Frame semantics at the core of creativity in translation

The main tenet in translation is to produce in the target text (TT) the same effects of the source text (ST). Thus, expectedly, a metaphor in the ST with its rich inferences will be a metaphor in the TT passing on the same inferences. Metaphors are mechanisms largely used to describe concepts in terms of others (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 1999). By applying features from one domain to another, aspects are highlighted, and images and feelings evoked. This is what the translator will seek to create in the TT.

One can not begin to grasp the process of translation without a linguistic model that regards words and phrases in a text as being closely related to people’s experiences of the world. Such a model of comprehensive explanatory value is Fillmore’s frame semantics (1977, 1982, 1985), according to which words that make an expression induce conceptual frames motivated by our whereabouts in the world, experiences, norms, values, attitudes and cultural practice. Depending on contextual information, words bring about particular semantic features, roles, purposes and sequences of events, and not all the frames potentially associated to it. Accordingly the words that make up a metaphorical utterance, in the sense of the frames they evoke, serve as prompts for a dynamic process of meaning construction on-line. That is to say the frames activate mental spaces, arrays of connections between them take place, and meaning and conceptualization are in this way rendered (Fauconnier 1994, 1997, Fauconnier & Turner 1996, 2002, 2008).

The effects of a metaphor are intimately dependent on the very words that compose it, and difficulty crops up when the lexicon of the target language does not contain a word that activates the same frames as the ones activated by a word in a given context in the source language. That’s when creativity comes in. Facing the lack of a formal match in the target language, the translator, in order to pass on the aspects highlighted, the images and the feelings evoked in the ST, creates novel expressions that are productive in conveying comparable effects as well as being formally adequate. I attempt to describe the creative process in the translation of metaphors, by looking into the mental processes behind metaphorical utterances in the ST and in the TT, namely frames activated, mental spaces set-up, cross-domain connections and blends. Bottom line is: in order to achieve an intended meaning, one needs appropriate prompts, there is to say words that evoke frames that bring in the necessary process of meaning construction that will render the desired effects. I will look into metaphors that are novel, singular or unusual in the pair Norwegian-Portuguese.
References


