



The Limits of Translatability Exemplified by Metaphor Translation

Author(s): Raymond van den Broeck

Source: *Poetics Today*, Vol. 2, No. 4, Translation Theory and Intercultural Relations (Summer - Autumn, 1981), pp. 73-87

Published by: Duke University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1772487>

Accessed: 12/02/2009 23:04

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=duke>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1995 to build trusted digital archives for scholarship. We work with the scholarly community to preserve their work and the materials they rely upon, and to build a common research platform that promotes the discovery and use of these resources. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Duke University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Poetics Today*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

THE LIMITS OF TRANSLATABILITY EXEMPLIFIED BY METAPHOR TRANSLATION *

RAYMOND VAN DEN BROECK

Institute for Translators, Antwerp

I. INTRODUCTION

Although in view of its importance and frequency in language use metaphor indubitably constitutes a pivotal issue in translation, it has hitherto received only random attention on the part of translation theorists. Presumably one of the main obstacles for a theory of translation to overcome is the intuitively subscribed and generally accepted “inadequacy of any single generalization about the translatability of metaphor.” If however we accept that there is such a thing as a theoretical constituent level on which translation phenomena can be dealt with, we must also accept that it is the proper task of translation theory to make generalizations about such phenomena. To admit the inadequacy of generalizations about the translatability of metaphor is to admit that translation theory as a whole is an absurd undertaking, since it then should be incapable of accounting for the translation of one of the most frequent phenomena in language use. Even if such generalizations must necessarily “fail to do justice to the great complexity of the factors determining the ontology of metaphors — why certain metaphors are created and others not; why a metaphor that is strikingly effective in one language becomes peculiar or even unintelligible if transferred unchanged into another [...]; in short, why languages are anisomorphic metaphorically” (Dagut, 1976: 32), it may content itself with the more modest task of laying bare some of the hidden mechanisms governing the translation of metaphors and their theoretic degree of translatability.

In this paper it is my intention to make such specifications as seem necessary to provide a theoretical framework in which general statements about the translation of metaphors can be made.

* Paper presented at *Synopsis 1*: “Translation Theory and Intercultural Relations,” held at the Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics in collaboration with the M. Bernstein Chair of Translation Theory, Tel Aviv University, 27 March–1 April 1978.

2. THEORIZING ABOUT METAPHOR TRANSLATION

In order that a phenomenon such as metaphor may be adequately dealt with in translation theory, it is obvious that some preliminary work will have to be done. All empirical phenomena are subjected to the rule that, if one wants to theorize about them, they must be properly observed and described. The assumption underlying any acquisition of scientific, i.e., intersubjective and systematic, knowledge of a phenomenon is that certain relationships be laid open, that a certain regularity be discovered. This regularity, in that it is not manifested by the phenomena themselves, must be assumed, or constructed, by the student of the discipline, whose proper task it is to state his assumptions about the character, the relations, the causes and functions of the phenomenon observed, by formulating them in the form of a hypothesis.

For a systematic discussion of the implications of metaphor in translation the theorist should have the following at his disposal:

- 1) a suitable, i.e., operational, definition of metaphor;
- 2) a specification of what can actually be meant by "transferring a metaphor from an SL to a TL," i.e., of possible *modes* of translating metaphors;
- 3) a specification of distinct contexts in which metaphors can occur, i.e., of the various structural relationships into which metaphors in texts can enter, and of the particular constraints which, according to their occurrences, are imposed on them;
- 4) a specification of the constraints which can be imposed on the treatment of metaphors by translation itself as a rule-governed activity, i.e., of the 'norms' that are operative in the translation process.

Generalizations about metaphor translation, if ever they are possible, will at least have to take these specifications as a starting-point.

3. METAPHOR: ITS TYPES AND USES

Whether metaphor is defined in Aristotle's terms as "the application to one thing of the name of another thing," or in terms of French structuralist semantics as "*la manifestation d'une isotopie complexe*" (Greimas, 1966: 96), or in terms of generative semantics as deviations from the normal selection restriction rules, is not important for our purpose. As a matter of fact to define metaphor does not belong to the proper task of translation theory. What we need however is an operational definition of 'transferred meaning' which says in which forms it manifests itself, which purposes it serves and how it is effective.

From the point of view of translation it therefore seems appropriate to distinguish between *categories* of metaphor, *uses* of metaphor, and *functions* of metaphor.

3.1. *Categories of metaphor*

From a synchronous viewpoint metaphors can be divided into three categories according to their relative degree of being 'institutionalized' or not. A first category comprises those that have gradually lost their uniqueness and have

become part of the established semantic stock (or 'lexicon') of the language. They are the so-called *lexicalized* metaphors whose range may vary from mere 'formators' (such as *in the face of*, *beforehand*, *everybody*, *already*) to single lexical items (such as *to harbour* evil thoughts, *hard* cash, a *hard-boiled* character, etc.) and idioms (such as *have a lark*, *lay heads together*, *lay bare*, *lay a finger on*, etc.). In spite of the objections which can be raised against the use of the term 'dead' metaphor, the notion of 'deadness' may give insight in the process by which a metaphor shifts from 'performance' to 'competence.' According to modern semantics various stages can be distinguished in the process: "the first stage of 'petrification,' almost inevitable in an institutionalized metaphor, is that the reference and ground of the comparison becomes limited by convention; in that, for example, a *fox* is '*a person who is like a fox in that he is cunning*' [...] A further stage is reached when the transferred definition loses its analogical feeling, so that *fox* is felt to be virtually synonymous with *a cunning man*. But even at this stage, a feeling of the link between the literal and transferred meanings may persist. The stage of absolute 'deadness' is reached only when the literal meaning has died out entirely [...]; or else, when the literal and transferred meanings have diverged psychologically to the extent that no connection is felt between them any more" (Leech, 1974: 227–228).

A second category is constituted by the large group of traditional, or *conventional* metaphors, which are more or less 'institutionalized' in that they are common to a literary school or generation. Instances of such 'shared poetic metaphors' would be *mere-hengest* [sea-steed] (as a metaphor for 'ship'), *heofon-candle* [the candle of heaven] (as a metaphor for 'sun,' 'moon,' 'star') or *heofon-ward* [the warden of heaven] (as a metaphor for 'God') in Old English poetry; Homer's 'fixed' metaphors such as *rosy-fingered dawn*; the Elizabethan's *pearly teeth*, *ruby lips*, *golden lads*; or the Augustan's *watery plain*, *silver streams*, etc. To modern readers some of these are bold and poetic, while most of the others are faded and quaint. Yet it is beyond doubt that such metaphors can clearly be distinguished from the more institutionalized patterns of the common language. They belong to the restricted area of literature and are only conventional within the period, school or generation to which they belong.

The third category is that of *private* metaphors, the so-called 'bold,' innovating creations of individual poets. But here again it is not easy to draw strict boundaries between the private and the more traditional. Many private systems have large overlap with metaphorical traditions, so that it would be fallacious to emphasize the 'uniqueness' of private metaphors.

Contrary to M.B. Dagut (1976) I would not insist, therefore, on making a basic distinction between metaphor on the one hand, and the other three forms (polysemes, idioms and formators) on the other hand. Dagut seems to miss the point where he contends that "in the case of polysemes, idioms or formators [...] translation is taking place between two different systems of language competence" and thus "depends essentially on the bilingual competence of the translator" (1976: 24). Surely, "every metaphor is an entirely new and unique creation" (p. 23); yet the status of a metaphor is not a static but a dynamic one. If

there is a shift from 'performance' to 'competence,' from the "individual innovating creation to routine collective repetition" (p. 23), there may be a similar shift from 'competence' to 'performance' through which lexicalized, or 'dead' metaphors may become 'live' symbols again. From a paradigmatic point of view metaphors of any category belong to a system or 'paradigm'; thus even the boldest poetic metaphors form part of the poet's 'private' system. It is only from the syntagmatic viewpoint that metaphors can be valued as being either effective or not.

3.2. *Uses of metaphor*

For translation theory it seems therefore essential to take into account the effectiveness of metaphors in actual communication, i.e., in language use. "In ordinary-language philosophy the meaning of a word is its use in a language-game (a language context and a situational context) such that to determine what the word means one need only look at the use of the language in its situation [...]. Metaphor could be developed in terms of this meaning-is-its-use theory" (Shibles, 1971). For the purpose of translation theory two situations appear to be basically important, depending on whether or not metaphors are *functionally relevant*, i.e., whether they are relevant to the communicative function of the text in its situation, or not. Thus, in a certain text, the use of a lexicalized metaphor may be functionally relevant (as, e.g., in a pun), whereas in another text the use of a 'live' metaphor, or even a bold one, may be of little or no functional relevancy, e.g., because the speaker or writer was completely unaware of his using it, or in that the occurrence of such a metaphor in his text was totally random or irresponsible.

3.3. *Function of metaphor*

The use of metaphor is closely related to its function, i.e., the communicative purposes it serves. Here it seems to me that a distinction should be made between creative metaphor and what I would call 'decorative' metaphor. In creative metaphor there is a deep necessary bond between the 'tenor' and the 'vehicle' (these terms are borrowed from Richards, 1936). Here we have the impression that metaphors should be interpreted literally (as the bond between tenor and vehicle is no longer a matter of mere convention but a 'natural' one). Such is the case, for example, in authentic poetry, creative prose, and other kinds of creative writing. In quite a lot of fiction, essay, etc., however, we are confronted with metaphors whose function seems to be a more illustrative or decorative one. They do not seem to be used out of necessity, however inventive or innovating they may be, and in many cases they can readily be replaced by other expressions, metaphorical or not, having a similar effect on the reader or hearer. Instances of merely decorative metaphors can be found in a good deal of contemporary prose journalism. (The quotation by M.B. Dagut from a recent issue of *Time* magazine can serve as an illustration: "The Conservative party has a *bullyboy* too, only she's a lady. She is Margaret Thatcher, 49, who this week *shucks off her gloves and barrels into battle* against ... etc."). Eventually it is

obvious that metaphor may differ in function from text to text, from language to language and from culture to culture (e.g., a primitive vs. a highly technological culture).

4. MODES OF METAPHOR TRANSLATION

Since the task of a theory is not to prescribe, but to describe and to explain, the theory of translation cannot be expected to specify how metaphors *should* be translated. What it can attempt, then, is to set up models according to which the observable phenomena can properly be described. Possible applications of the theory might be:

- (1) tentative predictions of how, in regard to given circumstances and under certain conditions, metaphors are most likely to be transferred into TL;
- (2) specifications of how, from the viewpoint of a 'normative' theory, metaphors are to be translated in order that 'optimal correspondence' between SL text and TL text may be established (according to type of text, function of metaphor, etc.).

By lack of thorough research in this area, however, it is impossible for the time being to make such generalizations as might be of use to translation practice.

A tentative scheme of modes of metaphor translation would show the following possibilities:

(1) *Translation 'sensu stricto'*. A metaphor is translated 'sensu stricto' whenever both SL 'tenor' and SL 'vehicle' are transferred into the TL. For lexicalized metaphors this mode of translating may give rise to two different situations depending on whether or not the SL and the TL use corresponding 'vehicles':

- a) If the 'vehicles' in SL and TL correspond, the resulting TL metaphor will be idiomatic.
- b) If the 'vehicles' in SL and TL differ, the resulting TL metaphor may be either a semantic anomaly or a daring innovation.

(2) *Substitution*. This mode applies to those cases where the SL 'vehicle' is replaced by a different TL 'vehicle' with more or less the same 'tenor.' Then the SL and TL 'vehicles' may be considered translational equivalents in that they share a common 'tenor.'

(3) *Paraphrase*. An SL metaphor is paraphrased whenever it is rendered by a non-metaphorical expression in the TL. In fact this mode of translating metaphors renders them into 'plain speech'; the resulting TL expression comes up to the level of a commentary rather than of actual translation. The table on p. 78 may serve as an illustration.

This schematic survey of possible modes of metaphor translation might readily give the impression that it oversimplifies a range of phenomena which in fact shows a much greater complexity and variegation. Yet it seems to me that the list is complete, at least in as much as concrete cases lend themselves to being caught within general categories.

SL metaphor	TL expression	Matching pattern	Transl. mode
La nuit tombe	Die Nacht fällt ein	corresponding T corresponding V	Translation ' <i>sensu stricto</i> '
Le jour tombe	Der Tag fällt	corresponding T corresponding V	
Le jour tombe	Die Nacht bricht (her)ein	corresponding T different V	Substitution
Le jour tombe	Es wird Abend	corresponding sense	Paraphrase

Of course the modes described may be given other labels than the ones provided by the scheme. For example, instead of three modes one might distinguish between four modes of metaphor translation. Thus 1(a) could be labelled *literal translation*, 1(b) *onomasiological translation*, (2) *semasiological translation* and (3) *discursive translation*.

Nothing, so far, has been said about the practical applicability of the given modes, about the desirability of their application to specific cases or the relative chances of the resulting products in particular circumstances. Thus the given modes stand for what they really are, i.e., mere theoretic possibilities. Neither have I specified them with regard to the three main categories of metaphor mentioned above, since the motives for applying them may not only be linked up with the type of metaphor but also depend on the textual environment in which it appears.

5. METAPHORS IN TEXTS: TRANSLATION PROBLEMS

The next specification relates to the implications arising from particular occurrences of metaphors in texts. It will raise, in its turn, questions concerning the translatability of metaphor in such occurrences.

With regard to the use and function of metaphors a traditional typology of texts will be of little use. The only plausible distinction seems to be that between creative and non-creative language use, in that in the former metaphor *as such* is functionally relevant, whereas in the latter it is most likely not to be. The extreme positions are occupied by literary language on the one hand, and the language of science on the other hand. In between these extremes there is a large midzone of possibilities. It is clear that for example in everyday informative language metaphors, even daringly private ones, may occur, but only in rare cases will they be 'functional' in a way that basically differs from the functioning of non-metaphorical expressions (cf. Leech 1974: 216).

In scientific discourse bold metaphors are very unlikely to occur. Lexicalized ones will of course be unavoidable, but it goes without saying that for a translator there is no problem in rendering them (metaphorically or non-metaphorically).

Of course science has its own metaphors. One may see formulas in science as metaphors, e.g., $E=mc^2$, which often relate hypothetical non-entities or 'forces'; but the only way a translator can deal with these conventional metaphors of science is to leave them unchanged, since they belong to a universal repertory of symbols.

The other extreme position is taken by the language of literature. It is now commonly agreed that literary texts manifest structured information on at least three levels: a) on the linguistic level, i.e., the level of the natural language in which they are formulated (*contextual* information); b) on a situational pragmatic level, in that they are situated in space and time and form part of a system of socio-cultural norms and conventions (*socio-cultural* information); c) on the literary-aesthetic level in as much as they are structured according to the rules and standards of a literary tradition (*intertextual* information). Thereupon in literary texts the material deriving from the linguistic code, the socio-cultural elements, etc., are subordinated to a principle of structuration that belongs to a hierarchically higher order, i.e., the principle of *artistic* structuration which is superimposed on them (Lotman, 1972: 22 ff.). It is this principle according to which characteristic deviations from the normal code are to be explained in literary texts.

It is obvious that the adequate analysis of problems emerging from metaphor translation in literature will have to confront the foregoing data. Therefore the three basic types of metaphor will now be discussed within the theoretical framework of artistic structure in literary texts.

5.1. *Private (or 'poetic') metaphor*

I will not enter into questions relating to the problem of what private symbolism is and what more properly belongs to convention. As a matter of fact the student of literature will be inclined to make a distinction between the 'private symbolism' of the modern poet and the 'widely intelligible symbolism' of the past (cf. Wellek and Warren, 1963: 189). What was once private, bold, or innovating may become traditional for later generations. What is more important for our purpose is that private metaphors cannot be accounted for without reference to the *system* (linguistic, socio-cultural, literary), even though they may be related to it in a negative way.

Linguistics accounts for the phenomenon of literary metaphor by postulating the direct contrast between 'deviation' and 'normality.' One way of explaining metaphor is by reference to collocation rules, as is done in the following example: "In Edith Sitwell's phrase *fruitbuds that whimper*, *fruitbuds* occupies a position relative to *whimper* normally filled by a relatively homogeneous set of animate nouns *dog, cub, animal, child*, etc. This group of customary collocates might be said to constitute a 'collocational core' of items, such that an opposition is set up between the deviant collocation with *fruitbuds* and the total 'collocational core.' Hence from the viewpoint of literary appreciation, it is within the capability of metaphor (as opposed to simile) to suggest a connexion between the explicit *vehicle* (represented by the deviant item) and a less tangible

cluster of associations constituting the *tenor* (and represented by the 'core' of customary collocations)" (Leech, 1966: 143–144). Another way of accounting for literary metaphor consists in showing that by the standards of the accepted code (i.e., 'literal meaning') a line like Milton's *To live a life half-dead, a living death* is a semantic absurdity in that it violates the contextual selection restriction rules of normal language. It is precisely by "its power of realigning conceptual boundaries," however, that "metaphor can achieve a communicative effect which in a sense is 'beyond language'" (Leech, 1974: 45).

In so far as private metaphor is itself a violation of the rules governing the linguistic system it will be difficult to realize how mere differences between linguistic systems (natural languages) can impose serious limits on its translatability. From this viewpoint Kloepfer's (1967: 116) statement "je kühner und freier erfunden, je einmaliger eine Metapher ist, desto leichter lässt sie sich in anderen Sprachen wiederholen" seems to hold true.

To think however that, whenever the SL system is violated, the TL system may — *mutatis mutandis* — similarly be violated, would oversimplify the matter. For example, when the creation of poetic metaphors of such a highly condensed type as R.M. Rilke's *Tränenbäume*, *Herzschwung*, *Trostmarkt* appears to be dependent not only on metaphoric potentialities (which are inherent to every natural language) but also on the particular morphological potentialities of German, it may be assumed that the relative success of transferring them into another language will equally depend on the morphological characteristics of the TL. Helmut Gipper (1966) has shown that in French translations the German compounds are rendered in a more 'analytic' way as *arbres de larmes*, *élan du coeur*, *marché de consolation*. In a Dutch translation it might be much easier to preserve the 'synthetic' character of the original metaphors since the Dutch language, like German, is of a more motivated type than e.g., French or English.

Metaphor translation may become extremely problematic when a poetic metaphor, instead of deriving merely from violation of the semantic rules, is based on a grammatical peculiarity of the SL. A well-known example is Heinrich Heine's poem "Ein Fichtenbaum," in which the binary opposition between a subject (*ein Tannenbaum*: masculine gender) and an object (*eine Palme*: feminine gender) is highly significant in that it embodies metaphorically the romantic relationship between 'lover' and 'beloved,' and thus contributes to the very theme of the poem. The difficulty, even the impossibility, of translating this poem into Russian (*Fichtenbaum*/Russ. *sosna*: fem.) or French (*un sapin*, *un palmier*: both masc.) has often been mentioned. This example shows that a full account of the translatability of poetic metaphors from the viewpoint of the linguistic system cannot be given, as it involves the specific semantic relationships in poems emerging on the level of the phono-grammatical units.

Another sort of difficulties can arise from the extra-linguistic factor in metaphors, the so-called cultural context in which they originate. This may be illustrated by the following stanza of Lowell's "For the Union Dead":

The Aquarian is gone. Everywhere,
giant finned cars nose forward like fish;

a savage servility
slides by on grease.

The difficulties involved in translating this stanza would be largely cross-cultural, depending on whether in the target culture there are words having a range of associations similar to those evoked by the English words *savage*, *servility*, and *grease*. In this connection it seems worthwhile to quote the tentative hypothesis put forward by Dagut (1976: 32) "that the framework of 'possible' metaphors for any given language is determined by a combination of the accumulated cultural experience of the members of that language-community and the 'institutionalized' semantic associations of the items in their lexicon."

A third kind of impediments for the translator of private metaphors to overcome are those thrown up by aesthetic convention and tradition. Many private systems (e.g., those of Blake and Yeats) are tradition-bound in that they have "overlap with existing symbolical traditions" (Wellek and Warren, 1963: 190). Translatability will thus be high in the case of shared literary traditions, or will at least depend on the availability in the target literary system of similar symbolical traditions which can provide adequate substitutes. Another aspect of this problem is that large differences in aesthetic and moral codes between the SL and TL may impose certain constraints of a prohibitive nature on the translation, e.g., when the target system is governed by rigid conventions such that an SL metaphor is rejected for its boldness, lack of modesty, etc. This may be a frequent cause of distorted, 'flattened' or 'purified' metaphors in translations.

5.2. *Conventional metaphor*

More than the private metaphors of modern poetry the 'shared poetic' metaphors institutionalized by literary tradition are culture-bound. It even belongs to their very essence to be highly conventional and thus to depend on prevailing aesthetic norms and cultural acquisitions. Despite their being deeply embedded in the spatial and temporal surroundings in which they originated conventional metaphors turn out to be capable of adequate translation. This may be due to the fact that many of them, along lines varying from literal translation and paraphrase to imitation, have become part of the shared cultural inheritance of civilized mankind (the Jewish tradition, Greek and Roman Antiquity, the Arab tradition, Christianity, etc.); they now belong to world literature. Even if we go beyond the borders of Western civilization, it remains true that metaphors are capable of adequate translation. It seems even reasonable to assume that translatability in this respect is merely a consequence of the *necessity* to translate, i.e., to domesticate, the works of the classics.

This is not to say that translation here involves no problems. Most of these however will concern the choice of an appropriate translation *mode* rather than translatability as such. Thus a literal transfer may hamper facile decodability in the TL, as, for example, when Catull's *Gnidumque arundinosam* becomes German *Cnidus, das schilfumflüsterte*. Another danger consists in rendering a conventional metaphor as if it were a 'bold' one (*overtranslation*), or

alternatively, in falling back on metaphors “sadly ‘hallowed’ by cliché” (Lefevere, 1975: 74).

5.3. *Lexicalized metaphors*

The problems involved by the translation of this kind of institutionalized metaphors are more complex than one might think. There is even no exaggeration in saying that this type, precisely in that it is institutionalized and thus belongs to the particular system (linguistic and cultural), forms the main challenge for the translation of certain texts.

With the exception of dictionary equivalences, the assumption that “this is an area of translation that can be fully ‘mapped’ by translation theory, through a contrastive analysis based on the understanding of transferred meaning” (Dagut, 1976: 24) must therefore prove to be erroneous. Indeed, the treatment of lexicalized metaphors will entirely depend on their functional relevancy to the communicative situation in which they occur. In non-creative language their translation presents no real problem since for every one of them the TL dictionary provides either a corresponding polyseme or idiom, or an equivalent non-metaphorical expression. Alternatively, it would be equally erroneous to assume that in creative writing every metaphorical expression should be relevant to the communicative function of the text. “Ignorance, to be sure, can confer an illegitimate originality upon the first examples of an unfamiliar convention. Indeed, the etymological metaphors of a language, not ‘realized’ by those whose native language it is, are constantly taken, by analytically sensitive foreigners, as individual poetic achievements. One has to know intimately both language and literary convention to be able to feel and measure the metaphoric intention of a specific poet” (Wellek and Warren, 1963: 196). This danger of overtranslating linguistically institutionalized metaphors is by no means illusory; on the contrary, it must be closely connected with the ‘translator’s illusion’ (“*l’illusion du traducteur*”) which according to Jean Paulhan (1953: 104–105) is the fallacy that dissociates in the interpreter’s view the clichés and commonplaces of the foreign language, and brings him so far as to confuse in the text what is part of the language and what is due to the author — in short, it is the fallacy that highlights every word of the SL and causes it to have a consciousness which it has never had, or which it has lost at any rate.

The real challenge of lexicalized metaphors with regard to translation consists in the fact that, occasionally, within the same piece of discourse several levels of signification may exist simultaneously. Since they are constructed from morphemes that are also used non-idiomatically, most idioms can also be interpreted literally. If someone *beats a dead horse*, e.g., he may in fact be engaged in striking the carcass of a certain kind of animal. The idiomatic expression, in other words, is ambiguous between the literal interpretation and the figurative interpretation of harping on an issue that has long since been decided. In modern poetry this potential ambiguity of idioms is often set at work, thus becoming a functionally relevant feature of the text. The idiomatic phrase *for a lark* in the second stanza of the poem “Chanson” by Robert Creeley is a

good illustration of the phenomenon (“As when for a lark/ gaily, one hoists up a window/ shut many years”). Within the context of the poem both the literal *and* the figurative meanings of the idiom are ‘actualized’; the effect thus provoked is akin to that of a real poetic metaphor.

Deliberate linguistic ‘foregrounding’ or *aktualisace*, to use the term that was introduced by the pre-war Prague School of Linguistics, consists in using the devices of language “in such a way that this use itself attracts attention and is perceived as uncommon, as deprived of automatization, as deautomatized, such as a live poetic metaphor (as opposed to a lexicalized one, which is automatized)” (Havránek, in Garvin, 1958: 10). Foregrounding is of course not confined to creative writing, but is also found in creative joking speech (punning) and children’s language-games. Literature, however, is characterized by the “consistency and systematic character of foregrounding” (Mukařovský, in Garvin, 1958: 23).

In *complex* texts such as poems the structuring principle of artistic (or poetic) organization to which the contextual patterns of ordinary language are subordinated re-awakens the symbolic force of the dead metaphor, so that in a sense it becomes a ‘live’ metaphor again. But at the same time it retains its specific character of being a ‘*Bedeutungsmetapher*’ (as opposed to a real poetic metaphor or ‘*Bezeichnungsmetapher*’; cf. Hausmann, 1974: 117). The effect of this simultaneous occurrence is that, as in puns, a contrast emerges by which the ‘tenor’ is played off against the ‘vehicle.’ The ‘foregrounded’ idiom manifests structured information of at least three kinds: 1) *contextual* (although the reference is ambiguous between the literal ‘vehicle’ and the figurative ‘tenor’); 2) *poetic* (in the sense given to it by Roman Jakobson when he characterizes the “poetic function” as a highlighting of the message *as such*); 3) *metalingual* (in that it gives information about the *code* as a semasiological system).

The real difficulty of rendering such ‘deautomatized’ idioms in the TL is that “the functionally relevant features include some which are in fact formal features of the *language* of the SL text. If the TL has no formally corresponding features, the text, or the item, is (relatively) untranslatable” (Catford, 1965: 94). Thus, foregrounded idioms or polysemes constitute the very limits of translatability since the well-known anisomorphy of different languages will only in rare cases allow corresponding idiomatic phrases or polysemes whose literal and figurative meanings have total overlap.

6. GENERALIZATIONS: LAWS OF TRANSLATABILITY

From the previous discussion of the various categories of metaphor and the functional relevancy of their occurrence in textual settings, certain hypotheses concerning the relative success of translating them can be formulated. These hypotheses will be presented here as basic principles (or ‘laws’) of translatability. Since substitution of TL metaphors for SL metaphors (see 4, above) or paraphrasing will in general not hamper translatability, it will be obvious that the following principles basically relate to translation *sensu stricto*.

It goes without saying that translatability of metaphors does not stand apart

from translatability in general, but is only a special case or significant aspect of it. This means that the basic law for general translatability also applies to metaphor translation. This law as it has been formulated by Itamar Even-Zohar (1971: IX) says that “the degree of translatability increases when the relational series which produce information and rhetoric in the SL and TL grow closer.” In the same way the following particular laws of translatability in general apply to metaphor translation:

- (1) Translatability is high when a pair of languages are of a close basic ‘type,’ provided that the conditions under (2) and (3) are fulfilled.
- (2) Translatability is high when there is contact between SL and TL.
- (3) Translatability is high when the general cultural evolution in SL and TL proceeded on parallel lines.
- (4) Translatability is high when translation involves no more than a single kind of information. In other words, a text is more translatable if it displays information of a single type than if it is ‘complex’ in that various types, and hence a greater quantity of information, are involved.

(Adapted from Even-Zohar)

The last principle is of special importance for metaphor translation, because its further specification will allow us to distinguish between different degrees of translatability according to particular categories of metaphor in different contextual settings. It will therefore be reformulated as follows: *translatability keeps an inverse proportion with the quantity of information manifested by the metaphor and the degree to which this information is structured in a text.* The less the quantity of information conveyed by a metaphor and the less complex the structural relations into which it enters in a text, the more translatable this metaphor will be, and vice versa (BASIC LAW).

This basic law is now capable of further specification:

- (1) Lexicalized metaphors in merely referential texts (where their ‘vehicles’ as such have no functional relevance), as they represent a single kind of information, are of a high translatability.
- (2) Foregrounded lexical metaphors in complex texts (poems, puns) are of a very low translatability since they convey contextual (semantic as well as pragmatic or cultural), poetic, and metalingual information simultaneously.
- (3) Bold private metaphors in literary texts (and hence ‘poetic’ metaphors) will be more translatable than conventional metaphors to the degree that they are less culture-bound and are thus able to dispense with *culture-specific* information.
- (4) Finally it seems reasonable to assume that ‘decorative’ metaphors (as e.g., in journalistic prose) will impose lower requirements on the translator than ‘creative’ ones (as in poetry); to the degree that they are less relevant for the communicative function of the text — at least in so far as their ‘vehicles’ are concerned — they may often either be substituted by TL-specific equivalents or paraphrased.

Thus the translatability of metaphor can stand as a model for translatability with regard to different types of text. It will be obvious, however, that the

foregoing principles must not be interpreted as unconditioned universal laws. They are to be understood as hypothetical statements about more or less probable relations, and are tentative in so far as they may invite further explication and generalization.

7. HIGHER CONSTRAINTS ON TRANSLATION: TRANSLATIONAL NORMS

A further step to be taken would involve a description of the various ways in which metaphors are actually translated by different generations, in different periods of literary history, between particular pairs of languages and literatures, and by individual translators. Such a description would certainly allow the student to discover regularities and recurrent patterns, which historical poetics could account for. It is not my intention to make a start with this description, not even to state the general lines along which it might be undertaken.

It seems however quite acceptable to assume that the actual ways in which metaphors in literary texts are translated stand in close relation to rules and norms. In this connection the concept of “initial norm” as developed by Gideon Toury (1976) will be a useful tool for the distinction between ‘basic’ attitudes. According to Toury the translator is always confronted with a “basic choice between two polar alternatives deriving from the two major constituents of the ‘value’ in literary translation [...]: he either subjects himself to the original text, with its textual relations and the norms expressed by it and contained in it, or to the linguistic and literary norms active in the TL and in the target literary polysystem, or a certain section of it.”

Although the translator’s practical decisions will rarely represent one or the other alternative in its ‘pure’ form — that is to say that the decisions made will thus generally be some combination of these two extremes — a description of metaphor translation in terms of initial norms can start from the following basic distinction:

- (1) If the translation adheres to the SL norm, metaphors will tend to be translated ‘*sensu stricto*,’ even if the resulting item in TL might prove to be incompatible with the target linguistic and/or literary norms. This *retentive* mode of translating is then responsible for the deviant (or ‘alienating’, i.e., exotic and/or archaic) character of translated metaphors.
- (2) If the second position is adopted, SL metaphors are most likely to be replaced by more or less corresponding (or equivalent) TL metaphors, or will at least often be adapted. The prevailing mode here is substitution by which original metaphors are *domesticated*, i.e., adapted to the prevailing norms of the target system, which eventually determine the *acceptability* of translational equivalents.

The acceptance of this concept of translational norms has fargoin consequences for a description of actual metaphor translation. It may, for example, account for the fact that sometimes bold SL metaphors are replaced by plain or flat TL items, or that certain SL conventional metaphors are distorted or even omitted in the translation. In such cases it is important to realize that the translation of metaphors, together with the other literary devices, is subjected to

higher hierarchies of constraints than merely linguistic ones. In either position (retention vs. domestication) it is the literary models that function as constraints on the availability of linguistic options in a translated text. Even when, for example, the TL may possess an item that corresponds perfectly to a given SL metaphor, the norms governing these models may neutralize the serviceability of the former (this idea has been suggested to me by Itamar Even-Zohar).

Another interesting aspect of this concept is that it links up with certain insights of historical poetics concerning the role and status of the translator as an 'author.' In certain periods, Classicism for instance, the position of the translator was assumed to equal that of an original author. Hence his freedom to submit the text to the prevailing aesthetic and moral canons, and to adapt it to contemporary taste. In other periods, the Romantic era for example, the role of the original author was revalued, whereas the translator was only accorded an inferior position. Therefore his task was mainly one of preserving the peculiarities of the author by rendering his text as 'faithfully' as possible (cf. Popovič, 1967: 616).

8. CONCLUSION

One of the objections that could be raised to this discussion of metaphor in translation is that it treats this poetic device as if it were something that can be dealt with in isolation, i.e., apart from the other poetic means. It is clearly understood, however, that the translatability of metaphor in concrete texts will depend on the relations into which it enters with the other elements on various levels (syntactic, prosodic, etc.). It is also obvious that analysis must necessarily separate and treat in isolation what in reality presents itself combined and unified. The few generalizations that follow from the discussion do not stand for metaphor only. They may apply — *mutatis mutandis* — to translation of literature in general and must therefore be supplemented with further generalizations concerning other poetic phenomena. What I have mainly attempted to show is that certain generalizations *can* be made. Since the theory is concerned with *discovering* regularities, it should not try to create them by imposing rules or norms on translational practice. I hope that this paper, in that it brings a tentative description of how and to which extent metaphors can be translated, has in a sense contributed to clarifying what a theory of translation can actually try to achieve.

REFERENCES

- CATFORD, J.C., 1965. *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* (London: OUP).
 DAGUT, M.B., 1976. "Can 'Metaphor' Be Translated?" *Babel* XII, 21-33.
 EVEN-ZOHAR, ITAMAR, 1971. *Introduction to a Theory of Literary Translation* (Ph.D. Thesis. Tel Aviv (English abstract)).
 GARVIN, PAUL L., 1958. *A Prague School Reader on Esthetics, Literary Structure and Style* (Washington: Georgetown).
 GIPPER, HELMUT, 1966. *Sprachliche und geistige Metamorphosen bei Gedichtübersetzungen* (Düsseldorf: Schwann).

- GREIMAS, A.J., 1966. *Sémantique Structurale: Recherche de Méthode* (Paris: Larousse).
- HAUSMANN, FRANZ JOSEF, 1974. *Studien zu einer Linguistik des Wortspiels* (Tübingen: Niemeyer).
- KLOEPFER, ROLF, 1967. *Die Theorie der literarischen Übersetzung* (München: Fink).
- LEECH, GEOFFREY, 1966. "Linguistics and the Figures of Rhetoric," in: Roger Fowler, ed., *Essays on Style and Language* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul), 135–156.
- 1974 *Semantics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin).
- LEFEVERE, ANDRÉ, 1975. *Translating Poetry: Seven Strategies and a Blueprint* (Amsterdam/Assen: Van Gorcum).
- LOTMAN, JURIJ, 1972. *Die Struktur literarischer Texte* (München: Fink).
- PAULHAN, JEAN, 1953. *La Preuve par l'Étymologie: Métrique 1* (Paris: Minuit).
- POPOVIČ, ANTON, 1967. "Die theoretischen Probleme der Übersetzung," *Literatur und Kritik* XX, 611–617.
- RICHARDS, I.A., 1936. *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York & London: OUP).
- SHIBLES, WARREN, A., 1971. *Metaphor: An Annotated Bibliography and History* (Whitewater, Wisconsin: The Language Press).
- TOURY, GIDEON, 1976. "The Nature and Role of Norms in Literary Translation," in: James S Holmes, José Lambert and Raymond van den Broeck, eds., *Literature and Translation: New Perspectives in Literary Studies* (Leuven: ACCO), 83–100.
- WELLEK, RENÉ AND WARREN, AUSTIN, 1963. *Theory of Literature*, 3rd. edition (Harmondsworth: Penguin).