
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Cognitive Approach to Metaphor Translation in Children's Literary Discourse: The Case of *Romeo and Juliet*

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| ABSTRACT

Metaphor as a concept has traditionally been viewed as a literary device through which writers can hold readers' interest. However, recent evidence suggests that metaphors can go well beyond their rhetorical function and can be examined from a cognitive standpoint. This study uses a cognitive approach to metaphor translation in children's literary discourse, with a reference to *Romeo and Juliet*, and its translations into Arabic. Specifically, the study attempts to explore the ways in which metaphors are presented to the Arabic reader, taking into consideration the way English and Arabic cultures and languages conceptualize experiences and notions. The paper argues that the use of metaphors presents a challenge for Arab translators because the transfer from one language and culture to another one is hampered by linguistic and cultural differences; the difficulty of translating metaphor is also due to the differences that exist between children's and adults' understanding of metaphors. In this article, I describe an exploratory study that investigates the ways in which Moroccan elementary school children perceive metaphors. The results indicate that Moroccan elementary school children tend to misinterpret metaphors because they use different cultural references when attempting to interpret them. The findings also reveal that comprehension of metaphors involves the transfer of knowledge from one conceptual domain to another, which depends largely on the cognitive development of the child.

| KEYWORDS

Arabic, English, culture, conceptual metaphor, translation strategies

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1. Introduction

Metaphor has traditionally been defined as a linguistic phenomenon, which is characterized by the comparison of two strikingly different concepts, but which share some common characteristics. Newmark states that metaphor is any figurative language which demonstrates resemblance (1988, 104). Knowles and Moon (2005, 2) define metaphor as; "the use of language to refer to something other than what it was originally applied to, or what it "literally" means, in order to suggest some resemblance or make a connection between the two things". Different approaches have been suggested with regard to metaphor translation, each has tackled this issue from a differing perspective namely; prescriptive, contextual, descriptive and cognitive. Firstly, there is the classic trend which considers metaphor as a poetic expression, an ornamental linguistic device that is generally untranslatable, and very often paraphrased or omitted. Secondly, the modern trend addresses metaphor from a cognitive perspective. It postulates that metaphor is not simply a matter of linguistic expressions, but it is fundamentally a conceptual process of mapping one domain of experience onto another domain. According to Lakoff, "The locus of metaphor is not in language at all, but in the way we conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another. The general theory of metaphor is given by characterizing such cross-domain mappings." (1993, 203). This view is particularly interesting in reconsidering translation approaches and practices. It is specifically germane to translating literature, in general, and translating literature for children in particular. Translators are often confronted to the perilous dilemma of keeping, adapting or deleting metaphors and a number of other cultural items.

Recently, many studies (Schaffner, 2004; Kovecses, 2005; Iranmanesh and Kaur, 2010) have focused on metaphor with respect to translatability and transfer methods. It has been argued that metaphors present a major challenge for translators since transferring them from one language and culture to another one may be hampered by linguistic and cultural differences. Several studies on metaphor translation have produced conflicting results. This raises the question of whether and to what extent cultural metaphor is translatable. According to Nida (1964) and Dagut (1976) metaphors are untranslatable while for Reiss (1971) and Mason (1982) they are fully translatable. Van den Broeck, (1981) and Newmark (1988) claim that metaphors are translatable but pose a considerable degree of inequivalence. In accordance with Newmark, Larson (1998) asserts that metaphors are not understood as easily as literal expressions. Metaphors, if translated literally, can result in confusion and misinterpretation. Larson (1988) points out that there are four main reasons why metaphors are hard to translate. First, the image used in the metaphor may not be familiar in the target language. Second, the object of metaphor is stated in an implicit way. Third the point of similarity is implicit and thus hard to identify. Fourth, the target language uses different images as comparison.

2. Cognitive Approach to metaphor translation

One of the most important theories about metaphor translation has been proposed by Lakoff (1993) according to which metaphor is not simply a linguistic device, but rather a conceptual phenomenon; it involves *mapping between source and target domains*. Some translation theorists have provided an interesting ground for understanding the limits and constraints of metaphor translation. For example, Mandelblit (1995) has highlighted the importance of the conceptual mapping conditions in translation. He claims that the difficulty in translating language resides in the lack of association between the metaphorical mapping systems existing in the source and target languages. Put differently, if the source language and the target language have similar mapping conditions, the translator's task is easy because s/he will only have to choose an equivalent target language metaphor. In case mapping conditions are different, the translation becomes problematic, and the translator has to find a different strategy. Al Hasnawi (2007, 20) shares Mandelblit's view and further asserts that, "the more the SL and the TL cultures in question conceptualize experience in a similar way, the easier the task of translation will be." Al Hasnawi building on Mandelblit's hypothesis for metaphor translation has added one more scheme to obtain the following options:

1. Metaphors of similar mapping conditions.
2. Metaphors having similar mapping conditions but lexically implemented differently.
3. Metaphors of different mapping conditions (the culture-bound SL metaphor).

Metaphorical studies in the field of translating literature into Arabic has gained significant popularity in recent years (Abu Libdeh, 2011; Al-Garrallah, 2016; Ashuja'a et al, 2019). However, very little research has been carried on the cognitive approach to metaphor translation in children's literary discourse from English into Arabic, two languages that have very little in common. The present study attempts to fill this gap. The focus of the present paper is to explore metaphor from a cogno-cultural perspective with a reference to *Romeo and Juliet*, and its translations in Arabic. More specifically, it seeks to investigate the challenges of metaphor translation and the strategies adopted to render cultural metaphor "translatable".

3. Method

Romeo and Juliet is a famous world classic written by William Shakespeare in the 16th century. It has been widely translated into different languages, including Arabic. It has been adapted in different ways by different people for readers with little or no ability to understand Shakespeare's style. The fact that some Arabic versions of *Romeo and Juliet* are now considered part of children's literature makes it an interesting text to study. This Arabic version (Al-Shariff, 2009) of *Romeo and Juliet* is part of a collection called "Yanabii al-kalām". It includes various renowned classics such as *Robin-Hood* and Charles Dickens's *Tale of Two Cities*; target readers are young children studying at primary and junior high schools.

The choice of *Romeo and Juliet* was a deliberate one. Shakespeare's style is a combination of prose, rhymed verse or blank verse. It is characterized by the use of a number of complex figures of speech such as metaphors which require a certain cognitive and cultural awareness to be decoded.

To analyse the suggested corpus, I first read the Arabic version of the book and compared it to its English (Shakespeare, 2005) and French (Hugo, 2003) counterparts, I mainly focused on the metaphors used in the source texts and the way they were rendered in the target texts. I referred to the French versions of these books because, unlike Arabic, French shares a number of linguistic and cultural aspects with English due to cultural exchange, conquest (Bryson, 1991), and their long coexistence (Vinay and Darbelnet, 1995). English and French, though having different origins, share many lexical similarities in both form and meaning (Lim, 2019).

4. Corpus analysis

In introducing the Arabic version (Al-Shariff, 2009: 2), the translator argues that this version is one of the most popular love stories in history; it embodies conflict between heart and duty, love and inherited hatred. This has resulted in many sacrifices and tragedies. Then, he introduces the major characters: The Capulet family Juliet's family and their enemies, the Montague family Romeo's family. In Scene V, Shakespeare describes the Capulet's feast and explains how Romeo manages to get into the party to see Rosaline, the woman he was supposed to be in love with. Instead, he falls in love with Juliet.

Translating Romeo and Juliet into Arabic is certainly challenging both at the linguistic and cultural levels, but what is even more challenging is to translate it for a young audience. For the purposes of this study, I will limit myself to the problems of metaphor translation. More specifically, I will address the religious images used by Shakespeare to depict Romeo and Juliet's budding, yet passionate love. In the original version, Romeo says to Juliet in Scene V (2004, 16-17):

- Romeo [To Juliet]:

If I profane with my unwortheist hand

This holy shrine, the gentle fine is this:

My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand

To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

- Juliet

Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,

Which mannerly devotion shows in this;

For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,

And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.

In the Arabic version, Romeo's utterance is changed into prose, but Juliet's answer remains unchanged; it is rendered literally:

جولييت: أيها الحاج الصالح لقد سر قلبي بشدة من ورعك وإني أؤكد لك أن للقديسات أياد كاللحاج تماما. فهن يستطعن تبادل اللمسات بها أيضا لكنهن لا يستطعن التقبيل بها. فالقبلات محرمات عليهنّ.

Back translation

- Juliet: Good pilgrim, my heart is so delighted with your extreme piety and I assure you that saints do have hands exactly like pilgrims. They can exchange touches with them but they cannot kiss with them for kisses are forbidden.

The word "الحاج" /al-hāj/ is a literal translation of "pilgrim" which fits perfectly in Shakespeare's version, where the analogy between Romeo's hands as pilgrims heading to Juliet who is, in the eyes of her lover, as pure and sacrosanct as a shrine. In contrast, in the Arabic version, the word "الحاج" /al-hāj/ and the word "قديسات" /qid-dīsāt/ (saints) are confusing because of their cultural load. The word Haj refers literally to a Muslim who has accomplished pilgrimage. It may also refer to wisdom and old age, as Muslims, generally, go to Haj when they are old. In Morocco, as well as in other Arab countries, it is common to call an older persons "Hajj". The term "قديسات" /qid-dīsāt/ is borrowed from christianity and depicts the image of pure, righteous women vowing themselves to God.

Rendering this metaphor literally may be interesting, though not without risk, for an older audience. However, the religious load of the word "pilgrim" may cause confusion for young readers. A research was conducted among elementary school children aged 8-12 to check their understanding and reception of cultural and metaphorical items in the target language (Chakir, 2016: 75). Results revealed that only four children (5.26%) from grade 6 (11- 12 years old) were able to understand that the use of "الحاج" /al-hāj/ and "قديسات" /qid-dīsāt/ is metaphorical and said that Romeo compares Juliet to a saint. The results confirm the strong relationship between children's cognitive abilities and their comprehension of figurative language. In this regard, Delahanty and Peel (1979: 116) found that children between the ages of 3 and 7 were unable to override literal interpretations but, starting from 8 years old; children displayed the onset of an ability to interpret words as having dual meanings. Children from three to seven are sensitive only to the literal translation, while seven to eight year olds demonstrate the beginning of the ability to use the psychological sense of terms. The ability to state the dual function of the terms was clearly developed in the twelve-year-old group. "حورية"/hūriya/ is another ambiguous word as the following passage illustrates:

وكان في سيره هذا لايزال مشيعا بذكرى كلمات جولييت ويحسها تتردد في أذنيه، مع كل خطوة، وكيف لا يشعر بذلك ، وقد غدت هذه الحورية خطيبته.

Back translation

While walking, he was escorted by the memories of Juliet's words which rang in his ears with each step. How could he not feel that and this fairy had become his fiancée?

The results revealed that only 11.8% of the children understood that the word referred to a beautiful woman. While 60.5% said that the word / hūriya/ meant a mermaid, a legendary creature with the head and upper body of a female human and the tail of a fish, and 27.7% thought it was a princess.

The word /ḥūriya/ and the context where it occurs exist neither in the original version nor in the simplified one. The rewriter has probably added this transitional sentence in order to strengthen the plot and he has chosen this word to refer to the marvelous creatures that pious men marry in paradise as cited in the Qurān (Pickthall, 1981: 658, 696, 711, 713).¹

In the English Macmillan simplified version, the rewriter uses a different strategy to deal with the pilgrim and saints metaphors. The result reads as follows:

- Romeo: I know I should not touch your hands. It is too perfect for my touch. But my lips are ready to smooth away that touch with a gentle kiss.

- Juliet: Good Sir, you are unkind to your hand, after all, people touch the hands of holy statues. (Romeo and Juliet, 2006 p.23)

There is a new image composed of a "good Sir" instead of a "pilgrim" touching a "holy statue" instead of "shrine" and "saints". The metaphor has been adapted to suit the audience, which is mainly composed of pre-intermediate foreign English learners. The new words are culturally less bound; they illustrate well the new image and make it accessible to target readers.

This is what the Arabic rewriter should have done with even more freedom since his readers are young and need particular adjustments to understand what they are reading.

The results mentioned earlier (Chakir, 2016: 75) confirm that the target readers of the Arabic version have not yet developed the prerequisite competencies to interpret metaphors. This casts doubts on the rewriter's decision to keep the original metaphor, particularly that he allowed himself to modify and remove various parts of the source text. Only words that carry a heavy religious and cultural load have been preserved in the target text; thus, contributing to children's confusion. This brings to the fore the linguistic view of metaphor developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). Seemingly, the rewriter has overlooked the fact that his readers' cognitive skills are not sufficiently developed to grasp this metaphor and its mappings. Shakespeare's metaphor builds on an abstract and sensitive source domain. Shakespeare uses religion to describe the first physical meeting between Romeo and Juliet. The mappings emerging from this metaphor have turned Juliet into a saint, her hands into a shrine and Romeo's lips into pilgrims. Accordingly, a secret romantic rendezvous involving sexual preliminaries becomes a holy and pure religious act.

Undoubtedly, the translator has tried to simplify and shorten the source text to meet his audience's reading abilities, but he failed with the most important part to avoid cultural ambiguity. Actually, even though the word "pilgrim" has its equivalent in Arabic, the conceptual mapping is complex and sensitive in the target culture. The translator should have tried to substitute the whole metaphor as in the Macmillan version or even opt for deletion because the use of this equivalence is misleading.

However, I do not hold the view that deletion is always the best strategy to adopt when translating or rewriting for children. In fact, young readers, as Stolt (1998:133), quoting Lindgren, maintains "[...] have the ability to re-experience the most alien and distant things and circumstances, if a good translator is there to help them, and I believe that their imagination continues to build where the translator can go no further." Children can, and should be open onto new images and other cultures via material that challenges, but nonetheless respects their intelligence and abilities.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

This study has examined metaphor translation in *Romeo and Juliet* from a cognitive perspective. Specifically, it has addressed the pertinence of the strategies used by Arab translators in translating metaphor in children's literary discourse. Analysis of the different versions has revealed that strategies included literal rendering, deletion, and addition. It has also shown that these strategies were not always pertinent. In some cases, they were source of confusion for young readers. The metaphor with the religious mapping in *Romeo and Juliet* is a telling example. The readers were unable to understand the image, firstly because at their age, they have not yet developed the necessary skills to decode metaphors; and secondly, the metaphor's mapping, itself, is culturally bound. In the same vein, adding metaphors in the target text was not a good option either. The metaphor comparing Juliet to a "ḥūriya" is an unnecessary addition. Not only did it confuse the young readers, but it did not add any significant information to the target text.

Deletion may be regarded as a safe strategy when translation is hard for cultural or linguistic considerations. However, omitting some aspects or details carefully placed by the author in the source text often entails significant losses in the target text. The translator has probably been partly forced to adopt that strategy because he realized that the source language culture and the target language one do not conceptualize those metaphors in a similar way. This raises the issue of selecting material for translation. If texts, such as *Romeo and Juliet*, contain linguistically or culturally problematic items for the target audience, as is the case of some metaphors, why would they be translated at all? One could argue that these types of books can be used as a means to share a wide range of intercultural aspects as well as to enrich learners' imagination and linguistic skills. This brings to the fore the issue of language, culture and audience in translation.

¹ (fair ones with wide, lovely eyes) الحورالعين

However, the findings of the present study should be considered in light of some limitations. First, the literature on translating children's books into Arabic is still scarce. Therefore, I have mostly relied on foreign literature in the field. Secondly, a more comprehensive field study involving different stakeholders, namely translators, publishers and readers could have given more insight into the process that Arabic translated children's books undergo from translation to distribution.. Accordingly, further research is needed to evaluate translated children's literature in the Arab world. Researchers are required to explore children's literary discourse from a cognitive perspective. Focus should be on the cogno-cultural skills of 21st century young Arabic-speaking children, taking into account their age, their literary and reading expectations, and the technological progress to which they are daily exposed. This would probably help editors, publishers and translators to tailor an enriching literature that would appeal to Arabic-speaking children in today's world.

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