

TRANSLATION OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN PRESIDENTIAL SPEECHES

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Abstract

Metaphors, traditionally regarded as stylistic embellishments, are recognized as fundamental to our conceptual frameworks, making their translation a complex task that often requires both linguistic knowledge and creative intuition. The paper analyzes 23 speeches by the Lithuanian presidents Gitanas Nausėda and Dalia Grybauskaitė, comprising a total of over 9,700 words. A set of 57 metaphors is selected, categorized into simple and complex types, and analyzed using Newmark's metaphor translation strategies. The findings reveal that the most frequently used strategy is reproducing the same image in the target language, applied to 18 out of 22 simple metaphors and 26 out of 35 complex metaphors. This suggests that metaphors in presidential speeches are often creative or intercultural, requiring careful preservation in translation. Other strategies, such as replacing a metaphor with standard target language images and conversion to sense, are used less frequently. No examples of translation by simile, deletion, or combination with sense are found.

Keywords: translation, figurative language, metaphor, presidential speeches

1. INTRODUCTION

The metaphor as a linguistic phenomenon has been an area of extensive scholarly discussion and research. A number of books and scholarly articles have been written on the subject. Metaphors in texts and speeches serve many purposes, including making complex topics clearer and making language more appealing and convincing. However, the understanding of metaphor in recent decades has expanded: it is now recognized as an integral component of our entire conceptual system, in contrast to its previous perception as a mere decoration of language that might be omitted. Figurative language is frequently regarded as the most challenging aspect of translation, often requiring intuition for effective rendering. This article focuses on the two most recent Lithuanian presidents, Dalia Grybauskaitė and Gitanas Nausėda, and examines how metaphors are used in their presidential speeches as well as how they are translated from Lithuanian to English.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Materials

This linguistic analysis examines 11 State of the Nation Addresses delivered by President Gitanas Nausėda (comprising 2,864 words) and their respective translations, alongside 12 speeches by former President Dalia Grybauskaitė (comprising 6,928 words). Official websites <https://www.lrp.lt> and <https://grybauskaite.lrp.lt/> are the sources of the speeches, respectively. A total of 57 metaphors is discovered and taken into account for the purpose of this study.

2.2. Methods

Selected metaphors are first divided into *simple* and *complex* categories for analysis, and then further classified according to the translation techniques employed. The analysis approach is based on the metaphor translation procedures proposed by Newmark (1981):

1. Reproducing the same image in a target language (TL)
2. Replacing the image with a standard TL image
3. Metaphor by simile, retaining the image
4. Translation of metaphor by simile plus sense

5. Conversion of metaphor to sense

6. Deletion

7. Same metaphor combined with sense

Newmark's (1981) taxonomy of translation strategies was chosen because it allows more possibilities for examining metaphor translation, although his primary strategies are similar to those of the other authors.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1. Definition and types of metaphor

Since Aristotle, the use of metaphor in language has been a subject of debate, and this interest has persisted to this day. *Metaphor* is a Greek word that means transference. Metaphors are described as “linguistic images based on a relationship of familiarity between two objects or concepts” in the *Routledge Dictionary of Language and Linguistics* (Bussmann, 2006). Metaphors have historically been regarded as a poetic device that enhances language’s visual appeal and captivating power. Aristotle defined a metaphor as assigning a name and significance to something that belongs to another (Marcinkevičienė, 1994; Zhang, Hu, 2009). A term frequently has both literal and metaphorical meanings; for instance, *a pig* can refer to both a dirty person (metaphorical meaning) and an animal (literal meaning).

A metaphor can be more than one word; Newmark (1981) distinguished between simple one-word metaphors and complex metaphors, such as idioms or proverbs, that are composed of many words. If characters or situations serve as metaphors for something else, it can even be an entire story. For instance, Knowles and Moon (2005) claim that *Animal Farm* by George Orwell is a story about farm animals, but it actually uses metaphors to discuss people and society.

From one object in terms of another object to one intellectual sphere in terms of another conceptual sphere, the definition of metaphor has changed significantly since the 1980s. Metaphors were found to be ubiquitous and inevitable in our ideas and behaviors as well as in language (Lakoff, Johnson, 1980; Knowles, Moon, 2005; Kovesces, 2010). According to Kovesces (2010), metaphors are mainly seen as conceptual rather than linguistic in the cognitive linguistic perspective. According to Crystal (2008), “A mapping between a more well-known, concrete conceptual domain (the ‘source domain’) and the conceptual domain which it aids in organizing (the ‘target domain’)” is the definition of a conceptual metaphor. New ideas are created by expanding the meanings of the existing words. For instance, discussing abstract concepts like *life*, *time*, *ideas*, etc., requires comparing them to more tangible words. When *time* is viewed in terms of *money*, for instance, metaphorical phrases like *You’re wasting your time*, *This will save you some time*, *He spends his days dreaming*, etc. are created.

Looking at metaphors from a different perspective, a broad distinction can be made between two basic categories—*lexicalized* and *non-lexicalized* metaphors (Dickins, 2005). Lexicalized are those that are recognizably metaphorical, with a fixed meaning in a particular language, which would even allow for such meaning to be subjected to dictionary definition (one of the examples in English could be *a rat* - a person who deserts his friends or associates). These meanings, especially those that link animal qualities to humans, can vary greatly among different languages. Pažūsis (2010) gives the same example, comparing the English *rat* (traitor) and the Lithuanian *žiurkė* (lousy, unworthy person). In comparison, unlexicalized metaphors, according to Dickins (2005), do not have a very clear meaning, or that meaning can change depending on the context. For example, *a man is a tree* could mean that a man, like a tree, grows up and bears fruit, or that a man, like a tree, is only partly apparent, and a huge part of it (the roots) is hidden, or something else depending on the context, as there are many ways that a man could be compared to a tree.

According to Kovesces (2010), metaphors can also be categorized based on their cognitive function, nature, and degree of generality. The degree of conventionality refers to how widely accepted the metaphor is or how frequently regular people use it in their daily lives. This applies to both

conceptual metaphors and linguistic metaphorical expressions. Unconventional or novel metaphors would be at the other end of the conventionality spectrum. According to Kovesces (2010), conceptual metaphors employ a variety of images, with *one-shot images* capturing a particular experience and *image-schemas* having a general schematic structure. Both specific and generic levels of conceptual metaphors are possible; generic-level metaphors provide structure for specific-level metaphors.

Cognitive function, which Kovesces (2010) writes about, is taken from conceptual metaphor theory by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). Conceptual metaphors, according to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), can be divided into three categories: *structural*, *orientational*, and *ontological*. *Structural metaphors* are those in which one concept is metaphorically structured in terms of another, providing a framework, such as *argument is war*. The concept of *war* in this case serves as a framework for the argument concept and allows us to think and talk about it using this parallel. *Oriental metaphors* include concepts of *up* and *down*, *in* and *out*, where everything that is good is *up* (e.g. *things are looking up*), and everything bad is *down* (e.g. *he's so down on himself; it's all downhill from here*). Finally, *ontological metaphors* enable us to identify experiences or processes as entities, allowing them to be defined and referred to regardless of their abstract nature; for example: *facing problems*, *a sick society*, *ironing out difficulties* and the like.

3.2. The translation of metaphor

Miall (1977) claims that the transfer of connotations is the main process involved in translating figurative language. In different cultures, words with the same meaning might have distinct implications or associations. Metaphor translation can vary based on the target language, ranging from the freedom of using analogous metaphors to the limitation of no equivalence. The simplest method for the latter is to leave a metaphor out entirely (Trim, 2007). According to Trim (2007), regional and time-specific variation might also be an issue when translating metaphors and the majority of translators either convert these into standard non-metaphorical structures or conventionalized metaphors. The amount of information that metaphors convey can be used to determine how translatable they are; more universal concepts will be easier to translate than culture-specific ones. It is worth mentioning that there are cases of cultural overlaps when there is equivalence in both pragmatic and lexical meaning (*don't look a gift horse in the mouth* – *dovanotam arkliui j dantis nežiūrima* – *a caballo regalado no le mires el diente*). Pažusis (2014) defines pragmatic meaning as a firm and consistent relationship between the signs of the language and the people who speak the same language. He classifies pragmatic meaning into the following groups:

- stylistic characteristics of the word (for example, in English, *start* is informal, *begin* is neutral, and *commence* is formal, while in Lithuanian, *pradėti* is the only equivalent for all these English words);
- register of the word, which refers to the choice of particular words and phrases depending on whether one is addressing someone in a friendly, familiar, or formal manner;
- emotional tone of the word (positive, neutral, or negative).

According to Pažusis (2014), there can be two ways of translating: phraseological (when a phraseological phrase in a source language (SL) is translated to appropriate the phraseological phrase in a TL) and not phraseological (when a phraseological word or phrase is translated into a freely constructed phrase (paraphrase)). The literal translation can only be used for creative or original metaphors that had been created by an author.

Baker, on the other hand (1992), suggests four approaches to translating idioms and fixed expressions, which can also be applied to the translation of metaphors:

- finding identical idioms in a TL in both form and meaning
- finding an idiom with similar meaning but different form
- paraphrasing
- omitting.

The first situation, however, is uncommon; rarely can an identical phrase or fixed expression be discovered in a TL that conveys the same meaning and contains equivalent lexical elements. In the second scenario, identical idioms may be found in a TL; they communicate the same meaning but use different lexical elements. However, it is vital to note that their connotations can differ at times, which implies they cannot be used in the same context. The next translation strategy is paraphrase, which is the most typical method employed when a suitable match cannot be discovered. Lastly, when there are no matches in a TL and the meaning cannot be easily paraphrased, translation by omission can take place.

Furthermore, Newmark (1988) proposes seven methods for translating metaphors:

- Reproducing the same image in a TL is best suited for one-word metaphors; complex metaphors are less well suited for this method. Complex metaphors, however, can be at least partially reproduced.
- Replacing an SL image with a standard TL image.
- Translating an SL metaphor with a simile in a TL that retains the same image.
- Translating a metaphor or a simile with simile plus sense (explanation of similarity between the item that is described by the metaphor and the item in terms of which the object is described) makes the translation more understandable to a less-informed reader.
- Converting metaphor to its sense.
- Deletion, which can only be used if the omission of a metaphor does not result in a significant loss of meaning or information.
- Combining a metaphor with its sense, i.e. using a translated metaphor and explaining its meaning.

Aside from translation techniques, Van den Broeck (1981) proposes examining other elements while translating metaphors. First, he believes, it is critical to consider the metaphor's effectiveness in language use as well as its functional relevance in the text. It can be meaningful and important at times, such as when it is a pun, and it can also be inadvertent, with the author using that metaphor at random. The second crucial consideration is the functions of metaphor. The metaphor's function is to serve a communicative purpose. According to Van den Broeck (1981), a distinction should be made between *creative* and *illustrative* or *decorative* metaphors, as the latter are not utilized in text because of need and may be readily substituted by another word that has an equivalent impact on the reader. According to Van den Broeck (1981), the objective of theory is to describe and explain, but it cannot dictate how metaphors should be translated. He proposes the following application to aid in properly describing the phenomenon: predicting how metaphors are most likely to be transferred to a TL and specifying how metaphors should be translated (based on the type of text, function of the metaphor, etc.) to optimally correspond given a specific context. After that, one of the following methods of translation can be used to translate metaphors:

- Translation in a narrower sense, i.e. *sensu stricto*. This is when both *tenor* and *vehicle* are transferred to a TL. There are two possible situations: when *vehicles* correspond (idiomatic metaphor) and when they differ (semantic anomaly or daring innovation);
- Translation by substitution, where a different *vehicle* is replaced with the same *tenor*.
- Translation by paraphrase, the process of translating metaphors into non-metaphorical explanatory expressions.

The main translation strategies described by different authors mentioned above clearly overlap. For example, what Baker (1992) named *finding identical idiom in both form and meaning*, Van den Broeck (1981) named translation *sensu stricto*, when both *tenor* and *sense* are transferred into a TL, and what Baker (1992) and Van den Broeck (1981) named *paraphrasing*, Newmark (1988) called *converting a metaphor to sense*, etc. For the present analysis, Newmark's taxonomy of metaphor translation strategies is applied.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Reproducing the same image in a TL

The analysis shows that the most frequent translation strategy used in translating metaphors in presidential speeches by Lithuanian presidents Dalia Grybauskaitė and Gitanas Nausėda is the strategy of reproduction of the same image in TL. 18 *simple* metaphors and 26 complex metaphors were translated using this strategy.

The examples below illustrate how by using a strategy of *reproducing the same image in TL* the common metaphors are transferred from the SL (Lithuanian) to the TL (English):

(LT1) *Esame teisingame kelyje.*

(EN1) *We are on the right track.*

(LT2) *Gerovės valstybės idėja prigijo ir leidžia šaknis.*

(EN2) *The idea of a welfare state has set in and is taking root.*

As it is seen from the examples, the main images of the Lithuanian metaphors are retained in the translation (*kelyje* – *on the track*; *prigijo ir leidžia šaknis* – *has set in and is taking root*) and exact equivalence is obtained. It is also worth noting that the metaphor *idėja prigijo ir leidžia šaknis* – *the idea has set in and is taking root* correspond to the conceptual metaphor *ideas are plants* (Lakoff, Johnson, 1980) and is equivalent in both languages.

The majority of simple one-word metaphors which appear in the presidential speeches are also translated by reproducing the same image, for instance:

(LT1) *Tačiau Europa neapsaugos mūsų nuo politinės trumparegystės: turime patys apsivalyti nuo išorinių įtakų, didinti pilietinį atsparumą.*

(EN1) *However, Europe cannot protect us from political myopia: we need to cleanse ourselves from foreign influences and increase civil resilience.*

Here, the metaphorical use of the word *trumparegystė*, referring to potential incompetence and inability to foresee political issues, is translated as *myopia*, retaining the same image of shortsightedness.

In the same way, most of the complex metaphors are transferred into English with no changes in the main image, for example:

(LT1) *Seimui pateikiau Viešujų pirkimų įstatymo pataisą, kurias priėmus kasmet būtų galima sutauptyti daugiau kaip 0,5 mlrd. eurų, nes dabar viešieji ištekliai primena kiaurą kibirą, kuris niekaip neprisipildo.*

(EN1) *I submitted to parliament amendments to the Law on Public Procurement. If approved, they would allow to save more than 0.5 billion euros every year. Today public resources remind of a leaking bucket that cannot be filled.*

(LT2) *Oligarchinių demokratinės sistemos užvaldymą pristabdėme, nors visi skaudžiai nusideginome pirštus.*

(EN2) *We have stopped the oligarchic take-over of the democratic system, even though all of us have painfully burned our fingers.*

In the examples above Lithuanian complex metaphors retain the images of a *leaking bucket* and *burnt fingers* in the English translation, as both languages share identical metaphors. It is worth noticing that the expressions in the examples can also be classified as cliché or stock metaphors, which might be the reason why the expressions shared by both languages are similar in form and meaning.

4.2 Replacing an SL image with a standard TL image

The second most common translation approach is to replace the SL image with a standard TL image; this strategy was employed to translate 4 *simple* metaphors and 7 *complex* ones.

The examples below are complex metaphors in which the SL image is replaced by a common image in the TL:

(LT1) *Kritikai nepakanti valdžia apynasrį mielai užmautų ne tik žiniasklaidai, bet ir tvirtas nuostatas turintiems kūrėjams, kurių tiesus ir itaigus kalbėjimas uždega tautos dvasią, skatina kritiškai mąstyti, didina tarpusavio pasitikėjimą.*

(EN1) *A government that is intolerant to criticism would gladly muzzle not only the media but also those decent creators whose open and encouraging words foster the national spirit, promote critical thinking and enhance mutual trust.*

(LT2) *O jau artimiausiuose rinkimuose galime pamatyti pseudodemokratinių judėjimų triumfą arba **ant nusivylimo bangos** išnirusi naujų koncernų – gelbėtoją.*

(EN2) *In the meanwhile, we may see pseudo-democratic movements triumph in the next elections or a new corporate savior rising from the waters of disappointment.*

The literal translations of the Lithuanian metaphors *uždega tautos dvasią* and *nusivylimo bangos* would be *ignites the spirit of the nation* and *wave of disappointment*, respectively. However, the translator chose to replace the main images and change them to the standard SL images.

Similarly, several simple one-word metaphors are also translated using this method, for instance:

(LT1) *Tačiau naujoji **nafta** šiandien yra ne tik žmogaus protas, bet ir duomenys.*

(EN1) *It is brains and data that are the new **fuel** of today.*

Here, the Lithuanian word *nafta* (En. oil), is replaced with the English metaphorically used word *fuel*, retaining the same stylistic effect and metaphorical meaning.

The findings indicate that replacing the SL image with a standard TL image is a rather frequently used translation strategy, particularly effective in conveying the metaphor's intended meaning while ensuring cultural and linguistic accessibility for the target audience. This approach allows for the preservation of metaphorical impact without relying on direct equivalence, demonstrating the translator's adaptability and sensitivity to TL norms.

4.3 Conversion of metaphor to sense

The third technique is metaphor to sense conversion, which involves transferring a metaphor's meaning into non-metaphorical language. According to Newmark (1981), this method is very prevalent. When there is no matching metaphorical expression in a TL, the meaning can be transferred simply by using plain words. In this study, however, only 2 complex metaphors were translated using this method, with none of the simple ones:

(LT1) *Juridinių asmenų milijonams jau septyneri metai uždrausta rungtis rinkimuose. Valstybė partijoms kasmet iš biudžeto atseikėja pusšešto milijono eurų, bet nostalgija verslo **piniginėms injekcijoms** neblėsta.*

(EN1) *For seven years now, corporate millions have been banned from elections. The state annually allocates 5.5 million euros from the budget to parties, but nostalgia for business **money** is dying hard.*

(LT2) *Jeigu Sveikatos apsaugos ministerijos stuburas atlaikys spaudimą, o Konkurencijos tarybos bei Valstybės kontrolės rekomendacijos bus įgyvendintos, **kainų svertai** pagaliau tikrai pakryps žmogaus naudai.*

(EN2) *If the Ministry of Health has the backbone to withstand the pressure and if the recommendations of the Competition Council and the National Audit Office are implemented, the **price balance** will be finally tipped in favor of people.*

In the two cases the Lithuanian metaphor *piniginėms injekcijoms* (En. *injections*) is simply reduced to its meaning, money in the translation while the metaphorical expression *kainų svertai* (En. *price levers*) becomes *price balance*. This might imply that translators have a tendency to use metaphorical imagery

whenever possible, turning to non-metaphorical equivalents only in situations where the target language lacks an appropriate metaphor.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Several conclusions may be drawn from this analysis of metaphor translation in the presidential speeches of Lithuanian presidents Gitanas Nausėda and Dalia Grybauskaitė:

- Reproducing the same metaphorical image in the target language is the most common translation technique because it preserves the conceptual meaning and stylistic effect of the original metaphor. This strategy was particularly prevalent for both simple and complex metaphors that have equivalent or similar expressions in English.
- Using a standard target language image instead of the source language metaphor is the second most common technique. This technique works well for preserving the metaphorical purpose while adjusting to the target audience's linguistic and cultural conventions. It demonstrates the translator's sensitivity and flexibility in finding a balance between the target language's naturalness and literal equivalence.
- Metaphor conversion to non-metaphorical or plain sense was less common and mostly utilized when the target language lacked an appropriate metaphorical equivalent. This suggests that translators tend to maintain metaphorical imagery whenever feasible, using literal explanations only when necessary to ensure clarity.

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