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Translation-related metaphors said or written by French translators in the last 50 years

Abstract

During the last fifty years French translators have made a considerable and repeated use of metaphors describing translators and translation practice in French articles, interviews, books and journals.

The goal of this paper is to examine these metaphors, try to sort them, find out if they share common grounds, and in light of these metaphors come to conclusions concerning the image of the translator and his practice in the eyes of French translators.

The literature review provided me with a basis for the firm connection between translation and metaphor and shed light on the essence of metaphor and metaphors in translation studies: Chamberlain (1988) as well as Gavronsky (1977) both discuss the negative image of translators and translation, yet while Chamberlain underlines the parallel between metaphors on translation and gender perceptions, Gavronsky focuses on the subordination of the translation to the source text out of perspective of piety versus cannibalism. During the 21st century, different models of translation studies have developed. De Leon (2010) presents two conceptual groups of metaphors that are dominant in translation: the first is "the Transfer Metaphor", by which translating means carrying objects from one place to the other, or extracting the meaning and carry it from the source text into the target text. The second is "The Imitation/Action Metaphor", by which translation is conceived as a new process, different from the one which brought about the creation of the source text. The goal of the process is to create a new text that will be similar to the source text, but not one and the same.

II

In light of this review I conducted an empiric research, where I examined 55 metaphors concerning translation produced by contemporary translators. I retrieved 37 of the metaphors from newspapers and radio interviews with translators that were later published on the internet. The other 18 metaphors were retrieved from two novels and one translator's creed, all written by contemporary French translators. I interpreted the metaphors using Sovran's "reconciliation model" (2006). This model bridges the tension and contradiction created as a result of the juxtaposition between the two constituents of the metaphor (the tenor and the vehicle) – semantically distant from each other – by searching for the abstract reconciling component. By "abstract reconciling component" I mean the words in the semantic field of the tenor which are closest to the semantic field words of the vehicle. According to this model the interpretation is constructed from three steps:

- A. Recognizing the tenor and its vehicle;
- B. Outlining the semantic frameworks of the tenor and the vehicle;
- C. Identifying the abstract component reconciling between the two constituents of the metaphor, on the basis of the different semantic structures.

As I also had in my intention to examine the image of the translator created in the texts using similes as well as metaphors, I included them in the discussion as well, and I interpreted them using the same model. In addition, in order to provide a richer and fuller background of the different translators, I present their biographical information in an appendix at the end of the paper.

This inspection of all the metaphors that I examined in this paper revealed that they are concerned with the relation between the author and source text on the one hand and the translator and target text on the other hand or with the translator and the

III

translation practice solely, the latter dividing into sub-topics. The paper is accordingly divided into three chapters:

- A. Metaphors in interviews concerning the relations between the author-source text and translator-target text;
- B. Metaphors in interviews concerning the translator and translation practice, classified according to the vehicle of the metaphor;
- C. Metaphors about translators and translation created by translators in two novels and one translator's creed.

All the metaphors were anchored in the speaker's value judgment, and in all the different chapters there are positive as well as negative metaphors.

The findings indicate that value ambivalence characterizes a great deal of the metaphors, and that the subjects of the vehicle under whom I grouped the metaphors did not present an identical stance of the translators towards the translator's status, translation practice, or their value judgment.

The chapter dealing with metaphors concerning the relations between target text- translator and source text-author presented quite an eclectic variety of metaphors, and it was the only chapter where the image of translation practice was presented solely positively. Overall, out of the 23 metaphors in which I recognized a positive judgment, 9 dealt with the translator and 14 with the translation practice. On the opposite side, out of the 18 metaphors presenting negative value judgment, 14 dealt with the translator, and only 4 dealt with the translation practice. In addition, 17 metaphors implied positive and negative value judgment simultaneously, only 4 of which dealing with the translation practice.

This data suggest that the translators' image in their own eyes tends to be negative. A possible explanation might be that within the field of the relations author – source text

and translator – target text, translators indeed tend to lessen their own value versus the source text's author, but they value their work highly. It is not unlikely that translator's negative image in their own eyes is one of the reasons for the tendency to conceal their biographical information.