

Strategies of Translating Arabic Metaphors into English:
Elias Khoury's Gate of the Sun as an Example*

Abstract

Hanan Khalid Abdulmajid Al-Qobati*

Translating metaphors is fraught with many obstacles. This is especially the case when translating literary works between Arabic and English. This research aims to discuss the strategies a translator adopts in rendering complex metaphors from Arabic into English. Elias Khoury's *Gate of the Sun* has been chosen as a case in point, where 24 examples of translated metaphors are selected. The study illustrates how the selected metaphors are either original or stock. The translator adopted two strategies when translating metaphors. The first aimed at maintaining the metaphorical force by reproducing the original metaphor in the target text, while the second involved replacing the metaphor with its ground. The translator adopts four strategies in translating stock metaphors, thus relating the analysis with the TT culture and context. The study shows that 41.7% of the selected metaphors are translated using the One-To-One Literal Translation method, whereas 41.7% of the metaphors are translated using the Literal Translation of the Meaning method, and 16.6% idiomatic translation. The researcher highlights areas where the translator makes efforts to bring about a representative rendering of the author's intended message. This study seeks to establish certain patterns used in translation that can be considered potential strategies for translators in dealing with difficult and nuanced metaphors in literary translation.

Keywords:

Translating metaphors; Translation Strategies; Elias Khoury's Gate of the Sun; Literal Translation; Meaning method; Idiomatic translation.

-
- An article extracted from an M.A. thesis presented to the Department of Translation, The Yemeni Academy for Graduate Studies, Yemen.

*© This material is published under the license of Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0), which allows the user to copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format. It also allows adapting, transforming or adding to the material for any purpose, even commercially, as long as such modifications are highlighted and the material is credited to its author.

استخدام برامج الترجمة بمساعدة الحاسوب من قبل المترجمين في اليمن: دراسة تحليلية لوجهات نظر المترجمين

حنان خالد عبدالمجيد القباطي*

المستخلص

تواجه ترجمة الاستعارات العديد من المشاكل، لاسيما في حال ترجمتها من العربية إلى الإنجليزية. يهدف البحث لمناقشة استراتيجيات الترجمة التي طبقت في ترجمة الاستعارات في رواية إلياس خوري باب الشمس، والتي تعد عينة الدراسة الحالية، واستهدف البحث دراسة وتحليل 25 مثال من الاستعارات مترجم إلى الإنجليزية من الرواية. كما انحصرت تحليل الاستعارات في نوعين فقط وهما الاستعارة الأصلية والاستعارة الراجحة، واستخدم المترجم استراتيجية الإبقاء على الاستعارة الأصلية في اللغة الأصل إلى استعارة أصلية في اللغة الهدف. كما استخدم المترجم الاستراتيجية الثانية وهي صياغة استعارة النص الهدف باستخدام وجه الشبه. وعمد المترجم إلى استخدام أربع استراتيجيات في ترجمة الاستعارة الراجحة وبهذا ربطت التحليل بسياق النص وثقافته. من أبرز نتائج الدراسة هو استخدام المترجم لمنهج الترجمة الحرفية على مستوى ترجمة العبارات والمفردات بحسب المعنى الدارج في اللغة الهدف وذلك بنسبة 40%. في حين استخدم المترجم الترجمة الحرفية على مستوى المعنى بنسبة 44% بينما استخدم المترجم الترجمة الاصطلاحية بنسبة 16%. فيما احتوى التحليل على ثمانية استعارات لم يترجمها المترجم. سلطت الباحثة الضوء على محاولات المترجم للحفاظ على روح النص من خلال الاهتمام بالمعنى المقصود للمؤلف.

* طالبة ماجستير، ترجمة، الأكاديمية اليمنية للدراسات العليا، الجمهورية اليمنية.

© نُشر هذا البحث وفقاً لشروط الرخصة Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)، التي تسمح بنسخ البحث وتوزيعه ونقله بأي شكل من الأشكال، كما تسمح بتكييف البحث أو تحويله أو الإضافة إليه لأي غرض كان، بما في ذلك الأغراض التجارية، شريطة نسبة العمل إلى صاحبه مع بيان أي تعديلات أُجريت عليه.

Background

The study of metaphor occupies an important place in translation studies. In his book, *A Textbook of Translation*, Peter Newmark defines metaphor as "any figurative expression: the transferred sense of a physical word; the personification of an abstraction; the application of a word or collocation to what it does literary denote, to describe one thing in terms of another" (104). Building on this definition, Newmark further emphasizes that the main and one serious purpose of metaphor is to describe an entity, event, or quality more comprehensively and briefly and in a more complex way than is possible by using literal language (84).

With regards to everyday metaphors, the case is not as complex. Grey states that everyday metaphors are invisible because one understands them immediately, and therefore they have no need to pay attention to their metaphorical character (2). The problem lies on how to maintain of these metaphors. Languages are full of metaphors and understanding them is not a piece of cake. They carry deep and surface meanings. The surface meaning is clear, but the problem is how to understand the deeper side of the metaphor. While everyday metaphors are easy to understand, analyzing metaphors in a literary context requires careful analysis of their unique structures and contexts.

Mohammed Farghal states that the Arabic metaphor is called *isti'aarah*, which literally means borrowing (105). Any metaphor is known to include three elements:

- 1) The entity from which we borrow;
- 2) The entity borrowed; and
- 3) The entity to which we borrow.

The nature of the Arabic metaphor and how it is comprehended are clearly explained by Farghal, who states that we borrow certain features from one concept and apply them to another in order to highlight certain imagery or a point of similarity. Arabic metaphors can be categorized into two main types:

1) Explicit metaphors, which are named in Arabic *al-isti'aarahat-attasrihiyyah*, where the entities mentioned are the one compared to; and

2) Implicit metaphors that are named *al-'isti'aarahat al-makniyyah* in Arabic; they are the ones compared (106).

In an article by Tetyana Oliynyk, Newmark's theory of metaphor as a stylistic device is explained, focusing on its classification and translation. She introduces Newmark as "one of the main scholars in the founding of translation studies in the English-speaking world in the XX century" (123). She highlights his key works, including *A Textbook of Translation* (1988) and *Paragraphs on Translation* (1989). Newmark emphasizes practical analysis of case studies to address major translation challenges, particularly translating metaphors (123). According to Oliynyk, metaphors can be simple or compound, and serve connotative and aesthetic functions, combining unity of form and content. She stresses that "when translating metaphors, a translator should identify the reason of comparison and to understand whether a given area is connotative or denotative" (124). While Newmark advocates preserving the original metaphor's form, he emphasizes that excessive literalness may affect the text's style; the method depends on text type, metaphor frequency, and the translator's choice.

Significance of Metaphors

Since metaphor represents the core of literary works, it has a special status in translation, in general, and literary translation, in particular. There is a need then to focus on the strategies and problems of translating metaphors from Arabic into English to examine some areas of misunderstanding that reside in the cultural relationships between Arabic and English.

The objective then is to investigate the translator's ability to transfer both surface and deep meanings of metaphors depending on their relevance to the context. Metaphors are generally employed to emphasize the meaning in addition to providing more than one meaning to the text. For example:

اجلس إلى جانبك، واستمع إلى بكاء الناس الذي يشق نافذة غرفتك.

I sit next to you and listen to the weeping of eople penetrating your room's window.

The metaphor here, taken from *The Gate of the Sun*, has two meanings. One can tell that there is a sound of weeping outside, this being the surface meaning. However, the deep meaning reveals that the sound of weeping is too loud to the extent it forces itself into the room despite the closed window .

A translator's job is to appropriately translate the meaning. The difficulty in translating metaphors resides in transferring both deep and surface meanings since metaphors are used differently from one culture to another. They certainly have different meanings and implications.

The importance of this research comes from the importance of metaphors themselves. Metaphors can enhance writing in many ways. This is why so many creative writers apply them in their works aiming at creating difference in meanings and contexts. One reason why metaphors are used is to give readers a picture to imagine in their minds what is being discussed. Another reason is to help readers understand some related ideas that are reflected indirectly through the application of metaphors. Metaphors may also be used to simply add value and interesting elements that help readers imagine the ideas in their minds. Thus, in doing so, the writing will surely be more interesting. A unique adoption of the best metaphor links less intelligible ideas with more intelligible ones. In this research I concentrate on the *Gate of the Sun* (*Bab El Shams*) by Elias Khouri, a novel that narrates the Palestinian crisis and their suffering in the hands of the Israeli Zionist occupation. The novel carries deep cultural and political significance as it seeks to document many historical events as seen through the eyes of several eyewitnesses represented in the novel. The events are not narrated directly for the author chose to engage the readers with these events by using nuanced metaphors. These are not easy to understand metaphors. Readers may find it difficult but it becomes more difficult to non-Arab readers who have to read it in translation.

The novel is a fascinating contemporary novel that explains many sides of the conflict especially these days after the Gaza event. The novel is exciting and

thought-provoking. It is a story of a nation, consisting of ten stories dealing with tens of Palestinian families who were forced to leave their homes and country. They were forced to move from warm homes to cold camps where they are treated as refugees rather than human beings with human rights. The Gate of the Sun reflects the catastrophe that befell a whole nation and is based on the experience of people who lived there. Those who lived abroad in the Diaspora are still Palestinians whose country is still impressed deep in their minds and memories. This is the message intended by the author, and to do so he employs a metaphorical language to represent the inner feelings of the characters.

Methodology

This research methodology combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches to analyze the translation of metaphors in Elias Khoury's novel *Bab El Shams (Gate of the Sun)*, translated by Humphrey Davies. The qualitative approach focuses on interpreting meanings and identifying strategies used in metaphor translation, while the quantitative approach determines the frequency and preference of translation methods. Data were collected systematically following the procedures outlined by Kothari and Kabir, and analyzed using qualitative content analysis as explained by Saldanha and O'Brien. The novel was purposefully selected for its rich use of cultural and political metaphors—nearly 500 in total. From these, 24 translated and 8 untranslated metaphors were chosen as samples. They were categorized into lexicalized and non-lexicalized types, according to Dickins et al.'s model, and further analyzed based on Newmark's metaphor classifications to identify the translation strategies and factors influencing metaphor transfer between Arabic and English.

What is a metaphor?

The study of metaphor occupies an important place in translation studies. In his book, *A Textbook of Translation*, Peter Newmark defines metaphor as "any figurative expression: the transferred sense of a physical word; the personification of an abstraction; the application of a word or collocation to

what it does literary denote, to describe one thing in terms of another" (104). In his book *Approaches to Translation*, Newmark explains that the main and one serious purpose of metaphor is to describe an entity, event, or quality more comprehensively and briefly and in a more complex way than is possible by using literal language (84).

Moreover, Dickins and others state that a metaphor is typically used to describe something more briefly, with greater emotional force, and more often more exactly than is possible in the literal language (194). Metaphor is more important in figurative language because it is the most widespread, and because it poses the most challenging problems in translation.

Strategies for Translating Metaphors

Many studies adopt Newmark's model due to its importance in translation studies. *Strategies of Metaphor Translation* discusses the usefulness of Newmark's model of semantic and communicative methods of translation. The study analyzes, discusses, and illustrates the seven strategies of metaphor translation proposed by Newmark. These are important strategies, as pointed out by Brankica Bojovic in her study of Newmark's view of translation as a craft. Every student of translation has therefore to acquire a technique in which the process to be followed takes into account the acts of comprehension, interpretation, formulation and recreation (75).

To identify and describe metaphors, scholars use different theoretical concepts and parameters rather than combine them with others within translatology or use them in specialized papers in scholars' journals. This research focuses on the practical dimension of the translation process between two different languages. Metaphors are very frequent and widely used tropes in English. Newmark's strategies for translating metaphors is primarily descriptive, and so they serve the purpose of this research.

Thus, any word, according to Newmark, can be a metaphor, and to find out if it is, the primary meaning has to be matched against the linguistic and cultural contexts (Bojovic 75). The first purpose of a metaphor is to describe something comprehensively, economically and generally more forcefully than is possible in literal language (Bojovic76). Newmark's model, according

to Bojovic, binds the translation strategies to the type of metaphor as well as text types. According to her, there are seven strategies for transferring a metaphor's proper meaning. These strategies are:

Reproducing the same image of the ST in the TL: This is the best way to translate stock metaphors, most frequently idioms.

Replacing the image in the SL with a standard image in the TL: It is used when there is no image that matches exactly the one in the SL and which does not clash with the TL culture.

Translating metaphor by simile: This strategy modifies an emotive metaphorical expression to suit the TL if that context is not as emotive in character as the SL.

Translating metaphor by simile and sense.

Converting a metaphor to its sense: This is a strategy where the image of the SL is reduced to its sense and rewritten to suit the TL.

Deleting: It is used when the metaphor is redundant.

Combining the same metaphor with the sense.

The Analysis of Metaphors

The analysis of metaphors in Gate of the Sun demonstrates the significance of strategies adopted by the translator and the challenges inherent in rendering Arabic metaphors into English. A sample of metaphors was selected according to Dickins and others' model, divided into lexicalized and non-lexicalized categories, and analyzed with reference to Newmark's classification. The comparison of the source text (ST) and the target text (TT) reveals the translator's consistent effort to convey both literal and figurative meaning, while occasionally adapting expressions to suit the target audience.

Non-lexicalized metaphors, which include original metaphors, are particularly difficult to translate due to the need to identify the contextual grounds, which are often ambiguous. In most cases, the translator used the first strategy proposed by Dickins et al., maintaining the metaphorical force from the ST in the TT. For example, the metaphor: رأيت خوفا باردا (I saw a cold fear) conveys the lingering childhood trauma faced by the protagonist, Khaleel, and his perception of his mother's fear. The translator rendered this

directly into English, preserving both tense and metaphorical sense. Similarly,

فالوطن يجب أن نأكله لا أن نتركه يأكلنا

Homeland is something we have to eat, not let it eat us represents the homeland as a living entity to be engaged with. The translator maintained the metaphor's force and direct equivalence. The metaphor

كان يأكل حين سقط رأسه

head fell forward while he was eating depicts a painful death; the TT preserves the past progressive tense and the literal description, reflecting the original's emotional weight. In

أطلب من الذكريات أن تأتي

I ask the memories to come

the translator retains the personal and emotional nuance, translating the metaphor one-to-one.

التاريخ هو أن نصبح آلهة ووحوشا

History is us becoming gods and monsters

conveys the complex interplay of idealism and human fallibility. The TT preserves both the image and the tense.

الرجل السابح في الشراشف البيضاء

My swimmer in white sheets

maintains the angelic and tender imagery, with the addition of the possessive pronoun "my" to capture intimacy. In the metaphor

موتها كان أزرقا

She turned blue in death

the translator adapted the cultural symbolism of color while keeping the functional meaning, and

تدفق الماء الأسود من فمه

Black liquid gushed from his mouth

And

أنا أعد والأعداد تضيق

I'd count and the numbers would get confused

are rendered literally to maintain fidelity and convey the physical and emotional impact of the events. The metaphor

فالحكايات تتسلل من الأهداب إلى العيون

Stories enter their eyes through the lashes

demonstrates subtle adjustments in word order to retain both imagery and readability in English.

Some metaphors were rendered using the fifth strategy, converting the metaphor into its ground to make the meaning clearer for the target audience. In

جسمي يتهدم

I feel the exhaustion

the translator simplified the intensity of the expression to convey tiredness rather than complete disintegration.

كيف نقيم هذه الحفلات في بيتي المحاط بجثث البيوت

How could we have held orgies in my house when it was surrounded by all those other wrecked houses

And

عيونهم غارقة في صحنوهم

They were all examining their plates

The two show functional adaptations, replacing literal metaphors with equivalent expressions that convey the situation accurately. The metaphor

احترقنا حزنا عليه

We mourned so bitterly

The above statement demonstrates loss of metaphorical force but retains the emotional meaning . But

يلوك كلماته

Talking incoherently

And

أنت تنطفئ الآن

You are dying now

exemplify functional translations that convey the original sense while adjusting metaphoric imagery for readability. The two examples:

ينخر العظام

Made the bones ache

And

أمشي معي في الكلام

Let me walk you round the place

illustrate strategies where metaphors are partially explained or slightly elaborated to ensure comprehension without losing the source intent.

Lexicalized metaphors in the selected sample were primarily stock metaphors. These were translated using a combination of Dickins et al.'s strategies, including converting the ST metaphor into a target stock metaphor, using idiomatic equivalents, similes, or explicating the metaphor's ground. For example,

رقصت كل حياتك على حبال الموت

Playing cat and mouse with death

And

انقطع لسانك

Cat got your tongue

utilize idiomatic translation to convey the same figurative meaning naturally in English. But in the examples:

صار وجهه أشكالا ألوانا

His face ran the gamut of emotions

And

هكذا نتحايل على الوقت

So put one over on time

similarly employ idioms to preserve both imagery and functional impact. In other cases, such as *يختنق تحت الحرام*

(Stifling the child's cries with the blanket), the metaphor is rendered functionally, emphasizing literal action over figurative expression.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that the translator of Gate of the Sun employed multiple strategies, balancing fidelity to the source text with the

need to communicate effectively in the target language. Non-lexicalized metaphors were mostly translated directly to maintain original force, while lexicalized metaphors often required idiomatic adaptation or explanation of the metaphorical ground. The examples analyzed reveal a nuanced application of literal, functional, and idiomatic translation strategies, ensuring that the metaphoric richness of the original Arabic text is accessible to English readers while respecting linguistic and cultural differences.

Suggestions for Further Studies

The research offers the following recommendations for future studies:

- .1 Conducting further studies on the use of similes in *Gate of the Sun*.
 - .2 Performing a comparative analysis of the impact of Arabic metaphors on the source readers (SR) versus the effect of their translations on target readers (TR).
 - .3 Investigating Arabic metaphors in greater depth, including their significance, usage, and the most effective strategies for translating them into other languages.
 - .4 Exploring the translation of culturally specific items (CSTs) according to Newmark's categories, and examining their relation to postcolonial theory in the context of Arabic literature.
- Al-Qobati 9
- .5 Examining symbolism in the novel and the role of translation in conveying the intended meaning of certain symbols to target readers.

References

- Bojovic, Brankica. "Strategies of Metaphor Translation." *ELTA Journal*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2014.
- Dickins, James. *Two Models for Metaphor Translation*. University of Salford Manchester, 2005.
- Dickins, James, et al. *Thinking Arabic Translation: A Course in Translation Method Arabic to English*. Routledge, 2002.
- Farghal, Mohamed. "Translating Arabic Metaphorical Expressions into English: Mahfouz's Morning and Evening Talk as an Example." *ResearchGate*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2020.
- Grey, William. "Metaphor and Meaning. The University of Queensland." *ResearchGate*, 21 Oct. 2015.
- Kabir, Syed. "Methods of Data Collection." *ResearchGate*, 2018.
- Newmark, Peter. *A Textbook of Translation*. Prentice Hall International, 1988.
- Oliynyk, Tetyana. "Metaphor Translation Methods." *International Journal of Applied Science and Technology*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2014.
- Saldanha, Gabriela, and Sharon O'Brien. *Research Methodologies in Translation Studies*. Routledge, 2013.