Metaphor and Translation: Case Studies in Indigenous Australian Poetry

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Abstract

The translatability of metaphors is one of the most complex and debated issues in translanguaging studies and can be approached from a variety of perspectives. This contribution focuses specifically on the interlingual dimension, exploring the translatability of figurative language and, in particular, metaphors. Developing as a reflection on the practical experience of translating a number of Australian authors into Italian, the paper examines the ways in which three First Nations writers (Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Ali Cobby Eckermann, and Evelyn Araluen) employ metaphors, by comparing their verses in English with some possible Italian translations. Their specific uses of metaphor highlight some of the mechanisms that drive the functioning of figurative language and the theoretical level of translatability, drawing attention to a few crucial problems that translators have to face and the strategies they can resort to, in the light of the most recent debates in the translation studies field.

Beyond any claims of the defining or normative orders, the aim of this enquiry is to call attention to literary translation as an interpretive process that contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamic nature of metaphoric meaning. As the examples provided suggest, metaphor opens to new world, new perspectives, and new interpretive orientations.

Keywords literary translation, metaphor, Australian literature, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Ali Cobby Eckermann, Evelyn Araluen

Introduction

The poem that opens the collection *Inside My Mother*, published in 2015 by Yankunytjatjara poet Ali Cobby Eckerman, is entitled "Bird Song".[1] It is a brief composition, organised graphically as a flock of migratory birds:

> our birds fly
> on elongated wings
> *they fly forever*
> *they are our Spirit*
>
> *our bird song*
> is so ancient
> *we gifted it*
> *to the church*
>   (Eckermann 3)

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[1] This essay is based on the seminar entitled "Metafora e traduzione. Casi studio nella poesia australiana" [Metaphor and Translation. Case Studies in Australian Poetry], held in Ferrara on 29 March 2023 as part of the lecture series "Giornate dell'editoria e della traduzione letteraria", co-organised by the University of Padua and the University of Ferrara. The methodology illustrated in the seminar is also employed in Zanoletti, "Le metafore", with reference to the theme of hope in Australian poetry.

The highlighted parts (italics mine) can be qualified as figurative expressions, containing metaphorical language. Reading the poem, in fact, no one will think that there are real-live birds that are able to fly endlessly (as the hyperbolic expression "they fly forever" implies); it is equally unlikely that the same birds can be made to coincide with what the author calls "our Spirit"; nor does it make sense to assume that, in the context of the poem, by referring to the birds' song we are talking about a real gift ("we gifted it to the church"). On the contrary, these expressions can be considered linguistic manifestations of metaphor, for two main reasons: first, the basic sense of the words employed does not coincide with the contextual meaning; and second, the contextual meaning of the words employed can be related to the basic sense through a similarity link (Steen).

Translating these verses into Italian ("Canto d'uccelli"), we would obtain something similar:

> i nostri uccelli volano
> con ali allungate
> *volano in eterno*
> *sono il nostro Spirito*
>
> il nostro canto d'uccelli
> è tanto antico che
> *lo abbiamo elargito*
> *alla chiesa*

(Eckermann 3, my translation)

As can be seen by comparing Eckermann's poem with the proposed translation, the metaphors expressed in Italian tend to follow literally those in English. The penultimate line is an exception: the past participle "elargito" (literally, "bestowed"), higher and rarer than "donato" or "regalato" (literally, "gifted"), evokes the semantic field of religion and anticipates the image of the church, closing the stanza. The verb "elargire" derives from the Latin adjective "largus" meaning generous, broad, wide. "Largus" recalls the image of the elongated, wide-open wings of the flying birds, protagonists of the first quatrain. Moreover, the assonance "elargito" / "antico" strengthens the underlying idea of antiquity, summoned by the Latinism. Finally, the allusion to spirituality implicit in "church" / "chiesa" (with lower-case initial letter) parallels and contrasts with, in the first tercet, the capitalised word "Spirit" ("Spirito"). Overall, except for the detour from literal rendering represented by the choice to translate "gifted" with "elargito", in the Italian retextualisation the use of figurative language follows the prototext. Why?

In "Bird Song", the image of singing appears to be connected to the sacred sphere and can be read as a metaphor for spiritual and cultural identity, intimacy with nature and the land, continuity between past and future, and resilience. It can be read as a metaphor for belonging and hope. And since the metaphorical expressions employed by Eckermann, a writer of Aboriginal ancestry, refer to precise cultural coordinates that underlie a world vision, the act of translation implies not only interpreting what the incipient sign system denotes, but also understanding the internal system of a language and the structure of a given text in that language, and reciprocating the textual system so as to reproduce similar effects in the reader (Eco, *Dire quasi* 16). Essentially, translating metaphors entails an intralingual, interlingual,

intercultural, and interemotional transference, where it is crucial to seize and internalise the emotional dimension, intimately connected with the cultural and connotative impact expressed by the signs that constitute it (Petrilli and Ji; Zanoletti, "Aboriginal" 255-256). This can be done by implementing different interpretive-translation strategies.

This contribution investigates the process that makes such transference possible, from a translation-semiotic perspective. Drawing on the experience of translating several Australian authors into Italian (Zanoletti, "Ab origena", "In Other", "Translating an Artwork", "Oodgeroo", "Translating an Imagetext", "*My People*", "Aboriginal", "Poems", "Le metafore"), I shall examine the ways in which three Indigenous writers, namely Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Ali Cobby Eckermann, and Evelyn Araluen, employ metaphors to talk about the future, by comparing their verses in English with some possible translations into Italian. Their distinct usages on one hand suggest some specific meanings that the concept of future has in the historical-cultural context of reference of each poet; on the other hand, they draw attention to some of the challenges that the translator must face and the techniques she can put in place, in light of the most recent advances in translation studies.

My investigation is structured in two main parts. The first part provides a propaedeutic introduction on the link between metaphor and translation. The second part focuses on the translation-oriented analysis of three poems, one for each author, highlighting some of the mechanisms that govern the functioning of metaphors and the theoretical level of translatability. Beyond any claims of the defining or normative orders, the aim is to emphasize the importance of translation as an interpretive process that contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamic nature of metaphoric meaning (Petrilli and Zanoletti 356-359) as well as a meaning-making operation that indicates the meaning option(s) relevant to the situation (Marais; Tyulenev). The generation of meaning through the processes of metaphorisation opens to new perspectives and interpretive orientations (Petrilli, "Meaning" 112).

Figurative Language, Metaphor and Translation

As is generally known, metaphors belong to the broader field of figurative language, to which simile, hyperbole, synecdoche, pun, and personification are also ascribable. Figurative language often implies a deviation from what speakers of a language learn as the standard meaning of a sequence of verbal signs, aimed at pursuing some special impact or meaning (Zanoletti, "Figures"; Eco, "Ekfrasi"; Petrilli, *Significare* 418-421; Welby 452-455).

According to the seminal theory of I. A. Richards, any metaphor consists of two elements: the *tenor* is the main subject, i.e. what one wants to describe (e.g. future); the *vehicle* is that to which the tenor is compared, i.e. the image used (e.g. movement forward). By means of the comparison between tenor and vehicle, the metaphor connects distant phenomena by analogy, constructing and translating concepts from one perceptual sphere to another (Arduini 46). Understanding metaphors, therefore, implies being able to discern similarity through an intuitive perception of resemblance within diversity, even at the intertextual level (Eco, "Ekfrasi" 5).

Less well known, though widely documented, is the fact that metaphor is not simply a linguistic entity or rhetorical phenomenon, but a cognitive construct. It is a matter of thought, before being a matter of language. According to the cognitivist theory developed by Lakoff and Johnson, to cite a milestone in this area of research, verbal metaphors are the by-product of a deeper analogical mental structure, which enables us to know and define the surrounding world in terms of what is most familiar to us. Far from being a mere ornament, metaphors contribute to modelling, conceptualising, and naming concepts, through a mechanism of a translational nature (Arduini 43; Petrilli, *Oltre* 114).

Translation, in fact, occurs when one employs metaphor, considering the movement from one field of discourse to another, from one language to another (Faini 98; Petrilli, *Oltre* 114). With the expression "principle of translation", the philosopher Victoria Lady Welby theorised the translational development of meaning, i.e. the relationship of mutual implication and amplification between signs and meanings in the continuous shift from one sign to another, in an infinite interpretative chain (Petrilli, "Il contributo" 456-458). For Welby, the concept of translation had a much broader meaning than interlingual reverbalisation. She understood translation in semiotic terms, as a trans-signal, trans-systemic, transdisciplinary, and transcultural phenomenon; as the capacity for mutual connection, dependency, and correspondence between different signs, senses, and idioms; as the ability to look at signs with other eyes. The interconnection between different interpretative/translative processes are decisive for the life of the signs in the human world and for the generation of new senses (Petrilli, *Significare* 253-255; *Oltre* 114).

From this semiotic perspective, dealing with the interlingual translation of metaphors means dealing with the capacity that verbal language has of translating images (Eco, "Ekfrasi" 1). And since, as noted above, a language reflects not only a lexicon and a grammar, but above all stories, cultures, and worldviews, the translation of figurative language implies the interpretation not only of the semantic sense, but also of the valuative (emotional, ethic, aesthetic, and pragmatic) sense underlying those signs (Petrilli, "Meaning" 93). The translator's task is to reinterpret and simplify the vision that produced those signs within the target cultural paradigm.

Within this framework, therefore, even when interpretation and translation occur within the verbal realm, a translation theory will be concerned not so much with prescribing how metaphors should be translated as much as with setting up models according to which observable phenomena can be adequately described. In other words, a non-prescriptive, explanatory approach should be preferred (van den Broeck 77): an approach applying theoretical paradigms able to represent all kinds of sign manifestations, and not only verbal ones.

Types of Metaphor and Translatability

Two thousand years and more of philosophical reflection on metaphor, starting with Aristotle, have bequeathed abundant terminology and countless classifications. Throughout history, the number of taxonomic systems developed to classify metaphors is as large as that of the models theorised to account for rhetorical figures in general. Drawing on the subdivision proposed in linguistics by Raymond van der Broeck (also Newmark; Faini 99-100; Eco, "Ekfrasi" 9; Steen 17), this study proposes three semiotic typologies: dead metaphor (DM), conventional metaphor (CM), and private metaphor (PM).

> ### Type 1: *Dead* (or *lexicalised*) *Metaphors*
> *Description*:   DMs constitute the majority of metaphorical tropes, and most are non-deliberate. They are linked to a specific concept and have become the norm in the usage by a particular linguistic community. The analogy underlying its formation tends to be forgotten.
> *Examples*:   "the legs of the table" ("le gambe del tavolo"); "bottleneck" ("collo di bottiglia").
> *Translatability*:   as a rule, DMs have high translatability. In complex texts such as poetry, they have low translatability.

Type 2: ***Conventional*** (or *prosaic*) ***Metaphors***

Description: CMs are those in which there is little awareness of the image evoked by the expression, and most are non-deliberate. They have become, over time, an integral part of everyday language, and no longer constitute a deviation from the norm.

Examples: "the politician was a clever fox" ("il politico era un volpone"); "to be hanging from a thread" ("essere appeso a un filo").

Translatability: CMs do not necessarily require metaphorical translation if the target language does not have a corresponding conventional metaphorical sense available.

Type 3: ***Private*** (or *poetic*) ***Metaphors***

Description: PMs are expressions employed deliberately and for the first time. Their emotive and evocative force is intense, since they stimulate us to see a content of which they do not clearly prescribe the type. They violate the semantic rules of standard language, and are employed for expressive or persuasive purposes.

Examples: "All the world's a stage" ("Tutto il mondo è un palcoscenico"; "Gumtree in the city street, / Hard bitumen around your feet" ("Eucalipto nella strada di città, / Duro bitume attorno ai tuoi piedi").

Translatability: PMs are more easily translatable than CMs.

These categories, it is useful to point out, are dynamic. Just as there are fully-lexicalised metaphors and others are in the process of being lexicalised, "in complex texts such as poems, the structuring principle of artistic (or poetic) organisation to which the contextual patterns of ordinary language are subordinated reawakens the symbolic force of the dead metaphor, so that in a certain sense it becomes a 'living' metaphor again" (van den Broeck 83).

      Applied to metaphors, the notion of interlingual translatability refers to the possibility to express figures transverbally. It also implies that between incipient and subsequent sign systems the relation is open: in other words, a translation can always be challenged by a new, future transposition.

Translation Strategies Applied to Verbal Metaphors

Like the classifications of the types of metaphor, the translation strategies applicable to metaphoric language are also varied and articulated (van den Broeck; Newmark; Larson; Tirkkonen-Condit, Alvarez, Denroche). Cross-referencing the varied contributions concerning interlingual translation, they could be traced back to three:

    Strategy 1: *onomasiological* (or *literal*) *translation* implies rendering the metaphor sensu stricto. The aim is to reproduce the formal play of the incipient sign system word-by-word.

    Strategy 2: *semasiological* (or *substitution*) *translation* implies transforming and dynamising the image, seeking a non-literal variant in the target language. The aim is to maintain some form of connotation and to retain the underlying structural principle of the incipient sign system.

Strategy 3: *discursive* (or *standardising*) *translation* involves dissolving the metaphor into a simile, replacing the private metaphor with a conventional metaphor, or replacing it with non-figurative language, with a paraphrase, a footnote, or an explanation. The aim is to achieve greater transparency and clarity.

It will be beneficial to remember that there are different translation tactics, not only because the most suitable strategy must be chosen each time when faced with different types of metaphor, but above all, because there are different translation projects, and it is important for the translator to make her own explicit (Berman). For example, the choice could be between a *domesticating* translation, which interprets a metaphor foreign to one's own culture as something to camouflage and, instead of highlighting difference, adapts to the norms of the target language; and a *foreignising* translation, which tends to emphasise diversity, with deviating, alienating, exotic, or archaising results (van den Broeck 85; Venuti; Arduini 48). Or translators could opt for a *text-centred* approach, focusing on aesthetic, poetic, and expressive functions and considering metaphors as manifestations of the writer's individual creativity; alternatively, they could favour a *reader-centred* approach, focusing on how metaphors are more likely to be familiar to the receiver (Eco, "Ekfrasi" 8).

Translation Difficulties and Risks

The categorisations outlined above might suggest that translating metaphors is a linear process, free of ambiguities and misunderstandings. On the contrary, such a process is not without its difficulties and risks.

One knot of complexity to keep in mind relates to the structure and function of a metaphor within the sign system to which it belongs. As will become clear in the second part, translating a poetic metaphor does not entail dealing with an isolated figure but with an entire sign system, where that one figure is just one of many threads. Hence it is necessary to examine each thread, given the interconnections and interdependencies between the various constituent signs of the plot (Arduini 43-44). Moreover, not only are there different types of metaphor, but these different types are intertwined with other figures in the poem. It is paramount to make the most of all the peculiarities of that figure, that is, its links with other semiotic elements, with the synchronic and diachronic conventions which make that figure semantically poignant.

Having said this, for the purposes of this investigation, among the possible difficulties related to the interlingual translation of metaphors I will limit myself to pointing out three macro-typologies: linguistic issues, extra-linguistic factors, and aesthetic conventions and traditions.

Linguistic issues include differences of a grammatical nature between source language and target language. One need only think, for example, of the different rules that dictate the word order within the sentence (Steen 20); or, on a phonological level, of the fact that in English there are more consonantal sounds than in Italian, whereas Italian is a language rich in vowel sounds; or, again, of the relationship between written and spoken language. In the case of First Nations authors writing in English, the specificities of Australian Aboriginal English (AAE) should also be considered (Malcolm).

Extra-linguistic difficulties are related to the cultural system from which the texts originated (van den Broeck 80), such as semantic anisomorphism. It is equally important to note how, as different cultures conceptualise the world differently, metaphors tend to be context-specific. The complexity inherent in translation, then, is not due to the lack of an equivalent lexical element in the subsequent sign system, but rather to the divergent cultural conceptualisation of phenomena in the two linguistic communities. With regard to the Aboriginal authors examined here, for example, it ought to be considered that the cultural

contexts where the metaphors exist and are analysed also have a political and socio-historical dimension.

As for conventions and aesthetic traditions, one aspect not to be underestimated is that the act of translation is often influenced by the expectations of the target audience. Furthermore, it is good practice to consider the differences in the aesthetic and ethical codes of the sign systems being compared: translatability will have a lower difficulty coefficient in the case of, for instance, shared literary practices (81).

The Interlingual Translation of Metaphors of Future

Based on the theorisations illustrated so far, the second part focuses on the translation of figurative language contained in three poetic texts. Authored, respectively, by Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Ali Cobby Eckermann, and Evelyn Araluen, these texts have been selected from a larger corpus to be representative of one important topic: the future and the life of generations to come. As the analysis will show, metaphors allow each author to touch on themes such as memory, identity, hope, and belonging; and contribute to exemplify the link between suffering and healing, and between death and life as prominent motifs within First Nations poetry.

Of course, pre-translation text analysis is an integral part of the interlingual translation procedure, particularly in literary translation, as it facilitates the translator in making conscious and informed decisions on which paths to take and which choices to make. In this case, given the focus of the study, when transcribing the verses in English I have italicised figurative language, in particular metaphors. Moreover, the interpretation work has been carried out with regard not to the individual metaphor but, as mentioned above, to the image in its context. This broad view has entailed the comparison between the choices made by the author of the poem and those made by the translator.

Case Study 1: "Assimilation – No!"

The connection between past and future is central to the work of the Quandamooka writer Oodgeroo Noonuccal (1920-1993), who was the first in Australia to employ poetry as an instrument to claim socio-political rights on behalf of the Indigenous peoples, subjugated by the white invaders. In her collection *My People* (1970), the word "time" occurs on no less than 48 occasions; in addition, 22 are the direct references to the past, 6 are those to the present, and 10 are the explicit mentions of the future. "Assimilation – No!" ideally belongs to a nucleus of poems dedicated to the theme of identity (Zanoletti, "*My People*" 70) and encourages the overcoming of the process of assimilation towards a future built on authentic multiculturalism. Symbolising circular time, Oodgeroo's poem opens and closes with the same metaphor:

1   *Pour your pitcher of wine into the wide river*
      And where is your wine? There is only the river.
      Must the genius of an old race die
      That the race might live?
5   *We who would be one with you*, one people,
      We must surrender now much that we love,
      The old freedoms for *new musts*,
      Your world for ours,
      But *a core* is left that we must keep always.
10   Change and compel, *slash us into shape*,
      But not *our roots deep in the soil of old*.
      We are different hearts and minds
      In a different body. Do not ask of us

To be deserters, to disown our mother,
15   To change the unchangeable.
The gum cannot be trained into an oak.
Something is gone, something surrendered, still
We will go forward and learn.
Not swamped and lost, watered away, but keeping
20   Our own identity, our pride of race.
Pour your pitcher of wine into the wide river
And where is your wine? There is only the river.   (Oodgeroo 144)

Oodgeroo's poem unfolds in 22 lines, framed by a proverb-like metaphor in identical rhyme (river / river, Type 3). With this refrain, Oodgeroo criticises the policy of assimilation perpetrated by the Australian state and Federal governments against the Aboriginal peoples, comparing it to the act of pouring wine into a flowing river. This is not, however, the only metaphor employed by the poet: "The gum cannot be trained into an oak" matches "We will go forward and learn. / Not swamped and lost, watered away, but keeping / Our own identity, our pride of race". In the first case, a metaphorical maxim referring to the Australian landscape (Type 3) suggests that it is against the law of nature to distort someone's identity. In the second case, a CM ("We will go forward", Type 2) precedes a chain of PMs ("Not swamped and lost, watered away", Type 3) wishing for a future when Aboriginal identity and pride fully emerge.

Other metaphors are scattered throughout the lyric. The CM "We who would be one with you" is followed by the metonyms "new musts" and "Your world for ours" (lines 7-8, Type 2) evoking the process of assimilation which forced Aboriginal people to adapt to superimposed models. Oodgeroo proposes, in contrast, that the essential part cannot be repudiated ("a core is left that we must always keep", Type 2). Finally, she warns the whites that however much they want to mould Indigenous individuals in their own image and likeness, her people's roots will remain firmly planted in ancient soil ("slash us into shape, / But not our roots deep in the soil of old", Type 3). In this PM, the past is the tenor, and roots is the vehicle.

In the final part, a metonymy tells that Aboriginal people have distinctive physical, sensory, and mental characteristics ("We are different hearts and minds / In a different body", Type 2), while the exhortation "Do not ask of us / To be deserters, to disown our mother" (Type 3) brings to mind the Australian desert (from Late Latin "desertum", literally "thing abandoned") and Mother Earth, evoking that ancient soil where the Indigenous roots are planted.

Assimilazione – No !

1   Versa la tua brocca di vino nel vasto fiume
E dov'è finito il vino? C'è soltanto il fiume.
Il genio della vecchia razza antica deve morire
Per salvare la razza?
5   A noi che per sentirci uniti a voi come un solo popolo,
Ora dobbiamo rinunciare alle tante cose amate,
Le vecchie libertà per i nuovi doveri,
Il vostro mondo per il nostro,
A noi rimane un nucleo che dobbiamo preservare.
10   Potete trasformarci, obbligarci, tagliarci in nuove sagome,
Ma non le nostre radici sprofondate nella vecchia terra.
Siamo cuori e menti diversi

In corpi diversi. È inutile chiederci
Di abbandonare, di rinnegare nostra madre,
15   Di cambiare quello che non si può cambiare.
L'eucalipto non potrà mai diventare una quercia.
Qualcosa è sparito, qualcosa ha ceduto, ma
Nonostante tutto vogliamo andare avanti e imparare.
Non annegati e persi, travolti dalla corrente,
20   Ma con la nostra propria identità, l'orgoglio di razza.
Versa la tua brocca di vino nel vasto fiume
E dov'è finito il vino? C'è soltanto il fiume.

<div align="right">(Oodgeroo 145)</div>

The process of translating Oodgeroo's poem into Italian could draw on the general principle that PMs (Type 3) can be rendered sensu stricto (Strategy 1), while DMs or CMs (Types 1 and 2) would suggest adopting a non-literal variant or periphrasis (Strategies 2 and 3). Following this indication, in the proposed translation the onomasiological and semasiological strategies (Strategies 1 and 2) prevail with regard to the rendering of metaphors. Only to a small extent have metaphorical expressions been translated discursively (Strategy 3). The choice of Strategies 1 and 2 has helped to preserve as much of the imagery created by Oodgeroo as possible, in particular images of the future (*text-centred approach*).

Onomasiological translation has in many cases involved PMs (Type 3). Let us look at a few examples. The Italian translation of lines 1-2 and 21-22 follows the source sign system almost literally, with the sole exception of the idiomatic expression "dov'è finito il vino?" (literally, "where did the wine end up?"), which reinterprets the colloquial and inquisitive tones of Oodgeroo's question. Similarly, lines 10-11 combine a sensu stricto translation ("le nostre radici sprofondate nella vecchia terra", Strategy 1) and a substitution ("nuove sagome", literally, "new outlines", Strategy 2). A further example of literal rendering is "Non annegati e persi, travolti dalla corrente" (Strategy 1). In only two cases, PMs have been rendered discursively, reducing the semantic complexity of the initial signs (Strategy 3): following the Latin etymology, "to be deserters" has become "abbandonare" (literally, "to abandon"), while the metaphor of training in "cannot be trained into" (almost a kind of manipulation, or at least interference) has been translated, a little more neutrally, as "non potrà mai diventare" (literally, "can never become"). Rhythmic and prosodic reasons have prompted these choices, as literal translation would have lengthened the text excessively.

This analysis suggests that Oodgeroo's writing, seemingly plain and straightforward, is imbued with metaphorical language. Noonuccal's depiction of the future is made of images of resilience and hope. These images contribute to make her political message comprehensible to all, emphasizing a sense of involvement and connection.

Case Study 2: "Unearth"
Politics is not the exclusive domain of Oodgeroo's writing but, *ça va sans dire*, represents a primary topic in much of Indigenous Australian literature. A poignant example is Ali Cobby Eckermann's poetry, whose subject matter is the problematic history of Indigenous Australians since colonial times. In her collection *Inside My Mother* (2015), Eckermann explores her own life and experience as an Indigenous woman and one of the Stolen generations as well as looking at the historical perspective. She returns to this subject repeatedly, lit by dreams and visions of startling intensity, populated by symbolic presences and ritual scenes. In "Unearth" the emphasis goes, like in Noonuccal's poem, to the link between the past and the future and

the connection between generations. Exploring this topic, Eckermann scatters the poem with rhetorical figures, including metaphors:

1   let's *dig up the soil* and *excavate the past*
   breathe life into the bodies of our ancestors
   when movement stirs their bones
   boomerangs will rattle in unison

5   it is not the noise of the poinciana
   stirred by wind in its *flaming limbs*
   the sound of the rising warriors *echo*
   a people suppressed by dread

   a hot wind whips up *dust storms*
10   we glimpse warriors in the mirage
   in the future the petition will be everlasting
   even when the language is changed

   boomerang bones will return to memory
   excavation holes are dug in our minds
15   *the constant loss of breath is the legacy*
   there is blood on the truth

(Eckermann 37)

"Unearth" plays on continuous temporal leaps from the present to the future and back. It opens with an exhortation to excavate the earth and bring the ancestors' bones back to surface and life. In fact, the polysemous verb "dig up" carries within itself not only a denotative meaning (to excavate) but also metaphorical meanings (to bring to light something hidden, buried, and dead, Type 1). Moreover, throughout the poem Eckermann combines archaeological lexicon (soil, excavate, bones, bodies, excavation holes, dug) with abstract philosophical terminology (past, life, dread, language, memory, minds, truth), and this combination produces a series of metaphorical expressions.

Most metaphors created by Eckermann are PMs (Type 3): for instance, "breath life into the bodies of our ancestors", "flaming limbs", "excavation holes are dug in our minds", and "there is blood on the truth". DMs ("dust storms", "echoes") and CMs ("suppressed by dread") are also at play. One of the most extraordinary inventions, however, is line 13, where Eckermann associates the boomerang's property of returning with anamnesis ("boomerang bones will return to memory", Type 1). In fact, echoing Oodgeroo (238-240), the expression "boomerang bones" evokes a range of associations including the historical theft of Aboriginal skulls and skeletons and their display in European museums, and campaigns for their return and reburial in Australia. "Boomerang" is not only a metaphor for return, but also have a metonymic function signifying both the kitsch appropriation of Aboriginal artefacts by settler culture and the resilience of Indigenous cultures.

As we have seen, the three metaphor types can be translated using different strategies. Generally, non-deliberate metaphors (i.e. DMs and CMs, Types 1 and 2) can be translated either by finding a corresponding image in the target culture (Strategy 2), or by dissolving the image in a paraphrase (Strategy 3): the principle is translating the less familiar with the more familiar. Deliberate metaphors, on the other hand (Type 3), can most often be rendered

verbatim (Strategy 1). Let us see if and how this is put into practice when translating the poem into Italian:

Dissotterrare

1   scaviamo il terreno e riesumiamo il passato
     diamo il respiro ai corpi degli avi
     quando il movimento scuoterà le loro ossa
     i boomerang sibileranno all'unisono

5   non è il fruscio della poinciana
     con le sue fronde fiammeggianti al vento
     il suono dei guerrieri insorti echeggia
     un popolo soffocato dal terrore

     un vento caldo monta tempeste di sabbia
10   nel miraggio scorgiamo guerrieri
     in futuro l'istanza sarà eterna
     anche quando la lingua sarà cambiata

     ossa come boomerang torneranno alla memoria
     è nella nostra mente che si scava
15   la costante perdita di respiro è l'eredità
     c'è del sangue sulla verità

(Eckermann, my translation)

The most frequently employed translation strategy has been to resemantise metaphors strictu senso. This often allows the images to be rendered more vividly, emphasising Eckermann's poignant imagery (*text-centred approach*). Verse 1, where "excavate" has become "riesumiamo" (literally, "exhume"), is an exception: the PM has been dissolved in its paraphrased explanation (Strategy 3). This choice circumvents the risk that "dig up" and "excavate", almost synonymous, create a redundancy effect in Italian; moreover, the prefix ri-strengthens the idea of bringing back and avoids the cacophonic pun "ed esumiamo", whose pronunciation would coincide with "e desumiamo" ("and we deduce").

In other cases, structural movements have been introduced with respect to the source text (Strategy 2) to mediate the connotative meanings of the incipient sign system. For example, the new PM "diamo il respiro" (literally, "let's give breath") keeps reference to the semantic field of respiration conveyed by "breathe life into" and at the same time recalls the concept of giving life, to which the act of breathing is conditio necessaria. The new metaphor sounds more natural and effective than an onomasiological translation (*reader-centred approach*), also because it resembles the CM "dare fiato a", meaning "to announce loudly". Similarly, translating "suppressed" with "soffocato" (literally, "suffocated") introduces a new CM on breathing, emphasizing a leitmotif. Finally, "ossa come boomerang" ("like boomerangs, bones") transforms Eckermann's PM into a simile, making the boomerang / memory analogy more explicit while maintaining a certain degree of figurativeness. This is a good example of how translation makes meaning by reducing the pool of potentialities to an actuality that fits a particular situation (Tyulienev).

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The final rhyme eredità / verità, where the idea of future rhymes with that of authentic historical reconstruction, attempts to redeem, at least in part, the musicality of Eckermann's poem. The violence against the Indigenous peoples, Eckermann seems to allude, must and will be remembered.

Case 3: "Decolonial Poetics (Avant Gubba)"
While Oodgeroo's idea of the future as expressed in "Assimilation – No!" is made to coincide with the overcoming of assimilation policies in favour of intercultural dialogue, and Eckermann's representations of future are closely linked to the themes of memory and intergenerational connection, Evelyn Araluen's writing advocates a future where Aboriginal cultures are acknowledged as the foundation of Australia. Born and raised on Dharug country, Araluen is a descendant of the Bundjalung Nation, and the theme at the heart of *Dropbear* (2021), her debut collection, is the questioning of Australian settler-colonial narratives of the nation that suggest the land is an extension of Britain. In "Decolonial Poetics (Avant Gubba)", in particular, she makes it clear that today one cannot speak of post-colonial literature, as the legacy of an imposing and lying narrative of a terra nullius, a narrative that became a harbinger of violence and dispossession, is still in place. In the poem, the auxiliary verb "will", expressing the future tense, features no less than 7 times:

1   *when my body is mine* I will *tell them*
       with belly&bones
                do not *touch this prefix*
                or let your hands burn back
5   with your *unsettlement*
                there are no metaphors here

       when i own my tongue i will *sing*
       with throat&finger
                gobackwhereyoucamefrom
10   for i will be
                where i am for

       when *i am aunty*
       i will say, jahjums,
                look what we made for you
15   look at this earth we *cauterised*
                the healing we took with flame
       i will show them a place
       they will never have to leave

       and when i am dead
20   they
                will not
                say   my name

       and when you are dead,
                you can have poems

<div align="right">(Araluen 39)</div>

"Decolonial Poetics" can be read as an outraged, experimental declaration of intent about the aim and sense of making poetry. Metaphors are the key: although in line 6 the author denies it, the entire lyric is played out on the shift between literal and figurative, a shift that generates paradox and nonsense.

Except for two DMs ("do not touch this prefix"; "unsettlement"), which the poet highlights with the antiphrasis "there are no metaphors here", Araluen's metaphors could be all classified as PMs. In lines 1 and 7, metaphors generate seemingly illogical sentences. On close reading, "my body" refers to the whole physical structure that forms my person (denotative meaning), while "mine" emphasises that the body in question is my property (connotative and figurative meanings). Likewise, "my tongue" is both my piece of flesh and the idiom I speak (denotative meaning), while "i own" emphasises that I am in control of my body and my language (connotative and figurative meanings). These gaps create paradox. The final couplet "when you are dead, / you can have poems" is also contradictory, as arguably it makes no sense for dead people to own anything.

The DM "unsettlement" deserves special attention as it is rather complex. The word can have a dual sense here: making someone feel uneasy or unsettled (as the Italian "disagio"), and "decolonise", i.e. undoing the effects of the "settlement" of Australia by European colonisers.

A further metaphorical phrase appears in line 16, where Araluen imagines being old (see the metonymy "aunty", a term of respect for an Indigenous elder) and telling Aboriginal children ("jajhums") that her generation has healed the earth with fire. Anticipated a few lines above ("burn back"), this image recalls the practice of Cool Burning, or the small fires that Aboriginal people have set since time immemorial to hunt animals, maintain ecosystems and manage territory. In this context, however, the healing could also be a metaphorical healing: the process of decolonisation. Finally, it is worth noting the multi-word metaphors "belly&bones" and "throat&finger": indeed, it is hard to imagine speaking with one's belly and bones, and to sing using one's fingers.

How to negotiate all this semantic complexity, when translating Araluen's poem into Italian? How to bring out the semantic nuances of the source signs, without misinterpreting or parroting?

Poetica decoloniale (avan gubba)

1   quando il mio corpo sarà mio
      dirò loro pancia&ossa
          nessuno tocchi questo prefisso
          o possano bruciare le vostre mani
5   e la vostra destabilizzazione
          non parlo per metafore

      quando sarò padrona della mia lingua
      canterò con gola&dita
          tornatedadovesietevenuti
10   perché sarò
          dove devo essere

      quando sarò un'Anziana
      dirò jahjums, bambini
          guardate cosa abbiamo fatto per voi

15   guardate questa terra cauterizzata
la guarigione conquistata col fuoco[2]

mostrerò loro un luogo
che non saranno costretti a lasciare
e quando sarò morta
20   loro
          non
          pronunceranno il mio nome

e quando sarete morti voi,
          prendetevi qualche poesia   (Zanoletti 2023b)

Translating these verses presupposes getting to the heart of the culture that generated these metaphors. The translation of metaphors is not limited to a word-for-word, sign-for-sign transfer, but implies a plunge into the worldview from which the images spring, connecting seemingly distant worlds and concepts. Therefore, the Italian version of "Decolonial Poetics", a militant poem built on a precise historical-political vision and deliberately keeping a high degree of semantic ambiguity, is oriented towards the onomasiological translation of figures (Strategy 1). An exception is line 16, where I have chosen to explicate the PM with a semasiological reformulation, structurally similar but semantically simpler, adding an explanatory footnote about the practice of cool burning: "la guarigione conquistata col fuoco" (literally, "the healing conquered with fire") is thus an example of Strategy 2, which narrows down the initial pool of semantic potentialities.

As mentioned, the AAE word "aunty" does not describe the mere degree of kinship, but implies a relationship based on deference and affection, and is widely understood in this way by settler Australians. In Italian, a homological counterpart does not exist. In fact, the word "anziana" is often used as a euphemism instead of "vecchia", which can be perceived as derogatory. Both "anziana" and "vecchia" convey the denotative meaning (advanced age) but omit the Indigenous term ("aunty" in the sense of an elder). An alternative translation emphasising the connotative meaning is "un'Anziana": the capital letter adds importance and institutionality, while the indefinite article makes it clearer that the word refers to a social category and not just age.

This possible translation of Araluen's lyric attempts to mediate the complexities of the source sign system in a sensitive way, respecting the graphic rendering, the verse structure, and the word order as much as possible (*text-centred approach*). Only in limited cases was the choice made to facilitate the Italian reader's interpretative work (*reader-oriented approach*). In no case were non-English words or words referring to specific aspects of Indigenous cultures (e.g. "gubba", "aunty", "jahjums") omitted or paraphrased (*foreignising approach*). The Italian anaphors "quando" and "sarò" reciprocate Araluen's repeated references to the future ("will") and contribute to making the poem resound like a propitiatory chant, full of strength and hope.

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[2] L'immagine del fuoco richiama i piccoli incendi che da tempo immemore le popolazioni aborigene appiccano per cacciare gli animali, mantenere gli ecosistemi e gestire il territorio. Questa pratica, chiamata "cool burning", genera habitat disomogenei preferiti dai piccoli animali e impedisce ai fulmini e agli incendi selvaggi di consumare il territorio. [The image of fire recalls the small fires that Aboriginal peoples have set since time immemorial to hunt animals, maintain ecosystems and manage territory. This practice, called "cool burning", generates patchy habitats preferred by small animals and prevents lightning and wild fires from consuming the land.]

Conclusions

In the relatively underexplored field of study concerning the translation of figurative language, this investigation has entailed two main stages. The first stage, of theoretical-methodological nature, has involved examining the relationship between metaphor and translation at the crossroads of translation studies and semiotics, through an interdisciplinary approach aimed at broadening translation research beyond the boundaries of verbocentrism (Petrilli, "The Intersemiotic"; Marais; Petrilli and Zanoletti). Emphasis has been placed on three fundamental goals: identifying the different types of metaphor and their translatability; categorising the different translation strategies applicable to metaphors; and highlighting the potentialities, difficulties and risks involved in the process of the interlingual translation of metaphoric language. The aim has been to observe and describe metaphor and translation as semiotic phenomena concerning signs of various kinds, rather than exclusively linguistic phenomena.

The second stage has put these theoretical-methodological premises into practice, involving the analysis of the metaphors contained in three poetic texts written in English by different authors and translating them into Italian. The interpretative-translative process has proved to be an effective method for investigating the functioning of metaphorical language: it has required the translator to deepen her listening and understanding of the author's voice, as well as of her own language. During the analysis, several peculiarities related to the translation of metaphors emerged that are useful in shedding light both on interlingual translation in general and on specific aspects of metaphor in comparison to other types of figurative or polysemic expressions. As emerged repeatedly, for instance, the translatability of a metaphor relies on the relationships that the sign system it belongs to establishes with other elements at different levels. Moreover, translation tends to reduce the semantic complexity of the initial sign.

Since, in conclusion, an evaluation of the results must consider the range of the corpus taken into consideration, as well as the number of texts examined, the hope is that the methodology proposed and applied here may stimulate wider-ranging investigations, either within the study of Australian literature or towards new research perimeters. Translation is poised to become an important operative tool in a new transdisciplinary research paradigm and, as advocated in this study, a powerful lens to interpret Indigenous cultures in new and fruitful ways.

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