

The Challenges & Translatability of Metaphors Between Languages

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ABSTRACT

Metaphors and their impact within languages have been a topic of wide discussion between scholars. This research paper focuses on their translatability as well as the challenges that they pose to translators. Metaphors can become a problem during translation, since they are inherently tied to the culture of its source language, making them potentially meaningless in another. As a general rule of thumb, when translating metaphors, the cultures of both the source and target languages should be taken into consideration. This is so that meaning behind the metaphor can be accurately transferred.

KEYWORDS: Metaphors, Translation, Culture, Literal, Substitution, Paraphrasing

1. Introduction

In its essence all language can be thought of as metaphoric. The source of each word was initially used as a symbol to illustrate an idea of a tangible or intangible thing (Goatly, 2011). When a word is used to refer to some other word, that is a metaphor being used. All that is read, written, or heard, is essentially a metaphor one way or another (Philip, 2016).

A metaphor can be thought of as a figure of speech which is used to explain something or an action in such a way that while is not literal but does help to explain the intended idea by making a comparison (Prandi, 2017).

This is because metaphors are a type of figurative speech, which talks about words or sayings that describe something that means something different compared to their literal definition (Prandi, 2017).

If metaphors were to be treated literally, their meaning would most likely be silly or incompatible with the topic of discussion (Bokus & Kałowski, 2017).

During translation from one language to another language - Source Language → Target Language - metaphors have proven to be an immense challenge (Jalali, 2016). The reason for this is that metaphors that would be meaningful in the source language (SL)

can and often do become meaningless in the target language (TL) (Niemeier, 2017).

One of the most debated topics of translation has always been whether text should be translated literally or whether the translator should solely focus on translating the meaning of the text rather than the words themselves (Bokus & Kałowski, 2017). Metaphors can help shed some light on this topic of debate given their inherent defiance to be translated literally.

When it comes to metaphors themselves, scholars use various parameters and theoretical frameworks in order to identify, describe and to discern whether any given metaphor is translatable to the target language as well as the best method to transfer the meaning of the metaphor (Ciocoi, 2019).

These parameters, whether combined with other parameter from translatology or implemented in dedicated publications of scholars, can establish the foundation for the research of the translation of metaphors (Al-Zou'bi, 2020).

However, if we conclude that there is no such need for a theoretical framework by which metaphors in translation can be worked with, we must also conclude that it should be the task of the theory of

translation to be able to make generalizations about this phenomenon (Ciocioi, 2019).

If we assume that it is inadequacy to generalize the translatability of metaphor, we must also assume that the theory of translation as a whole is an illogical task, because it then must be unqualified for taking into account the translatability of one of the most frequent terms in all languages, metaphors (Niemeier, 2017).

One aspect of metaphors which scholars are trying to understand is that if the translation of these metaphors do not do justice by the complexity and meaning of the metaphors from one language to another, why do certain metaphors suit one language really well while being incompatible in another. In short, why are languages anisomorphic metaphorically when the source of all words are metaphors of the world around them. There are many hidden mechanisms controlling the translation of metaphors and their level of translatability (Goatly, 2011).

1.1 Aim

The aim of this paper is to specify what is the best method for the translation of metaphors depending on their type and characteristics.

Metaphors hold a significant value in the work of authors. It is a way for them to demonstrate a point without outright writing it. It is one of the tools used to get the reader to think deeply about the topic, to explore different meanings in it and to see the topic from another angle.

1.2 Problem statement

All works of translation are faced with an inherent difficult problem which is whether it is best to translate a text literarily or to translate the sense or the intention of the text. Some types texts such as legal documents require that the translation be literal while others such as literature are more lenient.

It is nearly impossible to make the decision that all metaphors should be either translated literarily or figuratively because factors that exist within both the

target language and the source language have a significant impact on determining the best method for each metaphor.

1.3 Method and theoretical background

For this research paper I used the work of various scholars in order to explore the ways in which metaphors can, should and must be translated depending on factors that exist in both the source language and the target language. However, one of key source that will be utilized in this research paper is the works of the author Newman who wrote extensively about metaphors and their role in languages. Most of the theories regarding the role and impact of metaphors come from the work of Newman.

1.4 Research questions

- Is it possible for metaphors to be translated to the target language while retaining their intended impact?
- What challenges do metaphors pose to translators during translation?
- Is it possible to establish a standard theoretical framework for translating metaphors?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Metaphors in translation

In regards to the translation of all books, no matter the category, clearly there are certain things that the translator needs to take into consideration. For instance, the translated text should essentially cover all the information covered in the source text, and it must retain the same literary characteristics of the source. Furthermore, if the complexity of the language used in the source is of a certain high class, then the target language must translate it in a way that retains the complexity of the language, and if the source language implements a lot of metaphors, then this aspect should also be transferred during the process of translation (Tobing & et al, 2016).

Up until the 1980s, translation wasn't a subject of scrutiny. However, in the last decades, it has been

evolved through the establishment of linguistic discipline. For example, in order for a translator to be able to translate, he must follow given rules with which the work is structured in terms of sentences, paragraphs, as well as terms and names that are linked to the source culture (Gentzler, 2016).

Some scholars claim that when translating a text, the translator has to use his own imagination in how to pick the correct word in the target language. In his concept, all sentences have certain structural autonomies that cannot, and should not be translated literally because then these words would lose their meaning (Munday, 2016).

One practical way to realize just how much words lose their meaning during literal translation, is to literally translate words from the source language into the target language and then retranslate those words back into their original language (Buzelin & Baraldi, 2016). By doing this, one will see firsthand just how much words lose their meaning. Therefore, all this illustrates that translators need to stay faithful to the source text, while taking into consideration the target language.

Given that this study focuses on the application of metaphors and their translatability from the source language to the target language, it is of importance to illustrate that there are not many research papers available in this field, particularly in Kurdish. When translating books into Kurdish, the translator must have an excellent knowledge of both the source language and the target language.

It is clear, that the translator has to make the translated book understandable for the target audience through making some minor variations in the structure of the translated text. Those variations can be the key to dealing with certain metaphors that are expressed, in some instance changing them entirely and replacing them. However, doing this would break some of the roles governing the proper translation of books, given that translation is

generally obligated to stay close to the source language (Munday, 2016).

2.2 The purpose of Metaphors

One of the most widely implemented devices of literature are metaphors. Metaphors are used to reference an interpretation or projection attributed to a subject or person by using other words. During the use of a metaphor, the subject is changed and replaced by another. The reason for this is to compare their similarities and shared traits between them (Gentzler, 2016).

The focus of the sentence is the first subject which is compared with the second subject in order to attribute a characteristic to the first subject. The reason metaphors are used is for better understanding the first subject through the second subject (Ciocoi, 2019).

Example:

"Henry was a lion on the battlefield"

In this phrase, it is suggested that Henry was a valiant and brave fighter that personified some or all of the characteristics and traits that are conveyed by the noble and violent animal. This phrase suggests right away that Henry was a brave and valiant fighter, just like the king of the jungle (Chita & Stavrou, 2020).

Just like other types of comparisons, metaphors help to supplement the contents of writings. By adding in details that stimulate the senses in the vein of metaphors, so that words become more intriguing and real, helping to stimulate the mind of the readers to imagine or even feel the presence of a character or scene (Prandi, 2017). A metaphor, if used properly can exercises the imagination of the reader by helping them see familiar ideas in a new light, or shed light on a complicated topic (Roche & Suñer, 2016).

One of the most useful tools in an artist's toolbox is the use of metaphors. This is because metaphors are useful regardless of the genre that is being written; poetry, non-fiction, blog or even fiction (Tobing & et al, 2016).

Because of how common metaphors are, a writer will find that there are various uses for them. This is why metaphors are so useful, the same metaphor can have different meanings depending on the context. When someone tells that they have a broken heart they most likely don't mean it literally (Roche & Suñer, 2016).

2.3 Types of metaphors

As indicated by Newmark (1988) there are six types of classifications, which will be explored below with suitable sub-types and examples.

2.3.1 Dead Metaphors

These metaphors are those that often relate to terms that are universally connected to all people regardless of culture. They relate to time, space, human activities and general features of nature (Aloairdhi & Kahlaoui, 2020).

Due to their extensive use and their inherent nature of being generally relatable to everyone, they have evolved into a literal part of language because the readers are not able to distinguish them as metaphors, so the images they invoke are lost (Grosu, 2020). Other phrases such as idioms when they start to be accepted as technical terms, transform into dead metaphors.

There are three types of dead; the first type is when image and feelings are maintained in a second language. The second type is when thousands of words denote objects, such as metonyms. And the third and final type is when non-technical words have physical and figurative meaning at the same time, for example 'foot of a hill' (Aloairdhi & Kahlaoui, 2020).

An example of a Dead metaphor:

"Time is running out"

This refers to an hourglass, where sand would run down and out of the top half of an hourglass. In modern times, hourglasses are not used by many people.

The metaphor however, is still used by the majority of people when signaling the urgency of time.

2.3.2 Stock Metaphors

As indicated by Newmark (1988) this type of metaphor is a traditional metaphor, which means that in a casual context, it is an effective and to the point method of relating to physical and emotional states both pragmatically and referentially. It is possible that they are culturally distanced with the topic of conversation or overlap with it. They could be used internationally or at the very least in widely throughout, it is possible that they may have aspects which can be considered subjective.

It is important to note that there is most likely no such thing as a universal metaphor, but it is the hopes of scholars that societies would someday reach a stage of wellbeing and physical health that there would be some basic metaphors which everyone would relate to (Craig, 2018).

An example of a Stock metaphor:

"Words cut deeper than a knife"

Words don't actually cut into flesh, so for the writer to go so far as to say that someone's words have cut even deeper than a knife implies that hurtful words were exchanged.

This is a very basic metaphor that almost everyone in the world can understand. The understanding of this metaphor is not linked to a single culture but to many.

2.3.3 Cliché

These metaphors are placed between stock and dead metaphors. This is because they are implemented to replace clear thoughts, often forcefully, but short of conforming to the specifics of the matter (Grimwood, 2020). These metaphors often comprise of two types of comparisons: literal nouns and figurative adjectives such as, 'filthy lucre' or figurative nouns and figurative verbs such as, 'explore all avenues' (Craig, 2018).

An example of a Cliché metaphor:

"The calm before the storm"

This phrase is often used when the writer is trying to

convey that things are about to happen at an accelerated rate compared to the calmness that is currently present.

Most of the time this metaphor is used, there is no actual storm that is coming, however the storm does represent danger that is about to arrive to disturb the calm.

This cliché metaphor has been used so much that it is no longer unique. We can simply categorize it as a metaphor that is not original.

2.3.4 Adapted Metaphors

These metaphors are essentially stock metaphors that have been adapted by the translator or speaker in order to fit a new context (Pedersen, 2017).

An example of an Adapted metaphor:

"ساخ دبن برینا خهنجرا بعلی ساخ نابن برینا خهبراً"

"Words cut deeper than a knife"

This metaphor is a stock metaphor that is widely used in the world. Each culture adapts the metaphor so that it can be implemented in its culture.

One of the main things that differentiate this Kurdish metaphor from its English counterpart is the use of the term "dagger" in Kurdish instead of knife.

Perhaps the reason the term "dagger" is used in the Kurdish version is because this metaphor in Kurdish implies that a betrayal occurred alongside the hurtful words. While in the English version no betrayal accompanied the hurtful words.

2.3.5 Recent Metaphors

Newmark (1988) shows that these metaphors are a metaphorical buzzword, often coined anonymously, and then spread rapidly in the source language. Scholars often categorize them as slangs.

An example of a Recent metaphor:

"There is no need to boil the ocean to reach the end"

This is an example of a recent metaphor that is used when the writer wants to indicate that a task can be accomplished without resorting to extreme measures. Boiling the ocean in this instance refers to using extreme tactics, and reaching the end refers to

accomplishing a task.

2.3.6 Original Metaphors

They are metaphors which are established or coined by the source language writer. They hold the principle idea of the writer's message, his or her characteristics as well as his or her ideas on life. As a result, these metaphors are complex as well as having double meanings. It is also possible that they hold personal or new strange element relating to the imagination (Videla, 2017).

An example of an Original Metaphor:

"Envy is a deep pit that if left unchecked will consume you"

This metaphor is an original metaphor describing envy.

In this metaphor "consume" refers to being overtaken by envy, and "deep pit" represents dark emotions that causes people to focus on the success of others instead of trying to improve themselves.

2.4 Difference between Analogies and Metaphors

In an analogy a comparison is made in which an idea or a subject is compared to another idea or subject which is different in various ways from it (Allen & Hospedales, 2019). The aim of an analogy is to explain ideas or things by using something familiar as a point of comparison. Similes and metaphors however, are tools which are used to paint an analogy. Therefore, we can consider an analogy to be an extension of metaphors (Ethayarajh, Duvenaud & Hirst, 2018).

Speakers and writers implement analogies to explain an unfamiliar or a complex idea with a mutual and well known topic. This would make it easier for the audience to understand the new idea, which might have been too complicated or foreign for them to comprehend before (Kumari, 2016).

Adding to this, by implementing this literary tool, writers manage to capture the focus of their audience. Analogies assist in increasing the readers intrigue as analogies gets them to look inward, to their own life

(Kumari, 2016).

An example of an analogy:

"An atom is structured as a solar system. The Sun is the Nucleus, and the planets are the electrons revolving around their Nucleus."

In this example, the structure of atoms related to that of the solar system by implementing the term "like" making it a simile. Then a metaphor is implemented to connect the nucleus to the sun, and then the electrons to the planets, short of implementing terms such as "like" or "as." Because of this, metaphors are utilized to develop an analogy (Ethayarajh, Duvenaud & Hirst, 2018).

2.5 Metaphors in Literature

The vast majority of philosophers, great thinkers, and literary writers view the use of metaphors as a great tool in their literary toolbox that can determine the basic structures of language, thought and perception that would be invoked in the text (Philip, 2016).

Metaphors can be seen everywhere in literature, starting from the relationship between its smallest components (words, senses, figurative text) to its biggest components (plot, characters, narrative) (Philip, 2016).

Metaphors help in making the text more pleasant and exciting to read. The reader is taken on a journey where he is able to visualize the sense of the text, highlighting important themes along the way (Philip, 2016).

Some examples of metaphors in literature include:

First example:

"But soft, what light through yonder window breaks? It is the east, and Juliet is the sun" - William Shakespeare - Romeo & Juliet

This can be considered as one of the most well-known metaphors in the entirety of English literature. Clearly, Juliet, is not the sun in a literal sense. If that was the case Romeo would burn to death. The impact of implementing a metaphor here is comparable to the impact of simile, but more resilient. However,

because Romeo doesn't add comparative words into his phrase, we get the feeling that he is truly mesmerized by the beauty of Juliet. She is, in his eyes, as radiant as the sun itself (Lehman, 2020).

Second example:

"Our words are but crumbs that fall down from the feast of the mind" - Khalil Gibran - Sand & Foam

This metaphor has somewhat an identical implementation to sayings like "tip of an iceberg" or "mere shell." That what is observed and seen in the world is nothing but a small fraction of what is truly there. However, this particular metaphor is a lot more original and creative. It was really beneficial to it the fact that it is a single metaphor that was divided into two parts: words are related to crumbs and mind to feast (Chaudhuri, 2020).

Third example:

"I've eaten a bag of green apples." - Sylvia Plath, Metaphors

It is often the case that the meaning behind a metaphor is vague. This poem is bag full of figurative writing, where the meaning is vague. Overall, this poem is about the pregnancy of Plath. So, this phrase may be about the morning sickness she suffered from due to pregnancy. Green apples are a symbol of sourness, deterioration and even in some tales, poison. However, the fact she ate so many apples signifies an overindulgence, which puts a different twist to the metaphor (Mulry, 2019).

What caused Plath to overindulge and eat so many apples? The answer to this question is open to interpretation (Mulry, 2019).

2.6 Handling of metaphors during translation

The act of translation can be defined as the process or the instance of transferring ideas which are either written or spoken. Translation transfers the intension of what the words in a speech or book mean in a different language (Roche & Suñer, 2016).

The basic meaning of this is that the process of translation reaches beyond the framework of simply

substituting words from one language with different words in another. One topic of great discussion within translatology is that of metaphors, in regards to their translatability and which strategies are best suited for their translation (Roche & Suñer, 2016).

Basically, there are three primary strategies for the translation of metaphor per translatology.

As indicated by Newmark (1988) these strategies are:

- i. The literal translation of a metaphor. Thus creating an identical metaphor, termed direct translation.
- ii. The translation of a metaphor into an altered metaphor by replacing the image present in the source language to that of a metaphor that has the same or a close sense in the target language, therefore taking into consideration the culture of the target language.
- iii. Translating the sense of the metaphor - paraphrasing, which is the process of restating a metaphor during the process of translation.

Chaudhuri (2020) recognized the postmodern developments in translatology by perceiving them as a new or establishing stage in the discipline. This is because translation is now viewed as one of the tools in a range of methods of the manipulation of original texts, where the ideas of intention substitutes that of literal faithfulness to the source text, and where the notion of the source material is faced by a variety of different perspectives (Chaudhuri, 2020).

2.7 Maintaining the proper meaning of metaphors during translation

Generally, translation is a very difficult practice that while initially seems simple in its concept, during closer inspection it proves to be very complex. The reason for this is that translators are always confronted with a universal problem, when to translate literally and when to translate the intention of the source text (Pedersen, 2017).

This problem is made bigger with metaphors, which are often inherently tied to the source culture and

might make no sense when translated to the target language (Pedersen, 2017).

In the case of dead metaphors, while they are not particularly problematic, their literal translation is often not probable (Aloairdhi & Kahlaoui, 2020).

In texts which are vocative, cliché metaphors must be maintained in the target text (Newmark, 1988).

In texts which are informative, they must be condensed to their most basic information or substituted with a sounder stock metaphor.

In the case of stock metaphor translation, the source language image must be accurately replicated in the target language. However, the metonyms that would be used should be transferred so long as the replacements retain the same undertones as the source language. None the less, the source image is more often translated using images which are shown to be of a similar degree. It is also possible for stock metaphors to be condensed to their literal sense in the language (Craig, 2018).

During translation, adapted metaphors must be translated with the use of corresponding adapted metaphors or condensed to their basic sense (Pedersen, 2017).

With the translation of recent metaphors, they must be translated with the use of componential analysis.

In texts which are vocative, the original metaphors must be translated in their literal sense, because they hold the importance of core message of the writer (Newmark, 1988).

However, if the metaphor in question is vague or of small importance to the overall text, it is possible for it to be substituted with a descriptive metaphor or condensed to its basic sense (Videla, 2017).

In texts which are informative, the translator should consider the number and adaptability of the original metaphor in the overall writing and to make a decision on whether the text should be translated literally, reduced to its basic sense or should he modify the metaphor to better suit the target

language (Videla, 2017).

2.8 Procedures of translating Metaphor

As it was indicated by Newmark (1998) there are seven identifiable strategies for the translation of expressions which are seen as metaphors. They are:

- i. An identical image is to be replicated in the target language on the condition that it has a similar frequency of use in the target language.
 - It is most common that one word metaphors would be translated via this strategy, while difficult metaphors and idioms are translated depending on the similarity of the target and source cultures.
 - It is more difficult to reproduce a one-word metaphors that embodies the sense or quality of a particular event instead of trying to replicate an entity for example; ‘elbow one’s way’.
 - Similes can be identified as being a more cautious version of metaphors, that should be translated normally in any textual type.
 - Lastly, there are some topics which possess a universal connotation, such as animal, for example; “pig” is representation of filth and dirtiness all over the world.
- ii. It is possible that the source language image is substituted with a standard target language image, on the condition that the substitute is culturally compatible in the target language.
 - It is best that stereotypical metaphors are converted using their sense as a foundation regardless of whether those metaphors exist in the target language or not.
 - Euphemisms are usually considered a type of metaphors and can be substituted by an equivalent in the target language culture. The only exception to this that can be made is that if it is important that the reader must to be informed similarly in the target language as was the case in the source language.
- iii. It is possible to translate a metaphor into a simile while at the same time keeping its image. By doing this, the shock of a metaphor is modified, especially if the text in the target language is not able to invoke the same passion in its personality. It is possible that this strategy be implemented for any type of words and unique metaphors.
- iv. It is also possible that the translation of metaphors is done as simile, retaining its senses. This strategy is based on making a compromise, combining the translations of both semantic and communicative texts, which would help in addressing both expert and laymen readers.

The primary focus in these metaphors is on the connotations rather than aiming for producing an identical effect. It is worth noting that in some instances, the metaphors in the target language may have an incomplete meaning if a sense component is not.
- v. A metaphor can also be transformed into its sense. This strategy can be implemented in any kind of text, but is particularly favored when the sense or register of the source language is too broad to be properly implemented in the target language otherwise.
 - In order for this strategy to be performed, the metaphor must be analyzed in a componential process because its image is ‘plural-dimensional’ in order to find its sense.
- vi. A particularly radical strategy is to delete the metaphor alongside its sense element if it is unnecessary. However, this strategy should be implemented cautiously because the source text must not be authoritative or an expression of the personality writer.
 - The translator must make his decision after evaluating what content is important and what is less important within the text. One way to justify these deletions is an empirical

justification, where it is shown that the core function of the metaphor is being achieved somewhere else within the text.

- vii. In some occasions the translator might wish to be sure that the image of the metaphor would be properly understood so he might add some gloss as well. Therefore, he would transfer the same metaphor as well as its sense. As an example; the saying "The tongue is a fire" can be rephrased to "Just like a fire brings ruin; words can also ruin". This might suggest an absence of confidence in the power of the metaphor as well as its clarity, but it can be a helpful too if the metaphor is recurrent.

3. Conclusion

Metaphors can be seen everywhere, helping to make the text have the intended impact on the reader. Metaphors are also ingrained in the source language culture, which causes difficulties during the process of translation.

Overall, it is possible to state that metaphors can be translated from one language to another while retaining the intended impact that was present in the source language. However, certain things have to be taken into consideration during the process of the translation in order for it to be successful.

Factors such as differences in culture between the source and target language as well as the grammatical structure of the languages themselves provide challenges that the translator must analyze in order to determine how literally or figuratively the translator can transfer the metaphor between the languages.

Due to the various different types of metaphors there are, it is not possible to establish a standard theoretical framework for translating all metaphors. However, it is possible to establish a standard framework for how each of the different types of metaphors can be translated properly while retaining their intended impact into the target language.

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