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THE HYGIENICS OF TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETING: METAPHORS OF PURITY AND CONTAMINATION, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF TRANSLATOR AND INTERPRETER IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT. ***The Hygienics of Translation and Interpreting: Metaphors of Purity and Contamination, and the Construction of Translator and Interpreter Identity.*** Rooted in Critical Discourse Analysis and Pragmatics, and using metaphors as a heuristic tool, this essay will look at public and academic discourses on the practices of translation and interpreting associated with notions of cleanliness/purity vs uncleanliness/contamination. Such discourses may appear abstract and speculative in nature, but have a practical impact on normative (self) perceptions of translators' and interpreters' professional behaviour and habitus. They also seem to run through the academic and theoretical understandings of translation and interpreting along the axes of fidelity/infidelity and translator's invisibility/visibility, but also, by extension, in terms of respecting/trespassing boundaries (notions of norms of translation, or the interpreter as a conduit or gatekeeper). Real-life examples will be discussed to illustrate and deconstruct such metaphorical devices and highlight their connection with underlying value judgements attached to purity vs contamination. Existing metaphorical alternatives, which allow for the construction of more nuanced translators'/interpreters' identities, will also be discussed.

Keywords*: metaphors of interpreting and translation, conduit metaphor, vessel metaphor, translator's/interpreter's invisibility, 'pristine' translation*

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REZUMAT. ***Igiena traducerii şi a interpretării: metaforele purităţii şi ale contaminării şi construcţia identităţii traducătorului şi interpretului*.** Bazându-se pe instrumentele analizei critice a discursului şi ale pragmaticii şi folosind metaforele ca instrument euristic, prezentul articol va analiza discursurile publice şi academice privind practicile de traducere şi interpretare asociate cu noţiunile de curăţenie/puritate vs. necurăţenie/contaminare. Astfel de discursuri pot părea abstracte şi speculative prin natura lor, dar au un impact practic asupra percepţiilor normative (de sine stătătoare) ale comportamentului şi habitusului profesional al traducătorilor şi interpreţilor. De asemenea, ele par să direcţioneze abordările academice şi teoretice ale traducerii şi interpretării de-a lungul axelor fidelitate/infidelitate şi invizibilitate/vizibilitate a traducătorului, dar şi, prin extensie, în ceea ce priveşte respectarea/traversarea graniţelor (noţiunile de norme de traducere sau interpretul ca un conducător sau gardian). Vor fi discutate exemple din viaţa reală pentru a ilustra şi deconstrui astfel de dispozitive metaforice şi pentru a evidenţia legătura acestora cu judecăţile de valoare implicite despre puritate vs. contaminare. De asemenea, vor fi discutate alternativele metaforice existente, care permit construirea unor identităţi mai nuanţate ale traducătorilor/interpreţilor.

Cuvinte-cheie: *metafore ale interpretării şi traducerii, metafora conductei, metafora vasului, invizibilitatea traducătorului/interpretului, traducere "curată"*

Metaphors are powerful means of meaning-making. They are also translations of sorts. They map one conceptual domain onto another, so that the first domain can be conceptualized by means of the second (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Kövecses 2002, 4). Which is another way of saying that they *translate* a concept we do not quite grasp into another concept that we already know.

Just as something gets inevitably lost (and found) in translation, however, metaphors, too, lead us to focus more on certain aspects of the target domain—the ones that bear some affinity with the source domain—and leave others in the shadows. In other words, metaphors tend to act as discursive frames (Ritchie 2012, 106 and following). In fields such as Discourse Analysis and Pragmatics, the framing effects of metaphors have been vastly analysed with reference to real-life public, political and media discourses, mostly with a view to exposing how metaphors influence recipients' way of thinking about a certain issue (by way of example see Semino 2021; Garzone 2021; Semino, Demjén, and Demmen 2018).

Curiously, in Translation Studies, the use of metaphors seems to be more widely advocated as a proactive tool to conceptualize translation and interpreting (from now on, T&I). Several authors have used existing metaphors

or offered new ones as *heuristic* tools that are capable of shedding new light on the practices or products or actors of T&I, thus contributing to the advancement of our understanding of T&I in ways that may be unattainable through other, perhaps more rational, methods of investigation (Martín de León 2022; Guldin 2016, 32-33; Guldin 2020, 326-28; St André 2010 and essays within; Hermans 2007, chapter 4; Bollettieri Bosinelli and Torresi, 2016).

Other works have focused more critically on popular or literary discourses of T&I and the metaphors they contain, which most frequently point to T&I as subservient to the original text and author. For instance, good translations (and translators) have long been described as invisible screens or clear mirrors that carry the meaning across, add or subtract nothing—a metaphorical view opposed most famously by Lawrence Venuti (1995). Similarly, drawing on the metaphor of communication as a conduit, by which language is a vessel that transfers concepts from the sender's to the receiver's mind without modification (Reddy 1979), interpreters have traditionally been encouraged to identify as mere conduits who convey the original message from one person's mouth to another person's ears, neutrally transposing it into another language. The conduit metaphor of interpreting has been denounced as delusionary in interpreting studies ever since the 1990s, by scholars like Roy (1993), Wadensjö (1998), Angelelli (2004, 7-11) and Diriker (2004), who have also argued that the interpreter's neutrality is an abstraction and does not appear to find much application if you look at the actual socio-linguistic behaviour of interpreters in real-life interpreted encounters.[2]

Ça va sans dire, popular metaphors of T&I that rely on the notion of invisibility, such as T&I as a mirror or clear screen, carry with them the quality of absolute spotlessness, lest the mirror or screen become visible, thus revealing itself as something standing between the sender and the receiver. Similarly, well-functioning conduits and vessels are visualized as empty and with clean insides, otherwise they might not fulfil their function of carrying the original content (and only that) across languages. As a result, the conduit and vessel metaphors imply that a good translation or interpretation is *clean*, *pristine*, *pure*.

It is easy to understand why this kind of metaphors is popular with users of T&I. Images of unproblematic and "hygienic" transfer from a source to a target do away with the possibility of *betraying* the original or its spirit—betrayal being another long-standing metaphor for T&I, this time unequivocally

[2] Arguably, the very conduit metaphor of communication, by which language is a vessel that transfers concepts from the sender's mind to the receiver's without modification (Reddy 1979), is an oversimplification that does not account for interferences in the channel, the variability of the sender's and receiver's capabilities and subjectivities that influence their coding and decoding of the message, and the human-made and embodied nature of language itself—imperfect and opaque by definition.

imbued with negative overtones that are washed away by the positive connotation attached to cleanliness, purity, pristineness. When advertising for T&I services, then, guaranteeing clean, pure or pristine translation seems a good marketing idea and it is not surprising to find similar claims in agencies' or professionals' commercial literature and websites, such as those that will be found in the following section.

It is much less obvious, however, that after all the research in T&I that has long and convincingly argued against the translator's invisibility and the interpreter's neutrality, metaphors like the vessel or conduit or others that rely on pristineness should still circulate today within in-profession discourse, such as the examples of professional associations' Codes of Ethics that we will see in the section following the next.

In the following two sections, I will group together a few examples of real-life descriptions of T&I taken from the web in 2023-24 that entail notions of purity and pristineness, either explicitly mentioned or subsumed in references to translators and interpreters as conduits or vessels. Such descriptions have not been systematically collected and therefore have no ambition of constituting a representative sample of T&I promotional or professional discourses. My purpose here is twofold: firstly, I intend to show that such representations of T&I do persist after decades of academic debate have shown that they are inaccurate as well as damaging for translators' and interpreters' professional image. Secondly, I will try and deconstruct the discourses that rely on such metaphors in the proposed examples, with the help of pragmatics and critical discourse analysis (e.g. Verschueren and Blommaert 1991, Blommaert and Verschueren 1998).

Pristine translation and the interpreter as conduit in professionals' promotional discourses

In English-language public discourses of T&I service providers reaching out to perspective clients, metaphors of purity and cleanliness are so common that the entire material for the first part of this section was found with a simple Google query of the phrase 'pristine translation', run in April 2023. 'Pristine', meaning "still pure; uncorrupted; unspoiled"[3], is an absolute adjective that further boosts notions of accuracy, precision, fidelity and clarity—all cognates of pristineness in the field of T&I, which explicitly co-occur in some of the examples below (my emphasis):

[3] https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/pristine. The semantic connection between pristineness and judgments of moral integrity, hence trustworthiness, has been studied in anthropology and sociology (Douglas 1966; Zhong and House 2014) as well as psychology, especially in connection with OCDs (Zhong and Liljenquist 2006; Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley 2009; McKay and Carp 2017, 342-43).

> We provide the best interpreters and translators for *precise* interpreting, *pristine* translation [...] *Clear* communication across languages and cultures proves a challenge. Key decisions depend on *accuracy*, *precision*, and *clarity*. (LinkedIn profile, Capital Linguists, Silver Spring, Maryland)

Language Connections helps provide solutions for a few of this client's needs: *Precise*, *accurate* translations of complicated medical and legal documents [...] We always ensure that the translator we hire for this client isn't just a native speaker of their target language, but also has the medical or life sciences background so they can provide a *pristine* translation of even the most difficult and demanding material. (https://www.languageconnections.com/pharmaceutical-translation-for-a-biotech-pharma-and-medtech-consultancy/)

> Relying on just one person to deliver a *pristine* translation that is consistent with your original text and also reads correctly in the target language is a very risky strategy. (http://www.cgb-translations.com/services/proofreading-editing/)

> We transformed and directed our efforts towards establishing a platform that allows rendering *pristine* translation services (https://www.tridindia.com/blog/translation-services-for-ngo-and-survey-companies/)

> You see, proofreading is the bedrock of error free English, to spot and correct any mistakes before the text is released in to the public domain. Exactly the same principles apply to translations. But there's more to it for leading edge agencies specialising in *pristine* translation (https://accutranslate.co.uk/heres-the-real-reason-why-your-translations-arent-error-free/)

The phrase seems to be so ingrained in T&I promotional discourse that it recurs even in reviews of literary translations in the publishing trade press—despite the argument for good translations to be far from invisible or pristine being most sustained within literary translation studies (Venuti 1995, 1998):

> Hacker's prose, aided by Atkins's *pristine* translation, soars, particularly in her treatment of city and bourgeois life [...]. (*Publishers Weekly* review of K. Hacker's *The Have Nots*, https://www.europaeditions.com/book/9781933372419/the-have-nots)

> The Haydars' *pristine* translation captures Rashid's conflictedness and leaves *intact* al-Daif's wordplay (*Publishers Weekly* review of R. al-Daif's *Learning English*, https://www.interlinkbooks.com/product/learning-english/)

> Yoshimoto's marvelously light touch is perfectly captured by Emmerich's *pristine* translation. (*Publishers Weekly* review of B. Yoshimoto's *The Lake*, https://www.amazon.it/Lake-Banana-Yoshimoto/dp/1612190898)

Curiously, the phrase 'pristine interpreting' does not appear to enjoy the same popularity, and a Google search for this exact wording does not retrieve any results at the time of writing (March 2024). However, as argued in the previous section, the notion of pristine, unspoilt T&I is closely collected to the (empty and clean) vessel and conduit imagery that instead recur abundantly in the promotional discourse of T&I service providers:

> A professional translator is a *vessel* of your message. Although he or she might use different words to communicate, there shouldn't be any personal opinion, emotion or judgement. (https://lighthouseonline.com/blog-en/5-traits-to-look-for-in-a-professional-translator/)

> An interpreter is a *conduit* of information. They will interpret everything that is said in both languages. (https://www.georgefox.edu/diversity/interpreter-policy.html)

> The interpreter is a *conduit* for the communication that you are providing to [...] the person to whom you are communicating (https://www.hopealaska.org/deaf-supports/working-with-an-interpreter)

In line with the findings of Hale (2014, 321) and Crezee and Jülich (2020, 225), the conduit cliché appears unsurprisingly appealing for professional categories that routinely work with interpreters or, as the inanimate metaphor suggest, *use* interpreters, especially in sensitive domains of community or public service interpreting such as the judicial or healthcare settings:

> The interpreter is a *conduit* for information exchange, and not a direct participant in the proceeding. (Supreme Court of Georgia Commission on Interpreters, "Working with Limited English Proficient persons and foreign-language interpreters in the courtroom: A bench card for judges" https://www.ncsc.org/__data/assets/pdf_file/0017/19250/georgia-lep-benchard.pdf)

It is perhaps less understandable that the same imagery seeps into the discourse of interpreters that is purportedly aimed at other interpreters, suggesting that the authors do not only *sell* the inanimate, empty, clean-sided conduit metaphor to perspective clients, but also *identify* with it, and encourage other colleagues or trainees to do the same, as happens in the following entries from the same blog:

> Our role as interpreters is to act as *conduits* and help make communication possible between people who speak different languages (https://shenyunwu.wordpress.com/tag/medical-interpreting/)

> Sometimes you think you know better. You hear and understand what's going on, but when messages are transmitted between the source and target languages, the receiver doesn't always understand the message. […] Whether the misunderstanding came from your rendition of the message, the speaker's ambiguity, or the receiver's own misunderstanding, an interpreter shall not respond on behalf of a speaker nor get involved in side conversations. We must stay within our role as *conduits*, and only interpret. As an interpreter, you know that your role is simply to interpret. This means rendering what is said and not what isn't said. Any omission, addition, or distortion of the original intention of the message should be avoided at all cost. […] In sum, as an interpreter, *you do not have your own voice*, and may not speak on behalf of any speaker. Your role is to act as a *conduit* and pass on whatever is said (https://shenyunwu.wordpress.com/tag/interpreter-as-conduit/, entry titled "Hold Your Tongue (the Role of an Interpreter)")

This view contrasts with what other professional interpreters do voice over the Internet or social networks, echoing the academic debate over the impossibility, and undesirability, of absolute neutrality:

> Interpreting will never be respected as a profession while its practitioners cling to the idea that they are invisible *conduits*. (https://twitter.com/integlangsbiz/status/714363922971803649)

However, the very fact that there is an urge to detach oneself and the profession from the conduit metaphor (a parallel of the vessel metaphor for written translation), which is actually still championed as the only paradigm of interpreting by other practising professionals such as the one who authored the blog above, bears witness to the persistence of the conduit metaphor and its implications analysed here—emptiness, pristineness, objectification and invisibility.

Identification with the conduit or vessel metaphors and their implied qualities, however, is not just a matter of one or the other individual practitioner's opinion. It is also still rooted in the Codes of Ethics of some of the leading international and national T&I professional associations, as we will see in the following section.

The translator as vessel and the interpreter as conduit in professional associations' Codes of Ethics

A T&I professional association's Code of Ethics (CoE) may be argued to be halfway between in-profession discourse and public promotional discourse

aimed at perspective clients. On the one hand, upon joining the association, its members accept to follow the CoE in their professional conduct, therefore the CoE should describe a type of conduct that is attainable in real-life practice and that its members can ethically subscribe to. On the other hand, the CoE is made public on the association's website, for all members' perspective clients to peruse. It should therefore describe a type of conduct that is desirable from the clients' perspective, otherwise being a member of the association might damage one's professional career rather than advancing it.

In this context, professional associations may choose to describe a type of good conduct that acknowledges the impossibility of neutrality and invisibility in the real, embodied practice of T&I, in line with the academic reflections mentioned in the first section of this paper. Or alternatively, they may put on a more client-friendly face and choose to replicate the metaphors of the vessel and conduit, with their implications of invisibility, pristineness, emptiness. A third alternative might be to try and strike a balance between the two, perhaps by explaining why absolute neutrality and invisibility cannot be attained and are not even desirable for clients, because they are incompatible with human products such as language, and with human processes such as communication and T&I. Let us have a look at a few of real-life CoEs to see how they frame good T&I.

Article 10 of the CoE of the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) states:

> Fidelity of Interpretation—Interpreters shall strive to translate the message to be interpreted faithfully and precisely. They shall endeavour to render the message without embellishment, omission, or alteration.
> (https://aiic.org/document/10277/CODE_2022_E&F_final.pdf)

This CoE article does not contain any explicit mention of the conduit metaphor, or even its implied qualities of emptiness, pristineness, invisibility. It does, however, gloss 'fidelity' and 'precision' to the original (discursively framed as good) as a *lack* of something else: "*without* embellishment, omission, or alteration". In this wording, embellishment, omission, or alteration are clearly presented as bad or wrong, or out of place in a good (i.e, faithful and precise) rendition[4]. Therefore, good interpreting should be devoid of such 'contaminants' of the original message—which reminds of the qualities of emptiness and cleanliness associated with the conduit metaphor. Another implication of this article is that good interpreters will *refrain from* using embellishment, omission, or alteration;

[4] It seems appropriate here to remind that the quality of being "out of place" is the root constituent of the categories of "dirt" and contamination (Douglas 1966, 36; Campkin 2007, 69; Connor 2011; Baccolini and Torresi 2019, 26).

in other words, they will "hold their tongues", as per the title of the last blog entry in the previous section.

In this CoE, there is a mediation between the absolute ideal of "translat[ing] faithfully and precisely" and human imperfection, in the form of the verb "strive to". The same applies to the verb "endeavour" in the second sentence, which seems to acknowledge that there will be occasions in which embellishment, omission, or alteration will happen anyway, as hard as the interpreter tries.

Nevertheless, this concession to human fallibility does not frame alterations to the original in a less negative way. Embellishment, omission, or alteration continue to be presented as inherently wrong regardless of the context, which appears to runs counter the entire theory of functional translation (Nord 2017; Martín de León 2020). Functional approaches to T&I advocate *for* alterations when they are necessary to preserve the effectiveness, purpose and communicative intention of the original text and to adjust them to the receiving audience and context.

The wording adopted in AIIC's CoE also denies the fact that conference interpreting is a highly constrained type of translation (Mayoral, Kelly and Gallardo 1988), which means that alterations are not so much a necessary *evil* but actually *desirable* in order to manage as effectively as possible the multiple constraints posed by the interpreting task—time constraints, the constraints imposed by the different structure of the source and target oral languages, and also subjective constraints such as the interpreter's linguistic and cognitive resources being limited, as Gile's effort models teach us (Gile 1985, 2015).

Although sketching out absolute ideals conflicting with both academic thought and real-life professional practice, AIIC's acknowledgement that interpreters should "strive" (not "adhere") to such ideals keeps the CoE safe from any accusation of claiming the unattainable. Nonetheless, the framing employed in the text above seems to point to a client's, rather than a professional's, perspective. As documented by Zwischenberger (2009, 246-48) in her survey of AIIC members, individual professionals hold more diverse images of their professional role, although not all of them are more interpreter-centred than their association's[5].

The second CoE that I will discuss here is that of the the American Translators' Association, whose Article 6 states:

[5] Only 6.5% of respondents to Zwischenberger's survey, run in late 2008 among AIIC members worldwide, volunteered the conduit or other instrumental metaphors. However, another 9.6% mentioned they identified professionally as "conveyors of the message" (including faithfulness to the original text), 12.6% mentioned "serving either the speaker or the listener, and 3.8% felt "invisible".

> We the members of the American Translators Association accept as our ethical and professional duty [...] to convey meaning between people, organizations, and cultures accurately, appropriately, and without bias, depending on the context of the source, purpose, readership or audience, and medium. (https://www.atanet.org/about-us/code-of-ethics/)

The first part of the article refers to accuracy and appropriateness, two notions that seem to carry less absolutistic undertones, and to be more consumer-oriented (rather than source text-oriented) than the ones mentioned by AIIC, i.e. precision and faithfulness. The following "*without* bias" once again defines a translator's good conduct *a negativo*, on the grounds of a lack or absence (a concept cognate to emptiness and cleanliness, which are also specific kinds of absence) rather than an affirmation. However, this lack is immediately hedged as a non-absolute by a concession to functionalist views, as its very possibility "depend[s] on the context of the source, purpose, readership or audience, and medium". This concession also appears to cushion the friction between the mention of translating without bias and the long tradition of translation studies influenced by postcolonial, cultural, critical discursive and gender studies, which have all pointed to the inevitability of bias in T&I and language use in general.

It is perhaps in the light of all such academic reflections, as well as of real-life T&I work, that other associations have acknowledged more explicitly the impossibility and injustice of acting as (empty, clean, inhuman) vessels or conduits of meanings.

For instance, under article 5 of the CoE and Code of Conduct of Australia's AUSIT (2012 version, rewritten in association with Monash University), while vowing to translate accurately, *without* omissions or distortions, interpreters and translators are still entitled to mistakes and misunderstandings, as implied by points 5.3 and 5.4:

> 5.3 Interpreters and translators acknowledge and promptly rectify any interpreting or translation mistakes.
> 5.4 Where circumstances permit, interpreters and translators ask for repetition, rephrasing or explanation if anything is unclear. (https://ausit.org/code-of-ethics/)

Perhaps more tellingly, article 5.2 of the CoE of the Italian Translators' and Interpreters' association AITI reads:

> Translators and interpreters must not knowingly alter the content of an original text for ideological or personal reasons. Any personal opinions must be expressed with moderation and must be clearly separated from the original message. (https://aiti.org/en/code-professional-ethics-and-conduct)

In AITI's wording, the translator or interpreter *is* entitled to expressing personal opinions, which are not called 'bias', and are not presented as something to do *without*. Rather, the article affirmatively states the ways in which such opinions must be expressed. The translator's or interpreter's voice is no longer something wrong, or dirty, or inevitable but evil—provided that it stays put within its boundaries, hygienically and "clearly separated" from the original message. Also, the specification of "knowingly" in the first sentence is an admission that alterations *may* happen unknowingly (but in that case, if they are not known to the translator or interpreter, the implication is that they do not even fall within the scope of this code of ethics).

Making room for mistakes and misunderstandings (as in AUSLIT's CoE) or for translators' and interpreters' personal opinions, even tolerating the possibility of their unknowingly altering the original text (as in AITI's code), may not necessarily disrupt the conduit and vessel metaphors, but does run counter to their implied qualities. The conduit is no longer pristine, the vessel no longer empty; it becomes possible, or even inevitable, for something else to be transmitted alongside (or instead of) the original message, and contaminate it.

Towards an acceptance of the not-so-pristine side of translation and interpreting: a metaphorical political act

After so much theoretical reflection on the impossibility and injustice of translators having to stay invisible and interpreters having to "hold their tongues", why do the images of the conduit and the vessel, and the qualities of pristineness, emptiness and invisibility or neutrality that come with such metaphors still recur today in professional promotional discourse and in some of the leading professional associations' CoEs, as we have seen above?

One possible explanation is that metaphors are more powerful discursive devices than well-spun and well-informed arguments. Their tendency to reduce complex concepts to few, clear-cut elements allows for easier conceptualization and memorization (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Kövecses 2002). For this reason, if we want to effectively move away from the utopia of absolute faithfulness to the original that the conduit and vessel metaphors imply, then perhaps we should seek for and actively circulate alternative metaphors that—equally effectively—acknowledge that T&I preserve the original message *as much as possible*, *depending on the context*. It would also be wholesome for translators' and interpreters' identity if that *as much as possible* could be framed not necessarily as a loss, and if that *depending on the context* could be presented not necessarily as sloppy approximation, but as added value that T&I bring to the original, contributing to its meaning in a generative way, something to be acknowledged and cherished rather than despised and swept under the carpet.

If we reflect on the metaphors of the vessel and of the conduit, we realize that they both refer to artefacts, artificial things which exist only to fulfil a purpose. The smoother, the more mechanical, the less imperfect (the less human? the less *organic*, even?), the better. In the era of machine translation and AI, it is easy to see the trap in this kind of image: if being mechanical and acting as *automata* is the golden standard, then human translators and interpreters cannot compete. Still, the idea of carrying across or transmitting meanings originated by somebody else, also foregrounded in such metaphors, seems to be very catchy and effective. So, can we preserve the successful idea of transmission, of carrying something across the waters, and get rid of the idea of artificially clean perfection that is also implied by the conduit and vessel metaphors?

I believe we can. In an essay published in 2016, Rosa Maria Bollettieri Bosinelli and myself proposed one such metaphor. Translation (meant broadly as T&I), we argued, can be conceptualized as a bottle carrying the text across the sea of linguistic and cultural differences, and also across time. A vessel in all respects, except that when we visualize a message in a bottle, we tend to acknowledge that the seas it traversed did leave a trace on it and its content:

> [the] bottle [...] contains more than one message. The degree of yellowing of the paper, the weathering and opacity of the bottle, the shells and concretions that accumulate on the bottle, the shape, colour and material of the cork, the very air trapped inside the bottle, also become carriers of meaning. (Bollettieri Bosinelli and Torresi 2016, n.p.)

The message in a bottle metaphor couples the inorganic (the originally clear glass of the vessel) with the organic (the bacteria that cause the paper to yellow, the paper itself, the shells and concretions that accumulate on the bottle). However, in hindsight, one further step appears necessary to move both linguistically closer to, and at the same time semantically further from, the vessel and conduit metaphors and their implied qualities of emptiness, cleanliness and invisibility or neutrality.

So I propose to introduce the image of the *blood* vessel in T&I—for instance in our teaching materials and in-profession discourses. A blood vessel is both a vessel, and a conduit. But it is organic; it carries organic fluid (the message being translated or interpreted, which is a product of human activity and takes the form of human-made language). A blood vessel may become infected or cluttered, and even when it does work properly, it can hardly be referred to as clean or pristine. It is widely accepted that blood vessels, and the blood they contain, interact constantly with the surrounding tissues. The flow of blood through blood vessels is not smooth and constant, but it goes in waves, in time with the heartbeat. Also, a blood vessel does not function on its own, but is a stretch of the circulatory system and ultimately, part of the body.

The function of a blood vessel is to provide oxygen and nutrients to sustain the body, or to take waste out of it. In either case, its work is messy and complicated, but it makes life happen. As for alterations, it is through blood vessels that the gas exchange in the lungs is possible. Oxygen and nutrients are not just carried around, they are exchanged for waste carbon dioxide and toxins at some point, which are all part of life-sustaining processes.

The image of T&I as a blood vessel is an intentional reappropriation of the vessel and conduit metaphors. It is aimed at exploiting the popularity that these metaphors still enjoy today, after decades of critical deconstruction, in promotional and professional language. It is also a way of acknowledging that when meaning is transferred from one language to another, from one culture to another, the transfer inevitably carries some kind of transformation or contamination, because translations is, as all human activities, an embodied process that depends on (inter)subjectivity (Ivancic and Zepter 2022). Arguably, even machine T&I or the AI tools used for text generation or translation cannot escape this rule, as they operate using natural (i.e., human-made) languages, and their recipients are humans whose cognitive experiences and processes are also embodied and (inter)subjective. Machine T&I, then, is also a blood vessel—the conduit may be artificial, but the content is not, neither is the organic model the conduit is shaped after.

Realising the abstract and oversimplifying nature of non-human, non-organic metaphors of T&I such as the mirror, the conduit or the vessel is important for professional practice. It helps interpreters, translators, and those who train them professionally to be at peace with the fact that T&I or communication at large can never be a fully transparent and invisible screen, but inevitably carries some alteration of the original message—including some embarrassingly organic traces from all the very real, very human, participants of the embodied practice of meaning-making and meaning-sharing. It seems that the "third space" where T&I become possible (Bhabha 1990, 1994; House 2010) is never pristine to the point of sterility, and that signification does not go well with sanification.

It is also my contention that with this realization must come action, or a metaphorical political act—that of affirming the complexities and human nature of T&I by using metaphors that foreground the organic over the inorganic, the generative over the pristine, such as the message in a bottle or the blood vessel. Other similar metaphors, equally or more effective than these, may be waiting for future research to unveil or revamp them and bring them into the T&I discourse, and they will be very much welcome. Without such affirmative metaphorical action, we risk being unable to resist the popular and even professional discourses that continue to frame good T&I as an empty vessel, an uncluttered and pristine conduit, or an invisible glass screen or mirror.

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