

Translation and its Metaphors: the (N+1) wise men and the elephant

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This symposium was first planned because several of us involved in the teaching of translation and interpreting at Sheffield had come to see these things as having features in common with a range of other disciplines – some taught or practised by us, others not. We wanted to know whether these perceptions were more widely shared, and whether they were felt to be important. Answers on both counts turned out to be affirmative; they were also gratifyingly diverse. Their diversity does more than echo the variety of linkages posited in the first invitation to this dialogue. It confirms that we have to do with a network of connections of different kinds (which may, locally, be either more or less highly organized) rather than with some single master-pattern and its applications.

By contrast, some of the things that have been said from time to time about translation do seem to envisage it as furnishing just that kind of pattern. George Steiner, following up a chapter-title that invites us to consider “Understanding as Translation”, informs us that “Human communication equals translation” (1975: 47). Octavio Paz insists that “every text... is the translation of another text” (1971:154). Translation, Rosanna Warren writes, “is a model for cognition and survival” (1989: 6). These bold assertions may, of course, be manners of speaking only. Claims that are hardly less sweeping can make better sense in terms of their original, more localized applications. When Theo Hermans asserts that “Our accounts of translation constitute themselves a form of translation” (1999: 65), his possible over-commitment to a metaphor seems relatively apt in its immediate translation-studies context. José Saramago’s declaration that “To write is to translate [...] We transfer what we see or feel into a conventional code of symbols” (1997: 85) clearly prioritizes writerly experience over theoretical explanation. Similarly Liselotte Gumpel, maintaining that languages do not represent “reality” but rather translate “worlds into words” (1998: 47), makes a point about her philosophical view of language rather than about the scope of translation as such. A statement like this from Martin Buber’s collaborator Franz Rosenzweig is hardly separable from the dialogic philosophy associated with Buber himself:

“Everyone must translate, and everyone does. When we speak, we translate from our intention into the understanding we expect in the other – not, moreover, some absent and general other, but *this particular* other whom we see before us, and whose eyes, as we translate, either open or shut. [...] we all would have our own individual speech if [...] all speaking were not already dialogic speaking and thus – translation.” (1926: 47)

It is hard to associate that with Andrew Chesterman’s brisk characterization of “All writing is translation” as a “mutualist supermeme, benefiting both itself and the host organism” (1997: 14). What makes it hard is not so much the argument around intentionality which attends the whole notion of “memes” as the strong sense that to make any such association would involve a category-mistake. Translation, which functions so powerfully as a metaphor in Rosenzweig, seems by comparison trivial in this latter context as a metonym for all writing, or all linguistic activity, or all intellectual

disciplines. And indeed, this is the problem raised by all such universalist claims: that physical scientists translate data into accounts of the world, historians translate evidences into narrative, philosophers translate experience into theory, literary theorists translate whatever it is that they start with into whatever it is when they have finished with it, and so on. Such views can only be true at the cost of embodying a wholly trivial account of translation.

The proposition that “There is something called translation, which, besides being what translators do is (more or less) what all other attempts at organizing or applying knowledge amount to” can tell us very little about translation. It reduces any notion of that undertaking to the minimal element which all those others have in common with it. About them it tells us only that one thing; so it cannot tell us much about them either. We might interpret it as telling us what they *really* are, but why should this minimal core be seen as any more real than the “more or less” which is also part of their definition in each case? A more manageable claim might assert that translation provides us with an image or a cluster of images, universally applicable among the disciplines. This would at least allow room for a less minimal, more elaborated view of translation. But image-clusters of purportedly universal application are never unequivocally useful, either to those disciplines out of which they emerge or to those others to which they are then applied. Nor are we short of them. We already have, for example, psychoanalysis, market economics, and those neo-Darwinian memes; do we really need a translation-related cluster as well? A temptation always exists to elevate the theoretical parts of one’s own discipline into a “theory of everything”. Among cosmologists “theory of everything” may even be a legitimate object of pursuit. But that is because their subject-matter – the cosmos – actually *is* everything. Ours is not; nor is translation theory as we currently have it a “hard science” in their sense. Some of it, certainly, can claim to be the product of hard thinking, but overall it probably ranks as a less convincing case than that of the neo-Darwinists – though arguably no worse than Freudian psychology or Adam Smith-style economics. Better, then, not to stake such claims at all.

Yet can a case not still be made for them? And is it not underwritten at least in part by Richard Hudson’s description, elsewhere in this volume, of processes of interpreting that arise at every juncture of the linguist’s account of language? Can we not affirm, on that basis, that language and all the things that are done with it are inherently “interpretive”, in some sense that is particularly instanced by cases of interpreting and translation? Put like that, it is still rather more than Hudson’s carefully-nuanced exposition will allow. Interpreting, defined as “the relation between form and function”, presupposes a set of things which are recognized as forms, a set of other things which are, potentially, their functions, and some way of associating items from the two lists. And it presupposes very little else. The items in the set of forms may be of any kind with which we happen to be concerned. Of those in the set of functions it is required only that they should credibly exhibit some functional relation to items in the former set. There is no requirement that either set should be ordered as an item-by-item inventory (or in any other particular way), or that the ordering of the one set should run parallel to that of the other. It is necessary only that there should be some coherent way of “reading off” the one in terms of the other, so that what appeared at first merely as a form becomes meaningful in terms of its

function. To that end, the work which has to be done between them – the actual process of interpreting – may be of any kind that serves for the particular case in view.

This does not, of course, mean that we can know nothing about it. In many instances (including many that are concerned with language) we know a good deal about it. But it does mean that “interpreting” in the general case is conceived of in strikingly unspecific terms – as it has to be, if we are to think of it as playing a role in all manner of different contexts and disciplines. The case for thinking it an important element, common to all these as well as to interpreting and translation, is indeed strong. But the limiting paradox remains: the more generally applicable such a claim is, the less in particular it can tell us about these two. Certainly it will not be specific enough to establish either of them clearly as the paradigm, or the paradigmatic image or set of images, for all those other fields of mental activity.

We would do better to think of the interpretive pattern in this general sense as something no doubt widely shared by a great range of disciplines, and arguably shared in a more central way by interpreting and translation. But it would take a rather fuller account – though still of a sufficiently general character – to function as a “theory of translation”. And for such a theory to encompass actual practices, it would also need to embody a good deal of a more specific sort. Undoubtedly, a theoretical account of translation which had all these desirable features would be nice work if we could get it. About all that can consensually be said on that score, however, is that we do not have it or any very immediate prospect of acquiring it.

Over the past three decades or so, it is true, there has been more intensive thinking about translation theory than ever before, some of it notably more systematic than before. We seem to be moving out of a phase in which those who wanted to study translation as a socio-cultural phenomenon thought that they could dispense with linguistics, while linguists felt that they had nothing to gain from the fuzzy thinking of literary and cultural critics. Both groups, moreover, are coming to understand that what translators and interpreters do, and how they experience themselves doing it must form a respected part of their evidence. There are signs too of an awareness that the socio-cultural and linguistic perspectives, the insights of practitioners and theorists, the experiences of interpreters and translators (literary and non-literary) all need to be made mutually intelligible within some shared idiom. The candidates for that role are, it seems to me, two: either some extended version of neo-Darwinism (though its incursions into this area to date look a little premature), or an adaptation to the social and linguistic domains of some of the insights of cognitive science. Which is not to say that we should all become cognitive scientists or cognitive linguists and do the job from there, but rather that we should look in that direction while doing our own distinctive work as scholars of translation.

All that notwithstanding, it remains the case that there is no accepted theoretical account of what translation is, or of how it does what it does. It is even possible that the activity itself may not, of its nature, be very amenable to such accounts. For one thing, it probably makes better sense to say that we are dealing with a nexus of activities, rather than just

with one: that “translation” is something as elusive of definition as “game” in the later writings of Wittgenstein. One could, for example, readily make a case for the inclusion of interpreting within such a nexus; it would be much harder to establish that it fell wholly within a definable notion of “translation”. For another thing, translation, as George Steiner – squarely on target this time – observes, is “not a science but an exact art” (1975: 295). Finally, as I have argued in print before now (Round 1996: 24; 2000: 136-37), we may not even have been asking the right theoretical questions. How translations are motivated, for example, may be a more central and relevant concept than the rules by which they are elaborated, or the polysystems and subsystems which they illustrate and serve. For these and doubtless other reasons (some of which go back a very long time) a great body of what has been said and written theoretically about translation has been directed less towards defining it or explicating what happens when it happens than towards characterizing it. And a great part of that characterization, since the very earliest days of translational practice, has been pursued by way of metaphor.

The suggestion has even been made (D’Hulst 1992) that “there is something about the translating experience that calls for metaphorical language.” That would not be out of keeping with the situation thus far outlined; further reasons for thinking so may suggest themselves in the course of what follows. But the question may very well be merely one of degree: language in general, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) remind us, is very largely shaped by metaphorical constructions of the world – “metaphors we live by” – even though the occasions when we consciously and deliberately articulate them may be very few. That is certainly the case with the vocabulary of translation, at any rate in the Latin and post-Latin West. There was written translation, of course, long before Cicero began turning Greek philosophical texts into his own language, but more importantly for our purposes, there were interpreters (Lewis & Short 1962; the source for all discussion of Latin lexis here). The *interpretes* could be someone who read the omens and auguries (a rather high-status activity in Rome), or someone who explicated legal or other texts (a middling sort of educational technician), or just someone (often a slave or a captive) who interpreted between Latin and the languages of other peoples, commonly as a prelude to wiping them out in battle. The actual term combines *inter-* (“between”) with a verbal root which means “spreading it about” (here, “spreading the word”). So the *interpretes* stood, spreading the word, between two speakers, two armies, two speech-acts, two texts, two systems of signs, two languages. One notes how the usage becomes more figurative with each example.

This, then, was what the Romans called someone who did what Cicero did with the written texts of Greek authors. He was not happy about it, claiming to have worked “not as an *interpretes* but as an *orator*” (*De optimo genere oratorum*, IV, 14; in Brower 1966: 274) – by which he meant partly that he was a free rather than a literal translator, but also that his was a fit occupation for a free-born Roman gentleman, who had mastered the skills of rhetoric in order to argue eloquently in the law-courts and the Senate. Cicero, though, was the most terrible snob, and it was another four hundred years before most Romans felt the need for another word to describe someone who did what he did. St Jerome was a *translator*.

That term itself, though, comes out of the usage of Cicero's own time. *Transfere* (past participle *translatum*) was one of a number of verbs available to him to describe his own activity. Others included *vertere* or *convertere* ("to turn"), *reddere* – meaning "to give back", but used in rhetorical contexts for "to recite" or "to report" – and, of course, *interpretari*. The one which comes to dominate this semantic field, however, is *transfere*. If Cicero's agents, touring the cities of Greece which Rome had conquered a century or so earlier, had decided that an attractive piece of statuary – perhaps an Apollo from the school of Praxiteles – would look good in the gardens of their master's villa, and so had it crated and shipped across for his delight, their verb for that operation would have been *transfere*, "to carry across". This was the word which came to be used for Cicero's operations with the works of Greek philosophy. The image which it evokes is usefully generalized: there is something *there*; it is carried across a *space between*; it is now *here*. On one level the thing is as neutral as the "form to function" model, to which it seems clearly relevant. But it was also compatible with seeing translation as an act of appropriation and – as Cicero himself took pride in seeing it – an enrichment of Latin-speaking Rome with the spoils of Greece.

At the same time there were palpable differences from the case of the statue. Much as Cicero might admire the art of Praxiteles, he was not going to start work with a block of marble on his own account; nor, though he might find Apollo's physique impressive, was he likely to enrol for a course in bodybuilding. But in relation to the authors he was translating he was committed to doing something very like that. *Imitatio* of original authors was an essential part of rhetorical training; it was how the *orator* went to work. Often, moreover, the characters in the translated works – Socrates in Plato was an obvious instance – were themselves examples to be imitated. And what you imitated was not just a plundered (if still valued) object; it was, to that extent, your model and your superior.

The best-known product of this paradox was the widely-quoted epigram about "captive Greece leading her captor captive". More relevantly for our present purposes, it enables us to sum up the main elements in the mental space that is evoked for most of us even now by the term "translation". Structurally it has much in common with Richard Hudson's model of the interpretive process. There are items which are deictically *there* and which, being there, are known immediately only by their formal qualities; there are other items *here* which are available to us in a more fully functional way; and there is a process in between by which the first set of items is "read off" in terms of the second. The main structural differences are that the space between the two sets is more explicitly asserted as something which that process has to cross or otherwise nullify, and that in this intervening space there appears the figure of the translator/interpreter, who undertakes the process. But along with this metaphorical enrichment a whole series of problematic aspects are also highlighted.

How in the first place are the deictics being applied? Are the "here", the "there", and the "space between" conceived of in spatial, temporal, or linguistic terms – Greece to Rome, fourth to first century BC, Greek to Latin? The answer seems to be "In all three, with variable emphasis on the first two, but with the third as a constant". That answer will hold

until we ask, with Roman Jakobson, whether that third category could not more appropriately be intersemiotic, a matter of different *kinds* of code. (1959: 233) And we have to agree that, sometimes at least, it could. Then along come Theo Hermans (1985) and Gideon Toury (1995) and Susan Bassnett (Bassnett 1991; Bassnett & Lefevere, eds 1998), and others of that way of thinking, demanding to know whether by “linguistic” we did not really mean “cultural”. After some argument, we will probably concede that we meant that too. Our usage, we might notice, is already sufficiently metaphorical to admit of accounts framed for a good many different purposes. But where, in this variously imagined space, is our translator situated?

In between, no doubt, like the *interpretes* he or she is. But that still begs several questions. We might naturally associate translators and interpreters most closely with the languages, codes, and cultures into which, and on whose behalf, they are working. But they do not have to stand always in the same relation to all of these things. Interpreters, for instance, working turn and turn about between languages, cannot do so. Other examples would not be hard to construct, including cases (like that of the captive working under duress) where the translator/interpreter was decisively distanced from his or her targets. And are “here” and “there”, in any event, what we, acting as the deictic centre, take them to be, or are they more relevantly seen as what they would have been for this or that translator?

Again, given the measure in which the space to be traversed is always a metaphorical space, it comes as no surprise that the “carrying across” should turn out to be of a peculiar kind. Chesterman’s assertion that “although they are directional, translations do *not* move” (1997: 8) perhaps overstates the case. There is always movement in time, and across the space metaphorically envisaged: first there is a given text in its own culture (T^1 in C^1), and then there is its translated version in another culture (T^2 in C^2). But of course, T^1 also remains there in C^1 . Once *en route* for Rome, Cicero’s plundered statue was not in Greece any more. But Plato and Aristotle and Zeno were still there in Greece even after Cicero had finished transferring /translating them into Latin. Hence the development of other metaphors: of turning (which also keeps the notion of movement in view), reciting, reporting, rendering.

As to what it is that is brought across or turned or rendered, none of these metaphors offers much help with that. The shared imagery which occupies the mental space corresponding to “translation” includes no defining detail of the proper object of the translation process. Indeed, it presents that object as something oddly elusive: not a set of forms but not straightforwardly a set of functions either. We might get around that by suggesting that what translation works upon is actually the set of form/function relations made available in the source-text. But that would bring us no closer to a consensus on which of those relations should occupy the translator, or how. And while the object of translation remains unspecific, the process too remains incompletely profiled. The metaphorical picture of translation which is furnished by our traditional language for talking about it will carry us no further. If we want a more detailed account, we have to supply it ourselves, and to make it compatible with what is already there. It is, after all, what translators and translation-scholars have persistently attempted to supply out of their own metaphorical resources and with varying degrees of concern for compatibility. It is

still worth doing, even so, because the basic metaphorical picture of the translation-event, though susceptible both of variation and of extension, remains robustly convincing.

It would remain so even if we were to range much further afield in assembling our core terminology for translation. Richly worthwhile in its cross-cultural insights, such a quest would be likely to leave the main picture much as it is. Thus, St Jerome's key term *exprimere*, itself going back to Cicero, foregrounds that "pressing out" of meaning which a sense-for-sense translator will want to apply to a sacred text. But it does so merely as one particular way – the whole *ad litteram / ad sententiam* argument admits that there could be others – of filling in the indeterminate space left for "nature of the translation process". (Jerome 1980: 13; see also Copeland 1989) The Germans speak of *übersetzung* ("setting over") – no more than a variant on the image of spatial transfer. The Sanskrit term *anuvad* ("saying again in an explanatory way"), widespread in modern India, lies somewhere within the same semantic range as *reddere* (Trivedi 1999: 9); other Sanskrit words for "changing the shape" and "changing the language" offer further alternatives for what the translation process might prioritize. (Viswanatha & Simon 1999: 169) The Irish instruction to translate – *Cuir Gaelige an seo* ("Put Irish on this") – has less expected implications, inviting us to re-think the directional thrust of translation and the relative status of source and target-texts. And indeed, it took a particularly powerful cultural experience – Ireland's great age of interlingual scholarship and interlinear glossing – to implant this questioning of the established, Latin-derived model. Just so might some future age preserve in its own discourse about translation, some turn of phrase from the long-obsolete manuals of twentieth-century computerized language-processing. Or then again, possibly not.

It is when we turn from the more or less taken-for-granted metaphorical construction of the translation event to the more conscious metaphor-making deployed in characterizing its still unspecific areas that things become seriously unpredictable. The translator is, at one time or another, a truthful witness (Johnson 1989: 85), a discoverer of buried treasure (Hermans 1985), a slave-labourer on another man's plantation (Dryden 1697: 21), a colonist with the option of exploiting the original author *in situ* or making him an enforced immigrant (Fulda 1904; in Brower 1966: 279), a displaced and disadvantaged post-colonial figure (Trivedi, 1999: 12-13). He or she might be a restorer of historical music-scores, a specialist in animal anatomy (the translation as stuffed owl, at least, is familiar to most of us), someone engaged with jigsaw puzzles (one each for SL and TL) or with constructional toys, a fisherman working with differently-meshed nets. All that is a selection only from an article by Alex Gross, whose title "Some Images and Analogies for the Process of Translation" carries the alarming promise of yet more (1991: 34, 32, 30, 31, 27-28). Translators are alchemists or portrait painters, offering a an image of the source-text or perhaps of its author, or they are actors, directors (Spivak 1993: 179-81), or composers, or musical performers or improvisers, or conjurors (Gross 1991: 33-34), diplomats, linguistic mediators (Neubert 1997: 5-8), or cannibals (Campos 1963; 1981a). This last, Else Vieira insists, is meant only in the best of senses: "not a note of furious aggression, but rather one of irreverently amorous devouring" (which is to some extent reassuring). More relevantly, she sets that image, much favoured among Brazilians, in its context of Amerindian tribal custom: "a tribute to the other's strength that one wishes to

have combined with one's own for greater vitality" (1999: 96). Which, give or take a plateful of chick peas, is only what Cicero was trying to do with Greek philosophy. Much the same goes for another of Campos's more lurid figurations of translation: "a transfusion of blood" (1981b: 208).

Some of the more striking metaphors applied to the translation process, however, are actually about something else. Isaac Bashevis Singer's remark that translation "undresses the literary work, shows it in its true nakedness" (Delisle & Woodsworth 1995: v) vividly expresses a particular kind of authorial anxiety. It is certainly of interest that he can feel this way about translation, but less clear that this is what translation, or even literary translation, always does. For Heinrich Heine, poetic translation was "strawplaiting sunbeams" (Poggioli 1959: 144); for Charles Tomlinson and Henry Gifford in 1960, it was "resurrection, but not of the body" (Gifford 1995: 63); a few years earlier in 1942 Édouard Roditi had written that "the translator should meticulously reconstruct its [the poem's] body in another language." (in Brower 1966: 286) The differences here have at least as much to do with different views on the nature of poetry as with the practice of translation.

Where the focus is unambiguously on the latter, even conflicting metaphors can prove informative. Phyllis Bird's suggestion that Bible translators work to enable a modern audience "to overhear an ancient conversation, rather than to hear itself addressed directly" (1988: 91) pinpoints a refinement of priorities which might constructively be allowed to govern the process. So too, along rather different lines, does Jean Starr Untermeyer's account of her task as "not so much like transposing a composition from one key to another as [...] reorchestrating a composition for another set of instruments" (1965: 236). Ernst August Gutt calls translation "quoting the original out of context" (1998: 49), while for Albrecht Neubert, "Translating and interpreting are called for in situations where language is 'out of joint' and the work of the language mediator is to 'set it right'" (1997: 6). These are very different emphases, but the focus on linguistic disjuncture – between L¹ form and L² function – is strikingly to the point.

Yet the relevant profiling of translation is all too often hampered by the powerfully elaborated metaphorical expression of insights that are inherently partial – and sometimes palpably extraneous to any concern with knowing translation better. When Homi Bhabha finds "a conceptual near-synonymity between the 'transnational' and the 'translational'" (1994: 224), or Tejaswini Niranjana (1992) affirms that "translation is an over-arching metaphor for the unequal power-relationship which defines the condition of the colonized" (Trivedi 1999: 12), their primary focus is not really on translation at all. It is – quite explicitly in the latter case – on how that activity can be used as a metaphor for things which, legitimately, interest them more. Translation as a metaphor can tell us about the things for which it is used as a metaphor. It has less to tell us about translation, though its metaphorical use can tell us something about what its users think translation is. Among post-colonial critics, Maria Tymoczko achieves a more informative focus, asserting by way of analogy rather than metaphor that "The task of the interlingual translator has much in common with the task of the post-colonial writer" (1999: 21). That

is a proposition which can be inserted into the relevant mental/metaphorical space and argued about; it is not a bid to reconstruct that space for other purposes.

Similar distinctions are no doubt in order among gender-based translation metaphors. Steiner's characterization of one phase in the interpretive process as involving invasive, appropriative penetration (1975: 297-98) has more faults than the obvious one of not conveying very much about what it purports to describe. Feminist alternatives have been asserted in terms of surrender to the text and voluntary loss of rhetorical control (Spivak 1993), a delight in "interminable re-reading and re-writing" (Godard 1990; Arrojo 1995), but also a more assertive manipulation ("womanhandling") of textuality (Godard 1990), even an act of "hijacking" (von Flotow 1991). Sherry Simon, who summarizes these and similar views (1996: 13-14, 28-29, 143-44), offers the reasonable caveat that "Feminist translation involves extending and developing the intention of the original text, not deforming it" (1996: 16). There are, perhaps some more general points to be made too. Most translators' experience of translation involves alternate phases of hyperactive textual intervention and receptive, ludic passivity. We may, if it matters to us to do it (and there may be very good non-translational reasons why it should matter), identify these phases respectively as masculine and feminine. But we should not let that identification obscure the fact that both male and female translators need both phases. Nor should we allow it to obfuscate our enquiries into how the two work together in the overall translation process.

In general, too, the more our metaphors come to matter to us in their literal, non-translational contexts, the greater the risk to their potential usefulness for our understanding about translation. One obvious and closely-related example is the emphatic rejection by Susan Bassnett (1993: 58-59) and Barbara Johnson (1985) of metaphors of fidelity, as grounded in obsolete notions of submission and contractual obligation to source-text or spouse. It is all too easy in that context to overlook what both critics – the former in writing of "remaking relationships" (1996: 62); the latter in presenting the translator as "a faithful bigamist" (see also Doyle 1991: 13) – implicitly acknowledge as mattering most for translation. However much our views about marriage might change, translation cannot operate without some sense of a responsibility, an answerability (however conceived of) towards the source-text – the words already given (Nord 1997: 47-48). That the translator will have other promises to keep will, of course, also (and always) be true; the issue will be what to do about all of them.

We are unlikely, then, to get the most out of our metaphors if we insist on thinking of them too literally. From that point of view, a good deal of what has been written about violence as part of the translation process has to appear suspect. Peter Newmark's comment that the translation of any original work is bound to "do violence" to target-language norms (1991: 35) may be no more than a *figura etymologica*; he could as well have written "violate", as a synonym for "infringe" or "breach". There could be similar explanations too for some of Steiner's more alarming turns of phrase. On Haroldo de Campos's cannibalism, as already noted, we have Else Vieira's word (to say nothing of the biographical evidence) against taking it for any sort of reality. But it is Campos, too, who characterizes translation as "a parricidal dismemory" (1981b: 209) – meaning that

the translator first kills off the source-text author by substituting a new voice for his, and then forgets that it ever happened. In this, arguably, he may be letting his attachment to the Oedipus myth override his attentiveness to the act of translation, which by no means kills off the source-text as originally authored, and even allows something of it to survive, however problematically, in its newly-created version.

A more disturbing, though far from unfamiliar note is struck by Rosmarie Waldrop, writing of the “Dionysiac orgy of signification” which in Campos’s view (1985) achieves the destruction of source-text form. “I take pleasure,” she adds, “in destroying it because it means making it mine, and perhaps simply because there is pleasure in destruction” (1989: 226). If discarding a verse form has that effect on her, what happens, one wonders, when a wasp distracts her from her labours, and she has to get up and swat it? The Dionysus reference is the key to this, of course: we are in Nietzschean territory here. Arrojo (1995) makes the whole case plain, attributing to Nietzsche and the Freudians the lesson that there is “no escape from the violence involved in any attempt to make sense of the world, any attempt to use language to master the disorder of what lies beyond language” (Simon 1996: 29). The theoretical point is one which might be argued. But it seems very clear that this universal violence, like the violence which Lawrence Venuti sees as residing “in the very purpose and activity of translation [...] emerging at any point in the production and reception of the translated text” (1995: 18-19), is a metaphorical violence, some way removed from what might be happening on the São Paulo or New York streets. About translation these metaphors tell us little, and that obscurely. Language – the language of translation included – proceeds through determinate choices: we prioritize and opt for *this*; and in so doing, we rule out *that*. Yet our utterances often seem to be organized and validated in more fundamental ways – inchoate, indeterminate, but themselves still closely bound up with language. There are authentic tensions here for the translator. But we have to work quite hard on these metaphors of violence before we actually get to any of that.

Labour of that sort can create a certain impatience because there are already so many competing metaphors of a more directly relevant kind. The notion of translation as commentary, despite its impressive ancestry (echoed still in “Put Irish on this”) has not always been well regarded. Croce (1901) dismissed unaesthetic translations as “simple commentaries” (Brower 1966: 278). Yet for William Frost (1955) verse translation was “a commentary on the original” (Brower 1966: 291), while Neruda’s translator John Felstiner (1980: 1) called it “an essential act and art of literary criticism”. Recent theoretical emphases on continuations, supplements, and paratexts have lent further interest to images of this kind.

Such an interest might not be readily compatible (though it could be made so) with the profusion of images of translation as performance. “A performative relation to the other text” is what, for Venuti, distinguishes translation from scholarship (1995: 44). Godard (1990: 91) and Spivak (1993: 179-81) both develop the theatrical metaphor in a context of feminist translation practice. Ann MacLaren (1998) brings out more specific links with drama. Alex Gross, as we have seen, invokes various performances, musical and magical

as figures for translation (1991: 33-34, 35-36); Christopher Middleton (1989) argues for seeing it as “a species of mime”.

A third strand of obviously relevant imagery is supplied by the well-established repertoire of alchemical and scientific metaphors. Alchemy, with its transmutational goals, offered an image in whose terms Renaissance translators found it natural to present their work (see Hermans 1985). Some of them did so with great precision, as when Sir John Denham argued that, in pouring the “subtle spirit” of poetry from one language into another, a “new spirit” (that of poetry in English) must be added, lest the poetry evaporate (1656; in Webb 1976: 22). One might contrast the vague and cursory alchemical reference deployed in Shelley’s famous “violet in the crucible” image (1821; in Webb 1976: 22), not so much to show how translation might work as to insist that it cannot. With an altogether clearer notion of what is involved, José Saramago insists that, in translation as in alchemical change, “something must be transformed into something else *to keep on being what it was*” (1997: 86). The same relevant dialectic of identity and difference is present, too, in Margaret Sayers Peden’s image of melting and re-freezing an ice-cube (1989; in Bell 1993: 35).

More broadly, though from the translational viewpoint less usefully, Paul Feyerabend has asserted that “translating a language into another language is like constructing a scientific theory: in both cases we must find concepts to fit the language of the phenomena” (1987: 266; in Halverson 1997: 226). The translator has to find words, not concepts, though working much of the time with the latter; arguably, too, the thing has to be done by way of a less clear-cut, step-by-step process. Translation processes analogous to those of the sciences can, however, be singled out: notably the mapping of one language onto another – a metaphor routinely used by George Lakoff (e.g. 1987: 312) among others, and enriched with multiple variants (map-projections; units of measurement; temperature scales; old and new technologies; Chinese and western medicine) by the indefatigable Alex Gross (1991: 28-29, 33).

So where does all this plethora of translation-imagery get us? Many readers will be familiar with the genially didactic poem – based originally on a Sufi or Hindu parable – about the six wise men (all of them blind) who went to see the elephant. Each one making contact with a different part of it, they concluded severally that the creature was like a wall, a spear, a snake, a tree, a fan, and a rope, and proceeded to argue about it among themselves for a long time. “Each,” concludes the story, “was partly in the right, and all were in the wrong.” That certainly represents one way of handling a body of relevant but highly diverse imagery, and if the six wise men had been able to put their reports together in a common account, they would have found a better way still. But the resulting picture of the elephant would not have been improved upon if, for example, six hundred blind leprechauns had undertaken a yet more piecemeal survey, coming up with six hundred such partial testimonies. Their reconciliation would be a much more complex business, and the common ground between their manifold differences would be at risk of being so bleached of meaning as to reduce any composite picture to near-anonymity.

We run much the same risk in our attempts to characterize translation. We badly need ways of discriminating among all these metaphors, in terms not of their absolute rightness or wrongness, but of their broader or more specific applicability, their central or peripheral relevance, their cognitive force or lack of it. These issues have been highlighted in a rather sporadic fashion in much of the foregoing discussion; the time has now come to address them in a more purposive and systematic way.

Research towards this paper has provided evidence for a quite unscientific but fairly extensive overview of the range of terms used (preponderantly in twentieth-century debates conducted in English) for whatever it is that translators do (see Figure 1). Some of these follow in the wake of important but minority use in earlier times: *turn*; *express* or *expound* – this last being a medieval addition (Johnson 1989: 71) –, and the now archaic *do into TL* – stylistically marked but semantically bleached, and much loved by translators whose own versions share those qualities. There are important recent additions to this vocabulary, emphasizing the translator’s autonomy – *construct*; *produce*; *invent*; *complement*; *complete*; *supplement* – but insofar as translators are, in practice, less autonomous than such terms suggest, we might mark these down as metaphorical too, albeit legitimately so. The field is still totally dominated, though, by words reflecting either the appropriation and “bringing across” of others’ material expressed in the original Latin *transferre*, or the imitation of something pre-existent implied by *reddere* and the like.

We might call these the *trans*- group and the *re*- group, since most of the verbs in question have one or other of these prefixes. Rather surprisingly, there seem to be more *re*- words than *trans*- words. In the list as given, the difference is only 22 to 17, but the *trans*- set is inflated by five one-off terms coined by Haroldo de Campos, and the *re*-group does not allow for four near-synonyms which share its sense, but not its characteristic prefix. When these adjustments are made, the tallies are 25 and 12. While lacking any formal statistical warrant, these figures do suggest that the translator’s relation with source-texts has been a focus of rather more concern, while the target-oriented business of “bringing across” has preoccupied practitioners and critics rather less. Which is not precisely what much modern translation-theory might have led us to expect.

The central message, though, is that views of what happens in translation continue to be poised between images of appropriation and images of imitation. “Poised”, rather than “polarized”, because many people use images of both kinds – an indication, if any were needed, that neither kind of image is felt to provide a particularly complete or satisfactory account of the translation process. Not at all surprisingly, then, we find a number of voices raised – and the variety of sources from which they come is itself striking – in favour of metaphors of translation as a mediating, reconciling activity: the bridge, diplomacy, the negotiation of meanings. Not all are equally well-found: one thinks of William Frawley’s notion (1984) of a “third” or “matrix” code, operating alongside SL and TL. We might wonder again how Campos’s constructive view of translation as a two-way cultural enterprise squares with his image of it as a blood transfusion, or how his theme of cannibalism fits into his notion of translation as dialogue (Vieira 1999: 9, 11).

Yet “dialogue is a key image in this context. As Saramago, with his strong ethical roots insists, it is at once personal (author/translator) and collective (culture-to-culture), and its basis lies in mutual need (1997: 86). Not far from this is Untermeyer’s testimony of translation as “an adventure in empathy” (1965: 258), and closer still is Neubert’s reference, drawing on much practical experience of professional translating and interpreting, to the “language mediator” (1997: 5-8). Whether the translator’s mediation is primarily linguistic or cultural – in some measure, plainly, it is both – is something about which our model of it ought probably to allow for argument. Metaphors of this kind, though, will properly have a major part in shaping that model.

There are, however, other ways of handling binaries, and the imagery which reflects these will have its own contribution to make. From early Biblical translation to the politics explored in Mona Baker’s contribution to this volume, translation-outcomes have been capable of proving partisan and conflictive, bringing not peace but a sword. Without giving these tendencies more than their due – as post Nietzschean images of omnipresent violence tend to do – we ought not to leave them out of account. Hence the interest attaching to those images which present binary aspects of translation in essentially non-reconciliatory ways.

The alternatives of source and target positioning between which translation-scholars from Schliermacher onwards have invited us to choose (Schliermacher 1813; in Schulte and Biguenet 1992: 36-54) provide one obvious example. Another would be the sequencing of different translation activities – a more metaphorical business than it might sometimes appear. Reading and writing are both literally present in translation, though less clearly so in interpreting. But the schematic sequencing of them as separable undertakings, implicit in Ezra Pound’s approach as later in Yves Bonnefoy (1976; see Bassnett 1993: 62) is more a metaphor than a literal reality. The same applies to Félix de Grand’ Combe’s neat sequencing of the two underlying aspects of translation which govern the major part of our current vocabulary for it: “absorption followed by re-creation” (1949; in Brower 1966: 287).

There are attractions, too, about treating the seeming incompatibles that cluster in the mental space assigned to translation as susceptible, if not to reconciliation, then at least to convergence. Kirsten Malmkjaer (1993), for instance, posits the convergence of writers’ and readers’ beliefs (ST author/translator; translator/TT public) as the key notion in a model which will account for both success and unsuccess in translation – something which we surely need to do. Far less securely-founded is Ganesh Devy’s claim that “translation is a merger of sign systems; such a merger is possible because systems of signs are open and vulnerable” (1999: 185). The fact that they are open and vulnerable (if, indeed, it is a fact) is very far from being a sufficient condition for any such merger; hence the metaphor, attractive in itself, is drained of whatever conviction it might have carried. Translators do work between sign systems. We need to know more about how they manage it, and metaphorical constructions can, in principle, help us to do that. This one, though, does not help.

Nor, in general, does the final move in this direction: the attempt to dissolve all the experiences and metaphors of choice and negotiation which translation involves into a boundless play of textual and linguistic complements and completions. From Walter Benjamin (1923), Octavio Paz (1971), and Jacques Derrida (1985) those who are concerned with translation can derive much that is worth thinking about, but relatively little that lends itself to the ordering of their thoughts. The need is to fill out a usable mental space, and what fills mental spaces and makes them usable is, in the end, structure. This particular space is going to call for some fairly intricate modelling of that structure. The imagery which we bring to bear on that is going to have to address what Gregory Shreve and Geoffrey Koby call “a complex cognitive process in which world knowledge, linguistic competences, pragmatic constraints and social factors [are] all integrated” (1997: xiii). Our final principle of selection among translation-metaphors can only be one of aptness for that task.

The experiences of translation which structure our notions of such aptness will, of course, vary a good deal. In that sense we are still as far as we ever were from any consensual outcome. Yet this prolonged engagement with issues of metaphor does prompt a number of conclusions as to how a more inclusive overview of what translation is might be developed. In the first place the translation process can be seen as an operation involving mental spaces; this, by now, seems uncontroversial. Secondly, virtually all translation can be represented metaphorically as a mental-space operation of one of two kinds. It can be taken as a form of reported speech, an answer to the question “What did X say?” Or it can be taken as a counterfactual, responding to the question “If our own linguistic and cultural resources and constraints (or this more specific subset among them) were to be applied in this SL utterance (as, self-evidently, they are not), what would it be like?” Between them, the two possibilities seem inclusive enough to cover any cultural variants in translational practice. Some problems remain, however. Why should the two of them be seen as predicating a common set of processes – or, to put it another way, “How do we know that both are, equally, translation?” And again, how do we know, in any given case, which of the two we are dealing with? Detailed answers to these questions remain to be worked out, but the essential context for providing them is suggested by an observation of A.K. Ramunajan: “To translate is to ‘metaphor’, to carry across” (1989: 61).

The etymological point here is well made, but the line of reflection which it prompts has far wider implications. Translation may not actually *be* metaphor, but it is something very like it. When we translate, we are operating with the language of our source-text in very much the same way as we would operate on a stretch of metaphorical language. To the monolingual the language of a foreign-language source-text is strictly meaningless; to the translator it is, like figurative language, profoundly non-standard, but indirectly representative of something else: it is the image of a target-language text which has not yet come to be. To perceive the mental space which this later might occupy is to displace the source-text into a figurative zone. Some very specific and powerful pragmatic intervention is needed to get it out again. (Round 1993: 20-21) That intervention (which this account still leaves undefined in its detail) is the translation process.

All this, when I first formulated it in 1993, was based on Stephen Levinson's account (1983: 156-68) of the pragmatic handling of figurative language. I did not at that stage make the connection with John Searle's essay on metaphor (1977), but it is one well worth making, especially in relation to his diagrammatic classification of metaphors (reproduced here as Figure 2). Mapping the translator's source-text onto Searle's "sentence-meaning", and the various types of target-text onto his "utterance meaning" (the shift from form to function yet again), it becomes possible to match his classification of types of metaphor with a range covering most types of translation. The outcome of that mapping appears here as Figure 3. A good deal of this has yet to be worked out, of course, and even when that has been done, we will still be a long way from solving the major problems of translation theory. But the exercise does suggest that metaphor, with its power to synthesize complex experiences and prompt fresh possibilities of interpretation, will remain relevant to our attempts at solving them.

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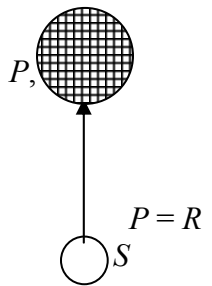
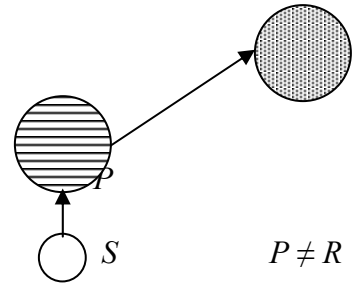
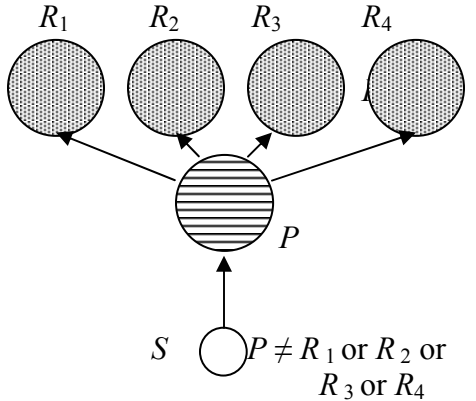
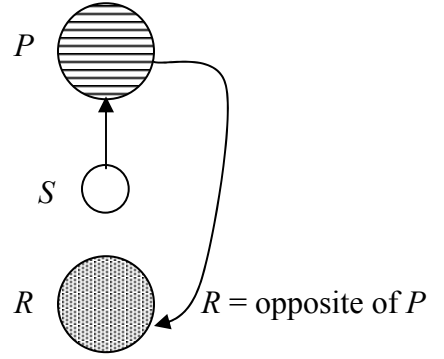
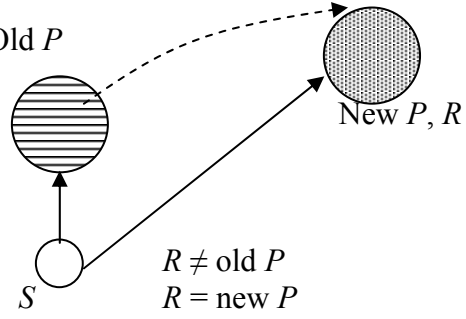
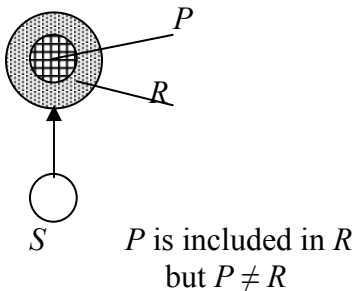
Figure 1

Terms for “to translate”: a selection

turn turn around	transcode transcreate	rebegin rebuild
do into TL	transcribe transfer	recapture recast
expound express	transform transfuse transject	reconstruct recreate reevaluate
interpret	translate transmigrate	re-express reform
construct create invent produce	transmit transmute transpose	reimagine reinvent remake render
complement complete supplement	transhellenize* transluciferate* transluminare* transparadise* transtextualize*	reorchestrate rephrase replace represent reproduce resurrect retrieve reword rework
		copy
		give account of imitate substitute

* Nonce-words, coined by Haroldo de Campos (see Vieira 1993, 28-30).

Figure 2. Searle's graphic comparison of the relations between sentence meaning and utterance meaning, where the sentence meaning is "S is P" and the utterance meaning is "S is R", that is, where the speaker utters a sentence that means literally that the object S falls under the concept P, but where the speaker means by the utterance that the concept S falls under the concept R.

<p>Literal utterance A speaker says <i>S</i> is <i>P</i> and means <i>S</i> is <i>P</i>. Thus the speaker places object <i>S</i> under the concept <i>P</i>, where $P = R$. Sentence meaning and utterance meaning coincide.</p> 	<p>Metaphorical Utterance (simple) Speaker says <i>S</i> is <i>P</i>, but means metaphorically that <i>S</i> is <i>R</i>. Utterance meaning is arrived at by going through literal sentence meaning.</p> 	<p>Metaphorical Utterance (open ended) Speaker says <i>S</i> is <i>P</i>, but means metaphorically an indefinite range of meanings, <i>S</i> is <i>R</i>₁, <i>S</i> is <i>R</i>₂, etc. As in the simple case, metaphorical meaning is arrived at by going through literal meaning</p> 
<p>Ironical Utterance Speaker means the opposite of what he says. Utterance meaning is arrived at by going through sentence meaning and then doubling back to the opposite of sentence meaning.</p> 	<p>Dead Metaphor Original sentence meaning is bypassed and the sentence acquires a new literal meaning identical with the former metaphorical utterance meaning. This is a shift from the metaphorical utterance diagram above to the literal utterance diagram</p> 	<p>Indirect Speech Act Speaker means what he says, but he means something more as well. Thus utterance meaning includes sentence meaning but extends beyond it.</p> 

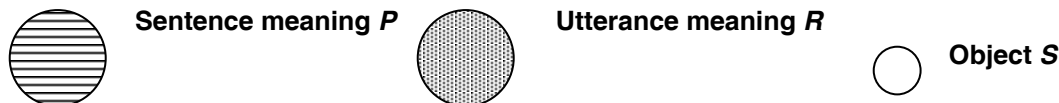
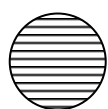
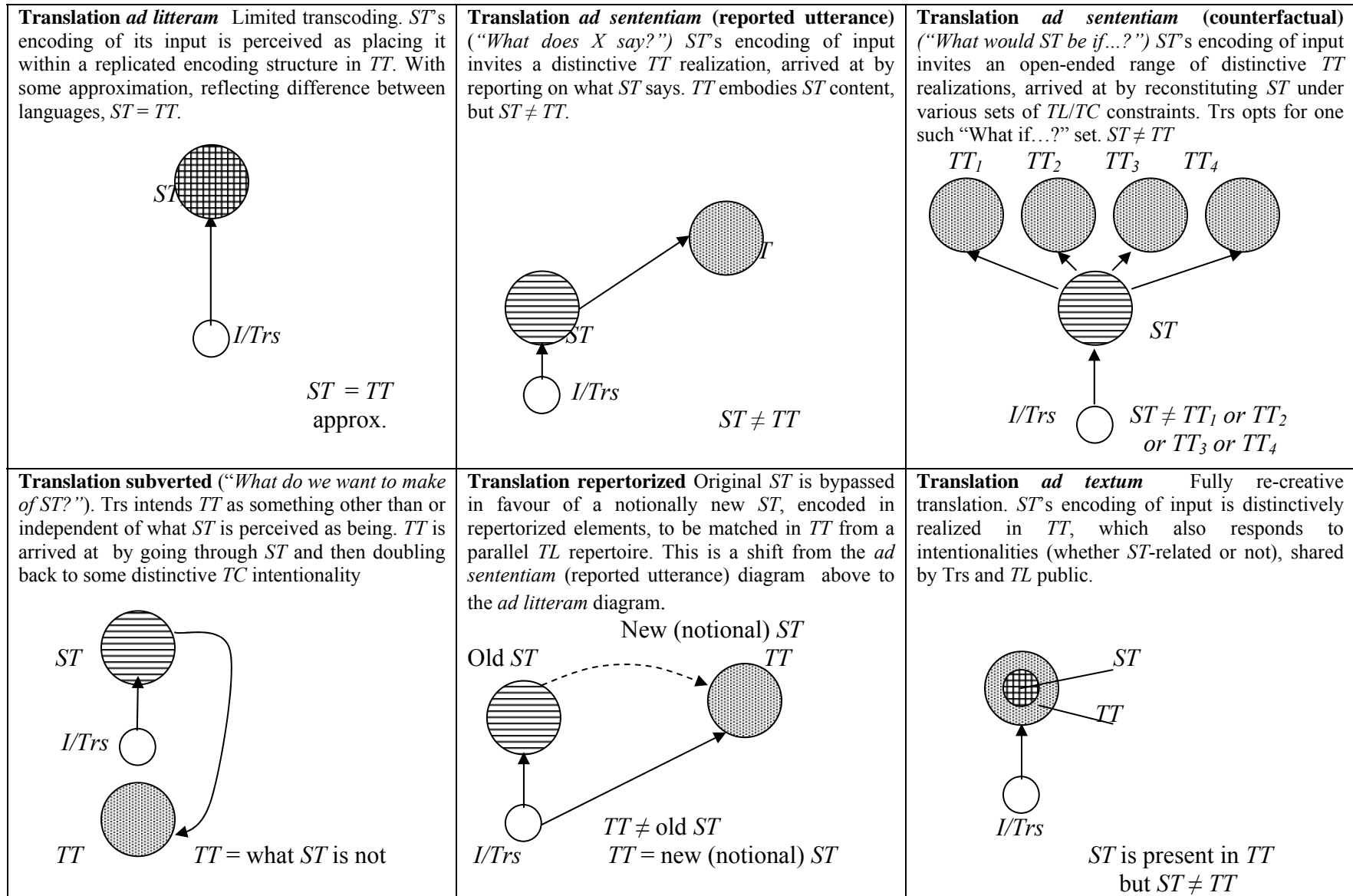
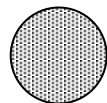


Figure 3. Translation-types distributed according to Searle’s classification of metaphors



Source text *ST*



Target text *TT*



Input to *ST*, perceived by translator *I/Trs*

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