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Cognitive Approach to Metaphor Translation in Literary Discourse

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Abstract

In this paper, a cognitive approach to metaphor translation in literary discourse is used, with a reference to a collection of short stories by a famous Russian writer Vasily Shukshin (1929-1974) and their translations in English. The study presented is focused on the analysis of the anthropomorphous metaphor, in particular the conceptual mapping between MAN and NATURE concepts described contrastively in source and target texts. The theoretical framework relies on the cognitive approach to metaphor, most notably on Mandelblit's (1995) Cognitive Translation Hypothesis.

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1. Introduction

In the translation process we create new texts (target texts) which exist independently from their source texts not only as products of the target language (TL) but also within the target culture. Investigations into the relationship between source (the text to be translated into another language) and target texts (the translated text) were incorporated into Translational Studies (TS), the scientific discipline dealing with theoretical and practical aspects of the process of rendering information from one language into another. Metaphor has become one of the main linguistic objects of comparative investigations between source and target texts. The tasks of metaphor translation make it necessary to outline the key views on metaphor, past and present. Metaphor is for most people a device of poetic imagination and ornamental aspect of speech that is used for some artistic and rhetorical purpose. Or, as the Encyclopedia Britannica puts it: "metaphor [is a] figure of speech that implies comparison between two unlike

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entities, as distinguished from simile, an explicit comparison signaled by the words “like” or “as”. Moreover, metaphor is typically viewed as characteristic of language alone, a matter of words rather than thought or action.

Up until most recently, metaphor has been primarily studied by philosophers, rhetoricians, literary critics, psychologists, linguists. Now there is a greater emphasis on situating metaphor studies within broad, comprehensive models of human cognition, communication, and culture. Lakoff and Johnson initiated a new study more than thirty years ago. In fact, it was their work “*Metaphors We Live By*” that changed the way linguists thought about metaphor; moreover, it partly defined cognitive linguistics itself as we know it today. Lakoff (1980) and his collaborators have provided an impressive empirical demonstration of the prominence of metaphorical thought in everyday life (i.e. our everyday concepts are structured by the conventional metaphors). Moreover, they have shown how many of the novel metaphors in poetry can be analyzed as new extensions or new combinations of conceptual metaphors (Lakoff, Turner, 1989). In general, cognitive theorists identify metaphor as a process of mapping between two different conceptual domains: the target domain (the concept to be described by the metaphor), and the source domain (the concept drawn upon, or used to create the metaphorical construction).

In recent decades, metaphor has been widely discussed within the discipline of Translation Studies, predominantly with respect to translatability (van den Broeck, 1981) and has since tackled the issues from several points of view (prescriptive, contextual, descriptive and cognitive) and in relation to different types of discourse. To put it another way, metaphor translating centers around three points: transfer procedures, text-typologies, and cultural specificity.

This paper attempts to investigate the anthropomorphous metaphor from a cognitive perspective with a reference to translation procedures and cultural adequacy in the literary discourse.

2. Methodology

The translation of metaphor has always been a source of discussion and conflict. It has been argued that metaphors can become a translation problem, since transferring them from one language and culture to another one may be hampered by linguistic and cultural differences. Different theories and approaches have been proposed with regard to metaphor translation, each has tackled this problem from a different point of view. The late twentieth century presented several papers on translation studies that touched on the subject in one way or another (Nida, 1964; Reiss, 1971; Dagut, 1976; van den Broeck, 1981; Newmark, 1988; Snell-Hornby, 1988; and others). Some contradictory views on the limits of metaphor translatability have emerged from these studies:

- Metaphors are untranslatable (Nida, 1964; Dagut, 1976).
- Metaphors are fully translatable (i.e. metaphor translation is no different than translation in general) (Reiss, 1971; Mason, 1982).
- Metaphors are translatable but pose a considerable degree of inequivalence (van den Broeck, 1981; Newmark, 1988).

An overwhelming empirical evidence of metaphor translatability makes the first viewpoint quite untenable. The second opinion is obviously ambiguous as stylistic appropriateness, cultural adequacy should be taken into account when translating metaphors that can become a challenging task for a translator. The adherents of the last realistic view are P. Newmark and R. van den Broeck. As metaphor considered as not only a stylistic rhetorical device but also a cultural phenomenon, certain types of metaphors are often predominant in specific genres. Newmark believes that choosing from among the strategies to translate metaphors is strongly contingent upon their types (scientific-technological (informative), institutional-cultural (vocative), literary texts (expressive texts) (Newmark, 1988). Newmark taxonomizes different types of metaphors in relation to their contextual factors and translation procedures. He designed ‘A Diagram of Metaphors and Their Translations’ presented in Table 1.

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