

Metaphors of translation

In brief



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◀ origins

The term *metaphor* was introduced into English from Middle French *métaphore*, and this from Latin *metaphora*, in turn taken from Greek *metaphorá*, which in a literal sense means “transfer, carry across”. The origin of the term is thereof in itself metaphorical; moreover, *metaphorá* also meant “translation”. Both concepts, “metaphor” and “translation”, have a common etymology and a parallel history in the Western tradition (Guldin 2016).

◀ other names

The term *metaphor* covers a semantic field close to and partly coinciding with *analogy*. According to the [Merriam Webster Dictionary](#), a metaphor is “a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them”, while an analogy is “a comparison of two otherwise unlike things based on resemblance of a particular aspect”. In this entry we will use the term *metaphor*, as it is more general, although we will do so from a cognitive perspective that brings us close to the notion of *analogy*.

☰ abstract

In most Western European languages, terms that denote translation are metaphorical in origin, and the use of metaphor is ubiquitous in discourses about translation and interpreting. According to the conceptual theory of metaphor, these metaphorical expressions are based on conceptual metaphors that allow us to organize complex, ill-defined experiential domains by importing cognitive structures from other domains that are more accessible to bodily experience. Research on metaphors of translation and interpreting addresses how these domains have been conceptualized through multiple metaphors of diverse origins.


Classical rhetoric, in general, considered metaphor an ornament of discourse that could be retranslated into literal language. Cognitive approaches, by contrast, define it as a cognitive structure that allows us to organize our experience. In the second half of the 20th century, the study of metaphor began to be approached from a cognitive perspective that had been anticipated by Nietzsche almost a century earlier. The conceptual theory of metaphor, developed in the 1980s, is the most explicit formulation of the idea that metaphor is ubiquitous not only in our language, but also in our thinking. Conceptual metaphors are described as sets of mappings between domains of experience that make it possible to provide conceptual structure to domains that are inaccessible to the senses or difficult to structure.

The theoretical shift that took place in metaphor theory was also echoed in the studies on metaphors about translation and interpreting. This entry presents different cognitive approaches to metaphor, in particular, the conceptual theory of Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 1999), and sketches the development of metatheoretical approaches to metaphors about translation and interpreting since the 1970s.



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Entry



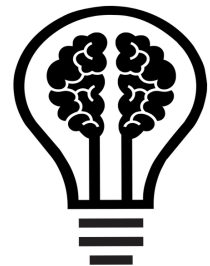
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Introduction

Our everyday speech is permeated with metaphors of which we are usually unaware. When we pay attention to them, they show up in such profusion that all language seems metaphorical to us. We use metaphors to talk about emotions, time, economics, language, the mind and, in general, areas that are difficult to conceptualize or inaccessible to our physical experience. In the 1980s, cognitive linguistics (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 1999; Reddy 1979) drew attention to the pervasiveness of metaphor and its cognitive functions. Drawing on expressions from everyday language, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) described conceptual metaphors as systematic mappings of cognitive structures from basic experiential domains onto more abstract domains that are less accessible to the senses. For example, the conceptual metaphor *KNOWING IS SEEING* (Lakoff & Johnson 1999) allows us to understand the domain of knowledge in terms of visual perception. This metaphor is reflected in everyday expressions such as “now I see what you are saying” or “I had a brilliant idea”, and can also be expressed in images.



When we conceptualize a domain of experience in a metaphorical way, we do not limit ourselves to denominating it differently, we also understand it in a particular way, in accordance with the perspective imposed by the chosen metaphor. Conceptual metaphors are mappings of inferential systems between two domains of experience that offer a specific view of the target domain, highlighting some of its aspects and leaving others in the shadows (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 10). For example, when we understand cognition in terms of the domain of vision, we highlight some aspects of this domain such as the possibility of focusing attention (the focus), the difficulties in understanding (the darkness), or the ideas that suddenly emerge (the light that comes on), and we

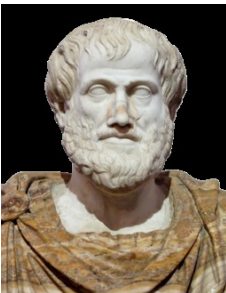
Visual representation of the metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING. [Source](#)

leave other aspects in the shadows that could be made manifest by other metaphors, such as knowing is hearing. This double sidedness of metaphor, which highlights some aspects of experience and hides others, makes its study especially relevant to understand the way in which a particular domain of experience is conceptualized.

Since the 1980s, there has been a growing interest in translation and interpreting studies in studying the metaphors that have been and are used to refer to these activities. The study of these metaphors can help us to become aware of the different ways in which the concept of translation can be constructed and of the evaluations implicit in each of these constructions. It also opens the possibility of questioning the values and concepts underlying the metalanguage we use to refer to translation and of using new metaphors, which can lead us to rethink and redefine our object of study (Hermans 2004). In the last decades, based on the cognitive approaches developed since the 1980s, metaphor has begun to be addressed in translation and interpreting studies as an indispensable cognitive tool for theoretical development (Guldin 2016; St. André 2010).

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¶ Cognitive approaches to metaphor



*Bust of Aristotle,
ca. 330 BCE,
Palazzo Altemps
(Rome). [Source](#)*

Classical theories on metaphor have their documented origin in the commentaries contained in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*, which are considered the beginning of classical rhetoric and poetics. Classical rhetoric described metaphor as a mere linguistic phenomenon, a deviation from the proper [meaning](#) of a word based on resemblance, whose purpose is sheer speech ornamentation and that can be replaced by a literal word without losing any of its meaning. However, classical rhetoric also recognized some cognitive aspects of metaphor. Aristotle himself (*Rhetoric* [4th century BCE](#): 1410b) conceded metaphor the potential to provide knowledge: "When the poet calls 'old age a withered stalk', he conveys a new idea, a new fact, to us by means of the general notion of bloom, which is common to both things." (Aristotle [4th century BCE](#), book III, part 10).

Even more relevant from a [cognitive perspective](#) is his claim that metaphors contained in names have the virtue of making the content of the message perceptible, of "making your hearers see things" ([Aristotle 4th century BCE](#): book III, part 11). This virtue can be related, from a current cognitive perspective, to the grounding of metaphor in embodied experience, and its capacity to make us perceive the abstract or undefined.

It was not until the eighteenth century, with [Giambattista Vico's](#) *The new Science* (1725), and the nineteenth century, with [Friedrich Nietzsche's](#) *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense* (1873), that a new perspective on metaphor was introduced, which did not consider it as a deviation from a literal use of language, but as an omnipresent feature of human thought that is essential for the formation of abstract concepts. For Nietzsche, there is no literal language and "[t]ruths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions – they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force, coins that have lost their embossing and are now considered as metals and no longer as coins" (1873: lines 122-125). Our perception and knowledge are already,

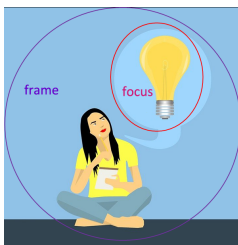
according to the philosopher, previously structured by that “host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms” (Nietzsche [1873](#): line 120) that constitute natural languages.

In the 20th century, several authors recognized a cognitive function to metaphor. In contrast to classical rhetoric, which explained it in terms of comparison and substitution of a literal term with a figurative one, [Richards](#) (1936), [Black](#) (1954), [Weinrich](#) (1958), and [Blumenberg](#) (1960), among others, confirmed its creative potential and its cognitive value. Richards ([1936](#)) did not consider metaphor an extraordinary or deviant use of language, but rather its omnipresent principle and its habitual way of functioning. His contextual view of rhetoric does not focus on word, but on discourse, which led him to reject the distinction between proper and figurative meaning, since words in themselves would no have meaning, rather it depends on their interaction with context. The theory of the interpenetration of the speech parts served Richards ([1936](#)) as a basis for developing his interactive view of metaphor, according to which metaphorical meaning is the result of the interaction of its components: the tenor (the main theme or underlying idea) and the vehicle (the idea through which the tenor is perceived). For example, in the metaphoric expression “she had a brilliant idea”, “brilliant” would be the vehicle through which the tenor, “idea”, is perceived. The metaphorical effect is the result of the interaction between two ideas or contexts, not between isolated words.



Friedrich Nietzsche.
[Source](#)

Black (1954), from the field of analytical philosophy, advanced on the path opened by Richards ([1936](#)) and took further the recognition of the cognitive value of metaphor by affirming that, in many cases, metaphor is not based on an existing resemblance between two ideas, but it itself creates this resemblance (Black 1962). In his analysis of the functioning of metaphors, Black (1954) distinguished the focus (the word that is used metaphorically) and the frame (the other words of the sentence, which are not used metaphorically and which allow us to identify the metaphorical use of the focus). Although with this division, he again gave prominence to the word (the focus), as in Richard’s theory (1936), the metaphorical meaning arises in his model from the interaction of two ideas: the meaning of the frame and the meaning of the focused element, which in itself is not metaphorical (Black 1962). Returning to the example “she had a brilliant idea”, according to Richards’ model, “brilliant” is the focus of the metaphor, whose metaphorical use is only perceived in relation to the frame, “she had an idea.” The extension of the meaning of the focus in its metaphorical used occurs through a system of commonplaces and implications that are applied to the main subject of the metaphor (in our example, “idea”), highlighting some of its aspects and suppressing others, i.e., organizing the way we perceive it.



Visual representation of the metaphorical expression “she had a brilliant idea” with distinction of focus and frame.
[Source](#)

Weinrich (1958) approached metaphor from linguistics, but he did not describe it as an isolated phenomenon, but as part of what he called an “image field” (*Blickfield*), a notion reminiscent in many respects of the conceptual metaphor of Lakoff and Johnson (1980). Like conceptual metaphors, these image fields played for Weinrich



Image field of the WORD AS COIN:
unidirectional relation between the donor field and the receiver field (Weinrich 1958). [Source](#) & [source](#)

(1963) the role of models capable of orienting thought. An image field is a structured network of metaphors that have coherent and systematic relationships with each other. Weinrich (1958: 278-282) gave as an example the WORD AS COIN, a field of which metaphors such as “coining words” or “lexical richness” would form part. Like Black (1954), Weinrich (1958) considered that metaphor, rather than being based on an existing similarity, itself created this similarity by relating two domains. Moreover, as cognitive linguistics would later do, Weinrich (1958) argued that metaphors are unidirectional, i.e., that the relations between the two domains go in only one direction (from the “donor field” to the “image-receiving field”).

Blumenberg (1960: 47) conceived his approach to metaphor as an endeavor in the service of the history of concepts, whose purpose was to show that metaphor is not a simple residue of a process of rationalization of language aimed at achieving its complete terminologization, that is, its univocal correspondence with precise and well-defined concepts. To show that the dynamics of metaphor is not exhausted in this process, Blumenberg (1960) addressed the study of what he called “absolute metaphors”, those that can only be replaced by other metaphors, but cannot be translated into literal concepts because it is precisely their metaphorical character that allows them to allude to human experience as a whole and, with it, to offer orientation to thought and action. An example of an absolute metaphor is the “naked truth”, which has taken various forms and has been approached in different ways throughout the history of philosophy. Blumenberg (1960) assigned to these metaphors an essential value in orienting experience, similar to that recognized by Weinrich (1958) for metaphors organized in images fields and to that attributed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) two decades later to conceptual metaphors.



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¶ The theory of conceptual metaphor

Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities. If we are right in suggesting that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor. (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 3)

The Truth, oil on canvas by Jules Joseph Lefebvre, 1870, Musée d'Orsay (Paris). An expression of the metaphor “the naked truth”.

[Source](#)

In the 1970s and the 1980s, cognitive semantics, linguistics, psychology and anthropology began to adopt an integrative view of cognition based on bodily and sensory experience, which granted metaphor an essential role in structuring our thinking on the basis of this experience. This shift in

perspective became apparent with the publication of two works: a collection of essays on metaphor edited by Ortony (1979) and *Metaphor we live by*, in which Lakoff and Johnson (1980)

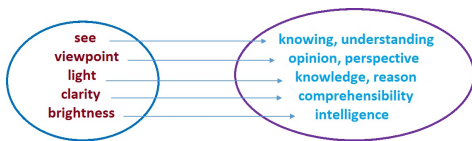


George Lakoff & Mark Johnson.

[Source & source](#)

presented their conceptual theory of metaphor and showed that much of our conceptual system has a metaphorical structure that is reflected in expressions of everyday use. Conceptual metaphor has been defined as a set of systematic mappings or correspondences between a source domain and a target domain (Lakoff 1993). These mappings allow us to understand the target domain, generally more abstract and less accessible to the senses, in terms of the source domain, which is usually more directly rooted in bodily experience. Mapped between the two domains are inferential patterns with which we can reason about the target domain using the logical structure of the source domain (Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 82).

An example of a conceptual metaphor is KNOWING IS SEEING (Lakoff & Johnson 1999) or UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING (Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Lakoff 2014), which is reflected in expressions such as “now I see what you are saying”, “changing your point of view”, “this shed light on the issue”, “having things clear” or “I have a brilliant idea”. This metaphor allows us to understand and conceptualize the experiential domain of knowledge applying the logics of visual perception through a series of mappings from the domain of vision to the domain of mind. Thus, according to the inferential patterns mapped with the notion “point of view”, in order to understand how other people think, we must try to adopt their way of thinking, just as it is necessary to change perspective to see things as other see them.



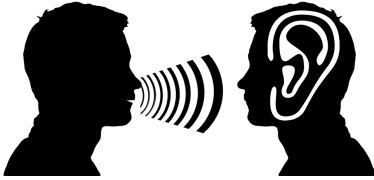
Examples of mappings of the conceptual metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING.

KNOWING IS SEEING.
Source

Experiential basis of the metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING. Source & Source

According to Johnson's (1999) conflation theory, conceptual metaphors arise from bodily experience not only in their cultural history, but also in individual cognitive development. In an early stage of metaphor formation, we simultaneously access its source and target domains and establish connections between them. Johnson (1999) identified this fusion phase in the acquisition of the metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING in a corpus of recordings of a child's interactions from the age of two to three years. In this phase, prior to the use of metaphor, the verb “to see” was employed in situations in which the domains of vision and knowledge overlapped. As Lakoff and Johnson (1999: 48) argued, the overlap of these domains is easily predictable, since much of our knowledge comes from visual perception, so that in many cases the verb “to see” is used both literally and metaphorically, as in “let’s see what's in the box”.

Grady (1997) distinguished two types of conceptual metaphors: primary metaphors have a direct basis in experience; complex



KNOWING IS HEARING / LISTENING. [Source](#)

metaphors result from the combination of primary metaphors. The experiential basis of primary metaphors suggests that they are universal, since all humans share basic experiences such as, for example, the physiological, behavioral and expressive responses associated with emotions (Kövecses [2010](#): 749). These responses serve as the basis for metaphors that are widespread in many languages, although there are also differences in the way each language conceptualizes emotions: for example, there are differences in the focus on one or another aspect of the physiological response to

anger. While English and other languages tend to focus on the increase in body temperature associated with this emotion —expressed by the metaphor ANGER IS HEAT—, in Chinese, most anger metaphors focus on the increase in pressure (Kövecses [2010](#)). Something similar happens with the metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING, which focuses on vision and leaves other forms of perception in the shadows. While this metaphor seems to have guided the formation of knowledge-related terms in Indo-European languages (Sweetser 1991), at least five Australian languages conceptualize knowledge based on the sense of hearing (Evans & Wilkins 2000).

Conceptual theory describes metaphors as unidirectional mappings. This means that we conceptualize a target domain in terms of a source domain and that this relationship is not reversible. Metaphorical mappings in general take the most concrete and familiar concept as source domain and the most difficult to conceptualize as target domain (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 1999). In line with this idea, for example, the metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING allows us to understand some mental processes in terms of visual perception; in contrast, we do not draw on the domain of knowledge to conceptually structure the domain of vision. However, several experimental studies have revealed bidirectional effects in the mappings between domains of experience underlying some conceptual metaphors (Shen & Porat 2017: 64).

For example, according to conceptual theory, the metaphor AFFECTION IS WARMTH allows us to describe affective relations in terms of physical warmth, but not the other way around. However, there are not only experimental data reflecting the mapping of physical warmth onto affect, but also for the reverse mapping. Thus, in one experiment, participants who held a container with a hot liquid in their hand judged another person as friendlier than those who held a cold drink (Williams & Bargh [2008](#)); conversely, in another experiment, participants who recalled a situation of social inclusion judged the temperature of the room to be higher than those who recalled a situation of exclusion (Zhong & Leonardelli 2008). In the latter case, the mapping would go from the affective to the physical domain (*HEAT IS AFFECTION), which contradicts the hypothesis of conceptual theory and does not correspond to conventional metaphorical expressions.



Since its emergence in the 1980s, the conceptual theory of metaphor has grown and diversified enormously. Many initial hypotheses have been confirmed by empirical studies, basic ideas have evolved and have been refined and applied in different domains. In these four decades, the conceptual theory of metaphor has also received much criticism (Kövecses 2017). On the one hand, it has been attributed a form of circular reasoning, because initially metaphorical expressions

were the only evidence for the existence of conceptual metaphors and, in turn, their presence was explained by recourse to these conceptual structures. However, data from non-language-based behavioral studies have demonstrated the existence of metaphoric mappings between domains of experience, thus breaking the initial circularity. On the other hand, the methodology used by cognitive linguists (in particular, the use of intuitive data) and the little relevance they give to language in the formation of metaphors have also been criticized.

By emphasizing the cognitive and experiential nature of metaphorical mappings, the conceptual theory of metaphor represented a radical departure from traditional approaches that considered metaphor a purely linguistic phenomenon. At the same time, its emphasis on cognitive structures pushed the linguistic aspects of metaphors into the background. Some later approaches address the study of metaphors in real discourses and contexts, and give a more relevant role to language in the formation of metaphors. For example, [emergentist](#) approaches to metaphor are based on [dynamical systems theory](#); their methods are discourse analysis and corpus studies, which allow them to study the emergence of metaphors in real discourse from the interplay of linguistic, semantic, affective and pragmatic factors (Cameron & Deignan 2006).

*HEAT IS
AFFECTION.*
[Source](#)

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¶ Metaphor research in translation and interpreting studies

In translation and interpreting studies, metaphors did not come to receive metalinguistic attention until relatively recently, and in general more attention has been paid to metaphors of translation than to those of interpreting. In the bibliography of essays on metaphors of translation and interpreting compiled by St. André (2010: 295-302), the earliest work is from 1977; three works are recorded from the 1980s, and twelve works from the 1990s and 2000s, respectively. Only three of these works are explicitly devoted to metaphors of interpreting. In addition to these essays, in the 2000s and 2010s a number of works have begun to address the study of translation metaphors in other cultural settings such as Eastern Europe, India, Japan, and China (e.g., Baltadzhiyan Vitanova [2020](#), [2021](#); Cheung 2005; Gopinathan [2006](#); Kothari & Wakabayashi 2009; Šeškauskienė [2020](#)). On the whole, the picture is one of expansion, both in terms of the number of works and the scope of study.

Kohler (1972) was one of the first authors to address the metaphors used in translation theories. His work, prior to the publication of the foundational book of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), adopted a traditional perspective that did not recognize the cognitive function of metaphor, but saw it as a pre-scientific tool that can pave the way for systematic reflection but does not generate knowledge by itself and at a later stage must be replaced by precise and explicit language. On the contrary, for Hermans (1985, 2004), metaphors are an essential part of translation theory. In his study on metaphors in Renaissance discourses about translation, Hermans (1985) analyzed the conceptual structure and cognitive implications of some metaphors; for example, he studied the oppositions outside-inside and perceptible-imperceptible expressed in the images of body and soul, garment and body, chest and jewel, or vessel and liquid, and their implication that signifier and signified are separable entities (Hermans 1985: 120; 2004: 121).



D'hulst (1992) proposed studying translation discourses by analyzing their metaphors, and adopted a cognitive perspective that granted metaphor an essential role in the development of translation theories. He did not see these metaphors as remnants of pre-scientific thinking, but as conceptual structures that guide the construction of models through the use of analogies. D'hulst (1992) focused his study on metaphorical concepts such as EQUIVALENCE, SYSTEM, FUNCTION, and TRANSFERENCE. For him, these metaphors provide coherence to translation discourses and do not need to be replaced by literal statements. Round (2005) also attributed to metaphors an essential role in translation studies, although he considered that they offer a limited view of their subject of study, and proposed to analyze them in order to determine their cognitive scope and

Outside-inside and perceptible-imperceptible oppositions in Renaissance metaphors of translation. [Source](#), [source](#) & [source](#)

strength. In his classification of metaphorical terms that refer in English to translation, he outlined two main groups of metaphors: a trans- group and a re- group, according to the prefixes used in each case. The trans- group reflects "the appropriation and 'bringing across' of other's material", i.e., the TRANSFER metaphor, and the re- group expresses the IMITATION metaphor (Round 2005: 58).

The metaphors used to conceptualize translation have continued to attract the attention of researchers in the last decade, and a number of metaphors have been described drawing from contemporary metaphor theories (e.g. St. André 2010, Guldin 2016). All in all, it should be kept in mind that theoretical approaches to translation and interpreting often do not rely on a single metaphor, but on constellations of interrelated metaphors, which complicates both the delineation of metaphorical models and the attempts to introduce innovative metaphors that provide a different view of translation and interpreting (Guldin 2016: 35). One of the most criticized constellations of metaphors in translation studies concerns the domains of gender and power. Feminist approaches (Chamberlain 2000) have questioned metaphors that associate authors with masculinity, as an active and creative principle, and translators, with a femininity that is passive and reproductive. This is the case, for example, of the French metaphor of the belles infidèles, which in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries represented translation through the dichotomy ugly and docile/beautiful and treacherous (Hermans 1985).

In the last two decades, studies on metaphors from cultural traditions other than the Western one have contributed to relativizing the view of translation reflected in the metaphors that permeate our tradition (Guldin 2016: 42; Tymoczko 2010). Kothari & Wakabayashi (2009) point to three important differences between Western and non-Western cultures underlying the metaphorical structures chosen in each tradition: the preponderance of written versus oral texts; the centrality or marginality of religious texts; and the relevance of nation-states versus that of subnational units. In the Western tradition, these factors favored the creation of metaphorical models expressing the primacy of the original and the need to preserve it in translation, as well as the idea of languages as closed structures with defined boundaries (e.g., the metaphors of TRANSFER, CLOTHING and IMITATION). These models did not emerge in other cultural traditions such as the Indian one, where the passage from one language to another was not even perceived as passage or movement

because there were no such defined boundaries between languages (Kothari & Wakabayashi 2009: 13).

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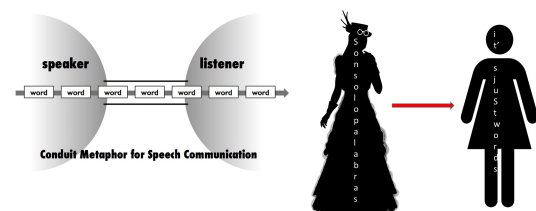
¶ Metaphors of TRANSFER & MOVEMENT

One of the features that characterize the notion of translation in our culture is the idea of "transfer" or "transference" of meanings. In the etymology of the terms used in Western European languages to refer to translation, we can find evidence of a metaphor that alludes to the action of transferring or transporting. For example, the Spanish term *traducir* and the French *traduire* come from the Latin *traducere* (to transport, to pass from one place to another), whereas the Latin *translatio* (transference or transfer) is the origin of the English translation. This name was used in Latin to allude to "transfer" both between languages (translation) and between a literal and a figurative meaning (metaphor), as well as the Greek *metaphorá*, which also means "transfer". Thus, a similar spatial metaphor alluding to a displacement operates at the classical root of these two concepts (Guldin 2016, 2020; Hermans 2004), although the Latin *translatio* had other non-spatial meanings as well, such as changing form or substance (Halverson 1999).

In addition to these etymological traces, we can find expressions of the TRANSFER metaphor in everyday language and in the academic terminology about translation and interpreting. For example, we speak of source and target languages, texts and discourses, and of direct and inverse translation and interpreting, in line with the idea that translating and interpreting consist of moving elements from one place to another, in a given direction. These places are conceived as delimited spaces and correspond to the texts, languages and cultures between which translation or interpreting take place (Martín de León 2010).

The TRANSFER metaphor can be seen as an extension of the CONDUIT metaphor described by Reddy (1979). According to this metaphor, identifiable in many of the expressions we use to talk about communication in Western European languages, language is a conduit through which ideas are transmitted, and words are containers into which we insert our thoughts to communicate them to other people, who, on the other side of the conduit, have only to extract the message from its container. The CONDUIT metaphor offers a view of language in which form and meaning appear as independent and separable objects, as does the CLOTHING metaphor, which describes language as the "dress wrapped around thoughts" (Guldin 2016: 15). These metaphors can be related to other central dichotomies in our cultural tradition, such as those of body and soul or form and essence.

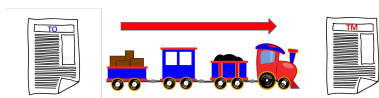
As Guldin (2016: 19, 31) reminds us, that of CLOTHING is one of the main metaphors used in the Western tradition to allude to metaphor and language in general. It is linked to the metaphor of "naked truth" and to the Platonic idea that language and the arts are mere imitations of a reality which in turn is only a shadow of eternal ideas. Translation is, according to this logic, threefold removed from truth. Translating consists in stripping thought of its original clothing and dressing it in the new garments of the target language, which are



usually considered less authentic and therefore less flattering or poorer than those of the original. The semantic body does not change, only its clothing. Similarly, the TRANSFER metaphor applies the CONDUIT scheme to translation and describes it as a double process of transmission of contents through two languages; according to this scheme, the translator's task is to extract the contents of the source language and transfer them to the target language, and the interpreter is a mere channel, a transmitter of contents.

CONDUIT and CLOTHING
metaphors [source] and image elaborated
from source & source

The CONDUIT and TRANSFER metaphors form a coherent system of mappings that articulate our everyday ideas about communication, translation and interpreting in such a pervasive way that it is difficult to recognize them as metaphors. However, like all metaphorical mappings, they too highlight some aspects of communication and translation and leave others in the shadows. For example, through these metaphors, meaning is conceived as a predetermined and transportable object, contained in words and independent of context and situation, and translation and interpreting are understood as transfers of meaning that involve no more difficulty than that of correctly extracting the content of the source text and introducing it into the appropriate words of the target text (Guldin 2016: 51-53; Martín de León 2003: 41-70, 2010).



In Romanticism, the TRANSFER metaphor found expression in Schleiermacher's (1813) dichotomy of moving the original toward the reader or the reader toward the original. The image of transplanting a tree to a new land where it loses its blossoms and leaves underlines the difficulty, even impossibility of this transfer (Koller 1972); however, from the perspective of the target culture, the transplant entails a gain (Guldin 2016: 39). In translation and interpreting studies, the TRANSFER metaphor has received criticism

and proposals have been made to replace it with other metaphors, such as TRANSLATING IS BUILDING BRIDGES, which stresses the need for specialized knowledge on the part of the translator (Hönig 1997), or the metaphor of MEMES, which starts from the domain of biological evolution and highlights the propagation and transformation of ideas through translation (Chesterman 1997). Tymoczko (2010) described the relationship of the TRANSFER metaphor with the history of Christianity and proposed exploring metaphors from other cultural traditions to approach translation from new perspectives. Also Cheetham (2016) proposed replacing the metaphors of MOVEMENT and SUBSTITUTION prevalent in our culture with other metaphors expressing ACTION or PERFORMANCE, in order to suppress the negative implications of the former and to emphasize other positive aspects of translation.

However, there are other MOVEMENT metaphors that do not imply the displacement of an object. For example, the terms used in Old English (*wendan*, to turn; *anwenden*, to turn into) to refer to the action of translating implied a change of position or a change of state (Halverson 1999). Also the names denoting translation in Chinese (*fanyi*) and Hungarian (*fordítás*)



allude to a turning motion, to turning over the original, and Lithuanian *vertimas* is etymologically related to a rotating motion around an axis (Šeškauskienė 2020).

ROTATION, TRAVEL & TARGET metaphors.

[Source](#), [source](#) & [source](#)

Guldin (2016: 44, 66-67) criticizes the focus on the spatial versus the temporal dimension and proposes replacing the TRANSFER metaphor with a metaphor that describes the translation process as a journey through a strait with different stages. The JOURNEY metaphor conceptualizes the translator as a traveler who must face difficulties and dangers and who follows the author's FOOTSTEPS (Baltadzhyan Vitanova 2020, 2021). The TARGET metaphor proposed by functionalist theories of translation also offers an alternative to that of TRANSFER. Translation is conceptualized as a goal-oriented action, thus relativizing the importance of the source text in the translation process; each new translation can lead to a different goal (Martín de León 2010: 93-97).

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¶ IMITATION metaphors

The concept of translation in the Western cultural tradition is characterized, in addition to the notion of "transfer", by that of "similarity". Both notions are intertwined in the different metaphors that structure this concept, although the idea of similarity implies that there has been no transfer, but rather the production of a new text similar to the original. This idea is picked up in the metaphors that describe translation as IMITATION, which may give rise to different readings and imply different valuations of the translated text. The Greek notion of *mimesis* contains an ambivalence that has its roots in the contrasting assessments of Plato, for whom imitation of reality (which is but a shadow of ideas) is doubly distant from truth, and of Aristotle, who considers *mimesis* a necessary learning ability.



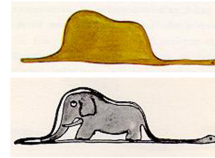
The classical concept of *imitatio* alludes to a particular form of *mimesis*, the imitation of a work of art (Hermans 2004: 119). The artist who imitates a model must seek to resemble it, but must also try to surpass it. This ambivalence reached the world of translation during the Renaissance with the gradual introduction of different metaphors related to the idea of imitation from the field of literary creation (Hermans 1985). Thus, on the one hand,

FOOTPRINTS metaphor. [Source](#)

the metaphor of the FOOTPRINTS corresponds to the vision of translation as a copy: the translator must follow in the footsteps of the author of the source text, which may imply that he must conform as closely as possible to the model of the original or that he must follow it at a certain distance, but, in any case, that there is a hierarchical relationship between the original and its translation that gives precedence to the former (Hermans 1985: 104-105).

On the other hand, imitation in the classical sense was also a form of appropriation, even of surpassing, a new act of creation that sought to emulate a model. This notion was introduced in the discourses on translation of the sixteenth and seventeenth

centuries through the metaphors of ASSIMILATION and REINCARNATION, which emphasize identification with the source text author, although they do not include the idea of competition (Hermans 1985: 113, 124). The metaphor of ASSIMILATION starts from the basic experience of eating, which also applies metaphorically to the realm of learning. Understanding an idea, just like understanding a text or an author, is metaphorized as ingestion, digestion and assimilation; when we understand something, we make it our own, we integrate it into our being. This metaphor highlights, on the one hand, the identification with the source text or its author, and, on the other hand, the appropriation of the text and its transformation to incorporate it into one's own body, language and culture (Martín de León 2010: 97-98). One of the most recent versions of the metaphor of ASSIMILATION is that contained in the [Anthropophagous Manifesto](#) published in 1928 by [Oswald de Andrade](#). This metaphor has become a symbol of the struggle against neocolonial dependence in Brazilian culture. The cannibalistic translation devours the original to transform it and make it its own (Guldin 2016: 40).



ASSIMILATION & REINCARNATION metaphors. [Source](#) & [Source](#)

The metaphor of REINCARNATION also underlines the identification with the author and the transformation of the source text. The author's soul is reincarnated in the translator and writes through him as he would have written if he had written in his own language (Hermans 1985: 126-127). [Walter Benjamin's](#) (1923) idea of "survival" (*Fortleben*), according to which works of art continue to live on in their translations, highlights the transformation and renewal that the original must undergo in order to live this new reincarnated life (Guldin 2016: 39; Martín de León 2010: 100). Also the metaphor of MEMES highlights the evolution of ideas as they propagate through translation (Chesterman 1997).

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¶ PERCEPTION metaphors

Metaphors that allude to sensory perception have been used to refer to both translation and interpreting. According to an extended version of these metaphors, the task of translators and interpreters consists in providing visual access to the source text or discourse, which means that they and their activity must remain invisible. This metaphor is consistent with that of the CONTAINER: the language of translation must be transparent to allow access to the content of the original. According to this idea, translation has been conceptualized as a WINDOW that allows us to see the source text, as a MIRROR that reflects it, or as LIGHT that lets us see what was in the dark (Hermans 2004: 121).



The metaphors centered on visual perception are related to the metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING, to the image of "naked truth" and to the Platonic idea of perception as a shadow of the world of ideas. The metaphor TRANSLATION IS A SHADOW forms part of this constellation and underlines the secondary character of

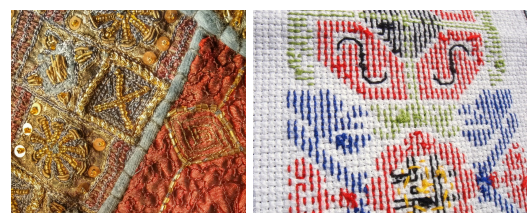
Metaphor TRANSLATION IS A SHADOW. [Source](#) translation as opposed to the original, of which it offers a flat, gray image. However, in the Indian tradition, this same metaphor activates other mappings of the source domain that have different implications for translation: the shadow not only follows the object that casts it, but also changes shape according to the angle of the light; similarly, the translation must not only follow the original, it can also vary according to the circumstances and the translator's interpretation (Gopinathan [2006](#): 236).

Translation has also been described metaphorically by drawing on senses other than sight. For example, in ancient Chinese, translations of sutra were described as watery wine or milk, chewed and regurgitated rice, or as a dish whose flavors have not been mixed well, alluding to the sense of taste to highlight the imperfect character of translations (Guldin 2016: 44-45). In her study of metaphors used by Bulgarian translators and interpreters, Baltadzhiyan Vitanova ([2020](#), [2021](#)) found images related to different senses that alluded to the translators' and interpreters' abilities and to the qualities of translations or interpretations (e.g., these may have a special coloring or aroma, be tasteless or have roughness). These metaphors are a clear example of how we use our bodily and sensory experience to conceptualize complex or abstract domains of experience.

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¶ ART and CRAFT metaphors

Metaphors that start from the domains of ART or CRAFT reflect a certain way of looking at the relationship between source text and translation, and at the role of the translator (Guldin 2016: 37). In the Western cultural tradition, translation has been conceptualized as different forms of ART, usually of a reproductive type: translators are musicians interpreting scores or actors representing literary works, translations are copies of original paintings (Koller 1972). The translation acquires in these images a secondary rank with respect to the original, of which it is a mere reproduction. This asymmetry reaches an extreme degree in the [image of the tapestry](#) that Cervantes (1615) puts in the mouth of Don Quixote (second part, chapter LXII), when he compares translations to "Flemish tapestries on the wrong side; for though the figures are visible, they are full of threads that make them indistinct, and they do not show with the smoothness and brightness of the right side".



TAPESTRY metaphor: TRANSLATION IS THE WRONG SIDE. [Source](#) & [source](#)

However, this same metaphor acquires a different value in the Chinese cultural tradition: the term *fan*, which was placed before *yi* to form the current denomination of translation, *fanyi*, originally alluded to the act of turning a piece of brocade to show its reverse side, a drawing with the same

pattern in the opposite direction, and served to vindicate the value of the translations of Buddhist sutras into Chinese (Cheung 2005: 35). This example highlights that a single metaphor can acquire different, even opposite, values in different cultural traditions. The metaphors of ART and CRAFT were also used to claim the creative character of translation in Bulgaria during the 1960s to 1980s, when the government was trying to enlist the support of artists and intellectuals in exchange for economic benefits and other privileges (Baltadzhian Vitanova [2020](#), [2021](#)).

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Research potential

As Hermans (2004) noted, the study of metaphors used in discourses about translation contributes to understanding how this concept has been structured in the past and how it is understood today. Metaphors function as models that guide research (Black 1962), so it is important to know them and be aware of their possibilities and limits. Empirical research on the metaphors that structure discourses on translation and interpreting in different theoretical approaches or in different cultural traditions is a promising area of study, where much research remains to be done. The conceptual theory of metaphor and its most recent developments offer a suitable theoretical and methodological framework for this research.

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Credits



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