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TRANSLATING THE METAPHORS WE LIVE BY

Intercultural negotiations in conceptual
metaphors

Lakoff and Johnson's groundbreaking Metaphors We Live By (1980) has been widely translated. Drawing on a corpus of three translations into Romance languages (French, Italian and Spanish), the study considers the cross-cultural productivity of conceptual metaphors, as well as the intercultural negotiations at play in the translation process. While most conceptual metaphors seem to cut across these closely-related cultures, their linguistic realizations still present a significant degree of variation.

Keywords conceptual metaphor; translation; cross-cultural; Lakoff; George; Johnson; Mark

Introduction

Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) was a major advance in metaphor theory. Its revolutionary argument was that linguistic metaphors are realizations of a metaphorical process in our thought: Simply put, we speak metaphorically because we think metaphorically. The book's success has been due to the quality of its findings, but also to its attractive format. In particular, the choice to present several short chapters containing a wide array of examples of lexicalized metaphors hidden in our everyday language no doubt helps account for the work's wide readership and its many translations.

In the last 25 years, *Metaphors We Live By* has been translated into most European languages, and in some of these languages several editions have been published, which can be taken as further evidence of the book's continuing success. Such a plurality of translations is all the more striking if one thinks of both the limited circulation of scholarly publications, and the hegemonic role of English as a lingua franca in scholarly discourse. Given the way the use of examples in *Metaphors We Live By* embeds the text in American English and American culture, its various translations open up an interesting space for reflection on the cross-cultural validity of conceptual metaphor theory. Indeed, these translations seem the perfect case studies to test some assumptions about the translatability of metaphors and the existence of a shared repertoire of conceptual metaphors across different languages.

In this essay, I have chosen to focus on a coherent sub-corpus of three translations: French, Spanish and Italian. While this choice is clearly prompted by my own linguistic competence, it finds a more compelling coherence in their belonging to the same linguistic group, that of Romance languages. My analysis is designed to investigate the translatability of conventional metaphors and, more specifically, whether similarities exist among the three translations; whether these similarities can be traced back to common linguistic structures or cultural heritage; and, tentatively, whether Lakoff and Johnson's basic conceptual metaphors are equally productive in the different Romance languages and cultures. I shall begin by briefly introducing the topic of metaphor translation, before moving on to an overview of my working corpus and to the analysis of some practical examples.

The translatability of lexicalized metaphors

The translatability of metaphors has been the object of heated debate in translation studies since the 1980s, because of the density of the linguistic, cultural and cognitive elements simultaneously in play. Among the various models proposed, a useful 'law' of translatability was formulated by Raymond Van den Broeck (1981: 84), who argued that 'translatability keeps an inverse proportion with the quantity of information manifested by the metaphor and the degree to which this information is structured in a text'.

According to this simple proportional rule, some predictions can be made about the translatability of the metaphors considered here. On the one hand, all the metaphors listed by Lakoff and Johnson are either lexicalized or catachreses – the expression 'dead metaphors' is avoided on purpose, since the authors argue that these metaphors are *alive* in our minds (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003: 55). Their lexicalization may suggest that a low quantity of information is manifested, since they are fairly 'invisible' as metaphors, and the implications of their source domains have been made opaque by use. Indeed some of them are commonly considered to be instances of referential language, to the point that few people would notice the metaphorical foundation of expressions such as 'wasting your time', 'waking up', and 'falling asleep'. In sum, their translatability would be quite high if only the book did not 'revitalize' these metaphors by foregrounding the subjacent conceptual metaphors. While it is perfectly easy to find a satisfactory translation for an expression such as 'falling asleep' in any given language, it may be more complicated to find a satisfactory translation which also preserves the same conceptual metaphor, namely UNCONSCIOUS IS DOWN.¹ And unfortunately this latter constraint is vital in this specific case, being the very reason why the example found its way into the book.

At the same time, it should be noted that all the examples provided by Lakoff and Johnson are decontextualized and assembled solely as linguistic instances of the same conceptual metaphor. Therefore, going back to the second parameter in Van den Broeck's law of translatability, the information they show is not highly structured in the text, since they barely interact with other metaphorical occurrences outside the group they appear in. This could partially ease the task of the translators, presenting them with fewer constraints and a wider space for freedom and negotiation. This is, however, a space which translators may or may not decide to take up, as I will now try to show.

Analysing the translation corpus

In order to analyse the French, Spanish and Italian translations of Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* (hereafter EN), some preliminary information is required concerning the circumstances of their publication, their impact, and their paratextual apparatus, which are often revealing of both translators' and publishers' stances in relation to a source text.

The French translation (hereafter FR)² was published by Editions de Minuit (Paris) in 1985, five years after the American edition. It was included in the collection 'Propositions', directed by François Recanati and devoted to philosophical work on language (such as volumes by Gilles Fauconnier, Roman Jakobson, John Searle, and so on), and it has not been reissued since. The translation was carried out by Michel Defornel (with the collaboration of Jean-Jacques Lecercle) and it appeared with no paratextual addition, namely, no introduction and virtually no footnotes. FR presents roughly the same number of examples as the English text, and often accommodates small variations in order to find a French metaphor with a similar degree of currency as the English one. These strategies indicate a target-oriented approach in the translation, although FR is still far from a thoroughly 'domesticating' translation, and indeed several expressions remain unconventional in French.

The Spanish edition (SP) was published a year later, in 1986, by Càtedra (Barcelona). It was included in the collection Teorema – a series including translated essays from several contemporary philosophers (such as Bertrand Russell, Gilles Deleuze, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and so forth) – and it has since been reissued several times, the most recent being the 7th edition in 2007. Unlike FR, SP presents a rich paratextual apparatus, including both an introduction and a note to the Spanish edition, written by José Antonio Millán and Susana Narotzky. There are also several footnotes, in which Carmen González Marín, the translator, explains cases of cultural-linguistic variation. The number of examples is roughly the same as in the English text, and at times original examples from Spanish are added in brackets in support of Lakoff and Johnson's argument. In their note to the Spanish edition, the editors state that 'all the examples come from the English language', while recognizing that 'in several cases the Spanish equivalent is also a common metaphor in our language' (SP 27, 2001),³ thus endorsing the cross-cultural productivity of such conceptual metaphors. At the same time, readers are warned of the complexity of metaphor translation and are asked to make an interpretative effort in relation to the source language and culture: 'there are examples that sound unnatural in Spanish: think of them as natural expression in English' (SP, 2001: 27). This may be taken as a clear hint of a source-oriented approach to the translation.

The Italian edition (IT) was only published in 1998, by Bompiani (Milan). It was included in the scholarly collection 'Strumenti Bompiani', directed by Umberto Eco and devoted to semiotic and philosophical essays, mostly by Italian scholars, and it has been reissued twice (3rd edition in 2007).⁴ The translation was carried out by Patrizia Violi, who also wrote an introduction explaining both the theme of the book and the strategies adopted in the translation. The translation is virtually without footnotes, like FR; however, in contrast to both FR

and SP, a significant number of ‘less translatable’ examples are omitted. Violi explains in her introduction that she adopted a source-oriented approach in the translation, ‘preserving the “American” sense of several metaphors’, because otherwise it would have been

another, and different, book; a book, this time, on Italian metaphor. Therefore, the examples were modified only to make them comprehensible to the Italian reader, eliminating (when other convincing examples were already present) a few wholly untranslatable expressions, and reducing to very few cases the need for a translator’s note.

(IT, 2007: 14)

According to this statement of purpose, approximately 10% of the examples provided by Lakoff and Johnson are omitted from the Italian translation, because they are deemed untranslatable, or incomprehensible to the Italian reader.

An important common feature among these three translations is that the examples of linguistic metaphors are provided only in the target language,⁵ with very few exceptions in FR and SP, when the original English examples are retained in the absence of comprehensible solutions in the target language (as we have just observed, IT omits such cases altogether). Both SP and IT offer a translator’s note in which they explain their translation strategies and anticipate possible criticisms, particularly the charge that the translated metaphors are not as conventional as they should be to fully support the book’s argument. Since Lakoff and Johnson’s argument is that conceptual metaphors shape our everyday language, a rich and effective repertoire of ‘natural’ examples taken from everyday language is essential to any translation of this book. Pursuing such ‘naturalness’ in face of the anisomorphism of languages – that is the asymmetric relationship between any two linguistic systems – is where the translation proves most challenging, as we shall shortly see in detail.

Some inferences can be made from the analysis of this translation corpus as to the productivity of conceptual metaphors across different languages and cultures. The main risk of such inferences is to interpret a ‘failure’ of the translation to find a similar linguistic metaphor in the target language (in terms of both the currency of the expression and its cognitive value) as a sign of the non-productivity of a given conceptual metaphor. However, such a risk is mitigated in this specific case by the functional relevance of metaphorical concepts in such a book (thus calling for a particularly careful treatment on the part of the translator), by the plurality of translations involved (more translations confirming the same tendency may indeed allow some generalization), and by my native or near-native cultural-linguistic competence in assessing the different translations.⁶

For the purpose of this study, I have selected a limited number of examples, which are representative of the strategies employed in the different translations, and of the cross-cultural productivity of conceptual metaphors. I will assess these examples according to both their cognitive relevance (which in principle should be preserved, being essential to the scope of the text), and their currency and naturalness, which is what made Lakoff and Johnson’s argument so strong and convincing.

Metaphors we live by or everyday-life metaphors?

The book's title proves an interesting case in point and a revealing one in many respects. Here are the four titles the volume was given in the different languages considered:

ST: *Metaphors We Live By*

FR: *Les Métaphores dans la vie quotidienne*

SP: *Metáforas de la vida cotidiana*

IT: *Metafora e vita quotidiana*

Although broadly similar, each of the translations contains its own particular shift from the source title. All three choose to substitute the verbal metaphor 'live by' with a nominal expression, 'everyday life'. While this is undoubtedly a plausible choice, it is a marked one and mutual influences may have helped such a convergence on similar solutions (FR possibly influencing the others, for simple chronological reasons). Interestingly enough, what happens here is essentially the translation of a source-text (lexicalized) metaphor into a target-text non-metaphor, that is, a case of omission. Given that metaphor is the subject of the book, the decision to omit a metaphor in the translation of its title may seem debatable. At the same time, this shows that this often-despised translation strategy (metaphor into non-metaphor) may be more frequent than one thinks, given the various constraints at play in the process of metaphor translation.

What the three translations omit to convey are the full implications of the preposition 'by'. Joining the two domains of 'life' and 'metaphor' in various ways (FR: *in* everyday life, SP: *of* everyday life, IT: *and* everyday life), they all establish a weaker, non-metaphorical link between them. It should be noted that all three translations added 'everyday' as a substitute for the idea of 'living by', namely, something affecting (not to say governing) every day of our life. Beyond any hint of mutual influences, one can also find in these translations a confirmation of Gideon Toury's 'law of growing standardization' (1995: 267–73), which suggests that normalization generally occurs in translation when structural complexity or ambiguity are involved. In fact, 'live by' presents a certain degree of ambiguity in that we could live by these metaphors as we 'live by our principles', but also, and more strongly so, as we 'live by our wits'. Given the anisomorphism between languages, these two meanings would find different lexicalizations in languages other than English – for example, Italian '*vivere secondo*' vs. '*vivere/campare di*' – and choosing one would imply taking a stand on the potential ambiguity of the title.

It is interesting to notice that the expression 'metaphors we live by' is reprised in the book to challenge the very definition of 'dead' metaphors: 'They are "alive" in the most fundamental sense: they are metaphors we live by', Lakoff and Johnson argue (2003: 55). And interestingly enough, no structural changes intervene at this point in the translations, although different solutions are adopted: '*ce sont des métaphores qui nous font vivre*' (FR, 1985: 64, 'metaphors which make us live'); '*son metáforas mediante las que vivimos*' (SP, 2001: 95, 'metaphors through which we live'); and '*sono metafore con cui noi viviamo*' (IT, 2007: 76, 'metaphors with which we live'). FR and SP more explicitly rely on the stronger sense of 'live by', seeing metaphors as

instrumental in our life, with IT opting for a softer ‘with which we live’. One may argue that such a significant parallelism with the book’s title should be preserved in a translation, and the same strategy adopted in both cases (although the titles may well have been chosen by the publisher rather than by the translator). Indeed, parallelism appears to be preserved within the text, where the title of the first chapter, ‘Concepts We Live By’, is coherently translated as ‘Ces concepts qui nous font vivre’, ‘Los conceptos mediante los que vivimos’ and ‘I concetti con cui viviamo’. All these expressions were potential titles for the book, although they may lack the structural immediacy which is vital for an effective title. In this particular case, the concision of the English grammatical structure, which allows the omission of the pronoun, is precluded in most Romance languages, which normally require the form ‘Metaphors by which we live’ (as in SP and IT).⁷ This lack of immediacy is a decisive problem when translating metaphors, since brevity of expression is one of their major strengths, and the problem becomes all the more prominent when it is foregrounded in a title, as in this specific case.

The *CONDUIT* METAPHOR and TIME IS MONEY

I will now analyse two well-known conceptual metaphors and their translatability into Romance languages. The first example is the main conceptual metaphor governing our way of speaking about language, the *CONDUIT* METAPHOR. This metaphor was first explored by Michael Reddy (1993 [1979]), who found more than 100 English expressions confirming the hypothesis that IDEAS (OR MEANINGS) ARE OBJECTS, LINGUISTIC EXPRESSIONS ARE CONTAINERS, and COMMUNICATION IS SENDING. Lakoff and Johnson give a few examples of this ‘complex metaphor,’ which are reproduced below in Table 1, along with their three translations.

The first thing one notices in Table 1 is that the Italian translation omits four of the 14 examples provided by Lakoff and Johnson. In these cases, more obviously than FR and SP, IT refrained from offering what the translator deemed to be implausible solutions, which would be unsupportive of the argument. It could be argued that, at least for example 1, the expression ‘*far passare un’idea*’ is nowadays not only comprehensible but quite frequent in Italian, similarly to FR and SP. This could be a diachronic change occurring in the 10 years since publication, with English slowly imposing its metaphors on other languages by virtue of its cultural and economic hegemony. While other suitable examples could be found (for instance, drawing on Reddy’s rich repertoire, which is explicitly called upon by Lakoff and Johnson), the Italian translator decided against it, consistent with her source-oriented approach. This appears to be an acceptable choice, given the sufficient number of examples already available to support this conceptual metaphor.

The French translation allows for small variations in the target metaphors in order to present its readers with expressions that have a similar degree of conventionality. This is achieved through different translation strategies: A small omission (‘to him’ in example 1), a touch of colloquialism (‘it’s me who gave you’ in example 2, and the hyperbolic ‘under tons of claptrap’ for ‘in terribly dense paragraphs’ in example 14), a change in form (affirmative to negative in example 10), and simple lexical adjustments (‘is right there’ – ‘is hidden right there’ in example 8; ‘came through to us’ – ‘go straight to our heart’ in example 3; and ‘into words’ – ‘down on paper’ in

TABLE 1 The CONDUIT metaphor in translation

ST – CONDUIT metaphor	FR – la métaphore du CONDUIT	SP – la metáfora del canal	IT – la metafora del canale
1 It's hard to get that idea across to him.	C'est dur de faire passer cette idée.	Es difícil hacerle llegar esa idea.	–
2 I gave you that idea.	C'est moi qui t'ai donné cette idée.	Yo te di esa idea.	Io ti ho dato quella idea.
3 Your reasons came through to us.	Vos raisons nous vont droit au cœur.	Nos alcanzaron tus razones.	–
4 It's difficult to put my ideas into words.	Il m'est difficile de mettre mes idées sur le papier.	Es difícil poner mis ideas en palabras.	È difficile mettere in parole le mie idee.
5 When you have a good idea, try to capture it immediately in words.	Quand vous avez une bonne idée, essayez de la saisir immédiatement et de la mettre en forme.	Quando tengas una buena idea trata de capturarla inmediatamente en palabras.	Quando hai una buona idea, cerca di catturarla immediatamente in parole.
6 Try to pack more thought into fewer words.	Essayez de mettre plus de contenu dans moins de mots.	Trata de poner más pensamiento en menos palabras.	Cerca di concentrare più pensieri in meno parole.
7 You can't simply stuff ideas into a sentence any old way.	Tu ne peux pas te contenter d'introduire n'importe quelles idées dans ta phrase.	No se puede simplemente llenar de ideas una oración.	–
8 The meaning is right there in the words.	Le sens est caché dans les mots.	El significado está ahí mismo en las palabras.	Il significato è proprio qui nelle parole.
9 Don't force your meanings into the wrong words.	–	–	–
10 His words carry little meaning.	Ses mots ne transmettent pas beaucoup de sens.	Sus palabras tienen poco significado.	Le sue parole hanno poco significato.
11 The introduction has a great deal of thought content.	L'introduction contient beaucoup d'idées.	La Introducción tiene una gran cantidad de contenido.	L'introduzione ha un elevato contenuto concettuale.
12 Your words seem hollow.	Tes mots sonnent creux.	Tus palabras parecen huecas.	Le tue parole suonano vuote.
13 The sentence is without meaning.	La phrase est vide de sens.	La oración no tiene significado.	La frase è senza significato.
14 The idea is buried in terribly dense paragraphs.	L'idée est ensevelie sous des tonnes de verbiage.	Las ideas están enterradas en párrafos terriblemente difíciles.	L'idea è nascosta in paragrafi terribilmente oscuri.

example 4).⁸ While the French linguistic metaphors are not all as conventional as the English ones, these translation strategies do aim at some kind of equivalence of effect on the target reader.

The Spanish translation, on the contrary, reveals a philological approach to the source-text. The translations offered in SP are quasi-literal renditions of the English expressions and the currency of the expressions is only rarely preserved. It is a deliberately source-oriented translation, as opposed to the more target-oriented approach followed by FR. Moreover, SP seems more willing than IT to ask for an interpretative effort on the part of its readers, and includes even less conventional expressions.

What we can infer from Table 1, with due caution, is that the *CONDUIT METAPHOR* is shared by all three languages, although a certain degree of linguistic variation can be detected, as well as some signs of lesser productivity in the three target languages. It may be argued that Lakoff and Johnson's examples in this case seem to be taken more from classroom discussion and academic discourse than from everyday language (several of them actually sound like teachers' remarks on students' papers), and this type of discourse may be more articulated around the *CONDUIT METAPHOR* in English than in the Romance languages considered here. Wider corpus-linguistic research into such metaphors would be necessary to confirm this hypothesis, but the lack of corresponding lexicalized expressions in any of the three languages (as in examples 9 and 14) seems to indicate that English exploits it more fully than other languages.

The second conceptual metaphor that I will explore is one of the founding metaphors in many industrialized societies, *TIME IS MONEY*.

This metaphor is certainly productive in all four languages, as demonstrated among other things by the proverbial status of the metaphor itself in all these languages.⁹ The monetary expression was apparently coined by Benjamin Franklin who wrote 'Remember that time is money' in his *Advice to a Young Tradesman* (1748),¹⁰ at a time when several of the lexicalized metaphors revealed by Lakoff and Johnson were still original, or even yet to be conceived. The advent of industrialization and capitalism ensured the success of such a metaphor – as the proliferation of linguistic expressions confirms – to the point of making it one of the fundamental metaphors many industrialized, capitalist countries live by. It is, however, by no means a universal metaphor, as there are cultures which do not conceive of time in these terms, as Lakoff and Johnson (2003: 8–9) remind us.

Needless to say, the cultural proximity of the languages considered here assures both the presence and the productivity of this metaphor. However, the 'complicated' translatability into Romance languages of some of these examples suggests that the metaphor may be slightly less exploited here than in English (particularly American English; see below). Again, this is an assumption that needs more corpus-linguistic research than these few occurrences, which may also be biased by the declared source-oriented approach of SP and IT. What is evident, however, is that some expressions are not entirely conventional in some of the target languages (examples 4 and 13), and this is only partially due to a source-oriented translation strategy. Moreover, the conventional use of verbs such as 'dedicate' and 'consecrate' emerging in the translations (examples 3, 7 and 11) resorts to a slightly different conceptualization of time, in which the emphasis is openly diverted from money and projected onto

TABLE 2 The TIME IS MONEY metaphor in translation

	ST – TIME IS MONEY	FR – LE TEMPS, C'EST DE L'ARGENT	SP – EL TIEMPO ES DINERO	IT – IL TEMPO È DENARO
1	You're <i>wasting</i> my time.	Tu me fais <i>perdre</i> mon temps.	Me estás haciendo <i>perder</i> el tiempo.	Stai facendomi <i>perdere</i> del tempo.
2	This gadget will <i>save</i> you hours.	Ce procédé vous fera <i>gagner</i> des heures et des heures.	Estes artilugio te <i>ahorrará</i> horas.	In questo modo <i>risparmieremo</i> alcune ore.
3	I don't <i>have</i> the time to <i>give</i> you.	Je <i>n'ai</i> pas de temps à te <i>donner</i> .	No tengo tiempo para <i>dedicártelo</i> .*	<i>Non ho</i> tempo da <i>dedicarti</i> .
4	How do you <i>spend</i> your time these days?	Comment <i>gérez-vous</i> votre budget-temps?	¿En qué <i>gastas</i> el tiempo estos días?	Come avete <i>impiegato</i> il vostro tempo in questi giorni?
5	That flat tire <i>cost</i> me an hour.	Réparer ce pneu crevé m'a <i>coûté</i> une heure.	Esa rueda deshinchada me <i>ha costado</i> una hora.	Questa gomma a terra mi è <i>costata</i> un'ora.
6	I've <i>invested</i> a lot of time in her.	J'y ai <i>mis</i> beaucoup de temps.	<i>He invertido</i> mucho tiempo en ella.	<i>Ho sprecato</i> un sacco di tempo per lei.
7	I don't <i>have enough</i> time to <i>spare</i> for that.	Je <i>n'ai</i> pas de temps à <i>perdre</i> .	No <i>dispongo</i> de tiempo <i>suficiente</i> para eso.	<i>Non ho abbastanza</i> tempo da <i>dedicare</i> a ciò.
8	You're <i>running out</i> of time.	Il ne te <i>reste plus beaucoup</i> de temps.	Estás <i>terminando</i> con tu tiempo.	Avete <i>esaurito</i> il tempo a disposizione.
9	You need to <i>budget</i> your time.	Tu dois <i>économiser</i> ton temps.	Tienes que <i>calcular</i> el tiempo.	Devi <i>pianificare</i> il tuo tempo.
10	<i>Put aside</i> some time for ping-pong.	<i>Mets</i> du temps de <i>côté</i> pour jouer au ping-pong.	<i>Reserva</i> algo de tiempo para el ping pong.	–
11	Is that <i>worth your while</i> ?	Cela <i>vaut-il</i> la peine que tu y consacres du temps?	¿ <i>Vale</i> la pena gastar ese tiempo?	<i>Vale</i> il tempo che ci <i>perdi</i> .
12	Do you <i>have</i> much time <i>left</i> ?	–	¿ <i>Te sobra</i> mucho tiempo?	<i>Avete</i> ancora un po' di tempo?
13	He's living on <i>borrowed</i> time.	Son temps ne lui <i>appartient</i> pas.	Vive de tiempo <i>prestado</i> .	–
14	You don't <i>use</i> your time <i>profitably</i> .	Vous ne <i>profitez</i> pas du temps que vous avez.	No <i>utilizas</i> tu tiempo <i>con provecho</i> .	Non stai <i>usando</i> il tuo tempo <i>in modo proficuo</i> .
15	I <i>lost</i> a lot of time when I got sick.	J'ai <i>perdu</i> beaucoup de temps quand je suis tombé malade.	<i>Perdí</i> mucho tiempo cuando caí enfermo.	<i>Ho perso</i> un sacco di tempo quando sono stato malato.
16	<i>Thank you</i> for your time.	<i>Merci</i> de nous avoir <i>donné</i> de votre temps.	<i>Gracias por</i> tu tiempo.	Grazie per il tempo che mi hai <i>concesso</i> .

*En inglés se usa el verbo *give*. Literalmente "dar". En español existen además expresiones como "¿Tienes un minuto?".

something which is offered to God, as a vow (see Latin *dedico, consecro*). Indeed, the most conventional ways of expressing the idea of giving one's time away use this specific metaphor (French 'consacrer,' Spanish 'dedicar' and Italian 'dedicare'). While they may well be seen as an entailment of the TIME IS MONEY metaphor (that is, TIME IS A VALUABLE COMMODITY), these expressions have quite a different connotation. Finally, it should be pointed out that a wholly different conceptual metaphor is usually activated in the case of the most widespread of these conventional metaphors, 'to spend time' (example 4). Despite the adjustments made in the three translations to preserve this conceptual metaphor, it is normally expressed in Romance languages by way of the TIME IS A MOVING OBJECT metaphor ('passer le temps', 'pasar el tiempo' and 'passare il tempo'). Interestingly enough, Frank Boers points out that comparative corpus research reveals that this latter conceptual metaphor is less common in the (American) Brown Corpus than in the (British) LOB Corpus, which may be taken as a hint of the primacy of the TIME IS MONEY metaphor in American culture.¹¹

Zoltán Kövecses (2005: 141) explored the TIME IS MONEY metaphor in Hungarian and concluded that 'What we can observe as a result of the comparison between English and Hungarian is that English has a more full-blown and coherent version of the metaphor than Hungarian'. While it is not possible to draw a substantial generalization from these few examples, these translations do seem to point in the same direction, given the difficulties they have in producing the same number of conventional expressions from this conceptual metaphor. One may argue that the lesser degree of success of this metaphor in Italian, Spanish and French is determined by cultural factors, such as a different religious heritage, with Puritanism 'imposing' the TIME IS MONEY metaphor in American-English, as suggested by E. P. Thompson.¹² It is also possible that this cultural 'difference' may be slowly consumed by globalization, as Boers (2003: 236) suggests: 'It could be argued of course that, as a result of ongoing economic and cultural globalisation, the cross-cultural differences in metaphor usage... will eventually be eroded'. For example, the metaphorical expression 'invest time in somebody/something' – which must have felt inappropriate at the time in IT, since it is substituted by its conventional negative form 'sprecare' ('to waste') – can nowadays be considered entirely conventional, to the point of receiving a dictionary entry.¹³ This may be a sign of the constant shift between degrees of lexicalization in metaphors, which is an important factor in the evolution of any given language. Needless to say, hegemonic languages and cultures may also have an impact on other cultures by exporting their most frequent metaphors, via the easiest channel of intercultural communication, namely, translation. Given its hegemonic role in many sectors, English may indeed slowly be spreading its metaphors via 'literal' translation to less powerful languages and cultures.

A case of unshared orientational metaphor:

FORESEEABLE FUTURE EVENTS ARE UP

As a final example, here is an interesting – albeit isolated – case of conceptual difference emerging from the three translations. It is a conceptual metaphor of the type that Lakoff and Johnson (2003: 14) define as 'orientational metaphors', that is, metaphors which 'have a basis in our physical and cultural experience' and mostly

'have to do with spatial orientation'. Examples of conceptual metaphors of this kind are HAPPY IS UP/SAD IS DOWN, which inform many conventional expressions in everyday language, such as feeling *up/down*, being in *high* spirits and *depression*. Orientational metaphors have a physical grounding (normally the basic experience of our bodies), which may lead one to think of them as being more 'universal' than others. However, Lakoff and Johnson (2003: 14; 24) warn against any generalization in this sense, pointing out that the orientation of such metaphors may vary from culture to culture.¹⁴

My parallel corpus revealed a good degree of cross-cultural productivity among such conceptual metaphors, with the notable exception of a metaphor which proves utterly unproductive in all three Romance languages considered here, as shown by Table 3.

This is one of the very few cases among Lakoff and Johnson's examples in which a conceptual metaphor does not seem to be shared at all by the three target languages; another case is a related metaphor, FINISHING IS UP. In both cases, it is not an instance of different linguistic realization or lesser productivity, but rather of the absence of the conceptual metaphor itself: The difference lies at the cognitive, not the linguistic level. This seems to be the case for all three target languages, although the translations employ different strategies to solve the problem. FR adds one of the very few translator's footnotes, admitting that 'unlike other metaphors, this one does not appear to have any equivalent in French' (FR, 1985: 26) and offers a literal translation alongside the English expressions. SP does almost the same thing, except for placing the English expressions in a footnote alongside the explanation that 'in Spanish, the orientation of future events appears to be AHEAD, rather than UP' (SP, 2001: 52). IT omits the conceptual metaphor *in toto* (both the examples and the following paragraph

TABLE 3 The FORESEEABLE FUTURE EVENTS ARE UP (AND AHEAD) metaphor in translation

ST – FORESEEABLE FUTURE EVENTS ARE UP (AND AHEAD)

All *up* coming events are listed in the paper. What's coming *up* this week? I'm afraid of what's *up ahead* of us. What's *up*? (Lakoff and Johnson, EN, 2003: 16).

FR – LES EVENEMENTS FUTURES PREVISIBLES SONT EN HAUT (ET EN AVANT)

All *up* coming events are listed in the paper (les rencontres sportives prévues dans les jours qui viennent sont indiquées dans le journal). What's coming *up* this week? (Qu'est-ce qui va se passer cette semaine?). I'm afraid of what's *up ahead* of us (J'ai peur de ce qui nous attend). What's *up*? (Qu'est-ce qui se passe?)* (FR, 1985: 26).

*Contrairement aux autres, cette métaphore ne semble pas avoir d'équivalent en français (N.d.T.)

SP – LOS ACONTECIMIENTOS FUTUROS PREVISIBLES ESTAN ARRIBA (Y ADELANTE)

Todas las actividades que va a *haber* están anotadas en el papel. ¿Qué va a *pasar* esta semana? Tengo miedo de lo que pueda pasarnos *más adelante*. ¿Qué *hay*?* (SP, 2001: 52).

*En inglés se usa un verbo preposicional con *up* para referirse a lo que va a pasar. En español parece que la orientación de los acontecimientos futuros no es tanto ARRIBA como ADELANTE. En el original: All *up* coming events are listed in the paper. What's coming *up* this week? I'm afraid of what's *up ahead* of us. What is *up*?

IT –

explaining the experiential basis of such metaphors), thus confirming the non-productivity of this orientational metaphor in Italian.

Lakoff and Johnson explain the experiential basis of such metaphors in these terms: ‘Normally our eyes look in the direction in which we typically move (ahead, forward). *As an object approaches a person (or the person approaches the object), the object appears larger. Since the ground is perceived as being fixed, the top of the object appears to be moving upward in the person’s field of vision*’ (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003: 16; emphasis added). While the first part of this explanation seems intuitive (and indeed FUTURE EVENTS ARE FORWARD is productive in all three languages), doubts can legitimately be raised about the second part. The metaphor is clearly productive in English (the examples are there to prove it), but its grounding in physical bases is possibly less sure than for the other metaphor, which may be the reason why FUTURE EVENTS ARE UP is unproductive even in such close languages and cultures as the ones considered here.

Of course other elements may also come into play, at different stages in the evolution of a language, determining the success of a certain conceptualization. In this case, the use of ‘up’ may well have an experiential basis, but its development may eventually rely on linguistic factors which are not as strictly related to the experiential basis. Interestingly enough, all the examples for FUTURE EVENTS ARE UP involve only the adverb ‘up’ itself and no other semantic realizations, unlike other common orientational metaphors such as HAPPY IS UP or GOOD IS UP, which involve expressions such as ‘my spirits rose’, or ‘we hit a peak last year’. A similar reliance on the particle ‘up’ can be found in the FINISHING IS UP metaphor, which is also unproductive in the three languages considered here. The single example of this metaphor given by Lakoff and Johnson (2003: 21) at the end of their chapter on orientational metaphors is ‘I’m finishing up’, an instance of the versatile ‘completive UP’ (Boers 1996: 145–46), frequent in several phrasal verbs. Once again, this conceptual metaphor seems to be equally unproductive in the three target languages, which either leave it in English (FR, IT) and/or add a footnote to explain it (FR, SP).

Conclusions

This analysis of a few translations of *Metaphors We Live By* and their way of dealing with its many examples has offered some insights into the cross-cultural productivity of some of the metaphors shaping our life and our language.

Needless to say, relying on such a small corpus makes any generalization about the cross-cultural productivity of conceptual metaphors provisional at best. However, limiting our research to three closely-related languages and cultures may conversely reveal subtle differences, with fewer variables involved. As anticipated, such an analysis is closely connected to the approach the different translators adopted in relation to the source text. Nevertheless, I think that once the translators’ stances have been defined, it is possible to draw from their ‘authorial’ decisions some hints about the cross-cultural productivity of these conceptual metaphors, and about the intercultural negotiation at play in the translation process. Ultimately, since every act of translation is essentially an attempt at intercultural communication, a ‘negotiation process’ as Eco (2003) defines it, such case studies offer a privileged space for reflection. The risk of making generalizations from this data can be reduced by

crossing different translations (something which is made easier by their linguistic proximity) and by a process of translation assessment such as I have attempted.

What can be said is that the majority of the examples do find a satisfactory rendition in the target language (in terms of both currency and cognitive value); some are not conventional expressions in the target languages, but are still comprehensible to a reader (because the conceptual metaphor is shared); a smaller number sound quite incomprehensible (those that SP decided to explain in a footnote and IT to omit); and only a very small number of metaphorical concepts appear to be unshared (for example, FORESEEABLE FUTURE EVENTS ARE UP).

So it can be said that metaphors cut across cultures much more at the conceptual level than at the strictly linguistic level, where a significant degree of variation is still present, making the task of the translator particularly challenging. I think that the very decision to translate such a book, and the degree of overlap in most conceptual metaphors, point toward a more-or-less shared repertoire of mental schemes across these four languages. However, several linguistic and a few conceptual differences still survive, which can be traced back to a different cultural-linguistic heritage. The question is whether such differences will be slowly eroded by the globalization of languages? While some tentative diachronic considerations seem to hint at this possibility, such a process of interference is still quite far from threatening a homogenization of our linguistic metaphors, and the challenges of metaphor translation are here to stay.

Notes

- 1 As has become customary in the tradition of Lakoff and Johnson's book, conceptual metaphors are indicated in small capitals.
- 2 FR is cited in the References under Lakoff and Johnson (FR).
- 3 Unless otherwise stated, translations are mine. SP is cited in the References under Lakoff and Johnson (SP).
- 4 Neither the Italian 2007 edition, nor the Spanish 2007 edition, includes the authors' afterword which appeared in the 2003 revised edition of *Metaphors We Live By*. IT is cited in the References under Lakoff and Johnson (IT).
- 5 While this is the most common translation strategy, it is not the only one possible. For example, in the Russian edition (Lakoff and Johnson, 2004), the English examples are kept alongside their Russian translation.
- 6 Two seminars, held at the University of Bologna and the University of Haute-Alsace, allowed me to test these translations with native speakers of the four languages involved, to whom I am indebted for a native assessment of the translations.
- 7 Only FR manages to escape from this structure. Incidentally, one may note how a similarly 'literal' solution was in fact adopted in Russian: *Метафоры, которыми мы живем* ('Metaphors we live by') (Lakoff and Johnson, 2004), while in German a transformation has been carried out, opting for a 'strong' interpretation of the source title: *Leben in Metaphern* ('Living in metaphors') (Lakoff and Johnson, 2007).
- 8 While being conventional in French, this latter expression, '*mettre sur le papier*' (put down on paper), does not seem to rely as strongly as the others on the CONDUIT METAPHOR.

- 9 These four forms are quoted for example in Augusto Arthaber's comparative dictionary of proverbs in seven languages (1989: 674–75). In Spanish, the expression '*El tiempo es oro*' is also possible and conventional.
- 10 It should be noted though, that the metaphor goes much further back, at least to Diogenes Laërtius, who, speaking of Theophrastus in c.230 CE, states the following: 'And a very favourite expression of his was, that time was the most valuable thing that a man could spend' (Diogenes Laërtius, 1853 Book 5, chapter 10, p. 196).
- 11 'TIME IS A MOVING OBJECT makes up only 2.73% of the temporal instances in the American corpus [Brown Corpus]. For the British corpus [Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus] the figure is 4.65%' (Boers 1996: 215).
- 12 'Puritanism, in its marriage of convenience with industrial capitalism, was the agent which converted men to new valuations of time; which taught children even in their infancy to improve each shining hour; and which saturated men's minds with the equation, time is money' (Thompson, 1967: 128).
- 13 INVESTIRE. 6 v. tr.CO TS psic., concentrare energia, carica affettiva e psichica su una persona, su un oggetto, su un'immagine reale o immaginaria. (TO INVEST. To concentrate energy, affective and psychic charge on a person, on an object, on an image, be it real or imaginary.) *Dizionario De-Mauro Paravia Online Edition*. 30 Nov. 2008 <<http://old.demauroparavia.it/59461>>
- 14 Lakoff and Johnson (2003: 14, 24) point out that cultural factors do come into play even in orientational metaphors: 'Though the polar oppositions up-down, in-out, etc., are physical in nature, the orientational metaphors based on them can vary from culture to culture... In general the major orientations up-down, in-out, central-peripheral, active-passive, etc., seem to cut across all cultures, but which concepts are oriented which way and which orientations are most important vary from culture to culture'.

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