The Heart of Language
-Translating Metaphors in an Informative Text

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Abstract

This paper is an analysis of the translation of metaphors in an English informative text and its Swedish translation. The English source text is entitled *The Madonna of Stalingrad: Mastering the (Christmas) Past and West German National Identity after World War Two*, and the Swedish target text is entitled *Madonnan från Stalingrad: att behärska det (nazistiska) förflutna och västtysk identitet efter andra världskriget*. The aim of this essay is to investigate how metaphors in an English informative text can be translated to Swedish. The analysis is based on translation strategies suggested by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), and Newmark (1988). The understanding of metaphors is based on theories by a number of scholars, such as Lakoff and Johnson (1980), and Knowles and Moon (2006).

In this paper, metaphors are divided into two groups, referred to as “literal metaphors” and “aesthetic metaphors”. The point is to convey that metaphors are not always “poetic” but actually very common in everyday language; we usually do not reflect upon the fact that we use metaphors all the time.

The result of the analysis shows that English and Swedish metaphors are often based on the same images, which indicates that English and Swedish Language cultures are similar. The analysis also shows that even though literal translation of English metaphors often is possible, in many cases transposition or especially modulation is required to make the metaphor idiomatic in Swedish. In most cases, the need for another solution than literal translation seems to be linked to context.

**Keywords:** translation, metaphors, translation strategies, informative text.
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1.1 Introduction

What is translation? The answer to that question has puzzled theorists ever since translation first became a field of its own. The main issue has always been about whether direct or free translation is the correct norm. Some theorists believe direct translation is the only acceptable way of translating because the goal is to be true to the source text and the author. Others have a more flexible view and believe it is equally important to be true to the target text readers and the conditions of the target language (Ingo, 2007: 17). Theory book after theory book has suggested models for dealing with different types of texts and, of course, some more or less general principles have attained a certain status. Reiss (1976), for example, proposes that informative and expressive texts should be handled differently. She suggests that a translation of an informative text should mainly be focused on content, while in an expressive text it is equally or even more important to consider the aesthetic form (Reiss, 1976: 20). This is one of many issues in translation theory and there are plenty of in-depth theories on all aspects of the transfer of units from one language to another. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that there are no undisputable solutions in the field of translation and some cynics might even say that there are no right translations, only those who are less wrong. The reason that I have brought up the “true to the content vs. true to the aesthetic form” aspect is that this basic idea is something to keep in mind now that I will move on to what this paper is about: the translation of metaphors.

This paper will focus on the translation of metaphors in an informative text. This is an interesting area of study because, as I stated above, the main aim when translating an informative text is to transfer the content of the source text to the target text, and the formal aspect is usually considered secondary. However, metaphors are common in informative texts as well and the translator has to consider whether there is an equivalent metaphor in the target language, whether the metaphor is used in the same way in the target language, and whether the expressive element in cases of metaphors is important for the target text.

The transfer of metaphorical units from English to Swedish poses a challenge for translators. One might usually think of metaphors as poetic, fanciful or rhetorical, or that they only occur in expressive texts where the author’s goal is to be artistic. However, this is not necessarily true. Metaphors are also literal (in the sense that they are non-poetic) and may well be used in other types of texts, but, as I will show, for other reasons.

One can actually say that English and Swedish are metaphorically structured (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 5). What this means is that when we try to conceptualize something we tend to
use everyday experiences in order to make it comprehensible, and these everyday experiences
are tied to culture (ibid: 8). Consider the term “cast”. In film and theater, this term is used to
describe “occupying a role”. Here, the use is metaphorical. “Cast” originates from the
everyday experience of, for example, casting iron; that is the non-metaphorical usage. In other
words, the term “cast” can be moved from one setting to another and consequently become
metaphorical.

The change from non-metaphorical to metaphorical is possible on the condition that the
resulting metaphor is coherent with the values of the specific culture (Lakoff & Johnson,
1980: 22). Let us consider the language cultures of English and Swedish. They are both
Germanic languages and both tied to what is normally referred to as “the western world”. They
are therefore similar in many aspects; the use of approximately the same metaphors
being one example of the similarities. However, they can also be considered “subcultures”
(ibid: 23) of the overall western culture. The question at hand is whether the metaphor has the
same connotative value in Swedish as in English. Will Swedish readers consider a particular
metaphor as something that they actually use in that particular context? Hence, one has to
consider if the original meaning of a term can be taken from one setting and be placed in
another, subsequently creating a metaphor, without rendering the target text “abnormal”
(Munday, 2008: 45).

English and Swedish both use metaphors that are not normally thought of as metaphors
because they are so closely related to how we think (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 11). This
applies to verbs, nouns, and adjectives, as well as adverbs and participles. The previously
discussed “cast” is an example of this. The metaphor that is to be translated into Swedish must
not feel “abnormal” to the reader; it must feel natural. If it does not, the text will be exposed
as a translation. Consequently, the translator must determine whether the metaphor meets the
cultural requirements for a literal translation or if it has to be dealt with in some other way.

1.2 Aim
The aim of this paper is to investigate how metaphors can be translated from English to
Swedish in an informative text. The following types of metaphors will be analyzed:

- Literal metaphors
- Aesthetic metaphors
1.3 Method
The data used for the purpose of this paper was obtained in two steps. Firstly, by translating an English informative text into Swedish and secondly, by identifying and classifying the translation strategies and theories of metaphors relevant for the aim of the paper. The source text (henceforth “ST”) and the target text (henceforth “ST”) will be discussed in further detail under Material below.

In the first step, the translation of the ST, different thesauruses such as Nordstedts, Oxford English Dictionary, tyda.se and NE proved useful sources for terminology, especially for capturing the alternative meanings of English terminology. Moreover, parallel texts also constituted a valuable source in the translation process. By studying such texts, important stylistic features of informative texts were recognized, and subject specific terms were obtained. Examples of those parallel texts are the Swedish translation of Antony Beevor’s *Stalingrad* by Ulf Irheden, Barbro Eberan’s *Vi är inte färdiga med Hitler på länge än*, Johan Östberg’s “Historie- och minneskultur i det återförenade Tyskland”, and several articles published in Populär Historia by esteemed historians such as Folke Schimanski.

In the second step, the identification and classification of translation strategies and theories of metaphors, several translation methods and a range of metaphor theories were important tools for handling the translation problem that this paper is focused on. The translation strategies include Vinay and Darbelnet’s methodology of translation (1995) and Newmark’s translation methods (1988). The theories of metaphors include works of Nida (1964), Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Ingo (2007), Newmark (1988), Knowles and Moon (2006), Reiss (1976), and Kelly (1979). Both the strategies and the theories will be discussed in detail in the section Background.

1.4 Material
The ST for the investigation of the metaphorical challenge of translation is an informative social science text entitled “The Madonna of Stalingrad: Mastering the (Christmas) Past and West German National Identity after World War II”. It was written by the American scholar Joseph B. Perry and was published in the *Radical History Review*, number 83, in 2002. The translation covers the first five sections of the article.

The purpose of the ST is to highlight the problematic and complicated issue of German guilt in post-war West Germany. Perry focuses on how Germans have tried to alter the perception of the ordinary citizens’, and especially the ordinary soldiers’, role in crimes
committed by the Nazis during the war. He claims that religion in particular has played an important role in altering the memories of WW2 in order to reduce the feeling of guilt and responsibility.

The target readers of the ST are most likely members of the scientific “community”. The ST is part of a particular field of social science that focuses on the effects of Nazism and the war on post-war Germany and its people. The question of guilt is a major issue in this field of research.

In fiction, which can be considered an expressive text type, the metaphor often has an emotive function. In other words, the expressive feature is not only the means to an end, but it has value by itself. In non-fiction, however, the metaphor is only the means to an end, i.e. getting the meaning of the content across (Stålhammar, 1997: 8, 50). The ST mostly contains metaphors that are closely connected to how we think. From this we can draw two conclusions. One, the ST author uses metaphors because he needs them to convey his message. Two, the author has picked these metaphors based on his cultural experience. Or in the words of Dagut: “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” (1976: 32). The reason the author needs to use metaphors is because the point he is trying to make is rather abstract. He deals with concepts such as “holiday spirit”, “nationalist themes” and “the rechristianization of Christmas”, the comprehension of which demands elaborate explanation in the form of metaphors.

To explain these concepts, the ST contains a kind of metaphors that Ingo calls “semantic metaphors”. He puts these in contrast to what he refers to as “fictional metaphors” (2007: 119). The difference between these two types of metaphors will be discussed in the section Background.

Regarding the TT, which is entitled “Madonnan från Stalingrad: att behärska det (nazistiska) förflutna och västtysk identitet efter andra världskriget”, the target readers are the same, as the aim of this paper is to analyze the translation of metaphors and not to analyze how the TT can be altered to suit a wider audience. The purpose of the translation is to convey the same content and values as the ST, and the paper focuses on how to deal with the metaphors to render the content and the values as clear in the TT as in the ST. However, the TT will naturally contain other changes due to grammatical differences in English and Swedish. Some terminology has also been modified to fit the Swedish linguistic prerequisites.
1.5 Background

In this section, I will present the translation strategies and the theories of metaphors mentioned in section 1.3. They constitute the basis for the subsequent analysis of the translation.

1.5.1 Translation Strategies

The translation strategies employed in this paper are taken from Vinay and Darbelnet’s *Comparative Stylistics of French and English* (1995), and Newmark’s *A Textbook of Translation* (1988). Vinay and Darbelnet, first, make a distinction between “direct translation” and “oblique translation” (indirect translation) (1995: 31). A conventional type of direct translation is what Vinay and Darbelnet call “literal translation”, which involves finding the same term in the target language (henceforth “TL”) and making sure that the term fits both grammatically and idiomatically into the TL (1995: pp.33–34). This kind of translation is often possible when the source language (henceforth “SL”) and the TL are part of the same language family and even more often when they belong to the same culture (1995: 34), which is the case with English and Swedish. The following example of a literal translation of a metaphor is taken from the ST:

(1) Spoke to the heart.

Talade till hjärtat.

Vinay and Darbelnet point out that there are cases where literal translation is not possible. A possible solution is then what they call “oblique translation”. This method includes, for instance, “transposition” and “modulation”. Transposition is suitable when the SL form of a term is structurally impossible to transfer to the TL (Vinay and Darbelnet, 1995: 35). Transposition is defined as “replacing one word class with another without changing the meaning of the message” (ibid: 36). The semantic sense remains the same but the form in which it is presented changes. An example of a transposition of a metaphor from the ST is:

(2) But the language of National Socialism also maps it.

Men nationalsocialismens språk sätter den också på kartan.
Modulation, on the other hand, involves changing the “point of view”. This is taking the translation a step further as modulation presupposes a greater knowledge of both the TL and SL (ibid: 246), and at this stage of translating, the challenge is about recognizing an unidiomatic or awkward TL unit even though it might turn out perfectly grammatical by literal translation or transposition (ibid: 36). There are several types of modulation, such as changing the point of view from negative to positive or passive to active or vice versa (Vinay and Darbelnet, 1995: 252). There is one type of modulation that Vinay and Darbelnet call “change of symbol”, which is directly tied to metaphors and proceeds from the assumption that symbolism in different languages is based on different images. This makes literal translation of metaphors awkward because the readers of the TT might be surprised by the choice of expression and this could affect the naturalness of the TT (ibid: 253). The following is an example of modulation (change of symbol), where I have included a literal translation to clearly show the difference.

(3) Religion helped veterans like Schröter and legions of German readers recover some meaning from Stalingrad, packaged with the appeal of holiday sentimentalism.

Religionen hjälpte veteraner som Schröter och mängder av tyska läsare att finna någon mening med slaget vid Stalingrad, paketerat med kraften av jul sentimentalitet. (Literal translation)

Religionen hjälpte veteraner som Schröter och mängder av tyska läsare att finna någon mening med slaget vid Stalingrad, inlindat i kraften av jul sentimentalitet. (Modulation)

Literal translation, transposition and modulation are some of the methods put forth by Vinay and Darbelnet. In addition, this paper complements this contribution with that of Newmark. The reason for this is that Vinay and Darbelnet mostly discuss translation strategies on the level of language in general; in other words, they are mostly concerned with the SL and TL aspect. Newmark, on the other hand, suggests translation methods that are appropriate for different text types. This is a valuable addition to this paper, which moves on the border between expressive and informative. Newmark discusses two of his proposed methods of
translation as the only ones that fulfill what is most important in translation: “accuracy” and “economy”. He calls them “semantic translation” and “communicative translation” respectively. The difference between these two is that semantic translation takes into account the aesthetic value of the ST while communicative translation is more concerned with content and the TT being reader-friendly (Newmark, 1988: pp.46–47). Newmark states that these two types of translation treat metaphors similarly, often literally, but that metaphors are often toned down in communicative translation, which is the preferred method when dealing with informative texts. On the contrary, semantic translation is often used for expressive texts (ibid: 47). If we are to understand why one and not the other of these methods above has been used in translating the ST metaphors, we must have greater knowledge of what a metaphor is, how it works, and how it relates to the overall theories of translation. This will be discussed in the next section.

1.5.2 Metaphor Theory

What is a metaphor? “The essence of a metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” is what Lakoff and Johnson would say (1980: 5). Kelly (1979: 33) is on the same track as he describes metaphors as something where the signifier changes while the signified remains the same. Knowles and Moon (2006: 3) speak of the metaphor as moving away from the literal sense to suggest a resemblance or to connect two language items. Undoubtedly, all these understandings are quite similar, but they nevertheless show how difficult it is to come up with a uniform definition of something that is rather abstract and sometimes transitory. To make things even more complicated, there are different types of metaphors.

Before discussing the different types, however, it is useful to consider what the purpose of metaphors is, since this will provide a better understanding of why they exist in the first place. Newmark (1988) states that metaphors have two purposes, one cognitive and one aesthetic. The cognitive purpose stems from the need to explain, to make things as clear as possible. When a literal explanation of an object, a person or a mental process, for example, is insufficient, a metaphor can be used. The aesthetic purpose is to please the senses, to make something interesting and fun to read (Newmark, 1988: 104). Obviously, it would be reasonable to assume that the purpose of metaphors in the ST analyzed in this paper is cognitive. However, aesthetic purposes do occur in non-fictional genres as well (Knowles and Moon, 2006: 5).
For the purpose of clarity, this essay divides metaphors into two groups, depending on whether their purpose is cognitive or aesthetic. On the one hand there are metaphors that are obvious, i.e. readers immediately recognize them as metaphors and will need to “unpack” them to understand their meaning (Knowles and Moon, 2006: 5). These metaphors are usually associated with literary texts because they are often new and temporary as they are many times the creation of an individual author at a moment of brilliance, where he or she has been able to create a new signifier, which may or may not become accepted into that particular language (Ingo, 2007: 119). (There are, of course, many examples of such metaphors that have become well-established in both Swedish and English). These metaphors are often rather aesthetic and this paper will therefore refer to them as “aesthetic metaphors”. Examples of such metaphors are:

(4) That gong-tormented sea (Yeats)
(5) The die is cast (Julius Caesar)

The other group of metaphors that this paper deals with is closely connected to the cognitive purpose of metaphors. In linguistic theory, these metaphors go by many names. Lakoff and Johnson, for example, call them “conduit metaphors” (1980: pp.11, 54–55). Their claim is that conduit metaphors are highly systematic in everyday life. Conduit metaphors, to them, are very much alive and “structure our actions and thoughts” (ibid: 55). They give the following example of the conduit metaphor:

(6) I gave you that idea.

The expression in (6) is so common that one usually does not contemplate the fact that an “idea” is not actually an object that can be physically “given”. Hence, “gave” is used metaphorically, and the example illustrates how metaphors are highly systematic in everyday life.

In their book “Introducing Metaphor” Knowles and Moon discuss the work of Lakoff and Johnson and they refer to the conduit metaphor as the “conceptual metaphor” (2006: 30). They also stress the importance of viewing this type of metaphor not primarily in terms of language but in terms of thinking. However, language provides a good way of seeing how these metaphors work in practice (ibid: 31). Perhaps one of the clearest and most obvious examples of a concept that shows that this type of metaphor is a part of how we think is an
example put forth by Lakoff and Johnson: “Argument is war” (1980: 4). Their point is that when we argue or talk about arguments we often try to make it comprehensible by using what for humans is a very familiar concept, namely war. The following examples of this are taken from their book:

(7) Your claims are indefensible.
(8) He attacked every weak point in my argument.

As one can see from examples 7 and 8, this type of metaphor is rarely thought of as a metaphor because it feels so natural; there is no interruption in this type of conceptualization. The reason why this is interesting in translation is because the different conceptualizations (argument is war is of course only one example) might vary from culture to culture (Knowles and Moon, 2006: 32). As stated earlier, Swedish and English are part of the overall western culture, but that does not exclude the possibility of different conceptualizations depending on what needs to be explained. However, if we are to understand this type of metaphor and the possible usage of the same metaphor in another language we need to investigate what is generally referred to as “source domain” (e.g. Knowles and Moon, 2006: 33). This will help us understand the cultural values of a specific language, which is what the metaphorical structure is based on (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 22).

The source domain can be exemplified with the “argument is war” concept. If we look again at example number 7 then “indefensible” is the metaphor. The concept of being indefensible comes from the area “war” which would consequently be its source domain. Besides source domain, Moon and Knowles describe what they call “target domain”, which is the area to which the metaphor is applied (2006: 33). In this case, the target domain would be “argument”. Thus, what is interesting for the translator is whether the concept originally found in the source domain can be transferred to the target domain in the same way in the TL without rendering the TT unnatural, or whether the translator has to pick the concept from another source domain which is more in line with the values of the TL culture. Since this type of metaphor constitutes such a big part of regular language, this paper will refer to it as the “literal metaphor”.

Now, how do these theories on metaphors fit in with the general translation theories? The answer to that is two-dimensional. On the one hand we have the aspect of text-type; on the other the aspect of language. As I discussed in the beginning of this section, there is a difference between expressive and informative texts. In expressive texts, the aesthetic feature
is of more importance than in informative texts, where the message is in focus. In informative
texts, the issue is whether the metaphor is necessary for the message of the translation or
whether a more “neutral” expression would be more suitable considering the text type.
However, Nida claims that a good translation “conveys the spirit and manner of the original”
(Nida, 1964: 164); hence, the translator must not completely ignore the aesthetic features.
This is the text aspect to consider if one is to determine to what extent the metaphors in the ST
can be rendered with a literal translation and to what extent they have to be altered to fit the
TT.

The other aspect – language – goes beyond text type; the focus here must be on whether
the items in the SL can be transferred to the TL unaltered and still remain just as natural to the
reader of the TT. English and Swedish words that would normally be seen as the literal
translation of one another might have alternative meanings (Ingo, 2007: 57), which in
metaphorical terms would mean that the metaphorical meaning of an English word might not
have a metaphorical meaning in Swedish, or at least not in the same way, and one must be
aware of this or else the ST runs the risk of becoming unnatural.

Catford (1965: 27) is also concerned with contextual differences. He separates what he
calls “formal correspondent” and “textual equivalent”. The idea behind this is that even
though a SL category, for example a metaphor, has an equivalent category in the TL, this
equivalent might change depending on the textual context. Formal correspondent, then, is the
default equivalent while the textual equivalent is the contextual variant.

Now that we have a better understanding of translation strategies, the theories on
metaphor and how these theories relate to the overall theories of translation, it is time to move
on to the actual analysis of the metaphors in the ST and the translation of them in the TT.

2.1 Analysis
In this section I analyze interesting cases of metaphors in the ST and the translation of these in
the TT on the basis of the translation strategies and theories of metaphors discussed in the
previous section. The analysis is divided into sub-sections, on the basis of what translation
strategy has been used in the TT.
2.1.1 Literal Translation

In this first sub-section, this paper analyzes instances of literal translation from the ST to the TT. The results of the analysis show that an informative text may contain both literal and aesthetic metaphors, which can be translated literally.

(9) Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, the central tourist site in the heart of West Berlin.

Minneskyrkan Kaiser Wilhelm Gedächtniskirche i hjärta av Västberlin.

In (9), the metaphors are “heart” and “hjärta”. The function of “heart” is to describe the location of Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in West Berlin. The source domain of “heart” is the human body, in which it is generally thought of as the most important organ and as having a central position. Consequently, in example 9, the Memorial Church is described as being positioned in the central parts of West Berlin, but it may also mean that these parts of West Berlin are the most important, historically and culturally, to the people of the city or that this is where the “pulse” is the highest. The Swedish translation in the TT is “hjärta”, which cannot be considered unidiomatic since the understanding of “heart” would be pretty much the same in the Swedish culture. An alternative translation, though not literal, would be to use “kärna”. However, though this solution would capture the “central” aspect of the metaphor, it would lose the “important” aspect.

In this particular case, both “heart” and “hjärta” can probably be considered literal metaphors because it would not be interruptive to any reader since the meaning of “heart” and “hjärta” is so closely connected to how we think in both the English and Swedish language cultures. Hence, the use of “hjärta” in the TT would be acceptable even though this is an informative text, which mainly focuses on content rather than form. Besides, even if the metaphor is aesthetic, it could still be used considering what Nida says about conveying “the spirit of the original” (1964: 164; see also section 1.5.2). In this case, “hjärta” would not only render the text idiomatic but it would also help to retain some of the original spirit.

The next example of literal translation clearly shows how literal metaphors are closely connected to everyday experiences:

(10) According to Security Service reports, the public responded positively to this interweaving of the holiday spirit with nationalist themes […]
Enligt säkerhetstjänsten reagerade allmänheten positivt på denna sammanvävning av julstämning och nationalistiska teman […]

In (10), the metaphors are “interweaving” and “sammanvävning”. Here, “interweaving” is used to describe the way in which “the holiday spirit” was combined with “nationalist themes”. The source domain of interweaving is the area of textile, where one weaves cloth to create a product. This is a perfect example of how we try to conceptualize the combination of two abstract phenomena like “the holiday spirit” and “nationalist themes” by using a concrete phenomenon like “weaving”. In the TT, the Swedish translation is literal, “sammanvävning”, which has the same source domain as “interweaving. The question is whether “sammanvävning” has the same metaphorical sense in Swedish and to what extent it is used in informative texts. Swedish Transportstyrelsen, for example, uses “sammanvävning” to describe when two traffic lanes merge into one (Vägmärkesförordningen, 2007: 90). In a suggestion to the Swedish Riksdag in 2002 we can read that “revisorerna har funnit att sammanvävningen av ansvar mellan staten och kommunerna […]” (Förslag till Riksdagen, 2002/03: RR21). Consequently, it is obvious that a literal translation of “interweaving” is perfectly acceptable and idiomatic and that it can be applied to widely different contexts. It would also be safe to conclude that this is a case of a literal metaphor, because the aesthetic purpose is secondary at best, and “interweaving” and “sammanvävning” are mainly there to concretize something otherwise abstract.

Example 11 is another example of literal translation but where the metaphors would not be considered literal:

(11) When I think back full of horror on the terrible years of the war, I wish that all the ruling statesmen in the world, who stand again on the edge of the abyss […]

När jag med skräck tänker tillbaka på krigets fruktansvärda år så önskar jag att alla världens ledare, som återigen står vid avgrundens rand […]

The metaphors in (11) could be considered aesthetic and constitute one of the very few examples of such metaphors in the texts. The example comes from a quote in the ST and the TT where a woman conveys her feelings about nuclear weapons. The metaphor “on the edge of the abyss” has a poetic, almost biblical, sense to it and cannot be considered “systematic”
or something that is based on “everyday experiences” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 8). In this case, the source domain would be that if you are standing on the edge of an abyss, you are close as you can be to falling into it and consequently die. And by falling into it, the political leaders will drag the rest of the world down with them. This sense would need more “unpacking” (i.e. understanding it might require a moment of reflection) than a literal metaphor, which strengthens its status as aesthetic. The Swedish translation in the TT is “vid avgrundens rand”, which is a literal translation and also a culturally set phrase in Swedish. This gives weight to the idea that languages of the same culture often share metaphors, but also that some aesthetic metaphors, instead of only being temporary, actually become accepted into a language for a longer period of time.

It seems like Newmark has a point when he states that what this paper defines as literal metaphors, in the form of verbs, “often defy literal translation and therefore offer choices” (1998: 106). In the TT, almost all metaphors in the form of verbs have been subjected to some type of change. However, example 12 shows that literal translation is possible

(12) His death in a Soviet POW camp underscored his status as victim […]

Hans död i ett sovjetiskt krigsfångeläger underströk hans status som offer […]

The main verb “underscored” in (12) has a metaphorical sense. The source domain of “underscored” is written communication, where one underlines to emphasize a particular section of text. This is clearly a literal metaphor as its main purpose is to conceptualize the rather diffuse concept “his status as victim”. In the TT, this metaphor has been translated literally as “underströk”. The phenomenon of underscoring text exists in Swedish as well; hence there is no cultural difference in that respect. But can it be used in a metaphorical sense as in English? The answer seems to be yes considering this example from “Europeiska gemenskapens officiella tidning” (2001: C89E/128): “Europeiska rådet i Feira underströk likaså småföretagens betydelse för tillväxt, konkurrenskraft och sysselsättning i unionen”. An alternative translation could be “förstärkte”, but as it has been concluded that the source domain is the same in the target culture and that this metaphor is being used in Swedish informative texts, I see no reason to deviate from the ST.

The next example is a quote from the ST that contains two metaphors, which have been translated literally. The issue with quotes in informative texts is that on the one hand you have
to consider the culture of the TL, but on the other hand, you have to be careful in altering
direct quotes.

(13) Goebbels’ speech in particular “struck the right tone and spoke to the heart”.

Goebbels tal i synnerhet “slog an rätt ton och talade till hjärtat”.

In example 13 there are the ST verb phrases “struck the right tone” and “spoke to the heart”,
which are metaphorical. They are there to describe the good qualities in Goebbels’ speech.
The source domain of “struck the right tone” is music. The right tone from an instrument will
sound good in the listeners’ ears and the wrong tone will, of course, sound awkward. The
source domain of “spoke to the heart” has to do with the characteristics ascribed to the human
heart. It is not only thought of as an organ but also something that contains certain qualities,
such as bravery, love and the perception of what is right and wrong. I would say that in this
particular context, at least, these two metaphors go beyond this paper’s definition of the literal
metaphor and into the space of aesthetic metaphors. They do have a conceptualizing
commission but they would probably not be systematic enough in the way we think to be
classified as literal metaphors. Furthermore, they are not likely to be found in the “normal”
sections of an informative text. Both the source domain “music” and “the heart” correspond to
the Swedish language culture. The TT translations are literal but they are also culturally set
phrases in Swedish, which even further illustrates the closeness of English and Swedish
language cultures. An alternative method would be to remove the metaphorical aspect and
write, for example, “Goebbels tal i synnerhet gjorde ett positivt intryck på folket”. This being
a direct quote, however, the TT solution is probably preferable.

2.1.2 Transposition
There were very few cases of transposed metaphors in the TT but one interesting case is the
following:

(14) Official and unofficial representatives of the postwar Protestant Church helped
develop a revised myth of War Christmas by exaggerating the religiosity of the
ordinary soldier. The rechristianization of Christmas lay at the heart of this
project, which marked a break with Nazi attempts to turn the holiday into a
celebration of the pagan “volk”.
Officiella och inofficiella representanter för efterkrigstidens protestantiska kyrka hjälpte till med att ta fram en reviderad myt om krigsjularna genom att överdriva religiositeten hos den vanlige soldaten. Återkristnandet av julen var kärnan i detta projekt eftersom man ville ta avstånd från nazisternas försök att göra julen till ett firande av en hednisk folkgemenskap.

Once again, in (14), the ST metaphor involves the expression “heart”. This time, “heart” is part of a prepositional phrase that is attempting to explain the status of the “rechristianization of Christmas” in a project by the Protestant Church. I will not go into a long discussion about the source domain of “heart” again, but in this context it is not a central location that is the meaning of “heart” but rather something of great importance. In the TT, the metaphor has been transposed into a noun phrase. To keep the metaphor in the form of a prepositional phrase would not be idiomatic in this particular context. A literal translation would be: “låg vid hjärtat av detta projekt”. However, the Swedish preposition ”vid” does not collocate with the noun” hjärta”. A Google search with “vid hjärtat av detta projekt”, for example, produces no results. The grammatical Swedish preposition in collocation with “hjärta” is “i”, which would render the translation “i hjärtat av detta projekt”. However, “i hjärtat av” generally collocates with places and not abstract nouns like project. Consequently, a transposition is necessary for the metaphor to fit into the Swedish language culture.

However, a transposition is not enough for this to be completely idiomatic in the TT. Simply a transposition would result in “var hjärtat i detta projekt”. In the TT, a modulation in the form of “change of symbol” has also taken place. Instead of “hjärtat”, the translation of “heart” is “kärna”. In Swedish informative texts, ”kärna” seems to be preferred when used to describe what is most important in a project, as in this example from ”Institutionen för reklam och PR” at Stockholm University: ”Själva kärnan i detta projekt är ju att ni ska visa att ni kan tillämpa det ni lärt er” (GI2 VT 2010: Uppdragsprojekt 15 HP).

2.1.3 Modulation

There are several examples of modulation in the TT where the ST metaphors have been what Newmark refers to as “toned down” (1988: 74; see also section 1.5.1); In other words, in these cases the translation is more communicative than semantic. The following translation exemplifies this:
The preserved ruins of the late-nineteenth-century Memorial Church tower […] are one of West Berlin’s central landmarks, meant to remind viewers of the cost of war.

De bevarade ruinerna av kyrktornet från sent 1800-tal […] är ett av Västberlins främsta landmärken. De finns där för att påminna besökare om vad krig innebär.

According to Lakoff and Johnson, a frequent conceptual metaphor is “time is money” as in “that flat tire cost me an hour” (1980: 8). Similarly, in example 15, the conceptual metaphor can be considered “war is money”. Thus, the source domain of the metaphor “the cost of war” is economics. However, it is probable that the phrase actually means that the problem is not that war costs money, but rather that it leads to the loss of human lives and the destruction of settlements. A literal translation into Swedish would be: “de finns där för att påminna besökare om vad krig kostar”. However, there is the risk of Swedish readers interpreting this as “money” instead of “human lives”. The fact that the ST discusses a ruined building could lead to the interpretation that the cost would be the amount of money it would take to rebuild it. Consequently, the translation in example 15 is more suitable because it uses the Swedish word “innebär”, which has a more neutral sense that will not be confused with “money”. To connect this more concretely to theory, modulation in the form “change of symbol” has taken place which has made the metaphor more idiomatic in this particular context: the formal correspondent has been replaced by the textual equivalent. Furthermore, this can be considered communicative translation rather than semantic, since the Swedish word “innebär”, even if it can be considered a literal metaphor, has lost all its original meaning and the metaphorical meaning is now fully incorporated in our system of thought, leaving no room for mixed connotations.

The next example illustrates how a change of symbol may be required or may at least be an alternative when a literal translation would result in a Swedish metaphor whose source domain is too strong for the metaphorical sense to be completely “the way we think”.

The Madonna and the didactic material around it position the invading German soldiers as suffering martyrs.

Madonnan och det omgivande ”upplysnings-materialet” framställer de invaderande tyska soldaterna som lidande martyrer.
In (16), the ST metaphor is “position” and the TT metaphor is “framställer”. Furthermore, a modulation in the form of “change of symbol” has taken place in the TT. A literal translation of “position” would be “placera” or “positionera”. The source domain of the ST metaphor is the area of placement; where something is. However, in this context, the position is not physical but figurative. The Swedish literal alternatives are sometimes used figuratively as well, which means that they can also be used metaphorically. A classic political Swedish example of “placera” being used metaphorically is “var placera du dig på höger-vänsterskalan?” Here, you only place yourself figuratively. “Positionera” is a common term in marketing as described in this Bachelor thesis from Luleå Tekniska Universitet: “syftet med denna uppsats är att beskriva hur företag namnger och positionerar sina produkter” (Johansson, H & Nylund, F, 2002). In this case, it is not the placement of products in certain stores that is intended, but how the products are being portrayed in comparison to other similar products on the market.

Consequently, both Swedish alternatives of literal translation can be used in a metaphorical sense. Nevertheless, in the TT, a modulation has been preferred; the question is why? The answer would be that in this particular context, which is not politics as such, and not marketing either but social science, “framställer” has a more neutral sense that will not be confused with the physical meaning as with “placera” and “positionera”. Thus, even though “placera” or “positionera” may be the formal correspondent of “position”, “framställer” could be considered the textual equivalent.

So far, the modulation strategy “change of symbol” has mostly been discussed in terms of toning down the metaphor. However, this is not always the case. Sometimes it simply means that the symbol does not fit in a particular context as the following example illustrates:

(17) Hopes for rescue collapsed after the holiday.

Hoppet om räddning dog efter julen.

In (17), “collapsed” is used to conceptualize the state of the abstract noun “hopes”. “Collapsed”, in its non-metaphorical sense, is used to describe the destruction of physical objects. A literal translation would be “hoppet om räddning kollapsade efter julen” and this would be understood by most Swedish readers. Undoubtedly, “kollapsade” has the same
source domain in Swedish and is used to describe physical objects as in “byggnaden kollapsade” or abstract objects as in “börsen kollapsade”. “Kollapsade” is consequently the formal correspondent of “collapsed”, but in this particular context it is not the textual equivalent. In the Swedish language culture, “hoppet” does not collocate with “kollapsade”, but rather with “dog”. A Google search shows that the combination “hoppet dog” produces 5 280 results while “hoppet kollapsade” produces none. Consequently, purely grammatically and in terms of understanding the metaphorical sense of “collapsed” a literal translation works, but from an idiomatic perspective, a modulation is required, as in example 17.

As stated in section 1.5.2, there are several types of modulation and so far I have brought up “change of symbol”. The next, “hat trick”, example illustrates how three types of modulation are involved in one single sentence:

(18) “Faith, belief and trust” in the Führer survived the test of defeat surprisingly well.

Nederlagets prövning rubbade inte soldaternas “tro, hopp och tillit” till Führern.

The metaphor in the ST is “survived” while the TT translation is “rubbade inte”. The source domain of the metaphor “survived” is, of course, that a living entity “did not die” or “made it through”, which in this context is used to conceptualize “faith, hope and trust in the Führer”, which logically could not survive anything because it cannot die in the same way a living entity can. Hence, “survived” has a metaphorical sense, but in the Swedish language culture, the translation of “test” is “prövning” and this does not collocate with “överlevde”, which means a “change of symbol” is required. Moreover, a search in “Språkbanken” shows that out of 121 instances of the word “överlevde” being used in “Göteborgsposten” during 2001, only in one context was “överlevde” used metaphorically. Hence, the solution in the TT is “rubbade inte”, which is also used metaphorically but clearly a change of point of view has taken place; the positive “survived” has become the negative “rubbade inte” and this is a type of modulation that Vinay and Darbelnet refer to as “negation of the opposite” (1995: 252).

However, with this solution, the ST sentence structure cannot be transferred into the TT. Another change of point of view has taken place, where the subject of the phrase in the ST, “faith, belief and trust in the Führer” has become the object of the phrase in the TT. Conversely, the object of the phrase in the ST, “the test of defeat”, has become the subject of the phrase in the TT, completing the three types of modulation in this sentence.
This example shows how a metaphorical unit in English can present a rather difficult challenge for Swedish translators, who, on the one hand, have to find an idiomatic translation, and, on the other hand, may have to alter the TT structure to make the phrase idiomatic in Swedish.

2.2 Conclusion

This paper set out to investigate how metaphors in an informative English text can be handled in a Swedish translation. The starting point was that even though the English and Swedish language cultures are similar, there might still be differences in how we tend to use metaphors. Another fundamental premise was that there are different types of metaphors, and in this paper they were divided into two groups: literal and aesthetic.

This paper was based on theories that view the metaphor as something that is closely connected to how we think; that we use metaphors that are based on everyday experiences to concretize abstract phenomena. Metaphors are not necessarily something that is used solely in fiction or poetry as an artistic tool but a necessary device in human communication. With this distinction, metaphors are very common, the literal metaphor in particular. This paper has shown the importance of investigating the source domain of a metaphor in order to understand why it is used in a specific context, as it is closely connected to the values of the language culture.

The conclusions that can be drawn from the analysis of the ST and the TT cannot be said to be universal as the data used in the paper only comes from one source. Nevertheless, there are some indications that point in a certain direction. It seems like the source domain of the literal metaphor, in most cases at least, is similar or the same in the Swedish language culture. This shows that the English and Swedish cultures largely share the same outlook. Consequently, literal translation of metaphors in the form of nouns or noun phrases, as well as metaphors in the form of verbs or verb phrases is often possible.

On the other hand, in some cases literal translation is not possible. This paper has shown that in those cases, the source domain is often the same in English and Swedish, and Swedish readers of the TT would in most cases understand a literal translation. The problem is that they would be surprised by the choice of word because it is unidiomatic; the quality of the translation would diminish. In such instances, a modulation in the form of “change of symbol” is required to make the metaphor feel comfortable in that particular context or, in order for it to collocate with the concept it is modifying.
There seems to be a tendency of toning down metaphors in the TT as in examples 15 and 16. The TT moves away from terms where the non-metaphorical sense in a term might be too strong for it to be used metaphorically in an informative text.

Moreover, it also seems like what this paper has defined as the aesthetic metaphor is rather scarcely applied in informative contexts, while the literal metaphor is very common.

This paper has contributed to the field of English to Swedish translation by highlighting the issue of metaphors. It has shown that the term “metaphor” is more intricate than one might usually think; metaphors are actually very common even though we might not always recognize them as metaphors. It has also shown that because Swedish and English language cultures as quite similar and that the source domain of metaphors is often the same, literal translation is often possible. However, in some cases, metaphors have to be changed or toned down in order for the text to be idiomatic in that particular context.

Considering the great impact the English language has on Swedish in terms of culture and business, subsequent research in the area of metaphors could focus on the way in which English metaphors have and will continue to have impact on the Swedish language. To what extent will unidiomatic use of metaphors become idiomatic in the future?


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