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Borges once said that the history of literature is the history of a few metaphors, and he lists some of them: the river as time, life as a dream, eyes as stars, women as flowers... Maybe, then, all reality can also be explained by means of a few metaphors. And if so, what would these metaphors be?

Cultural codes are frontiers between two realities, customs posts levying duties. The square peg does not fit into the round hole, and, unless we make some adjustment, *the Round Holers* will not be able to receive the message from the square peg. But if that is so, then perhaps the peg is meaningless without its squareness. And how many pegs are there in the market of ideas, anyway? Even the market cannot answer that question. I have therefore chosen to analyse a piece of one particular market: metaphor in the transaction of *bertsos*¹ [extemporised verses].

Bertso, metaphor and translation

The metaphor, supposedly the most important resource in literature and aesthetic pleasure, is by its nature a valuable instrument in the process of internalising language; the metaphor, or in other words, the mathematical translation, is the analogical algorithm that identifies the real with the imagined or suggested. In *bertsolaritza* (the practise of verse improvisation) and generally speaking in any oral tradition, metaphor has always been important, playing many different roles. Might Maritxu and Bartolo² perhaps not like something more than just wine? How long have they been singing for the partridge³ to lose its feathers? A translator must have a perfect understanding of the content and the objective of the text to be translated. In the case of the metaphor, he or she must first translate it from the source language to the source language, from Basque to Basque, albeit only to foster understanding. Above all, he or she must be clear about the type of metaphor being used and its purpose. In order to analyse the metaphors used in the *bertsos*, I will use the anthology *Bapatean 2006*, published by the Basque Association of *Bertso* Enthusiasts. Most of the examples analysed here are taken from that book, which contains the cream of the crop of 2006.

1 *Bertsolaritza* is the art of composing extemporary songs and singing them to given melodies. The improvising poet is the *bertsolari* and the sung piece is the *bertso*. At competitions, *bertsolaris* compete, sometimes on their own, sometimes sparring with another. The subject and metre are set by the *gai-jartzaille*, or the «theme-setter». The winner receives a ceremonial *txapela*, or beret.

2 *Maritxu where are you going*

Where are you going, Maritxu, so elegant? / To the fountain,
Bartolo, come if you want / What is there in the fountain? /
White wine, / we will drink together as much as we want.

Maritxu, when I am with you / I feel happy all over /
Bartolo, I feel happy too, / That you stay by me.

Maritxu, if you intend to get married, / think of
me, firstly / I am at your disposal forever /
with Bartolo your life will be good.

3 The partridge has its two wings / and a beautiful crest on its head / If only you too had a beautiful youth / With lovely blonde hair to dazzle the girls.

A lover shouldn't be ashamed / about walking about
boldly at night / By day it would be embarrassing /
Even in full view of (all) the birds.

I've gone after you night and day / O! I have reached
that lovely flower / Oh! at last I reached it / But
sadly it has lost its most beautiful feather.

No one in the world lives without sorrow / Certainly
I also have had enough of this / I wanted to marry
you / But my father wouldn't hear of it.

What would your father have to say to me about this? /
That I'm not enough for you? / Or that you're too
much for me? / Is there no prince for you now?

Why metaphor?

As we have said, metaphor is the analogical algorithm that identifies the real with the imagined or suggested. It is not a comparison, but rather an identification. Who does not recognise the pearls in the mouth of a beautiful girl? (And I'm not talking about her piercings, naturally.) If metaphor sets out both the real element and the suggested one, it is a basic, *in praesentia* metaphor: the pretty girl will have pearly teeth, rather than actual pearls. On the other hand, if the metaphor mentions only the suggested (or metaphoric) element, it is a pure metaphor: in this case, the pretty girl has pearls instead of teeth. Needless to say, translating basic metaphors is much easier than translating pure ones since the translator has more information.

The relative difficulty of translating a metaphor may vary, but the task can become considerably more complicated depending on the quantity and quality. If a text—or in our case a *bertso* or a *bertso*-singing session contains a large number of metaphors, we first need to consider whether they are just a random assortment of unrelated metaphors or whether they form a complete allegory. An allegory is an accumulation of metaphors in which all the metaphors are linked to one another. This can greatly complicate the translator's job.

How many metaphors?

As for *quality*, the classification is even more complex. When it comes to classification, the best metaphor for metaphor itself may be language: We don't know very well how we use them, we couldn't even begin to classify the ones we know, and yet we use them continuously. Nonetheless, many scholars have sought to establish a definitive classification of metaphors, thus opening up a fertile ground for debate. I have no intention of stirring things up further with this article; instead, I will try to confine myself to compiling the contributions of many different experts in the field.

What I have said so far about metaphors should smoothen the translator's path. But the personal metaphor makes it more difficult than one might wish. A personal metaphor or symbol is one that forms part of the author's individual reality. In the case of the *bertsos*, the author's reality is shaped by its intrinsic context as created by the theme set by the *gai-jartzaile* and by the extrinsic context, or the one surrounding the *bertsolari* (the people listening, the place, the moment, the situation, the occasion of the performance, etc.). According to Erich Fromm, symbolic language reflects our minds, and in that symbolic language the external world is the symbol of the inner world. He distinguishes between three types of symbols:

The *conventional symbol*, which is the one we use in everyday language. What is the link between the word «table» and the table itself? The link is conventional: the agreement of many people has been required for that object to be called by that name. The *accidental symbol* is an association of a personal nature which cannot be shared with anyone else. If you went to Paris and had a bad time there, you would relate Paris with having a bad time, but there would be no profound relation between the symbol and the reality. That symbology can alter the impact on the receiver; despite hearing romantic *bertsos* about Paris, the person who has had a bad time there may see accidental symbols. The *universal symbol* is the association that reflects an intrinsic relationship between reality and the symbol. In terms of agreement, it is the same as the conventional symbol, but that agreement is provided by the relationship itself, not by a collective decision. Fire signifies power and energy, which changes and at the same time is not consumed, a force that possesses the capacity to destroy. When we use fire as a symbol, we are endowing the reality we are describing with that meaning. One example of this is the *bertso* sung by Joxe Agirre at the *Bertso Eguna* [Day of the *Bertso*] in 2006: «Although the fire of our faith / Did not give much heat / At that time the fashion was / For churches and prayer». In this *in praesentia* metaphor, faith *is* fire (not *like* fire), and may be lit and extinguished, among other things.

According to Fromm, the set of universal symbols is the only common language the human race has created. Any person who meets the basic characteristics of humankind is qualified to use and understand that symbolic language based on common properties. Within that symbolic language Curtius used classical antiquity to identify five groups of metaphors, based on five themes: sailing, the family, food, the body and theatre.

Although Curtius's classification now seems outmoded, the sample we analyse here gives examples of all of these types. I myself used a sailing metaphor at the Plateruena Kafe Antzokia in Durango, when I sang a *bertso* dedicated to my mother in the Bizkaia provincial final: «My father had / His caravel from Bruges; / Then, on that wave / I was his second skiff...». Although my father worked on an oil tanker, by turning it into a caravel, I gave him two skiffs at the final of the Bizkaia *Bertsolari* Championship, my brother and me—I was the second of his sons. An example of the family metaphor can be found in the end of a *bertso* sung by Unai Iturriaga on 17 February 2006 in Legazpia: «Without knowing how things were / With our family in Legazpia / We could not / Continue on our way». Iturriaga has no family in Legazpia, but because it was the fourth time he had been invited to the festival, he felt at home among the people of the town and wanted to project this idea of proximity and family love to the audience. Food symbols are very frequent in *bertsos*: whereas justice is often associated

with thirst is common to attribute «hunger» to *bertso* enthusiasts in the opening greetings. For body metaphors, I would like to turn once again to the intervention by Unai Iturriaga I have already mentioned. As his unthemed duel with Maialen Lujanbio progressed, the thread of the battle led the Durango *bertsolari* to come up with these closing *bertsos*: «But she is here improvising / A girl with two brains... / I too have two heads, but / The one down below does not reason». In this case, one body part is used to represent another, but he develops the same process that gives us the «arse» [bottom] and «neck» of the bottle. To complete Curtius's list, we can find a theatrical reference in Aitor Mendiluze's opening *bertsos* at a festival in Durango: «My five organs / (are) Puppets in my hands / I will have to choose / Which is most advantageous to me...». *Bertsolaris* are often compared to puppets, puppet-masters and (for example, Iparragirre) comedians.

Metaphor - What for?

According to Grice, in any act of communication the receiver of the message expects the transmitter to speak as rigorously, clearly and quickly as possible, and the transmitter expects the receiver to understand it. In the case of a metaphor, the transmitter breaks the rule of quality («try to make your contribution true; say nothing if you believe it to be untrue; say nothing without a proper check»), i.e., instead of directly saying what he means, he reformulates it. Depending on the purpose, metaphors may be classed as follows:

Embellishing metaphor: this is the reformulation which seeks rhetoric/aesthetic pleasure by giving at least as much importance to form as to content. It is exemplified in the farewell sung by Xabier Silveira at the final of the Nafarroa *Bertsolari* Championship: «What I often / Have said in all heart / To a princess; / That you are what most / I love in this world; / That you are the foot of my *bertsos*, / The lady of my life; / That you are a burden / I can never cast off; / My father gave me my name and / I want you to give me my existence. / For all the kisses I have not given you / Here you have my champion's beret, mother». *Pedagogic metaphor*: this is an allegory that comes close to being a comparison, which is used to set out new content or to make something easier to understand. It is frequently used in the area of mythology and fable. Clearly, pedagogic metaphors can have an element of embellishment. Take, for example, Sebastián Lizaso's words to Andoni Egaña in Zestoa on St. Agatha's Eve, when, referring to Uztapide, he said: «In number of prizes you have broken / His record; / You have turned into a motorway / The path that he opened». *Euphemistic metaphor*: this is a type of rephrasing which seeks to avoid moral, social, religious or sexual taboos which the speaker cannot—or prefers not to—use. Euphemistic metaphors are very common in literature, sayings, phrases and popular songs. There are constant references

to sex at *bertso* festivals: One good example is the *bertso* sung by Miren Amuriza to Julen Zelaieta: «If I could / I would like to do it in the truck / and then / not to be able to brake». Needless to say, she wasn't talking about starting up the engine of a truck. *Fossilised metaphor*: this is a former metaphor which has now lost its metaphoric nature. If you talk about the mouse on a computer, for example, no one now would think of a rodent. In translation terms, fossilised metaphors are not considered to be metaphors when it comes to translation: instead a direct equivalence or adaptation, or perhaps a loan word, is sought.

How to translate a metaphor

Given that *bertsolaritza* is communication with rhythm, measured and sung, the translation of the metaphor poses no special difficulty. If the metaphor is universal, it will always be possible to translate. In the case of symbols, though, the translator has to try to make sure that the author's metaphor does not clash with any conventional metaphor in the target language, resulting in an accidental symbol; for example, the conventional symbols associated with the fox are very different in Basque and in Spanish. As for Curtius' classification, although it could be more comprehensive, in general, the translator has to try to maintain as far as possible the semantic field of the element suggested in the metaphor; if the sexual taboo is replaced by the terminology of the engine, it should be the same in the English translation, for example. Finally, it is essential to maintain the objective of the metaphor: a pedagogic metaphor in the source language should not turn into a mere embellishing metaphor in the target. And I would just add one small observation: if the *bertsos* are simultaneously interpreted, everything is permissible; if time is taken over the job, however, it is the translator who has to decide what level of rigour should be applied. Many metaphors used to be translated using comparisons and paraphrases. And in smuggling, where the aim is to get the goods from one side of the border to the other, nearly everything is permitted. ♦



↑ Maialen Lujanbio and Unai Iturriaga. [Alberto Elozegi]