *intertextual formations*. Lemke’s semantically based types of intertextual ties are particularly relevant to mapping the complex intertextuality of metaphors.

Metaphors fulfil a range of functions that can also be related to Halliday’s three linguistic metafunctions. As discussed by Goatly (1997: 148), metaphor fills lexical gaps (the experiential function); it foregrounds meanings and enhances memorability (the textual function), and most obviously, it expresses attitude and ideology and has aesthetic value (the interpersonal function). All these functions of metaphor have an intertextual dimension that can be related to Lemke’s semantically based types of intertextual relationship. Metaphor can function as a powerful cohesive device, linking to themes, attitudes and to ‘actions’ of comparing, in the intertextual environment.

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<sup>2</sup> This principle is illustrated in Thibault (1990: 104-112), who shares Lemke’s outlook on intertextuality.

Lemke focuses on *intertextual thematic formations* (ITFs) rather than on orienting or generic formations<sup>3</sup>. To explain how thematic ties are made through linguistic resources, and how through them, texts converge with or diverge from other texts in the intertextual system, Lemke extends Hasan's notion of cohesive ties in texts (Hasan 1994) which are based on relations of synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy and metonymy. Lemke and also Thibault (1990) are interested in how ITFs typically combine with intertextual orienting formations in registers, dialects, genres/discourse types, and in uncovering the often implicit ideology in these discourse formations.

This focus on how interpersonal or orientational meanings are mapped onto ideational ones through patterns of association in the intertextual environment is key to understanding how metaphors mean what they do. Metaphors attribute evaluative meanings to things and concepts. These evaluative meanings are implicit, and have to be recovered from the intertextual environment<sup>4</sup>. Metaphors also position readers and fictional characters and are linked to ideologies (Goatly 2008), as discussed in section 5 below.

## 5. Metaphor translation in Verga's *Vita dei Campi* and *Novelle Rusticane*<sup>5</sup>

Various translators of Verga's *novelle*, and Verga himself (Chiappelli 1954) have commented on the difficulties presented by his stories<sup>6</sup>. The historical reality they describe is remote from the experience of even urban-dwelling Italian readers contemporary with the publication dates of his stories (in the second half of the nineteenth century, the litter was still a mode of transport for the well-to-do in Sicily, where good roads were scarce). Particularly challenging however are some of Verga's stylistic choices in language, which include mixing Sicilian local dialect with metropolitan, more 'standard' Italian, and having both the narrator and characters use idiomatic expressions and proverbs characteristic of the regional communities which are the protagonists and subject matter of his tales. As stated earlier, I consider this use of figurative language as falling within the domain of metaphor. Metaphor in this broad sense then, is a key issue for translators of Verga's stories, and needs careful consideration.

### 5.1. Intertextuality and metaphor types in Verga's short stories

Zoomorphic and conceptual metaphors abound, collectively expressing Verga's pessimistic vision of humankind as sharing with animals a life of suffering and death (Oliva 1990). So do popular idioms (a form of dead metaphor), fulfilling the verist tradition's requirement for local colour. Closely allied to idioms are proverbs, capturing in popular metaphorical formulations rhetorical arguments about how the

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<sup>3</sup> Attitude is less meaningful until we know at what (ideational item) it is directed, or what it is caused by. Intertextual generic formations are perhaps less of a novelty than ITFs: they bear some relation to Hasan's notion of generic structure potential, or GSP (Halliday, Hasan 1989), an abstract category for modelling the activity-based stages of genres.

<sup>4</sup> In the appraisal framework for describing the language of evaluation (Martin, White 2005) metaphor is the most powerful of three postulated forms of implicit evaluation.

<sup>5</sup> Giovanni Verga's two collections of short stories in the verist tradition were published respectively in 1880 and 1884.

<sup>6</sup> Ellen McRae (2011: 277-285) provides an updated list of English language translations of Verga's works up to 2011. The translations by D.H. Lawrence of *Vita dei Campi* and *Novelle Rusticane* have been republished several times.

world is or should be. Metonyms or synecdochic metaphors are used, particularly for naming individuals and classes of people (Swain 2001), e.g. *pentolaccia* ('nasty pot'), the protagonist in a story of the same title, and *cappelli* ('hats') a popular term of reference for the gentry (in *Libertà*). There are stock metaphors current in local speech, e.g. "*ti mangerei come il pane*" ("I could eat you like bread", lovestruck Turiddu says to Santa in *Cavalleria Rusticana*). More rarely, we find literary or 'original' metaphors with romantic or pastoral idyllic associations, particularly in descriptions of nature.

Analysts of metaphor translation and competent translation practitioners deal with many aspects of the types of metaphors above, and talk about them in different terms, depending on their particular approach: linguistic; text-linguistic; cognitive; communicative or functional (3.). Polyvalence, connotations, associations, resonances, sociocultural context and so forth are referred to in the descriptions and recommendations for translation procedures (deletion, paraphrase, literal translation, cultural/functional/communicative equivalent etc.).

Against this background, the advantages of the Lemkean view of intertextuality in dealing with metaphor translation are several. In Lemke's theorisation, intertextuality is not a property of texts; it is about the meaningful relations that are constructed in communities between texts, synchronically and diachronically, and which distinguish texts as similar or different, valuable or not, ordinary or rare, familiar or strange. In this view, to posit that intertextuality is something that can be 'transferred' in translation (cf. Neubert, Shreve 1992) is off the point. The question is rather, what kinds of intertextual relationships will, can, should or does the translation establish in the target language culture (TLC), and how? Will, should, can or does the translation look more like the original, or more like other texts in the TLC?

The different types of metaphorical expressions described above set up various thematic, orienting and generic intertextual ties, e.g. to ideologies of class and gender, to the authorial worldview, and to local Sicilian dialect and culture. They play a key role in building coherence, both locating the work within a literary tradition and contemporary society (the contexts of creation and reception, Hasan 1989: 100-101), and constructing characterisation, setting and themes (in the represented, fictional context). The coherence-building role of metaphor can be made more visible for translation purposes by considering it in the light of the three kinds of intertextual meanings posited by Lemke. The next section develops this notion further, and explores the implications for translation. It selects some intertextually challenging metaphorical expressions from Verga's short stories and examines them from the Lemkean perspective outlined in 4<sup>7</sup>. It considers how far translation strategies like Newmark's (literal, one-to-one, cultural/functional equivalent etc), based on notions of equivalence are meaningful in this perspective, and whether or not it makes any sense to talk about 'intertextual equivalence' or, in Neubert's terms, of 'equivalent intertextuality'.

## 5.2. Metaphor and Lemkean intertextuality: implications for translation

Most metaphorical expressions contribute through their intertextual thematic, axiological and generic meanings to more than one of the fictional parameters above

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<sup>7</sup> On the assumption that, although intertextuality depends partly on individual experience, some general observations can be made, about thematic, orienting and generic ties.

(characterisation, setting and themes in the fictional works, the latter's identity in relation to other literary works and genres, and the authorial worldview). Take, for example, the synecdoche *cappelli* ('hats') in the story *Libertà*:

1. Le falci, le mani, I cenci, I sassi, tutto rosso di sangue! Ai galantuomini! Ai **cappelli!** Amazza! Amazza! Adosso ai **cappelli!** (*Libertà*, Verga 1979: 338)
  - a. Sickles, hands, rags, stones, everything red with blood! The gentry! The **hatfolks!** Kill them all! Down with **the hatfolks!** (tr. Lawrence 1984: 151)
  - b. The sickles, the hands, the rags, the very stones, everything red with blood. "Get the rich men!" – "Get **the hats!**" – "Kill them all!" – "Let's get **the hats!**" (tr. Cecchetti 1962: 207)
  - c. Sickles, rags, hands, stones were all dripping with it [blood]."Get the bigwigs! Get **the felt hats!** Kill 'em! Kill 'em! Get **the felt hats!**" (tr. McWilliam 2000: 208)

'Cappelli' has generic links to the literary movement verism (it is popular speech), and thematic and orientational links to social class differences in 19<sup>th</sup> century Sicily (peasants versus the ruling middle and upper classes), to a political ideology of revolution (the story is based on an uprising in 1860 in Bronte, Sicily, in the context of Italian unification), and to the affective disposition (hatred) of a downtrodden class towards its rulers. This kind of multi-functionality makes many of Verga's metaphorical expressions challenging to translate. The above three translations each use some kind of (semi)literal or one-to-one procedure, resulting in the neologisms 'hatfolks'; 'hats' and 'felt hats'. The synecdoche's affective meanings of bitterness and hate are here recoverable from the co-text, as is its thematic referent ('gentry' 'rich men' 'bigwigs'). Lawrence's compound noun 'hatfolks' perhaps conveys better and more spontaneously than 'hats' the class associations, which Cecchetti explains in a scholarly footnote (1962: 141), and which in McWilliam's 'felt hats' emerge with difficulty.

Some metaphorical expressions in Verga have salient orientational intertextual meanings that are particularly pressing for the translator. This is often the case with metaphorical nicknames (Swain, 2001). The brevity of the short story genre does not generally permit well-roundedness of characters. Also, *verismo*, the literary genre within which Verga is writing, is supposed to be a documentary-like form of dispassionate writing. Verga partly circumvents these constraints on characterisation through the orientational meanings of metaphors, which have to be recovered from the intertextual environment. They imply the positioning of the fictional characters and of the communities to which they belong (their prejudices, superstitions, beliefs). Metaphors enable the foregrounding of attitudinal dispositions of otherwise 'flat' characters, endowing them with passion and emotional depth. They are at times relatively unproblematic in translation, e.g. the sexual hunger inherent in *la Lupa*, the female protagonist of the story is recoverable from the literal translation 'She-Wolf' by Cecchetti and McWilliam, as is the furtiveness and stealth of *Gramigna*, a bandit and social outcast, when the comparison to a wolf ('come un lupo', Verga 1972: 204) is literally rendered with 'like a wolf' (Cecchetti 1962:89; Lawrence 1988: 149; McWilliam 2000: 93).

However, the name *Gramigna* ('dog grass') is itself metaphorical and implies ideological and attitudinal meanings that must be intertextually retrieved. McWilliam, Cecchetti and Lawrence all opt to carry over the Italian name into the English translation, and provide a technical footnote (Cecchetti 1962: 88; Lawrence 1987: 147) explaining its pejorative meaning as a noxious weed, harmful to farmers' crops. Other metaphorical names play a role in characterisation. *Pentolaccia* is the nickname of the protagonist of a story with the same title. Ideationally, the vehicle is

a cooking pot, though already the pejorative suffix *-accia* gives it a negative evaluative meaning ('a nasty cooking pot'). Lawrence's rendering, *Brothpot*, leaves the pejorative association out of the translation, unlike Cecchetti's solution: *Stinkpot*. The name is also symbolic of shame and stupidity: *Pentolaccia*'s wife is unfaithful to him with a wealthy noble, and with the money she receives for her favours, is able to keep a full pot of food on the hob for the unsuspecting, cuckolded husband. These thematic, ideological and orientational meanings of metaphors have to be inferred from the inter- and intratextual environment.

Idioms are also multifunctional in their intertextuality, capturing not only local colour but attitudes and ideologies. All three translations below substitute with a partially equivalent 'face to face' the idiomatic expression *vedersi sul mostaccio*, which has intertextual orienting ties to a southern Italian ideology of male virility and honour, and to an attitude of offended dignity. These meanings are lost in the translation. The context is the aftermath of the violent peasant uprising against the upper classes recounted in *Libertà*: Neli Pirrù is on trial in the courtroom for his role, and in the audience sees the apothecary's son, who has taken up with his wife in revenge, while Neli has been in prison:

2. Neli Pirrù doveva **vedersi sul mostaccio** quello dello speziale, che s'era imparentato con lui a tradimento! (*Libertà*, Verga 1979)

a. Neli Pirru had to see the apothecary's lad **face to face**, the fellow who'd become his relation underhand! (tr. Lawrence 1984: 157)

b. And Neli Pirru had to find himself **face to face** with the apothecary's son, who had become a relative of his in such a tricky way! (tr. Cecchetti 1962: 215)

c. And there was Neli Pirru, standing **face to face** with the chemist's son, who had played him such a trick to become his in-law! (tr. McWilliam 2010: 214)

This is a case perhaps of what Lemke calls "missing registers" (1985): there is no equivalent ideology in Anglo-Saxon communities with which to cohere. To capture these intertextual interpersonal meanings and establish a tie with the source culture (SC) intertextual system it would be necessary to supplement the translation with a paraphrase, or semi-literal translation capturing attitudinal meaning, e.g. "his moustache bristled at the sight of the apothecary's son...".

Metonyms for local institutions are also intertextually challenging for translation. The *Ruota* refers thematically to the practice of leaving illegitimate or unwanted babies on a wheel in the wall of a convent, and ties orientationally with a discourse of sin, shame and poverty. The anonymous visitor would then ring the bell and the nuns would come, turn the wheel and take away the child, who would likely be raised to a life of semi-slavery in service. The excerpt in which the metonym appears describes the killing of a priest during the peasant uprising in *Libertà*:

3. Non mi ammazzate, ché sono in peccato mortale! — La gnà Lucia, il peccato mortale; la gnà Lucia che il padre gli aveva venduta a 14 anni, l'inverno della fame, e riempieva **la Ruota** e le strade di monelli affamati. (*Libertà*, Verga 1979)

a. Lucia being the mortal sin; Neighbour Lucia, whose father had sold her to the priest when she was fourteen years old, at the time of the famine winter, and she had ever since been filling the streets and **the Refuge** with hungry brats. (tr. Lawrence 1984: 192)

b. Lucia was his mortal sin. Lucia, who had been sold to him by her father when she was fourteen, during the famine winter, and who now filled **the Cloister Wheel** and the streets with starving urchins. (tr. Cecchetti 1962: 207)

c. Gna Lucia was the mortal sin he meant. Her father had sold her to the Reverend when she was fourteen, the winter of the famine, and she had been filling the **Cloister Wheel** and the streets with starving brats ever since. (tr. McWilliam 2000: 209)

Perhaps because the institution of the *Ruota* ('baby hatch' or 'foundling wheel') was obsolete in the SC, Lawrence here has chosen a cultural semi-equivalent, *the Refuge*, which loses the axiological ties to a discourse of sin which in the Italian ST is opposed to a discourse of social injustice and exploitation. Cecchetti (1962: 207) and McWilliam supply technical, ideational explanations for their closer rendering 'Cloister Wheel', respectively in a foot- and end-note. Even if more accurate translations had been used, it is doubtful whether the ideology of shame would be more intertextually accessible, given the historical and cultural gap.

Metaphors also reinforce thematic meanings through their intertextuality. The opening lines to *Pane Nero* contain three metaphors, whose tenors are major recurrent themes throughout the stories: death, discord, illness and loss of material goods. The vehicles are actions: closing eyes (for dying); waging war (for having an argument), and eating, of flesh (for weakening the body) and of belongings (for obligations to pay bills incurred by death). These vehicles imply orientational meanings towards the themes in their marked lexical choices (euphemism in the first case, and hyperbole in the latter two), which have to be intertextually recovered. They compound the pessimistic outlook of the individual story and the stories collectively. The three translations below show different priorities:

4. **Appena chiuse gli occhi** compare Nanni, e ci era ancora il prete colla stola, **scoppiò subito la guerra** tra i figliuoli, a chi toccasse pagare le spese, ché il reverendo lo mandarono via con l'aspersorio sotto l'ascella. Perché la malattia di compare Nanni era stata lunga, **di quelle che vi mangiano la carne addosso, e la roba della casa.** (Verga 1979: 300)

a. Neighbour Nanni **had hardly taken his last breath**, and the priest in his stole was still there, when **the quarrel broke** out between the children as to who should pay the costs of the burial, and **they went at it** till the priest with the aspersorium under his arm was driven away. For Neighbour Nanni's illness had been a long one, the sort that **eats away the flesh off your bones** and the **things out of your house.** (tr. Lawrence 1984: 109)

b. No sooner had Nanni **closed his eyes for the last time**, with the priest standing over him in his stole, than his children were **at one another's throats** over who should **foot the bill** for the funeral. The priest was **sent packing** empty-handed, with the aspergillum under his arm. For Nanni had been sick a long time, with the sort of illness **that costs you an arm and a leg and the family furniture** too. (tr. McWilliam 2010: 173)

c. As soon as Nanni **closed his eyes**, and the priest with his stole on was still there, **a war broke out** among the children as to who had to pay for the funeral, and they drove the reverend away, the aspersorium under his arm. Because Nanni's illness had been long, one of those **which eat the flesh on your bones** and **the things you have in your house** (tr. Cecchetti 1962: 165)

McWilliam adds idiomatic expressions where there are none ('foot the bill' and 'sent packing') emphasising social dialect and local colour, and makes the orientational meanings of conflict more immediate ('at one another's throats'). On the other hand his translation loses the evocation of wasting flesh which is kept by Lawrence and Cecchetti, and the reference to the family furniture implies a shift to a more middle class register (Parks 2011).

The ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings of metaphors we have seen above have an intra- and intertextual dimension entailing multiple thematic, orienting and generic ties with local dialect and social mores, and more generally with ideology and discourses (on marital infidelity, honour, shame, gender, moral integrity), genres and registers in the real and (other) fictional worlds. Such intertextual ties are part of the meaning of metaphors. I propose that in the particular patterns of ties which they instantiate and repeat throughout a story or across the set

of stories, metaphors in Verga's *novelle* position the text less as similar to other, prior texts, and much more as distinct from other, prior texts. These patterns of intra- and intertextual ties realise a binding function, not unlike referencing and lexical cohesion in texts (Halliday and Hasan, 1976; Thibault, 1990). They contribute to the stories' unity, coherence and identity, which are intertextually as well as textually determined, and this has implications for metaphor translation.

## 6. Concluding remarks

Lemkean intertextuality means a shift in the analytical focus from the writer/reader/translator/text, to the intertextual environment of texts. Intertextuality is not a textual property or a form of mental processing, or a formal relationship between discrete, bounded elements in one text and another. It is the set of relationships which pertain between texts in a community and which enable members of that community to distinguish convergences and divergences between texts of various kinds. I have argued that this focus on the intertextual environment is sensitive to the meaning-making potential of metaphor in literary texts.

Lemke's distinction of intertextual relations into thematic (ideational) orientational (interpersonal) and generic (textual) types provides a framework for generalising about the complex meanings of metaphor. Metaphor can be seen as more or less conventional couplings of ideational and (implicit) interpersonal meanings whose text-specificity is interpreted through multiple thematic, orienting and generic relations with the surrounding textual and intertextual environment. This perspective constrains thinking in terms not of 'transferring' the intertextuality of metaphors, but in terms of degrees of contiguity between the ST and TT intertextual environments, which attempts to translate metaphor will probe. This leaves the question of translation procedure for metaphor substantially open, and suggests rather the usefulness of more empirical research on how metaphors in literary texts have been translated and how they mean through intertextuality in the original and translated versions.

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# Tradurre le ripetizioni in *Noi* di Evgenij Zamjatin

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**Abstract:** *L'intervento, che nasce come riflessione a margine della traduzione del romanzo My [Noi, 1919-20] dello scrittore russo-sovietico Evgenij Ivanovič Zamjatin (1884-1937), intende attirare l'attenzione sulla difficoltà che deve affrontare il traduttore quanto debba rendere una figura antichissima, ma a tutt'oggi efficace, qual è la ripetizione. Per Noi (come per altre opere dello scrittore), infatti, Zamjatin ha adottato una vera e propria 'strategia della iterazione', di cui si trovano consistenti tracce anche negli scritti teorico-pratici dello scrittore e in Tecnica della prosa, singolare volume che raccoglie le sue lezioni tenute nel 1920 a tutta una serie di aspiranti scrittori del tempo presso la Casa delle Arti dell'allora Pietrogrado. Una nutrita serie di esempi, seguita da un commento che illustra i casi più problematici, documenta come il traduttore sia tenuto a rispettare il più possibile la trama di unità lessicali uguali fra loro o aventi radici simili nella lingua di partenza, anche a costo di entrare in collisione con le consuetudini della lingua di arrivo. Il 'sistema' di ripetizioni zamjatiniano, infatti, è intrecciato profondamente con la poetica stessa del romanzo non soltanto sul piano stilistico e strutturale, ma anche tematico.*

**Parole chiave:** *Evgenij Zamjatin, traduzione letteraria, ricezione letteratura russa in Italia, Noi (romanzo), ripetizione.*

## 1.

Tradurre Evgenij Zamjatin, scrittore russo-sovietico nato nel 1884 a Lebedjan' (a sud-est di Mosca) e morto a Parigi nel 1937, significa confrontarsi con uno stile straordinariamente, quasi maniacalmente, sorvegliato, dove le parole sembrano soppesate con il bilancino e non avvicendabili – in russo, ben s'intende – da sinonimi di sorta, uniche e insostituibili, quasi raggelate nella loro perfezione. Ciò, in potenza, potrebbe anche rivelarsi un vantaggio per un traduttore: una volta individuata la parola nella lingua di arrivo (LA) che semanticamente intersechi nel modo più ampio possibile quella della lingua di partenza (LP) – cosa non semplice, va da sé, ma non impossibile – il gioco parrebbe fatto, il traghettatore dal russo all'italiano potrebbe ritenere concluso il proprio compito.

Il lavoro procederebbe così se le parole trascelte volta per volta da Zamjatin ricorressero con frequenza 'normale' nelle sue opere. Così, purtroppo, non è, e il ricorrere si fa più intenso laddove, banalmente, il numero delle pagine da voltare in italiano è maggiore. Se riferiamo una cosa così apparentemente ovvia è perché, prima di intraprendere una nuova versione del romanzo più noto e importante di Zamjatin, *My [Noi, 1919-20]* (vedi Zamjatin 2013)<sup>1</sup>, ci eravamo resi conto solo parzialmente di quanto la scrittura zamjatiniana fosse imperniata in modo così saldo su uno dei procedimenti retorici più antichi, ossia la figura della 'ripetizione'. Quanto ci era capitato di tradurre – la coppia di "racconti inglesi", *Ostrovitjane [Isolani]* e

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<sup>1</sup> L'opera, che prende il titolo dal pronome in prima persona plurale (*Мы [Noi]*), si configura come un romanzo di carattere antiutopico ambientato nel futuro, dove viene presentata una società di stampo totalitario regolata da un sistema di efficienza e precisione industriale di tipo tayloristico.

*Lovec čelovekov* [Il pescatore di uomini], e il racconto *Iks* [Ics] (cfr. Zamjatin 1999b, 2001) – era materiale di entità relativamente ridotta e, di conseguenza, sollevava percentualmente in misura minore questo problema. È stato approntando un nuovo *Noi* ‘italiano’<sup>2</sup> che la questione ci si è appalesata in tutta la sua complessità: la ‘strategia dell’iterazione’ messa in atto dallo scrittore ha evidenziato quali possano esserne i risvolti per chi cerchi di proporle un analogo in un’altra lingua.

## 2.

Alla voce ‘ripetizione’ dell’arcinoto *Dizionario di linguistica e di filologia, metrica, retorica*, troviamo, testualmente, che «la ripetizione è una delle relazioni sintattiche e semantiche a cui è affidata la coesione testuale» ed è vista «come procedura dell’*adiectio* e opposta alla *variatio*» (Garavelli 2004: 658). Sempre alla stessa voce si accenna alla vitalità della *variatio* stessa nelle lingue neolatine, laddove sarebbe molto attenuata o inesistente in altre, tra cui, per esempio, l’inglese e il tedesco (cfr. 659). Tra le lingue che tollerano piuttosto bene l’iterarsi di questa o quella unità lessicale, anche a breve distanza, si può annoverare anche il russo.

Fin da subito, quindi, si profila un problema di ‘galateo’ scritto: un testo programmaticamente incurante di *variatio* come quello approntato da Zamjatin può entrare in rotta di collisione stilistica con l’italiano, dove, invece, avviluppare uno stesso concetto in una rete di vocaboli di significato molto simile continua complessivamente a essere ritenuto contrassegno del ‘bello scrivere’.

Come procedere? Sul piano prescrittivo un teorico della traduzione come Newmark suggerisce che le ripetizioni andrebbero conservate, “a meno che l’originale non sia scritto male o trascurato” (1988: 254). Possiamo dire con certezza che non è il caso di Zamjatin. Secondo Nida una traduzione non dovrebbe alterare i “modelli di ridondanza” dell’originale, pena una scoperta innaturalità della traduzione stessa (1975: 42). Qui, tuttavia, non si tratta di semplici ripetizioni da conservare in quanto tali, né di un ‘semplice’ loro dosaggio che ambisca a rispecchiare la maggiore o minore ‘marcatezza’ ingenerata dal loro accumularsi, tenendo conto del peso specifico che esse hanno nelle rispettive lingue: qui siamo di fronte a una questione più ampia, ossia – come si diceva sopra – di una ‘strategia dell’iterazione’ o, se vogliamo, di una ‘poetica della ripetizione’. La ‘trama’ di unità lessicali che occorrono con frequenza ‘inusitata’, oltre che creare coesione e compattezza, – veri puntelli su cui si regge l’edificio della prosa zamjatiniana – assolve a una funzione di guida per il lettore, che si orienta nel corso della narrazione proprio grazie a questo lessico che si propone e ripropone (e vi sono casi in cui è demandato all’uso di quella – e solo quella – parola l’intendimento di questo o quel punto della vicenda).

Zamjatin stesso che, in quell’insieme di considerazioni di carattere squisitamente prescrittivo (finanche didattico) che è *Tecnica della prosa*, chiede al traduttore “l’occhio ubbidiente del copista” (Zamjatin 1970: 110), si è soffermato su questo

<sup>2</sup> La prima edizione italiana di *My* risale al 1955 per la cura di Ettore Lo Gatto (cfr. Zamjatin 1955, poi variamente ristampato). Nel 2007 (cfr. Zamjatin 2007) ne è uscita una nuova edizione, per la quale rimandiamo a quanto già osservato nella postfazione a Zamjatin 2013: «Segnalo doverosamente anche l’edizione di *Noi* apparsa per Lupetti Editore nel 2007 (e le due edizioni successive 2009, 2011), sebbene, pur avendo meritoriamente riportato sulla scena editoriale italiana il romanzo, non introduca grandi elementi di novità, giacché presenta una traduzione molto vicina a quella ‘storica’ di Ettore Lo Gatto» (Niero 2013: 274, nota 2).

congegno narrativo, battezzandolo con nomi diversi, con implacabile lucidità costruttiva e accentuata autocoscienza in materia di ‘fabbricazione’ di un testo letterario (tratti, questi, tipici anche della saggistica ‘formalisteggiante’ dello scrittore, raccolta in Zamjatin 1999a). Con riferimento alla caratterizzazione dei personaggi zamjatiniani, i quali vengono racchiusi in un particolare fortemente significativo capace di concentrare in sé la loro essenza, Zamjatin ha coniato la definizione di *zritel'nye lejtmotivy* [leitmotiv visivi] (1988: 89) e di *priëm reminiscencij* [artificio delle reminiscenze] (1970: 87-88). Sebbene, in diversi casi, l’incarnazione linguistica di tali espedienti stilistici superi la parola singola, sfociando in vere e proprie immagini, anche quest’ultime restano ancorate a singoli lemmi, che rappresentano l’unità di misura minima dell’iterare. È, insomma, a questo elementare, ma fondamentale, livello, che il ‘copista’ viene messo a dura prova; è – detto altrimenti – la resa di queste parole-traino a mettere in difficoltà volta per volta il traduttore perché ostacola quel normale processo di ricorso a sinonimi o a parole semanticamente affini, che si innesca quando una stessa parola dell’originale viene tradotta diversamente a seconda del contesto in cui si cala e in ossequio agli usi e alla ‘combinabilità’ (*sočetaemost’*) della LA.

Qualora il traduttore decida di serbare immutata l’unità lessicale in questione – ma può, onestamente, non porsi il problema, una volta riconosciuta la rilevanza del procedimento? – può essere costretto, per non smarrire l’effetto di richiamo e rimando, a creare una serie di combinazioni nuove o relativamente nuove nella LA.

### 3.

Riportiamo qualche esempio tra quelli che ci sono parsi più significativi.

Il primo riguarda l’aggettivo *nelepyj* che, contemplato assieme alle occorrenze come avverbio (*nelepo*) e sostantivo (*nelepost’*), appare più di cinquanta volte. I dizionari consultati – tre cartacei (Majzel’-Skvorcova 1977; Dobrovolskaja 1997; Kovalëv 2007), uno *on-line* (*Bol’šoj ital’jano-russkij* [sic] *i russko-ital’janskij slovar’*) – propongono queste soluzioni: ‘assurdo’, ‘ridicolo’, ‘spropositato’, ‘goffo’, ‘sgraziato’, ‘insensato’ (alle quali ci sentiremmo di aggiungere ‘incongruo’).

La nostra scelta, dopo una non breve indecisione tra ‘assurdo’ e ‘insensato’, è caduta su quest’ultimo (che tra l’altro ci consente di ricorrere ad ‘assurdo’ per rendere, in tutta una serie di casi, sia il sostantivo *absurd* sia l’aggettivo *absurdnyj*). Ed ecco i contesti in cui si colloca il vocabolo in questione<sup>3</sup>:

	Originale	Traduzione
1	[...] эти <i>нелепые</i> , безалаберные, глупо-толкующиеся кучи пара. (141)	[...] questi <i>insensati</i> , squinternati, mucchi di vapore in stolido accozzaglia. (9)
2-3	Мне вспомнилась [...] картина в музее: их тогдашний, двадцатых веков, проспект, оглушительно пестрая, путаная толчая людей, колес, животных, афиш, деревьев, красок, птиц... [...] Мне показалось это так неправдоподобно, так <i>нелепо</i> , что я не	Mi era tornato in mente [...] il quadro in un museo: il viale com’era una volta, al tempo dei loro ventesimi secoli, una ressa assordantemente variopinta e aggrovigliata di persone, ruote, animali, locandine, alberi, colori, uccelli... [...] Mi è sembrato così inverosimile, così <i>insensato</i> ,

<sup>3</sup> In questo e nel successivo specchio riportiamo direttamente a piè di citazioni i numeri di pagina riferibili a Zamjatin 2011 (LP) e a Zamjatin 2013 (LA). Abbiamo evidenziato in corsivo soltanto la parola interessata. Gli altri, rarissimi, corsivi in italiano restituiscono parole che, in russo, sono evidenziate grazie alla *razrjadka*, ossia un’accentuazione della spaziatura tra le varie lettere.

	выдержал и расхохотался вдруг. (143)	che non mi sono trattenuto e sono scoppiato a ridere forte. (12)
4	Терпеть не могу, когда смотрят на мои руки: все в волосах, лохматые – какой-то <i>нелепый</i> атавизм. (144)	Non sopporto che mi guardino le mani, sono piene di peli, villose: un' <i>insensata</i> forma di atavismo. (14)
5	Как и все – я слышал только <i>нелепую</i> , суетливую трескотню струн. (151)	Anch'io, come tutti, udivo soltanto un <i>insensato</i> , frenetico strepito di corde. (25)
6	Или, может быть, что-нибудь новое – относительно... относительно той? Хотя уж тут, как будто... Нет, это было бы слишком <i>нелепо</i> . (151)	Oppure, forse, c'era qualcosa di nuovo a riguardo... a riguardo di quella donna? Sebbene, qui, a dire il vero ... No, ciò sarebbe stato oltremodo <i>insensato</i> . (27)
7	[...] там, впереди, белеет бельмом облако, <i>нелепое</i> , пухлое [...]. (155)	[...] là, più avanti, biancheggia l'albume di una nuvola <i>insensata</i> , paffuta [...]. (32)
8	[...] самая <i>нелепая</i> из всех их «квартир». (157)	[...] è il loro 'appartamento' più <i>insensato</i> . (35)
9	Какая <i>нелепая</i> , нерасчетливая трата человеческой энергии, – не правда ли? (157)	Che spreco <i>insensato</i> e incauto di energia umana, non è vero? (35)
10	[...] <i>нелепые</i> «квартиры» [...]. (157)	[...] <i>insensati</i> 'appartamenti' [...]. (35)
11	[...] отчего это <i>нелепое</i> состояние? (158)	[...] come mai questa <i>insensata</i> situazione? (36)
12	По-видимому, даже ее [старухи] слабеющие мозги понимали всю <i>нелепость</i> и рискованность поведения этой женщины. (159)	Anche il suo [della vecchietta] cervello rammollito, evidentemente, capiva tutta l' <i>insensatezza</i> e i rischi del comportamento di quella donna. (39)
13	[...] <i>нелепый</i> сон [...]. (161)	[...] sogno <i>insensato</i> [...]. (41)
14	[...] я улыбался – все шире, <i>нелепей</i> [...]. (162)	[...] mi aprivo in un sorriso sempre più ampio e <i>insensato</i> [...]. (43)
15	[...] они служили своему <i>нелепому</i> , неведомому Богу – мы служим <i>лепому</i> и точнейшим образом ведомому [...]. (168)	[...] quelle servivano il loro Dio <i>insensato</i> e ignoto, mentre le nostre ne servono uno <i>sensato</i> e perfettamente noto [...]. (54)
16	[...] будет трудный, <i>нелепый</i> , абсолютно нелогичный разговор... (172)	[...] si avvierà una conversazione faticosa, <i>insensata</i> , assolutamente illogica... (60)
17	Все это – явно была <i>нелепая</i> фантазия, действие яда. (176)	Era solo una mia <i>insensata</i> fantasia, effetto del veleno. (69)
18	Все это – пустяки, и все эти <i>нелепые</i> ощущения – бред, результат вчерашнего отравления... (177)	Tutte queste sono sciocchezze e tutte queste <i>insensate</i> sensazioni sono delirio, frutto dell'avvelenamento di ieri sera... (70)
19	Помню, я подумал: «Такая у него <i>нелепая</i> , асимметричная внешность и такой правильно мыслящий ум». (179)	Ricordo di aver pensato: “Un aspetto così <i>insensato</i> , asimmetrico e, insieme, un cervello che pensa correttamente”. (73)
20	Я думал: как могло случиться, что древним не бросалась в глаза вся <i>нелепость</i> их литературы и поэзии. (182)	Pensavo: come è potuto succedere che agli antichi non saltasse agli occhi tutta l' <i>insensatezza</i> della loro letteratura e della loro poesia? (78)
21	Так же смешно и <i>нелепо</i> , как то, что море у древних круглые сутки тупо билось о берег и заключенные в волнах миллионы килограммометров – уходили только на подогревание чувств у влюбленных. (182-183)	Altrettanto ridicolo e <i>insensato</i> era il fatto che il mare, presso gli antichi, si infrangesse sulla riva per giornate intere e i milioni di chilogrammi contenuti nelle onde altro non facessero se non rinfocolare i sentimenti degli innamorati. (78)
22	СОВЕРШЕННО <i>НЕЛЕПОЕ</i> ПРОИСШЕСТВИЕ (184)	UN AVVENIMENTO DEL TUTTO <i>INSENSATO</i> (80)
23-24	[...] не все ли равно одной <i>нелепостью</i>	[...] un' <i>insensatezza</i> in più o una in meno

	больше или меньше? Кроме того, я уверен: раньше или позже всякую <i>нелепость</i> мне удастся включить в какой-нибудь силлогизм. (187)	fa qualche differenza? Inoltre sono convinto che, presto o tardi, riuscirò a chiudere qualsiasi <i>insensatezza</i> in un sillogismo. (87)
25	– Уйдите, – но от слез вышло у нее «Ундите» – и вот почему-то врезалась и эта <i>нелепая</i> мелочь. (189)	– Mi lasci – trasformato, però, dalle lacrime in “Mi lanci”: ed ecco che, per qualche motivo, anche questo <i>insensato</i> dettaglio mi è rimasto impresso. (90)
26	Около 5-ти столетий назад, когда работа в Операционном еще только налаживалась, нашли глупцы, которые сравнивали Операционное с древней инквизицией, но ведь это так <i>нелепо</i> , как ставить на одну точку хирурга, делающего трахеотомию, и разбойника с большой дороги [...]. (190)	Circa cinque secoli fa, quando il lavoro all’Ufficio Operazioni era ancora in fase di approntamento, qualche idiota aveva pensato di paragonare l’Ufficio Operazioni all’antica Inquisizione; ma è altrettanto <i>insensato</i> che mettere sullo stesso piano un chirurgo che esegue una tracheotomia e un brigante di strada [...]. (92)
27	[...] и я ловлю себя на том, что <i>нелепо</i> , не в такт шагам, размахиваю руками. (195)	[...] ed ecco che mi sorprende ad agitare le braccia in modo <i>insensato</i> , sordo con il moto delle gambe. (98)
28	<i>Нелепо</i> опрокинутый, подвешенный за ноги – я молчал, весь полыхая от стыда. (195)	<i>Insensatamente</i> capovolto, appeso per i piedi, tacevo, rosso di vergogna. (100)
29	«А вдруг он, желтоглазый, – в своей <i>нелепой</i> , грязной куче листьев, в своей невычисленной жизни – счастливее нас?» (200)	“E se poi il tizio dagli occhi gialli – nel suo mucchio di foglie <i>insensato</i> e sporco, nella sua vita non precalcolata – fosse più felice di noi?” (106)
30	Что же, значит, эта <i>нелепая</i> «душа» – так же реальна, как моя юнифа [...]. (205)	Che farci? Significa che questa <i>insensata</i> ‘anima’ era reale come la mia unif [...]. (115)
31	Зачем здесь эти <i>нелепые</i> «сны» [...]? (205)	Che ci fanno, qui, tutti questi ‘sogni’ <i>insensati</i> [...]? (116)
32	[...] и я вижу ясно, что это только отрывок <i>нелепого</i> предрассудка древних – их идеи о «праве». (214)	[...] e vedo chiaramente che si tratta soltanto del residuo di un <i>insensato</i> pregiudizio degli antichi: la loro idea di ‘diritto’. (130)
33	[...] один из моих <i>нелепых</i> «снов». (218)	[...] uno dei miei <i>insensati</i> ‘sogni’. (136)
34	[...] не рассуждая: можно, нельзя, <i>нелепо</i> , разумно – я кинулся в эту точку... (223)	[...] senza riflettere se fosse possibile o impossibile, <i>insensato</i> o sensato, mi sono precipitato verso quel punto... (143)
35	В <i>нелепых</i> , спутанных, затопленных словах я пытаюсь рассказать ей [...] (226)	Con parole <i>insensate</i> , confuse, sommerse, tento di raccontarle [...] (148)
36	И ясно, что вчерашнее <i>нелепое</i> «растворение во вселенной», взятое в пределе, есть смерть. (229)	Ed è chiaro che l’ <i>insensata</i> ‘dissoluzione nell’universo’ verificatasi ieri, se ne viene calcolato il limite, significa morte. (152)
37	Всякому ясно, что принять в расчет их голоса было бы так же <i>нелепо</i> , как принять за часть великолепной, героической симфонии – кашель случайно присутствующих в концертном зале больных... (237)	È chiaro a chiunque che recepire le loro voci sarebbe altrettanto <i>insensato</i> che recepire, come parte di una magnifica sinfonia eroica, la tosse di alcuni malati presenti casualmente in sala... (167)
38	Как рассказать то, что со мною делает этот древний, <i>нелепый</i> , чудесный обряд, когда ее губы касаются моих? (240)	Come raccontare cosa mi succede quando ha luogo questo antico, <i>insensato</i> , meraviglioso rituale delle sue labbra premute sulle mie? (171)
39	Это – или <i>нелепое</i> , безрассудное	O era una forma <i>insensata</i> e imprudente di

	мужество – или тут было что-то еще непонятное мне. (248)	temerarietà oppure qui c'era qualcosa che ancora mi sfuggiva. (186)
40-42	– Это немислимо! Это <i>нелепо</i> ! Неужели тебе не ясно: то, что вы затеаете, – это революция? – Да, революция! Почему же это <i>нелепо</i> ? – <i>Нелепо</i> – потому что революции не может быть. Потому что н а ш а [...] революция была последней. (255)	– È impensabile! È <i>insensato</i> ! Ma davvero non vi è chiaro? Ciò che state ordendo è una rivoluzione. – Sì, una rivoluzione! Cosa c'è di <i>insensato</i> ? – È <i>insensato</i> perché una rivoluzione non può esserci. Perché la <i>nostra</i> [...] rivoluzione è stata l'ultima. (194)
43	– [...] Так вот: назови мне п о с л е д н е е число. [...] – Но, I, – это же <i>нелепо</i> . Раз число чисел – бесконечно, какое же ты хочешь последнее? (255)	– [...] E dunque: dimmi qual è l' <i>ultimo</i> numero. [...] – Ma, I, è una cosa <i>insensata</i> . Dal momento che il numero dei numeri è infinito, come vuoi che faccia a dirti qual è l' <i>ultimo</i> ? (194-195)
44	[...] и вдруг <i>нелепое</i> ощущение чего-то постороннего, осевшего на лицо – чего никак не смахнуть. (256)	[...] e all'improvviso ho l' <i>insensata</i> impressione che qualcosa di estraneo mi si sia posato sulla faccia e io non lo possa scacciare con la mano. (197)
45	[...] какой <i>нелепый</i> предрассудок [...] (261)	che <i>insensato</i> pregiudizio [...]! (206)
46-48	<i>Нелепое</i> чувство – но я в самом деле уверен: да, должен. <i>Нелепое</i> – потому что этот мой долг – еще одно преступление. <i>Нелепое</i> – потому что белое не может быть одновременно черным, долг и преступление – не могут совпадать. (265)	È <i>insensato</i> , ma in effetti sento di essere certo che, sì, io devo. È <i>insensato</i> perché questo mio dovere è un ulteriore crimine. È <i>insensato</i> perché il bianco non può contemporaneamente essere nero, doveri e crimini non possono coincidere. (212)
49	[...] <i>нелепо</i> жду какого-то чуда [...] (268)	[...] aspetto <i>insensatamente</i> un qualche miracolo [...] (217)
50	[...] и не видел никакого выхода из всего этого <i>нелепого</i> положения. (279)	[...] non vedendo via d'uscita da quella <i>insensata</i> situazione. (235)
51	<i>Нелепая</i> , смешная, человеческая правда! (280)	Una verità <i>insensata</i> , ridicola, umana! (237)
52	И все это как-то <i>нелепо</i> , ужасно связано с Машиной – я знаю к а к, но я еще не хочу увидеть, назвать вслух – не хочу, не надо! (283)	E tutto ciò, in qualche modo <i>insensato</i> e terribile, c'entra con la Macchina: io so <i>in che modo</i> , ma ancora non voglio vederlo, dirlo ad alta voce – non lo voglio, non lo accetto! (241)
53	Кровать – как-то <i>нелепо</i> , наискось отодвинутая от стены. (286)	Il letto spostato dalla parete in modo <i>insensato</i> , sghembo. (246)
54	И это все время неотвязно, <i>нелепо</i> , мучительно напоминает мне о чем-то, о чем нельзя, о чем сейчас – не надо. (288)	E ciò per tutto il tempo mi ricorda – in modo sconnesso, <i>insensato</i> , tormentoso – qualcosa di cui non si può parlare, inopportuno in quel momento. (249)
55	Никакого бреда, никаких <i>нелепых</i> метафор, никаких чувств: только факты. (293)	Nessun delirio, nessuna metafora <i>insensata</i> , nessun sentimento: meri fatti. (258)

Fatto salvo il margine di diversa sensibilità linguistica caratteristico di ogni lettore e il buon grado di adattabilità dell'aggettivo in questione a svariati contesti, ci appaiono leggermente inusuali le combinazioni dei casi 1 ('mucchi insensati'), 7 ('nuvola insensata'), 29 ('mucchio di foglie insensato') e 30 ('anima insensata'). Lievemente faticoso, altresì, ci sembra l'uso del sostantivo 'insensatezza' nei casi 23-



24. Al caso 54, per mantenere la contrapposizione fra *nelepyj* e *lepyj*, quest'ultimo ha subito nella LA un consistente slittamento di senso: da 'buono', 'bello', 'acconcio', 'avvenente', *lepyj* (slavo ecclesiastico, oggi usato raramente) è diventato 'sensato'. Complessivamente presi, questi casi rappresentano, comunque, un prezzo da pagare non altissimo per recuperare la scia lessicale entro cui Zamjatin vuole che il lettore si muova.

Il secondo esempio a cui vogliamo accennare, *jasno* ['chiaro', ma anche 'evidente', 'palese', 'lampante', usato sia come avverbio sia come predicato nominale sia come aggettivo, *jasnyj*, e anche al comparativo, *jasnee*], compare circa un centinaio di volte in tutto il romanzo ed è sottoposto a sollecitazioni analoghe. Abbiamo perciò ritenuto di documentarne la presenza soltanto in forma sommaria, evidenziando, però, come si tratti di un tic verbale del protagonista, D-503 (canzonato, per ciò stesso, dalla deutereagonista, I-330) e, al pari di *nelepyj*, figuri tra le parole chiave di uno (il 6°) dei sommari preposti a ognuno dei quaranta capitoletti-appunti che compongono il romanzo. Ma non solo: la frequenza con cui *jasno* si affaccia nel corso della narrazione è significativa anche perché si inserisce agilmente nel sistema di opposizioni caratteristico di *Noi*, che è un romanzo 'bipartito' su molti piani: topografico ('Stato Unico' *versus* 'non-Stato unico'), concettuale ('entropia' *versus* 'energia'), di ordinamento politico ('totalitarismo' *versus* 'anarchia') e così via. Nella fattispecie *jasno* rappresenta un opposto dell' 'insensato' di cui sopra, innescando una contrapposizione fra i campi semantici della 'chiarezza' (comprensibilità, logicità, razionalità e, *last but not least*, trasparenza) e dell' 'oscurità' (incomprensibilità, illogicità, irrazionalità, opacità). In una società totalitaria e iperregolata come quella del romanzo in questione, l'assurdo, l'insensato, l'incongruo possiedono rilievo (e una corrispondente potenziale eversività) ben più ampio che in una società cosiddetta 'democratica', dove appaiono meno inaccetti. Che Zamjatin abbia fatto intenso ricorso a questi due vocaboli, non è, insomma, casuale: la loro resa, quindi, val al di là della mera equivalenza semantica, inserendosi in una strategia di recupero dello spirito 'bipolare' del romanzo.

#### 4.

Il terzo esempio ad alta frequenza di apparizione e a cui intendiamo riferirci – si tratta dell'aggettivo *ostryj* (e dell'avverbio correlato *ostro* nonché dei verbi e dei sostantivi che ne contengono palesemente la radice) – è il più problematico. Già in russo l'ampiezza semantica del vocabolo e la notevole varietà di contesti in cui può essere usato sono foriere di difficoltà per chi voglia ricorrere a un traduttore sempre uguale o di medesima radice. A seconda delle collocazioni, *ostryj* può essere reso (sempre avvalendosi dei dizionari summenzionati) con 'acuto', 'tagliente', 'affilato', 'aguzzo', 'pungente', 'appuntito', 'acuminato', 'puntuto', 'a punta' (detto di oggetti: ed è il caso che ci interessa maggiormente); ma può anche significare 'sottile' (vista, udito), 'perspicace' (ingegno, mente), 'mordace' (lingua), 'acre', 'penetrante' (odore), 'piccante' (cibo), 'forte', 'ardente' (sentimento), 'teso', 'grave', 'critico' (situazione), 'pericoloso' (malattia) e altro ancora.

La nostra scelta è caduta – principalmente e con alcune eccezioni – su 'aguzzo', ma con gli effetti collaterali che i casi stessi si incaricheranno di evidenziare, ossia, principalmente, una certa estensione della sfera di applicazione della parola in

oggetto, alla quale vengono come ‘spremute’ qualità metaforiche che non sembrano esserle connaturate *ab origine*.

	<b>Originale</b>	<b>Traduzione</b>
1	И тотчас же эхо – смех – справа. Обернулся: в глаза мне – белые – необычайно белые и <i>острые</i> зубы [...]. (143)	Mi sono voltato: denti bianchi – insolitamente bianchi – e <i>aguzzi</i> mi si sono impressi negli occhi, un viso femminile sconosciuto. (12)
2	Какие белые <i>острые</i> зубы! (143)	Che denti bianchi e <i>aguzzi</i> ! (13)
3-4	Я увидел <i>острым</i> углом вздернутые к вискам брови – как <i>острые</i> рожки икса [...]. (143)	Ho visto le sopracciglia inarcarsi ad angolo <i>acuto</i> verso le tempie, quasi fossero le asticelle <i>aguzze</i> di una ics [...]. (13-14)
5	[...] необычайно белые и <i>острые</i> зубы [...]. (149)	[...] denti insolitamente bianchi e <i>aguzzi</i> [...]. (23)
6	[...] плотно облегающее черное платье, <i>остро</i> подчеркнуто белое открытых плечей и груди [...]. (150)	[...] un abito nero molto aderente, il bianco delle spalle nude e del seno che <i>spiccava</i> accentuato [...]. (24)
7	[...] белые <i>острые</i> зубы. (157)	[...] bianchi denti <i>aguzzi</i> . (35)
8	<i>Острая</i> улыбка-укус. (159)	Un <i>aguzzo</i> sorriso-puntura. (38)
9	И сверкнули глаза – два <i>острых</i> буравчика, быстро вращаясь, ввинчивались все глубже [...]. (161)	Uno scintillio anche negli occhi: due piccoli trapani <i>aguzzi</i> che, girando veloci, si avvitano sempre più in profondità [...]. (42)
10	Резкие, быстрые – <i>острым</i> топором – хореи. (169)	Bruschi trochei, rapidi come un’ascia <i>affilata</i> . (56)
11	На один мельчайший дифференциал секунды мне мелькнуло рядом с ним [R-13] чье-то лицо – <i>острый</i> , черный треугольник – и тотчас же стерлось [...]. (169-170)	Per un minuscolo differenziale di secondo mi è parso guizzargli [a R-13] accanto un viso, – un triangolo <i>aguzzo</i> , nero – poi subito scomparso [...]. (56-57)
12	Сверкнуло нестерпимо- <i>острое</i> лезвие луча [...]. (170)	Una lama di luce insopportabilmente <i>aguzza</i> ha balenato [...]. (57)
13	Я молча смотрел на нее. [...] И я увидел странное сочетание: высоко вздернутые у висков темные брови – насмешливый <i>острый</i> треугольник [...]. (172)	La guardavo in silenzio. [...] E ho notato una strana combinazione: sopracciglia inarcate alte, presso le tempie a formare un beffardo triangolo <i>aguzzo</i> [...]. (62)
14	<i>Острые</i> зубы, улыбка. (173)	Denti <i>aguzzi</i> , sorriso. (62)
15	Она была в легком, шафранно-желтом, древнего образца платье. Это было в тысячу раз злее, чем если бы она была без всего. Две <i>острые</i> точки – сквозь тонкую ткань [...]. (173)	Indossava un vestito leggero, color giallo zafferano, di foggia antica. Era mille volte più feroce che se fosse stata nuda. Due estremità <i>aguzze</i> spuntavano dal tessuto sottile [...]. (63)
16	Темные брови – высоко к вискам, <i>острый</i> насмешливый треугольник [...]. (174)	Sopracciglia scure inarcate alte, verso le tempie; un beffardo triangolo <i>aguzzo</i> [...]. (65)
17-18	<i>Острые</i> зубы – <i>острый</i> , насмешливый треугольник бровей. (176)	Denti <i>aguzzi</i> , l’ <i>aguzzo</i> e beffardo triangolo delle sopracciglia. (68)
19	Я записываю это, только чтобы показать, как может странно запутаться и сбиться человеческий – такой точный и <i>острый</i> – разум. (177)	Trascrivo tutto ciò soltanto per mostrare come possa stranamente smarrirsi e sviarsi una cosa precisa e <i>aguzza</i> come la ragione umana. (70)
20	Я не отрывался от часов, я был – <i>острая</i> , дрожащая секундная	Non staccavo gli occhi dall’orologio, ero una lancetta dei minuti <i>aguzza</i> e

	стрелка. (185)	tremante. (82)
21	На углу в белом тумане – кровь – разрез <i>острым</i> ножом – губы. (185)	Sangue nella nebbia bianca, all'angolo: un taglio <i>affilato</i> di coltello, labbra. (82)
22	Это древнее, давно забытое «ты», «ты» властелина к рабу – вошло в меня <i>остро</i> , медленно [...]. (185)	Questo 'tu' antico, scordato da tempo, il 'tu' del padrone allo schiavo, si è conficcato in me <i>aguzzo</i> e lento [...]. (83)
23	И человек – тончайший. [...] у него только профиль, <i>остро</i> -отточенный [...]. (186)	E un omino, sottile sottile. [...] non presentava che il profilo, <i>aguzzo</i> , appuntito [...]. (84)
24	Были только нежно- <i>острые</i> , стиснутые зубы [...]. (187)	C'erano soltanto dei denti stretti, teneramente <i>aguzzi</i> [...]. (85)
25	[...] надела юнифу – и всегдашнюю свою <i>острую</i> улыбку-укус. (187)	[...] ha indossato la unif e, insieme a quella, il suo solito <i>aguzzo</i> sorriso-puntura. (86)
26	Вот сейчас откуда-нибудь – <i>остро</i> -насмешливый угол поднятых к вискам бровей [...]. (195)	Ed ecco, da un qualche punto, sbucare, <i>acutamente</i> beffardo, l'angolo di sopracciglia inarcate verso le tempie [...]. (99)
27	Он посмотрел на меня, рассмеялся <i>остро</i> , ланцетно. (197)	Il dottore mi ha guardato ed è scoppiato in una risata <i>aguzza</i> , una risata-bisturi. (103)
28	[...] <i>остро</i> -капающие капли из умывальника [...]. (199)	[...] gocce che cadono <i>aguzze</i> nel lavabo [...]. (105)
29	Тогда I медленно, медленно, все глубже вонзая мне в сердце <i>острую</i> , сладкую иглу, – прижалась плечом [...]. (203)	E allora I, lentamente lentamente, conficcando sempre più in profondità nel mio cuore il suo ago <i>acuminato</i> e dolce, ha premuto la sua spalla contro di me [...]. (112)
30	Как сейчас вижу: сквозь дверную щель в темноте – <i>острый</i> солнечный луч переламывается молнией на полу [...]. (204)	Lo vedo come se fosse ora: attraverso l'interstizio fra le porte, nel buio, un <i>aguzzo</i> raggio di sole si frange a mo' di lampo sul pavimento [...]. (114)
31	Этот Нуль мне видится каким-то молчаливым, громадным, узким, <i>острым</i> , как нож, утесом. (216)	Mi immagino questo Zero come uno scoglio taciturno, massiccio, stretto, <i>aguzzo</i> come un coltello. (132)
32	Нож – был гильотиной, нож – универсальный способ разрешить все узлы, и по <i>острию</i> ножа идет путь парадоксов [...]. (216)	Il coltello è una ghigliottina, è uno strumento universale per rescindere tutti i nodi e sul <i>filo</i> della sua lama corre la via dei paradossi [...]. (133)
33	Там над Стеной – <i>острые</i> , черные треугольники каких-то птиц: с карканием бросаются на приступ [...]. (218)	Lassù, al di sopra del Muro, uccelli si gettavano – neri triangoli <i>aguzzi</i> – all'assalto con stridio [...]. (134-135)
34	[...] по лбу ползли вниз, в глаза, <i>остро</i> -соленые капли пота... (218)	[...] dalla fronte mi colavano negli occhi gocce di sudore <i>acri</i> di sale... (136)
35	Сладкие, <i>острые</i> , белые зубы; улыбка. (226)	Denti teneri, <i>aguzzi</i> , bianchi; un sorriso. (149)
36	И на секунду, смутно: глаза, губы, две <i>острых</i> розовых завязи. (231)	E, per un attimo, appaiono confusamente: gli occhi, le labbra, due <i>aguzzi</i> ovari-rosa. (156)
37	[...] это <i>острая</i> , ф и з и ч е с к а я боль в сердце. (233)	[...] un fitta <i>aguzza</i> , <i>fisica</i> , al cuore. (160)
38	Это почему-то врезалось <i>острее</i> всего: тысячи беззвучно орущих	Questo, per qualche motivo, è ciò che – <i>aguzzo</i> più di ogni altra cosa – mi si è

	ртов – как на экране чудовищного кино. (234)	inciso nella mente: migliaia di bocche silenziosamente urlanti, come su uno schermo mostruoso. (162)
39	[...] она дышит жадно сквозь сжатые, сверкающие <i>острые</i> зубы. (236)	[...] respira avidamente attraverso i denti stretti, <i>aguzzi</i> e scintillanti. (164)
40	Угольно-черные, тонкие брови вздернуты к вискам: <i>острый</i> треугольник, улыбка. (244)	Le nere, sottili sopracciglia di carbone si inarcano verso le tempie: un triangolo <i>aguzzo</i> , il suo sorriso. (178)
41	Я помню, как она взяла со стола мой стеклянный треугольник и все время, пока говорила, прижимала его <i>острым</i> ребром к щеке [...]. (247)	Ricordo che aveva preso dal tavolo il mio triangolo di vetro e, mentre parlava, se ne premeva uno spigolo <i>aguzzo</i> contro la guancia [...]. (183)
42	[...] <i>острый</i> треугольник – улыбка. (249)	[...] un sorriso, un triangolo <i>aguzzo</i> . (186)
43	Насмешливый, <i>острый</i> треугольник бровей [...]. (255)	Il triangolo <i>aguzzo</i> e beffardo delle sopracciglia. (194)
44	И все <i>острее</i> , все темнее треугольник [...]. (261)	E il triangolo si fa <i>aguzzo</i> , scurisce [...]. (205)
45	[...] <i>острые</i> , горячие губы. (261)	[...] i suoi denti <i>aguzzi</i> , brucianti. (206)
46	Беспощадно- <i>острый</i> , черный треугольник на белом [...]. (262)	Impietosamente <i>aguzzo</i> , un triangolo nero sul bianco [...]. (207)
47	[...] головы мгновенно <i>заострились</i> клиньями, и <i>острые</i> локти, ребра, плечи, бока. (265)	[...] le teste si erano mutate istantaneamente in cunei <i>aguzzi</i> ; e <i>aguzzi</i> erano i gomiti, le costole, le spalle, i fianchi. (211)
48	Стиснутые, белые, <i>остро</i> -улыбающиеся зубы... (273)	Denti stretti, bianchi, snudati in un sorriso <i>aguzzo</i> ... (226)
49	[...] весь мир разбит на отдельные, <i>острые</i> , самостоятельные кусочки [...]. (276)	[...] il frantumarsi del mondo, ridotto in pezzi separati, <i>aguzzi</i> , indipendenti [...]. (230)
50	[...] <i>острый</i> треугольник бровей [...]. (277)	[...] l' <i>aguzzo</i> triangolo delle sopracciglia [...]. (231)
51	[...] <i>острая</i> , сладкая полоска зубов... (283)	[...] una tenera fila di denti <i>aguzzi</i> ... (241)
52	<i>Острыми</i> , черными, пронзительными, падающими треугольниками они [птицы] заполнили небо [...]. (285)	Come triangoli <i>aguzzi</i> , neri, striduli e precipitanti, essi [gli uccelli] avevano affollato il cielo [...]. (244)
53	Но на полдороге наткнулся на <i>острые</i> , неподвижные копыта ресниц, остановился. (287)	Ma a metà strada, imbattutomi nelle lance <i>aguzze</i> e immobili delle sue ciglia, mi sono fermato. (248)
54	[...] <i>острая</i> , сладкая полоска зубов. (288)	[...] l' <i>aguzza</i> , tenera fila di denti. (249)
55	Из зеркала на меня – <i>острый</i> , насмешливый треугольник бровей [...]. (288)	Lo specchio mi rimandava l' <i>aguzzo</i> , beffardo triangolo delle sopracciglia [...]. (250)
56	[...] я хватал их за рукава, я молил их – как больной молит дать ему скорее чего-нибудь такого, что секундной <i>острейшей</i> мукой сразу перерубило бы все. (290)	[...] prendevo le persone per le braccia, supplicandole come fa un malato che implori qualcosa capace di togliere, in un attimo di tormento <i>lancinante</i> , dente e dolore con un gesto netto. (252-253)
57	Я заметил, что у ней <i>острые</i> и очень белые зубы и что это красиво. (293)	Ho notato che aveva denti <i>aguzzi</i> e molto bianchi, e che ciò era bello. (259)

Si sarà notato come l'aggettivo in questione riguardi spessissimo la descrizione del volto di I-330 (denti e sopracciglia). Andava perciò considerato come parte integrante di un'immagine d'autore, la quale esige, in modo pressoché tassativo, il ricorso a una stessa, ripetentesi, unità lessicale. Segnaliamo i casi in cui ciò non è stato possibile: il 3 ('angolo *acuto*') e il 26 ('angolo *acutamente* beffardo') per la presenza, esplicita o implicita, di una locuzione fissa in italiano; il 6 ('bianco che *spiccava* accentuato'), dove il contesto non autorizzava in alcun modo l'uso di 'aguzzo'; il 10 ('ascia *affilata*') e il 21 ('taglio *affilato* di coltello') per motivi di proprietà di linguaggio; il 29 ('ago *acuminato*') per l'evidente ineleganza che avrebbe comportato l'impiego di un impresentabile 'ago aguzzo'; il 32, dove la resa di *ostrië* ['filo della lama'] esclude 'aguzzo', pur riassorbendone il senso; il 34 ('*acri* gocce di sale'), dove la sfera dei sensi suggeriva un traducevole meno bizzarro di 'aguzzo'; il 56 ('tormento *lancinante*'), dove si è pensato che, per sottolineare la gravità 'dentistica' della situazione, 'lancinante' servisse meglio di 'acuto' o 'acutissimo', pur se imparentati fonicamente con 'aguzzo'. In tutti gli altri casi è spettato al traduttore spingersi verso accostamenti inusuali nella LA, peraltro giustificati da una analoga inusualità riscontrata nella LP. Ci riferiamo, nella fattispecie, ai seguenti casi: l'8 ('*aguzzo* sorriso-puntura'; e così per i casi 14, 25, 35, 40, 48), che tuttavia si colloca sull'asse semantico dei non inusuali 'denti aguzzi' (già apparsi ai casi 5 e 7 e ripresi anche in seguito) e risulta, quindi, 'logico' nonché intelligibile; l'11 ('triangolo *aguzzo*'; e così per i casi 13, 16, 18, 33, 40, 42, 44, 46, 50, 52, 55), insolito, ma non eccentrico; il 12 ('lama *aguzza*'), irriuale ma, crediamo, non inaccettabile; il 18 ('gocce *aguzze*'), inconsueto, ma plausibile; il 30 ('*aguzzo* raggio di sole'), inconsueto, ma tollerabile; il 36 ('*aguzzi* ovari rosa'), singolare, ma non peregrino. Gli altri casi riscontrati non ci sembrano uscire dalle cornici di combinazioni normali e, quindi, non riteniamo necessario soffermarci su di essi, se non per dire che contribuiscono a creare un senso di accumulo, il quale non soltanto va a rafforzare l'effetto *leitmotiv* più volte additato, ma si iscrive in una strategia che procede dal piano stilistico per sfociare in quello tematico, dotandosi, quindi, di un valore aggiunto. Vorremmo, infatti, concludere affermando che la foltezza delle iterazioni è il fisiologico riflesso lessicale delle scene corali, degli unisoni coatti, della sincronia collettiva che contraddistinguono un'opera come *Noi*. La ripetizione, insomma, si intona con il mondo entropico e meccanicizzato di *Noi*, è parte intima della sua poetica. E poco importa se qua e là si abbia l'impressione di veder spuntare l'ingegnere navale Evgenij Zamjatin, che non resiste a farci gustare la bellezza *sui generis* degli ingranaggi del suo libro, come in certi orologi moderni tanto più esteticamente accattivanti quanto più le rotelle si offrono artisticamente alla vista del compratore.

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# ***Igra slov: tradurre il palindromo nei testi russo-sovietici. Difficoltà, strategie, implicazioni culturali***<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Secondo Umberto Eco tradurre significa “capire il sistema interno di una lingua e la struttura di un testo dato in quella lingua, e costruire un doppio del sistema testuale che, sotto una certa descrizione, possa produrre effetti analoghi nel lettore” (2003: 16). Il compito del traduttore si complica notevolmente in presenza del linguaggio figurato, diventando particolarmente arduo quando si incontra una sua peculiare manifestazione: il gioco di parole (*calembour*, *igra slov*). È infatti possibile, secondo Bubnov (2002a), collocare simili fenomeni di ludolinguistica all’interno del più ampio contesto del linguaggio figurato; più precisamente, Bice Mortara Garavelli (2003: 130) considera questi “metagrafi” come “manifestazioni della poesia figurata”. Il problema della traduzione dei giochi di parole è molto attuale nel caso di buona parte delle sperimentazioni avanguardiste e dei testi postmoderni, caratterizzati da uno spiccato atteggiamento ludico nei confronti della parola, come hanno sottolineato a più riprese i teorici della letteratura novecentesca. In base a queste premesse, nel presente contributo vengono analizzati una serie di case-studies tratti da opere “moderne” e “postmoderne” russo-sovietiche, verificando la fattibilità della loro traduzione in diverse lingue. Nello specifico, si riportano esempi di anagramma e palindromo, in quanto dispositivi che consentono non soltanto un’originale rielaborazione del significante, ma anche una ricca (e conseguente) sedimentazione di significati, requisito indispensabile per la creazione del linguaggio figurato. In prospettiva comparativa s’intende presentare un percorso che parte da scritti futuristi (Velimir Chlebnikov), per poi approdare ai complessi rompicapi linguistici proposti da Saša Sokolov alla fine degli anni Settanta. Una simile indagine è sostanzialmente volta a discutere, da un punto di vista teorico, la questione della traduzione dei giochi di parole; inoltre, si rifletterà sui problemi traduttivi legati al contesto culturale russo-sovietico.

**Parole chiave:** anagramma, palindromo, letteratura sovietica, Velimir Chlebnikov, Vladimir Nabokov, Saša Sokolov.

*Thy genius calls thee not to purchase fame  
in keen iambics, but mild anagram:  
leave writing plays, and choose for thy command  
some peaceful province in Acrostic Land.  
There thou mayest wings display and altars raise  
and torture one poor word ten thousand ways.  
MacFlecknoe (1682), l.203. J. Dryden.*

Secondo Umberto Eco tradurre significa “capire il sistema interno di una lingua e la struttura di un testo dato in quella lingua, e costruire un doppio del sistema testuale che, sotto una certa descrizione, possa produrre effetti analoghi nel lettore” (2003: 16). Il compito del traduttore si complica notevolmente in presenza del linguaggio

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<sup>1</sup> Pur nel confronto e nella stesura congiunta, la parte introduttiva e il primo paragrafo di questo articolo sono stati scritti da Gabriella Elina Imposti, mentre il secondo paragrafo e la conclusione da Irina Marchesini.

figurato, e in particolare nel caso del gioco di parole (*calembour, igra slov, pun, wordplay*). Secondo Bubnov (2002a) è infatti possibile collocare simili fenomeni di ludolinguistica all'interno del più ampio contesto del linguaggio figurato<sup>2</sup>. Bice Mortara Garavelli, inoltre, considera questi “metagrafi” come “manifestazioni della poesia figurata” (2003: 130). In maniera analoga, Leech definisce il gioco di parole come “a foregrounded lexical ambiguity which may have its origin either in homonymy or polysemy” (1969: 209). Infine, Delabastita lo identifica come “the general name for the various textual phenomena in which structural features of the language(s) are exploited in order to bring about a communicatively significant confrontation of two (or more) linguistic structures with more or less similar forms and more or less different meanings” (1996: 128).

Egli distingue quattro gruppi di *wordplay*:

1. Basato sulla somiglianza fonetica (paronomasia, allitterazione, assonanza, antanaciasi, poliptoto, derivazione, omeoteleuto, apofonia, cacofonia e neologismo).
2. Il gioco di parole fondato sulla polisemia, come la sillepsi e il zeugma.
3. Basato sull'omofonia, la cui manifestazione tipica è il *calembour*.
4. Il gioco di parole fondato sulla *trasformazione*, che comprende tutte le figure basate sull'alterazione della struttura fonetica e grafica di una parola per crearne un'altra, come l'anagramma, *portmanteau word*, metatesi, metagramma, eterogramma e palindromo.<sup>3</sup>

Il problema della traduzione dei giochi di parole<sup>4</sup> è molto attuale nel caso delle sperimentazioni avanguardiste e dei testi postmoderni, caratterizzati da uno spiccato atteggiamento ludico nei confronti della parola, come hanno sottolineato a più riprese i teorici della letteratura novecentesca, tra cui Best-Kellner (1997), Gutleben (2002), Hutcheon (1984), Stonehill (1988) e Waugh (1984). Il traduttore (inteso come lettore particolare e privilegiato) che ha a che fare con testi del genere dovrà anzitutto comprendere lo specifico codice linguistico che devia in maniera creativa rispetto alla norma. Egli dovrà poi tradurre questo “linguaggio cifrato” cercando di riprodurlo, come indica Eco, gli “effetti” presenti nell'originale.

In questa sede ci soffermeremo in particolare sul *palindromo*, che Bartezzaghi (2011) definisce come “una sequenza di lettere o di sillabe che possa essere letta anche in senso retrogrado dando come esito o la sequenza di partenza o un'altra sequenza pure dotata di senso”. Sempre secondo lo stesso autore, si possono distinguere tre tipi di palindromo di una parola singola:

- (a) una sequenza di lettere che non porta a una parola esistente (esso → osse);
- (b) una sequenza di lettere che corrisponde a una parola esistente (asso → ossa);
- (c) una sequenza di lettere che corrisponde alla parola di partenza (osso → osso).

Al di là dell'interesse tradizionalmente manifestato dall'enigmistica, soprattutto per i palindromi del tipo (c), occorre rilevare che anche in campo letterario la figura del palindromo ha conosciuto e conosce tuttora una vasta fortuna, in particolare in ambito russo, dove, come vedremo, viene ad assumere un ruolo significativo nella poetica dell'avanguardia prima e del postmoderno poi.

<sup>2</sup> Aleksandr Bubnov è lo studioso russo che, ad oggi, pare essersi occupato maggiormente di palindromi, giochi di parole e linguaggio figurato. Per un quadro completo sui rapporti tra questi elementi, cfr. Bubnov (1997), (2002b), (2005). I russi in generale sembrano all'avanguardia in questo campo. Si vedano anche Voskresenskij (1971), Rybinskij (2000), Lukomnikov-Fedin (2002).

<sup>3</sup> La seguente schematizzazione è stata ricavata dalle autrici a partire dal saggio di Delabastita (1996).

<sup>4</sup> Sui problemi traduttivi in generale, si veda Salmon (2003) e (2004).



In base a queste premesse, si analizzeranno una serie di *case-studies* di palindromi tratti da opere russo-sovietiche, “moderne” con Velimir Chlebnikov e Nabokov, e “postmoderne” con Saša Sokolov, in quanto dispositivi che consentono non soltanto un’originale rielaborazione del significante, ma anche una ricca (e conseguente) sedimentazione di significati, requisito indispensabile per la creazione del linguaggio figurato.

Pertanto, utilizzando la terminologia adottata da Marco (2010: 264), s’istituirà una comparazione tra le scelte autoriali operate nel *source text* (ST) rispetto a quelle adottate dal traduttore nel *target text* (TT), commentando in particolare il secondo termine di paragone. Naturalmente, poiché nella traduzione rientrano fattori extra-testuali difficilmente misurabili, come la personalità e la preparazione del traduttore, ci si soffermerà specificamente sull’esame della componente testuale e sulle sue peculiarità. Difatti, come giustamente sottolinea Marco, “classifications of translation techniques for particular translation problems are better suited to accounting for the specifics of each problem than general typologies, postulated as valid for any textual segment” (2010: 265).

## 1. Il palindromo nella letteratura russa d’inizio Novecento. Velimir Chlebnikov

Nel 1912 Velimir Chlebnikov ricorre al palindromo, figura metaforica che in passato era stata ampiamente utilizzata in Russia nel contesto della poesia barocca e classica (Birjukov 2003). Come osserva Lotman:

[п]алиндром активизирует скрытые пласты языкового сознания и является исключительно ценным материалом для экспериментов [...] Палиндром не бессмыслен, а много-смыслен. [...] В русском же языке палиндром требует способности “видеть слово целиком”, то есть воспринимать его как целостный рисунок [...] Таким образом, обратное чтение меняет семиотическую природу текста на противоположную. (Lotman 1992: 22-23)<sup>5</sup>

Chlebnikov coglie tale potenziale e trasforma profondamente questa figura che, come commenterà un altro poeta futurista russo, “прежде игра детей — стала игрой гигантов”<sup>6</sup>.

Il palindromo rientra nell’elenco dei sistemi “linguistici” chlebnikoviani più complessi<sup>7</sup>, in quella “периодическая система слова”<sup>8</sup>, così la definisce Majakovskij (1959: 23), che egli voleva creare.

Il senso profondo del palindromo nella poetica di Chlebnikov si palesa alla luce dei terribili tormenti della rivoluzione: secondo l’artista, infatti, esso è “отраженные лучи будущего, брошенные подсознательным ‘Я’ на разумное небо”<sup>9</sup>. Nel 1920

<sup>5</sup> Tr. it.: “Il palindromo attiva gli strati nascosti della coscienza linguistica e costituisce un materiale eccezionalmente prezioso per la sperimentazione. [...] Il palindromo non è privo di senso, ma al contrario è dotato di una molteplicità di significati. [...] Nella lingua russa infatti richiede l’abilità di vedere ‘la parola nella sua interezza’, ovvero di percepirla come un disegno unitario [...]. In tal modo, la lettura all’inverso muta la natura semiotica del testo nel suo opposto”. Qualora non diversamente segnalato, tutte le traduzioni sono da considerarsi nostre.

<sup>6</sup> Tr. it.: “Prima gioco di bambini si è trasformata in gioco di giganti” (Kručenyč 1928: 18).

<sup>7</sup> Grigor’ev 2000: 123-124, 127.

<sup>8</sup> Tr. it.: “tavola periodica della parola”.

<sup>9</sup> Tr. it.: “Un riflesso dei raggi del futuro, proiettati dall’‘Io’ inconscio sul cielo della ragione”, così scrive Chlebnikov in *Svojasj*, SP, II, 8-9, ora in Chlebnikov (1986: 37).

egli dedicherà all'eponimo brigante cosacco secentesco Razin<sup>10</sup> addirittura un intero poema tutto scritto in palindromi, che all'epoca, come constata Kručenyč, era “единственная в литературе большая вещь, построенная на примере перевертня”<sup>11</sup>.

Il “tema palindromico” riflette dunque il tema della rivoluzione, che lega e capovolge, superando i confini del tempo e dello spazio, i destini del brigante Razin e del poeta<sup>12</sup>. Come afferma Chlebnikov stesso nella *Tromba del Gul mullah*: “[я] Разин напротив, Я Разин навыворот [...] Он грабил и жег, а я слова божок”<sup>13</sup>.

Erika Greber (1998a) ben sintetizza questa corrispondenza tra palindromo e rivoluzione, peraltro abbracciata da diversi critici e scrittori, che sta alla base dell'eccezionale fortuna di cui il palindromo ha goduto negli ultimi anni, non solo in Russia ma anche in altri paesi<sup>14</sup>:

[a]llowing for reversibility of the linear discourse, the palindrome represents the very idea of transformation and metamorphosis. Palindromic reversion is a device for breaking up the linearity of speech and, by implication, the irreversibility of time. [...] Sequentiality and causality of time and space are annihilated in the palindromic motion. Thus, the palindrome can be conceived of as a chronotope of revolution (‘chrono-topos’: time-space).<sup>15</sup>

Le opere di Chlebnikov sono state tradotte in molte lingue, tra cui l'italiano, a cura di Angelo Maria Ripellino (1968), il quale, tra l'altro, si è cimentato con successo con quel vero e proprio *tour de force* di neologismi qual è *Zakljatje smečhom* (*Esorcismo col riso*). Tuttavia, nessuno ha sinora tentato di tradurre verso l'italiano i palindromi chlebnikoviani del 1912, e nemmeno il poema palindromico *Razin*.

Abbiamo invece una traduzione inglese di *Pereverten'* (*Palindromo*) del 1912 fatta da Gary Kern<sup>16</sup>, in cui si dedica attenzione all'esatta traduzione del senso letterale del *ST*, che peraltro risulta assai enigmatico. Ne riportiamo qualche verso:

ПЕРЕВЕРТЕНЬ (КУКСИ, КУМ МУК И СКУК)	Turnabout
Кони, топот, иннок, Но не речь, а черен он. Идем, молод, долом меди. Чин зван мечем навзничь. Голод, чем меч долог?	Horses, tramping, a monk, Yet no speech, but black is he. We go a lad, over the dale of copper. Rank is named with the sword downward. Hunger by what is the sword long?

Tab. 1. Comparazione tra originale chlebnikoviano e traduzione “letterale” inglese.

<sup>10</sup> Stepan Timofeevič (Sten'ka) Razin (c.a. 1630-1671), cosacco del Don che negli anni 1670-71 capeggiò la più grande rivolta cosacca della storia russa di epoca prepetrina.

<sup>11</sup> Tr. it.: “L'unica opera di grandi dimensioni in letteratura costruita sul modello del palindromo”, Kručenyč (1928: 18).

<sup>12</sup> Cfr. Markov (1962: 157). Osserva inoltre Barbara Lönnqvist (1986: 299) che “[t]he palindrome functions on the formal level as a realization of the philosophy of inversion pervading Chlebnikov's poetic word”.

<sup>13</sup> Tr. it.: “Io sono un Razin al contrario, sono un Razin alla rovescia, lui rubava e bruciava e io della parola sono il dio”.

<sup>14</sup> Cfr. Birjukov (2003).

<sup>15</sup> Cfr. anche Greber (1998b) per una trattazione più ampia del palindromo come cronotopo della rivoluzione.

<sup>16</sup> Gary Kern (1976). Il testo della traduzione, che in inglese ha il titolo ‘Turnabout’, è riportato per intero in appendice a Greber 1998a.

È evidente che l'obiettivo stesso della traduzione, quello cioè di creare nel lettore un "effetto analogo" a quello dell'originale, viene qui disatteso. Infatti, al di là della mera ricostruzione del significato delle singole parole non si riesce a ricreare "il valore intrinseco della costruzione eufonica"<sup>17</sup> di questa poesia palindromica, tutta intessuta sulla ripetizione di sequenze di suoni in ordine inverso che comporta un evidente "indebolimento dell'aspetto semantico"<sup>18</sup>.

Il poeta tedesco Oskar Pastior, invece, in *Mein Chlebnikov* (2003) si cimenta con un intero componimento palindromico, che non tenta di riprodurre il senso, per così dire "superficiale" del testo chlebnikoviano, ma piuttosto si mette in competizione con il poeta russo:

[a]n Chlebnikov [...] reizte mich gerade die Unmöglichkeit, seinen Wortgeflechten mit einer Sinn-Klang-Rhythmus-Übertragung beizukommen – als Herausforderung, seine poetische Methode, die er als "Sternensprache" universell theoretisiert [...] [K]ann ich auch sagen, daß die Arbeit an und mit Chlebnikov stellenweise wie ein Freiheitsrausch war...<sup>19</sup>

Pastior sceglie allora di tradurre la figura del palindromo in quanto tale, sacrificando l'aderenza alla lettera per conservare il principio strutturale di fondo del componimento.

Chlebnikov	Traduzione italiana letterale da Chlebnikov	Pastior	Traduzione italiana da Pastior
ПЕРЕВЕРТЕНЬ (КУКСИ, КУМ МУК И СКУК)	Palindromo (Mogi, di comari tormenti e tedi)	Rätsel, Nebel, Manie...	Enigma, Nebbia, Mania...
Кони, топот, иннок, Но не речь, а черен он. Идем, молод, долом меди. Чин зван мечем навзничь. Голод, чем меч долог?	Cavalli, scalpito, monaco, Ma non discorso, ma è nero lui. Andiamo, giovane, per la valle del rame. Il grado è chiamato dalla spada rovesciata. Fame, per che cosa è lunga la spada?	Eis-Echo, wiederhell, ist still. Ehre die Woche sie. Zagbart, Schneemensch, Trabgast. Ton tut not. Reite, Tier!	Un'eco di ghiaccio, di nuovo luminosa, tace. La settimana la onora. Timida barba, pupazzo di neve, ospite al trotto. Il suono genera necessità. Cavalca, animale!

Tab. 2. Confronto tra originale chlebnikoviano e "libera" traduzione tedesca.

Come si vede, Pastior, pur rinunciando a tradurre alla lettera, conserva come centrale il tema del "cavallo" dal quale prende l'avvio il componimento chlebnikoviano e scrive 'à la' Chlebnikov, attualizzandolo nella lingua d'arrivo. Come sottolinea Ingold (2003: 107), il poeta tedesco "macht sich Chlebnikov zueigen (und behauptet sich zugleich – in der Rolle des 'Übersetzers' – als Dichter),

<sup>17</sup> "самоценность эвфонической конструкции", Jakobson (1921).

<sup>18</sup> "ослаблени[e] смыслового момента [...]", Jakobson (1921).

<sup>19</sup> Tr. it: "Di Chlebnikov [...] mi ha attratto solo l'impossibilità di ottenere quel suo intreccio di parole con una comunicazione senso-suono-ritmo - come una sfida al suo metodo poetico, che ha teorizzato universalmente come "linguaggio delle stelle" [...] Posso affermare che il lavoro su e con Chlebnikov era a tratti simile ad un'euforia di libertà", Pastior (2003: 103-105).

indem er dessen poetisches Rüstzeug übernimmt, um es, durchaus eigensinnig, am Körper der deutschen Sprache zu erproben”<sup>20</sup>.

E dunque la traduzione mette in evidenza in maniera contrastiva “l’adeguatezza palindromica”<sup>21</sup> di ogni singola lingua. Negli esempi citati fin qui sembrerebbe inevitabile scegliere tra la traduzione della figura retorica del palindromo in quanto tale e la mera traduzione del significato dei singoli vocaboli, rischiando in tal modo di scivolare nel totale non senso. Ci si chiede se non sia possibile invece riprodurre il gioco di parole presente nella lingua di partenza adottando una diversa strategia traduttiva, ad esempio ricorrendo ad una figura retorica affine al palindromo, come l’anagramma.

## 2. L’uso dei giochi di parole nel romanzo “moderno” e “postmoderno” sovietico

### 2.1. *Invitation to a Beheading* di Vladimir Nabokov

Prendiamo in considerazione, ad esempio, il romanzo *Priglasenie na kazn’* (1938) di Vladimir Nabokov, poi autotradotto in inglese, con la collaborazione del figlio, come *Invitation to a Beheading* (1959). Qui troviamo il seguente brano: “[В]озьми-ка слово ропот, говорил Цинциннату его шурин, остряк, и почти обратно. А? Смешно получается?”<sup>22</sup> (Nabokov 2007: 771). Il vocabolo russo “ropot” significa “mormorio di malcontento”, “lamento”, ma anche “agitazione”<sup>23</sup>; letto al contrario, però, “topor” vuol dire “ascia”, “scure”, “accetta”<sup>24</sup>, elementi questi che senza dubbio contribuiscono all’operazione di *foregrounding* del tema portante all’interno della narrazione, la decapitazione, appunto.

Per la traduzione di questo gioco di parole, Dmitrij Nabokov ha fatto ricorso ad una particolare forma di *anagramma*, che Michael Curl chiama “*cognate anagram*”, “a special variety of anagram in which the letters of a word or phrase are transposed to form another word or phrase which redefines, or is closely related in meaning to, the original” (1982: 233). Nella traduzione di Nabokov figlio, infatti, leggiamo: “[t]ake the word ‘anxiety’,” Cincinnatus’ brother-in-law, the wit, was saying to him. “Now take away the word ‘tiny’, eh? Comes out funny, doesn’t it?” (Nabokov 1989: 103). La parola russa “ropot” viene tradotta in inglese come “anxiety”, dalla quale si ricavano, anagrammandola, l’aggettivo “tiny” e la parola-chiave “axe”, ovvero l’“ascia”, “scure”, “accetta”, corrispondente al significato “rovesciato” “topor” del palindromo “ropot”, nonché nodo centrale del romanzo.

Trovandosi di fronte all’effettiva impossibilità di rinvenire un equivalente perfetto nella lingua d’arrivo (in questo caso, l’inglese), il traduttore ha necessariamente dovuto rinunciare ad inserire un palindromo nella sua versione. Dmitrij Nabokov opta per un diverso tipo di gioco linguistico, non andando ad intaccare quell’intento ludico che spesso funge da detonatore semantico nelle opere nabokoviane. Infatti, sia nell’originale russo, che nella rielaborazione inglese, le parole “topor” e “axe” non

<sup>20</sup> Tr. it.: “si appropria di Chlebnikov (e allo stesso tempo si afferma - nel ruolo di “traduttore” - come poeta), adottandone caparbiamente l’armamentario poetico per metterlo alla prova sul corpo della lingua tedesca”.

<sup>21</sup> Cfr. Greber (1998b: 162).

<sup>22</sup> Tr. it.: “prendi la parola agitazione, - stava dicendo il cognato arguto a Cincinnatus, - e leggila al contrario. È divertente, eh?”.

<sup>23</sup> Dal dizionario *Abbyy Lingvo Russo-Italiano*, <http://www.lingvo-online.ru/ru/Translate/ru-it/ропот> (consultato il 18/11/2013).

<sup>24</sup> Dal dizionario *Abbyy Lingvo Russo-Italiano*, <http://www.lingvo-online.ru/ru/Translate/ru-it/топор> (consultato il 18/11/2013).

vengono esplicitate, non sono “materialmente” presenti: la “ricostruzione” della parola spetterà al lettore, che viene direttamente coinvolto, e cognitivamente sollecitato, nella risoluzione del piccolo enigma. La scelta del “*cognate anagram*” è particolarmente felice non soltanto perché consente di conservare i due nuclei tematici e semantici contenuti in “ropot”, ma anche perché in tal modo si riesce a trasmettere la dimensione figurata risultante dai due sensi del palindromo: cosa infatti può generare il pensiero della decapitazione, contenuto *in nuce* nella parola “ascia”, se non ansia e agitazione? Una simile soluzione rivela la sua finezza ed eleganza se si considera anche il palindromo “axa”,

Greek (and possibly English alternative) word for axes, that is, not the cutting tools but the plural of axon – in Greek meaning, in the singular, an axis of any sort, but coming in English to mean one sort of axis in particular, the core of a nerve fiber, also called a neuraxon (Donner 1996: 55).

Sebbene, come spiega Michael Donner, questo lemma non sia in realtà il plurale di “axe”, è tuttavia possibile che il lettore compia una simile associazione. Come un cerchio che si chiude, anche il significato di “axa” contribuisce ad arricchire la stratificazione semantica già in atto, attraverso l’allusione alle fibre nervose, che sono direttamente coinvolte nella percezione delle emozioni.

Nella traduzione italiana a cura di Margherita Crepax assistiamo invece ad una trasformazione radicale di “ropot”: “Prendi la parola ‘dioscuri’ stava dicendo a Cincinnatus il cognato, quello arguto. ‘E ora togli la parola ‘dio’, eh? Divertente, no?’” (Nabokov 2004: 106). Per ottenere un gioco di parole plausibile in italiano, la traduttrice ha inserito una parola composta: la sottrazione di un componente (“dio”) consente in ogni caso la “sopravvivenza” di un altro vocabolo di senso compiuto (“scuri”), che richiama, seppur debolmente, la tragica situazione in cui si ritrova il personaggio. Come nella versione inglese, la proposta di Crepax lascia fuori dal testo la “soluzione” del gioco di parole; a ben guardare, però, esiste almeno un’altra traduzione plausibile, che mostra maggiori analogie con quella di Nabokov figlio. La parola “ambascia”, ad esempio, condivide con “ropot” un tratto semantico comune, nel suo senso figurato di “dolore morale”, “angoscia”. Se poi si applica il procedimento del “*cognate anagram*”, si otterrà l’onomatopeico “Bam”, che riproduce l’effetto delle interiezioni “a” (russo) e “eh” (inglese), ma soprattutto si avrà il lemma “ascia”, un perfetto palindromo fonetico (/’aʃʃa/), e traduzione letterale di “topor” (russo) e “axe” (inglese). In italiano si potrebbe dunque tradurre così la frase: “Prendi la parola ‘ambascia’ stava dicendo il cognato arguto a Cincinnatus. ‘E ora togli una parte e... Bam! Divertente, no?’”

ST (Russkij)	Ropot - Topor
TT1 (English)	Anxiety = Tiny + Axe
TT2 (Italiano)	Dioscuri (Dio+Scuri)
TT3 (Italiano, <i>proposta</i> )	Ambascia (Bam+Ascia)

Tab. 3. Possibilità traduttive del gioco di parole nabokoviano in diverse lingue.

## 2.2. Škola dlja durakov di Saša Sokolov

Nel criptico romanzo di Saša Sokolov, *Škola dlja durakov* (*La scuola degli sciocchi*, 1976), è possibile trovare un interessante esempio di palindromo, che

Bartezzaghi definirebbe di primo tipo<sup>25</sup>, e che Giampaolo Dossena, invece, chiama “pseudobifronte” (Dossena 2004). Nella parte finale della narrazione, in cui la componente metafinzionale dell’opera emerge in maniera prepotente, il lettore s’imbatte improvvisamente in un termine poco comprensibile, “minodvesp” (Sokolov 2009: 132), che non possiede alcun senso evidente in lingua russa. Tuttavia, il contesto nel quale questo misterioso vocabolo è collocato ci fornisce un indizio. L’autore del libro iscritto nel romanzo sta conversando con il suo personaggio/narratore, il ragazzo che frequenta la “scuola degli sciocchi” del titolo. Ci troviamo quindi nella fucina dell’autore, nel *locus* narrativo forse più “autentico” dell’intero romanzo: le due figure stanno discutendo del mestiere letterario, un lavoro che assorbe tutto il tempo dell’autore, ma anche quello del personaggio, al quale il primo consiglia di raccontare ancora certi episodi della sua vita per riempire qualche pagina in più: “заполним еще несколько страниц беседой о чем-нибудь”<sup>26</sup> (Sokolov 2009: 133). Traspaiono qui i timori dell’autore nei confronti della censura sovietica, in conseguenza della quale egli paventa di dover essere sottoposto forzatamente alle cure dello psichiatra Zauze<sup>27</sup>:

[H]о боюсь, что ему, Николаю Горимировичу, не понравится: он все-таки, как писали в прежних романах, немного слишком устал и угрюм. Думаю, попадись ему только в руки моя книга, он позвонит вашему отцу — они с отцом, насколько мне известно, старые товарищи по батальону, служили вместе с самим Кузутовым — и скажет: знаете, мол, какой о нас с вами пасквиль состряпали? [...] И боюсь, после этого у меня будут большие неприятности, вплоть до самых неприятных, боюсь, меня сразу отправят туда, к доктору Заузе.<sup>28</sup> (Sokolov 2009: 132)

A questo punto, per cercare di passare attraverso le fitte maglie della censura sovietica, lo studente consiglia allo scrittore di non pubblicare il libro con il suo nome, ma con un “minodvesp” (Sokolov 2009: 132). Evidentemente si vuole giocare qui sull’apparente incomprensibilità della parola, che svierebbe la censura e, di conseguenza, salverebbe l’autore. Un parlante nativo, tuttavia, non può fare a meno di individuare in questa parola “immaginaria” almeno due nuclei semantici, legati, il primo alla parola “mina”, nel duplice significato di “volto” e “mina”, e il secondo al numerale femminile “dve”, “due”. Si applica in questo caso il principio della “etimologia popolare”, dotando di significato una parola evidentemente criptata, come del resto era comune nel gergo della mala russa. Ma se leggiamo questa parola da destra a sinistra, come nel riflesso di uno specchio, scopriamo quel capovolgimento “semiotico” di cui parlava Lotman che, in questo mondo finzionale, esemplifica la ricerca di un’alternativa creativa alla soffocante realtà sovietica. E, in effetti, la parola incriminata altro non è che “psevdonim”, ovvero pseudonimo.

<sup>25</sup> “una sequenza di lettere che non porta a una parola esistente”, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/palindromi\\_\(Enciclopedia\\_dell'Italiano\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/palindromi_(Enciclopedia_dell'Italiano)/) (consultato il 18/11/2013).

<sup>26</sup> Tr. it.: “riempiamo ancora qualche pagina con una chiacchierata su qualcosa” (Sokolov 2007: 211).

<sup>27</sup> Si ricordano brevemente le due modalità tipiche della repressione dissidente: lavori forzati o internamento in un ospedale psichiatrico.

<sup>28</sup> Tr. it.: “ho paura che a lui, a Nikolaj Gorimirovič, non piacerà quello che scrivo: lui, nonostante tutto, come si scriveva nei romanzi di una volta, è *non molto, ma leggermente troppo* stanco e cupo. Credo che se il mio libro finirà nelle sue mani, lui telefonerà a vostro padre – non va dimenticato che lui e vostro padre sono vecchi compagni d’arme, hanno prestato servizio nientemeno che nell’esercito di Kutuzov – lei è al corrente, dirà, della bella pasquinata che ci hanno ammannito? [...] [H]o paura che questo chiarimento darà luogo a molte spiacevolezze nei miei confronti, compresa la più spiacevole di tutte: ho paura che mi spediranno subito *là*, dal dottor Zauze” (Sokolov 2007: 209).

Tuttavia, questo “camuffamento” sembra aver depistato non soltanto la censura sovietica, ma in certi casi anche i traduttori contemporanei. Nella traduzione italiana a cura di Margherita Crepax, ad esempio, troviamo un non meno enigmatico “Omino Due SP” (Sokolov 2007: 210). Se, da un lato, la sua proposta, riproducendo il palindromo dell’originale e frammentando la parola “immaginaria” in tre parti, cerca di “costruire un doppio del sistema testuale che [...] possa produrre effetti analoghi nel lettore” (Eco 2003: 16), la soluzione trovata non pare particolarmente felice, perché lascia incerto il lettore su come “leggerla” adeguatamente. Forse nella coppia “Omino” “Due” si è voluto celare l’ambigua condizione necessaria per la sopravvivenza dello scrittore dissidente sovietico? Un’altra soluzione<sup>29</sup>, che non rinuncia però a evidenziare il cruciale nucleo semantico della duplicità autoriale, potrebbe essere trovata mediante l’anagramma della parola stessa, ottenendo un più convincente “dueponimos”.

Anche in virtù della perfetta omonimia dei termini nelle due lingue, la versione inglese, “mynoduesp” (Sokolov 1988: 219), mantiene la stessa forma dell’originale, ricalcando il palindromo, ma smarrendo il potenziale semantico contenuto nel russo. In alternativa, la traduzione inglese avrebbe potuto ricorrere a procedimenti simili a quelli messi in atto da Dmitrij Nabokov. Infatti, anagrammando la prima parte del lemma “*pseudonym*”, “pseud-”, si ottengono, come suggerisce Curl (1982: 149), altre due parole di senso compiuto, “spued” e “dupes”. Nel primo caso, il passato/participio passato del verbo “to spew” (che significa “eruttare”, “rigurgitare”, “vomitare”, ma anche “sgorgare”, “scaturire”) permetterebbe di valorizzare quella dimensione di liquidità che informa l’intero romanzo. Pertanto, la soluzione “spued onym”, “nome sgorgato”, “nome scaturito”, contribuirebbe a rafforzare ulteriormente il riferimento al tema dell’acqua e a quello scorrere sotterraneo della letteratura “autentica” che Sokolov, e altri come lui, auspicavano ai tempi del regime sovietico. Anche il secondo anagramma, “dupes”, consentirebbe il recupero di altre caratteristiche fondamentali dell’opera. Se s’intende “dupe” nel suo significato di “credulone”, “allocco”, si riuscirebbe a riprendere il tratto del disagio mentale che connota il protagonista, già a partire dal titolo, e dunque dal paratesto<sup>30</sup>. Con un “dupes onym”, “nome dei creduloni”, l’autore riuscirebbe, secondo il suo personaggio, a beffare i censori, e dunque a farla franca. Questo elemento si collega direttamente al significato di “to dupe”, “ingannare”, “frodare”, azione che corrisponde all’effetto primario che si vuole solitamente ottenere con l’uso di uno pseudonimo. Pertanto, il “dupes onym”, ovvero “il nome inganna”, ripete, mettendolo in primo piano, il dato dell’inaffidabilità, nella sua duplice articolazione di inattendibilità dell’autore nei confronti della censura, ma anche nei confronti del suo pubblico<sup>31</sup>. Si noterà, a questo punto, che le soluzioni proposte per l’inglese sono ancora una volta “*cognate anagrams*”. Una simile scelta traduttiva potrebbe essere giustificata anche dalla funzione “profetica” che l’anagramma svolgeva presso le antiche culture greche e romane, ma anche nella Cabala. Come ricorda Curl, “[i]t was believed [...] that anagrams had a mystical significance, and they were at times

<sup>29</sup> Emersa dalla discussione con il prof. Alessandro Niero, che ringraziamo.

<sup>30</sup> A questo proposito, si pensi anche alla “dedica” dell’autore, anch’essa inserita nel paratesto (prima dell’*incipit* del romanzo): “[с]лабоумному мальчику Вите Пляскину, моему приятелю и соседу. Автор” (Sokolov 2009: 6) Trad. it.: “[a]l ragazzo debole d’intelletto, Vitja Pljaskin, mio amico e vicino di casa. L’autore” (Sokolov 2007: 5).

<sup>31</sup> Il narratore di *Škola dlja durakov* è infatti inaffidabile.

used in prophecy” (1982: 9)<sup>32</sup>. Significativamente, il medesimo compito quasi “divinatorio” viene assolto dai fittissimi riferimenti biblici criptati all’interno del testo, che, in maniera coerente, dipingono lo scenario pressoché apocalittico della fine del regime sovietico.

<i>ST</i> (Russkij)	“minodvesp”		
<i>TT1</i> (Italiano)	“Omino Due SP”	<i>TT2</i> (Italiano, <i>proposta</i> )	“dueponimos”
<i>TT3</i> (English)	“mynoduesp”	<i>TT4</i> (English, <i>proposta</i> )	“spued onym”
		<i>TT5</i> (English, <i>proposta</i> )	“dupes onym”

Tab. 4. Possibilità traduttive del gioco di parole sokoloviano in diverse lingue.

### 3. Conclusioni

Nel campo ancora parzialmente inesplorato della traduzione dei giochi linguistici, intesi come linguaggio figurato, sembra impossibile trarre conclusioni generalizzanti; l’unica regola che si può ravvisare, forse, consiste nel fatto che si possono osservare tecniche diverse adottate in determinate circostanze. Nei casi qui presentati sono emerse almeno due tendenze:

- la traduzione dei giochi di parole attraverso un’alternativa che conservi o la forma o il/i nucleo/i semantico/i del gioco;
- la traduzione dei giochi di parole attraverso una espressione corrispondente nella lingua d’arrivo.

Nella prima ipotesi, ci si avvicina alla proposta di Eco, che vede la traduzione come la creazione di un effetto analogo all’originale nella lingua d’arrivo. Ciò può avvenire tramite forme espressive non connotate, oppure, come succede in traduzioni più eleganti, attraverso il ricorso ad altre forme retoriche, come fece Nabokov figlio pensando al “*cognate anagram*”.

La seconda ipotesi, invece, si verifica con successo nel caso in cui si abbia a che fare con dei calchi o con prestiti linguistici di vocaboli derivati soprattutto dal latino o dal greco; la variazione tra calchi sarà minima, e dunque forma ed effetto saranno più facilmente trasmissibili nella traduzione. Sarà quindi possibile tradurre il palindromo con un palindromo, come abbiamo visto nel caso della traduzione inglese di Sokolov.

Tuttavia, un requisito fondamentale per la traduzione dei giochi di parole sembra essere la profonda conoscenza dell’autore e dell’opera sulla quale si lavora. Se questa indicazione è vera a livello generale nell’ambito della traduzione letteraria, nel contesto specifico della produzione metafinzionale diventa condizione imprescindibile, considerate le difficoltà che questo tipo di narrazioni presentano. C’è, infine, un punto di partenza vincolante per il lettore, e quindi anche per il traduttore, una fioca luce che potrebbe illuminare il suo cammino ermeneutico; scrive Howard W. Bergerson: “[t]he palindromic poet’s only obligation is that his palindromic dream should have a clear meaning for him; for, obviously, the reader – if he finds the poem obscure – has a right to the assurance that there exists a meaning to be discovered” (1973: ix).

<sup>32</sup> Per una rassegna storica sul palindromo, e forme affini, cfr. Dubois (1983). Sulla funzione “magica” del palindromo si veda anche Lotman (1992: 23).



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**Poetry**  
**Poesia**



# Lingue in sala rianimazione: sulle poesie di Roger McGough e la loro traduzione in italiano

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**Abstract:** Nella introduzione alle *Lyrical Ballads*, William Wordsworth invitava i poeti ad abbandonare le espressioni figurate, ormai sterili, che facevano parte del repertorio della “Poetic diction” (così, ad esempio “Feathery tribes” come modo figurato e irrigidito per dire uccelli) per aprirsi alla lingua realmente usata dalla classe medio e medio bassa della società. Analogamente i *Pop poets* di Liverpool (Adrian Henni, Brian Patten, Roger McGough) invitano a ignorare il poetichese (inteso appunto come repertorio di figure poetiche convenzionali) o il linguaggio criptico di certa poesia modernista, per utilizzare piuttosto la lingua parlata dalla gente comune all’epoca della società di massa. Espressioni idiomatiche, colte nella pubblicità dei mass media, o frammenti di conversazione entrano così nella poesia, in modo simile a quanto era successo con la contemporanea pop art di Warhol o Rauschenberg. Ma queste espressioni (singole parole, espressioni idiomatiche, frasi proverbiali ecc.), spesso assunte nel linguaggio quotidiano senza più alcun riferimento al significato denotativo, ma irrigidite come catacresi, vengono sorprendentemente risignificate attraverso processi di ricontestualizzazione o di minima variazione fonetica. Così il pesce “monkfish” in una poesia per bambini di Roger McGough torna ad essere un “pesce religioso” (Ever see an oyster in a cloister / then how about a monkfish?), oppure l’espressione figurata “to have the cake and eat it too”, diventa il pretesto per una macabra ma umoristica poesia (*The Cake. I wanted one life / you wanted another / we couldn’t have our cake / so we ate each other*). Prendendo in considerazione in particolare le opere poetiche di Roger McGough, sulle quali ho lavorato in questi anni in prima persona come traduttore, cercherò di individuare queste espressioni figurate, di ordinarle secondo categorie retoriche (catacresi, idiomatismi, espressioni proverbiali ecc.), di studiarne i meccanismi attraverso i quali i poeti le risignificano e, infine, di proporre alcune possibili traduzioni, con alcune considerazioni sulle strategie traduttive alla luce delle più recenti acquisizioni della traduttologia.

**Parole chiave:** espressioni idiomatiche, poesia, metafore morte, Roger McGough.

*Di solito quando una nuova concezione del mondo succede a una precedente, il linguaggio precedente continua ad essere usato, ma appunto viene usato metaforicamente. Tutto il linguaggio è un continuo processo di metafore, e la storia della semantica è un aspetto della storia della cultura; il linguaggio è insieme una cosa vivente ed un museo di fossili della vita e delle civiltà passate. Quando io adopero la parola disastro nessuno può incolparsi di credenze astrologiche e quando dico “per Bacco” nessuno può credere che io sia un adoratore delle divinità pagane, tuttavia quelle espressioni sono una prova che la civiltà moderna è uno sviluppo anche del paganesimo e dell’astrologia.  
Antonio Gramsci (2201: II, 1438)*

Oltre ai filologi che, per professione, analizzano i nomi con la lente d’ingrandimento della storia della lingua, sono a volte i bambini o i poeti che riescono a scorgere nelle parole cose inaspettate, grazie a uno sguardo obliquo,

curioso, che sembra rifiutarsi di accettarle nella loro asettica convenzionalità, irrigidite come sono spesso dagli automatismi della comunicazione. Forse certi termini o certe espressioni, utilizzati dapprima come traslati, si sono nel tempo standardizzati, trasformandosi in cliché, imbrigliando la vitalità semantica ed evocativa che scaturisce dalla interazione conflittuale fra le due parti – *tenor* e *vehicle* (Richards 1936) o *primary* e *subsidiary subjects* (Black 1954) o *tenor* e *subsidiary subject* (Prandi 2010: 308) – che costituiscono la metafora. Gianni Rodari, con le sue poesie per l’infanzia, ma non solo, ha offerto a generazioni di italiani numerose occasioni per attivare la vitale curiosità per la lingua, per esercitare quella grammatica della fantasia che sollecita i corto circuiti fra le parole, costringendole “a uscire dai binari dell’abitudine”, a scoprire “nuove capacità di significare” (Rodari 1973: 17), che a volte coincidono semplicemente con la riscoperta della loro vivezza originaria.

I traduttori purtroppo, come notava con riprovazione Ortega Y Gasset (2001: 30-31), hanno spesso nei confronti della lingua d’arrivo un atteggiamento di deferenza, costretti a questo anche da *editor* ed editori preoccupati più del mercato che della poesia. Questo atteggiamento li porta a rimettere nei binari della convenzione linguistica ciò che nel testo di partenza poteva invece essere una effrazione intenzionale della lingua e della istituzione poetica, perdendo così un’occasione preziosa per contribuire non solo a tenere in vita il testo tradotto, ma anche a muovere la lingua e la cultura letteraria ospitanti. Uno degli obiettivi di questo articolo è semplicemente quello di richiamare l’attenzione sull’importanza che la traduzione di testi poetici ha non solo nell’apprendimento della lingua e della cultura straniera, ma anche nel sollecitare la lingua di arrivo a rimettersi in gioco nel rapporto dialettico con l’altro.

Rifacendomi alla centralità della coppia bermaniana di “esperienza e riflessione” (Berman 2003: 15-18), e rifuggendo quindi da ogni pretesa definitoria o normativa su come si debba tradurre una metafora, presenterò alcuni tentativi di traduzione in italiano di poesie per l’infanzia particolarmente ricche di traslati, scritte dal poeta inglese Roger McGough. Le ho chiamate “traduzioni aperte”, apponendo in modo pleonastico al sostantivo un aggettivo inutile, perché, come noto, nessuna traduzione può dirsi chiusa e definitiva, o meglio, per dirla con Berman, “la traduzione è nella sua essenza plurale” (2003: 20). Tuttavia, Rodari *docet*, “la parola singola ‘agisce’ solo quando ne incontra una seconda che la provoca” (1973: 17), ed è bene non dimenticare quanta dinamicità e individualità ci sia in potenza nel termine “tradurre”, “*traducere*”, nel senso di “condurre oltre” con un atto intenzionale, come sottolineava Gianfranco Folena analizzando l’uso innovativo che Leonardo Bruni fece di questo termine (Folena 1991: 72). Dopo tre brevi premesse sulla traduzione (che diventeranno cinque nel corso dell’esposizione) e una ancor più breve digressione sui tipi di metafora, cercherò di descrivere alcune specificità della poetica di McGough e del gruppo di poeti a lui affini, noti come “pop poets” di Liverpool, insistendo in particolare sulla loro intenzionale “rivitalizzazione” dei cliché, per giungere poi alla traduzione delle poesie per l’infanzia tratte da *The Imaginary Menagerie* e ad alcune riflessioni su di esse.

## 1. Tre brevi premesse sulla traduzione e una digressione sulle metafore

**1.1.** Scrive C. S. Peirce (1923: 3) in un breve e intenso saggio intitolato *The Rules of Philosophy*:

Philosophy ought to imitate the successful sciences in its methods [...]. Its reasoning should not form a chain which is no stronger than its weakest link, but a cable whose fibers may be ever so slender, provided they are sufficiently numerous and intimately connected.

L'immagine è invitante, potrebbe essere virata un poco e adottata da ogni avveduto traduttore di poesia (e non solo). Nel tradurre un testo poetico è necessario che ogni aspetto sia considerato con la massima attenzione: gli elementi metrico ritmici, le figure retoriche e fonetiche, le allusioni intertestuali, il rispetto o l'evasione dalle norme pragmatiche delle istituzioni poetiche formano nella loro complementarità e coesione il testo poetico, un tessuto derivato appunto da tanti diversi fili. L'intero, come diceva già Aristotele, non si risolve nella somma delle sue parti; è maggiore di esse (Aristotele 1968: I, 560). Concentrarsi su un solo aspetto (ad esempio la traduzione della metafora) può essere utile, a patto che si ricordi, riprendendo l'immagine di Peirce, che se consideriamo il testo come una catena, cioè una successione di vincoli meccanicamente e non organicamente connessi, allora il testo che ricostruiremo in una lingua e in una cultura diversa sarà debole quanto lo è l'anello più debole della catena. È più utile, sia per la poesia originale sia per quella originale poesia che costruiamo nella traduzione, non dimenticare che molti fili, per quanto piccolissimi, se intrecciati con perizia e cura, potranno formare un cavo più solido e coeso. Dunque una prima premessa, ovvia, ma che è bene ribadire, è che quando si traduce una poesia non si traduce solo una "figura" ma un testo, in cui la "figura" è uno dei molti fili.

**1.2.** Una seconda premessa, altrettanto ovvia, è che non solo ci sono tanti tipi di metafora, ma che essi si intrecciano con altre figure della poesia in modi diversi, per cui la loro traduzione presenta gradi variabili di difficoltà. Per indicare queste variazioni mi servo di un tecnicismo sportivo: *il coefficiente di difficoltà*. In molti sport si assegna la vittoria a chi riesce a raggiungere una meta nel minor tempo possibile: così avviene nelle gare di velocità a piedi, a nuoto o con qualche mezzo. Si tratta di trasferire un corpo (quello dell'atleta) da un luogo a un altro. In questi sport non sono previste valutazioni sullo stile con cui uno corre, nuota, guida o pedala. In altri invece non solo il corpo deve raggiungere la meta, ma deve farlo anche in modo elegante. Sono gli sport in cui da regolamento anche l'occhio vuole la sua parte: i tuffi, ad esempio, oppure la ginnastica. Le evoluzioni che il corpo fa sono scrutinate e valutate sulla base di tabelle complesse che determinano il grado di difficoltà dell'esercizio. Lo stesso si può dire della traduzione delle figure: non si tratta solo di portare una figura da un testo a un altro, ma di fare in modo che in questo trasporto siano esaltate, e se possibile mantenute, tutte le peculiarità di quella figura, e cioè i suoi numerosi legami con gli altri elementi del testo, con le convenzioni sincroniche e diacroniche in cui quella figura si significa e che la rendono semanticamente ed esteticamente preziosa.

Esemplifico con due poesie: la prima è del newyorkese Billy Collins (2001: 147) che si diverte a giocare con espressioni metaforiche da lui stesso create, ma presentate come fossero *cliché* e si intitola *Idiomatic*; la seconda, *The wrong beds*, è di Roger McGough (2003: 368) che comincia la poesia con una metafora originale

(“La vita è un reparto d’ospedale”), ma poi immediatamente la intreccia con un’espressione idiomatica, “You’ve made your bed – you’ll have to lie in it” che significa (senza voler fare ricorso a un’espressione idiomatica italiana più o meno equivalente) che ciascuno dovrà vivere facendo fronte alle conseguenze delle proprie scelte e delle proprie azioni. Se ci limitiamo al vincolo dell’uso figurato del linguaggio, tralasciando per ora ogni discorso sulla resa del ritmo, la traduzione del primo testo ha un coefficiente di difficoltà basso, la seconda invece presenta un livello di difficoltà pari al 3,9 o addirittura al 4, che nei tuffi è il grado massimo.

*Idiomatic:*

It is a big question to pose so early in the morning  
or “in the light woven by birds,”  
as the Estonians say,  
but still I must ask what is my place in life?  
my “seat on the invisible train,”  
as they say in Hungary.  
I mean why am I just sitting here  
in a lawn chair listening to a thrush,  
“the little entertainer of the woods,”  
as the Swiss call him,  
while out there in the world  
mobs of people are rushing over bridges  
in and out of the cities?  
Vegetables grow heavy in their fields,  
clouds fly across the “face of the earth,”  
as we call it in English,  
and sometimes rockets lift off in the distance –  
and I mean that quite literally,  
“from the top of the table” as the Portuguese have it,  
real rockets rising from the horizon,  
or “the big line,” if you’re an Australian,  
leaving behind rich gowns of exhaust smoke,  
long, smooth trajectories,  
and always the ocean below,  
“the water machine”, as the South Sea islanders put it –  
everything taking place right on schedule,  
“by the clock of the devil,”  
as our grandparents were fond of saying.  
And still here I sit with my shirt off,  
the dog at my side, daydreaming –  
“juggling balls of cotton”, as they say in France.

Ed ecco la poesia di McGough:

Life is a hospital ward, and the beds we are put in  
are the ones we don’t want to be in.  
We’d get better sooner if put over by the window.  
Or by the radiator, one could suffer easier there.

At night, the impatient soul dreams of faraway places.  
The Aegean: all marble and light. Where, upon a beach  
as flat as a map, you could bask in the sun like a lizard.

The Pole: where, bathing in darkness, you could watch  
the sparks from Hell reflected in a sky of ice. The soul  
could be happier anywhere than where it happens to be.



Anywhere but here. We take our medicine daily,  
 nod politely, and grumble occasionally.  
 But it is out of our hands. Always the wrong place.  
 We didn't make our beds, but we lie in them.

**1.3.** Nel testo di Collins le espressioni idiomatiche sono tutte inventate dal poeta<sup>1</sup>, tranne quella inglese (“face of the earth”) – che peraltro è comune anche in italiano (“faccia della terra”) – quasi a voler rendere più verosimile l’intera finzione. Leggendo la poesia si può rimanere affascinati dall’arguzia divertita e dalla leggerezza con cui il poeta riesce a creare interazioni insolite fra campi semantici distanti. Il problema nella traduzione sarà semmai riuscire a mantenere lo stesso livello di grazia e di naturalezza dell’originale; ma la resa delle figure si otterrà abbastanza facilmente restando aderenti al livello lessicale del testo fonte. La poesia di McGough invece presenta un coefficiente di difficoltà massimo. Tutto si gioca su una straniante ricontestualizzazione di un’espressione idiomatica attraverso una metafora originale. Se la vita è un reparto d’ospedale, e già la cosa di per sé non sembra particolarmente rassicurante, noi non solo ci troviamo sempre nel letto sbagliato ma, al contrario di quanto dice l’adagio popolare, siamo anche costretti a restarci nonostante non lo abbiamo “fatto”, *id est* “scelto”, noi. In italiano esistono idiomatismi più o meno equivalenti a “Il letto te lo sei fatto tu, adesso deve sdraiartici sopra e starci” come “Hai voluto la bicicletta? Adesso pedala!”; ma usare l’espressione italiana per tradurre questa poesia sarebbe, temo, un ‘tuffo’ nel vuoto.

Che fare? Di fronte a traduzioni di questo tipo viene naturale pensare che ci siano più soluzioni possibili e che dipendano in gran parte dal progetto traduttivo che si ha in mente, o che si dovrebbe avere in mente, e quindi dallo scopo della traduzione (Reiss, Vermeer 1984; Nord 1997): perché traduciamo? Per piacere? Per una competizione con il testo di partenza o con la lingua di arrivo? Per denaro? E per chi traduciamo? Per un editore accademico? Per un editore commerciale? Per noi stessi? ecc. La terza premessa è che ci sono diverse soluzioni perché ci sono diversi progetti traduttivi (Berman 1995). Il progetto dunque conduce il traduttore nel suo fare, ed è *essenziale*, nel senso forte, ontologico del termine: esso determina e legittima la traduzione. Anche chi traduce pensando di non avere un “progetto traduttivo” ce l’ha: non c’è scampo.

**1.4.** Nella poesia di Collins abbiamo incontrato metafore inedite travestite da idiomatismi; nella poesia di McGough invece un idiomatismo è stato preso in un certo senso alla lettera e, con l’ausilio di una metafora inedita, si è risignificato, dando vita a una disillusa e amara considerazione sulla esistenza. Newmark probabilmente definirebbe le prime “original metaphors” e suggerirebbe di tradurle letteralmente: “In principle, in authoritative and expressive texts, these should be translated literally” (Newmark 1988: 112). La seconda rientrerebbe invece nelle “Cliché metaphors”, descritte come metafore “that have perhaps temporarily outlived their usefulness, that are used as a substitute for clear thought, often emotively, but without corresponding to the facts of the matter” (Newmark 1988: 107). Queste ultime sono entrate così profondamente nel linguaggio da aver quasi completamente perso la forza della loro figura, per ridursi al senso traslato. Newmark le colloca accanto alle “metafore morte” e alle “metafore standard”. Per queste metafore le

<sup>1</sup> Comunicazione personale dell’autore.

strategie traduttive indicate da Newmark sono più varie e ammettono sia l'aderenza letterale sia la sostituzione con equivalenti consolidati nella cultura di arrivo, che però spesso risultano poco accurati (Newmark 1988:109). Che le "dead metaphors" siano veramente morte, e abbiano abdicato così al loro essere metafore per diventare "an expression that no longer has a pregnant metaphorical use" (Black 1993: 26) è un tema, come noto, messo in discussione da più di trent'anni dalla linguistica cognitiva. Così scrive Kövecses (2002: XI), chiudendo con il riferimento al seminale studio di Lakoff e Johnson:

The 'dead metaphor' account misses an important point: namely, that what is deeply entrenched, hardly noticed, and thus effortlessly used is most active in our thought. The metaphors [...] may be highly conventional and effortlessly used, but this does not mean that they have lost their vigor in thought and that they are dead. On the contrary, they are 'alive' in the most important sense – they govern our thought – they are 'metaphors we live by'.

Di fronte alle attenzioni del traduttore molte metafore morte, moribonde o solo un po' assopite sembrano per miracolo tornare in vita. Non succede sempre. Catacresi come "collo di bottiglia" o "gamba di un tavolo" trovano in inglese corrispondenti e poco evocativi "bottle neck" o "table leg". Ma già di fronte a una banale "freccia dell'auto" si può rimanere interdetti: ci si accorge subito che in un'espressione del tipo "The arrow! you forgot to put the arrow!", urlata a un amico che guida distrattamente, c'è qualcosa che non va, e che dietro il nome che designa quell'oggetto che si accende e si spegne ci deve essere una motivazione legata alla storia della tecnologia: ad esempio che le prime autovetture segnalavano il cambio di direzione con astine meccaniche a forma di freccia, manovrate a mano che fuoriuscivano dalla carrozzeria. In inglese d'altronde si usa "blinker" per freccia. La parola potrebbe restare così, inerme, nel suo isolamento necrotico, fino a quando un traduttore, un bambino o un poeta non decidessero di ridare attenzione al soggetto secondario dell'interazione metaforica, trasformando così l'auto in una diligenza del Far West colpita dalle frecce degli indiani o un essere che sbatte le ciglia (blinks).

In un saggio molto rigoroso, ma anche ricco di suggestioni sulla tipologia delle metafore e sulla loro traduzione, Michele Prandi riporta una bella meta-metafora del grammatico medievale Geoffrey de Vinsauf, secondo il quale una metafora è una pecora che salta lo steccato e si trova in un campo straniero: "*Propria ovis in rure alieno*". A quel punto l'animale può decidere di tornare nel recinto spaventato o può restare nel campo straniero cercando di sopravvivere alle bestie nemiche, o accettando le regole del luogo, o imponendo le proprie regole. Per Prandi è importante sottolineare come i vari tipi di metafora abbiano una comune origine, che consiste in un "conceptual transfer and interaction" (Prandi 2010: 306), che possono tuttavia portare a esiti diversi. Ci sono situazioni in cui le metafore tendono a diventare coerenti ("consistent metaphors") con il sistema linguistico e di pensiero, e l'interazione fra "tenor" e "subsidiary subject" tende ad annullarsi, nel senso che il termine sostitutivo sembra identificarsi completamente con il senso primario o viceversa. Così, ad esempio, il termine "ala" nell'espressione "ala di un edificio", perde ogni riferimento all'ala di un uccello o di un aereo e diventa mero sinonimo di "parte". Ci sono invece altre situazioni in cui l'interazione resta "conflittuale" (conflictual); il contrasto tra i due elementi che interagiscono è chiaro e la metafora è vivente e creativa (living). Per quanto il "subsidiary subject" possa perdere ogni specificità semantica originaria a favore del "tenor", per Prandi, alla cosiddetta metafora morta manca "the irreversibility of real death – like the sleeping girl of the

fairytale, a dead metaphor can be raised to new life at any moment” (Prandi 2010: 310). Nessuno può vietare a un bambino, ad esempio, di far muovere le ali a un edificio e permettergli così di volare. Né lo si può vietare a un poeta. Sarà poi compito del traduttore cercare, con il rispetto dovuto al testo e alle rivitalizzate metafore, di far quadrare il cerchio nella lingua e nella cultura di arrivo, sapendo, come sostiene Prandi, che il compito forse più complesso è proprio quello della resa delle “metafore coerenti”:

The most difficult metaphors to translate are not creative, conflictual metaphors, rich in content and typically designed for open-ended interpretation, but consistent, conventional metaphors, documented by extended uses of polysemous words and by idiomatic uses of complex expressions. This does not imply that the translation of conflicting metaphors is free of risk. These risks, however, are of a completely different nature. (Prandi 2010: 319)

## 2. *Mots de la tribu*

Esaurite, per ora, le premesse, presenterò brevemente una caratteristica della poetica di McGough, che assumerò come “case study”. In una sua breve composizione, il poeta di Liverpool informa il lettore su dove egli trovi ispirazione e materiali:

### *Smithereens*

I spend my days  
collecting smithereens.  
I find them on buses  
in department stores  
and on busy pavements.

At restaurant tables  
I pick up the leftovers  
of polite conversation  
At railway stations  
the tearful debris  
of parting lovers.

I pocket my eavesdroppings  
and store them away.  
I make things out of them.  
Nice things, sometimes.  
Sometimes odd, like this. (McGough 1976: 44)

Si parte dunque dalla lingua d’uso, non da repertori tematici o stilistici della tradizione poetica consolidata. Adrian Henri, compagno di McGough nell’avventura così particolare e frizzante dei poeti pop di Liverpool, scrive in una sua dichiarazione di poetica quanto la lingua veramente parlata dalla gente debba costituire il repertorio privilegiato a cui guardare per l’elaborazione del testo poetico. Riprendendo un celebre verso di Mallarmé (“*donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu*”), Henri scrive:

To me the implications of this are obvious: to purify the dialect of *my* tribe. My tribe includes motor-bike specialists, consultants, gynaecologists, Beatles fans, the people who write ‘Coronation Street’, peeping toms, admen, in fact the language of everyone saying anything about anything in English. This implies the whole spectrum of specialist jargon, argot, dialect. More specifically I think my concern should be with the whole area of language as it impinges on me, now. (Henri 1986: 76)

Una preoccupazione, quella di Henri, che ricorda l'*Advertisement* e poi la *Preface* delle *Lyrical Ballads*, dove Wordsworth (1992: 117, 132) dichiara di voler utilizzare la lingua realmente parlata dalla classe media o medio bassa della società e rifuggire intenzionalmente i luoghi convenzionali della dizione poetica. Se per Henri quest'attenzione alla lingua della tribù coincide spesso con il riuso in un contesto stranante di lacerti di pubblicità o versi di canzoni, secondo le modalità citazionistiche di tanta pittura pop inglese o americana (basti pensare ai collage di Rauschenberg o alle riproduzioni di Warhol), McGough frequentemente ruba dalla lingua quotidiana espressioni idiomatiche, le toglie da quell'uso automatizzato che ne aveva disinnescato la carica figurale, e le riporta alla loro primitiva forma significante: le prende alla lettera, le rivitalizza, restituendo alla parola sclerotizzata la sua infinita capacità di sorprendere.

Ce n'è un bel campionario nel corpus poetico di McGough. A voler essere scolastici, nel senso della scolastica, si potrebbe fare una catalogazione delle tipologie utilizzate (unità lessicali, collocazioni, cliché, catacresi, proverbi ecc.) Oppure potrebbe essere interessante sottoporre ai gruppi di ricerca che si occupano di individuare le metafore, e del cui prezioso lavoro siamo grati (Steen 2010), una poesia brevissima come questa:

*Missed*  
out of work  
divorced  
usually pissed

he aimed  
low in life  
and  
missed.

Immagino che si potrebbe discutere se *out of work* o *pissed* siano metafore. Credo che non ci sarebbero dubbi sul fatto che *to aim low* sia un'espressione figurata, ma anche che è un ribaltamento di un'espressione convenzionale: nella vita di solito si "punta in alto", così come *more is up* e *less is down*. È l'antitesi della metafora spaziale (*Oriental metaphor*) che Lakoff e Johnson (2003: 14-21) considerano pressoché universale (e quindi, in un qualche modo, con un coefficiente di difficoltà traduttivo basso). La traduzione presenta semmai qualche problema in più per il ritmo (metro, rima, allitterazioni) e per la scelta di un termine che renda bene quel "*pissed*" ("metafora recente" così gergale e pregnante). Facile invece la resa dell'espressione idiomatica che è stata rivitalizzata grazie a una capriola imprevista: puntare in basso sono capaci tutti, ma fallire pur puntando in basso è una iattura assoluta. Una possibile traduzione potrebbe essere la seguente:

*Mancato*  
disoccupato  
divorziato  
di solito sballato

ha puntato  
in basso nella vita  
e ha  
mancato. (McGough 2004: 100-1)

Espressioni idiomatiche che vengono ascoltate per caso e portate nella sala rianimazione della poesia sono numerose nella raccolta completa di McGough per adulti. Spesso la poesia prende le mosse semplicemente dalla ripresa del senso letterale di uno dei termini che compongono l'idiomatismo.

Nella poesia sul tormento notturno dell'insonne (McGough 2004: 112-3), intitolata "Catching up on sleep", che si può rendere con "recuperare il sonno", il "catch" è inteso alla lettera come "afferrare" o, nel linguaggio sportivo, "placcare" il sonno (*sleep*) che però è "slippery" (e qui siamo di fronte a un altro piccolo gioco di prestigio che sfrutta una quasi omofonia) e sguscia via, trasformando il letto in un campo di rugby dove si gioca per tutta la notte una partita impossibile, con il sonno che scappa da tutte le parti, finché all'alba il difensore esausto riesce a fermarne la corsa.

In modo simile nella poesia "The Rot" (McGough 2004: 86-7) l'espressione idiomatica "the rot set in", per indicare che in un rapporto di coppia qualcosa si è guastato, diventa l'inizio invece di una battaglia inutile combattuta contro la muffa che si sta espandendo, inarrestabile, sui muri casa, dentro gli armadi e fin dentro le vite di una giovane coppia di ex innamorati e dei loro figli.

A volte sono forme proverbiali ad offrire il materiale di partenza per trasformazioni impreviste, sorprendenti, a volte surreali o macabre come in "The cake", dove due amanti in crisi, impossibilitati a "tenere la torta" ("to have the cake") e nello stesso tempo a mangiarla (come dice l'adagio popolare), finiscono per mangiarsi a vicenda:

*The cake*

I wanted one life  
you wanted another  
we couldn't have our cake  
so we ate each other.

Una traduzione quasi parola per parola potrebbe essere:

*La torta*

Io volli una vita  
tu volesti un'altra  
non potevamo avere la nostra torta  
così ci mangiammo l'un l'altro.

Una traduzione letterale, che non è traduzione parola per parola (Berman 2003: 88), dovrebbe occuparsi anche di quello che non c'è nelle singole parole, come il rimando implicito fra *hate* (odiare) e *ate* (passato di mangiare), e i giochi fonetici, la compattezza ritmica dell'enunciato nella sua interezza:

*La Torta*

Io volevo una vita  
tu ne volevi un'altra  
non potemmo tenere la torta  
e così ci mangiammo a vicenda.

Nel terzo e quarto verso si cerca di restituire la compattezza dell'originale con la ripetizione del pattern degli accenti (U U — U U — U U — U), e alcune allitterazioni (/t/ e /m/), anziché forzare le rime con inversioni sintattiche e banali soluzioni grammaticali (come, ad esempio, "La torta tener non potevamo / e a vicenda noi ci

mangiavamo”). Il terzo tipo di traduzione, in questo caso addomesticante ed etnocentrica, è preoccupata soprattutto di rendere la parodia del proverbio lavorando con una massima più o meno equivalente della lingua di arrivo. È certo un problema trovare degli equivalenti assoluti nelle espressioni proverbiali; in questo ambito ci si deve accontentare, come succede spesso con la traduzione e come ha insegnato Eco (2003), di dire più o meno la stessa cosa. Comunque. Per quanto si possa dubitare dell’equivalenza fra le due massime coinvolte, una terza traduzione potrebbe essere:

*La moglie piena*

Io volevo una vita  
tu ne volevi un'altra  
ubriachi tutta la notte  
ci siamo riempiti di botte. (McGough 2004: 90-91)

Non so quale delle tre versioni sia accettabile. Forse tutte e tre, dipende: ciascuna ha una sua ragion d’essere. E si torna alla premessa numero tre: è importante che il traduttore renda esplicito il proprio progetto traduttivo, evitando di nascondersi dietro a una presunta e impossibile invisibilità, causa prima di morte di tanti testi in traduzione.

Un ultimo caso, ma l’elenco potrebbe continuare a lungo, è *Having my Ears Boxed*, un’espressione metaforica con cui si descrive una punizione una volta in uso nelle scuole britanniche. Il maestro colpiva lo studente indisciplinato sulle orecchie con le mani raccolte a formare una sorta di piccola cassa armonica: l’effetto di rintronamento era terribile. L’espressione letteralmente significa infatti “in scatolare le orecchie di qualcuno”. Qui di nuovo l’espressione viene presa alla lettera dall’io che nella poesia è un bambino e che, davanti alla porta del preside, attende di ricevere la punizione temuta, immaginandosi che di lì a poco le orecchie gli saranno tirate fino a staccarsi e poi riposte in un paio di scatole: “Separate coffins of polished pine / L and R. ‘Gone to a better life’”, “Bare singole di pino verniciato / S e D. ‘Passate a miglior vita’” (McGough 2004: 20-21).

Per riuscire a cogliere nelle forme metaforiche “morenti” o sclerotizzate dall’uso queste infinite potenzialità liriche e narrative, è necessario tenere le orecchie ben aperte o fidarsi, come suggeriva Rodari, di quell’ “orecchio acerbo” che hanno anche gli adulti:

È un orecchio bambino, mi serve per capire  
le cose che i grandi non stanno mai a sentire:  
ascolto quel che dicono gli alberi, gli uccelli,  
le nuvole che passano, i sassi, i ruscelli,  
capisco anche i bambini quando dicono cose  
che a un orecchio maturo sembrano misteriose...”  
Così disse il signore con un orecchio acerbo  
quel giorno sul diretto Capranica-Viterbo. (Rodari 1979: 19)

McGough, nella poesia inglese, mi pare sia un ottimo rappresentante di questa categoria di persone che fanno sentire le potenzialità della lingua con orecchio bambino, un orecchio che assomiglia molto all’orecchio acerbo dello studente di una lingua straniera che si arrampica sugli specchi per dare senso, con le sue poche conoscenze, a parole nuove.

### 3. Un bestiario di animali-verbali

Quest'ultima sezione è dedicata alla lettura, accompagnata da qualche breve commento, di alcune traduzioni alle quali ho lavorato negli ultimi tempi. Si tratta di un libretto di poesie per bambini di McGough intitolato *Imaginary Menagerie*. Era stato pubblicato per la prima volta nel 1988 con le illustrazioni di Tony Blundell di molti degli animali immaginari con cui McGough aveva riempito il suo serraglio. Recentemente (2011) McGough ha ripubblicato il libro presso un diverso editore illustrando le poesie personalmente, in una sorta di autotraduzione intersemiotica. Di solito, e questa considerazione ci riporta alla premessa numero tre, gli editori di libri per ragazzi acquistano i diritti dei libri come oggetti comprensivi di testo e immagini. Questo significa che il traduttore non solo deve affrontare i vincoli intratestuali delle poesie (ritmi, giochi di parole, figure ecc.) e intertestuali (riferimenti ad altri testi, parodie, allusioni ecc.) ma deve fare anche i conti con vincoli paratestuali come le immagini, che limitano le soluzioni traduttive. In questo caso specifico, visto che gli animali che McGough ha ripreso sono spesso animali-verbali e che in italiano le soluzioni costringevano a metamorfosi traduttive imbarazzanti, il poeta, con grande generosità, si è dichiarato disponibile a disegnare nuovi animali per la versione italiana, che esce dunque dall'editore Gallucci di Roma con il testo in inglese, l'immagine originale, la traduzione italiana e, dove necessario, con una nuova immagine, che sarà una traduzione intersemiotica fatta dall'autore "originale" di un testo che una volta era suo, ma che con la traduzione è diventato "più o meno" suo.

**3.1** Iniziamo con esempi in cui il nome dell'animale contiene un altro nome, come il "torpedone" che porta in sé un "pedone" o il "canestro" che accoglie un "cane". Sono parole matrioska o, se posso permettermi una metafora originale, *parole incinte*. Alcune avranno un coefficiente di difficoltà traduttivo minimo come:

*Anaconda*  
 Ever see  
 an anaconda  
 drive through town  
 on a brand new Honda?

Don't ask him  
 For a ride

You might end up  
 Inside

Che può facilmente diventare qualcosa del tipo:

Hai mai visto  
 un anaconda  
 sfrecciare per la città  
 su una fiammante Honda?

Non chiedergli  
 di salire

o in pancia  
 vai a finire. (McGough 2013: 18-19)

perché, curiosamente, il serpente ha lo stesso nome sia in italiano che in inglese, e la moto giapponese che contiene è nota in entrambi i contesti culturali. In questo caso si mantiene sia l'animale sia il disegno originale.

Simile, ma con un coefficiente di difficoltà alto, è la poesia *Swordfish*. Qui il pesce spada inglese porta in grembo un pesce parola, ma in italiano?

*Wordfish*  
 Wordfish  
     are swordfish  
 in a state of undress

Criss-crossing  
     the ocean  
 in search of an S.

Restando nell'ambiente ittico si può forse azzardare una sostituzione:

*Pesci orfani*  
 Orfani  
     sono scorfani  
 un po' sotto stress

vanno in cerca  
     per il mare  
 di un C e di una S. (McGough 2013: 138-139)

**3.2.** Pesce spada, come pescecane è spesso percepita come una sola parola, come ferrovia: non credo che quando si pronuncia quella parola si pensi a una via di ferro. Ci avviciniamo alla *catacresi*; e su animali il cui nome è diventato un automatismo McGough si diverte. Al ristorante, quando si ordina un *Monkfish* (in italiano “Coda di rospo”) non si pensa a un pesce religioso che si è messo il saio. Ma se cambia l'ambientazione il pesce ritorna ad essere quello che forse era all'origine:

Ever see  
 an oyster  
 in a cloister?

Then how about  
 a monkfish? (McGough 1988: 70)

Qui si potrà cercare nel repertorio linguistico della lingua in cui si traduce qualche animale acquatico religioso come il pesce San Pietro, un'orata o una foca monaca.

Ancora una volta (vedi premessa 1) non basta però trovare una soluzione per la parola: la poesia, per quanto breve, ha altri equilibri (la rima *oyster cloister*, ad esempio) di cui il traduttore dovrà tener conto. Siccome McGough ama divertirsi, nella nuova edizione del libro ha complicato la storiella in questo modo:

Ever see an oyster  
 in a cloister?

Nuns in a shoal?

A monkfish praying  
 for a lost lemon sole?



La catacresi iniziale (*monkfish*) porta a un universo figurato fatto di suore che nuotano e di pesci monaci che pregano per sogliole/pecorelle smarrite (*lost son, lost soul, lost sole*), con parole quasi omofone in posizione finale di verso: *shoal* e *sole*. Il coefficiente di difficoltà aumenta. Come in precedenza, il repertorio della lingua di arrivo, può offrire soluzioni inattese, come l'omonimia di banco (un banco di pesci, ma anche banco di una chiesa). Sono i regali che le lingue fanno e che permettono insperate compensazioni traduttive, che dovranno poi fare i conti anche con il vincolo paratestuale (McGough disegna per questa poesia un gruppo di suore che nuotano come un banco di pesci, e, per fortuna, non disegna né un *monkfish* né una sogliola) e con quelli intratestuali (come le rime).

Hai mai visto un'ostrica  
in un chiostro?

Un banco di suore in gita?

Una foca monaca che prega  
per una gallinella smarrita? (McGough 2013: 100-101)

*Badger* è il tasso: probabilmente il nome deriva dalla curiosa striscia bianca (badge) che questi animali hanno sul muso. McGough parte da questa rivisitazione della parola "badger" per raccontare la storia di questo animale. Il fatto che all'inizio dei tempi il *Badger* sia cattivo e pericoloso, McGough lo scorge già nel nome che contiene "bad": una *catacresi per di più incinta*, si potrebbe dire. Così è facile immaginare per il poeta che una volta ci fossero sulla terra non solo i *Badgers* ma anche i *Goodgers*, con indole e caratteristiche fisiche molto diverse.

And then suddenly, without warning,  
there came The Great Drought  
followed by The Great Fire  
followed by The Great Flood  
followed by The Great Plague  
followed by The Great Jazz Revival.  
And when finally The Great Famine  
took the forest by the throat

Poi d'improvviso, senza preavviso,  
venne la Grande Siccità  
seguita dal Grande Incendio  
seguito dal Grande Diluvio  
seguito dalla Grande Peste  
seguita dal Grande Revival del Jazz  
e quando alla fine la Grande Carestia  
prese la foresta per il collo...  
(McGough 2013: 27)

I *Badgers*, cattivi e avidi più che mai, arraffarono tutto quel che poterono dai poveri abitanti della foresta, mentre i *Goodgers*, altruisti di natura, cercarono di aiutare tutti. Come prevedibile, alla fine i *Goodgers*, a differenza dei *Badgers*, non sopravvissero e si estinsero. Intervenne poi Pan, che volle che i *Goodgers* non venissero dimenticati, e segnò con il bianco indelebile dei giusti il muso dei *Badgers*, che da quel giorno diventarono striati e un po' più mansueti. Il coefficiente di difficoltà della traduzione è piuttosto alto perché oltre alla ripresa del significato etimologico e al gioco con la parola matrioska, il nome dà vita a una storia piuttosto articolata, a conferma della premessa numero uno, e cioè che non dobbiamo preoccuparci troppo di un anello della catena, ma dell'intero. Come succede spesso nelle traduzioni, alcune possibili soluzioni sono sotto il naso: basta imparare ad ascoltare anche la lingua in cui si traduce (quella della importanza della "padronanza" della lingua di arrivo e delle sue istituzioni poetiche è una quarta premessa che non si dovrebbe mai dimenticare). In italiano *Badger* è un animale, ma tasso è anche un albero, il nome di un poeta e la percentuale da dare agli strozzini e

alle banche per un prestito. Nella poesia i *Badgers* dopo le “piaghe” della storia vessano il resto degli animali, e spillano loro tutto quel che hanno, mentre i *Goodgers* sono generosi. In un periodo in cui l’economia è ossessivamente presente nei nostri discorsi viene immediato pensare che i *Badgers* in italiano siano tassi cattivi e alti mentre i *Goodgers* siano tassi buoni e bassi. (Da qui una quinta premessa: le traduzioni sono figlie del loro tempo).

**3.3.** Nel libro ci sono animali dai nomi invitanti come *Bushbaby* (galagone) o *Anteater* (formichiere), che McGough con un gioco di prestigio trasforma in *quasi omofoni* animali impossibili, ma molto attivi già nel nome (*omen nomen*): ecco che il galagone si trasforma in una piccola spazzola (*Brushbaby*) e il formichiere in mangiatore di zie (*Aunteater*). Il grado di difficoltà qui obbliga forse a qualche capriola di troppo, costringendo di conseguenza il poeta illustratore a inventarsi nuovi disegni per la “Spuzzola” e il “Pappagallo carnivoro” italiani:

*Brushbaby*

The brushbaby  
lives under the stairs  
on a diet of dust  
and old dog hairs

In darkness, dreading  
the daily chores  
of scrubbing steps  
and kitchen floors

Dreaming of beauty  
parlours and stardom  
doomed to a life  
of petty chardom.

*Spuzzola*

La spuzzola  
vive sotto le scale  
mangia polvere  
e peli di cane

al buio maledice  
il lavoro d’ogni giorno  
pavimenti da tirare  
in cucina e nel soggiorno

e sogna la bellezza  
i saloni e la celebrità  
ma è destinata  
a una grigia laboriosità.  
(McGough 2013: 38-39)

**3.4.** *Caterpillar* invece è parola matrioska (contiene infatti *cat*), ma foneticamente, con una variazione minima, potrebbe dare l’impressione di essere una sciarada: *cat+pillow* (un gatto cuscino, come mostra bene il disegno di McGough):

*Catapillow*

A catapillow  
is a useful pet

To keep  
upon your bed

Each night you simply  
fluff him up

Then rest  
Your weary head.

In italiano una possibile versione potrebbe essere la seguente:

*Caramicia*

La caramicia  
da notte

è un buon  
animaletto

ottima  
se fa freddo

quando  
vai a letto. (McGough 2013: 46-47)

**3.5. Idiomatismi.** La prima definizione che si trova sui dizionari di *Bookworm* è “a person usually devoted to reading and studying”, e solo in seconda battuta un insetto che infesta i libri. Il primo significato della parola è ben presente, ma, come nelle catacresi, spesso dimenticato. Facile, partendo da lì per McGough costruire una storia sui “worms” più intelligenti che il poeta conosca, alcuni dei quali anche vegetariani, attentissimi a evitare di mangiare “names of animals / or references to meat”. Anche quando giunge la loro ora di morire lo sanno fare con grande dignità e compostezza: “they slip between the pages / curl up and eat ‘The End’” (McGough 2013: 36). A volere fare una traduzione “spendibile” e a “equivalenza dinamica” dovremmo ricorrere alla frase idiomatica italiana. Abbiamo anche noi i nostri animali colti, naturalmente i topi da biblioteca. Basterà cambiare alcuni dettagli e la storia funziona anche in italiano.

È ovvio che ci troveremo di fronte a una traduzione addomesticante, ma non potremmo fare altrimenti in questo caso. Un verme da biblioteca in italiano avrebbe connotazioni ben diverse. Inoltre, come ben mostra J.J. Lecercle nel suo corposo *Una filosofia marxista del linguaggio*, una parola come “verme” può diventare oggetto di riflessioni molto interessanti. Il caso che Lecercle analizza è quello di un articolo apparso in un’edizione francese del giornale popolare inglese *The Sun*, “noto per le sue campagne xenofobe” al tempo della guerra contro l’Iraq. Il giornale titolava “Chirac est un ver”, titolo che accompagnava un fotomontaggio con un enorme verme con la testa di Chirac. Lecercle fa notare come questo trasferimento di significato sia da una parte insensato, perché in inglese *worm* ha un significato spregiativo mentre in francese quel campo connotativo sarebbe semmai figurativamente coperto da un animale come il cane (“He made me feel like a worm” – cioè insignificante – in francese sarebbe tutt’al più “Il me traite comme un chien”), ma d’altra parte evidenzia come il testo francese non sia “nato” in francese, ma sia una forzatura della lingua inglese: in breve, un esempio di imposizione linguistica, che Lecercle chiama imperialista.

L’operazione di traduzione del Sun è corretta e semplicistica. È corretta, perché l’enunciato “Chirac è un verme” è impeccabilmente grammaticale; [...] ma è semplicistica. Il traduttore ha aperto mentalmente un dizionario inglese-francese alla parola “worm” [...] Questa concezione del linguaggio, che fa della lingua una lingua veicolare, uno strumento di comunicazione trasparente [...] ignora completamente che cos’è una lingua naturale: cioè il fatto che questa, chiamata così dalle lingue artificiali, è in realtà una costruzione culturale. Afferrare una lingua per il verso obliquo attraverso le connotazioni, significa comprendere che una lingua è anche una storia, una cultura, una concezione del mondo, e non solamente un dizionario e una grammatica. (Lecercle 2012: 21)

Le filastrocche, i nonsense, le poesie giocano spesso con il “senso obliquo” della lingua e fanno sentire l’urgenza di prestare attenzione anche a quelle lingue *altre*, che

sono anche negli strati fossili della lingua quotidiana, che forse troppo spesso dimentichiamo o relegiamo ai margini della “langue”. Perché, come scrive Paolo Bagni, in uno studio che meriterebbe ripetute rivisitazioni sia per la densità concettuale sia per la grazia stilistica, la metafora non è “mediazione”, ma “medietà”, è esitazione, “stare in mezzo”:

Stare tra: tra normalità e contraddizione, tra l'appartenere e il diventare altro, tra l'ovvio e l'inaudito, tra il mai pronunciato e il luogo comune, tra il non mai inteso e il già saputo, tra l'esibita evidenza del dire e il taciuto orizzonte di un non detto, tra ciò che non è ancora e ciò che è già. (Bagni 2003: 224)

E poco oltre, l'auspicio che la lingua riesca a salvarsi dall'appiattimento della semplificazione, dall'asserzione definitiva, omologante di un linguaggio univoco, grazie a una “scintilla di felicità verbale” che è custodita dai cliché, dalle metafore:

Quando nel luogo comune emergono le condizioni di un dire che sempre oltrepassa ciò che è comune per catturare l'altro, quando, catturati dal già detto, sempre di nuovo troviamo l'imminenza di qualcosa ancora da dire: allora, ecco, è il tempo della parola che dobbiamo interrogare. [...] Che la metafora esiti tra appartenenza e metamorfosi: in ciò che è comune saper catturare l'altro, saper diventare altro, così da rispettare la promessa di un destino metaforico, ma per ritrovare in ciò che è stato il tempo dell'attesa, così che niente di ciò che è stato realmente vada perduto. (Bagni 2003: 226)

**3.6.** Tornando ai vermi, ai topi da biblioteca e alle espressioni idiomatiche: qualcuno dei lettori più affezionati alle traduzioni “vere”, quelle con la T maiuscola, si sarà spazientito e avrà pensato che queste non sono vere poesie, e che neppure le traduzioni sono vere traduzioni; o forse avrà già raggiunto un livello di insofferenza tale che, come dicono gli inglesi, avrà uno scatto d'ira, “a Hairy canary”. C'è anche lui nel bestiario di McGough, che non lavora più solo con semplici parole (catacretiche, incinte, sciarade ecc.) da cui derivare con o senza leggere variazioni fonetiche o grafiche storie, ma con espressioni idiomatiche, come quelle viste in precedenza, che danno vita attraverso la sovrapposizione di piani semantici, a storie curiose:

<i>Canary</i> Beware the canary gone hairy	<i>Canarino</i> Sta' attento al canarino se gli spuntano i peli
Fed on steroids instead of seeds	Nutrito con steroidi invece di semini
On humans now this mutant feeds	questo strano mutante mangia anche i bambini
A tweet like thunder eyes that rage	cinguetta come il tuono ha occhi pieni di rabbia
Do not loiter near its cage	non stare lì a far niente vicino alla sua gabbia
Beware and be wary There's nothing as scary as a furry canary.	Sii cauto e sospettoso Niente è più spaventoso di un canarino peloso. (McGough 2013: 44-45)

Qui, in italiano, la storiella funziona, più o meno, lo stesso, ma certamente si perde la forza dell'espressione figurata da cui è partita la poesia. A questo punto, potremmo dire con una traduzione straniante o, credo meglio, stranierizzante, che in questo caso non siamo riusciti a tenere la torta e a mangiarla. Anche per questo credo che un buon sottotitolo per la versione italiana di questo libretto di poesie per bambini di Roger McGough sia "traduzioni aperte", nel senso che ogni lettore potrà proporre una sua soluzione alternativa, anche intersemiotica, volendo.

Come le poesie, i giochi di parole, i nonsense sono spesso delle maschere d'ossigeno per una lingua che, se lasciata alle sole bocche di parlanti e scrittori ossequiosi della norma e della lingua standard, diventerebbe presto tanto ingessata e sclerotizzata da morire, così le traduzioni possono portare aria nuova nella lingua di arrivo. Un traduttore non è un becchino, un trasportatore di cadaveri. Ci piace piuttosto immaginarlo come un infermiere, modesto ma indispensabile, che cerca di tenere in vita sia un testo di un'altra cultura e di un'altra lingua sia la propria lingua e la propria cultura.

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# “only a finger-thought away<sup>1</sup>”: Translating figurative language in Troupe’s and Daa’ood’s poetry

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***Abstract:** This paper focuses on the issues raised by the translation of idioms, amphibology, wordplay, onomatopoeia, neologisms and portmanteau words, in the perspective of pinpointing the specific challenges one meets when translating oral poetry, and keeping in mind the interconnection between orality and literacy as an essential element of a Black aesthetic. As it examines some pieces by American poets Quincy Troupe and Kamau Daa’ood in translation, it aims at bringing to light the specific problems raised by the interweaving of the visual and the aural as made particularly salient by figurative language. It argues that, in a literal and metaphorical meaning as well, collaboration is of the essence when translating figurative language. Drawing on Clive Scott’s idea that “the ‘work’, the outcome of an ongoing sequence of avant-textes remains, in some senses, hypothetical” and on Paul Valéry’s representation of the work of translation as “caus[ing] us in some way to try walking in the tracks left by an author; and not to fashion one text upon another, but from the latter to work back to the virtual moment of its formation”, it argues that, when translating figurative language in performance poetry, the translator may be viewed as an arranger who uses the source text as score, taking his turn in a continuum of performances both written and oral which ensure the survival of the poems.*

***Keywords:** performance poetry, Quincy Troupe, wordplay, neologism, amphibology.*

## 1. Introduction

What is figurative language? Definitions almost always include imagery, metaphor, simile, hyperbole, synecdoche, puns, personification. They may also include additional figures of speech such as onomatopoeia, idioms, alliteration. This flexibility and variability in the definition of figurative language immediately points to the questionability of a reduction of figurative language to what belongs to the sphere of the image and encourages us to include in a discussion of figurative language in translation elements which are usually deemed to belong to the field of rhythm and sound. Indeed, puns and wordplay for instance may rely on sound effects which, in oral poetry, are of crucial import. In his introduction to a collection of essays on punning and translation, Dirk Delabastita remarks that “classificatory assessments must be made in a global and context-sensitive manner, that grey zones may exist between prototypically clear points of reference” (Delabastita 1997: 5). I shall argue that translating Troupe’s and Daa’ood’s poetical works, which make up the corpus of my case-study, requires an increased attention to those “grey zones” which, largely because we are dealing with performance poets who write oral poetry, are an overarching feature of their poetry, as they accommodate the oral and the written word.

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase appears in Troupe’s poem “memory” (Troupe 2002: 79).

While figurative language is often divided into “figures of thought” (tropes) and “figures of speech” (schemes or rhetorical figures), the dividing line is anything but clear (see Teilanyo 2007: 310). I shall thus rely on Abrams’ 1988 most inclusive definition of “figurative language” as involving “a deviation from what speakers of a language apprehend as the ordinary, or standard significance or sequence of words, in order to achieve some special meaning or effect” (Abrams 1988: 63).

Meanwhile, while the translation of metaphors is certainly a crux in translation studies, the emphasis on metaphor has tended to obscure the debate on the translation of figurative language by sidetracking other figures and phenomena which may be of equal interest and import to translators. Meschonnic was among the first translators and theoreticians who pointed out the damageable neglect of sound and rhythm resulting from excessive concern with metaphors. Therefore, I propose to elude that all-powerful monarch of figurative language, metaphor, in this article, though Troupe himself evokes metaphor in his poems, not in a roundabout way, but most directly, as he repeatedly uses the word “metaphor” itself, thus not only calling a spade a spade, but possibly pinpointing a characteristic feature of his craftsmanship as a poet, as is exemplified by the following two excerpts.

& it is the collected face of collected memory that wears  
 the **metaphor**<sup>2</sup> of collected dust  
 the collective mathematics of lamenting calibrations  
 hieroglyphics  
 cracking & peeling & curling in stone, dust storms swirling  
 around edges  
 (“skulls along the river”, Troupe 2002: 103)

eye walk, liquid footsteps of my words  
 across tongue bridge, to where you stand  
 just now, offer you these bittersweet syllables  
 pregnant with history of what  
 we have seen together, **metaphors**,  
 (“eye walk”, Troupe 2002: 188)

I will thus mostly focus on the somewhat eclipsed issues raised by the translation of idioms, amphibology, wordplay, onomatopoeia, neologisms and portmanteau words, all of these in the perspective of pinpointing the specific challenges one meets when translating oral poetry, and keeping in mind that some scholars have identified “the intrinsic interconnection between orality and literacy as an essential element of a Black aesthetic” (Du Ewa Jones 2002: 66) and have coined the stimulating concepts of “voiceprint” or “soulscript” (June Jordan quoted by Du Ewa Jones 2002: 66).

Collaboration, which etymologically speaking points to the experience of working together, has been central to my work as a translator of Troupe’s poetry, as it has been central to the work of the Passages collective of translators who, in addition to collaborating as a collective, have collaborated with Daa’ood, just as I have very literally collaborated with Troupe through interviews and phone calls and e-mails. But I hope to demonstrate that, in a more metaphorical way as well, collaboration is of the essence when translating figurative language.

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<sup>2</sup> All subsequent words appearing in bold type are my emphasis.



## 2. Background

Though they differ in many ways, the poetic works of those two writers, related as they both are to the Black Arts Movement and the Watts Writers Workshop (a creative writing workshop which emerged in the wake of the 1965 Watts riots in Los Angeles), call for a joint examination. For the purpose of this article, their mutual interest in the interplay of the vocal and the visual will be foregrounded, to the detriment of more distinctly individual features. While, as is the case with other poets who emerged with the Black Arts Movement such as Amiri Baraka, Sonia Sanchez, K. Curtis Lyle or Ojenke, their poetry testifies to the influence of the sounds of jazz, its visual dimension was downplayed for a long time. As was pointed out by Du Ewa Jones in his 2002 landmark article on orality and textuality in jazz poetry,

because many [...] of the jazz-inflected poems penned by Black Arts writers during the mid-1960s and early 1970s were composed with the intent for oral recitation in public community spaces such as theatres, neighborhood centers, church parish halls, and yes, coffee shops, the achievements of their compositional effects on a *textual* level have not been sufficiently appraised. (Du Ewa Jones 2002: 77)

Besides, not all of Troupe's or Daa'ood's poetry is jazz poetry, far from it. I will thus focus on that "*textual level*", trying not to forget though the background I have just delineated, which has left a durable imprint on their poetics. It is indeed the specific problems raised by the translation of this interweaving of the visual and the aural as made particularly salient by figurative language in their poetry which will be my main concern here.

## 3. Idioms

Troupe's poems are characterised by firmly anchored cultural references, also called "culturèmes" (Ballard 2005: 126), preeminently encapsulated in figures of speech, such as African American idiomatic phrases or metaphors borrowed from basketball lingo.

### 3.1. Basketball lingo

Troupe used to play basketball, having made it to the all-star basketball team in his twenties. His father (also named Quincy Troupe) was a great athlete, who made all-state in football, basketball and baseball, and would most probably have made all-star baseball, if it had not been for the racially-prejudiced environment of late 1930s and early 1940s America, which prevented him from playing in the Major Leagues. Troupe's poems feature such basketball celebrities as Michael Jordan or Magic Johnson to whom he pays homage in his 1984 "poem for 'magic'". The poem may be read as an attempt to "translate" in writing the magic of Magic Johnson's moves on the playing court, since Troupe's alternately jarring and fluid rhythms, long and short clauses, mimic Magic Johnson's fast changes in rhythm, strategically aimed at surprising the opponent. It is thus an intersemiotic translation of some sort, in much the same way as jazz poetry has been described as "the translation of a jazz ethos into a poetic aesthetic" (Du Ewa Jones 2002: 71) or the "translation of jazz instrumentation into written form" (Du Ewa Jones 2002: 72). While the rhythm in the poem is meant to mimic Johnson's moves and produce what I propose to call a "basketball poetry prosody", thus posing serious problems for the French translator

whose native language is not syntactically well equipped to accommodate such fast changes in rhythm, the first task of the translator is to find his/her way in a wilderness of basketball lingo, much as Magic Johnson is finding his through the jungle of “human trees” the players are metaphorically referred to as.

up & down, you see everything on the court, off the high  
yoyo patter, stop & go dribble, you shoot  
a threading needle rope pass sweet home to kareem  
cutting through the lane, his skyhook pops the cords  
now lead the fastbreak, hit jamaal on the fly  
now blindside a behind the back pinpointpass for two more  
off the fake, looking the other way  
(“a poem for ‘magic’”, Troupe 2002: 152)

d’un bout à l’autre, tu vois tout sur le terrain, alors que tu dribbles  
façon yoyo, stop & go, tu fais une passe  
dans le style fil dans le chas d’une aiguille, tranquille, à kareem  
qui traverse la raquette, son tir crochet met en plein dans le filet  
et puis tu contre-attaques, tu passes à jamaal à la volée  
et tu enchaînes avec une passe aveugle dans le dos  
tout en feignant et en regardant de l’autre côté  
(“poème à ‘magic’”, Troupe 2014<sup>3</sup>)

### 3.2. Basketball lingo and African American idioms

The translator’s task is further complicated by the combination of basketball lingo and African American idioms in some lines of the poems.

juke & dazzle, shaking & baking down the lane  
take the sucker to the hoop, ‘magic’ johnson  
recreate reverse hoodoo gems off the spin  
deal alley-oop-dunk-a-thon-magician passes, now  
double-pump, scissor, vamp through space, hang in place  
& put it all in the sucker’s face, ‘magic’ johnson  
& deal the roundball like the juju man that you am  
like the sho-nuff shaman man that you am  
‘magic,’ like the sho-nuff spaceman that you am  
(“a poem for ‘magic’”, Troupe 2002: 153)

en avant pour embrouilles et bluff, et feintes dans la raquette  
amène ce ballot jusqu’au panier, ‘magic’ johnson  
recommence tes diableries de dribble avec rotation arrière  
fais-nous tes passes lobées de magicien ponctuées de smash en série  
tes doubles extensions, tes ciseaux, improvise dans l’espace, reste en suspens  
et mets-en plein la vue de ce ballot, ‘magic’ johnson  
et envoie le ballon comme le fétiche que t’es  
comme le sacré chaman que t’es  
‘magic’, comme le sacré cosmonaute que t’es  
(“poème à ‘magic’”, Troupe 2014)

The recurring “sho-nuff” here is an African American idiomatic phrase meaning “sure enough”. Recapturing the orality of those lines which read as direct address or apostrophe to Magic Johnson appeared as a priority, which led me to deliberately disregard the specifically African American idiolect the word belongs to.

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<sup>3</sup> All references to Troupe 2014 are references to my forthcoming translation of his poems (see References).

Incidentally, when first confronted with the idiom, I asked Troupe if it referred to a kung-fu character (I was thinking of a character in the 80s film *The Last Dragon*). His answer was: “No. But if you think it works here as referencing both things, then by all means use it like that.” This testifies to Troupe’s ready acceptance of additional ambiguities brought in by the translation and points to his conception of translation as part of the process of “cumulative increase” (Scott 2006: 109) that writing itself is. In that perspective, one might say that Troupe belongs to a postmodernist tradition which acknowledges that, intertextuality being part of the very dynamic of translation (see Scott 2006: 116), a “postmodernist vision of the unowned text” (Scott 2006: 115) may allow for substantial interventions on the part of the translator.

Meanwhile, the translation of “hoodoo” also raised an interesting issue. While the word, rooted in a Southern folk tradition and frequently used with the same meaning as voodoo, may mean “bad luck”, amongst many African American poets, musicians and visual artists, as I was told by Troupe, it means instead a new world kind of magic, Magic Johnson being thus viewed as a kind of witch-doctor or magician when he creates a basketball move like the one “translated” in the poem. The French word “diableries”, while it allows for the introduction of a welcome alliteration (making up for other lost alliterations), appears as a satisfying equivalent in that it conjures up a similarly harmless, if not playful, type of magic.

Sometimes, idioms may be conflated with personal references. A sociolect may also be an idiolect. It is the case with “you am” here, which is a phrase older Southern African American people use. Troupe mentioned in a conversation that its usage evolved out of a personal experience he had with an old woman he met one day in the elevator of the apartment building he lives in. While my choice of “t’es” to translate “you am” conveys the a-grammatical and oral character of the expression, it fails to aggregate the various connotations the American expression holds for Troupe: older people, Southern people, a neighbour’s idiolect. (Besides, it fails to convey the interesting conflation of “you” and “I”, which in the source-text reads as a hint of the identification of poet and basketball player and the consequent elevation of the poet’s artistry through his elevation of the player’s craftsmanship.) Again, recapturing the orality of the line appeared as a priority here, which results in the regrettable, though amply meditated, neglect of colloquial vernacular, among other things.

If we briefly go back to the first excerpt from “a poem for ‘Magic’”, we also notice that difficulties may emerge from syntactical ambiguity in addition to lexical ambiguity. The present participle “cutting” may be read as referring either to Magic Johnson or Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, one of his teammates, here simply evoked as “kareem”<sup>4</sup>. This syntactical ambiguity is typical of Troupe’s poetry and might be one of the most challenging difficulties the French translator is confronted with. It relies on a rhetorical figure known as amphibology in stylistics and it will be at the heart of my next part.

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<sup>4</sup> Troupe frequently uses first names, such as “kareem” or “jamaal”, thus relying on his readers’ familiarity with the celebrated basketball players of the time, while the use of lower case letters instead of capital letters as initials further adds to their “communalisation”. Troupe frequently uses lower case letters when capital letters might be expected, as in titles.

#### 4. Amphibology

Like Amiri Baraka arguing that “the clearest description of now is the present participle” while encouraging his fellow poets to “worship the verb” (Baraka 1966: 175) in his seminal 1964 essay “Hunting Is Not Those Heads on the Wall”, Troupe embraces a poetics of process notably implemented by the frequent use of present participles. What are French translators’ strategies when confronted with an outstanding use of amphibology in poems larded with overstretched present participles whose potential grammatical subjects and objects are numerous and indefinite?

This is illustrated by an excerpt from “what is it poetry seeks”, which I have selected because the poem itself revolves around issues of sense vs sound and situates the aim of poetry preeminently in the search for figures of speech, here envisioned both as sculptures (*cutting a figure of speech*) and shaven faces, with a likely bilingual pun on “figure” and “face”.

what does poetry seek beyond  
 turning a phrase, or two,  
 cutting a figure of speech with a word  
 sharp as a shaver’s wish  
 to rid the face of hair,  
 slicing through the tangle of texts  
 as a razor blade would **lopping off**

**an ear**, a way of hearing,  
 (“what is it poetry seeks”, Troupe 2006: 75)

que cherche la poésie si ce n’est  
 trouver une tournure, ou deux,  
 sculpter une figure de style avec un mot  
 aiguisé comme le désir d’un rasoir  
 de débarrasser le visage de ses poils,  
 fendant le fouillis des textes  
 comme une lame **coupant**

**une oreille**, une manière d’entendre,  
 (“que cherche la poésie”, Troupe 2014)

A major challenge here lies in the syntactical organisation of the two stanzas, and more precisely in the grammatical value of “lopping off”. Should we read the two stanzas as syntactically unrelated and thus analyze “lopping off” as a present participle, derived from the intransitive verb “to lop”, meaning “to droop”, or, taking into account the particle “off”, as a slightly deviant use of the transitive verb “to lop off”, meaning “to cut off”, rid of any complement, thus used as an absolute verb? In that case, though, an alternative remains: “lopping off” may be comparable to “turning” and “cutting” and “slicing”, thus having poetry as its predicate. Or it has the “razor blade” as its predicate. But, the two stanzas may also be syntactically related, and or rather they *must*, since “to lop off” as opposed to “to lop”, is not an ambitransitive verb. Then, if “lopping off” has the “razor blade” as its predicate, it might be read as having “an ear” as a direct object complement, thus supporting an extended simile. As a consequence, meanwhile, it becomes difficult to articulate in an aurally and semantically satisfying manner “a way of hearing” with “lopping off”, while the appositional structure of “an ear, a way of hearing”, relying on the

figurative potentialities of “an ear” as meaning “a way of hearing”, encourages us to do so. And, were we to give an oral performance of that poem, we might then be led to pause after “an ear” instead of pausing after “lopping off”, which tends to show that orality and textuality may compete or vie with one another and be irreconcilable.

As a translator, I have so far opted for the most unblocked solution, acting out on a vision, shared with Clive Scott among others, that “it is the translator’s task to maintain, or indeed increase, the innate incomprehensibility of the ST” (Scott 2006: 106). Now, French as a strongly gendered language makes it especially difficult to maintain a degree of polysemy (and I believe the same goes for all Romance languages). Here, polysemy is guaranteed by the choice of the present participle “coupant” versus the feminine adjective “coupante”, since the choice of the latter would make it impossible to relate it to “an ear” as a direct object complement.

While the pervasive ambiguity of Troupe’s poems feeds notably on the repeated use of idioms and amphibology, soundplay adds yet another level of equivocation which confronts translators with choices made all the more difficult as performance poetry evidently implies the *possibility* of its being performed, hence read aloud.

## 5. Wordplay

As is pointed out by Delabastita, the distinction between wordplay and soundplay is “anything but watertight or unproblematic” (Delabastita 1997: 5). For obvious reasons, in performance poetry, wordplay is most often soundplay. In order to accommodate the requirement that the poem could be performed, the translators may have to prioritise performance over silent reading, hence sounds versus meaning. In other cases, semantics cannot be overlooked and the translators will have to neglect soundplay.

The most prominent use of wordplay in Troupe’s poems lies in his recurrent spelling of “I” as “eye”.

bones gone home to stone, eye say  
 (“skulls along the river”, Troupe 2002: 103)

eye walk, liquid footsteps of my words  
 across tongue bridge, to where you stand  
 just now, offer you these bittersweet syllables  
 pregnant with history of what  
 we have seen together, metaphors,  
 (“eye walk”, Troupe 2002: 188)

use to be eye would be lying there  
 in margaret’s lap, longside her sweet  
 soft thighs, on Sunday mornings, sipping  
 champagne, sucking on her soft, open lips  
 drinking in the love from her moist, brown eyes  
 (“change”, Troupe 2002: 186)

jadis c’était moi qui étais allongé là  
 dans le giron de margaret, contre ses douces  
 ses tendres cuisses, le dimanche matin, à siroter  
 du champagne, à suçoter ses tendres lèvres ouvertes  
 à m’abreuver de l’amour de ses yeux noisette embués  
 (“changement”, Troupe 2014)

Troupe thus appears to conflate vision with subjectivity. But there are other reasons for the wordplay. In an interview he gave to *The American Poetry Review* in 2005, Troupe explains that he uses “eye” instead of “I” in his poems, though not in his prose writing, because of his “embrace of the concept of the ‘third eye’ in the centre of the forehead that comes out of Egyptian philosophy and culture” (Troupe 2005: 53). Since it is impossible in French to match that wordplay with a relevant word in terms of both sound and meaning, the translator is forced to ignore the interesting remotivation of the word “I” through homophony and content himself with the one-dimensional personal pronouns “je” or “moi”. This choice appears even more constrained if the translator keeps in mind that the poem might be read aloud and even more so if it is performed on stage. Any translation of the semantic content of “eye” would block the audience’s access to the more global meaning of the poem since it would make it syntactically incomprehensible. The macro-textual perspective here should prevail over the micro-textual one.

Now, how does a French translator negotiate Daa’ood’s wordplay in “c sharp” (which also reads as “see sharp”) and “b natural” (which also reads as “be natural”)? Confronted with such polysemy and unable to invest the written with the oral the way the source text does, the Passages collective of translators has clearly prioritised here silent reading vs. reading aloud, on the one hand, and the musical background of the work, on the other hand.

c sharp, b natural  
music music  
all is music

b sharp, c natural,  
music music  
life is music  
 (“Liberator of the spirit”, Daa’ood 2012: 44)

do dièse, si bécarré  
musique musique  
tout est musique

si dièse do bécarré  
musique musique  
la vie est musique  
 (“Libérateur de l’esprit”, Daa’ood 2012: 45)

To capture what Meta Du Ewa Jones (2002: 66) calls “the dynamic interplay between vocal and visual characteristics in musically influenced Black poetry” is an authentic challenge to translators. While, to quote Du Ewa Jones (2002: 67), “the sound of language has a visual dimension”, as is clearly manifested here, this visual dimension may be lost in translation, as is wordplay in this instance.

## 6. Onomatopoeia

Another variety of soundplay, onomatopoeia regularly features in American performance poetry, providing as it does an efficient means of bridging the gap<sup>5</sup> between writing and the jazz music this poetry claims as a major source of

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<sup>5</sup> Troupe portrays the poet as “stretch[ing] rubber sentences into bridges of music” (“words that build bridges toward a new tongue”, Troupe 1999 : 107).

inspiration, as is illustrated by these lines blending onomatopoeia, explicit references to jazz musicians, wordplay grounded in the nicknames they were given (“Bird” for Parker, “Trane” for Coltrane) and soundplay relying on homophony (train/trane, coaltrain/coltrane) or paronomasia coupled with etymology (blue/blues):

the bird man still singing now over steel tracks  
snaking through & in between landscapes, where tupac & biggie now sleep  
beside coaltrain(s) blowing through the night’s voodoo air, sweet  
the feeling here now, still blue as you were charlie parker,  
& truly american as slow trains choo-chooing twelve bar blues  
 (“words that build bridges toward a new tongue”, Troupe 1999: 108-109)

While Daa’ood’s “Liberator of the spirit” falls within the framework of the “John Coltrane poem”<sup>6</sup>, “an unmistakable genre in Black poetry” (Kimberly Benston quoted in Du Ewa Jones 2002: 67), his translators interestingly appear to have drawn from a common practice which, though not inimical to his own, exceeds his own poem as they resort to onomatopoeia to translate a phrase which is not onomatopoeic in the source text:

celestial solos  
sailing galactic wailing  
smoke-a-rooney  
**be-bop fingerpop from the top**  
 (“Liberator of the spirit”, Daa’ood 2012: 44)

solos célestes  
voguent sur des lamentos galactiques  
ça emporte, c’est le déclic  
**be-bop les doigts qui claquent et hop**  
 (“Libérateur de l’esprit”, Daa’ood 2012: 45)

Here, the translators seem to have clearly acknowledged the need to prioritise sound vs. sense, as the prepositional phrase “from the top” has been translated as “et hop” which barely means the same thing but most adequately conveys both the dynamics of the line and the assonantic wordplay it relies upon, thus taking into account the musical background of the poem and its author. Onomatopoeia (as used in “et hop”) thus appears as an interesting resource to make up for the loss of the consonantic wordplay supported by both “fingerpop” and “from the top” as they interact with the initial and semantically crucial “be-bop”.

## 7. Neologisms and portmanteau words

Equally challenging is the translation of neologisms and portmanteau words, not least when the latter are bilingual and foregrounded by their use as titles, signalling their programmatic function and the author’s most visible intention to emphasise his interest in creation viewed as cross-fertilisation<sup>7</sup>. Indeed Troupe readily describes himself as a “neologist”: “I believe in the poet being a neologist, which is one of the

<sup>6</sup> On that tradition, see Du Ewa Jones 2002: 67 and 88, n.1.

<sup>7</sup> This interest is notably emblematised by his running a literary series called “Artists on the Cutting Edge: Cross Fertilizations” at the Museum of Contemporary Art in San Diego from 1993 to 1999, bringing together poets (John Ashbery, Derek Walcott, Kamau Brathwaite, etc.), novelists (Toni Morrison, William Gass, etc.) and musicians, about which he comments: “I loved mixing up everything because this is the way things truly are in the United States: mixed up.” (Troupe 2005: 54)

reasons I called my last book of poems *Transcircularities*, which you won't find in the dictionary because I made the word up." (Troupe 2005: 53)

While his 2002 collection of poems was entitled *Transcircularities*, his latest collection of poems, published in 2012, is entitled *Errançities*. The word includes a truly and literally remarkable cedilla ("ç") which immediately conjures up French as a language, and it is evidently coined with the French word "errance" (meaning "wandering") combined with the English word "cities". The cedilla may thus be said to be literally bridging the gap between the two languages, while alerting the reader/translator as to the bilingual grounding of the portmanteau word. While it is merely ornamental in that case, since it has no impact whatsoever on the pronunciation of the word (the pronunciation would remain the same without the cedilla), it may be viewed as signalling the author's intention to situate his work on hybrid grounds.

Now, one may want to account for the use of a French word by Troupe even before one settles to translate this title (or not). Troupe's biography offers a possible explanation for his choice of French here. Since 2003 he has spent his time between New York and Guadeloupe where until 2011 he had a small place, which might account for the strabismus of the title he gave to the 2012 collection. Besides, and possibly more importantly, in an interview he gave in 2005, he recalls that "France was the first place that accepted [him] as a black person" (Troupe 2005: 52) when he was there as a young man in his twenties, having joined the army in the sixties and ending up in Metz, while he was playing basketball all over Europe. He explains that "when [he] came back to the United States, [he] had a different view about whites, informed by [his] experience in France." (Troupe 2005: 52) His title's straddling two languages may thus be accounted for by a desire to absorb or appropriate a culture which had a profound impact on him in that it welcomed him as a black man, thus acting as counterweight to the racial bias he had to struggle with and against during his childhood and teenage years in St. Louis. In that perspective, the title *cannot but* remain bilingual in the French translation.

With the use of neologism possibly registering social disruptions or disturbances inside the language, Troupe may appear to take his cue from a "tradition of black liberties taken with language" (Mackey 1998: 519), also exemplified in the works of such Caribbean poets as Aimé Césaire or Edward Kamau Brathwaite, with their "*marronage*" or "calibanization" (see Mackey 1998: 518-519), his own "versioning" of English to be understood as part of what some have identified as "a politics of neologism" (James Clifford quoted by Mackey 1998: 518).

## 8. Conclusion

In the poem "it all boils down", Troupe writes:

a shopping list of syllables is what poets carry  
 when confronting the winds of language  
 beyond that only the wind knows what it is doing—  
 ("it all boils down", Troupe 2002: 148)

This vision of poetry as dictated by chance and accident may provide the ground for an approach of translation allowing for a degree of freedom on the part of the translator. My belief that free translation is legitimate in this particular instance is also grounded in the exchanges I have had with the poet. I recall one particular episode which I try to keep in mind whenever the burden of translating such multi-



layered poems becomes too heavy. As I was working with Troupe back in the summer of 2011 when he was an artist-in-residence in Bordeaux, I came to him with a lexical problem I was faced with. I presented him with two options regarding the translation of the word “packed” as it appeared in the metaphorical lines “sentences, packed with local / idioms” in an early version of the poem “Sentences”: one option was “bourrées” which would be more colloquial and the other “saturées” which would be more formal, the register of “packed” in that context being difficult to match. His reaction was astounding: Let me change the original word, then! And he settled for the word “saturated” in the source text (“Sentences”, Troupe 2012: 157). So much for the idealisation of the original or source text and its supposedly intangible character! Naturally, it is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, due to the fact that the original was still in limbo so to speak as Troupe was in the process of revising his text as I was translating it. But it raised in me an awareness of the extent to which some writers are ready to see translation as a journey back to the origins of the work, what with the instability it implies for the so-called original, which then becomes nothing more than an “avant-texte” as is suggested by Clive Scott when he interestingly argues that “the ‘work’, the outcome of an ongoing sequence of *avant-textes* remains, in some senses, hypothetical” (Scott 2006: 107). French modernist poet Paul Valéry conceives of the work of translation as “caus[ing] us in some way to try walking in the tracks left by an author; and not to fashion one text upon another, but from the latter to work back to the virtual moment of its formation” (Valéry 1992: 120-1).<sup>8</sup> My experience as a translator of Troupe’s poetry has made it possible for me to “swim back” so to speak to this prenatal virtual space where the “work” is not yet the “work”, thus durably printing on my mind the notion that there is no such thing as an intangible original, the episode I have just related being possibly a mere illustration of a reality which far exceeds it: namely, in Scott’s terms, that “the translator is, after all, an editor, someone who is transmitting, resocialising, re-embedding the text in what amounts to a collaborative enterprise, not someone who is merely fossilising a text in its sacred monumentality.” (Scott 2006: 110) Never is this truer than when one proceeds to translate poetry and, more particularly in poetry, figurative language.

As he discusses the functional role of poetry readings in the Black Arts Movement, poet and scholar Lorenzo Thomas argues that:

All poetry is incomplete until it is read aloud. Nevertheless, the poem printed on the page is effective when it functions as a memorandum to excite the reader’s recall of a previous performance, or serves as a score for future vocal reproduction. If the poet has done the job of preparing that alphabetic transcription well, she can be sure that the poem will live. (Thomas 1998: 320)

His vision of the written poem as incomplete, as both “memorandum” and “score”, both past- and future-oriented and bound to “live” only when performed, echoes a now common vision of translation as guaranteeing the survival of the source text and contributing to its fertilisation in time – a vision rooted in the German romantic tradition and promoted by Benjamin and Berman among the first. When translating performance poetry, the translator may thus be viewed as just another

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<sup>8</sup> “Le travail de traduire, mené avec le souci d’une certaine approximation de la forme, nous fait en quelque manière chercher à mettre nos pas sur les vestiges de ceux de l’auteur ; et non point à façonner un texte à partir d’un autre ; mais de celui-ci, remonter à l’époque virtuelle de sa formation” (Valéry 1957: 215).

arranger who uses the source text as score, taking his turn in a continuum of *performances* both written and oral which ensure the survival of the poems.

And I will conclude with a reflexive poem by Troupe which makes it clear that to him poetry *is* incomplete, a poem ironically entitled “at the end” and aptly devoid of any period, in which he playfully relies on the polysemy of the words “period” and “point”. It called for a specific strategy in order to solve the delicate problem of puns grounded in polysemy here, and the translation shows how I have literally imprinted my collaborative presence on the text through puns grounded in the polysemic potential of my own language.

at the end of every sentence a period occupying space as molecular energy	à la fin de chaque phrase un point occupant l'espace comme l'énergie moléculaire
a point to make another point in space the end is the beginning of another end	un terme pour reprendre en d'autres termes dans l'espace la fin est le commencement d'une autre fin
recurring cycles occupying space	cycles récurrents occupant l'espace
& death being only a period at the end of a sentence	& la mort qui n'est qu'un point à la fin d'une phrase
earth	la terre
a point that starts another point	un terme qui ouvre sur un autre terme
& at the end there is space to begin again	& à la fin il y a de l'espace pour recommencer
always space at the end to begin again	toujours de l'espace à la fin pour recommencer
(“at the end”, Troupe 2002: 170)	(“à la fin”, Troupe 2014)

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# Tradurre la grammatica poetica di Ungaretti: Una lingua aperta al cosmo

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**Abstract:** *Il presente articolo intende dimostrare la pertinenza dello studio delle traduzioni francesi e inglesi dei versi ungarettiani per un'analisi della lingua poetica e delle metafore che caratterizzano la sua prima "stagione poetica" (L'Allegria, 1919). In questa prima raccolta, dove le poesie del Porto sepolto, "poesie di guerra attraversate dai miraggi dell'Egitto perduto" (F. Livi) incontrano altre poesie impregnate anche del ricordo del paesaggio – deserto – egiziano, si manifesta un tentativo di reinvenzione del legame sintattico che riflette la posizione del soggetto lirico nel mondo e nello spazio. Questo tentativo, per il poeta-soggetto, di trovare il proprio modo di stare al mondo, si esprime attraverso una grammatica poetica particolare: neologismi verbali, transitività del verbo e sintassi della frase riesplorate in maniera poetica collaborano con metafore più classiche per rinnovare il legame del soggetto con il cosmo. Questa grammatica della poesia del soggetto lirico ungarettiano viene rivelata in maniera particolarmente ricca dal lavoro sulle traduzioni (principalmente in francese con le traduzioni dei poeti J. Lescure, Ph. Jaccottet, P. J. Jouve e altri all'interno della raccolta Vie d'un homme, e quella meno famosa di J. Chuzeville, ma anche in inglese con le traduzioni di D. Bastianutti o A. Frisardi). La traduzione, forzando a volte l'esplicitare, snoda il verso sintetico per sottolineare quest'apertura della lingua al cosmo.*

**Parole chiave:** Ungaretti, poesia, soggetto lirico, grammatica, cosmo.

Il processo di traduzione, inteso in senso letterale ma anche figurativo, è al centro dell'opera di Ungaretti. Poeta, traduttore e commentatore delle proprie traduzioni, tradotto in tante lingue e in alcune dai più grandi poeti – si pensi al volume di traduzione francese nella collana "Poésie Gallimard" dove tramite i versi di Ungaretti s'incontrano Philippe Jaccottet, Jean Lescure, Pierre Jean Jouve, André Pieyre de Mandiargues, Francis Ponge e Armand Robin – Ungaretti, che scriveva anche in francese, incarna un percorso poetico in cui la questione della traduzione e quella della creazione poetica non vanno mai separate. Ma la sua opera, compresi i saggi sulla poesia, le prose egiziane e altri testi, va anche considerata come un insieme attraversato in vari modi dal processo di traduzione, nel senso di traslazione o di *translatio*, se pensiamo ai tantissimi rimandi che esistono non solo fra una raccolta e l'altra o fra una poesia e l'altra, ma fra la poesia, le lezioni, i saggi o anche le cronache. Non ci soffermeremo su questi fenomeni di intertestualità interna all'opera di Ungaretti, ma vedremo che hanno un rapporto diretto con la questione della traduzione delle figure della sua poesia.

In quanto traduttore, Ungaretti ha sempre interessato la critica (Ossola 2010) che ha spesso sostenuto che la sua opera di traduttore fosse una forma di produzione originale<sup>1</sup>. Tuttavia, possiamo notare e deplorare un certo vuoto critico sulla

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<sup>1</sup> Quest'idea, che appare nella famosa lettera di Ungaretti a De Robertis del 2/3/1944 costituisce la tesi di Violante Picon (1998) nel suo libro su Ungaretti traduttore. Si ritrova nei lavori di Savoca (2004, 2007) su Góngora tradotto da Ungaretti.

questione delle traduzioni della sua opera: fra i circa venticinque titoli che cita Isabel Violante Picon nella sezione “Ungaretti tradotto/Ungaretti traduttore” della sua bibliografia, soltanto uno rinvia alla traduzione dell’opera ungarettiana. L’interesse del poeta per il lavoro di traduzione e per il confronto tra testo originale e testo tradotto dovrebbe spingerci a considerare il suo testo tradotto come una parte importante della ricezione della sua opera poetica.

La questione della traduzione di Ungaretti è così interessante che, in certi casi come quello della recente traduzione in arabo (Ungaretti 2007), la traduzione andrebbe avvicinata alla concezione che il poeta aveva della poesia araba in rapporto al paesaggio del deserto, concezione esposta in vari testi fra i quali il *Quaderno egiziano* del 1931 (Ungaretti 1996: 65-69)<sup>2</sup>. Pur non trattando nel presente articolo di questa recente traduzione araba – ci limiteremo infatti alle traduzioni francesi e inglesi – ci conviene però ripartire dal paesaggio. Questo motivo essenziale nella poesia ungarettiana rivela il modo in cui la traduzione ci avvicina a una caratteristica della prima “stagione poetica” (Piccioni 1992: xxxi) di Ungaretti: l’apertura della lingua al cosmo.

### 1. Il deserto e dopo: il paesaggio e le sue figure

Interessandosi alla prima poesia di Ungaretti – la raccolta *L’Allegria* (1919), dove ai versi del *Porto sepolto*, pubblicato a Udine nel 1916, queste “poesie di guerra attraversate dai miraggi dell’Egitto perduto” (Livi 1986), s’aggiungono altre poesie del fronte anch’esse impregnate dal ricordo del deserto egiziano – la critica ha sempre rivolto un’attenzione particolare al paesaggio. Per Emerico Giachery, si tratta di ripercorrere la vita-opera del poeta attraverso vari luoghi, considerandola come un testo scandito in “pregnanti grumi spazio-temporali” (1998, quarta di copertina). Questa prospettiva, che spiega il titolo stesso del suo saggio *Luoghi di Ungaretti*, si ritrova in vari studi del testo ungarettiano, da quello di poesie come *Il Porto sepolto* (Pietromarchi 2007) o *1914-1915* (Mileschi 2009) a quello dell’intero percorso poetico, come dimostra la presentazione a cura di L. Piccioni della *Vita d’un uomo*, dove l’idea di *provenienza* geografica (o perfino terrestre) della poesia di Ungaretti (si chiami “deserto”, “campo di guerra”, “Egitto”, “Carso”, “Lazio”, ecc.) è pregnante (Piccioni 1992: 13-55). Per chi vuole proporre una lettura delle figure più frequenti di questa prima poesia, conviene, dunque, ripartire dal paesaggio.

In quel momento della scrittura poetica di Ungaretti, la nozione di paesaggio rinvia a due elementi spaziotemporali maggiori. Il primo è il paesaggio della scrittura: il campo di guerra, il Carso dove il poeta combatteva fra il 1915 e il 1918, e addirittura la trincea di cui recano traccia i versi di poesie come *Veglia*, *In Dormiveglia*, *Pellegrinaggio* o altre. L’altro è il paesaggio lontano, quello dell’evasione o di una forma di esotismo – luogo dell’infanzia e del sogno: l’Egitto – che si chiama anche Oriente (seppur assolutamente diverso dall’Oriente topico degli scrittori viaggiatori dell’800) o l’Africa, paesaggio che comprende realtà così diverse come la “linea vaporosa” del Mar Mediterraneo, quel “mare interno” che ossessiona Ungaretti, o il deserto. D’altronde, le immagini del deserto spesso riuniscono vari aspetti di quel secondo paesaggio che sembra essere uno sfondo permanente della

<sup>2</sup> Dal resto, in uno dei suoi primi testi di prosa sull’Egitto (Ungaretti 1993: 111-115), il poeta evocava già i grandi nomi della poesia anteislamica fra i quali il famoso ‘Imru-l-qais e immaginava un’assemblea di poeti arabi (si veda anche Ungaretti 1972: 22).

scrittura de *L'Allegria*. L'attenzione rivolta a questi *luoghi di Ungaretti* sottolinea anche il legame molto forte che li unisce. Questo legame si definisce sia come una fusione, pienamente realizzata nella figura del "porto sepolto" che sovrappone all'immagine dell'antico porto di Alessandria quella, attuale e quotidiana durante la guerra, della sepoltura, sia come una tensione. Tante poesie de *L'Allegria* sono così costruite secondo una strutturazione di due paesaggi opposti nella loro funzione: l'uno morboso e mortifero, l'altro, paesaggio di un "sogno di freschezza" e d'infinito. Possiamo dire che gran parte delle figure ricorrenti della raccolta *L'Allegria* prende forma dalla presenza di questi due paesaggi e del loro rapporto: la risonanza dell'immagine del "porto sepolto" viene appunto da questa fusione di due realtà; a un altro livello, questa fusione si ritrova nei versi della celebre *I fiumi*, dove i panni del soldato fermo davanti al paesaggio deserto e languido fanno nascere dal campo di guerra la figura del beduino (Ungaretti 1992: 43-45).

Ma quello che importa, al di là delle immagini che sintetizzano questi due luoghi ungarettiani, è capire quanto le figure che intendiamo esaminare attraverso il processo di traduzione sono legate a una figurazione dello spazio specifica della poesia di Ungaretti. Sul campo di guerra, questa figurazione diventa movimento o dialettica da uno spazio-tempo all'altro: evasione dalla trincea verso il mondo mitico e dolce dell'Oriente (*Fase d'Oriente* e *Sogno*), ritorno al mondo duro e greve del fronte dopo una breve illusione, una "gita folle" (Ungaretti 1992: 37): in *Fase d'Oriente* l'altro spazio si raggiunge soltanto quando "chiudiamo gli occhi / per vedere"; in *Pellegrinaggio* il riflettore di guerra, assumendo la funzione di trasfigurazione poetica, "mette un mare / nella nebbia" (Ungaretti 1992: 46).

## 2. Tradurre la grammatica del mondo

Vediamo dunque come appare il doppio legame fra la nozione di paesaggio e il processo di traduzione. Da una parte, questa figurazione dello spazio, che è anche figurazione dell'*io* lirico nello spazio, si esprime tramite la sintassi, cioè l'insieme delle relazioni all'interno della frase che si possono considerare come l'equivalente verbale di un *modo di stare al mondo* ungarettiano; la sintassi di Ungaretti, e più generalmente la sua grammatica personale, è uno dei punti che interessa e divide i suoi traduttori. Dall'altra, il ricorso frequente al paesaggio come chiave di lettura della poesia di Ungaretti funziona come un lavoro di decifrazione, la ricerca di una possibile referenzialità (infanzia in Egitto, motivi dell'Oriente, esperienza di soldato nel Carso, ecc.) che compensi l'aspetto oscuro, opaco, della lingua poetica. Il paesaggio farebbe parte dell'aspetto familiare, in opposizione all'ermetismo della sintassi e delle "parole nude" (Ungaretti 1969: 294) che ci lasciano sconcertati. Ma l'analisi delle traduzioni della poesia di Ungaretti rivela il legame profondo fra l'elemento familiare (cioè *riferimento* o *richiamo*, elemento che, facendoci uscire dalla poesia come mondo e sistema autonomo, ci rinvia spesso alla biografia) e l'elemento oscuro: immagini, tratti di lingua, grammatica particolare.

Se possiamo dire che la difficoltà maggiore della poesia di Ungaretti – dal punto di vista del lettore, dello studente o anche del traduttore – viene da ciò che il poeta chiama la "parola nuda", questa nudità si esprime attraverso una grammatica particolare, risultato della ricerca poetica stessa. Infatti, nel saggio *Une aspiration indéfinissable* (Ungaretti 1969: 292-297), il poeta descrive ciò che negli anni Venti era, per quelli della sua generazione, la ricerca di un nuovo linguaggio poetico. Il loro tentativo di fare "nascere" la parola "da una tensione espressiva che le desse

tutta la sua pienezza di senso”, origine della loro lingua ermetica, viene spiegato come un nuovo rapporto con lo spazio, una nuova posizione dell’uomo, in senso innanzitutto fisico, nella natura e nel mondo. Tutto sembra partire dall’esperienza della guerra: “la vita messa a dura prova (*affrontée*) all’immensa sofferenza della guerra” con i suoi “ritorni all’elementare” è vissuta come “immediatezza nuda del sentimento, spavento davanti alla natura, identificazione spontanea ed inquieta con l’essenza cosmica delle cose”<sup>3</sup>. Quest’esperienza, per essere trascritta, esige una nuova parola capace di dire questo legame con il mondo.

Si capisce allora perché fra le particolarità della lingua di Ungaretti con cui si scontra la traduzione (e con cui si scontrano coloro che si interessano alla traduzione), le forme verbali sono le più frequenti. Durante i primi anni di scrittura poetica, ci colpisce innanzitutto la frequenza dei sintagmi che hanno a che vedere con il verbo e con la sua costruzione (preposizione, prefisso o pronome), che si tratti di transitività o di costruzione riflessiva o pronominale. Nei versi di una decina di poesie scritte fra 1915 e luglio 1917 (Ungaretti 1992: 24-69), leggiamo:

La linea / vaporosa **muore** / al lontano cerchio del cielo (*Levante*)

Morire come le allodole **assetate** sul miraggio (*Agonia*)

**Allibisco** all’alba / **Mi si travasa** la vita / Ora **specchio** i punti del mondo (*Lindoro di deserto*)

E **piombo in** me / E **m’oscuro in** un mio nido (*A riposo*)

Colle mie mani plasmo il suolo **diffuso di** grilli / mi modulo di / somnesso uguale / cuore / [...] e **mi trasmuto** / **in** volo di nubi (*Annientamento*)

[...] **a** un arpeggio / perso nell’aria / **mi rinnovavo** (*Monotonia*)

[...] un gorgoglio / di grilli che mi raggiunge / e **s’accompagna** / alla mia inquietudine (*Sonnolenza*)

L’interminabile / tempo / **mi adopera** / come un / fruscio (*Dolina notturna*)

**M’illumino** / **d’immenso** (*Mattina*)

Come una nuvola / **mi filtro** / **nel** sole (*Trasfigurazione*)

Così letti l’uno dopo l’altro, questi versi o frammenti di versi sembrano ripetere la stessa figura, una figura non definibile in terminologia retorica, ma dove sentiamo il coinvolgimento del poeta nell’elemento naturale o cosmico: siamo al limite della personificazione o di una specie di panteismo poetico. E qui ci colpisce il ruolo involontario del traduttore: il suo lavoro, e la nostra lettura delle traduzioni, ci fanno vedere ciò che sarebbe passato inosservato (forse per una specie di assuefazione alla musica ungarettiana: lingua, struttura dei verbi, morfosintassi delle parole). Infatti, l’esperienza qui evocata – “mi si travasa la vita”, “e piombo in me / e m’oscuro in un mio nido”, “mi modulo di somnesso uguale cuore”, “il tempo mi adopera come un fruscio”, “m’illumino d’immenso”, “mi filtro nel sole” – sembra descrivere diverse

<sup>3</sup> “Il m’apparut en effet [...] que la parole devait naître d’une tension expressive qui lui donnât toute sa plénitude de sens. [...] Mais l’expérience de la guerre, la vie affrontée à l’énorme souffrance de la guerre, mais ces retours à l’élémentaire: immédiateté nue du sentiment, épouvante devant la nature, [...], identification spontanée et inquiète à l’essence cosmique des choses [...], voilà ce qui me permet de préciser, dans mon esprit, la valeur de la tâche que j’avais entrevue [...]” (Ungaretti 1969: 294)



tappe di un lungo processo di apertura allo spazio, talvolta spontanea, talvolta impaurita, processo mediante il quale il soggetto poetico sembra diventare *poroso* al mondo. Rompendo il ritmo dolce di questo monologo cosmico del poeta, la traduzione dunque ci sveglia perché, soprattutto in una lingua francese più analitica di quella italiana, snoda quello che il poeta ha cercato di annodare o legare.

Questa trasformazione appare in maniera ovvia nelle forme sintetiche che integrano un dativo latino, molto frequente in italiano e nella lingua di Ungaretti: la traduzione fa entrare nel sintagma una preposizione (così *mi si travasa la vita* diventa naturalmente “la vie se transvase *en* moi”) che modifica l’aspetto raccolto dell’immagine. Conviene ora esaminare le traduzioni francesi e/o inglesi dei versi citati e di alcuni altri frammenti dove si ritrova lo stesso tipo di figure:

**Tabella 1. Le traduzioni a confronto**

G. Ungaretti ( <i>L'Allegria</i> , 1919)	Trad. di J. Lescure o Ph. Jaccottet (1973)	Trad. di J. Chuzeville (1939)	Trad. di D. Bastianutti (B) 1997 Trad. di A. Frisardi (F) 2002
1 “Levante” La linea vaporosa muore al lontano cerchio del cielo	La ligne vaporeuse s’efface au cerceau lointain du ciel	Vaporeuse la ligne meurt. Au lointain cercle du ciel	(B) is dying in the distant / canopy (F) dies / in the distant circle
2 “Agonia” Morire come le allodole assetate sul miraggio	[...] comme les alouettes altérées sur le mirage	[...] comme les alouettes assoiffées Sur le mirage	(B) thirsty larks / upon a mirage (F) skylarks thirsty / over the mirage
3 “Lindoro di deserto” Allibisco all’alba Mi si travasa la vita Ora specchio i punti del mondo	Je blêmis de stupeur c’est l’aube La vie se transvase en moi Je reflète à présent les coins du monde]	J’ai l’effarement de l’aube Et la vie en moi se change [...] s’égarent les points du monde]	
4 “A riposo” E piombo in me E m’oscuro in un mio nido	Et je tombe en moi Et je m’enténébre dans mon coin		(F) I plummet into myself And go dark in my nest
5 “Annientamento” Colle mie mani plasmo il suolo diffuso di grilli mi modulo di sommesso uguale cuore	Avec mes mains je donne figure au sol] diffus de grillons je me module tout bas d’un cœur égal	De mes mains je pétris le sol Tout unifié de grillons Je me module D’un cœur soumis Et monotone	(B) I mold the earth alive with crickets I modulate myself in humble kindred heart
6 “Monotonia” a un arpeggio perso nell’aria mi rinnovavo	à un arpège égaré dans l’air je redevais neuf	À quelque arpège Perdu dans l’air Je me retrouvais nouveau	(F) I was brought back to life by an arpeggio drifting in the air

7 “Sonnolenza” [...] un gorgoglio di grilli che mi raggiunge e s’accompagna alla mia inquietudine	et poursuit son chemin avec mon inquiétude		
8 “Perché” Reggo il mio cuore che s’incaverna e schianta e rintrona	Je soutiens mon cœur qui s’encave et ébranle et gronde		(B) my heart that crashes within me that bursts and rumbles
9 “Mattina” M’illumino d’immenso	Je m’émblouis d’infini		(B) I grow radiant In the immensity of it all
10 “Trasfigurazione” Come una nuvola mi filtro nel sole	je me filtre au soleil		
11 “Giugno” Quando mi morirà questa notte [...] Mi morirà questa notte?	Quand cette nuit à moi-même mourra [...] Mourra-t-elle cette nuit à moi-même?		(B) When / this night in me will die [...] When / this night in me will die (F) When / will this night die [...] Will this night die in me?

Osserviamo lo stesso tipo di intrusione di una preposizione per altre forme contratte: alla fine di *Fase d'Oriente*, il breve momento di evasione dalla trincea (il “molle giro di un sorriso”, il “turbine di germogli di desiderio”, l’“infinite promesse” che, quando “chiudiamo gli occhi”, vediamo “nuotare in un lago”), è seguito da un ritorno alla coscienza e al campo di guerra: “ci rinveniamo a marcare la terra / con questo corpo / che ora troppo ci pesa”. La forza dell’immagine è dovuta alla costruzione del verbo, che permette di esprimere in una stessa azione la fine del sogno del soldato, un ritorno a se stesso, ma anche un ritorno alla realtà, cioè a un luogo e a un tempo determinati. Invece la traduzione “nous en revenons” non può fare altro che raffigurare quell’universo sognato (un lago pieno di sole, di promesse, di desiderio?) come un luogo esterno al soggetto: qui non si tratta di *ritornare qui* né di *ritornare a noi stessi*, ma piuttosto di *tornarne*. La questione che c’interessa, dunque, non è quella di un giudizio di valore della traduzione né di valutarla in termini di perdita o di modifica: la traduzione agisce qui come un rivelatore della nostra lettura spaziale del verbo e della figura.

Identica forse la maniera in cui il soggetto, diventato “creatura”, esce da un sonno-sogno alla fine di *Risvegli* (“sbarra gli occhi / e si sente riavere”): non è un caso se ritroviamo qui lo stesso prefisso. Anche senza la presenza ambigua di qualche preposizione o pronome, la scelta operata dalla traduzione è simile: in inglese, la creatura si sentirà sia “himself again” (di nuovo se stessa), sia “renewed” (rinnovata), ma non entrambi.

Anche il caso della preposizione “a” è interessante: in questo tipo di costruzioni verbali tipicamente ungarettiane, essa viene molto spesso tradotta con un’altra preposizione in francese o in inglese. Così nell’espressione *allibisco all'alba* (3) dove si fondono due realtà: l’impallidire per paura e l’alba, che qui appare come causa, momento, luogo, ma anche come destinatario di questo *allibire*, con tutta l’ambiguità della preposizione *a*. In francese, nonostante la polisemia della stessa preposizione, ogni traduttore ha scelto un aspetto diverso: uno opta per il momento, ma senza rapporto di causalità, mentre l’altro ha voluto unire il soggetto e l’alba ma solo attraverso l’idea di sbalordimento, di attonimento, in modo tale che tutta l’idea di pallore sparisce. La difficoltà di tradurre le preposizioni più comuni si ritrova nei versi “*a un arpeggio / perso nell'aria / mi rinnovavo*” (6), versi difficili che possiamo interrogare come Ungaretti stesso ci invita a interrogare Petrarca nella sua lettura-traduzione del sonetto 164, per esempio (Ungaretti 1969: 41-70). Quale tipo di realtà rinnova qui il soggetto? Il suono dell’arpeggio? La sua visione – quella di un arpeggio che fluttua nell’aria come l’inglese *drifting*, che lo figura nello spazio – ci spinge a capirlo? Se l’arpeggio può essere la causa di questo rinnovamento, sembra esistere anche un rapporto più intimo fra il poeta e l’arpeggio, come se il poeta si rinnovasse all’arpeggio cioè *per* lui, facendone il destinatario di questa rinascita, come, in *Lindoro di deserto*, allibisce “all’alba” o come può anche, al contrario, *morirgli* la notte (“Mi morirà / questa notte?” in *Giugno*). Possiamo dunque pensare che il traduttore inglese avesse dovuto scegliere fra *at* e *to*: invece, la scelta di “by” cancella l’ambiguità di questo rapporto. Le due parole *drifting* (immagine nello stesso tempo più forte e più comune) e *by* chiariscono il rapporto senza però permetterci di capire “rinnovavo” in relazione con “perso”, cioè di afferrare il movimento di unificazione o di raccolta di se stesso che abita la poesia di Ungaretti.

### 3. Neologismi visibili e invisibili

Se sembra difficile non leggere in termini di perdita questi processi di separazione, a partire dalla fusione originale di diverse realtà, vediamo tramite altri esempi che la traduzione può anche svelare l'aspetto inedito di una parola o di una forma che per il lettore italiano si uniforma in una serie. Ne è un esempio l'uso della forma riflessiva, del tutto inusuale, per un verbo che sembrava al primo sguardo una semplice costruzione pronominale. Infatti quando leggiamo *mi modulo* (6) o *mi rinnovavo* (9), ci troviamo davanti a costruzioni certo molto impregnate dallo stile ungarettiano (in quanto esprimono un'azione del soggetto lirico su se stesso), ma grammaticalmente normali. Altri verbi sembrerebbero a una lettura un po' distratta – o “a un'attenzione distratta”, per citare ancora Ungaretti lettore di Petrarca (Ungaretti 1969: 44) – di formazione identica: *m'oscuro* (4) o *m'illumino* (14). Ma vediamo che la traduzione, invece di darci l'equivalente di questi verbi che sarebbe *je m'illumine* o *je m'obscurcis*, propone un altro verbo: non soltanto per ragioni sonore e ritmiche, ma anche e soprattutto perché questo famoso “je m'éblouis” di Jaccottet traduce il fatto che *m'illumino* non è semplicemente un diventare luminoso, come s'illumina una città, ma esprime il coinvolgimento dell'io in questa luce – azione o implicazione assolutamente persa con l'inglese “I grow radiant”. Per quanto riguarda la traduzione francese “je m'enténébre” per “m'oscuro”, si tratta di un neologismo che attira la nostra attenzione sul fatto che, in realtà, Ungaretti usa anche lui una specie di neologismo grammaticale: *m'oscuro* significa *rendo oscuro me stesso*, e non semplicemente *divento oscuro*, senso che riduce il pronome a un ruolo di particella invece di dargli il suo senso pieno.

Anche se, come vedremo, esistono neologismi in senso classico nella lingua di Ungaretti, qui si tratta per il poeta di rinnovare il rapporto fra soggetto e verbo, d'inventare nuove possibilità di legame fra l'io e il mondo. A questo tentativo di riesplorare la grammatica, e in particolare la nozione di transitività – che bisogna intendere in un senso grammaticale e filosofico – partecipano tutta una serie di termini con i quali si scontra quasi sempre il traduttore: il suolo “diffuso di grilli” diventa “unifié”, cioè *unificato*, mentre sembra esprimere uno sparpagliamento del suono; l'immagine delle “allodole assetate *sul* miraggio” cioè di una sete di cui il miraggio è nello stesso tempo il luogo e la causa (altro motivo nato dell'immaginario desertico di Ungaretti) ha bisogno delle due traduzioni inglesi “*over* the mirage” e “*upon* the mirage”, che dobbiamo combinare mentalmente, per trovare un senso. Il neologismo nasce dunque da un uso inedito del *legame*: non è né l'aggettivo o participio né la preposizione a sorprenderci, ma la relazione fra i due che la traduzione deve, per necessità, forzare.

Per il traduttore, il gioco con il neologismo (autentico o *contestuale*) nella lingua di arrivo può anche essere un modo di rendere visibile il rinnovamento della morfosintassi nel testo originale. Anche qui la traduzione assume un ruolo di rivelatore: quando leggiamo “reggo il mio cuore che s'incaverna” (12), non ci troviamo di fronte a un neologismo: il verbo esiste, si dice dell'acqua che scorre sotto terra. Ma invece di rendere quest'idea precisa, la traduzione francese “qui s'encave” propone un verbo la cui costruzione imita la morfologia (prefisso + idea di *caverna* o di *cave* / cantina, cioè di un posto sotterraneo e scuro) di quello italiano e riesce a rivelarci qualcosa del verbo di Ungaretti. Per questo “cuore” di poeta, infatti, non sembra che si tratti di scorrere come l'acqua sotto terra né di mettere in cantina

(significato del verbo *encaver*, che si usa per il vino), ma di un movimento che possiamo definire, se accettiamo di snodare la morfologia lessicalizzata del verbo, come un *diventare caverna*, *entrare in caverna*, racchiudersi in se stesso e nell'oscurità. Sembra che testo originale e traduzione siano capaci a volte di collaborare per fare sorgere dal verso due neologismi invece di nessuno. Al contrario, l'inglese "my heart / that crashes" fa entrare nel verso una violenza visuale e sonora molto lontana dalla progressione lenta verso l'oscuro del verbo italiano e della sua traduzione francese.

#### 4. Poesia e traduzione infinita

Il ruolo ambivalente della traduzione si potrebbe definire come una capacità negativa di chiarire (o illuminare) le immagini, cioè di trasformare un fallimento in un processo che mette in valore la ricchezza stessa delle figure ungarettiane. L'idea di una funzione interpretativa o analitica della traduzione non ha niente di nuovo, ma, nel caso di queste figure, la lettura alla quale ci invita il testo tradotto appare come una nuova via di accesso ai versi de *L'Allegria*: la frequenza delle forme in cui il legame sintattico e la transitività vengono reinventati costruisce questa prima raccolta a partire dall'immagine centrale di un soggetto – grammaticale, lirico, ma anche filosofico – aperto al cosmo.

Possiamo dunque parlare, a proposito di Ungaretti, di una grammatica figurativa: la costruzione dei verbi ci rinvia a una posizione fisica e metaforica nello spazio che è, prima di tutto, paesaggio. Infatti, questo cosmo non è altro che una figurazione astratta del paesaggio, sia esso il paesaggio dell'Egitto (il deserto come realtà e metafora) o quello della guerra, oppure la piana desolata dove non si può che aspettare o ancora la trincea dove il soldato, forse, s'incaverna. Questa lingua aperta al cosmo esprime dunque una specie di porosità al paesaggio che è anche piena accettazione della vita e della finitudine. Si capisce allora la fusione dei paesaggi della scrittura in una stessa realtà che si potrebbe chiamare un deserto-cosmo, dove si ritrovano elementi tipici della poetica ungarettiana: miraggio, volta del cielo, luce, stupore dell'immensità. L'ambiguità dell'atteggiamento del soggetto poetico – incavernato o euforico, ma sempre dinamico di fronte al paesaggio cosmico – si esprime ancora nelle ultime strofe de *La notte bella* (Ungaretti 1992: 48):

Sono stato  
uno stagno di buio

Ora mordo  
come un bambino la mammella  
lo spazio

Ora sono ubriaco  
d'universo.

La posizione stessa dell'io "ubriaco d'universo" ci rimanda alla traduzione perché ci invita a leggere i versi di Ungaretti come anche loro traduzione: riflettono non solo il motivo, ossessionante per Ungaretti lettore e traduttore, dell'incontro "dell'eterno e del temporale" (o addirittura della "presenza dell'eterno nel temporale"), motivo che lo guida attraverso la poesia di Petrarca, di Shakespeare o di Leopardi, ma anche un'immagine virgiliana che sembra fare nascere tutte le altre. Quest'immagine non esprime altro, appunto, che l'atteggiamento dell'uomo *aperto* al cosmo – al cielo di cui Ungaretti evoca sempre il "cerchio", la "volta", la "campana" o anche la "corolla

di tenebre” (Ungaretti 1992: 7, 26, 45, 64) – questa posizione che prova a esprimere la grammatica reinventata di Ungaretti. La permanenza di questo motivo, centrale nelle lezioni brasiliane su Virgilio, Dante e Petrarca, si manifesta tramite una particolarità editoriale: nel 1969, le lezioni brasiliane di Ungaretti e altri suoi saggi sui classici, diventati a loro volta classici, furono raccolti, insieme a diversi saggi sulla traduzione (di Shakespeare, Racine, Góngora, Mallarmé, ecc.) e sulla poesia, in uno stesso volume assemblato da Ungaretti e tradotto, sempre con il poeta, dal suo amico Jaccottet: *Innocence et mémoire* (1969). La raccolta, che esiste soltanto *in traduzione*, si può leggere come un lungo processo di traduzione dove Ungaretti sembra decifrare i testi con l’idea, sempre presente in mente, di questo rapporto fra l’individuo poeta e l’universo.

Che si tratti di evocare i maestri tradotti, di commentare i classici italiani o di inventare, nei versi scritti vent’anni prima, una nuova grammatica poetica, vediamo risorgere la posizione del soggetto virgiliano sotto la volta celeste, *sub nocte*, attento al movimento del carro stellato della notte, commisurando l’infinito dello spazio (che per Dante o Petrarca sarà l’eternità) con la propria condizione di uomo sempre teso fra l’infinito e l’effimero della vita umana.

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# “The eye’s kiss”: Contextualising Cees Nootboom’s *Bashō*

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**Abstract:** Taking its cue from the poem ‘*Bashō*’ by the Dutch poet Cees Nootboom and its translations in English and Italian, this essay explores the intercultural and intertextual relations underlying the process of translating a travel experience into poetry and its reflections in the different languages. The poem being concerned with the conceptual metaphor of the journey, the figure of the poet is confronted with an image of the traveller. Its intimate link with perception calls for a revisitation/revision of the relationship between the visual experience and the sign. The perversion of the separation between signifier and signified in linguistics and its consequences for poetry and poetics are considered in the light of Giorgio Agamben’s study *Stanze on the image and the word in medieval love poetry*, and of his more recent work on signatures. The fourfold structure of ‘*Bashō*’ reflects the presocratic mythology of the four elements, based on the metaphorical opposition between space and time. Writing is equated with water and time, observation with earth and space. Nootboom’s cosmopolitanism is rooted in Dutch soil, which is ambiguously demonstrated in the fourth section of the poem through the metaphor of the pumping station. The essential ground for the equation of the poet with the pumping station (in Dutch: *gemaal*) is the elevation of the water to a higher level, which is lost in the English and Italian versions. In space the metaphorical system of the poem is reflected in the fourfold structure of the compass-card and the journey to the North is its main thematic connection to the poet’s interior journey.

**Keywords:** translation, metaphor, poetry, travel.

When Stephen Dedalus, in the beginning of the third chapter of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, is walking on the beach near Sandymount and is confronted with the external world, he muses: “Signatures of all things I am here to read, seaspawn and seawrack, the nearing tide, that rusty boot” (1960: 45). Annotators of *Ulysses* have referred the reader to the 16<sup>th</sup> century German theologian Jakob Boehme<sup>1</sup>. The passage from the semiotic to the semantic, from perception to meaning is a movement from semiotics to hermeneutics and finds in the signature the domain in which reading is translated into writing. The polarity of the sign and the problematic mediation between the two poles are central in Giorgio Agamben’s aesthetic theory. In his recent book on method, *Signatura Rerum*, he traces the theory of signatures from Paracelsus and Boehme, through Warburg, Foucault and Benveniste, to a philosophy of signatures, which he recognises in Walter Benjamin’s ‘mimetic faculty’ (Agamben 2008: 72). Already in his book *Stanze*, Agamben occupied himself with the duplicity of the poetic sign (Agamben 1977). He investigated the endeavour to reconcile image and word in the classical and medieval theory of the pneuma, the doctrine of the spirit in which all aspects of medieval culture intermingle, from medicine to cosmology, from psychology to rhetoric and soteriology. This ghostly presence he sees exemplified in Provençal love poetry, in the ‘*Stilnovo*’ and Dante. In translating figurative language an awareness of the fundamental unity of the poetic sign within the poetic space calls

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, Thornton 1961: 41.

for a continuous quest for the ‘right word’. While investigating the Dutch poet Cees Nootboom’s poem ‘Bashō’ and its translations in English and Italian, I was confronted with a number of metaphors which evoke the medieval tradition of love poetry. So I was sent back to Agamben’s theory. Here I will concentrate mainly on the first of the four stanzas of the poem:

Oude man tussen het riet achterdocht van de dichter.  
Hij gaat op weg naar het Noorden hij maakt een boek met zijn ogen.  
Hij schrijft zichzelf op het water hij is zijn meester verloren.  
Liefde alleen in de dingen uit wolken en winden gesneden.  
Dit is zijn roeping zijn vrienden bezoeken tot afscheid.  
Schedels en lippen vergaren onder wuivende luchten.  
Altijd de kus van het oog vertaald in de dwang van de woorden.  
Zeventien het heilig getal waarin de verschijning bestemd wordt.  
Het voorbijge verteren bevriest zo versteend als een vlinder.  
In een marmer getij de geslepen fossielen.  
Hier kwam de dichter voorbij op zijn reis naar het Noorden.  
Hier kwam de dichter voor altijd voorgoed voorbij.

‘Bashō’ has been translated from the original Dutch into English by the South-African Nobel Prize winner J.M. Coetzee and was published in his anthology of Dutch poetry *Landscape with Rowers* (Nootboom 2004: 60-67):

Old man among the reeds mistrust of the poet.  
He is on his way to the North he is making a book with his eyes.  
He is writing himself upon the water he has lost his master.  
Love only in things cut out of clouds and winds.  
This his calling to visit his friends take leave.  
Under fluttering breezes to gather skulls and lips.  
Always the eye’s kiss translated into the words’ drive.  
Seventeen the sacred number in which coming-forth is ordained.  
To digest the past frozen stony as a butterfly.  
Polished fossils in a marble tide.  
Here passed by the poet on his journey to the North.  
Here passed by the poet finally forever.

The Italian translation by Fulvio Ferrari was published in the collection *Le porte della notte* (Nootboom 2003: 32-39):

Vecchio uomo nel canneto sospetto del poeta.  
È in cammino verso il nord scrive un libro con gli occhi.  
Scrive se stesso sull’acqua ha perduto il suo maestro.  
Amore solo nelle cose ritagliate nelle nubi e nei venti.  
Questa è la sua vocazione andare dagli amici per prendere congedo.  
Accumulare crani e labbra sotto cieli ondeggianti.  
Il bacio dell’occhio sempre tradotto nella costrizione delle parole.  
Diciassette il numero sacro in cui si determina la visione.  
La passata putrefazione congela pietrificata come una farfalla.  
In una marmorea marea i fossili levigati.  
Di qui è passato il poeta nel suo cammino verso il nord.  
Di qui è passato il poeta passato per sempre.

In Nootboom’s poem we can discern a double focus. On the one hand there is the cultural opposition between East and West which is heralded by the title of the poem: the penname of the seventeenth-century Japanese poet focuses the reader’s attention on Japanese culture and especially on Japanese poetry. This is the horizontal

movement of the poem and some knowledge of Japanese culture, haiku poetry and the figure of Bashō seems necessary for its successful reception. The second focus is on the north-south opposition. The concepts of north and south, east and west define our thinking about place, direction and movement. This fourfold division of space acquires metaphorical significance in language and redraws the map of the poetic sphere. Lakoff and Johnson speak of ‘orientational metaphors’ which ‘organize a whole system of concepts with respect to one another’ (1980: 14). By an ‘accident of cartography’, as the protagonist of Ian McEwan’s novel *Solar* (2010) has it, the South pole is placed under the North, which suggests a hierarchy and gives the North pride of place. There is specific mention in ‘Bashō’ of a journey to the North – a journey to the north of Japan actually took place in the life of the poet Bashō –, and the capitalisation of this place, which features in the fourth part of the poem as the conclusion of the journey, lends special importance to it.

The division of the poem in four sections, stanzas of twelve verses each, its metre of four feet to a line and the metaphorical use of the compass-card, suggest a geometrical figure of a square within a circle, where time is represented by the circle and space by the square. Nootboom’s ‘fourfold vision’, which calls to mind Heidegger’s *Geviert*<sup>2</sup>, extends the compass-card to the pre-socratic division of the elements. To this we may add the time sequence of the four seasons, so important for haiku poetry. Derrida suggests a classification of metaphor by its source. It assumes a place of origin and a process of migration:

In classifying metaphors of origin (natural metaphors), we should soon need to have recourse to the mythology of the four elements. [...] But we should find corresponding to this empirical aesthetics of sensible contents, a corresponding transcendental and formal aesthetics of metaphors which would be the condition of possibility for the empirical aesthetics. We should be led back by it to the a priori forms of space and time. (Derrida 1974: 26)

The first problem is the question of the identity of the protagonist, or the protagonists. The first verse opposes – or juxtaposes – two figures: an old man and a poet. The absence of a verb makes for a static picture. The line could be divided into two parts and placed on a page like a haiku, but the second verse introduces time:

He is on his way to the North he is making a book with his eyes.

The peculiar elliptic form of the verses invokes the haiku. The first verse lacks a verb and connects a concrete image metonymically in a focalised place, old man among the reeds, to an abstraction: mistrust. We may read the abstraction as a comment on the concrete image. According to the (haiku) technique known as ‘the principle of internal comparison’ the two parts that make up the whole are compared to each other, not in simile or metaphor, but as two phenomena, each of which exists in its own right.<sup>3</sup> In this network of ambiguities what immediately strikes the reader is the duplicity of the poetic line, the contradictory images and the contrast between concrete and abstract. Though there is a clear reference to the haiku techniques, there are also many formal differences. First and foremost the rigid syllable count of the Japanese form has no correspondence in Nootboom’s line and the piling up effect of the accumulation of verses – there is no enjambment in the first stanza – runs counter to the concision and intensity of the haiku. The beginning is a picture, there is no movement, but the second with the progressive aspect of the verb (‘he is making’)

<sup>2</sup> On Heidegger’s *Geviert*, ‘fourfold’ see Young 2006.

<sup>3</sup> See for this principle Henderson 1958: 18.

and the expression ‘on his way’ introduces movement and future time. There is a clear break in the middle of both verses. The repetitive rhythm stresses the duality creating an effect of opposition.

Does the third person singular refer to the old man, to the poet or to both? Or perhaps the first ‘he’ to the old man and the second to the poet? Who is this old man then and why does he evoke the mistrust of the poet? Perhaps the old man is the outer form of the poet? While he absorbs the world around him is he creating poetry, a book? The reeds suggest a Japanese print, but may also have symbolic associations. It is not clear why there should be mistrust (in Dutch: *achterdocht*, ‘suspicion’, Ferrari has ‘sospetto’) from the poet. Or is it the poet who should be mistrusted? Certain poets certainly might be, witness the beginning of the second stanza:

We know poetic poetry the common dangers  
Of moonstruckness, belcanto.

Coetzee decided to translate the Dutch word *achterdocht* with ‘mistrust’. The concept rendered by the Dutch word certainly has this element of suspicion and the negative prefix may connect with Dutch words, such as *misverstand*, ‘misunderstanding’, which is relevant in this context of cultural differences. What gets lost in translation, however, is the spatial element, *achter* means ‘behind’, and there is also an association with English ‘afterthought’. Nooteboom definitely plays on the contrast *achter* – *voor* (behind – before/in front of) with its inevitable confusion between space and time in this first stanza. The mistrust, or suspicion, of the poet indicates an unresolved identification of observer and observed.

The third verse invites the connection with the pneumatic doctrine of medieval love poetry, where the element of water is associated with the source of Narcissus. Agamben stresses the medieval conviction that Narcissus, presented at the beginning of the *Roman de la Rose*, is not so much in love with himself, but with the *image* of himself (1977: 78). He is making the book of himself with his eyes:

He is writing himself upon the water

The water serves as the mirror in which the image appears, but water cannot retain the image:

Love only in things cut out of clouds and winds.

The appearance of the word ‘love’ in the fourth verse is certainly significant. Here the image is no longer received passively from the water, but transformed through the airy element into the love object. Nooteboom’s metaphor for the material transformation is reminiscent of the biblical commandment against idolatry: *Gij zult u geen gesneden beeld maken*, “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth”: the graven image of Exodus 20:4. The Dutch verb used, *snijden*, refers to the act of cutting and the art of sculpture, which brings to mind the story of Pygmalion, the subject of a long digression just before the conclusion of the *Roman de la Rose*. As Agamben convincingly shows, the myth of Pygmalion exemplifies the movement from the reflected image, with which the *Roman* began, to the artistically constructed image. The love object is an idol. The metaphor is repeated in the second stanza, where Narcissus’ image is connected with Pygmalion’s idol and transformed into language:

Out of the world you cut an image that bears your name

The missing link in the pneumatic circulation is provided by what animates the idol, the *pneuma*, in ‘Bashō’ represented by clouds and winds. Nooteboom’s curious definition of love *only in things* – in Dutch the things have the definite article, *de dingen* – stretches the pneumatic love theory to a poetic statement. Or even, as circumstantial evidence connected with the life story of Bashō might show, a poetic testament. In Nooteboom’s novella *Mokusei!*, subtitled ‘a love story’, the protagonist, a photographer, falls in love with his Japanese model. She is the perfect model and is described only in terms of static images: her face is like a mask, she is compared to a statue of a drowned girl and their love making is curiously silent and static. The affair ends as it had begun with the photographer observing his lover while she is sleeping.

In the poem the importance of the pneumatic metaphor is confirmed by its last verse, given in italics, which might indicate that it is a reference to, or a quotation from, Bashō’s work:

*I too was tempted by the wind that blows the clouds.*

Coetzee’s translates the Dutch *verleid*, meaning ‘seduced’, with ‘tempted’. Moreover, the Dutch word is connected with *leiden*, ‘to lead’, *verleiden* is temporally and spatially defined: ‘being led astray’. In this case I think the connotation to the act of love is necessary, though the association with temptation with its religious overtones might also be appropriate. As usual Ferrari follows the original more closely: ‘*Anch’io sono sedotto dal vento che sospinge le nubi*’. The ‘fluttering breezes’ in Coetzee’s translation of line six is another clear reference to the *pneuma*. The original has *wuivende luchten* (literally: ‘waving skies’), while Ferrari translates ‘*cieli ondeggianti*’, evoking the watery element. What binds the image to the word is the eye’s kiss of verse seven:

Always the eye’s kiss translated into the words’ drive.

This central metaphor of the stanza shows the necessity of translating the image into language. The love knot is here a figure to signify the figurative, to use Derrida’s phrase. It connects the poet’s vision to his destiny. In the poetic word the reconciliation between desire and its elusive object can take place. In poetic practice Narcissus succeeds in obtaining his proper image through the poetic circulation in which the image generates desire, desire is translated into words and the words delimit the space within which enjoyment is possible. The phrase – the eye’s kiss – also evokes the Nordic technique of the ‘kenning’, known from Old Norse and Anglo Saxon poetry, where disparate elements are linked in a single phrase. The English genitive in Coetzee’s translation for the Dutch *de kus van het oog* stresses this effect, in line with the haiku technique of internal comparison<sup>4</sup>.

That the journey to the North is an interior journey is confirmed by Japanese tradition. Bashō’s famous travel book *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* (奥の細道 *Oku no Hosomichi*), which was probably Nooteboom’s model for much of the thematic content of “Bashō”, is an account of a journey to the north of Japan interspersed with poems (Bashō 1966). In Japanese ‘deep north’ may be a homonym for ‘interior’. The journey to the North is conceived as a journey within (‘oku’ means ‘within’). In Dutch ‘Deep North’ is usually translated as ‘high’ or ‘far’ North.

<sup>4</sup> The technique is also exploited by the Swedish poet and Nobel Prize winner Tomas Tranströmer in his haikus. See for instance Tranströmer 2011.

The pneumatic circulation as reconstructed by Agamben, which unites outside and inside world and is sealed with the eye's kiss, is well suggested by Coetzee's translation of Dutch *dwang* in *de dwang van de woorden* as 'the word's drive'. The Dutch word literally means 'constriction, constraint', in fact Ferrari translates 'costrizione', but it has also something of the driving force of the movement of the spirit, the 'moto spiritale' of the pneumatic theory. Moreover, for iconic reasons, the choice of the similar monosyllable, *dwang*/drive, is certainly felicitous. What might be interpreted as a critique on the constrictions of language, however, gets lost in Coetzee's translation.

The tree metaphor, which defines much of our thinking about origin and beginning, figures predominantly also in our ideas about identity. The distinctions between north and south, east and west gain significance only within the context of its application and use. The concept of 'rooted cosmopolitanism' is currently applied to many writers who, though belonging to a specific cultural community, broaden their interests to other cultures and identities. The great cosmopolitan poet Seamus Heaney, for instance, expressed his particular identity and position as member from a rural, Northern Irish community in his collection *North* (1975) and Derek Walcott originally intended to name his collection *The Fortunate Traveller* 'North and South' (Olson 2008: 23-26). The cultural debate about tradition and identity frequently falls back on the root metaphor. Roots are anchored to the soil and give nourishment to everything that rises up out of them: the trunk, the branches and the leaves. Though they are invisible, they sustain and conserve the whole: the visible tree. In "Bashō" the root metaphor is opposed to the metaphor of the journey. The element that moves through all four sections of the poem is water. The beginning pictures an old man among the reeds, between land and water. Nootboom's roots hold on ever so lightly to his native watery soil, meanwhile stressing his fundamental unrootedness and his cosmopolitanism. The Dutch language is the main anchor to that soil. Water, out of which Dutch mythology has grown, is the constitutive metaphorical element of "Bashō", and in the final section of the poem the poetic activity is presented through the metaphor of the pumping station. This unpoetical word is translated by Coetzee with the metaphorical activity of 'milling'. "The poet is a milling through him the landscape is turned into words." The Italian translator Fulvio Ferrari speaks of a 'macina' and F. Garcia de la Banda translates in Spanish 'molino de agua' (Nootboom 2003b: 99). The Dutch word *gemaal* in fact contains the verb *malen*, 'milling', 'grinding', so it could be read as a Perfect Participle of the said verb. There is however another important ground for this metaphor which cannot be rendered by the activity of milling or grinding, connoting the activity of producing flour – and therefore bread – for instance. The pumping station is a facility which uses pumps to bring water to a higher level. In the Netherlands there are many examples of these facilities within the domain of water management. Water always seeks the lowest place and this why it represents for the Taoist the 'highest good'. "The highest good is like water. Water gives life to the ten thousand things and does not strive. It flows in places men reject and so is like the Tao" (Feng, English 1989: 8). What the poet does is lifting the principle of water to a higher level. A spiritual, 'northern' level perhaps.

Before disappearing from western science at the end of the eighteenth century, the theory of signatures influenced science and magic of the Renaissance and Baroque periods, while finding its most elaborate theological expression in the theory of sacraments. The proximity of the sacraments and magic is perhaps most

evident in the practice of baptism of images as shown by Agamben in his essay on signatures (2008: 45-55). The dilemma of the separation and the reunification of the word and the image are manifested clearly in the practice of translation, where the human faculty of discerning resemblances is constantly called for. Agamben quotes Benjamin who compares this ‘immaterial resemblance’ to a flash of lightning that appears in discourse and gives it meaning (2008: 73). Without this complement to the semiotic structure of language the passage to discourse would be incomprehensible. The metaphor of the flash indicates that the sphere of the signatures is historical. The production and perception of meaning are temporal: “Sie huscht vorbei” are Benjamin’s exact words: It slips/flashes past, or, in Agamben’s translation: “Ella guizza via”. In Nooteboom’s final verse of the first stanza this temporality, exemplified in the water metaphor, is spatially expressed:

Hier kwam de dichter voor altijd voorgoed voorbij.

Here passed by the poet finally forever.

Di qui è passato il poeta passato per sempre.

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**Fairy-Tales and Folklore**  
**Fiabe e folklore**



# Translating figurative language: The case of *Pinocchio* in English

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**Abstract:** *The article discusses a variety of figurative language uses in Le Avventure di Pinocchio. Storia di un Burattino (Collodi 1981/1883) and the ways these are conveyed in a selection of ten of its major English translations. Pinocchio is one of the most translated classics of children's literature and beyond. Its potential for symbolic connotations and never-ending appeal to both the young reader and the adult are indisputable, as demonstrated by the profusion of its translations, adaptations, transpositions and reworkings all over the world ever since its publication. The translation of figurative language, in particular, may vary to a substantial extent depending, inter alia, on its level of lexicalisation and/or cultural specificity and associated degree of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural divergence. Crucially, different renderings of figurative language are here especially regarded as a key to access different reading levels of the famous Italian tale. A first part of the article is devoted to a brief presentation of the corpus of target texts at the basis of the work and of the main translation procedures identified in the analysis. A second part focuses on a restricted but significant number of examples of various figures of speech from different versions. The original is indeed rich in a complex texture of multiple figures deeply rooted in the Italian (and Tuscan) culture of the time. Their rendering tends to vary depending on the translation/adaptation in question, i.e. the respective implied primary target readers (e.g. adult and children or young children only) and correlated different emphasis on distinct dominant functions.*

**Keywords:** *figurative language, translation, children's literature.*

## 1. Introduction

*Le Avventure di Pinocchio. Storia di un Burattino* (Collodi 1981/1883) is one and many stories at the same time, a text rich in “hidden depths” (Lawson Lucas 1996: xii) and stimuli aiming at different emotional and intellectual responses, read and enjoyed by audiences of children and adults, who find different pleasures in it (see West in Brock 2009: 164 ff.). Paraphrasing Gibbs (1998: 110), the tale is dominated by themes which reflect underlying conceptual metaphors such as the “nose as measure of truth, the conscience as audible agent, and goodness as humanity”. It indeed represents an enduring supply of still pertinent motifs that revolve around and tend to build up on the general ideas of the life journey towards responsible human adulthood, the role education has in it, the tension between conformity and transgression. The indissoluble bond between such a potential wealth of topics and flexible readership has surely contributed to the prolific afterlife of the tale, as demonstrated by the profusion of its translations, adaptations, transpositions and reworkings all over the world ever since its publication<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> For a review of relevant work on critical analyses of the tale from multiple perspectives, the appraisal of its reception abroad, as well as a survey of some of its major transpositions and developments see, e.g., Stych 1971, Sachse 1981, Perella 1986, Tommasi 1992, Wunderlich, Morrisey

The present article discusses a restricted but significant selection of figurative language uses of the famous Italian tale (as source text – henceforth ST) and the ways these are conveyed in a range of its major English translations (as target texts – henceforth TTs). The general symbolic threads of the ST are here viewed as being due, at least in part, to the cumulative effect of figurative uses at a more local level, which are differently modulated in the TTs. The latter, that is, may vary to a substantial extent depending, *inter alia*, on their level of lexicalisation and/or cultural specificity and associated degree of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural divergence. Crucially, different renderings of figurative language in the various TTs are here regarded as a key to access different reading levels of the ST<sup>2</sup>.

The next sections focus, respectively, on a brief presentation of the corpus of TTs at the basis of the work and of the translation procedures identified in the analysis, followed by an overview of relevant cases of various figurative categories, and by some general conclusions.

## 2. The corpus of TTs

The corpus counts ten TTs including past and more recent versions both in British and American English<sup>3</sup>. They consist of (in chronological order):

- the very first translation of the tale into (British) English by Murray (1892) (henceforth TT1);
- the first translation of the work into American English by Cramp, with editorial revision by Lockwood (1901/1904) (henceforth TT2), based on Murray's version but largely purged of violent events and episodes of misbehaviour of young characters;
- Della Chiesa's (American) version, published in the UK in 1914 and in the USA in 1925 (henceforth TT3), regarded as the 'reference' translation in the US;
- Murray's version revised by Tassinari (1951) (henceforth TT4);
- the translation by the university Professor and poet Rosenthal (1983) (henceforth TT5), commissioned by the *Fondazione Nazionale Collodi* to celebrate the 100th anniversary of *Pinocchio* as a book and ideally addressed to contemporary American children, as specified in the introductory section<sup>4</sup>;
- the annotated text by the American Professor Perella (1983/1986) (henceforth TT6), which aims to be as "philologically close to the letter, imagery, and syntax of Collodi's text as tolerable English allows" (75), thus especially addressing learned adult readers;
- Lawson Lucas's annotated translation (1996) (henceforth TT7), especially addressing the learned adult (British) reader (cf. Lathey 2006: 14) and which

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2002, Pezzini and Fabbri 2002, Sherberg 2006, O'Sullivan 2006, West 2006, West's *Afterword* in Brock 2009, Nasi 2010.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed analysis of the different target audiences addressed or presupposed by the TTs under observation and a more extended account of relevant socio-historical conditions see Masi (2013).

<sup>3</sup> A selection of TTs was first collected for another work on *Pinocchio* (cf. Bruti and Masi 2009), and has been enriched with more versions at a later stage for further interrelated research (see Masi 2013).

<sup>4</sup> The translation has in fact met with criticism especially because of the many alterations of the original rhythm (see, e.g., Perella 1986, Wunderlich 1987; for a different view on such alterations see Masi 2010).

proposes a trend towards the ‘universalisation’ of ‘Italianness’ explicitly stated by the translator in the introduction to the text (also see Halliday 2009, Masi 2010);

- Canepa’s version (2002) (henceforth TT8). This is another American academic’s version preceded by a brief note where it is specified that “Collodi’s ‘simple’ style is, in fact, fruit of a linguistic and rhetorical mastery that is far from any spontaneous naïveté”; the translator has indeed tried “to replicate the marvelous agility” resulting from “the playful balance its author is able to sustain between the simulation of oral storytelling and a more self-consciously literary voice” (TT8: xii);
- Rose’s British English version (2003) (henceforth TT9), with abstract illustrations by S. Fanelli, more an adaptation than a translation, a text that “preserves all the slapstick violence and didacticism of the 19th-century original, [...] but [...] also plays up a more modern mindset”. It is a “modish treatment, a far cry from conventional versions of the classic [which] may be best suited to collectors [...] Ages 7-up” (from *Children’s Review*)<sup>5</sup>;
- a devious or false simplicity also emerges from the introduction by U. Eco to the last and most recent (American) TT of the series, i.e. Brock’s (2009) (henceforth TT10). Eco mentions, *inter alia*, that the simplicity of the prose of the original tale poses a challenge to translators, but he also believes that the award-winning poet and translator has remained faithful to Collodi’s style, for which, he hopes, Anglophone readers will be grateful.

### 3. Translation procedures

Figurative language, metaphors in particular, have been often regarded as a translation problem which may require different procedures to be overcome, with consequent modification or loss of the intended effect of the original (see Dagut 1976, van den Broeck 1981, also cited in Schäffner 2004). For Dagut (1976: 22), a metaphor consists of an “individual flash of imaginative insight”, a creative product resulting from the violation of a linguistic system and being therefore highly culture-specific. The main function of metaphoric language is to shock readers by creating an aesthetic impact, hence the importance of its maintenance in translation. In fact, the exact reproduction, in translation, of the same image and correlated associations as those of the source is generally quite a rare case. Among the proponents of relevant alternative procedures are, for instance, van den Broeck (1981) and Newmark (1981). Although they adopt different approaches (descriptive and normative, respectively, see Schäffner 2004: 1256), their strategies are largely congruent, and Newmark’s more extended classification can be viewed as complementing van den Broeck’s. Below is a list of the main procedures emerging from the analysis (an elaboration partly adapted from Newmark’s classification), which is here applied to different figures besides metaphor:

- a) Borrowing and/or literal translation of source language (SL) figure;
- b) Borrowing and/or literal translation of SL figure with explicatory endnote;

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.publishersweekly.com/978-0-7636-2261-9> (reviewed 1/5/2004, last accessed 18 April 2012).

- c) Replacing the figure in SL with another figure of the same category in the target language (TL), displaying variable degree of adaptation (and with possible loss of original associations);
- d) Replacing SL figure with figure of a different type in TL, e.g. metaphor by non-metaphoric image (simile; simile + sense paraphrase; sense paraphrase only);
- e) Deletion of SL figure (and possible compensation).

#### 4. Overview of examples

*Pinocchio* is an endless source of similes, metaphors, hyperboles, etc., which are used, for instance, to convey intensified human instincts and needs (such as hunger), evoke strong emotions, portray a personified environment and express social criticism. Below is a selection of a variety of examples (from the many that emerged from the manual analysis of TTs but which have not been included for lack of space). Far from being exhaustive, it is however noteworthy in representing diverse categories and translation procedures. In the examples, the TTs are approximately ordered on the basis of the translation strategies mentioned above, i.e. from versions adopting (a) to (e).

##### 4.1. Simile

Similes are quite frequent in the ST and often involve culture-bound words from such domains as fauna, flora or food<sup>6</sup>. The following is a case in point, taken from chapter 35, when Pinocchio tells his father about the way the terrible Shark had swallowed him:

1) [...Allora un orribile Pesce-cane...] m'inghiottì come un tortellino di Bologna

A simile is maintained in each TT, but while [TT8] simply borrows the SL image, [TT6] complements the borrowing with an explicatory endnote (indicated below, as elsewhere in the paper, by an asterisk), thus potentially satisfying the curiosity of a learned adult reader:

[TT8] as if I were a Bologna tortellino

[TT6] [...] as if I were a Bolognese *tortellino*\*

[TT5] replaces the original with a more extended simile which works as an explicatory gloss within the body of the text, more suitable to cater for the needs of a younger audience:

[TT5] like one of those bits of meat wrapped in pasta – tortellini – that the good people of Bologna love to eat

The other TTs replace the original with different items still from the culinary domain (with the exception of [TT2]):

[TT1] as if I had been a little Bologna tart

[TT7] like a bit of spaghetti\*

[TT10] like a ravioli

[TT4] as if I had been a meat pasty

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<sup>6</sup> For an analysis of procedures employed for the translation into English of culturemes in *Pinocchio* see Masi (2013). Similes with food items, in particular, are among those lexical choices that often highlight geographical differences across TTs (on the translation of *gastrologo* in *Pinocchio* also see Masi 2010).

[TT3] [...] as if I had been a chocolate peppermint  
 [TT9] [...] like a fairy cake  
 [TT2] [...] like a pill

The range of food choices is in fact far from homogeneous: [TT1], for instance, keeps the cultural reference to the Italian city albeit the recruited image is a kind of cake (*tart*) rather than a kind of pasta. [TT7] and [TT10] keep the reference to the Italian culture by means of presumably less stringent forms of exoticisms (cf. recognised exoticisms, see Katan 2009); it is also worth noting that [TT10]'s choice (*ravioli*) is surely more successful than [TT7]'s (*spaghetti*) in conveying the sudden and quick motion portrayed in the ST. Finally, the replaced images in the remaining cases completely omit the reference to the Italian culture, albeit possibly resulting more familiar and attractive for a young reader (and even an average/not learned adult reader) of the TL (cf. esp. *fairy cake* in [TT9] and *chocolate peppermint* in [TT3]).

The next example too (still from chapter 35) involves a simile: Pinocchio is walking inside the Shark's stomach and the passage is rich in sound-symbolic effects (cf. the repetition of sibilants and affricates which suggest the actual sound of steps in water), climaxing with the description of the odour of fried fish, which is emphasised through a subtle ironic reference to the habit of Catholics of fasting (thus not eating meat but more fish) during Lent. Also, the augmentative suffix *-ona* in *sdruciolona* confers a more 'active', personified quality to water<sup>7</sup>:

2) [E nel camminare] sentì che i suoi piedi sguazzavano in una pozzanghera d'acqua grassa e sdruciolona, e quell'acqua sapeva di un odore così acuto di pesce fritto, che gli pareva d'essere a mezza quaresima.

6 of the 10 TTs under observation ([TT6], [TT7], [TT2], [TT3], [TT10], [TT8]) opt for a literal translation of the ST, with [TT6] and [TT7] also providing an explicatory endnote (only [TT6] has been reported below as a specimen):

[TT6] he felt his feet splashing in a pool of greasy, slippery water which gave off such an acrid smell of fried fish that he thought it was mid-Lent\*

[TT5] too preserves the cultural reference, but once again replaces the original with a more extended simile (cf. *Sunday* and the extra pause obtained through a full stop):

[TT5] he felt himself stepping into puddles of greasy, slippery water. The puddles gave forth such a strong smell of fried fish you'd have thought it was Sunday in the middle of Lent

[TT9], instead, omits the reference (and correlated irony) of the ST by replacing the original with an expression (*fish-and-chip shop*) surely more accessible to its primary young target audience and which also contributes to the intensity of the sound-symbolic effects of the passage<sup>8</sup>:

[TT9] he could feel his feet splashing through a puddle of slippery, oily liquid, which smelt so strongly of fried hake that he could have been in a fish-and-chip shop

Quite surprisingly, the older versions by [TT1] and [TT4] completely obliterate the passage in question.

<sup>7</sup> I am grateful to L. Merlini Barbaresi for this remark (personal communication).

<sup>8</sup> [R]'s version often opts for this type of cultural relocation and also displays idiomatic uses even where there were none in the ST.

## 4.2. Metaphor

The example below is from chapter 16 and describes Pinocchio hung by the assassins on the Great Oak: his motion caused by the wind is conveyed through the image of a festive Tuscan folkdance (*trescone*), with humorous, almost tragicomic overtones due to the contrast with the dramatic situation:

3) [... sospeso per il collo], ballava il trescone alle ventate di tramontana [...]

In several TTs the metaphor is maintained, albeit the original image is replaced in various ways. In [TT7] the original folkdance (admittedly obscure even for an average contemporary Italian) is substituted for with another example of less stringent form of exoticism used by this translator:

[TT7] dancing the tarantella in the gusts of north wind

[TT10], [TT6] and [TT9] choose a target culture item, with [TT10] enriching the original with overt personification of the wind (which has become a ‘dancing partner’):

[TT10] dancing a jig with the north wind

[TT6] [TT9] dancing a jig to/in the gusts of the north wind

[TT1] and [TT4], instead, just preserve the dancing metaphor with no reference to the festive atmosphere evoked by the specific kind of dance in question, with possible correlated downplay of humour:

[TT1] [TT4] dancing up and down in the gusts of the north wind

In [TT5] the image of dancing is inserted in a different strategy that replaces the original metaphor with a more extended simile:

[TT5] bouncing about in the blasts of the cold wind as though he were dancing

[TT8]’s solution is more similar to a paraphrase of the sense of the excerpt, although exceptional in the use of *whirling*, which confers kinaesthetic suggestions to the description of the rhythmic manner of motion of the object-puppet caused by the wind:

[TT8] whirling to the rhythm of the gusts of the north wind

Finally, the remaining versions focus on the motion of the object with even more prominent deletion of the original image and the correlated cultural/humorous associations:

[TT3] being knocked helplessly about by the wind

[TT2] swinging backwards and forwards

## 4.3. Hyperbole

Hyperbolic effects are pervasive and tend to superimpose on several other figures in the tale<sup>9</sup>. Different means can be employed to create them. In the example below, describing Pinocchio’s hunger in chapter 5, we have an accumulation of images, i.e. a hyperbolic climax also containing similes and idiomatic expressions, and where the last segment, in particular, involves synesthetic overtones, as a sensation (*hunger*) is conveyed as a concrete entity that can be cut:

<sup>9</sup> On the compound nature of hyperbole see, e.g., Ravazzoli 1978.



4) [...] l'appetito diventò fame, e la fame, dal vedere al non vedere, si convertì in una fame da lupi, in una fame da tagliarsi con il coltello

[TT8], [TT6], [TT7] and [TT10] preserve the crescendo of the original through a literal translation of the peculiar Italian idiom in the last position. [TT8] and [TT6] more prominently convey the synesthetic conversion as suggested by the idea of thickness; also, [TT6] once again complements the literal translation with an endnote especially devoted to the idiom in question:

[TT8] his appetite became hunger, and in the bat of an eye the hunger was transformed into a wolfish craving, into a hunger so thick you could cut it with a knife

[TT6] his appetite became hunger; and in a twinkle of an eye he had become as hungry as a wolf: a hunger so thick that you could cut it with a knife\*

[TT7] that appetite became hunger and, in the twinkling of an eye, the hunger turned into a ravenous hunger, a craving that you could cut with a knife

[TT10] his appetite had turned into hunger, and then suddenly it was a wolflike hunger – a hunger you could have cut with a knife

[TT5], [TT3] and [TT9] delete the synesthetic idiom, but maintain the hyperbolic contours of the three-piece sequence (cf. l'appetito diventò fame, / e la fame, dal vedere al non vedere, si convertì in una fame da lupi, / in una fame da tagliarsi con il coltello) by reserving the last position for another idiomatic expression of the passage (*fame da lupi*), surely more accessible to the TL audience. This is rendered in slightly different ways, replacing, in some cases, the wolf of the original with other animals (cf. bear – still as famished agent – in [TT3], and horse – as potential prey-patient – in [TT9]):

[TT5] he was terribly hungry. Then he became frantic, like a starving wolf

[TT3] the queer, empty feeling had become hunger, and the hunger grew bigger and bigger, until soon he was as ravenous as a bear

[TT9] he wasn't just hungry any more: he was starving – so starving he could have eaten a horse

In the remaining versions the hyperbolic effect is far less intense: in [TT2] the wolf simile is maintained but is inserted in a shorter sequence, while in [TT1] and [TT4] we have a paraphrase of the idiomatic sense:

[TT2] the appetite became hunger, and the hunger finally became like that of a wolf

[TT1] his appetite had become hunger, and in no time his hunger became ravenous – a hunger that was really quite insupportable

[TT4] his appetite had become hunger, and in no time at all his hunger became ravenous – a hunger that was really difficult to bear

In the subsequent excerpts (taken from chapters 31 and 33, respectively), the hyperbolic effect of the description of the *Omino di burro*, the coachman leading naughty boys to Toyland, is intensified by the repeated use of diminutives<sup>10</sup>. Interrelating with their modifiers and other elements of the co-text<sup>11</sup>, diminutive nouns such as *omino*, *visino*, *bocchina*, *mostriciattolo* in fact contribute to the

<sup>10</sup> For examples of diminutives with hyperbolic quality see Mortara Garavelli (1988: 182).

<sup>11</sup> The passage also involves metaphors, similes, and irony – cf. *bel mestiere* in the segment from ch. 33 – differently modulated in the TTs. By way of illustration, the metaphor *visino di melarosa* is often replaced with a simile, which in the case of [TT1] and [TT4], for instance, is rendered through the image of an *orange* instead of that of an *apple*; [TT9] proposes more divergent and idiomatic similes (cf. *like a cat trying to get on the right side of a fellow with a pilchard* and *as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth*), while the ironic component mentioned above is replaced by a more explicit *real business* in [TT5] or omitted in other versions (e.g. in [TT2]).

magnification of pragmatic-evaluative qualities (the man's deceptive flattering behaviour) besides semantic-dimensional ones (i.e. smallness)<sup>12</sup>:

5) [...] un omino più largo che lungo, tenero e untuoso come una palla di burro, con un visino di melarosa, una bocchina che rideva sempre e una voce sottile e carezzevole, come quella d'un gatto, che si raccomanda al buon cuore della padrona di casa (ch. 31)  
 [...E ora avete capito, miei piccoli lettori,] quel era il bel mestiere che faceva l'Omino? Questo brutto mostriciattolo, che aveva la fisionomia tutta di latte e miele (ch. 33)

The majority of TTs use lexical means to convey this array of meanings, notably the adjective *little* (and negative value adjectives such as *nasty*, *horrid*, *horrible*, *wicked*, *cruel* for *brutto mostriciattolo*); only some versions are reported below, starting with [TT6], which provides a rather literal translation (e.g. *little man*, *small face*) of the original ([TT1] and [TT4] as well use a similar rendering):

[TT6] a little man more wide than tall, soft and oily like a lump of butter, with a small face like a rosy apple, a little mouth that was always smiling, and a thin wheedling voice like that of a cat appealing to the tender heart of the mistress of the house  
 [...] what the fine trade carried on by the little man was? From time to time this revolting little monster whose face was all milk and honey

[TT7] too displays a literal rendering, and upshifts the adjective *little* and the noun *man* to the rank of proper nouns through capital letters, in line with the ST, cf. *Omino*, ch. 33 (capitalisation is also used in [TT8] and [TT3]). Furthermore, it supplies extra information about the sinister nature of the character in question through an endnote, and is overall more compliant with the typical English structuring of noun phrases (cf. premodification patterns such as *red-apple face*, *ever-smiling little mouth*, etc.):

[TT7] a little man who was wider than he was tall, as soft and unctuous as a pat of butter, with a little red-apple face, an ever-smiling little mouth, and a sweet and gentle voice, like that of a cat winning over the tender-hearted mistress of the house\*  
 [...] the nature of the Little Man's fine profession? That nasty little monster, whose appearance was all milk and honey

[TT10] exploits both lexical and morphological means to emphasise the semantic dimension of smallness, viz. the adjective *miniature* and the combining form *Mini* in *Mini-Man*, respectively:

[TT10] a miniature man wider than he was tall, as soft and oily as a pat of butter, with a face like a little rose apple, a little mouth that was always laughing, and a thin, unctuous voice like a wheedling cat appealing to its kind mistress  
 [...] what a fine line of work Mini-Man was in? This nasty little monstrosity, who looked all milk and honey

[TT5] even uses an extra occurrence of *little* (*little voice* for *voce sottile*) within a globally more explicit description (cf. *looking as*, *shaped like*, *sounded like*, etc.):

[TT5] a little man, broader than he is tall, soft and greasy looking as a lump of butter, with a smiling little face shaped like an apple, a little mouth that was always laughing, and a quiet, caressing little voice that sounded like a cat's when it purrs affectionately at the feet of the lady it belongs to  
 [...] what the little coachman's real business was? That cruel little monster, who seemed to be all milk and honey

<sup>12</sup> On the evaluative meanings of diminutive and augmentative suffixes see Merlini Barbaresi (2002).

In [TT9], we have a more neutral reference to smallness (cf. *small person*), made only once, and such a reference is deleted altogether in [TT2], with the consequent subversion of the effect of the original and the promotion of opposite features of the character's appearance (i.e. fatness and bigness):

[TT9] a small person who is almost as broad as he is tall, soft and unctuous as a pat of butter, with a rosy face, a mouth that is always wreathed in smiles and a thin, mellifluous voice that sounds like a cat trying to get on the right side of a fellow with a pilchard

[...] what the coachman's game was. This horrid little monster, who looked as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth

[TT2] a man very fat and round, like a big ball of butter, with an oily smile, a face like an apple, and a thin, caressing voice like that of a cat trying to win the affection of its mistress!

[...] what the trade of the driver was? That monster, who had a face of milk and honey

The following passage is from chapter 28 and describes the smell inside the fisherman's cave where Pinocchio is about to be fried and eaten by the green creature. Hyperbole (and irony, see later on) depends, once more, on the interrelation of morphological and lexical means, i.e. the diminutive form *odorino* followed by the idiom *da mozzare il respiro*. *Moccolaia* refers to the burnt wax of a candle-butt, i.e. a mixed smell of smoke and burnt oil/grease. In this case, the diminutive form clearly conveys evaluative meaning, which can be interpreted as being either positive (not completely implausible from the bizarre fisherman's perspective), or more likely, ironic (hence negative, especially from Pinocchio's perspective):

6) [... una grotta buia e affumicata, in mezzo alla quale friggeva una gran padella d'olio, che mandava] un odorino di moccolaia, da mozzare il respiro

In this case the TTs under analysis display quite disparate solutions. [TT6] is the only version that reproduces the potential irony of the original through the use of a positive value adjective:

[TT6] a delicious smell like candlesnuff such as to cut your breath short

Other TTs maintain the hyperbolic effects to different degrees by means of different types of replacements. [TT7], [TT10] and [TT5] replace the original with a rendering that foregrounds the intensity of the smell:

[TT7] such an odour of candle-grease as to take your breath away

[TT10] such a whiff of candle snuff as to take your breath away

[TT5] The greasy smell was so strong you could hardly breathe

[TT8], instead, appears to have interpreted the original as a true diminutive (see *little* and *enough*), with downplay of the hyperbolic effects of the passage:

[TT8] gave off a little snufflike odor that was enough to take away your breath

[TT3] and [TT9] maintain the hyperbolic effect especially thanks to the idiom in final position and also provide an overt negative evaluation of the smell in question:

[TT3] [...] sending out a repelling odour of tallow that took away one's breath

[TT9] [...] [cooking oil], which stank so badly that it took Pinocchio's breath away

[TT1] and [TT4], instead, insert an overt negative evaluation of the smell within a paraphrase of the original idiom (*suffocating*), also using a rather idiosyncratic rendering<sup>13</sup>:

<sup>13</sup> A hypothesis about the source of the awkward rendering may be the *Candlesnuff Fungus* (*Xylaria hypoxylon*), which looks similar to a snuffed-out candlewick, hence the name.

[TT1] [TT4] [...] sending out a smell of mushrooms that was suffocating

Lastly, [TT2] completely deletes the SL figures.

#### 4.4. Metonymy and irony

The next example (from chapter 27) portrays Pinocchio's schoolmates throwing different books as weapons at him. They are referred to by their titles in the plural (as evidenced by the use of initial capital letters and italic style in the ST), which actually stand for the entire volumes. What is more, some of them stand, (self-)ironically, for the preceding production of Collodi himself (cf. *Giannettini* and *Minuzzoli*):

7) [...cominciarono a scagliare contro di lui] i *Sillabari*, le *Grammatiche*, i *Giannettini*, i *Minuzzoli*, i *Racconti* del Thouar, il *Pulcino* della Baccini

[TT8] and [TT6] preserve the original configuration through morphologically adapted borrowings and literal renderings; [TT6], in particular, underlines in an endnote the social and educational relevance of the works mentioned in the ST (together with the self-ironic and presumable advertising intents of such references):

[TT8] spelling primers, grammars, *Giannettinos*, *Minuzzolos*, Thouar's *Tales*, Baccini's *Little Chick*

[TT6] their primers, their grammars, their *Giannettinos* and *Minuzzolos*, Thouar's *Stories*, Mme Baccini's *Little Chick*\*

In [TT10] the ironic reference is made explicit through paraphrase, presumably to enhance comprehensibility for both the young and average adult readers of the TL:

[TT10] their spelling books, their grammar books, Thouar's *Popular Tales*, Baccini's *Memoirs of a Chick*, a couple of books by a fellow named Collodi

In [TT7], instead, self-ironic associations disappear because the translator replaces the ST references with titles that recruit easily recognisable late 19th century production in English, as explained in an endnote, in line with the 'universalising' trend of this TT:

[TT7] their *Primers* and *Grammars*, their *Alices* and *Huckleberry Finns*, their *Lamb's Tales* and *Black Beauties* [...]\*

Finally, several other texts (viz. [TT1], [TT4], [TT9], [TT2], [TT3] and [TT5]) replace the originals with more generic hyperonyms, thus losing the self-irony due to the implied intertextual reference of the ST (only some versions, progressively more generic, have been reported as examples below):

[TT9] grammars and dictionaries, maths books and Histories of the Nation

[TT5] spelling books, grammar books, dictionaries, books of stories

[TT3] Readers, geographies, histories, grammars

#### 4.5. Paronomasia and antithesis

The final example below is just a small sample from the Circus Manager's long and verbose speech introducing the donkey Pinocchio to the audience before the show, in chapter 33, which is rich in nonsensical humorous effects and displays, among other things, paronomasia *in absentia*: odd words are used which sound like and evoke the missing appropriate counterparts (cf. *menzogna/lie* for *menzione/mention*, or *soppresate* – after *soppresata*, a type of sausage – for *sorpassate/surpassed* or *sopportate/endured*). The passage indeed has a strong

jocular effect contributing to an overall idea of contradiction. The latter aspect is also conveyed by the overt antithetic contrast between mountain (*montagna*) and plains (*pianure*), as well as implied meadows (cf. *pascolare/graze*) and torrid zone (*zona torrida*):

8) [...] Non starò qui a farvi menzogna delle grandi difficoltà da me soppressate per comprendere e soggiogare questo mammifero, mentre pascolava liberamente di montagna in montagna nelle pianure della zona torrida

[TT8], [TT6] and [TT7] show different attempts at preserving a great deal of the effects described above. [TT8] tends to recreate paronomastic effects through the adapted borrowing *suppressed*, the compensatory alliteration of bilabial nasals in *make mendacity* and keeps the literal translation of the antithetic pairs of the original:

[TT8] I won't stand here and make mendacity of the great difficulties that I suppressed in order to comprehend and subjugate this mammal, while it was freely grazing from mountain to mountain on the plains of the Torrid Zone

[TT6], too, proposes fairly similar solutions, but emphasises alliteration (*make mention, mendacious*) and absurdity/humorousness through the awkward combination of *mendacious difficulties* (which overtly states the falsity of the character's speech); the passage is also complemented by an endnote:

[TT6] I will not here make mention of the mendacious difficulties suppressed\* by me in order to reprehend and subjugate this mammal while he was grazing freely from mountain to mountain in the plains of the torrid zone

In [TT7] the puns on words mainly rest on *laying (lying)* and *suppressed (surpassed)*:

[TT7] I shall not engage in laying before you the great difficulties suppressed by me in order to comprehend and subjugate this mammal, while he was freely grazing from mountain to mountain on the plains of the torrid zone

Almost all the remaining versions delete paronomastic effects, while maintaining the antithetic ones (see [TT1], [TT4] [TT5], [TT9] and [TT10]). [TT9], in particular, seems to compensate for some of the lost effects through a more informal style (cf. the stronger dialogism through the use of *your* and of the question mark, and the informal collocation *tall stories*), as well as a more emphatic antithesis thanks to the double reference to the Equator :

[TT9] Will I waste your precious time with tall stories about my intrepid efforts to capture and subdue this mammal, as it roamed freely from mountain to mountain on the great equatorial plains of the equator? I will not.

[TT10] only preserves the original antithetic pairs, with a verbose style (cf., e.g., *surmounted, aforementioned, whilst*):

[TT10] I shall not stand here deceiving you with regard to the great difficulties surmounted by myself in captivating and subjugating the aforementioned mammal, whilst he grazed freely from mountaintop to mountaintop in the torrid zone.

[TT3], instead, deletes the antithesis, but tries to appeal to the reader by referring to the distant and exotic *wilds of Africa* (as an intensifier of the presumed aggressiveness of the donkey Pinocchio):

[TT3] I shall not take your time tonight to tell you of the great difficulties which I have encountered while trying to tame this animal, since I found him in the wilds of Africa.

[TT2] proposes a paraphrase with complete deletion of all the effects mentioned above.

## 5. Conclusions

The examples and heterogeneous variety of the phenomena covered in the analysis surely deserve a broader investigation than what was here allowed, also considering the temporal dimension, as the selected TTs span over more than a century. The present study has nonetheless highlighted significant ST – TT asymmetries as well as some translation trends of different TTs. The asymmetries often originate from the unique compact clusters of figures and correlated associations in the ST (e.g. hyperboles superimposing on metaphors, similes and irony, metonymy intertwining with irony, paronomasia working hand in hand with antithesis, etc.) which usually require disentanglement and a combination of different procedures for translation.

Although further exploration is obviously necessary, the different TTs can be placed on a cline depending on the procedures they appear to privilege (from (a) to (e), see § 3). [TT8] and [TT6] tend to use borrowings and literal translations, often complemented with explicatory endnotes in the case of [TT6]. The other TTs, instead, tend to use a more varied combination of procedures. [TT7], for instance, either uses less stringent forms of exoticisms or replaces the originals with TL counterparts (sometimes providing an explicatory endnote); [TT10] displays both some literal renderings and more creative replacements; [TT5] often replaces the originals with more extended and explicit patterns; [TT9] privileges more substantial replacements; [TT3] shows generic replacements and deletions, all the more prominent in [TT1], [TT4], and [TT2] in particular.

The identification of such trends is here envisaged as an appraisal of each TT's functional priorities in relation to its overtly declared or presupposed primary target audience. Indeed, the translation of figurative language in the various TTs appears to have different dominant functions:

I) that of a 'magnifier' of the concrete domain (to an extent made plausible by the presupposed fantastic nature of the world at issue), i.e. performing an expressive/emotive function, so as to enhance the appeal of the story esp. to young readers by emphasising their affective-emotive reaction, their involvement, their imaginative potential (e.g. this functional configuration is variously performed by versions such as [TT5], [TT9], [TT10] and [TT3]);

II) that of a 'threshold' to a more abstract domain of signification primarily accessed by adults, fulfilling a compound informative and expressive function (i.e. learned entertainment through irony and social satire) (e.g. these functions are differently fulfilled by [TT6], [TT7] and [TT8]).

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# **“My mother thinks I eat like this”/ “Mia madre pensa che io mangi come un maialino”: The translation of picture books and of their many languages**

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***Abstract:** Children under a certain age (7-10) are not able to understand figurative language and interpret it literally. However, children’s literature fully exploits its expressive potential, even in genres addressed to very young readers since the presence of a “difficult” language may actually stimulate the child’s imagination (Rodari 1997: 7). An interesting case is that of picture books, in which words and images both contribute to creating the narration given that, in these literary products for small children, figurative language combines in many ways: on the one hand, the illustrations might help in understanding the transferred meaning while, on the other, they generate a complex game of echoes between literal and figurative meanings (Terrusi 2012: 101). If, according to Epstein (2013: 23), the translator should try to face figurative expressions, the challenge in picture books is sometimes almost insurmountable because of the multimodal nature of these texts. The aim of this paper is therefore to examine how the figurative language is realized and how translators handle it. In particular, a selection of fifteen picture books by British and American classical authors has been analyzed; some of them turned out to be particularly useful for a preliminary classification.*

***Keywords:** picture book, figurative language, multimodality, illustrations.*

*Some books are to be tasted,  
others to be swallowed,  
and some few to be chewed and digested.  
Sir Francis Bacon  
“Of Studies”, *The Essays* (1597/1625)*

## **1. Figurative language and children’s literature**

Figurative language has been largely employed for describing the process of translation. As Polezzi emphasizes, the act of translating and translations have often been described through metaphors; it will suffice to consider the 17<sup>th</sup> century figurative expression “belles infidèles” or the motto “traduttore traditore” (2004: 7). However, scarce attention has been given to how figurative language is translated. This seems even truer when the translation of children’s literature comes into play. Indeed, the relationship between figurative language and books aimed at young people is a complex one, particularly if the books at stake are those for pre-school readers such as picture books. In particular, one wonders how these literary products – with a short verbal text and all-page illustrations and whose intended readers have limited cognitive abilities – can be associated with figurative language, since research has demonstrated that children usually develop the ability to recognize and understand figurative expressions when they are about eight-ten years old. In fact, before that threshold, children interpret them literally. As a result, when Foster offers some guidelines to people who want to become writers for children, she specifies

that boys and girls are able to conceive and comprehend abstract concepts when they are eleven and, subsequently, only then are they able to understand and enjoy idiomatic expressions, for example: “From sixth grade through the beginning of high school (ages 11-14), youngsters acquire the ability to reason abstractly and can appreciate such complex literary devices as irony, analogy, idiom, sarcasm, and allegory” (2006: s.p.). Furthermore, if children around three can partly recognize a metaphor, this has to be “tangible and salient, referring to sensory objects (e.g. clouds are pillows, leaves are dancers)” (2006: s.p.).

Contrary to all advice and research, children’s literature exploits the considerable expressive potential of figurative language, even in genres which are addressed to very young children. As a matter of facts, and against all expectations, the language of children’s literature can be highly metaphorical and sophisticated, mostly in those texts for so-called pre-readers, even to the point that they are often used to stimulate children’s metaphorical and inferential skills:

[...] contrary to what might predicted from the current knowledge about younger children’s metaphorical language comprehension ability, the popular children’s literature contains a great deal of sophisticated metaphorical language. An average of 54 metaphors per 1,000 words of text was found in the books. [...] Books targeted at very young readers contain as much metaphorical language as books aimed at older children. (Colston, Kuiper 2002: 36)

These figures are even more astonishing when considering the typology of texts marketed for the age group under six years of age, the picture book.

## 2. Figurative language, picture books and their translation

### 2.1. The picture book

The age of their intended readers seems relatively definite, whereas the spelling of the English term designating this literary work for “illiterate” readers is problematical: it is written as two separated words, as one word or as two words with a hyphen. As noted by Valentino Merletti, this uncertainty shows the need for a clear-cut definition:

Il dibattito – e il relativo disaccordo dei critici – inizia fin dalla corretta (o incorretta) grafia dell’oggetto in esame: *picturebook?* *picture-book?* *picture book?* Possono sembrare questioni di lana caprina ma in realtà denunciano un’incertezza e al tempo stesso un bisogno di connotazione precisa e univoca.<sup>1</sup> (Valentino Merletti 2004: 17)

Dictionaries can also not unravel this conundrum: the online *Oxford English Dictionary*, for example, gives two entries with the term written in two separate words – both as a noun and as an adjective – while the online *Merriam Webster* gives two entries: “picture book” as a noun, dated 1847, and “picture-book” with the hyphen as an adjective, dated 1922. The Italian word “albo illustrato”, even if orthographically univocal, seems semantically less satisfying and less explanatory. “Albo” – album – is generally used for a collection of picture-cards or for a drawing album while the adjective “illustrato” – illustrated – seems to suggest a subordinate and mere ornamental role of the images:

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<sup>1</sup> “The debate – and the relative disagreement among critics – starts from the correct (or incorrect) spelling of the word under consideration: *picturebook?* *picture-book?* *picture book?* This may appear to be hair splitting but in point of fact it reports an uncertainty and, at the same time, a need for a precise and univocal connotation.” Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are the author’s.

Tuttavia l'espressione italiana mantiene nel sostantivo *albo* l'idea di una raccolta, di un fascicolo, simile agli "albi di figurine", all'"albo da disegno", e nell'aggettivo *illustrato* la derivazione dal verbo *illustrare*, nel senso di "corredare di figure un testo", "rendere chiaro", "illuminare", quasi che le immagini fossero successive al testo verbale e avessero la semplice funzione di chiarirlo o decorarlo. Tutto questo genera una certa ambiguità e non lascia traccia della qualità narrativa insita negli albi illustrati [...].<sup>2</sup> (Dal Gobbo 2007: 42)

In fact, the narrative quality of the picture books that Dal Gobbo mentions is connected to a basic editorial distinction between "picture book" and "illustrated book", a distinction which depends on the relationship between the images and the verbal text. Given that the readers of picture books cannot actually read but mainly listen to the adult's voice (reading the words aloud) while watching the illustrations, picture books are conceived and built on the interplay between verbal and visual elements. Thus, images and words equally collaborate in the construction of meaning (Schwarcz, Schwarcz 1984; Shulevitz 1985) with no one of the two elements prevailing upon the other. This specific relationship, which involves multiple semiotic codes, has been described with several expressions ranging from "iconotext" to "synergy" or "multimodal text", referring to Kress and van Leuwen. As a result, the reading experience of the picture book is shared by the adult aloud reader and the child reader-viewer, thereby constructing a dyadic situation (Cardarello 1995) which is allowed by the co-presence of the verbal and visual codes and thus inscribed in the picture book itself. In particular, the pages work as a metronome which beats the rhythm of the text (Tontardini 2012: 27).

The complex multimodality of picture books is then enhanced by the fact that even their paratext and their entire structure are relevant so as to re-interpret the aesthetic experience they subsume, as highlighted by Tontardini: "[...] vedere, con gli occhi ma anche con gli altri sensi che l'albo illustrato chiama in campo, agisce su corde profonde che permettono ai lettori di strutturare pensiero, attraverso un sistema verbo visuale"<sup>3</sup> (Tontardini 2012: 25). The touching experience and the turning of their pages are part of the sophisticated intellectual situation they activate between the two differently-aged readers and the book itself. Besides the emotional involvement, the picture book stimulates both the child-reader's senses and intelligence: he/she is led to understand the difference between verbal and iconic language as well as learn and memorize words and realize that reading is a pleasure (see Cardarello 1995). Thus, "[l]'esperienza dell'albo illustrato produce forme di pensiero, organizzative, deduttive, interpretative"<sup>4</sup> (Tontardini 2012: 47).

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<sup>2</sup> "Yet, the Italian expression retains the idea of a collection, of a booklet, in the noun *albo*, similar to the album for picture-cards or the drawing album, while the adjective *illustrato* is a derivation from the verb *to illustrate*, in the sense of "equip a text with images", "to make clear", "to illuminate", almost as if the images were subsequent to the verbal text and had the simple function of clarifying or decorating it. All this generates a certain ambiguity and does not leave traces of the narrative quality inherent to picture books [...]."

<sup>3</sup> "[...] to see, with the eyes but also with all the other senses that a picture book involves, strikes children's innermost chords, which allow readers to structure their thought, through a verbo-visual system."

<sup>4</sup> "The experience of the picture book produces organizational, deductive and interpretative forms of thought."

## 2.2. Translating picture books and its many languages

A deep-rooted prejudice has, however, arisen in spite of the different important functions carried out by this “simple book for illiterate children”, namely, that its translation is an easy and semi-automatic process because of the typically very short verbal text and the allegedly helpful presence of the illustrations. As Oittinen points out:

Even publishers of picture books are often unaware of the demands that this type of literature places on the translator. This is another reflection of the publishers’ attitude toward children’s literature in general: they find it ‘easier’ than literature created for grown-ups. (Oittinen 2000: 113)

The demands the translator has to cope with during picture book translation depend specifically on the fact that there are many codes involved with different patterns of interactions. As already noted, images in picture books are not mere ornaments but play a fundamental role with the words in the narration so that the translator cannot ignore them. And if, on the one hand, they can lend a hand to the translator by disambiguating the situation or by suggesting some possible solutions, on the other, they can actually be a challenge because of the close relationship they establish with the verbal. In any case, they cannot be disregarded:

In the translation of picture books neither element – words or pictures – can be isolated, nor are they isolated when the translator translates. In this genre combining words and pictures, an ideal translation reflects an awareness not only of the significance of the original text but also of the interaction between the visual and the verbal, what the pictures do in relation to the words [...]. (O’Sullivan 2005: 102)

Moreover, the verbal and the visual actually create the entire reading-situation and the rhythm of the text; the translator has to take these factors into account too.

Another element which exercises considerable influence on the activity of the translator of picture books is the notion of child that underlies these texts: this notion might be defined as the assumptions made by a given society on what is “good” and “suitable” for youngsters and on their abilities of comprehension as well as on their emotional maturity. This parameter is obviously intertwined with ideological issues and intrinsically connected with the didactic *milieu* they are plunged into. Generally, all children’s literature is actually twofold; it simultaneously belongs both to the literary world as well as the educational system. This specific feature differentiates children’s literature from adult’s<sup>5</sup>. It goes without saying that the concept of childhood is culture-specific and changes according to different cultural contexts as well as diachronically, thereby having implications on the translation. In fact, Oittinen argues:

“[...] translators are acting on the basis of their own child images [...]. Whatever the strategies chosen, they reflect the adults’ views about children and childhood. Ideology and ethics always go hand in hand in translating for children, which is no innocent act.” (Oittinen 2006: 42)

Still, this “no innocent act” is complicated by the tropes that can be frequently found within children’s texts, and in picture books. Contrary to popular belief, as already emphasized, picture books can be compared to poetry given the essence and the high percentage of figurative language they display: “Nella combinazione degli elementi narrativi di un albo riconosciamo la struttura di figure retoriche comuni alle

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<sup>5</sup> “A feature distinguishing children’s literature from adult literature is that its origins are to be found both in the literary and the educational system.” (O’Sullivan 2005: 19)

forme poetiche [...]”<sup>6</sup> (Terrusi 2012: 101). Distinctively, because of the very nature of these multimodal texts, their figures of speech are usually realized on both levels, that is verbally and visually, in several ways: on the one hand, the illustrations might facilitate the child’s understanding of the content of the figure of speech; on the other, the pictorial content of the images might generate a game of echoes between figurative and non-figurative meanings (Terrusi 2012: 101) so that often “images can enhance the verbal figurative language” (Nikolajeva, Scott 2006: 212).

In this regard, Rau emphasizes that picture books are an inexhaustible mine for exploring the potential of metaphorical language. Yet, Rau laments that if pictorial metaphors have been an object of study in many fields (see, for example, Forceville 2008), the multimodality of picture books in relation to figurative language has been largely overlooked:

“Although Lakoff’s and Johnson’s theory<sup>7</sup> allows for a wider interpretation, almost for a decade research was limited to linguistic metaphors. Since the 1990s pictorial metaphors have been studied in art, advertising and comic books.” (Rau 2011: 147)

Similarly, and considering the translation of children’s literature in general, the only extensive study on translating figurative language in books for young readers (not in picture books however) is by Epstein, who suggests that “[i]f an author uses expressive language, regardless of whether scientists or a given culture believe children can understand this language, translators have to find a way to approach and handle it” (Epstein 2010: 23).

Given all their “languages”, it is therefore obvious that the translation of picture books is a great challenge for the translator.

### **3. “My mother thinks I eat like this”/ “Mia madre pensa che io mangi come un maialino”**

The aim of this paper is to examine the many paths that figurative language may follow when entering into contact with a multimodal product for children as well the problems it poses to the translator. The corpus of texts that are analyzed is a selection of fifteen contemporary picture books<sup>8</sup> by classical British and American authors and their Italian translations. In particular, some of them turned out to be interesting for a drafted preliminary classification. All the figures of speech have been studied together with the idiomatic expressions, whereas personification has been left out from the analysis because it dominates children’s literature.

#### **3.1. Figurative language at the verbal level and its translation<sup>9</sup>**

It has been noted that when a figure of speech only occurs at the verbal level, and the image has no figurative content, no serious difficulties are encountered by the translator. Rather, the illustrations prove to be particularly helpful. In *The Polar*

<sup>6</sup> “We can recognize the structure of figures of speech common to the poetic forms within the combination of narrative elements of a picture book.”

<sup>7</sup> “The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.” (Lakoff, Johnson 1980: 5)

<sup>8</sup> *Where the Wild Things Are* by M. Sendak (1967); *The Giving Tree* (1964) and *Who Wants a Cheap Rhinoceros?* (1993) by S. Silverstein, *War and Peas* (1974) by M. Foreman and *Ups and Downs* by B. Gill and their respective translations did not turn out to be very significant.

<sup>9</sup> See Nikolajeva & Scott (2006) for the different interactions between verbal and visual in picture books.

*Express*, by C. Van Allsburg (1984), the verbal text says that “it seemed as if we could scrape the moon” while the train taking the little protagonist to the North Pole in order to meet Santa Claus was climbing the mountains, running “over peaks and through valleys like a car on a roller coaster”. The style of the illustration is realistic<sup>10</sup> and the image only obliquely evokes the verbal simile and the hyperbole. The iconic text which accompanies the words shows the train on the ridge of a mountain whose top cannot be seen, suggesting in this way its highness. Moreover, almost only the lights of the train are visible; similarly, the image may visually remind one of a roller coaster. The Italian target text – *Polar Express* translated in 2004 by S. Daniele and published by Salani – easily retains the same figures of speech: it can be read that “[...] le montagne erano talmente alte che sembravano toccare la luna”<sup>11</sup> and that the train passed “[...] picchi e valli come una macchina dell’otto volante”<sup>12</sup>. In the following double spread, there is an oxymoron and another simile: the Polar Cap is defined as “a barren desert of ice” and the lights of the North Pole look like those of a “strange ocean liner sailing on a frozen sea”. In the image, the Polar Express is on a long bridge. Sky and earth seem to mix up. The point of view of the observer is located under the bridge. Again, the pictorial style is realistic; however, the idea of an unlimited space is conveyed by the reflection of the lights on the iced surface and by the snowflakes falling indistinctively both on the ground and on the water. The train is heading towards some buildings whose dark contours and smoking chimneys may call to mind a transatlantic. The Italian translation makes the two figures of speech identical: “un arido deserto di ghiaccio” and “[...] sembravano quelle di una strana nave da crociera che solcava un oceano ghiacciato”.

In the “green” picture book *Dinosaurs and All That Rubbish* by M. Foreman (1974), it is said that, after the devastation of the eco-system of the earth caused by pollution, the trees and the flowers “[...] spread like the smile of the world”. The corresponding double spread represents three smiling and dancing dinosaurs and some mammoths that are running towards a forest. The Italian target text (*I dinosauri contro il mondo immondizia* published in 1975 by Elle, the name of the translator is not mentioned) again adheres to the source text: “[...] si allargò come un sorriso in tutto il mondo”. As it can be seen, these examples of “private” (see van de Broeck 1981: 75) figures of speech are not problematical from a translational point of view.

Another example of a “private” simile – in which the image does not pose any obstacle – is in *Swimmy* by L. Lionni, the story of an intelligent little black fish that finds a way to not be eaten by some bigger fish. Indeed, in this specific instance, the illustration drops a hint to the translator of the Italian target text (*Guizzino* issued in 1977 by Emme and translated by Lionni himself, even if not indicated). The main character meets a lobster which is said to “walk[ed] about like a water-moving machine”; the translator – taking cue from the colors of the crustacean and from the form of the claws – comes up with a synthetic solution for an almost untranslatable expression into Italian: “[...] si muoveva come una ruspa arrugginita”<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> <http://bethgismondiblog.tumblr.com/post/7225404599/illustration-heroes-chris-van-allsburg> (last accessed on 30/11/2012).

<sup>11</sup> “The mountains were so high that they seem to touch the moon.”

<sup>12</sup> “[...] peaks and valleys like a car on a roller coaster.”

<sup>13</sup> “[...] moved like a rusty scraper.”

By the same token, it is the image which inspires the Italian translator of the picture book *There's a Nightmare in my Closet* by M. Mayer (1968), but, in this case, the English verbal text is not characterized by any particular figure of speech. The story is very simple – a little boy meets the monster hidden in his closet and discovers that it is not as threatening as it seems – and even the verbal text is undemanding. The translator of the Italian edition (*Brutti sogni in ripostiglio* published in 1989 by El Edizioni with the translation of G. Lughì) translates the sentence “[M]y nightmare began to cry” – probably in order to make the reading more exciting – with an Italian idiomatic expression, “[...] il brutto sogno cominciò a piangere come una fontana”<sup>14</sup>, the text supported by the image of the Nightmare desperately crying.

A simile at the visual level supports the translator in a picture book at the limits of untranslatability. *In the Night Kitchen* by M. Sendak (1970) narrates the dreamlike adventure of Mickey who, in his parents’ kitchen, is mistaken for some milk by three identical cooks. The picture book is completely built on assonances and on wordplay that is almost untranslatable into Italian as their pivot is the resemblance between the name of the little hero and the word “milk” (Mickey/milk) (see Nières-Chevrel 2003). Since the translator could not reproduce the initial wordplay which makes the narration start, she verbalizes a visual simile, the *fil rouge* of the entire story sustaining the wordplay itself. In order to allow the Italian reader to understand why Mickey – in the Italian picture book named “Luca” (*Luca, la luna e il latte* published in 1971 by Emme and translated by S. Maltini) – is thought to be the milk, the translator ignores the source text<sup>15</sup> at the beginning and specifies that Luca was “[...] bianco come il latte nella luce della luna”<sup>16</sup>. This is reinforced and justified by the image of the light yellow moon and by the image of the naked baby and his pale skin.

### 3.2. Translating symmetrical verbal and visual figures of speech

When figures of speech are simultaneously and symmetrically found at both the verbal and iconic level (whether of the same type or different one from another), a tendency to make them more transparent has been detected.

According to Rau (2011: 149) in *Fish is Fish* (1970) by Lionni, there is a strict correspondence between visual metaphors and words, but this connection, for example, does not seem to create enormous problems. It is the story of the friendship between a frog and a fish. The frog sets out on a journey to see our “wonderful world” and then it comes back to describe what it has seen to its friend. The double spreads illustrate the dialogical situation: the frog is talking – as its mouth open clearly indicates – while the fish, with its eyes closed, is imagining what its friend is recounting, thereby turning its words into images. This is illustrated by balloons over its head that conventionally represent thoughts. Their white background tells the readers that the words of the frog are filling the empty mind of the protagonist; according to Rau:

In terms of Lakoff’s and Johnson’s theory this is in accordance with the conceptual metaphor MIND IS A CONTAINER, which is conveyed in verbal expressions such as in the fish’s mind, the picture in the fish mind was full of lights and colors... his friends saw the birds fly through his mind. (Rau 2011: 150)

<sup>14</sup> “To cry like a fountain”, i.e. “to cry buckets.”

<sup>15</sup> “Past the moon and his mama and papa sleeping tight [...]”

<sup>16</sup> “[...] white like milk under moonlight.”

All these verbal expressions are straightforwardly maintained in the Italian translation, published by Babalibri in 2006 and translated by M. Marconi with the title *Un pesce è un pesce*: “nella mente del suo amico volavano meravigliosi pesci colorati ricoperti di piume”, “il pesce aveva nella mente immagini colorate e cose meravigliose”.

*Frederick*, still a Lionni’s picture book (1967), is also able to explain the meaning of “imagination” and “dream” through pictorial and linguistic metaphors (Rau 2011: 146). Actually, the protagonist is a mouse that symbolizes the function and the role of the poet in society, often marginalized and misunderstood. While his friends are gathering provisions for the winter, he “gather[s] colors” “for winter is gray”. In the illustration, the grey of the rocks is predominant. This “frozen” metaphor is maintained in the Italian target text (*Federico*, first published in Italy in 1967 by Emme). When there is no food left, the mice ask Frederick to share his special reserve with them: Frederick’s poetic words inspire his companions to imagine colors so that “they saw the color as clearly as if it had been painted in their mind”. In the illustration, yellow, red, green, violet and blue spots fill their empty thought balloons. The Italian translation “[...] videro i colori come se avessero tante piccole tavolozze nella testa”<sup>17</sup> somewhat adheres to the source text, yet it exploits the illustration in order to create a clearer symmetry with the iconic material. Consequently, the young Italian reader is somehow helped.

An almost identical situation occurs in *Swimmy* when the verbal text informs the reader that the fish sees “a forest of seaweeds growing from sugar-candy rocks”. The illustration depicts the seaweeds as trees and the rocks round and colored like candies. The pictorial metaphor is therefore based on the isomorphism between all these elements. Given that the Italian text does not feel the need to underline that the candies are rocks, it emphasizes that they are multi-colored: seaweeds “[...] crescevano da caramelle variopinte”<sup>18</sup>. However, when ambiguity arises, the translator tries to avoid it: when *Swimmy* meets some “sea anemones, who looked like pink palm trees swaying in the wind”, in the Italian text the color is turned into “red” since the sea anemones/palms in the images are more reddish than pink.

### 3.3. Interaction between verbal and visual figures of speech

When the transferred meaning of the figure of speech or of the idiomatic expression is realized through the interaction of images and words, their translation becomes a hard task. In the latter case, the multimodality of picture books is entirely exploited. Examples are rarer because these verbo-visual constructions are really close to being untranslatable: the difficulty of the first example lies in purely linguistic reasons, whereas the second demonstrates how the different notion of the child and his/her abilities to make inferences can influence the work of the translator.

The picture book by T. Ross *I’m Coming to Get You* (1984) contains a verbo-visual figure of speech which is impossible to translate into Italian: a multimodal amphilogy. An amphilogy aims at creating ambiguity by using some signifiers which can be interpreted differently (Ghiazza, Napoli 2008: 235). In particular, in this text, it is created by the interplay between the verbal and the pictorial text. An alien monster is devouring the planet of the banana people: he eats its mountains, drinks its

<sup>17</sup> “They saw the colors as they had many little palettes in their heads.”

<sup>18</sup> “Seaweeds were growing from multi-colored candies.”



water and “had the jellyfish for dessert”. The illustration directly shows the visualization of the literal meaning of the compound word (see Nikolajeva, Scott 2006: 211): in the sea there are some fish whose backs look like jelly candies. This figure of speech is lost in the Italian translation (*Adesso ti prendo!* published in 1994 by EL Edizioni with the translation of G. Lughì) where there is an evident contrast between the image and the verbal text since the “meduse” have a different shape.

The second example is in *I Keep Changing* by B. Gill and A. Reid, first published in 1971<sup>19</sup>. It is a picture book which teaches children that many perspectives upon things exist. The Italian edition (*Continuo a cambiare. I Keep Changing* published in 2006 by Edizioni Corraini and translated by Corraini Studio) is a nice and innovative example<sup>20</sup> in which there are both the source text (in italics under the Italian translation) and the target text. Different English idiomatic expressions – which have a direct identical Italian equivalent and which activate the same underlying image – are employed. Yet, the verbal idiomatic expression “to eat like a bird” in the English source text is completed by the image; in fact, the text is “My father think I eat like this” and the illustration depicts a canary. Similarly, the idiomatic expression “to eat like a pig” in the next page is accompanied by the verbal text, “My mother thinks I eat like this” and the image shows a big pink pig. In the Italian translation the two idiomatic expressions are fully verbalized: “Papà pensa che io mangi come un uccellino” and “Mamma pensa che io mangi come un maialino”<sup>21</sup>.

Nonetheless, there are few examples of this kind given the impossibility to find many idioms based on the same image in both languages: another example which shows this difficulty is the title of a still bilingual picture book by M. and F. Barbero, published by B edizioni in 2007 and translated into English by M. Nebiolo: the Italian idiomatic expression “attacchiamo bottone!” (“attach a button”, i.e. “to talk endlessly”) is translated with an English idiomatic expression which has the word “button” in it but has a different meaning, “Right on the button”.

#### 4. Conclusions

Some conclusions can thereby be drawn from the analysis of the corpus and from the consequent classification of the different ways in which figurative language combines in picture books presented in this paper. Figures of speech can be *de facto* found not only at the verbal level, but also at the verbal and visual levels in a symmetrical relationship, or they can be realized through the interaction of the two codes, thus exploiting the multimodal potential of picture books. Obviously, these different situations imply different solutions and different problems when translation comes into play.

Two main tendencies are actually detected. Difficulties in the translation of the figurative language in picture books seem to increase when the figures of speech are more and more lexicalized: when they are original creations of the authors they seem to be more easily translatable, even if they are found also at the pictorial level. However, when the verbal and the visual are simultaneously involved there is a general tendency to make the figures of speech more transparent at the verbal level.

<sup>19</sup> Translated into Italian and published by Emme Edizioni with the title *Se...* in 1971.

<sup>20</sup> This specific Italian publishing house publishes many innovative children’s picture books with the source text and its Italian translation.

<sup>21</sup> “My father thinks I eat like a little bird”; “My mother thinks I eat like a little pig”.

Given the multimodal nature of these texts, serious problems arise when verbal and pictorial languages are closely interconnected: not only for linguistic reasons but also due to differing notions of childhood in the two cultures. In this case, losses and evident changes are detected.

It is also true, however, that, verbal and visual figures of speech can unexpectedly become a source of inspiration for the translator.

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# Proverbi e metafore del *Pentamerone* di Basile: Esperienze traduttive a confronto

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**Abstract:** *In uno studio del 1941 il critico Speroni individuava nel Cunto de li Cunti, secentesca raccolta di fiabe in dialetto napoletano di Giambattista Basile, la presenza di ben 290 proverbi e 222 espressioni idiomatiche. I proverbi e i detti proverbiali rappresentano di fatto una costante nel progetto testuale del Cunto, se si pensa che sentenze moraleggianti, wellerismi o veri e propri proverbi aprono e chiudono tutte le favole, oltre ad inserirsi nel corpo stesso del testo. E lo stesso vale per l'inusitato numero di metafore sparse per tutta l'opera, da quelle con cui l'autore si diverte a indicare sistematicamente l'alternarsi del giorno e della notte, a quelle sulla morte o a quelle riferite alle attività corporali, dalla sessualità alla defecazione. Il loro numero eccezionale e la loro peculiare struttura possono rappresentare un vero rompicapo e una sfida per il traduttore. Lo sapevano bene tanto i riscrittori ottocenteschi inglesi del Cunto quanto quelli contemporanei: fra gli altri, gli italiani Benedetto Croce (autore della prima traduzione integrale dell'opera in italiano), Michele Rak, o l'americana Nancy Canepa, la cui singolare resa delle espressioni proverbiali e idiomatiche, appiattita sul testo di partenza, bene esemplifica come lo spettro dei modi del tradurre possa risultare assai differente a seconda che si privilegi una traduzione source-oriented o target-oriented. Il contributo proposto intende appunto evidenziare, attraverso il confronto di alcune traduzioni dal dialetto napoletano all'italiano (Croce) e all'inglese (Canepa), le strategie messe in atto dai singoli traduttori, sollecitate da specifiche motivazioni, finalità, scelte stilistiche e di poetica.*

**Parole chiave:** proverbi, metafore, traduzione, Basile, Cunto.

*Il me semble que, [...] les proverbes seraient à prendre dans une théorie du langage poétique comme énonciation, dans une linguistique de l'énonciation, et du discours.*

H. Meschonnic

*Le metafore sono più che modi di parlare: sono modi di percepire, di sentire e di esistere.*

J. Hillman

**1.** Con *Lo Cunto de li Cunti* (o *Pentamerone*), opera barocca di Giambattista Basile pubblicata postuma fra il 1634 e il 1636, siamo di fronte alla prima raccolta di fiabe in Occidente. Capostipite del genere fiabesco (cfr. Rak 2005 e 2007: 59-78), il *Cunto* è composto da cinquanta fiabe, narrate in cinque giornate da dieci brutte vecchie, le più esperte «parlettere» (ciarliere) della città. Apre l'opera un racconto-cornice che, prima di concludersi, genera altre quarantanove storie e si completa uroboricamente nell'ultimo *cunto* della *Scompetura* che, insieme alla 'Ntroduzione, costituisce la cinquantesima fiaba che tutto ha partorito e tutto contiene.

Il *Cunto* è un testo difficile persino da leggere oltre che da tradurre, scritto nel complicato dialetto letterario secentesco e traboccante di proverbi, metafore,

enumerazioni barocche, accumuli di sinonimi e descrizioni iperboliche. Un'esuberanza stilistica divenuta, già nel '700, il principale atto d'accusa che l'illuminista Galiani, studioso di economia e lingua napoletana e autore nel 1779 del trattato *Del dialetto napoletano*, aveva mosso a Basile con questo caustico giudizio:

Alla stupidità dell'invenzione corrisponde la mostruosità dello stile. [...] volendo esser grazioso, e far ridere, e non avendo alcun talento a ciò fare, in luogo delle vere lepidezze, si avvale unicamente di quelle metaforacce, di que' traslati, di que' bisticci, e contrapposti, de' quali il suo infelice secolo essendo stato inondato, può però dirsi con verità, che verun scrittore ne facesse maggiore scempio di lui. [...] Tutto il libro è così: né si dà mai il caso, che egli sappia contenere a dir qualunque cosa in una maniera semplice, e vera. Dove gli mancano le metafore, cominciano i bisticci, e i contrapposti tali da rivoltare lo stomaco più agguerrito al gusto cattivo. (Galiani 1827: 158-160)

Galiani, accanito detrattore di Basile e dei suoi *cunti*, non esita a biasimarne la prosa "adulterata e piena d'errori" e a rinvenirvi non solo la prova della deturpazione del vero dialetto, ma persino la causa della generale corruzione dei costumi (Galiani 1827: 161). Dopo aver condannato con durezza le "metaforacce", i "traslati" e i "bisticci" disseminati nel testo, riserva la stessa sprezzante riprovazione verso i proverbi e modi di dire, le "espressioni strane, e bizzarre usate dal volgo" (Galiani 1827: 160), a cui Basile ricorre in modo altrettanto spropositato, quasi a volerne dispiegare un completo prontuario:

Il solo pregio dunque del Basile si restringe all'aver egli avuta la più incredibile, e minuta contezza di tutte le voci, de' proverbj, de' modi di dire, e delle espressioni strane, e bizzarre usate dal volgo. Se avesse consumata tutta la vita ne' chiassi, e nelle taverne, non ne poteva apprendere dippiù. Il suo Cunto de li Cunte basta solo a formarne il compiuto vocabolario. (Galiani 1827: 160)

Al di là della pregiudiziale condanna senza appello di Galiani, è un dato di fatto che solo con il *Pentamerone* di Basile le fiabe entrano per la prima volta nel campo della letteratura, così com'è vero che l'aspetto innovativo e artisticamente più fecondo dell'opera risiede proprio nella calcolata immersione del materiale fiabesco sia nel vivace contenitore linguistico del dialetto, sia in quello smisurato e ribollente della retorica barocca, entrambi congeniali all'autore per le sue continue, iperboliche enumerazioni, per il suo arsenale di proverbi e idiomatismi, per le sue spettacolari metafore.

2. La centralità dei proverbi nell'economia dell'opera di Basile è stata riconosciuta, fra gli altri, da Charles Speroni in uno studio del 1941 dal titolo *Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases in Basile's Pentameron*. Prerogativa meritoria di quel contributo è stata quella di rintracciare nel complicato tessuto che compone le fiabe di Basile, tutti i proverbi, le frasi proverbiali e le espressioni idiomatiche presenti nell'opera. Ben 290 risultano i proverbi e 222 i modi di dire, volendo escludere alcuni passaggi dubbi di cui pure Speroni dà conto nell'appendice al volume. All'identificazione dei proverbi si accompagna una scrupolosa analisi comparata della loro occorrenza in altre raccolte italiane, inglesi e tedesche, oltre che nelle numerose sillogi e nei dizionari contemporanei alla stesura dei *cunti*.

Sull'uso dei detti proverbiali è di fatto costruita l'intera impalcatura del *Cunto*, come suggerisce già la sua apertura, affidata appunto al proverbio "chi cerca chello che non deve trova chello che non vole" (Basile 1986: 10), che anticipa la morale della favola che sta per essere narrata e che fa da prologo a tutte le altre. La storia è quella di una schiava nera che con l'astuzia riuscirà a sottrarre alla bella e

malinconica Zoza, figlia del re di Vallepelosa, il principe Tadeo suo promesso sposo e, insieme a lui, la corona e il titolo di principessa. Solo nell'ultima delle cinquanta fiabe la schiava sarà smascherata e per questo mortalmente punita. Il proverbio posto in apertura inaugura una costante nel progetto testuale del *Cunto*. Il ricorso sistematico a espressioni proverbiali ne fa una componente *strutturale* dell'opera e le conferisce un'architettura stabile, essendo ogni fiaba aperta e chiusa puntualmente da sentenze moraleggianti, wellerismi o veri e propri proverbi (cfr. Rak 1986: lxiii-lxiv).

Almeno due sembrano, al riguardo, le questioni su cui è opportuno soffermarsi. Da una parte, l'effettiva replicabilità dell'impianto strutturale garantisce una maggiore facilità di memorizzazione delle fiabe e quindi la possibilità che vengano riraccontate, visto che il *Cunto* era prima di tutto un passatempo di corte da leggere e recitare ad alta voce nell'occasione rituale del dopopranzo. E poi la replicabilità degli stessi proverbi che, nella loro formulazione standardizzata e fissa, si prestano appieno ad essere dispositivi di memoria, autentiche formule mnemoniche. Tratti peculiari del proverbio sono proprio la sua fissità e la precisa successione delle parole, il cui spostamento o semplice inversione andrebbe a pregiudicare il ruolo essenziale degli elementi prosodici e metrici, la rima, l'assonanza, il ritmo, che invece sono espedienti mnemonici necessari. I proverbi, ha scritto Meschonnic, non si descrivono, si *riconoscono* (Meschonnic 1976: 420) e se è possibile riconoscerli è proprio in virtù dell'ordine fisso delle parole di cui sono costituiti e degli accorgimenti retorici e metrici che ne agevolano la memorizzazione. Il linguaggio proverbiale assolve la sua funzione didascalica e morale passando prima attraverso una funzione mnemonica: le singole parole che lo realizzano sono parole reclutate dall'arte della memoria, parole fortemente iconiche, capaci, attraverso l'immagine evocata, di richiamare immediatamente, insieme al detto, il monito morale sotteso.

Sulle caratteristiche di fissità, di ripetibilità, di autonomia sintattica e semantica dei proverbi valgano le lucide considerazioni di Paolo Bagni riportate nella sua postfazione al saggio di Jean Paulhan *L'esperienza del proverbio*:

Non è allora tanto la peculiarità della struttura che fa il proverbio, quanto la sua *fissità*, fissità che è originalità prosodica, che si destina alla *citazione*, alla *ripetizione*. Proprio perché citabile, ripetibile, il proverbio s'iscrive in una situazione: e attraverso la fissità della sua formula iscrive in sé questa situazione; e attraverso la ripetizione, e la sua irriducibile intonazione, funziona come un *fuori-testo* nel testo [...]. (Bagni 2000: 44)

Proverbi, dunque, come micro-testi nel testo che, grazie alla loro forma chiusa e sempre identica a se stessa, riescono a riadattarsi perfettamente all'interno di situazioni narrative differenti, a valere per più circostanze. È quanto accade ai proverbi di Basile, la cui compiutezza semantica, autonomia e relativa impermeabilità ne permettono la continua adattabilità in fiabe diverse all'interno della stessa opera e in opere diverse.

**3.** Come accade per i proverbi e i modi di dire, altrettanto sistematica è l'occorrenza nel testo di espressioni metaforiche, di cui Calvino ha persino tentato un dettagliato censimento nel saggio *La mappa delle metafore*, concludendo che “anziché essere considerate un ornamento che infiora la struttura portante degli intrecci e delle funzioni narrative”, esse avanzano “in primo piano come la *vera sostanza del testo*” (Calvino 1996: 143, *corsivo nostro*). Metafore che scandiscono puntualmente il sorgere e il tramontare del sole:

Venuto la matina – quando l'ombre de la Notte secotate da li sbirre de lo Sole sfrattano lo paiese [...] (Basile 1986: 102)<sup>1</sup>  
[Venuta la mattina – quando le ombre della Notte inseguite dagli sbirri del Sole lasciano il paese ...] (103)

Comme la Notte spase li vestite nigre perché se conservassero da le carole [...] (290)  
[Quando la Notte stese i vestiti neri perché si preservassero dalle tarme...] (291)

Metafore erotiche, riferite ad appassionate notti d'amore:

[...] e fatto apparecchiare le tavole, fecero no magnare de signore, lo quale scomputo se iezero a corcare a no bello lietto addoruso de colata, dove Cienzo, auzando li trofei de la vittoria avuta co lo dragone, trasette trionfando a lo Campeduoglio d'Ammore. (Basile 1986: 152-154)  
[... e, fatte apparecchiare le tavole, fecero un pranzo da signori e quando lo finirono, andarono a corcarsi in un bel letto odoroso di bucato, dove Cienzo, alzando i trofei della vittoria ottenuta sul dragone, entrò trionfando nel Campidoglio d'Amore]. (153-155)

o come quelle, più frequenti, che alludono ad un amplesso andato in bianco per motivi disparati e spesso di rabelaisiana comicità:

E, chiamanno la zita a portare lo quatierno pe saudare li cunte amoruse, essa, puostose lo spruoccolo 'n mocca, pigliaie la figura de n'urzo terribele e le ieze 'ncontra. (Basile 1986: 362)  
[E, chiamando la sposa per farsi portare il quaderno su cui saldare i conti dell'amore, lei, messo il bastoncino in bocca, si trasformò in un orso terribile e gli andò incontro]. (363)

Metafore corporali, “con cui Basile celebra i fasti della defecazione nei suoi colori e odori” (Calvino 1996: 142):

[...] fece no maro de liquido topazio e l'arabi fumme 'nfettarono lo palazzo. (Basile 1986: 546)  
[... fece un mare di topazio liquido e i profumi arabi ammorbarono il palazzo]. (547)

Metafore legate alla morte che, pure assai frequente nella raccolta, non è mai descritta in modo esplicito:

Ma, 'nante che se stotasse la cannela de la vita a lo 'ncanto dell'anne [...]. (Basile 1986: 356)  
[Ma, prima che si spegnesse la candela del vivere all'asta degli anni...]. (357)

La scelta degli esempi è senz'altro arbitraria e riduttiva, eppure sollecita subito qualche considerazione. Intanto non è superfluo rilevare che, nel caso delle metafore usate da Basile – e per quelle relative all'alternarsi del giorno e della notte si tratta per lo più di personificazioni – non è in gioco il semplice uso metaforico di *una* parola rispetto alle altre che compongono il sintagma, ma ci si trova di fronte ad *interi* enunciati metaforici, potremmo dire a metafore estese, ossia intere frasi di parole tutte usate metaforicamente, nelle quali la metafora scaturisce dalla tensione fra *tutti* i termini e per la cui comprensione può risultare insufficiente la semplice sostituzione con gli equivalenti letterali. Più utile a ricostruirne il significato può invece rivelarsi la conoscenza del contesto nel quale l'espressione metaforica è usata, delle circostanze che la ispirano e delle intenzioni di chi la pronuncia (cfr. Black 1992: 46-48). Non trattandosi di una pratica di pura sostituzione dei termini metaforici con corrispondenti termini letterali, ma di un'esperienza di cortocircuito fra il significato letterale e quello metaforico da cui scaturisce un'inedita estensione di significato, è necessario uno sforzo da parte del lettore, una sua “risposta creativa”

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<sup>1</sup> Il testo di riferimento è qui l'edizione a cura di Michele Rak, con testo italiano a fronte, Milano, Garzanti, 1986.



che gli permetta di trovare connessioni fra parole e immagini del tutto distanti e dissimili fra loro (cfr. Black 1992: 115).

L'impiego insistito di metafore da parte di Basile è chiaro indizio che in tale uso, per di più potenziato dall'esuberanza lessicale del dialetto napoletano, si riveli non un divertito intento decorativo, quanto piuttosto la personale risposta dell'autore alla poetica barocca e ad una concezione "interattiva" della metafora, secondo cui essa è capace di *creare* nuove similarità, piuttosto che limitarsi ad esprimere similarità già esistenti (Black 1992: 54-66). Lo ha già ribadito, fra gli altri, Giovanni Getto scrivendo appunto che per Basile "non si tratta soltanto di un gioco, di un capriccio verbale che trovi la sua giustificazione in se stesso, nel gratuito svolazzo e nella variopinta tavolozza" (Getto 2000: 311, ma cfr. almeno anche Anceschi 1960; Calcaterra 1961, Picone, Messerli 2004, Guaragnella 2011); si tratta piuttosto del riflesso nella scrittura del modo di sentire barocco, di una nuova poetica che proprio in questa figura retorica ritrova non solo il mezzo per creare meraviglia ma, più problematicamente, una forma nuova di esercitare il pensiero che, non censurando i rimandi e le ripetizioni, scatena di continuo l'immaginazione, da cui deriva una costante elaborazione semantica. La metafora, avrebbe scritto Tesauro nel suo trattato sull'arte dell'argutezza, è fra tutte le figure retoriche la più "ingegnosa" e "acuta: però che l'altre quasi grammaticalmente si formano e si fermano nella superficie del vocabolo, ma questa riflessivamente penetra e investiga le più astruse nozioni per accoppiarle" (Tesauro 1978: 67). A una teoria "tensionale" della metafora, lontana dalla teoria "nominale" aristotelica - intesa come semplice fenomeno di sostituzione di un termine con un altro - rimanda anche l'indagine ermeneutica di Paul Ricœur, per il quale la metafora "consiste in effetti in un errore calcolato: assimila cose che non stanno insieme, ma, grazie a questa stessa incomprensione, fa sorgere una relazione di senso, fin qui non rilevata, tra termini che la classificazione anteriore avrebbe impedito di mettere in comunicazione" (Ricœur 1994: 150 e XXVII).

Se da questa prospettiva critica ci si sofferma ad osservare l'impalcatura stilistica del *Cunto de li Cunti*, si comprende allora che il lavoro retorico di Basile, nel generare metafore, iperboli, paronomasie, allusioni, sa restituire al lettore una scrittura seducente e vigorosa il cui intento non è solo quello puramente decorativo di dare una forma a un contenuto, o di sovrapporre un *ornatus* al senso letterale già perfettamente compiuto in sé, ma di dare corpo alle parole, "di plasmare l'immaginazione facendone parole" (Hillman 1983: 358). Ciò vuol dire che le figure stilistiche generate dall'azione retorica diventano esse stesse vera *sostanza* del testo, annullando di fatto la sterile illusione dicotomica di un significato separato dal significante.

**4.** Tanto i proverbi di Basile, formule fisse eppure sempre in movimento da una fiaba all'altra come sequenze autonome e autosufficienti, quanto le metafore e le espressioni figurate, autentiche "marche di fabbrica" dell'opera (Imbriani 1875: 454), sembrano davvero non finire mai. Il loro numero eccezionale e la loro peculiare struttura possono perciò rappresentare un vero e proprio rompicapo e una sfida per i traduttori che decidano di cimentarsi con questo difficile testo.

Fra gli altri lo sapevano bene, in area tedesca, i fratelli Grimm, ammirati lettori e imitatori nei loro *Märchen* del modello basiliano, di cui pure segnalavano la prosa "ardita, libera, senza velo", una ridondanza "di similitudini e bisticci e proverbi e

rime, che per lo più il tedesco è impotente a riprodurre” (cfr. Imbriani 1875: 452-454, ma si veda anche Sorrentino 2012). Ma lo sapevano bene anche i traduttori italiani del *Cunto*, primo fra tutti Benedetto Croce, alla cui versione del 1925, la prima in forma integrale, va il merito di aver rimesso letteralmente in vita il testo, dopo il prolungato silenzio a cui lo aveva destinato per tutto l’Ottocento l’Italia risorgimentale e postunitaria.

Ci si soffermerà qui di seguito su qualche esempio di traduzioni di proverbi e di metafore basiliane facendo riferimento proprio alla versione italiana di Croce, e comparandone il progetto traduttivo, le scelte stilistiche, di poetica e le strategie adottate con quelle della studiosa americana Nancy Canepa, autrice nel 2007 della più recente versione inglese del *Cunto*. La scelta di mettere a confronto, attraverso pochi esempi, la resa di proverbi e metafore di Croce e di Canepa è dettata non certo dall’intenzione di un giudizio comparativo che evidenzi la bontà di una versione rispetto all’altra, ma dalla più concreta esigenza di comprendere come il tempo storico delle traduzioni e le differenti poetiche dei due traduttori abbiano indirizzato in modi del tutto diversi le loro scelte (cfr. Albanese 2013).

Ma partiamo da Croce, del quale non si può tacere la profonda conoscenza dell’opera di Basile, attestata, fra l’altro, già nel 1891 dal tentativo, limitato a sole due giornate, di edizione dell’opera in dialetto napoletano, oltre che da numerosi interventi critici, fra cui l’importante monografia contenuta nei *Saggi sulla letteratura italiana del Seicento* del 1911 e la lunga e densa introduzione che il filosofo premette alla traduzione del 1925. Qui Croce si preoccupa di rendere esplicito il proprio progetto traduttivo:

[...] e sono stato fedelissimo alle parole del testo, cercando di non scemare la quantità, e di alterare il meno possibile la qualità, delle immagini che contengono; ma mi son condotto con piena libertà di rifacimento verso la sintassi, che nel Basile è difettosa e spesse volte pessima [...]. Ho resistito alla tentazione, alla quale altri sarebbe soggiaciuto, di sostituire per equivalenza agli idiotismi napoletani vocaboli e frasi dell’uso fiorentino vivo; e mi sono studiato di lasciare al libro, non solo tutti i suoi ornati barocchi, ma anche un certo sapore napoletanESCO. (Basile 2001: XXVI)

Seppure fermo nel proposito dichiarato di fedeltà alle parole del testo, sì che vi resti forte l’impronta della sua napoletanità, si impone per Croce l’obbligo di intervenire “con piena libertà di rifacimento” sulla sintassi, che egli giudica “difettosa” e “pessima”. Già nel suo saggio del 1911 aveva lamentato le costruzioni sintattiche gonfie e sovrabbondanti così frequenti in Basile, scrivendo che i *cunti* sono “capricciosamente ornati” di “ricami e frange”, e che “metafore stravaganti, equivoci e giochetti di parole, allusioni, enumerazioni, sinonimie scherzose, si succedono e s’intrecciano senza posa” (Croce 1911: 56).

Anche Canepa è studiosa di Basile attenta e di lunga data: la sua frequentazione con l’opera dello scrittore napoletano è confluita nell’importante studio monografico sul *Cunto* e la nascita del racconto fiabesco (1999), in contributi critici (cfr. almeno 2002, 2003, 2004) e, nel 2007, nella traduzione integrale del testo. Un’operazione, questa, che Jack Zipes nella sua prefazione non ha esitato a definire “a prodigious accomplishment” (Basile 2007: XIV) e a cui riconosce l’indubbio merito di aver contribuito in maniera decisiva alla conoscenza di un testo poco noto nella cultura angloamericana, se si pensa che la traduzione più recente era ancora quella di Penzer del 1932, basata sulla versione di Croce.

Al pari di quello crociano, altrettanto dettagliato è il progetto di traduzione che Canepa premette alla sua versione. Qui, oltre a dare conto dei criteri di scelta dell'edizione tradotta, e si tratta dell'esemplare braidense del 1634-36, dichiara le ragioni di poetica che stanno alla base degli interventi operati sul testo:

To what degree should the text be “familiarized”? Translating Basile’s early modern version of a nonstandard language into standard American English is especially fraught with the risks of assimilating the status of Neapolitan to that of a dominant language. [...] The temptation to “domesticate” in the direction of rendering a more polished, easy to read, and accommodating translation is one that most of Basile’s early translators, and some of his later ones, succumbed to. Even Croce, certainly not naïve about the risks inherent in passing from one language to another – and a fellow Neapolitan to boot – tended to deal with difficult, or racy, passages by either simplification, elimination, or, above all, sanitation of the original. (Basile 2007: 29)

Quella di Basile è un'opera polifonica, scritta, come si è detto, in una lingua difficile e rimane forte per il traduttore la tentazione di addomesticarla nella direzione di una riscrittura scorrevole, raffinata e ripulita da sbavature. Del resto, proprio di questo tipo di manipolazione addomesticante, secondo Canepa, si è reso responsabile lo stesso Croce intervenendo energicamente a spezzare l'impalcatura sintattica gonfia e ipotattica dell'originale, eliminando, aggiungendo, semplificando ed edulcorando il testo nei suoi luoghi più audaci. Questa è invece la strategia che Canepa si propone di perseguire:

I have opted for a productively foreignizing translation, in which I attempt to preserve the distinctive tone, as well as the idiosyncrasies, of Basile’s literary language, a language that is “strange” even in Italy, where all Italians except erudite Neapolitans read him in translation. [...] A deceptively fluent translation that purported to re-create a transparency and accessibility that were absent in the original text would thus be the most unfaithful to the spirit and letter of *The Tale of Tales*. (Basile 2007: 30-31)

La sua posizione traduttiva sembra dunque rientrare, a differenza di quella crociana, in quello che potremmo chiamare il primo movimento di Schleiermacher, in cui “il traduttore lascia il più possibile in pace lo scrittore e gli muove incontro il lettore” (cfr. Schleiermacher 1993: 153). Ed è ancora, quella di Canepa, una posizione che accoglie appieno, persino nella terminologia, il punto di vista assai critico di Venuti nei confronti di traduzioni di tipo addomesticante, di fatto prevalenti nella cultura angloamericana, che il mercato editoriale incoraggia e favorisce in nome degli imperativi di scorrevolezza, fluidità e facile leggibilità dei testi stranieri (cfr. Venuti 1999 e 2005, Albanese 2012a).

Ma proviamo ora a verificare la coerenza delle dichiarazioni dei traduttori rispetto ai loro interventi sul testo iniziando dal confronto di qualche proverbio. Il primo esempio è la chiusura della fiaba *La preta de lo gallo* (IV, 1). Lo si riporta nelle due traduzioni di Croce e di Canepa, oltre che nell'originale napoletano:

BASILE:

cane ch'è scottato d'acqua cauda  
ha paura perzi de l'acqua fredda. (Basile 1986: 672)

CROCE:

il cane, che provò la scottatura,  
anche dell'acqua fredda si spaura. (Basile 2001: 281)

CANEPA:

a dog scorched by hot water becomes afraid of cold water, too. (Basile 2007: 304)

Il proverbio nell'originale presenta una struttura binaria chiusa, composta rispettivamente da un decasillabo e un endecasillabo. È altrettanto evidente che la mancanza della rima non pregiudica affatto il ritmo marcato dei versi.

Quella di Croce è riscrittura poetica che elabora con maestria un raffinato corrispettivo italiano del detto, del tutto equivalente dal punto di vista semantico; Croce cerca la forma bella, in una resa che, almeno a suo avviso, sembra addirittura migliorare l'originale laddove restituisce, con maggiore rigore metrico rispetto a Basile, due endecasillabi, per di più con una cadenza rimata (*scottatura/matura*) del tutto assente nell'originale. La traduzione di Canepa rompe la forma chiusa del proverbio originale e la sua compattezza ritmica, trascurando la regolarità metrica o la convenzionale e normativa idea di poesia a vantaggio della restituzione, in prosa, quasi di ogni singola parola. Quella di Canepa sembra una scelta tesa volutamente a spiazzare il lettore di lingua inglese, soprattutto se confrontata con le forme inglesi più ricorrenti del proverbio e facilmente individuabili dalla consultazione dei dizionari:

A scalded cat (dog) fears cold water.  
(Oxf. 26 in Speroni 1941: 245; Arthaber 2009: 292)

o con l'uscita, individuata ancora da Arthaber:

The burnt child dreads the fire. (Arthaber 2009: 292)

in cui rintracciamo senza troppe difficoltà alcuni tratti tipici dei detti proverbiali, per esempio la concisione, o il ricorso ad accorgimenti retorici che ne facilitano la memorizzazione e la replicabilità: in questo caso è l'assonanza prodotta dai termini *child/fire*.

Un altro esempio interessante è un proverbio tratto da *Lo Viso*, il terzo *cunto* della terza giornata, ed è ricavato dal corpo centrale del testo. Eccone, nell'ordine, la versione di Basile e le traduzioni di Croce e Canepa:

BASILE:  
eccote ditto quattro 'nante che fosse 'nsacco. (Basile 1986: 510)

CROCE:  
Ecco che tu hai detto quattro prima che fosse nel sacco. (Basile 2001: 212)

CANEPA:  
There you have it: I said "four" before it was in the bag. (Basile 2007: 237)

Il proverbio originale ha di nuovo struttura metrica chiusa composta da due settenari, e l'assonanza *quattro/nsacco* garantisce ritmo e musicalità al verso. La traduzione di Croce restituisce il proverbio di Basile mantenendo perfettamente la forma metrica chiusa dei versi, divenuti in questo caso due ottonari, e restituendo alla pagina quel ritmo originario assicurato dall'assonanza *quattro/sacco*.

La versione di Canepa sopprime del tutto la rima, pur salvando l'allitterazione *four/before*, e privilegia ancora la lettera del testo, la completa aderenza al tessuto linguistico dell'originale, creando un effetto davvero straniante, se si pensa che la forma del proverbio più familiare per il lettore di lingua inglese è nell'espressione:

To count one's chickens before they are hatched.  
(Oxf. 506 in Speroni 1941: 245)

o anche nelle due uscite:

Don't boil your fish till they are hooked.  
Make not your sauce till you have caught your fish. (Arthaber 2009: 577)

Allo slittamento del piano semantico e figurale del proverbio inglese che, nelle sue forme più ricorrenti, restituisce immagini di galline e pesci, fa da controcanto la traduzione di Canepa, ancora una volta aderente al testo di partenza e all'ordine di significato del proverbio originale.

Coerentemente con quanto dichiarato dai due traduttori nell'iniziale progetto traduttivo, la resa dei proverbi conferma un'evidente divergenza nelle strategie adottate: del tutto uniformata al testo di partenza quella di Canepa, e fortemente stranierizzante, e invece alla ricerca della forma bella e della compattezza stilistica quella di Croce, che a tal fine non disdegna di prendersi qualche libertà con il testo di Basile, sottoponendolo a piccoli aggiustamenti e zeppe, "togliendo e aggiungendo e variando dove l'arte ciò richieda" (Croce 1946: 161).

Proviamo ora a soffermarci su alcuni passaggi dell'opera in cui ricorrono espressioni metaforiche per verificare se, anche in questo caso, vi sia coerenza fra le dichiarazioni d'intenti dei traduttori e le strategie effettivamente messe in atto. Il primo esempio è tratto dalla fiaba *La palomma* (*La colomba*, II, 7), e il momento è quello finale in cui le disavventure di una coppia d'innamorati, separati dalle avversità, si risolvono felicemente con una bella festa di nozze. Così Basile chiude il racconto:

E, cossì decenno e scomputa la festa, iettero a corcarese e, pe confirmare lo stromiento fatto de la nova fede promessa, *'nce fece fermare dui testimonie* e li travaglie passate fecero chiù saporite le gustate presente [...] (Basile 1986: 392, *corsivo nostro*)

dove l'audace allusione metaforica è a quei "dui testimonie", ossia ai testicoli dello sposo che, autentici testimoni del patto nuziale, ne suggellano meglio di chiunque altro la validità, diventando i protagonisti della notte di nozze. Com'è facile intuire, la metafora sessuale, innescata dall'uso figurato dell'espressione "far firmare due testimoni", è qui rafforzata dal gioco di parole *testimoni/testicoli*, che Basile si diverte a costruire ricorrendo ad un minimo slittamento fonetico. Questa la versione di Croce:

E, terminato il festino, andarono a letto; e il principe, per confermare il rogitto della nuova fede promessa, volle che *fosse firmato da due testimoni*, e i travagli passati fecero più saporiti i gusti presenti [...]. (Basile 2001: 164, *corsivo nostro*)

Pur riportando integralmente la metafora sessuale basiliana, Croce si preoccupa tuttavia di inserire una nota a piè pagina riferita a quei "due testimoni", commentando laconico che si tratta di un "bisticcio salace, che non ha bisogno di spiegazione" (Basile 2001: 164). Una nota che smaschera i ferri del traduttore svelandone la volontà censoria. Così invece Canepa:

When this was said and the festivities had ended, they went to bed, and to authenticate the contract of their newly promised loyalty the prince *had his two witnesses sign it*. And the past hardships made the present pleasures more tasty [...]. (Basile 2007: 194, *corsivo nostro*)

Anche la versione di Canepa, che riprende alla lettera il testo di partenza, è accompagnata da una nota a piè pagina che esplicita, senza l'imbarazzo e la reticenza di Croce, il sottinteso riferimento di Basile ai "testicles" (Basile 2007: 194). Come spesso accade in altri luoghi del *Cunto*, ci si trova anche in questo caso di fronte ad espressioni metaforiche originali, non radicate in uno specifico tessuto culturale e linguistico ma frutto dell'estro barocco dell'autore napoletano; la loro resa in un'altra lingua non comporta perciò particolari difficoltà traduttive, potendo il traduttore – come qui fanno Croce e Canepa – limitarsi ad assicurare nell'altra lingua almeno il

livello semantico dell'espressione originaria, per lasciare poi al lettore il gusto di ricavare nel testo tradotto la stessa valenza metaforica del testo di partenza. È evidente che, nel brano di Canepa appena riportato, il passaggio dal dialetto napoletano (e dall'italiano) all'inglese (ossia il passaggio da "testimoni" a "witnesses") ha comportato una perdita della parziale omofonia che era racchiusa nel sottinteso gioco di parole originario *testimoni/testicoli*.

Un altro esempio interessante si ritrova nella fiaba *Il serpente* (II, 5): qui la metafora, ancora a sfondo sessuale, è affidata alla virulenta invettiva di Sapatella, moglie di un ortolano, che accusa il povero marito di essere incapace di darle un figlio. Eccone la tirata, nell'originale e nelle traduzioni italiana e inglese:

BASILE:

Ecco ca pe fi' a li sierpe fanno li serpunchiole e io nasciute sbentorata a sto munno co no guallaruso de marito, che, con tutto che sia ortolano, non è da tanto de fare no 'nsierto. (Basile 1986: 338)

CROCE:

Ecco che persino le serpi fanno i serpicini; e io nacqui disavventurata a questo mondo, con un ernioso di marito, che, quantunque sia ortolano, non è da tanto da fare un innesto! (Basile 2001: 139)

CANEPA:

There you have it: even serpents have little serpents, and I was born to this world unlucky, with a hernia of a husband who isn't a good enough gardener to give me a graft. (Basile 2007: 170)

Questa volta Basile ricorre a una metafora tratta dal mondo contadino, lo stesso in cui la fiaba è ambientata, proponendoci l'immagine efficace di un inetto ortolano incapace di fare un innesto: l'allusione è naturalmente alla presunta impotenza dello sventurato protagonista, colpevole secondo Sapatella di non riuscire a fecondarla e, di conseguenza, di non adempiere come si deve al suo dovere di marito. Anche qui, come nell'esempio precedente, i due traduttori si limitano a trasferire diligentemente l'ordine del significato del brano, lasciando di nuovo al lettore il compito di coglierne il senso metaforico.

Si riprende infine, fra gli innumerevoli passaggi di quest'opera-cornucopia, un ultimo esempio di metafora salace e virulenta, questa volta rivolta da un re a sua figlia Porziella che, disubbidendo ai suoi ordini, si rifiuta di andare in sposa a un orco risultato vincitore di una sfida lanciata proprio dal re. Nel bel mezzo della sfuriata fra i due, Basile mette in bocca al padre questo coloratissimo insulto:

BASILE:

Vide *fiato de lo culo mio* ca vo' fare dell'ommo e mettere legge a lo patre! (Basile 1986: 112, *corsivo nostro*)

La licenziosa metafora "fiato de lo culo mio", con cui Basile felicemente sintetizza il rapporto gerarchico di "derivazione" dei figli dai padri, e il loro dovere di ubbidienza verso chi li ha generati, è così tradotta da Croce e Canepa:

CROCE:

Guarda un po': una *scoreggia* del mio *deretano* vuol far l'uomo, e dettar legge al padre! (Basile 2001: 45, *corsivo nostro*)

CANEPA:

Just look at this *stink of my own ass* who wants to play the man and lay down the law for her father! (Basile 2007: 79, *corsivo nostro*)

Mentre la versione di Canepa risulta ancora una volta del tutto appiattita sul tessuto linguistico dell'originale, restituendolo tal quale e non preoccupandosi di attenuarne con eufemismi i termini più azzardati, Croce sfodera invece la sua lima

ensoria, sostituendo l'energica offesa "fieto de lo culo mio" con un blando, "scoreggia del mio deretano".

5. Le traduzioni di Croce e di Canepa, seppure qui limitate alla sola resa delle espressioni figurate, bene esemplificano come lo spettro dei modi del tradurre possa risultare assai differente a seconda che si privilegi una traduzione *target-oriented* o *source-oriented*. Se maggiore affinità fra i due traduttori si è riscontrata nella resa delle metafore basiliane, con una comune aderenza al livello lessicale e semantico del testo di partenza, pur fatto salvo un più mirato intento censorio di Croce, la traduzione dei proverbi ha invece chiaramente delineato una diversa strategia messa in atto e coerentemente sostenuta, come si è visto, da un ben definito progetto traduttivo iniziale.

La scelta di Canepa di tradurre i proverbi, i modi di dire e le espressioni metaforiche va nella direzione della lettera del testo di partenza e, nel caso specifico dei proverbi, trascura l'accomodante ricerca dei loro equivalenti certo più familiari alla lingua e alla cultura d'arrivo, privilegiando il livello lessicale e semantico dell'originale a scapito di quello fonetico, retorico, metrico e ritmico (cfr. Albanese 2010 e 2013).

Croce d'altra parte non è certo un traduttore *invisibile*, e i suoi interventi sul testo basiliano portano in realtà tutto il peso della sua poetica e della sua ideologia; innumerevoli altri passaggi si potrebbero riportare a evidenziare un procedimento di pressoché costante pulizia del testo da termini da lui avvertiti come scurrili. Al traduttore, sostiene convinto Croce, una volta che abbia colto il tono e lo spirito del testo di partenza dovrà essere lasciata "larga libertà di variazioni e di eliminazioni e di aggiunte, dov'egli le senta necessarie" (Croce 1946: 149, ma sulla traduzione crociana si veda anche Albanese 2012a: 119-145 e 2012c: 87-117).

Nel caso di Croce e di Canepa siamo di fronte a riflessioni differenti e a specifiche motivazioni, scelte stilistiche e di poetica che hanno sollecitato soluzioni diverse. È difficile dire, in un caso o nell'altro, se si tratti delle scelte giuste, così com'è difficile dire, più in generale, se ci sia un modo giusto di tradurre il linguaggio figurato. Si potrà essere liberi di giudicare più o meno riuscite e più o meno adeguate le traduzioni analizzate, ma quello che interessa per una critica che davvero possa dirsi "produttiva" (cfr. Berman 2000) è evidenziare che qui le scelte dei due traduttori rispondono in maniera conforme a precise intenzioni di poetica traduttiva, esplicitate peraltro in un dettagliato progetto. "Il traduttore ha tutti i diritti, se agisce lealmente" (Berman 2000: 77), che è anche dire che il traduttore è leale se dichiara quello che fa; e la lealtà dei traduttori consiste qui nell'aver adottato delle scelte del tutto coerenti con la loro posizione e con il loro progetto traduttivo (Berman 2000: 59-61). Sulla necessità della coerenza come imperativo morale per il traduttore si era soffermato già Schleiermacher il quale, dopo aver delineato i due atteggiamenti diversi nei confronti del testo da tradurre, quello etnodeviante o straniante e quello addomesticante, concludeva avvertendo che "le due vie sono talmente diverse che, imboccatane una, si deve percorrerla fino in fondo con il maggiore rigore possibile" (Schleiermacher 1993: 153).

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# Necessity teaches the naked woman to spin: Translating Icelandic idioms

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**Abstract:** *The Icelandic language sports a vast variety of idioms (orðatiltæki) widely used in everyday speech, in literature and by the media. Native speakers of Icelandic are aware of the richness of this corpus and are constantly encouraged to keep it alive: newspapers feature dedicated columns, and every week a different expression is printed and explained on milk cartons. A good grasp of these orðatiltæki is considered a prerequisite for mastering Icelandic as a foreign language. Icelandic idioms have been classified by linguists, as Friðjónsson and Sveinsson, in five different groups. They are all quite clearly defined as being different from proverbs (málshættir), which do not require structural connection. They often preserve extinct morphological features, i.e. inflectional endings now lost, and are phonetically relevant, highlighted by alliteration or rhyming schemes. Some of them originate from the Bible or other religious writings; some others stem from Icelandic medieval literature, like the sagas, or give a vivid picture of Icelandic society and material culture. In various degrees they all pose problems of recognition and translation into the target language. The paper will give a brief survey of the classification and usage of Icelandic orðatiltæki with examples taken from a prominent Icelandic author and their translation into English and into Italian. The paper will then attempt to suggest possible translation strategies, focusing also on a new approach whose aim is to maintain – where feasible – the culture-specific material in the target language(s).*

**Keywords:** *Icelandic, idioms, translation, Halldór Laxness.*

## 1. Introduction

The present paper is divided in two main parts. The first part aims to give a brief overview of Icelandic idioms, and to define their role in Icelandic language and society; I will then indicate how they are classified by Icelandic linguists, making use of examples in both English and Italian from the novels of the celebrated Icelandic author, Halldór Laxness, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1955. In the second part a more practical approach will deal with their translation. As a full-time translator of Icelandic literature, I know all too well how frustrating it can be to admit defeat when confronted with a seemingly untranslatable idiom; however, it is stimulating to look for and – in some cases – find solutions that reflect the cultural context of the original Icelandic expression while still making sense in Italian.

## 2. Icelandic Idioms

The Icelandic language offers a remarkable variety of idioms that are widely used in everyday speech, in the media, and in literature. To take just one recent example, the title of an article on the Icelandic state radio and television website (published on [www.ruv.is](http://www.ruv.is), November 12th, 2012): *bjórin þótti úlfur í sauðargæru* means literally “the beer was thought to be a wolf in sheep’s skin”, that is to say, something dangerous lay behind its deceptively innocuous appearance. The image can be found both in the New Testament (“beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s

clothing”, *Gospel of Matthew* 7, 15; it is also falsely attributed to Aesop as fable 451 in the Perry Index), and reflects a common European cultural background that should not pose too many problems in English or Italian translations. The same cannot be said about another recent example from an Icelandic newspaper (published on *Vikurfréttir*, September 16th, 2012): *að leggjast undir feld* literally means “to lie down under a fur”, while metaphorically it means “to think deeply about something”, “to meditate on something”. The cultural reference behind this image is familiar to most Icelanders: it derives from a reputedly historical episode, in which Þorgeir of Ljósavatn, a medieval chieftain, has to decide whether the whole nation should convert from paganism to Christianity in the year 1000 and he is said to have laid for a whole day under a fur to meditate (as related in *Landnámabók*, or the Book of Settlements, I, 16). For native speakers, the expression has a rich cultural resonance and represents a link with the past which is impossible to recreate in translation: the allusion is culturally specific to Iceland and its implications are hard for a non-native speaker or reader to fully appreciate (Cacciari, Tabossi 1993: 24). In the following discussion idioms that underline the distinctiveness of Iceland and its culture will be examined.

As in any other language, Icelandic idioms (Icelandic: *orðatiltæki*) are defined as phrasal units whose meaning cannot be derived from the ordinary meanings of their syntactic components (Pulman 1993: 249). They are characterised formally by polilexicality, that is, they consist of at least two words. They all need syntactical contextualisation, and thus clearly differ from proverbs (Icelandic: *málshættir*), which are micro texts, or independent assertions, that do not require any structural connection to be understood (Sverrisdóttir 2009: 151). An idiom, on the other hand, is recognised as a configuration – that is, a unitary expression which has a meaning beyond that of its constituent elements (Cacciari, Tabossi 1993: 6). In this sense, the “literal meaning” of the idiom, whenever available, usually has little or nothing to do with the idiomatic meaning (D’Arcais 1993:79). Idioms are also characterised by cohesiveness – they have a fixed meaning and users perceive them as a single entity. But the most important feature for a nation such as Iceland, which has always relied on language to assert its own identity, is that idioms often violate grammar and in some instances do not respect grammatical, syntactical or lexical rules. They might preserve archaic declension stems, for example, or reveal unorthodox overlapping of noun declensions, or deploy obsolete terms. They can diverge from lexical, morphological or syntactic norms, or they can retain obsolete formal features, and thus bear witness to the history and the development of the Icelandic language.

Idioms are very important for Icelanders. In an extremely language-conscious nation, they are a source of pride and pleasure, and worthy of being looked after with care and attention. Widely deployed in the media, in advertising and wordplay, they also appear in everyday speech, where they do not seem to signal any particular socio-linguistic stratum or idiolectal register. In the Icelandic media discourse that followed the 2008 economic crisis there was a striking increase in the use of idioms relating to seamanship, as if the lives of nineteenth-century fishermen had suddenly become more comprehensible to modern, urban Icelanders who had fallen victims to the global recession (see for example the chapter titles in Jóhannesson 2009). In the preface to his book, Sveinsson (1993: 7) says that idioms are “the spice of the language”: they are regularly used to enrich a narrative, their metaphorical colour rendering it more engaging. Many native speakers of Icelandic are fully aware of the

richness of this corpus and are constantly encouraged to keep it alive: for example, a national dairy products company undertook a campaign to refresh national awareness of idioms by printing and explaining a different figurative expression on one litre cartons of milk every week. In some other countries, like Great Britain for example, photographs of missing children are printed on milk cartons; it would be interesting to explore the notion that idioms may in some sense be seen as the missing children of the Icelandic linguistic culture.

To explain it more clearly, let's turn to one of the texts on the cartons, the idiom "að verða ekki um sel", which literally means "to dislike seals", while its underlying idiomatic meaning is "to become uneasy", "to dislike the look of something". It derives from the folkloric notion that seals can be dangerous creatures, appearing suddenly and without noise and thus sometimes frightening people. Moreover, seals are supposed to have a disturbing, almost human appearance, that has been a source of unease to Icelanders since settlement times. For reasons that are far from clear, it has always been a disquieting experience for an Icelander to look into the eyes of a seal. The figurative meaning is therefore driven by a conceptual metaphor that exists independently as part of Icelanders' overall conceptual system (Gibbs 1993: 69). There is no way to establish how 'dead' this idiom is, whether native speakers immediately understand the association with ancestral fear of seals. It is certainly very challenging, if not impossible or out of place, to preserve the same image in the target languages, no matter how eager the translator is to retain the image of this life-changing encounter with a seal – and it is no easier to find a zoomorphic equivalent, as exemplified below with excerpts taken from Laxness' novels. Neither the English translators nor myself succeeded in doing so, opting each time for a different solution, as suggested by the context:

ST: [...] sér meiri kandís, þá fór honum **ekki að verða um sel**. Tvær sneisafullar grautar skálar – einn kvenmaður [...] (Laxness 1934-35: 65)

TT1: [...] more sugar to eat with it, he began **to feel a certain misgiving**. Two basins full to the brim – one woman [...] (Laxness 2008: 53)

TT2: [...] e si staccò altro zucchero, allora cominciò **a vedersela brutta**. Due terrine piene – una donna [...] (Laxness 2004a: 65).

None of the solutions seems as colourful or evocative as the original. A further example from the same book shows how translators did not stick to the same solution in all occurrences:

ST: [...] og þá fór nú Bjarti **ekki að verða um sel**, hann hafði fylgst með öllu sem gerðist, en nú [...] (Laxness 1934-5: 172)

TT1: [...] Bjartur began **to feel rather worried**; he had followed everything with great interest so far, but this [...] (Laxness 2008: 129)

TT2: [...] E a Bjartur la cosa **smise di piacer gli**, aveva seguito tutto quello che era accaduto ma adesso [...] (Laxness 2004a: 157)

Another novel prompts more examples:

ST: [...] ofmikið fransbrauð. **Mér fór ekki að verða um sel**, ég var óvanur að sjá kvenfólk og fánst það [...] (Laxness 1957: 170).

TT1: [...] too much white bread. **I began to feel a little uncomfortable**; I was not used to seeing women and always found [...] (Laxness 2000: 130);

TT2: [...] troppo pane bianco. **Cominciai a sentirmi un po' a disagio**, non ero avvezzo a vedere donne e lo trovavo [...] (Laxness 2007: 187).

## 2.2. Classification of Icelandic idioms

Icelandic idioms have long been an object of study for linguists in Iceland, and have been collected and classified in numerous dictionaries (Friðjónsson 1997 and 2006 being the most highly regarded). They seem not to have been the object of psycholinguistic or cognitive studies. For a national theory of idioms, the figurative genesis of idiomatic expressions is much more relevant, and Icelanders seem more interested in studying these figurative origins, because they regard them as a treasure-chest preserving the material culture of their ancient traditional society. They bear witness to the history of Iceland and its distinctive way of life: many idioms originate from activities dating back to settlement times, such as basic agrarian practices and fishing customs before mechanisation. Sveinsson (1993), for example, classifies idioms according to their material content, and identifies the most common areas: inland travel, domestic activities, agriculture, seamanship and fishing, and battles and weapons (somewhat curiously, as post-Reformation Iceland has always been a country without an army).

Idioms have been classified into different groups. Though a more recent classification is now available (Sverrisdóttir 2009, following the Swiss linguists Burger, Buhofer, Sialm 2007), where the mapping is much more complex, for the purposes of this paper I prefer to follow the long-established and simplified grouping made by Friðjónsson (1997). His five classes are: *orðtök* (figures of speech); *talshættir* (phrases or sayings); *fastar líkingar* (similes); *samstæður* (pairs); and *fleyg orð* (familiar words).

### 2.2.1. Orðtök

*Orðtök* (figures of speech) are fixed idioms used metaphorically or figuratively, with their overall meaning not corresponding to the meaning of their individual constituent elements. Sverrisdóttir (2009: 162) notes that in German they are known as *idiomatische Redewendungen*, or *Idiome*.

For example, “að vera heill á húfi” means “to be safe”, “to be unhurt”, but literally it means “to be in one piece, undamaged on the ship” where *húfur* is part of a ship. The expression occurs for the first time in a medieval saga and over time has become a standardised expression. This example illustrates one of the most prominent features of Icelandic idioms, which can sometimes help the poor translators to identify them, in that the two words are linked by alliteration, a common feature of Germanic poetry. Again, in both the English and the Italian version the underlying image of the ship is lost, the idiom has been neutralised and translated by means of equivalent expressions, as we can see from the following examples:

ST: [...] en þó kom þar að lokum að hann stóð **heill á húfi** uppá eystri bakka Jökulsár á Heiði [...] (Laxness 1934-35: 145)

TT1: [...] but finally the moment arrived when he was standing **safe and sound** on the eastern bank of glacier river [...] (Laxness 2008: 110)

TT2: [...] ma alla fine si ritrovò **tutto intero** sulla riva orientale del Jökulsá á Heiði [...] (Laxness 2004a: 133)

ST: Hér sérðu hana dóttur þína **heila á húfi**, sagði konan hreykin að hafa vakið þetta [...] (Laxness 1934-35: 173)

TT1: Here you see your daughter sound **in wind and limb**, said Gudny, proud of having recalled this object [...] (Laxness 2008: 130)

TT2: Guarda un po' qua tua figlia **viva e vegeta**, disse la donna orgogliosa di averla [...] (Laxness 2004a: 158).

In most cases, the alliterative pair of terms has been in fact translated with a figure of speech, by transferring it into the 'Pairs' category (see 2.2.4.).

### 2.2.2. Talshættir

A second category identifies *talshættir* (phrases, or sayings; *Redewendungen* in Sverrisdóttir 2009: 162) or fixed idioms: their meaning is not metaphorical but somewhat altered or unusual; their meaning can nevertheless be inferred from the meaning of the constituent elements.

“Þegar öllu er á botninn hvolft” for example, means literally, “when everything has been turned onto the bottom/upside down”, that is to say, “when the matter has been considered thoroughly”, or “everything considered”. It relates to the work of coopers, whose final task was to make the bottom of a barrel, which could only be fixed and secured when the barrel had been turned upside down. In the following examples, none of the translators has managed, or chosen, to retain the barrel image:

ST: [...] ætli maður komist ekki nær sköpunarverkinu í fabúlunni en sönnu sögunni **þegar öllu er á botninn hvolft**. (Laxness 1968: 99)

TT1: [...] I wouldn't be surprised if one comes closer to the Creation in the fable than in the true story, **when all's said and done**. (Laxness 2004b: 80)

TT2: [...] magari ci si avvicina alla creazione più nelle favole che nel racconto vero, **in fin dei conti**. (Laxness 2011: 91)

Another example:

ST: [...] á myndunum, að það er, **þegar öllu er á botninn hvolft**, alseinginn raunverulegur munur á Frakklandi og [...] (Laxness 1934-35: 145)

TT1: [...] to the conclusion, **after minute and conscientious comparison of the pictures**, that there is no fundamental difference between France [...] (Laxness 2008: 426)

TT2: [...] delle fotografie, che **quando si va a studiar la cosa per il dritto e per il rovescio**, non c'è affatto alcuna reale differenza tra la Francia [...] (Laxness 2004a: 511).

### 2.2.3. Fastar líkingar

The third category comprises *fastar líkingar* (similes; *redensartliche* or *phraseologische Vergleiche*; Sverrisdóttir [2009: 165] following Burger refers to them as *comparative Phraseologismen* or *Vergleiche*). These involve direct or indirect comparison, and their meaning is always quite clear.

“Eins og eldur í sinu”, “like fire in dead grass”, meaning “very fast”. The simile is known from the medieval sagas; *sina* is the yellowish dead grass left uncut on the fields from previous years, and which is very easy to ignite. There are serviceable translations in English and Italian:

ST: Hitt flaug **einsog eldur í sinu** um plássíð á hálf tíma að nú væri Gústa komin heim [...] (Laxness 1931-2: 118)

TT1: But the news that Gusta was home again spread like **fire in last year's grass** [...] (Laxness 1973: 115)

TT2: Ma la notizia del ritorno di Gusta si era diffusa **come fuoco nella paglia**: in men che mezz'ora fu nota in tutto il paese [...] (Laxness 1958: 156)

We must remember though that it is highly probable that the Italian translation from 1958 made use of a translation in another language and not of the original Icelandic.

#### 2.2.4. Samstæður

The fourth category comprises *samstæður* (pairs; *Zwillingspaare*; are called *orðapör* by Sverrisdóttir 2009: 165), pairs of words used repeatedly in fixed form and meaning. Linked by a conjunction they appear in a sequence which cannot be changed. Usually their meaning is quite transparent, though there might be cases in which there is a metaphorical element. They often feature alliteration or internal rhyme.

“Í blíðu og stríðu”, “through thick and thin”, “in good times and bad”. The association between *blítt* (neuter of adj. *blíður*, “tender, mild”) and *strítt* (neuter of adj. *stríður*, “hard, strong, difficult”) can be found in medieval literature and is probably elliptical, referring to the weather; the neutral forms of the adjectives are apparently used here as nouns. We have an example in:

ST: [...] að það er gamalær sem hefur skrölt með mér í **blíðu og stríðu**, hún er beint undan hrút frá honum [...] (Laxness, 1934-35: 162)

TT1: [...] It’s an old ewe that’s pegged along with me **through thick and thin**; she was sired by one of the late reverend Gudmundur’s tups [...] (Laxness 2008: 410)

TT2: [...] che c’è una vecchia pecora che mi ha accompagnato **nel bene e nel male**, è stata appunto montata da un ariete [...] (Laxness 2004a: 489)

A more interesting example:

ST: [...] Strandbáturinn athugar sinn gáng í **blíðu og stríðu**, smýgur milli fjallanna miðfirðis [...] (Laxness 1931-2: 9)

TT1: The mail boat toiled meditatively onward **through thick weather and clear**, crept among the mountains in mid-fjord [...] (Laxness 1973: 11) [which makes the concept behind the image explicit]

TT2: Il battello postale in servizio lungo la costa orientale islandese, arranca prudentemente attraverso la nebbia compatta. Orientandosi sulle stele e sulle rocce a picco, s’insinua nel fiordo di Axlar [...] (Laxness 1958: 5) [the Italian translation from 1958 has completely lost the pair]

#### 2.2.5. Fleyg orð

The last and trickiest category for translators, consists of *fleyg orð* (familiar phrases; *geflügelte Worte*): that is, sentences, sentence fragments or assertions uttered by someone in particular circumstances; often their origin is unknown, though there is always a source, an author or original location, where the idiom first emerged. These idioms are quite similar to proverbs, but still need connection.

“Hver veit nema Eyjólfur hressist”, “who knows, maybe Eyjólfur will feel better”, means “you never know, maybe better conditions await us”. The origin is unknown and probably dates back to the era of Black Death epidemics; in the Icelandic folklore the sentence appears to be spoken by the mother-in-law of a certain Eyjólfur, newly married and without children; she is expressing the wish that her son-in-law may recover and thus produce grandchildren. A couple of years ago a fellow translator working from Swedish came across a quotation from Laxness and sought trying to identify this Eyjólfur, even suggesting that the name could be a misspelling of Jósef (Stalin). Once we had solved the puzzle, she settled on a neater solution (“sooner or later things will change”):

ST: Den isländske nobelpristagaren Halldór Laxness skriver 1964, i sin bok *Skaldetid*, om sina tidigare resor till Josef Stalins Sovjetunion: “Många fruktade också – och jag var en av dem – att det skulle motarbeta socialismen i världen på det hela taget, ifall man berättade om socialismens ovedersägliga misär hos Stalin – i ‘socialismens huvudland’. Man sade sig **‘vem**



**vet om inte Eyolf kommer sig**’ och väntade otåligt i detta hopp, och överskyldde bristerna under tiden. (Fröberg Idling, 2006: 33)

TT: [...] nel suo libro *Skáldatími* (Vita di poeta) sui viaggi compiuti nell’Unione Sovietica di Stalin, il premio Nobel islandese Halldór Laxness scrive: “Molti – e io ero tra questi – temevano anche che, mettendo a nudo l’inconfutabile miseria del socialismo staliniano nel paese socialista ‘per eccellenza’, si sarebbe danneggiato il socialismo nel mondo in generale. Ci si diceva: **‘prima o poi le cose cambieranno’** e si aspettava impazienti, animati dalla speranza, coprendo, nel frattempo, le magagne. (Fröberg Idling 2010: 29-30).

### 2.3. Modern attitudes towards idioms

With increasing globalisation and waves of immigration into Iceland over the last twenty years, native idioms are more than ever under threat, and not only because they can be hard to master for speakers of Icelandic as a second language, but also because they represent a challenge for the new generations of Icelanders. The fear that some idioms might disappear from the language is a real one – we find Tómasson (1970: 35) expressing it forty years ago, in his review of Halldórsson’s first book. Many idioms originate from traditional activities, habits, and ways of life that can seem bizarre to young people, who in the wake of recent patterns of urbanisation are largely unfamiliar with the ways of rural society. Idioms seem to be associated with “the old days”, or *gamla daga*, an undefined period between the ninth-century Icelandic settlement and the second world war, at which point *nútími*, that is, modernity, emerged (Hastrup 2004: 26). Thus the risk is that speakers may gradually lose their grasp on idioms or misunderstand them in some way. In other words, some of these expressions are becoming ever more opaque, linguistic fossils whose literal meaning, even for some Icelanders, is little more than a philological curiosity (D’Arcais 1993: 80).

Such opacity can easily lead to misuse. In the dairy company’s campaign to refresh Icelanders’ familiarity with their native idioms every morning at the breakfast table, people are warned against the kinds of confusion that can often occur in spoken language. To quote one of the milk cartons again, “koma eins og þjófur úr heiðskíru lofti”, “to come as a thief from a cloudless sky” is a common error, deriving from conflating “koma eins og þruma úr heiðskíru lofti” “to come as a thunder from a cloudless sky” and “koma eins og þjófur á nóttu” “to come as a thief at night”. The milk carton warning ends by exhorting people to “vaka yfir myndauðgi málsins”, or “stand guard over the rich imagery of the language”.

### 3. A practical approach: How to translate Icelandic idioms

I will now turn to the practice of translating them. It is unrealistic to expect non-Icelandic readers to display native-speaker awareness of Icelandic idiomatic expressions (Gibbs 1993: 69), whether the idioms be transparent or not in the source language; moreover, as we have seen, the unfortunate translator cannot convey the requisite experiential background in the target language – and I could go on and on with scores of similar examples, confirming that Icelandic idioms represent the ultimate in untranslatability. And as I now approach my final point, I’d like to return to the title, which in itself is really a proverb and therefore, strictly speaking, beyond my remit in this paper. I have chosen to cite it because it offers ample scope for paraphrase, as in *necessity teaches the poor translator to invent*. Whenever we attempt to translate an idiom with an equivalent one in the target language, we are indeed replacing an alien notion with a more familiar one, and are thus prioritising

the requirements of the target-oriented translation. Some idioms are, as we have seen, in their very essence Icelandic, and it would be a great pity if they were to be lost in translation. Idioms should not always be a *crux desperationis*.

There's no way to know if for most idioms the meanings of the constituent words and their internal structure are still current and functional in the process of understanding and interpreting. They may be obsolete, but their visual impact, their image, remains and offers, at least in some cases, a taste of Icelandic culture.

Although a risk aversion strategy is sometimes preferable, I am persuaded that a translator should try wherever possible to give readers some sense of the source world – to use the idiom in order to provide a fleeting glimpse of an alien reality, without stumbling into distracting exoticism. If a metaphor is the product of our own culture (Lakoff, Johnson 2003: *passim*), a translator can enable readers to engage with a different culture through its metaphors, thereby providing some sense of how Icelanders organise their conceptual and lexical knowledge, and establishing connections across domains. As Berman (2003: 54) says, the equivalent of a locution is not a substitute for it; on the other hand, speakers possess a so-called “consciousness of a proverb” that enables them to recognise immediately the new formulation. As we know, unlike actual words, idioms have a syntactic structure that may be fossilised, but on occasions is very flexible and open to modification (Cacciari, Tabossi 1993: xii). They vary considerably in the extent to which they may sustain lexical substitutions, syntactic operations, and semantic productivity (1993: 19) and we have many examples of semantically productive idiom variants in everyday conversation and in the media (1993: 8). Translators can therefore take advantage of possible variations or internal modifications to try and create – where opportunity arises – a new idiomatic version, provided that it fits the context and satisfies the usual requirements of acceptability in the target language. Translating is a form of interpretation, as we know, and each translation is the result of personal strategies and choices; but I have always thought that it could be interesting if a nearly dead or opaque idiom in the source language could generate another such idiom in the target language. There may be very few possibilities/opportunities for this – and the results may be speculative and subject to strict evaluation of context and acceptability. Yet if, for example, “að hverfa eins og dökk fyrir sólu” (“disappear like dew in front of the sun”; where the accusative *-u* ending of the word *sól*, “sun” is a fossilised form which has been lost in modern Icelandic) appears to have an exact equivalent in the Italian “sciogliersi come neve al sole” (“melt like snow in the sun”), we should nevertheless realise that in Iceland the sun does not melt snow as rapidly, and might thus prefer the perfectly acceptable (to my ears at least) alternative “sciogliersi come rugiada al sole” (“melt like dew in the sun”).

In “vera eins og álfur út úr hól”, “to be like an elf out of his hillock”, meaning “to be at a loss, perplexed in a foreign environment”, the simile derives from the fact that outside their traditional folkloric place of residence, elves are considered to be largely incapable of survival. The idiom can probably be translated as “essere come un pesce fuor d’acqua” (“to be like a fish out of water”), but I see no contextual problem with “essere come un elfo fuori dal poggio” (to be like an elf out of his hillock). Again, would it be reasonable to have a “ciliegina sulla torta” (a cherry on top of the cake”) in Iceland, instead of a “rúsinan í pylsuendanum” (“the raisin at the end of the sausage”)? I find “leccare la morte da un guscio” (“to lick death from the shell”; “að lepja dauðann úr skel”) more striking than “vivere di stenti” (“to be on the

breadline”) or to be “come un oggetto malfatto” (“eins og illa gerður hlutur”, “like a badly made thing”) instead of “inerte” or “impacciato” (“inert” or “clumsy”), as we can see in this example:

ST: En telpan sat þarna **einsog illa gerður hlutur** og datt ekkert í hug að segja, og sá eftir að [...] (Laxness 1931-2: 129)

TT: Ma Salka Valka non parve reagire in alcun modo: se ne stava **inerte** sulla panca senza far motto. Era dispiacente di essersi[...] (Laxness 1958: 173).

I could offer further examples, but these would be mere speculations, as I have just noted, for in translation we are not dealing with theory *versus* practice, but rather – as Berman reminds us – with reflection *versus* experience. Besides, it might even be that translators of Icelandic will not need to worry too much longer about translating idioms. Not only are they disappearing from the mouths of native speaker, but (in the opinion of some pessimists) the whole language is apparently on the brink of extinction, at least in the digital world, and has recently been declared as an endangered species by the Researchers from the University of Manchester’s National Centre for Text Mining (NaCTeM). As the famous detective-story writer Arnaldur Indriðason notes in an interview (*Il Corriere della Sera*, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2011), it is highly unlikely that in a hundred years from now anyone will still be speaking Icelandic.

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# Problemi di traduzione dei proverbi metaforici nei dizionari bilingui francese-italiano

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***Abstract:** Una definizione soddisfacente del fenomeno proverbiale non può prescindere dalla nozione di prototipo. Il proverbio prototipico possiede vari tratti, ma quale ruolo assume la metafora? Lo statuto metaforico dei proverbi raccoglie vasto consenso nell'ambito degli studi paremiologici. Se per alcuni studiosi i proverbi sono tout court metaforici, altri sottolineano come la loro metaforicità si dia solo quando il senso convenzionale non coincide con quello compositivo: avremo quindi proverbi letterali e proverbi metaforici. Il nostro intervento sarà volto a mettere a fuoco la specificità dei proverbi metaforici (adottando il criterio identificativo di Kleiber 2000) e ad analizzarne le problematiche traduttive in lessicografia bilingue, con particolare riferimento all'ambito francese-italiano. Il corpus adottato è costituito da quattro dizionari bilingue francese-italiano (Boch, Garzanti, Hachette-Paravia, Larousse). Attraverso uno studio del corpus lessicografico della lettera A, si cercherà di mostrare le possibili strategie traduttive dei proverbi metaforici. Un approccio polifattoriale si renderà necessario per analizzare i vari gradi di equivalenza tra i proverbi, a livello categoriale, lessicologico, statistico, stilistico, semantico e ritmico. Sarà interessante, inoltre, rilevare gli scarti tra le scelte traduttive dei dizionari, che evidenziano come il punto chiave sia spesso la corretta interpretazione del proverbio da tradurre e come la supposta "immutabilità/fissità" del proverbio sia un concetto da relativizzare, alla luce delle varianti esistenti. Se il "fondo comune" greco-latino a cui attingono la maggioranza dei proverbi francesi e italiani garantisce spesso una buona resa traduttiva, ciò non significa che per tutti i proverbi sia possibile trovare un equivalente valido, soprattutto dal punto di vista semantico e ritmico.*

***Parole chiave:** proverbio, metafora, paremiologia, francese-italiano, italiano-francese.*

Nel nostro contributo analizzeremo un corpus lessicografico bilingue contemporaneo (francese-italiano e italiano-francese), allo scopo di mettere in luce le problematiche relative alla traduzione del linguaggio figurato dei proverbi. Adotteremo un approccio "polifattoriale", in grado di spiegare i diversi livelli dell'equivalenza, che investono l'ambito categoriale, lessicologico, stilistico, statistico, semantico e ritmico.

Prima di dare avvio alla riflessione, è però opportuno soffermarsi sulla natura del fenomeno che andremo a studiare. Cercheremo quindi, innanzitutto, di rispondere alla domanda: "che cos'è un proverbio"?

## 1. Il proverbio: problemi di definizione

Superata l'impasse definitoria che ha a lungo contraddistinto gli studi sui proverbi, esiste ormai ampio consenso sul fatto che il linguista *possa e debba* sforzarsi di chiarire il problema della definizione del fenomeno proverbiale (cf. Kleiber 2000).

Limitandoci qui all'ambito francofono, ricordiamo il contributo di Greimas (1970), che sottolinea il carattere connotato dei proverbi (oggi diremmo "metaforico"), la loro arcaicità, la loro struttura ritmica binaria e l'impiego di un presente storico volto a comunicare verità eterne.

Arnaud (1991), in modo più analitico, indica i criteri che permettono di riconoscere i proverbi: lessicalità, autonomia sintattica e testuale, valore di verità generale, carattere anonimo. Arnaud sottolinea inoltre la *densità* del significante che caratterizza i proverbi (la quale si manifesta nel ricorso a paronomasie, rime, assonanze, chiasmi, ecc.) e la loro componente *didattica*.

Anche per Schapira (1999) è possibile definire i tratti del *prototipo proverbiale*. Trattasi di un enunciato investito di una grande autorità, anonimo, collettivo e popolare, fisso, banale, stereotipato, che si è a lungo opposto alla massima (o aforisma), la quale è individuale, originale e colta. Per l'autrice, il proverbio è anzitutto un enunciato semanticamente autonomo, trasparente e dal significato metaforico, sebbene la metaforicità rappresenti un tratto facoltativo.

Secondo Kleiber (2000), un proverbio è un'espressione idiomatica o fissa, vale a dire un'unità polilessicale codificata, che possiede al tempo stesso una certa rigidità o fissità formale e una certa "fissità referenziale" (o "stabilità semantica"). Come per Arnaud (1991), anche per Kleiber i proverbi (a differenza dei *detti*, per esempio) sembrano essere ristretti agli uomini.

La riflessione di Anscombe (2009) è tra le più approfondite: all'interno della macro-categoria delle frasi "sentenziose", abbiamo quelle che si possono far risalire a un autore preciso (massime, sentenze, morali) e quelle che si riferiscono a un *on-locuteur* (locutore impersonale); tra queste ultime, abbiamo frasi situazionali (che qualificano direttamente una situazione) e frasi generiche: soltanto le frasi generiche possono essere definite "paremiche". All'interno di questo gruppo, distinguiamo proverbi (per loro essenza *metaforici*), adagi (a contenuto morale/giuridico) e detti (che riguardano il rapporto dell'uomo con la natura)<sup>1</sup>.

Anscombe sottolinea anche la rilevanza del "fondo comune" greco e latino per l'ambito paremico indo-europeo e il fatto che le metafore più frequenti siano comuni alle culture di lingua romanza. Si può quindi supporre che questa origine comune dell'italiano e del francese, a livello paremico e metaforico, possa agevolare la ricerca di equivalenze proverbiali.

## 2. I proverbi metaforici

Concentriamoci ora su un aspetto particolare dei proverbi: la *metaforicità*. Com'è noto, la metafora (etimologicamente, dal greco *meta pherein* "portare al di là, trasferire") consiste in una "sostituzione" resa possibile dalla somiglianza, da un tratto semantico comune che diventa il *tertium comparationis* tra due elementi messi in relazione.

Per lungo tempo, la metaforicità ha costituito il primo e più importante tratto definitorio del proverbio<sup>2</sup>, secondo una tradizione che risale ad Aristotele.

Se Anscombe (2008; 2009) attribuisce uno statuto metaforico a *tutti* i proverbi, per la maggioranza degli autori non tutti i proverbi sono necessariamente metaforici.

<sup>1</sup> Vale la pena ricordare che per Anscombe (2003; 2005) i proverbi non sono *expressions figées*, poiché la grande maggioranza ammette delle varianti.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Schapira (1999).

Secondo Arnaud (1991) esistono infatti proverbi metaforici e altri che non lo sono: i primi sono *idiomatici* (il loro senso non deriva dalla combinazione dei sensi delle loro componenti), mentre i secondi vengono definiti *letterali* (è il caso di *Tale padre tale figlio*)<sup>3</sup>. Nella prospettiva di Tamba (2000), esistono, da un lato, proverbi metaforici e, dall'altro, proverbi che possiedono un senso letterale, compositivo o frastico. Quando senso convenzionale e senso compositivo coincidono, avremo un'interpretazione letterale del proverbio (*sens phrastique*); altrimenti, sarà necessario ricorrere a un'interpretazione metaforica (*sens formulaire*).

Il punto di vista di Kleiber (2000) merita un'attenzione particolare. Secondo l'autore, i proverbi del tipo *Il calzolaio ha sempre le scarpe rotte* o *L'abito non fa il monaco* non rientrano tra i proverbi metaforici, poiché la relazione tra il senso letterale e quello proverbiale è di tipo iponimico-iperonimico; al contrario, proverbi del tipo "*Chat échaudé craint l'eau froide*"<sup>4</sup> o *Quando non c'è il gatto, i topi ballano* possono essere considerati realmente *metaforici* perché, rispetto a quelli del primo tipo, il passaggio dal senso letterale al senso del proverbio necessita una *traslazione* da un ambito non umano (nella fattispecie, animale) all'ambito umano (tuttavia, rimane sempre necessaria un'elevazione da un tipo di situazione particolare a una di livello molto generale). Nel nostro contributo, adoteremo questo criterio *ristretto* (passaggio dall'ambito non umano all'ambito umano) per l'identificazione dei proverbi metaforici.

Così come i proverbi non sono soltanto forme di un repertorio, ma costituiscono modelli culturali che orientano i nostri comportamenti in base ai valori centrali in una determinata società, così le metafore non sono solamente figure retoriche, bensì strumenti per concettualizzare il mondo, veicoli di rappresentazioni culturali<sup>5</sup>. Kövecses (2005) ci ricorda inoltre che la metafora non si realizza principalmente nel linguaggio, ma nel pensiero: noi capiamo il mondo *con* le metafore, non ci limitiamo a parlarne. Sebbene molte metafore si basino su esperienze umane "incarnate" (es.: AFFETTO È CALORE, a causa della correlazione tra il caldo e l'amore genitoriale), esistono anche metafore che non sono universali: ambiti astratti possono infatti venire colti in maniere diverse da cultura a cultura.

Stabilita la correlazione tra metafore e proverbi sul piano culturale e cognitivo, dedichiamoci ora ai problemi di traduzione delle forme proverbiali.

### 3. Come tradurre un proverbio?

Il problema della traduzione dei proverbi rientra in quello, più vasto, della traduzione delle "forme fisse" (espressioni figurate o idiomatiche, giochi di parole e *calembours*, indovinelli, metafore lessicalizzate, ecc.). In particolare, occorrerà chiedersi: le verità espresse dalle forme proverbiali coincidono tra lingue geograficamente e culturalmente vicine, come l'italiano e il francese<sup>6</sup>? La necessità di trovare un equivalente preesistente viene evidenziata anche da Wozniak (2010): per tradurre un proverbio, occorrerà cercare una forma proverbiale esistente, associabile formalmente (conservando i termini-chiave e la struttura ritmica) e semanticamente (senza riduzioni né amplificazioni) al proverbio esistente. Si dovrà

<sup>3</sup> Tuttavia, Schapira (1999: 67) osserva che i proverbi metaforici sono decisamente i più numerosi.

<sup>4</sup> Letteralmente: "Il gatto che si è scottato teme l'acqua fredda".

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Dobrovolskij; Piirainen (2005).

<sup>6</sup> Come ricorda Navarro Brotons (2010), la vicinanza tra due lingue non è una garanzia definitiva per trovare un equivalente.

quindi parlare di *corrispondenza* piuttosto che di traduzione, poiché le forme proverbiali traducibili devono essere comunque già attestate.

Dal canto suo, Anscombe (2009) lamenta come le opere dedicate alla traduzione delle forme proverbiali siano il più delle volte inutilizzabili e le equivalenze proposte siano grossolane, spesso erronee, talvolta fino al controsenso. Vedremo più avanti se si potrà dire lo stesso anche per i dizionari del nostro corpus.

Anscombe (2009) delinea inoltre i diversi livelli di equivalenza delle forme proverbiali. Andiamo a esaminare brevemente i principali, poiché costituiranno i criteri che adotteremo nella nostra analisi:

- equivalenza categoriale: bisognerà distinguere i proverbi da altre forme contigue<sup>7</sup>: frasi situazionali, tautologie, adagi prescrittivi, detti agricoli o meteorologici; a questo livello di equivalenza, l'idea di *funzionalità simile* sarà quindi dominante, dato che le diverse categorie corrispondono ad altrettanti modi di inserimento e articolazione nel discorso;
- equivalenza lessicologica: si pone il problema della stabilità delle forme, poiché, in linea generale, gli enunciati proverbiali non sono stabili<sup>8</sup>;
- equivalenza statistica, relativa alla frequenza delle forme proverbiali nel discorso;
- equivalenza stilistica, relativa ai registri linguistici;
- equivalenza semantica<sup>9</sup>, relativa alla conservazione del significato, compreso quello *figurato*;
- equivalenza ritmica<sup>10</sup> (fatto salvo che gli schemi ritmici delle diverse lingue spesso non coincidono, occorrerà valutare se la presenza di versi, rime o accenti permette la conservazione di una certa *coesione fonetica*).

Per tradurre i proverbi, secondo Anscombe occorre identificare un *invariante semantico-pragmatico*. Ciò che complica però la traduzione delle “forme sentenziose” è il loro funzionamento a due livelli: esiste infatti un senso “formulare”, che corrisponde alla struttura apparente della forma sentenziosa, e un senso costruito, che definisce il senso “reale” di questa forma e si rivela talvolta controverso.

Mettiamoci quindi alla ricerca di questo invariante proverbiale, tenendo presente lo scarto possibile tra senso formulare e senso costruito, prima di esaminare le traduzioni proposte dai dizionari.

#### 4. La traduzione dei proverbi metaforici nei dizionari bilingui francese-italiano

Abbiamo scelto come corpus i quattro dizionari bilingui francese-italiano di grande formato disponibili oggi in commercio in Italia: *Boch* (2007), *Garzanti* (2006), *Hachette Paravia* (2007) e *Larousse* (2006)<sup>11</sup>. Il nostro campione ha riguardato la lettera A, nelle due direzioni (francese-italiano e italiano-francese). Precisiamo che abbiamo svolto la ricerca sui cd-rom dei dizionari: grazie agli

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *infra*, par. 1 per i criteri definitivi adottati da Anscombe.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *infra*, n. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Sardelli (2010), la quale insiste sulle tecniche attanziali nella traduzione.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Anscombe (2000).

<sup>11</sup> La ricerca automatica del cd-rom del *Larousse* non ha purtroppo permesso l'estrazione di proverbi. Abbiamo quindi utilizzato questo dizionario esclusivamente come verifica per la traduzione di proverbi già riscontrati nel corpus.



strumenti di ricerca automatica, è stato possibile estrarre i proverbi con più precisione.

Iniziamo col fornire alcuni dati quantitativi. Abbiamo classificato come proverbi quelli indicati come tali dai dizionari, con la relativa menzione/abbreviazione “prov.”. Seguiamo quindi il principio *metalinguistico* a cui fa riferimento Anscombe (2009) (“un proverbio è tale se è definito come proverbio”) pur non prestando ciecamente fede, come si vedrà, nella classificazione operata dai dizionari.

Ecco i dati per i dizionari presi in considerazione, relativamente alla lettera A:

- dizionario *Boch (B)*: 21 proverbi nella sezione francese-italiano e 22 nella sezione italiano-francese;
- dizionario *Garzanti (G)*: 45 proverbi nella sezione francese-italiano e 44 nella sezione italiano-francese;
- dizionario *Hachette Paravia (HP)*: 29 proverbi nella sezione francese-italiano e 31 nella sezione italiano-francese.
- dizionario *Larousse (L)*, 17 proverbi nella sezione francese-italiano e 21 nella sezione italiano-francese.

Il numero dei proverbi recensiti varia quindi notevolmente da opera ad opera (anche in proporzione alle dimensioni di ogni opera), ma in ognuna si può notare un sostanziale equilibrio tra le due sezioni.

Successivamente, abbiamo isolato la classe dei proverbi metaforici rifacendoci alla tipologia di Kleiber (2000)<sup>12</sup>.

Ecco i dati per i quattro dizionari esaminati:

- *B*: 3 proverbi metaforici nella sezione francese-italiano (14% del totale dei proverbi) e 6 nella sezione italiano-francese (27%);
- *G*: 6 proverbi metaforici nella sezione francese-italiano (13%); 9 nella sezione italiano-francese (20%);
- *HP*: 5 proverbi metaforici nella sezione francese-italiano (17%); 8 nella sezione italiano-francese (25%);
- *L*: 2 proverbi metaforici nella sezione francese-italiano (12%); 3 nella sezione italiano-francese (14%).

Le percentuali sono piuttosto basse per tutti i dizionari, il che è dovuto naturalmente al criterio “ristretto” adottato per questa ricerca.

#### 4.1. Analisi dei dati

Passiamo ora ad analizzare i vari gradi di equivalenza tra i proverbi, a livello categoriale, lessicologico<sup>13</sup>, stilistico, statistico, semantico e ritmico. Questo approccio “polifattoriale” è a nostro avviso necessario per rendere conto della natura semantica e insieme pragmatica dei proverbi.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *infra*, par. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Trattasi di un criterio intralinguistico: la presenza di varianti proverbiali nella lingua di partenza andrà a illustrare tale criterio.

#### 4.1.1. Sezione francese-italiano

Nella sezione francese-italiano dei dizionari del nostro corpus abbiamo rilevato 12 diversi proverbi metaforici, fatte salve le varianti formali. Li riportiamo di seguito, corredati di brevi chiose<sup>14</sup>.

1. *Petite pluie abat grand vent*, basta un nonnulla per calmare le acque. *G*  
 “Il suffit parfois de peu de chose pour apaiser une grande querelle” (*PR*<sup>15</sup>).

Secondo Kleiber (2000: 46) questa frase è un *detto* se ci si limita al senso letterale e meteorologico, ma funziona come proverbio se si carica di un senso figurato relativo all’ambito umano.

A livello traduttivo, viene conservata l’equivalenza semantica ma non quella ritmica<sup>16</sup>. Inoltre, la metafora meteorologica viene persa nella traduzione, che si limita a una riformulazione e *non* costituisce un proverbio<sup>17</sup>.

2. *Chien qui aboie ne mord pas*, can che abbaia non morde. *HP*

*Tous les chiens qui aboient ne mordent pas*, can che abbaia non morde. *G*

“Les personnes qui menacent et manifestent leur colère ne sont pas les plus dangereuses” (*PR*), del tutto analogo alla definizione offerta da *GI* per il proverbio equivalente italiano: “Chi minaccia e strepita non fa danno”.

La variante citata da *G* (*Tous les chiens qui aboient ne mordent pas*) appare in due edizioni del *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* (1694 e 1762)<sup>18</sup> ed è oggi desueta in francese. Peraltro, questa forma desta qualche perplessità: simile a una premessa maggiore di sillogismo, presenta un determinante restrittivo del soggetto (*Tous*) che secondo Schapira (1999: 77) rischia di ridurne l’estensione e rendere l’espressione non proverbiale.

Nella traduzione italiana, l’equivalenza semantica e metaforica vengono conservate, così come quella ritmica (4+3).

Anche gli altri due dizionari del corpus presentano il medesimo proverbio, ma non sono stati presi in considerazione: *L* lo riporta alla voce *chien* (quindi al di fuori del nostro campione) e *B* non lo contrassegna con la marca “*prov.*”, confermando l’ipotesi di Anscombe secondo cui il principio metalinguistico può rivelarsi problematico.

3. *Qui veut noyer son chien l’accuse de la rage* = ogni pretesto è buono per sbarazzarsi di qcn., qcs. *HP*

Secondo Arnaud (1991) si tratta di un enunciato interamente metaforico<sup>19</sup>, chiosato da *PR*: “On juge sévèrement ce qu’on a décidé de supprimer, de détruire”.

*G* riporta la stessa locuzione, presentandola come citazione di La Fontaine<sup>20</sup>, con la traduzione letterale “Chi vuole annegare il proprio cane lo accusa di rabbia”.

<sup>14</sup> Indichiamo in neretto il lemma da cui è tratto il proverbio; nel caso dei verbi, ovviamente il lemma corrisponderà alla forma all’infinito.

<sup>15</sup> Per questo e gli altri dizionari citati, cf. bibliografia per le abbreviazioni.

<sup>16</sup> In francese, notiamo infatti uno schema binario 4+4.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Ballard (2009: 43), a proposito della traduzione delle metafore proverbiali.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Gómez-Jordana (2012: 261-266).

<sup>19</sup> Per uno studio dell’evoluzione diacronica di questo proverbio, cf. Gómez-Jordana (2012: 239-253).

<sup>20</sup> Citazione apocrifia: la fonte autentica è Molière, *Les femmes savantes*.

Alla voce<sup>21</sup> *chien*, *G* ripresenta la stessa locuzione, non la indica come proverbio e propone la traduzione “Per sbarazzarsi di qlcu i pretesti non mancano mai”.

*B*, s.v. *rage*: “*Quand on veut noyer son chien, on dit qu’il a la rage (o la gale)*, chi il suo cane vuole ammazzare qualche scusa ha da trovare”.

*L*, s.v. *rage*: “*Qui veut noyer son chien l’accuse de la rage*, chi il suo cane vuole ammazzare, qualche scusa deve pigliare”.

Per *HP* e *G*, non esiste quindi un proverbio italiano attestato che sia equivalente, mentre, in altri lemmi (esclusi dal nostro campione), *B* e *L* trovano una corrispondenza, fornendo due varianti diverse.

4. *Tant va la cruche à l’eau qu’à la fin elle se casse*, tanto va la gatta al lardo che ci lascia lo zampino. *HP*

“À s’exposer à un danger, on finit par le subir; à trop exagérer, on finit par laisser” (*PR*); e, per quanto riguarda il proverbio traduttore: “Chi continua ad arrischiarsi in cose pericolose o illecite alla fine viene colto sul fatto e le sconta tutte” (*GI*).

La metafora della *cruche* (brocca) viene quindi traslata nell’ambito zoologico, il che rende l’equivalenza soltanto parziale.

5. *Il faut casser le noyau pour avoir l’amande*, non si ha comodo senza incomodo; non c’è pane senza pena. *B*

“Il faut prendre de la peine avant de retirer de l’utilité, du profit de quelque chose” (*TLFi*).

La metafora dell’*amande* (mandorla) si perde nella prima traduzione; la seconda soluzione recupera parzialmente una dimensione metaforica e aggiunge una componente ritmica (la paronomasia *pane/pena*).

6. *À laver la tête d’un âne on y perd sa lessive*, a lavar la testa all’asino si perde il ranno e il sapone. *G*

“C’est perdre son temps que d’essayer d’instruire un imbécile, ou de vouloir faire entendre raison à un obstiné” (*TLFi*). Per l’equivalente italiano: “Chi compie una buona azione verso persone volgari, rozze, villane, perde inutilmente il suo tempo e quello che ha donato, senza che i beneficiati si accorgano di quanto è stato fatto per loro” (*LeM*).

L’equivalenza proposta rispetta tutti i parametri adottati (categoriale, statistico<sup>22</sup>, stilistico, semantico e ritmico).

7. *Faute d’un point, Martin perdit son âne*, per un punto Martin perdé la cappa. *B*

L’espressione non è stata rilevata nei dizionari monolingui o negli altri bilingui esaminati; secondo Pittàno (1992), si tratta di una “locuzione che si usa per riferirsi a chi, per un nonnulla, ha perduto una grande occasione, a chi vede sfuggirsi lo scopo ormai raggiunto”. Non si tratta quindi di un proverbio.

8. *Entre l’arbre et l’écorce il ne faut pas mettre le doigt* = non bisogna ficcare il naso negli affari altrui. *HP*

*Entre l’arbre et l’écorce il ne faut pas mettre le doigt*, tra moglie e marito non mettere il dito. *B/G/L*

<sup>21</sup> D’ora in avanti, abbreviamo s.v.

<sup>22</sup> La frequenza del proverbio è infatti scarsa in entrambe le lingue.

“Il ne faut pas s’immiscer dans une affaire où il y a des intérêts contradictoires” (PR); e, per l’italiano *Tra moglie e marito non mettere il dito*: “I rapporti d’una coppia sono tanto complessi e segreti da non consentire a nessuno di giudicare e quindi di intervenire in una lite, dato che di solito quello che appare è molto diverso da quello che è” (LeM).

Risulta evidente che l’equivalenza proposta da HP è una falsa corrispondenza.

Gli altri tre dizionari propongono invece un proverbio autentico, con una sfumatura “lessiculturale”, collegata all’ambito familiare: una metafora botanica (*arbre/écorce*) si oppone a una di matrice familiare (*moglie/marito*).

9. *C’est au fruit qu’on connaît l’arbre*, dal frutto si conosce l’albero. G

*On reconnaît l’arbre à ses fruits*, dal frutto si conosce l’albero. B

“C’est à l’œuvre, au résultat, qu’on peut juger l’auteur” (PR); per l’italiano: “Le intenzioni si giudicano dai risultati, le persone dalle azioni” (LeM).

Le origini di questo proverbio rimandano al *Vangelo di Matteo* (12: 33); l’equivalenza è soddisfatta da tutti i punti di vista.

10. *Les arbres cachent la forêt*, non bisogna perdersi nei dettagli. L

*C’est l’arbre qui cache la forêt*<sup>23</sup>, perdersi nei particolari senza avere una visione d’insieme. HP

“Les détails empêchent de voir l’ensemble” (PR).

Viene offerta una *parafrasi* del proverbio francese: solo la dimensione stilistica viene conservata, ma si perdono tutte le altre, a cominciare dalla metafora vegetale.

11. *La bave du crapaud n’atteint pas la blanche colombe*, raglio d’asino non sale in cielo.

Il senso è quello indicato per l’italiano da LeM: “Le parole degli sciocchi, dei miseri, dei ciarloni, non raggiungono mai i centri dove si governa, si comanda, si decide”.

S.v. *crapaud*, B propone: “sentenza d’asino non va in cielo”, e G: “raglio d’asino non giunge al cielo”; s.v. *bave*, L traduce: “l’elefante non sente il morso della pulce; raglio d’asino non sale in cielo”.

Le traduzioni mostrano l’esistenza di tre varianti in italiano; ma, quel che più conta, le metafore zoomorfe vengono conservate insieme agli altri livelli di senso.

12. *Au bout de l’aune faut le drap*, ogni cosa ha la sua fine. G

“Toutes choses ont leur fin” (TLFi).

La traduzione è del tutto letterale, e viene persa la metafora che riguarda l’*aune* (antica unità di misura). A livello stilistico, la forma arcaica francese (ellissi del soggetto impersonale *il*) viene tradotta in un italiano contemporaneo, creando quindi un ulteriore scarto.

Sulla base delle considerazioni precedenti, proponiamo una tabella riassuntiva che presenta, per i 12 proverbi esaminati, le equivalenze riscontrate a livello categoriale, lessicologico<sup>24</sup>, statistico, stilistico, semantico e ritmico.

<sup>23</sup> Questa forma si avvicina molto a quella della frasi situazionali.

<sup>24</sup> La dicitura “var.” sta a indicare la presenza di varianti proverbiali.

FR_IT	CATEG.	LESSIC.	STAT.	STIL.	SEM.	RITM.
1	no	-	no	sì	no	no
2	sì	var.	sì	sì	sì	sì
3	no	var.	no	no	no	no
4	sì	-	sì	sì	sì	sì
5	sì	-	sì	sì	no	no
6	sì	-	sì	sì	sì	no
7	sì	-	sì	sì	sì	sì
8	sì	-	sì	sì	sì	sì
9	sì	var.	sì	sì	sì	sì
10	no	var.	no	sì	no	no
11	sì	-	sì	sì	sì	sì
12	no	-	no	no	no	sì

Tabella 1: Corpus francese-italiano

I “no” nella colonna “categ.” indicano l’assenza di un proverbio equivalente in italiano; com’è evidente, tale assenza tende a “trascinare”, pur con qualche eccezione, una serie di lacune traduttive sul piano statistico, stilistico, semantico (relativo alla presenza di metafore) e ritmico. Rimandiamo alla conclusione generale per ulteriori commenti.

#### 4.1.2. Sezione italiano-francese

In questa sezione abbiamo rilevato 14 proverbi metaforici. Li presentiamo di seguito, accompagnati da brevi commenti.

1. *Can che **abbaia** non morde*, chien qui aboie ne mord pas. *HP*

Rimandiamo alla sezione precedente per i commenti. Il proverbio soddisfa tutti i parametri adottati.

2. *Acqua passata non macina più*, le passé c’est le passé. *HP*

*Acqua passata non macina più*, la page est tournée. *G*

*Acqua passata non macina più*, morceau avalé n’a plus de goût, le moulin ne moud pas avec l’eau coulée en bas. *B*

*Acqua passata non macina più*, le temps perdu ne se rattrape jamais. *L*

Il proverbio significa: “È inutile rivangare il passato” (*GI*); oppure “Quanto appartiene al passato (ricchezza, onori, bellezza, gloria, potenza), al passato resta e non può incidere sul presente né risolvere i problemi attuali; ricordare non conforta né aiuta” (*LeM*). Come nota Sardelli (2010), si tratta di un proverbio in disuso.

La traduzione di *HP* propone un truismo sotto forma di tautologia, che fa cadere l’equivalenza categoriale.

*G* presenta una frase situazionale, che difetta della genericità richiesta dai proverbi.

La prima traduzione di *B* rispetta il valore semantico e metaforico, oltre a fornire un equivalente attestato; la seconda forma proposta è invece più problematica<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> Secondo Anscombe (2011) tale forma, ripresa in un dizionario di proverbi francesi (Maloux), traduce alla lettera un proverbio inglese (*The mill cannot grind with the water that is past*) e non costituisce un autentico proverbio francese.

La scelta traduttiva di *L* si accontenta infine di una riformulazione sotto forma di “frase fatta”.

3. *L'acqua va al mare*, l'eau va à la rivière. *HP/G*

*L'acqua corre al mare*, l'eau va (toujours) à la rivière. *B*

“La fortuna capita sempre a chi ne ha meno bisogno” (*GI*); “ricchezza e successo arridono spesso a coloro che ne hanno già; ogni evento ha la sua conclusione naturale e inevitabile” (*Z*).

Nella traduzione, l'equivalenza viene rispettata a tutti i livelli.

4. *L'acqua cheta rovina i ponti*, il n'est pire eau que l'eau qui dort. *HP/G/L*

*Acqua cheta rompe i ponti*, il n'est pire eau que l'eau qui dort. *B*

“Nuoce maggiormente chi opera in silenzio, nascostamente” (*GI*).

Anche in questo caso, l'equivalenza proposta è adeguata a tutti i livelli.

5. *Lasciar correre l'acqua per la china*, laisser courir l'eau. *G*

“Non affannarsi, in quanto le cose vanno comunque e naturalmente per il loro verso” (*Z*).

L'equivalenza viene rispettata, tranne a livello ritmico: il francese presenta infatti una formula “piatta” e priva di valore poetico (nell'accezione di R. Jakobson).

6. *La prima acqua è quella che bagna*, il n'y a que le premier pas qui coûte. *B*

“Il momento del primo approccio con una persona o una realtà spiacevole è quello più difficile da affrontare e gestire; i primi mali e le prime disillusioni sono quelli che più ci affliggono e tormentano” (*Z*).

In questo caso, notiamo che la frequenza del proverbio italiano è molto inferiore alla forma corrispondente francese; inoltre, l'equivalenza semantica (a livello di significato, prima ancora che metaforica) non viene soddisfatta.

7. *L'albero si conosce dal frutto*, c'est au fruit qu'on connaît l'arbre. *G*

Rimandiamo alla sezione precedente per i commenti. Il proverbio soddisfa tutti i parametri adottati.

8. *Tanto va la gatta al lardo che ci lascia lo zampino*, tant va la cruche à l'eau qu'à la fin elle se casse. *HP*

Rimandiamo alla sezione precedente per i commenti. Il proverbio soddisfa tutti i parametri adottati.

9. *L'arco sempre teso si spezza*, il ne faut pas trop tirer sur la corde (o ficelle). *G*

Il proverbio italiano viene messo in relazione con un *precetto* francese; siamo quindi al di fuori di una possibile equivalenza categoriale, con ciò che ne consegue agli altri livelli.

Sul piano metaforico, si rimane nell'ambito del concetto di *flessibilità*, per cui l'equivalenza semantica “tiene”.

10. *Tanto fumo, poco arrosto* = beaucoup de blablabla, mais rien de concret. *HP*

“Essere tutto fumo e niente arrosto, molto fumo e poco arrosto, più fumo che arrosto, (*fig.*) si dice di persona o cosa che nonostante l'apparenza conclude o vale poco” (*GI*).

Rileviamo innanzitutto che, tanto in italiano quanto in francese, non abbiamo a che fare con un proverbio, piuttosto con un *modo di dire*: trattasi infatti di frase situazionale e non generica<sup>26</sup>.

La presenza di varianti lessicologiche viene attestata dagli altri dizionari del corpus:

*B*, s.v. *fumo*: “molto fumo e poco arrosto, molto fumo e poca brace, une belle façade et pas grand-chose derrière”.

*G*, s.v. *fumo*: “molto fumo e poco arrosto!, ce n'est que du vent!”.

*L*. s.v. *fumo*: “molto (o tanto) fumo e poco arrosto, plus de bruit que de besogne”.

11. *Meglio un asino vivo che un dottore morto*, mieux vaut un chien vivant qu'un lion mort. *HP/L*

*Meglio un asino vivo che un dottore morto*, un chien vivant vaut mieux qu'un lion mort. *G*

*Meglio un asino vivo che un dottore morto*, chien en vie vaut mieux que lion mort. *B*

“Non vale la pena di rovinarsi la salute con lo studio eccessivo” (*GI*); “Meglio una cosa modesta disponibile che una cosa di valore di cui non è possibile usufruire” (*LeM*).

Si tratta di un probabile calco e adattamento di un versetto dell'*Ecclesiaste*<sup>27</sup>, divenuto poi proverbio<sup>28</sup>.

Malgrado le leggere varianti, il proverbio fornito in traduzione è equivalente sotto tutti gli aspetti; sul piano metaforico, si rimane sempre nell'ambito zoomorfo.

12. *Raglio d'asino non sale in cielo*, la bave du crapaud n'atteint pas la blanche colombe. *HP*

*Raglio d'asino non sale al cielo*, prière de fou n'est point écoutée. *G*

È quanto meno bizzarro che *G* non adotti la stessa traduzione di *HP*, dato che l'abbiamo riscontrata nella sezione francese-italiano (v. 4.1.1.). La traduzione di *G* non è comunque originale, trovandosi già in Arthaber (1929).

Ad ogni modo, i criteri adottati per misurare l'equivalenza vengono soddisfatti in entrambi i dizionari.

13. *A lavar la testa all'asino si perde il ranno e il sapone*, à laver la tête d'un âne, on perd sa lessive. *G*

Rimandiamo alla sezione precedente per i commenti. Il proverbio soddisfa tutti i parametri adottati.

<sup>26</sup> Paradossalmente, l'equivalenza categoriale viene quindi conservata benché nessuna delle due forme sia un proverbio.

<sup>27</sup> 9.4: “Meglio un cane vivo che un leone morto”.

<sup>28</sup> Classico esempio di *proverbialisation*, cf. Schapira (2000).

14. *Ad asino vecchio basto dorato*, à vieille mule, frein doré. B

“Ironico, quando l’oggetto, l’attrezzo migliore si dà al più anziano in età o in grado” (LeM).

Anche quest’ultimo proverbio rispetta tutti i parametri adottati; in particolare, viene conservata la struttura binaria.

Di seguito proponiamo la tabella riassuntiva per i proverbi metaforici della sezione italiano-francese.

IT_FR	CATEG.	LESSIC.	STAT.	STIL.	SEM.	RITM.
1	sì	-	sì	sì	sì	sì
2	no	-	no	no	no	no
3	sì	var.	sì	sì	sì	sì
4	sì	var.	sì	sì	sì	sì
5	sì	-	sì	sì	sì	no
6	sì	-	no	sì	no	no
7	sì	-	sì	sì	sì	sì
8	sì	-	sì	sì	sì	sì
9	no	-	no	no	sì	no
10	sì	var.	no	no	no	no
11	sì	-	sì	sì	sì	sì
12	sì	var.	sì	sì	sì	sì
13	sì	-	sì	sì	sì	sì
14	sì	-	sì	sì	sì	sì

Tabella 2: Corpus italiano-francese

## 5. Conclusione

Quali risultati emergono dalla nostra analisi? Innanzitutto, non stupisce notare come i parametri presi in considerazione si manifestino preferibilmente in blocco. Tuttavia, nel caso di alcuni proverbi, soltanto certi valori vengono soddisfatti. È l’ambito *ritmico* a risultare più problematico: quand’anche tutti gli altri valori siano rispettati, la “coesione fonetica” del proverbio equivalente può far difetto, come nel caso dei proverbi n. 5<sup>29</sup> (FR\_IT) e n. 5-6 (IT\_FR). A livello categoriale, se nel lato FR\_IT 4 proverbi su 12 non trovano un equivalente italiano (33%), nel lato IT\_FR sono soltanto 2 su 14 (14%). I proverbi che soddisfano tutti i criteri presi in esame sono invece 6 nella sezione FR\_IT (50%) e ben 9 nella sezione IT\_FR (64%): il “fondo comune” linguistico e culturale è senz’altro all’origine di questa sostanziale contiguità tra le forme proverbiali francesi e italiane.

Per quanto riguarda la strategie traduttive, non abbiamo riscontrato né calchi né falsi proverbi; nei casi di intraducibilità, si fa quindi ricorso esclusivamente alla chiosa, conservando il solo livello semantico. Che cosa avviene rispetto alle metafore proverbiali? L’ambito zoomorfo è prevalente in entrambe le sezioni; in italiano spicca in particolare la figura dell’*asino*, con ben 4 proverbi<sup>30</sup>. In francese abbiamo riscontrato anche diverse metafore vegetali (con la parola *albero*, soprattutto), mentre in italiano è rilevante l’ambito naturale non animato (numerosi sono in particolare i proverbi relativi all’*acqua*).

<sup>29</sup> Un raro caso dove i valori ritmici sono meno “densi” nel proverbio di partenza.

<sup>30</sup> Bloc-Duraffour (1977) recensisce 25 proverbi italiani dove figura questo animale.



Nel caso dei proverbi senza equivalente attestato, come abbiamo detto, i lessicografi si sono mostrati assai cauti, e non hanno proposto né calchi né falsi proverbi. Tuttavia, come osserva Kleiber (2010), i proverbi metaforici sono traducibili direttamente (a differenza delle espressioni idiomatiche) senza penalizzare la comprensione: l'elevazione verso il senso "iperonimico" o "sovraordinato" fa sì che una traduzione letterale dei proverbi n. 5 e n. 10 francesi risulterebbe del tutto leggibile in chiave metaforica, ossia: *Bisogna rompere il nocciolo per avere la mandorla* e *Gli alberi nascondono la foresta/È l'albero che nasconde la foresta*. Pur conservando il senso "costruito" del proverbio, questa scelta cauta e "conservatrice" da parte dei dizionari non fornisce all'utente degli equivalenti "inseribili in discorso" ed è di scarso aiuto per il traduttore. Una soluzione mista (chiosa esplicativa tra parentesi abbinata a un calco o un falso proverbio) potrebbe forse salvaguardare sia l'aspetto semantico sia quello pragmatico.

Infine, la presenza di varianti in entrambe le sezioni conferma il punto di vista di Anscombe: la fissità formale *non* costituisce un tratto definitorio dei proverbi.

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Jane Helen Johnson is lecturer in English Language and Translation at the University of Bologna. She holds an M.A. in Translation Studies from the University of Birmingham and taught translation from Italian to English at the University of Bologna's Scuola di Lingue Moderne per Interpreti e Traduttori in Forlì for many years, as well as working as a professional freelance translator. Her research interests include corpus linguistics and corpus stylistics, particularly with application to translation and the works of Grazia Deledda in Italian and English, where she investigated deixis and point of view. Working with Professor D. R. Miller, she has used corpus linguistics to focus on phraseology in parliamentary discourse within a Systemic Functional Linguistic framework. Another recent project is situated within the field of Corpus Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) and concerns the representation of risk in news media and academic articles from the discipline of sociology.

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Renata Kamenická is associate professor and head of the English-language Translation Programme at the Department of English and American Studies, Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University. Her PhD dissertation in Translation Studies, *Explicitation and Translator's Style* (2007; Charles University, Prague), discussed explicitation and implicitation as markers of a translator's style in literary translation. She has published mainly empirical papers covering various topics in literary translation and methodology in translation pedagogy. Apart from the topic addressed at the *Tradurre Figure* conference, her other current research interest concerns personality-related approaches to translation. She has translated both fiction and non-fiction from English into Czech.

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Enrico Monti is associate professor in Translation Studies at the University of Haute-Alsace (France) and head of the Applied Foreign Languages (LEA) Department. He received his PhD from the University of Bologna, where he pursued his research on metaphor translation as a postdoctoral fellow (2011-2012) under the supervision of Donna R. Miller. His scholarship focuses mostly on translation studies, and he has published articles on both literary and specialised translation: 'Translating the Metaphors We Live By' (*EJES* 13:2, 2009), 'Metaphors for metaphor translation' (*Thinking Through Translation With Metaphors*, 2012), 'Échos de la traduction dans la presse culturelle' (*Synérgies*, 2013). A member of ILLE (Institut de recherche en Langues et littératures européennes), he has co-directed with Peter Schnyder a volume on retranslation, *Autour de la retraduction* (Paris, Orizons, 2011) and a volume on *Traduire à plusieurs/ Collaborative Translations* (forthcoming in 2014). For more information: <https://uha.academia.edu/EnricoMonti>.

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Myriam Swennen Ruthenberg (Ph.D. New York University) is associate professor of Italian and Comparative Literature at Florida Atlantic University. In the last two decades she has concentrated her research on the writer, translator, and cultural critic, Erri De Luca, who became the topic of several articles, an edited volume entitled *Scrivere nella polvere: Saggi su Erri De Luca* (Pisa: ETS, 2005), and the first English translation of one of this author's works, *I colpi dei sensi (The Senses of Memory, 1999)*. Re-writing lies at the core of her published and forthcoming research on Boccaccio, as well as on the early Renaissance *novellatore* and chronicler Giovanni Sercambi, and her articles on Elsa Morante, Tomasi Di Lampedusa focus on the recasting of respectively Medieval and Renaissance texts in a twentieth century mold. The notion of re-writing has also conditioned her research in translation studies. She is currently working on an authored book, entitled *Erri De Luca e la scrittura alla vigilia della creazione*.

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**CeSLiC – Centro di studi linguistico-culturali**  
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**Tradurre Figure / Translating Figurative Language** offers 30 original contributions on the interlingual translation of figurative language. The chapters were first presented at an international conference held at the University of Bologna in December 2012 and have been selected through a double peer-reviewed process. Why figurative language in translation? Essentially because figurative language – and the contributions in this book can be seen to prove it – may often foreground the complexities of the translation process, as well as the strong link between language and culture that this process has to renegotiate. Written in either English or Italian, the different contributions of this volume investigate the topic from a wide range of approaches and through several possible language pairs. We are confident that these stimulating and wide-ranging chapters will contribute to casting new light on the practice of translators around the world when dealing with the manifold implications and challenges that figurative language cannot help but pose.

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**Enrico Monti** is associate professor in Translation Studies at the University of Haute-Alsace (France) and head of the Applied Foreign Languages (LEA) Department. He received his PhD from the University of Bologna, where he pursued his research on metaphor translation as a postdoctoral fellow (2011-2012) under the supervision of Donna R. Miller. His scholarship focuses mostly on translation studies. A member of ILLE (Institut de recherche en langues et littératures européennes, EA4363), he has co-directed with Peter Schnyder a volume on retranslation, *Autour de la retraduction* (Paris, Orizons, 2011). For more information: <https://uha.academia.edu/EnricoMonti>.

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