

Metaphor in multiple learner corpus translations

Metaphor is frequently viewed as a translation problem, “a kind of ultimate test of any theory of translation” (Toury 1995). Much focus in translation studies has revolved around the extent to which metaphor is translatable and the development of guidelines for metaphor translation. In addition, a growing body of research is being produced in the field of Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS), investigating what translations actually are rather than what they should be (see e.g. Rosa 2010, Toury 1995). The present study contributes to this endeavor through an exploration of the translation of metaphors found in the Norwegian-English Student Translation Corpus (NEST; <http://clu.uni.no/humfak/nest/>), a corpus of L2 learner language. This investigation thus marries DTS with learner corpus research.

This investigation identifies and categorizes the translation of metaphors from 30 different Norwegian source texts (ST) in a total of 287 English translated texts (TT), thereby both describing individual translations and providing comparative descriptions of several TTs derived from the same ST. The paper focuses on the translations of three types of metaphors, identified using MIPVU (cf. Steen et al. 2010) metaphorical verbs, codified in Norwegian, 2) idioms, which are often culture-specific and 3) potentially deliberate metaphorical expressions such as similes and other figurative analogies (cf. Nacey 2013, Steen 2008).

The informants have Norwegian as their L1, and are advanced L2 learners of the target language (TL) enrolled on one of several parallel tertiary-level translation courses taken as part of their English studies. The main goal of the translation courses was to raise language awareness, thereby increasing these learners’ English proficiency. The translations were meant to adhere to the principle of faithfulness, mirroring the STs as closely as possible. STs range from 200 to 900 words and cover different topics and text types, so as to illustrate a variety of contrastive challenges for the learners to translate and discuss. Texts thus range from instructional pamphlets and newspaper articles to fictional prose. Most STs have multiple translations (mean = 9.5 TTs per ST).

Translated metaphors have been categorized following Newmark’s (1981) proposed guidelines for translating metaphor, listed in Table 1 along with the translation strategy abbreviations adopted in this investigation.

	Translation strategy	Abbreviation
1	Reproduction of the same SL metaphor in the TL	$M \rightarrow M$
2	Replacement of the SL metaphor with a standard TL metaphor	$M_1 \rightarrow M_2$
3	Translation of the SL metaphor by simile	$M \rightarrow S$
4	Translation of metaphor (or simile) by simile plus sense [a literal gloss]	$M/S \rightarrow S + \text{gloss}$
5	Conversion of metaphor to sense [a literal paraphrase]	$M \rightarrow P$
6	Deletion of metaphor	$M \rightarrow \emptyset$
7	Translation of metaphor by same TL metaphor plus sense [a gloss]	$M \rightarrow M + \text{gloss}$

Table 1 Classification guidelines for metaphor translation

Newmark’s proposed procedures constitute a top-down approach, based on an assumption that the translators want to render the metaphors “as accurately as possible, not to pare them

down” (Newmark 1981). Actual translation occurrences were not consulted when drawing up the guidelines (see Fernández 2011). Thus, the present study adapts Newmark’s classification system, modifying it as indicated by the translation solutions actually chosen by the students – thereby ending up with a classification that represents the data under study.

Table 2 presents examples of each metaphor type, with sample categorizations of two authentic NEST translations (the minus sign indicates that information has been omitted in the translation):

	ST original	TT translation	Translation strategy
1	Ordene <u>risser opp</u> den nye tilværelsen	The words <u>cut out</u> the new existence (NEST_Kri_013en.s60)	M → M
		The words <u>shaped</u> the new way of life (NEST_Kri_001en.s61)	M ₁ → M ₂
2	“kjerringa-mot-strømmen-holding”	attitude of contrariness (NEST_Opp_115en.s38)	M → P
		”going against the grain attitude” (NEST_Opp_004en.s37)	M ₁ → M ₂
3	som ild med en ring av lys omkring	like fire enclosed by a circle of light (NEST_Nor_013en.s16)	M → M
		like fire all around within it ... (NEST_Nor_014en.s14)	M → M (-)

Table 2 Sample translation categorization

Access to multiple TTs of the same STs allows for mapping the varying strategies adopted to solve the identical translation challenge. The subsequent analysis and discussion centers on the linguistic and conceptual hurdles metaphor presents for novice L1-L2 translators.

References

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