

REVIEWS

Agnieszka Gicala 2021:

Translating a Worldview: Linguistic Worldview in Literary Translation. Trans. by Agnieszka Gicala.

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In line with this journal's broad and varied focus, it seems particularly appropriate to review Agnieszka Gicala's *Translating a Worldview* for *LaMiCuS*. This monograph combines considerations of language, culture, poetics, and conceptualization and in doing so, it belongs to what has been called cultural cognitive linguistics (Underhill 2022: 46) or cognitive cultural linguistics (Głaz, in press). Although the author focuses on the applicability of the linguistic worldview conception to analyses of literary translation, both the specific points she makes and the general observations that come out of the book contribute more broadly to our understanding of how humans express themselves in the languages and cultures that they live in.

Agnieszka Gicala's monograph is her own translation of the Polish original (Gicala 2018), which is one of the few publications that systematically explore translation in the context of the linguistic worldview conception. It proposes employing that conception in order to describe and understand the processes, and perhaps to also evaluate the decisions made in translating poetry. The book is grounded in the Polish context in two ways: theoretical and analytic. On the theoretical side, it mainly employs the linguistic worldview model (or models) proposed in Polish scholarship, while in its

analyses it looks into the poetry of the Polish Nobel Prize winner Wisława Szymborska. Given that the debate on issues of translation in the context of linguistic worldview is a field thus far largely unexplored,¹ the book's imperfections (see below) are understandable: such is the fate of ambitious projects that blaze the trail for future studies. Gicala's monograph, at the same time, continues what might be considered a particularly Polish-style reflection on translation in the cognitive perspective. A major role in the development of that reflection has been played by Elżbieta Tabakowska (a few of whose publications are referenced), Wojciech Kubiński (alas, not referenced, see e.g. Kubiński 2002), or Barbara Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (again, not referenced, see Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2010). Like Tabakowska, Gicala seeks coherence in dealing with language, translation, and literature – which is, in my opinion, her major contribution to the field. She proposes directions for research, outlines perspectives for specific solutions, recognizes problems that await the researcher.

The book's content is divided into an introduction, five chapters and some final remarks. Chapter 1 introduces the linguistic worldview conception, which then in Chapter 2 is discussed in the context of literature and literary translation. This is where the author introduces her model of translation and linguistic worldview, based on Edward T. Hall's (1959, 1976) iceberg model, the approach to translation proposed by Pieciul-Karmińska (2007), and the linguistic worldview model elaborated by Bartmiński (2012 /2009/). The remaining three chapters focus on the poetry of Wisława Szymborska: Chapter 3 introduces the reader to her "poetic world", while Chapters 4 and 5 analyze English translations of Szymborska's poems *Rozmowa z kamieniem* [conversation with a stone/rock] and *Chmury* [clouds], respectively. Gicala uses the translations (jointly) produced by Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh, Joanana Trzeciak, and her own students. The latter is an especially valuable aspect of the analysis, in that here research and pedagogy achieve greater coherence and clearly manifest themselves as being mutually inspiring and influential. In this way, the readers can also confront their own ideas with those of others, something that is particularly valuable in both translation studies and translational practice. Few other fields are so heavily under the pressure of subjective judgement but that judgement need not entail arbitrariness, as the analyses in the book clearly show. The analyses are exceptionally solid, detailed, and meticulously referenced with publications on Szymborska's poetry and its English translations.

Gicala's monograph is a valuable publication, and the theoretical model proposed (even if in need of some elaboration) is carefully thought out and

¹ Which does not mean non-existent, as the author notes in her Chapter 1 (p. 15), where she lists a number of relevant publications. To those, one may add e.g. Underhill and Gianninoto (2019).

supported. The idea to make use of Hall's iceberg model, Pieciul-Karmińska's approach to translation, and Bartmiński's linguistic worldview conception is, in my view, intriguing, worthy of attention, and promising in its theoretical implications. With regard to the analysis, the author not only displays extensive knowledge of Szymborska's poetry but also clearly has a good "feel" for it.

It is a pity, therefore, that the analysis is only based on two poems by Szymborska, especially as Gicala had produced more of those in her earlier publications (e.g. Gicala 2013, 2014). It would have bolstered the case made by the book if the author had included those observations, and would have likewise rendered her exploration of the linguistic worldview/translation interface better documented and more convincing. The author is aware that the limited scope of analysis does not afford far-reaching conclusions (p. 161), but regardless of this, the result is that the book leaves the reader with some sense of insufficiency. Admittedly, to remedy this entirely, the volume would have had to have been somewhat differently designed in its structure and content so as to incorporate not only more analyses but also to integrate more observations into coherent prose. I am sure, however, that the author is perfectly capable of doing so. Gicala has shown that she can competently apply her methodology and be convincing in her argumentation; therefore, by expanding the analytical scope of her monograph she could have painted a somewhat more attractive picture of Szymborska-and-worldview in translation.

Another drawback of the book is the impression that arises in the analytical part that some of the connections between the theory and analysis could have been stronger. This is important because, in some sense, one does not necessarily need to be made aware of the linguistic worldview conception, the iceberg model, or the place of translation in that model to appreciate the intricacies of rendering Szymborska's poems into English. Yet, doing so without these theoretical constructs in place would render the whole enterprise much more reliant on the reader's own intuition – therefore, a more systematic presentation of the connections between the theory and the analysis would have been welcome. Perhaps the author could have utilized her theoretical diagrams while weaving her analytical thread? Similarly, she could have used tables with examples and fragments of poetry that would clearly juxtapose what she calls "standard" and "non-standard" linguistic worldview. Let me be clear: the quality of content is unquestionably present in the book, what I would perhaps like to have seen is a better way of presenting or "selling" it to the reader. One is therefore not convinced, for example, by the statement that the relative proportions of different elements of analysis support "the accuracy of the metaphor of translation as a double iceberg" (p. 120). Rather, they only show that the author can produce this kind of analysis

but the choice of the model still needs to be made a little more convincing to the reader.

Before I conclude, let me also raise the following five points, not so much as a critique but an invitation to engage in discussion, in publications or at conferences.

First, in a book so focused on language and culture, one would expect some note to be taken of the notions of *linguaculture* (Friedrich 1989) or *linguaculture* (Agar 1994), possibly with future developments.

Second, while referring to Langacker's notion of *imagery*, the author seems to bypass a certain terminological detail (cf. p. 34), namely the fact that at a certain point Langacker clearly switched to the term *construal* so as to avoid unwarranted associations with imagination. This decision clearly results in reducing the visual dimension of the metaphors he uses in his model.

Third, while discussing the linguistic worldview conception according to Underhill (p. 42), the author seems to mistake what Underhill (following Wilhelm von Humboldt) classifies as *Weltansicht* (i.e., linguistically grounded perception and conceptualization of reality) for *Weltanschauung*, which is a worldview in the sense of ideology or a system of beliefs. This is surprising especially as Gicala references Underhill's (2009) book, devoted to precisely this kind of distinction.

Fourth, because Gicala's monograph is clearly inspired by the cognitive approach to language, one cannot help being surprised by her comment in footnote 80 on p. 103 that one can safely omit, in analysis, the homonymy (and the different etymologies) of the English *rock* 'stone' and *rock* 'to sway'. According to Langacker, homonymy is the weakest form of polysemy, which in semantic analysis can hardly be omitted. While acknowledging the different etymological paths of these lexemes, a cognitive approach to language should nevertheless account for their formal identity. A feeling for form is, after all, indispensable in (cognitive) poetics – and according to Geeraerts (1988: 227), language “is not just content: it is also form”.

Fifth, one could be somewhat critical of the comment on p. 112 concerning the alleged “neutrality” of the English *will* in future use. Crucially, *will* is a modal verb (and therefore by definition non-neutral), deriving from the Old English *willan* ‘want’. One can also still come across, albeit infrequently, uses of *will* as a lexical verb but with a clear shade of volitionality (i.e., modality), such as *to will sb to do sth.*² The relationship between these uses and the expression of future is complex, nuanced, and far from straightforward – and this is precisely what one would expect to be recognized in a monograph so thorough in its treatment of linguistic details.

2 For instance, this is a construction that Andre Agassi used in his farewell speech after playing the last match in his career, at 2006 US Open: “You have willed me to succeed” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xqLfanoRob8>; accessed 8 Sept., 2022).

Having said that, I do believe Agnieszka Gicala has produced a highly original piece of work, of interest to linguists, translators, translations scholars, or simply lovers of poetry. She must be appreciated as a perceptive and linguistically sensitive researcher, with an ability to both weave a fine thread of semantic associations and synthesize those into a coherent model of translation and worldview.

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