

“Translating metaphor – what is the problem?”

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Translating figurative language involves aligning the linguistic, conceptual, communicative and cultural systems of one language with those of another language (cf. Steen 2011). Taking metaphor as a central problem, questions have been raised about the very possibility to do so by many scholars. In this talk I aim to differentiate a number of these problems in order to assess their relative magnitude and relevance.

Firstly, if most lexical metaphor is a matter of conventional use, why would there be an insuperable problem in aligning these conventional metaphorical uses across languages with each other? Furthermore, how often do two languages in fact differ in exhibiting different patterns between conventionalized metaphorical use; and if these different metaphorical uses between two languages are conventional, is it then enough to make one decision about the way in which the difference has to be resolved?

Secondly, when metaphors are not conventional, what sorts of problems arise between the two languages in simply transferring the novel source domain from one language to the other? Since novel metaphor occurs rather rarely, how important is this issue in comparison with the first issue? Does it mostly pertain to translation of poetry, for instance?

Thirdly, novel metaphor use is typically a form of deliberate metaphor use. However, conventional metaphors may also be used deliberately. Does this change the situation for the translation of conventional metaphors developed above? In other words, how does the deliberate use of a metaphor as a metaphor affect the status and function of the expression for translators? Or is this a non-issue?

Fourthly, if metaphor is defined as the expression of a cross-domain mapping, it does not have to be limited to pure metaphor in language. Simile, analogy, and extended comparison may then also be treated as forms of metaphor. Moreover, it may be assumed that these are typically deliberate forms of metaphor use. As a result, how does this area of investigation relate to the picture developed in answer to the third point above?

These are the themes to be addressed in this talk, which will therefore have a reflective and possibly agenda setting purpose.

References:

Steen, G.J. 2011. “The contemporary theory of metaphor—Now new and improved!”, *Review of Cognitive Linguistics* 9(1), 26-64.

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