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TRANSPORTING METAPHORS FROM L1 TO L2 -

IMPLICATIONS FOR AN INTERCULTURAL APPROACH

TO FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING[+]

1. Questions

In association with the results of the recent debate on metaphors in linguistics, psychology and philosophy I want to raise, clarify and attempt to answer to following questions:

- Does this debate provide any new insights which are of relevance for foreign language learning and teaching?
- If we assume that there is some evidence for the claim that our conceptual perception of the world is more metaphorically structured than hithero believed, should that not lead to an attitude towards teaching which would permit a transport of methaphors from L1 to L2 in order to support the identity of the learner, even if some of these transports would traditionally be regarded as interferences? (I use the neutral term *transport* instead of *transfer* in order to avoid the positive connotations which the term *transfer* usually has.)
- If we allow unusual individual transports of metaphors from L1 to L2, how do we ensure that this does not interfere with the learner's ability to acquire the target langauge in a proper way?
- What, if any, are the consequences for our attitudes towards the teaching process if we try to use the cultural differences conveyed through the metaphorical system for an approach to foreign language learning and teaching which takes seriously the fact that a learner has to come to terms with something foreign, and that he may not automatically be prepared to relinquish his resistence against it?
- And, finally, what are the implications of these considerations for the production of new teaching material?

Asking these questions has meant neglecting others; no serious attempt is made to advance the purely theoretical discussion about metaphors, no detailed synchronic or diachronic analysis of specific metaphors and their field in given[1], nor will there be a debate about the proper translation of metaphors[2].

2. Metaphormania

"We are in the midst of metaphormania" JOHNSON (1981) wrote as the opening sentence of his reader *Philosophical Perspectives on Metaphor*. He claims that a boom in a new type of research on metaphor since the early 60's has followed twenty-three hundred years of elaboration on the basic definition of metaphor by Aristotle. Now, whether in the case of Brecht's epic theatre or with regard to modern linguistic approaches I am always a bit sceptical when someone claims that what he is doing is something completely new which rectifies the shortcomings of a tradition since Aristotle. In examining such a claim, one has to look carefully to see whether truly new insights are being presented or whether it isn't just a case of a new marketing strategy[3].

Very roughly speaking it can be said that the recent debate on metaphors is united in as far as its attack on the traditional position on metaphors is concerned. This traditional position is portrayed as one which deals with metaphors on the word level and works with the contrast of *figurative* vs. *literal* meaning[4]. A metaphor, in the position under attack, is an elliptical simile, - *brevior est similtudo* as Quintilian wrote. This is a terribly simple picture of the position under attack, and, with philosophers like Vico or Humboldt in mind, one can say that it is certainly not justified to claim this to be the position of everybody who thought about metaphors before the outbreak of 'metaphormania'[5].

However, I offer this brief sketch in order to be able to show what it is that this 'metaphormania' apposes.

The most radical change witnessed in the debate on metaphors has occurred in relation to the status that is attributed to them. A metaphor is no longer seen as a rhetoric device or an ornament of speech mostly to be found in poetry, but as a basic entity of the human mind:

> "(...) our ordinary conceptual system, in terms
> of which we both think and act, is fundamentally
> metaphorical in nature, (...)"

claim LAKOFF/JOHNSON (1980: 3) in the opening of their book

Metaphors we live by. Lakoff/Johnson try throughout their book to show how our everyday way of talking and thinking is systematically structured by metaphors. Even our most literal expressions involve them. Based on common spatial orientations are metaphors like:

(1) I'm feeling down
(2) He's really up
(3) He is in top form
(4) She's on top of the situation
(5) She's at the height of her power
(6) She has high standards
(7) That was a low trick
(8) He couldn't rise above his emotions etc.

Lakoff/Johnson's book is full of examples of this kind which all seem to cry out for one objection: These aren't metaphors at all.

At least this is what one would say from a traditional point of view. At best they are dead, frozen, *verblaßte* metaphors - lexical items. And it can be said that dead metaphors aren't metaphors any more[6]. So, one way of rejecting this approach to metaphors could be to say that compared with the philosophical tradition, it talks about different objects, and so it isn't really surprising when it generates a different outcome.

Secondly, one could complain about an inflationary use of the term *metaphor* and argue that if everything is X, one could as well say nothing is X, because X has lost its selectivity.

Thirdly it could be claimed that entities which don't really belong together are just being dealt with here under one heading. Even if the examples quoted above have metaphorical status, do they not still differ greatly from the boldly and imaginatively coined new phrase which offers a new insight to a reader/listener? Lakoff/Johnson seem to recognize this as they differentiate between conventional metaphors - like the ones quoted above - and metaphors which create new meaning. Nevertheless they insist on regarding both as metaphors.

If one dispenses with the clear definitory identification of things which are different in order to emphasize what they have in common, one must be very sure that the highlighted common feature is truly striking enough to put the fact that one has gone back behind a useful categorisation in the shade. In applying this to the metaphor discussion: one has to be convinced that the metaphorical nature of our thinking is important enough to compensate for the loss of clear distinction between metaphors as creative entities and lexical items with a metaphorical past.

Lakoff/Johnson argue that even though expressions like *wasting time* or *attacking positions* are conventionally fixed within the lexicon of English - and in the traditional sense would be dead metaphors - they are <u>alive</u> because they are reflections of systematic metaphorical concepts that structure our actions and thoughts. "They are alive in the most fundamental sense: they are metaphors we live by." (ibid: 55). They create "similarities of a new kind" (ibid: 151), they "can have the power to define reality" (ibid: 157), they are "devices for understanding and have little to do with objective reality" (ibid: 184). JOHNSON (1981a: 41) summed up the basic ideas about the cognitive status of metaphors as follows:

> "We encounter our world, not passively, but
> by means of projective acts influenced by
> our interests, purposes, values, beliefs,
> and language. Because our world is an
> imaginative value-laden construction,
> metaphors that alter our conceptual
> structures (...) will also alter the way
> we experience things."

I do not intend in getting involved here in a general debate about relativism, language, thought and the world etc. Therefore, I will try to derive the weakest and least-controversial claims possible from this debate for foreign language learning.

I see this emphasis on the cognitive status of metaphors as a reaction to the neglect of the cognitive aspect in the past in favour of an approach which saw metaphors largely as a linguistic phenomenon. I would not like to see it as a case of the cognitive aspects acquiring complete dominance to the exclusion of others. I would like to go back to a more moderate and vague position and insist on the existence of a

complex interdependence between language, thought and reality.
But even from such a moderate position which wouldn't put
all the emphasis on the cognitive status of metaphors it
could be argued that in foreign language learning and teaching
metaphors have not yet received the attention they deserve.

3. Coping with metaphors in a foreign language

Foreign language teachers have been basically occupied
with the understanding of metaphors, usually in selected
pieces of literature; textbooks have banned them into the
later pages of Volume 2 or 3; conventional or dead metaphors
have, up to now, been a matter of vocabulary and a potential
source of interferences. Not enough importance has been
attached to the fact that it is metaphors in particular which
are the carriers of the Weltansicht specific to the culture
of the languages in question. The transport of a metaphor
from L1 to L2 in cases where it doesn't 'work' in that
language has generally been regarded as an interference. It
is, however, also possible that a conventional metaphor in
L1 may become a new and bold metaphor in L2.

Thus, on the level of the individual learner one could
ask: if his metaphorical (in the Lakoff/Johnson sense of the
term) structuring of the world is part of his cognitive
system and thereby relevant for his identity, isn't it natural
and useful, if he transports this metaphorical structure into
the new language? And if it is so, do we, as teachers of that
new language, really have to tackle the transport of such
metaphors which don't comply with the way the world is struc-
tured in our language in the same way as we tackle incorrect
spelling, pronunciation, word-order etc. right from the
beginning?

The fear that deviations from the norm of the target
language prevent the learner from being able to communicate
properly in that language is our strongest reason for not
allowing his bold metaphorical expressions to settle. POMME-
RIN (1977: 129ff.) has argued that a new creation like Knast-

sitzer - a word which, even though it is morphologically possible
doesn't belong to the conventionalized vocabulary of the Ger-
man language[7] - which was produced by a Turkish girl learning
German has to be regarded differently from a similar new
creation by a journalist, poet etc. What could be praised as
innovative, creative in a different context has to lead to
action on the part of the teacher. The reason: We can't judge
a text divorced from the communicative competence of its
producer in that particular language. Our journalist is
granted so-called emancipation from the norm because no one
doubts that he would be capable of explaining what he meant
if his originality led to a break-down in communication. For
our learner on the other hand - usually far away from having
adequate command of the target language - this wouldn't be
possible and, furthermore, there is the danger of the forma-
tion of an ideolect system which might seriously undermine
effective communication in the target language.

We tend to see new creations by learners, even if they
are - in the terminology of COSERIU (1975) - in accordance
with the system but not with the norm of the target language,
as deficits: the learners haven't yet acquired the appro-
priate way of expressing what they want to say in the target
language.

4. Socially accepted creativity in a foreign language

Koestler, Canetti, Nabokov are just a few of the authors
we praise for being creative in a language which isn't their
mother tongue. In the sphere of literature we accept this
even from people who haven't made their name yet, who might
still be students.

The Institute for German as a Foreign Language in the
University of Munich has organized two competitions so far
for people who don't have German as their first language.
A number of the contributions have been published in the
books Als Fremder in Deutschland und In zwei Sprachen leben

(ACKERMANN (1982 und 1983)) and the originality of expression in these poems, short stories of prose sketches should dumbfound anyone who might have thought of foreigner's literature as being something inferior in quality. Especially striking are the metaphors which process the bilingual situation and the living between cultures.

The second language is a *Stiefmuttersprache* (a stepmother-tongue)[8]. Living between two cultures is like living the life of a *Halbdrachen* (a half-dragon) in a fairy-tale[9]; *das Holzpferd der Kindheit wiegt am Abend einen Mond für den Geliebten in der alten Sprache* while the next morning *die neue Sprache rüttelt wach...*[10]. Striking the comparison *mein Gastarbeiterdeutsch ist eng wie das ausländergesetz* (my migrant worker's German is as tight as the law for foreigners)[11]. Not only fear comes through these images, but also hope, the hope for example that the *Duden*, that codification of the German language, will be used as a *Malkasten* (a paintbox)[12], and there are playful uses of German especially by Michel Boiron, for example when he remarks *Komisch, ... die deutsche Sprache. Wenn zwei Liebende sich angezogen fühlen, sind sie meistens ausgezogen*[13] or when he plays bilingually in order to express his anger at the way he, and especially foreigners who don't come from a country as positively evaluated by Germans as France, are dealt with by the *Ausländerpolizei* (in the Aliens registration office) when they ask for asylum or even just for an *Aufenthaltsberechtigung* (residence permit) in the police station in a street called Puttkamerstraße:

> "Puttkamerstraße. Der Name der Straße ist ein
> Witz. Ein Witz aus zwei Sprachen. In meiner
> Sprache PUTT gleich Hure, Dirne, Prostituierte...
> und KAMER: das Zimmer, Schlafzimer. PUTTKAMER:
> das Schlafzimmer der Hure. Mein Freund Wolfgang
> würde sagen: 'Ausländerwitz' und nicht lachen.
> Ich lache. Es beruhigt mich, wenn ich zur Poli-
> zei gehe."[14]

What looks like a bilingual pun - a proper name is dissected into two meaningful parts - turns out to be a highly imaginative image for a situation of power and submission, where people who look for asylum often have to cover up their real feelings and motivations in order to behave in a way which they hope is most pleasing to the people on the other side of the desk.

Creativity in an area where one is supposed to be creative doesn't seem to present any problem. Different interpretations of a metaphor - e.g. the ones reported by LAKOFF/JOHNSON (1980: 143) of *the solution of a problem* as being 'a difficulty that can be done away with' vs. 'something which is merely dissolved and which turns up again and again' - can provide an interesting occasion for an intercultural discussion if encountered in a context which is favourable to such an exercise. On the other hand they could also lead to clashes in the case where different approaches or attitudes towards a certain activity or problem are deduced form the same metaphor. Direct transport of metaphors can lead to the conveyance of 'wrong' information, e.g.

(9) She flew through the exam

which is the opposite of

(10) Sie flog durchs Examen

and

(11) vogelfrei

which doesn't mean at all the same as

(12) free as a bird.

And while

(13) eine Obduktion durchführen

might in many cases work as a transport of

(14) to hold a post-mortem

it could in some contexts also cause the raising of German eyebrows. Cases like these together with our main, very responsible goal of conveying a correct version of the target language usually stop us from encouraging students to use bold metaphors too early in that language.

But if ALEXANDER (1983: 19) is right in saying that only

> "if your learners can be primed to look out
> for non-denotational meaning, we shall have
> made a small step in the direction of the
> cultural learning process which L2-learning
> entails."

and if in principle we accept that we consider an utterance
like

(15) Meine Mühlen mahlen langsam

as a creative use of

(16) Gottes Mühlen mahlen langsam

by an Irish student who wanted to describe the fact that she
is a very slow eater and if we want to encourage such a use
of the foreign language[15], we have to take into account that
transports like 9/10, 11/12 or 13/14 take place. The question
is: how to minimize 9/10, 11/12 or 13/14 and how to encourage
15/16?

5. Teachers' attitudes towards students expressing their very selves in the foreign language

To avoid a misunderstanding: It is not fair to use extra-
ordinary examples like the ones produced by foreigners in the
context of literature in order to make a case for a different
approach to metaphors in ordinary classroom situations where
they aren't that striking all the time and usually not gram-
matically correct either. Nor should accepting the conceptual
status of metaphors lead to any weakening of measures in the
classroom which help the learner to acquire that variety of
the target language correctly that is relevant to him. Both,
however, should lead to a questioning of the attitudes we
have towards the attempts of students to express their very
selves in the foreign langauge.

In the past we have often forgotten that acquiring a new
language does not necessarily mean that the learner really wants
to become 'a fish in the water', someone with an identity in the
target language and culture[16]. Rather, resistance against
that different, odd sounding way the world is organized in the
target language can occur. This isn't that much of a problem
as long as trivial, tourist-geared topics like booking a
room in a hotel are dealt with as it is most of the time in
what is often called the communicative approach, but it becomes
more serious when topics like *national stereotypes, love,*

euro-centrism etc. are dealt with, which might get a bit
closer to the bone of the learner and which demand some form
of intercultural reflection in order to enable the under-
standing of the different concepts.

If, under the general topic of *orientation in space* I
learn how to ask for directions to the language lab, my
resistance against the way something is done in the target
language and culture will be much lower than in cases where
under this topic I'm confronted with a different way of
organizing space in living areas, of keeping my physical
distance from other people in communication etc. If under
the general topic of *body* I only learn how to refer to certain
parts of the body - leaving the relevant ones covered with
a fig leaf - when I just learn what hand means in the target
language, my inner resistance will be different from a
situation in which, under this general heading, I am con-
fronted with taboo areas for physical contact which are
different from the ones in my culture. I will want to utter
my objections and these objections are not only that the
organization of the space in which we live is objectively
different but also that things are perceived and talked about
differently.

In other words, in an intercultural approach to foreign
language learning it is important to state that learning
how to communicate _in_ certain situations isn't enough, but
that it is equally important to talk _about_ your means of
communication and your control of situations. Talking _about_
the concepts that come with the learners first language and
confronting them with those of the target language requires
a much bigger emphasis on the mastery of comments on a meta-
level and a much bigger readiness on the teacher's part to
get involved in a discussion about different concepts. I
don't think this is just a luxury.

If in _second_ language acquisition, in the case of children
of migrant workers for example, we seriously try to achieve
an intercultural education, we cannot reach this goal without
dealing with the differences in *Weltansicht* which are
enshrined in the two languages.

In _foreign_ language learning, at least in cases where
juveniles or adults learn a language without a concrete
travelling purpose, I think a way of teaching which accepts
the learner as an adult and offers him topics which go in-
tellectually beyond the simulation of everyday small-talk
promises to be motivating - especially if comparisons between
the two cultures are accompanied by a possibility of comparing
different perceptions of the world through the two languages.

A generally favourable attitude towards dealing with language
in this way will enable the learners to be creative - creative
not in the sense of special group activities, debates about the
role of the teacher, free text production, short dramas etc.,
which is how the term _creative_ is usually understood in the
context of foreign language teaching, but creative in a more
philosophical sense - they will try to integrate the newly en-
countered into their own language system and try to use
their system as a base for expressing themselves in the other
language. These attempts can lead to rather incomprehensible
results and it is the teacher's task to make sure that these
attempts are productive, i.e. that
a) they are seen as 'work-outs', necessary for the compre-
hension of the new and as expressions of the self of the
learner and
b) that at the same time they are kept under control in a way
that ensures the advancement towards a general command of
the target language.

This is all a question of attitude and I do think that,
as in many cases, the attitude of the teacher to his task
and the general climate in the classroom are the most important
factors in enabling this kind of learning to come about.
This is a general statement. I don't believe that any recipe
for a certain type of teaching behaviour can be the key for
the achievement of this kind of learning, but rather it must
come about as the result of a particular, co-operative and
open type of learner-teacher interaction[17].

6. Implications for the production of teaching material for German as a foreign language

I am going to restrict myself to materials which aim for
a world market - like _Deutsch aktiv_[18], _Sprachkurs Deutsch_[19]
etc. and thus cannot incorporate a direct contrastive element[20].
What is needed in order to enable this kind of material to
contribute to an intercultural approach to foreign language
learning?

Such material would need a way of dealing with topics which
makes it stimulating enough for adult learners to get in-
volved. This leads away from the types of presentation which
assume that communication can only be offered as little
dialogues in everyday situations, towards a presentation of
any kinds of texts which satisfy a need for real information
and which offer topics under a challenging and new light. This
should lead as well to a useful integration of literature -
not just as an ornament or not _konkrete Poesie_ alone as an
illustration of the grammar portion of the day.

A way must be found through which one can deal with topics
which would enable a so-called intercultural comparison. This
sounds pretty advanced, but I'm talking about the first
lessons of volume one already, where one could for example
call for comparisons between the different way names are
structured and used. In the type of book I am talking about,
there couldn't be a direct contrast between L2 and a specific
language and culture. This is a deficit; but it is one which
can be partly used to advantage; for example learners can be
invited via projects to express the specific features of
their language and culture actively and build up a comparison
between them and the new language and culture. Obviously
such a concept needs a cyclical progression of topics in order
to enable the treatment of the same topic on different language
levels with growing differentiation.

So much for the way of dealing with the topics. On the
linguistic level, as I have said above, we have to get away
from the sole conveyance of language needed for the talk _in_
a particular situation and have to provide the language

necessary to talk about concepts, language and communication
as well, without of course letting the whole thing drift into
a linguistic   seminar on meta-communication. Furthermore
clusters of conventional metaphors, for example a collection
of the use of orientational metaphors for different purposes,
should be introduced,
a) to show a potentially systematic metaphorical structure
of the target language and
b) to allow the learner to build up a contrastive cluster
in his language and draw comparisons about the similarity/
difference in expression.

From this and from what I have said about the importance
of a proper thematic approach, it should be clear that the
mother tongue has quite an important role to play in such
a concept. Stimulating debates about a topic or the difference
between a linguistic concept in L1 and L2 shouldn't be ter-
minated just because the level of control of L2 isn't advanced
enough to carry on. In such an approach topics are too im-
portant to be experienced by the learner as mere vehicles
for the transport of grammar and communicative units which
can be done away with whenever it suits the teacher.

Nevertheless, this valuing of the role of the first
language should neither lead to mother tongue debating classes
nor to a cliche version of the so-called old grammar-transla-
tion method, even though translation has an important part in
this approach - not as a means of selection but as a coopera-
tive technique where learners try to discuss the best possible
(that is: on their language level possible) translation of a
text and as a useful tool for the comparison of linguistic
concepts[21]. Attempts at putting these ideas into practice
are made in MEBUS et al.(forthcoming).

7. Afterthought

Every understanding, Humboldt wrote, is at the same time
non-understanding[22], but at the same time we see that a
practical concept of understanding nonetheless does exist.

A potential misunderstanding as the result of the use of
metaphors which don't work in the target language should not
therefore inhibit us from trying to integrate the positive
aspects of transports of metaphors: for the learner they
bridge the gap between the old and the new, and a discussion
about them on a meta-level can lay open and activate for
the learning process a part of the personality of the learner
which is usually not catered for. Through this, in turn, a
deeper understanding of the target language and culture on
the part of the learner might be possible which would include
the reflections of his own position towards that which is
alien to him. Such an approach, which differs considerably
from one which tries to raise the learners to near-perfect
members of the target culture is, at least in my eyes, more
honest and better suited for a general goal of international
understanding.

Footnotes

+ This is a revised version of a paper given at the 7th
   World Congress of Applied Linguistics, August 1984
   in Brussels. I am grateful to Michael Bamberg and
   Emer O'Sullivan for suggestions, examples etc. The
   implications of an intercultural approach for the
   production of teaching materials have been worked out
   in close association with Heinke Behal-Thomsen,
   Jürgen Genuneit, Gudula Mebus, Andreas Pauldrach
   und Marlene Rall.

1 As an example of a detailed synchronic and diachronic
   analysis of the metaphorical process (dealing with
   heart, sweet and *cup*) cf. DIRVEN (1984).

2 For a very stimulating way of describing ways of
   translating metaphors cf. NEWMARK (1981).

3 This is one reservation to be borne in mind in the
   discussion about the implications of this new approach
   for foreign language learning and teaching. The other
   is: just because there is some movement as such in
   theoretical linguistics, psychologiy etc. doesn't
   mean that its implications for teaching have to be
   considered automatically: there is no automatic
   application of linguistics. For a survey of the ill-
   formed outcomes of direct applications of linguistics
   to foreign language teaching cf. RÖSLER (1979).

4 For a non-trivial overview of the different traditional
   conceptions of metaphor cf. LIEB (1967).

5 Cf. e.g. the *inhaltsbezogenen* stance taken by INGENDAHL
   (1971).

6 And from the point of view of researchers who don't
   agree with the traditional elliptical simile position,
   these aren't metaphors either. They wouldn't fulfill
   the condition set by WEINRICH (1967: 6) about being in
   einem konterdeterminierenden Kontext for example.

7 At least it didn't before it became part of the academic
   discussion.

8 MADJDEREY, A (1983: 119).

9 NAI-LI-MA (1983: 25)

10 BEDREGAL (1983: 31).

11 BIONDI (1983: 86).

12 REDNER (1983: 225).

13 BOIRON (1983: 239).

14 Ibid.: 234.

15 Cf. e.g. SCHULTE (1982) as a collection of the creative
    use children of foreign workers in Germany have made
    of the system of the German language.

16 Take pronunciation as an example. As long as nobody
    has any difficulties in understanding what I say in
    a foreign language I don't mind being identified as
    German by my vs and ws; because a) I am a German and
    b) I might 'get away' with things which I otherwise
    wouldn't. Of course, especially in the case of Ger-
    mans, the identification as being one could have a
    very different effect in many cases. But I still
    find it very odd when suddenly, in the company of
    native speakers of English, German friends sound
    as if they come from California, Cork or Cambridge.

17 For a detailed debate of the relevance of the learner
    teacher interaction for learner-centered language
    teaching cf. part V of RÖSLER (1984).

18 NEUNER et al. (1979).

19 HÄUSSERMANN/WOODS/ZENKNER (1978).

20 Even though by means of the *Glossar* and the differentia-
    tion of the *Arbeitsbuch* according to regions some form
    of coping with the first language and culture might
    occur.

21 For 'learner-centered' translation-classes cf. RÖSLER
    (1980).

22 Cf. HUMBOLDT (1907: 64f.): "Keiner denkt bei dem Wort
    gerade und genau das, was der andere, und die noch
    so kleine Verschiedenheit zittert, wie ein Kreis im
    Wasser, durch die ganze Sprache fort. Alles Verstehen
    ist daher immer zugleich ein Nicht-Verstehen, alle
    Übereinstimmung in Gedanken und Gefühlen zugleich
    ein Auseinandergehen."

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