

83. Difficulties of the Translation of Culture Specific Collocations from English into Arabic in the Political Context

Osama Ali Musbah Bala
Misurata University, Libya
os.musbah@yahoo.com

Preface

In this paper, I will be discussing how culture-specific metaphors are translated from English into Arabic in political texts based on a corpus of texts. The analysis from linguistics and translation point of views might in some occasions overlap and though assist the translator in reaching better understanding of metaphors. Consequently, the translator will be able to reach a translation by which he/she will deliver clear semantic utterance to his/her audience. The research will consider many aspects of metaphors such as their function in political texts. Some examples will be extracted from the texts and investigated thoroughly in a bid to find out how metaphors are being translated from English into Arabic in the political text. Ultimately, the research will attempt to find out which procedures are frequently applied to translating culture-specific metaphors from English into Arabic in political fields. The findings of the research will aim to reach the most common procedures in translating culture-specific metaphors from English to Arabic based on the frequent use of translation procedures throughout the investigation.

The Introduction

Journalists and presenters in all kinds of media depend predominantly on the use of figurative language to express themselves effectively in a bid to persuade their audience of what they believe. I will be discussing one element of figurative language which is “metaphor”. The main function of metaphors is to add stylistic embellishment in the text. In addition, metaphors are used to touch reader’s feelings and emotions in order to draw their attention to a particular situation or cause.

The translatability of metaphors has always been an issue for translators due to the fact that transferring them from one language and culture to another one could be hampered by linguistic and cultural differences. I will be investigating a corpus of texts and one speech to find out what procedures are most appropriate to be applied to the process of translating metaphors from English to Arabic in political texts. The aim of the research is two fold: first to explore how metaphors are used to deliver a strong, meaningful and precise message to audiences. Secondly, which translation procedures are commonly used by translators in the process of translating metaphors from English into Arabic in political texts?

The finding of the research will possibly conclude and clarify the most common procedures that are adopted by translators in the process of translating metaphors from English into Arabic in political texts. The conclusion of the research will be based on the frequent use of certain translation procedures in the analysis of the corpus. The frequent use of these procedures will most likely indicates the most applied procedures in translating metaphors from English into Arabic in political texts. The analysis of corpus will be based on theories suggested by leading scholars in the field of translation as well as examples of English metaphors translated into Arabic.

Many scholars suggested theories and procedures to help in the process of translating metaphors. Although no theories seem to deal specifically with political metaphors, there are, however, many theories that address the issue of translating metaphors in general.

The research begins by defining metaphors from a linguistic point of view and then narrows down until it reaches the discussion of the translation technique used and finally ends at the conclusion and findings of the research. Throughout the analysis of the material investigated, I will be analysing metaphors in three stages:

First I will discuss the metaphors linguistically in order to comprehend image that the addresser wants the addressee to visualise. There is no way that the message of a metaphor could be translated without understanding the meaning of the metaphor first. Secondly, I will try to identify the problems that might occur in the process of transferring metaphors from English into Arabic. Finally,

I will try to find out what procedures are applied by translators in each case and why they chose such procedures.

Literature review

Definition of Metaphor

“Metaphor is a word or phrase used to describe sb/sth else, in a way that is different from its normal use, in order to show that the two things have the same qualities and to make the description more powerful” (Oxford dictionary 2006:925). The word metaphor derives from the Greek *metapherein*, transfer, as META=+ *pherein*, to bear (Oxford English Dictionary, 1996). Metaphor is a figurative language which represents one of what is called “figures of speech”.

Other figures of speech are synecdoche, metonymy, irony and simile. Metaphor may mean different things to different people and specialists are confounded when asked about a definition of metaphor. “Metaphor can be defined as a figure of speech in which a word or phrase used in non-basic sense, this non-basic sense suggesting likeness or analogy with another basic sense of the same word or phrase”. (Dickins, Hervey & Higgins 2002:147)

Metaphors and Culture

Culture poses a barrier in the process of translation in general and specifically in translating metaphors because they activate different associations in two different cultures. Cultural metaphors cause problems due to the fact that the concept of SL metaphor is unknown in TL and therefore the readers have no knowledge of that concept. As a result addressees cannot understand cultural metaphors if they are translated literally. Culture-specific metaphors might be paraphrased into the TT due to the absence of the SL metaphor image in the TL. The fact that cultural metaphors can only be conceived by speakers and listeners of that specific culture make non-native speakers of that language unable to understand the figurative meaning of such metaphors. The magnitude to which translation problems can reach depends entirely on the language combination and how differed they are from each other. The more distinct the language combination is, the more problems occur in the process of translation. In this research, I will be dealing with two distinct languages (English and Arabic) in a bid to find out how metaphorical expressions are being tackled.

Metaphors and politics

Garber described the political communication as “lifeblood or mother’s milk of politics because communication is the essential activity that links the various parts of society together and allows them to function as an integrated whole” (1993:305). Communication is the main vehicle in political life and language is the main vehicle of communication. Politicians use metaphors as persuasive tools which help them to communicate effectively “by addressing symbolic themes residing in the segments of public consciousness” (Mio, 1997:113). Politicians use metaphors to awaken concepts which already exist in the addressees’ mind by drawing an analogy between two concepts. Moreover, metaphors are used in politics to promote public support for the government or political parties but they could also backfire if they are not chosen carefully or they are not accurately understood by addressees. Metaphors play an important role in the language used in political discourse due to their ability to convey a great deal of information in a concise manner. Metaphors aim to help the listener to visualise what is meant by the expression used. In addition, politicians use metaphors to emphasise suitable issue of the case they want to prove and hide others. It all depends on the interpretation in the mind of the addressees. Using a metaphor is a skill to appeal to the emotions of listeners in a way that feels natural to the audience (Beard 1991: 17-21). Metaphorical expressions are used in politics due to the fact that political events are fundamentally abstract and can not be directly experienced by senses; therefore metaphors are used to make these events tangible for the public. Metaphors serve as persuasive devices due to their ability to stir emotions and bridge the gap between rational and irrational forms of persuasion (Mio, J. 1997:113). Metaphors allow the public to grasp the meanings of political events and feel a part of the course. In addition, metaphors are used in political texts to facilitate the addressee’s ability to understand the addresser’s message or to understand a specific concept which may not be conveyed fully by non-metaphorical language.

The function of Metaphors

Metaphors are used as speech ornaments and meaning-enhancing analogies. They basically compare two things which are essentially unlike in order to help the addressees visualise the image that the addresser wants to deliver. Metaphors could be used to express a thought or believe by alluding to other thought or believe to make it vivid and catch the attention of the receptors. Politicians need to use language which contains memorable phrases to be remembered which is metaphorical language. Thus, politicians can deliver stronger message to the addressees. The function of metaphors depends entirely on drawing an analogy between two concepts in order to deliver a certain image to the imagination of the readership. The analogy is carried out by the use of metaphorical word in the place of another word to provide more concise meaning with greater emotional force. "The purpose of metaphor is basically twofold: its referential purpose is to describe a mental process or state, a concept, a person, an object, a quality or an action more comprehensively and concisely that is possible in literal or physical language; its pragmatic purpose which is simultaneously is to appeal to the sense, to interest, to clarify 'graphically', to please, to delight, to surprise. The first purpose is cognitive, the second is aesthetic." (Newmark 1988:104).

Metaphors are used to draw an image of a particular situation in the reader's mind. It serves to put more emphasis on the idea or imaginary situation that the speaker tries to deliver to the audience. This serves to attract the reader's attention to the importance of the message that the speaker tries to communicate. This always involves illusion or deception. The images that the addresser uses in making an analogy are simply not true. Newmark points out that fact in his book 'A Textbook of Translation' that "Metaphors, both purposes, always involve like a lie where you pretend to be someone that you are not, a metaphor is kind of deception, often used to conceal intention" (1998:104).

Lakoff and Johnson, on the other hand, drew attention to the mechanism of metaphors and stated that the mechanism of metaphors relies thoroughly on conceiving a concept by relating it to another concept by means of imaginary vehicle. That vehicle is used to show emotion emphasis or a bid to persuade. Lakoff and Johnson pointed out that "Metaphor is principally a way of conceiving of one thing in terms of another, and is primary function in understanding" (2003:36). In any given situation language becomes more vivid and alive with metaphors.

Types of metaphors

There are six types of metaphors according to Newmark's classification:

- Dead metaphor: is a metaphor whose meaning is being hardly conscious of.
- Stock metaphor: is an established metaphor which, in an informal text, is a concise method of covering a physical and mental situation both referentially and pragmatically.
- Cliché metaphors: are metaphors used as a substitute for a clear thought.
- Adapted metaphor:
- Recent metaphor: is a metaphorical neologism.
- Original metaphor: is created or quoted by the writer.

It is necessary to distinguish between two types of metaphors, "lexicalised metaphors" and "non-lexicalised metaphors". Albeit this distinction is not always crystal clear but the following features might help to recognise whether a metaphor is lexicalised or non-lexicalised. Lexicalised metaphor refers to the use of words or phrases whose metaphorical sense is fixed and not hard to be guessed by the readers. In other words, lexicalised metaphors are those whose meaning is fixed and which are mentioned in dictionaries.

According to Dickins, Harvey & Higgins (2002) lexicalised metaphors consist of three categories:

- Dead metaphor: refers to a metaphor whose meaning is not felt or realised.
- Stock metaphor: refers to a metaphor whose meaning is widely used.
- Recent metaphor: refers to new metaphors (neologism).

Unlike lexicalised metaphors, non-lexicalised metaphors have no clear or fixed meaning. This type of metaphor cause difficulties in translation as the meaning of the metaphor in question requires the translator to go through the whole paragraph, if not the whole text, to work out the meaning of the metaphor. Due to the fact that the meaning of non-lexicalised metaphor is slightly ambiguous, translators, therefore, will have real difficulties working out the meaning of it. It is crucially important that translators to get the meaning of non-lexicalised metaphors right, if not, translators will unconsciously produce erroneous translation due to his/her incorrect analysis of metaphors in the SLT. It is also vital to distinguish two types of non-lexicalised metaphors which are conventionalised metaphors and original metaphors (Dickins, Hervey & Higgins 2002:149).

Conventionalised metaphors are those whose meaning is not lexicalised or fixed but they draw on cultural or linguistics conventions. The following example will provide clearer understanding for this type of non-lexicalised metaphors:(He redeployed his troops) (Dickins 2002:149), although the meaning of the metaphor is not lexicalised, the translator can guess it because the convention is generalised in English that arguments described in terms of war.

Original metaphors constitute a significant problem in the translation process because they do not relate to any linguistic or cultural conventions.

Translating metaphors

Translating metaphors from and into two culturally distinct languages such as English and Arabic can be a very daunting task for translators. The meaning of metaphors cannot be predicted from their referential meaning. Therefore, translators have to work out the meaning of metaphors before translating them. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) initiated what is called 'The cognitive approach' in which metaphors are analysed cognitively. In the cognitive study of metaphor an emphasis is made on the psychological as well as the socio-cultural and linguistic aspects of metaphor. Dagut (ibid. 28) says that "what determines the translatability of a SL metaphor is not its 'boldness' or 'originality,' but rather the extent to which the cultural experience and semantic associations on which it draws are shared by speakers of the particular TL.

Nida (1964) described the 'best' translation as the one capable of evoking in the TL reader the same response as the SL text does to the SL reader. The translator can tackle the problem of translating metaphors by following two steps. First, he/she should try to understand the metaphor thoroughly by perceiving the metaphor the same way as SL audience do. Secondly, the translator has to do his/her level best to accommodate the translation of SL metaphor into the TL through translation which combine with the way TL audience perceive the world. According to Dagut (1976: 22), metaphors shock its readers and the effect of the sock should be retained unless there are linguistic and cultural factors hinder that effect.

The problem caused by the difficulty of translating a metaphorical expression constitutes a major problem in the translation process. This problem occurs mainly because the metaphor has a hidden or an ambiguous meaning within it whether the metaphor is at a word level or a textual level. The meaning of the SL metaphor could be translated by many means (will be discussed later) but the question lie on whether a translator could really convey the sense, liveliness and effect of the ST metaphor.

“The elusiveness of metaphor- the difficulty of getting a linguistic grip on it, so to speak- derives from its being at the frontier of linguistic change and fluidity. So do the problems of translating it.”

(Dagut 1976:23)

Equivalence is by large considered as controversial notion in the discipline of translation. Some scholars rejected the notion thoroughly stressing that by retaining 'equivalence' in vocabulary, scholars sidestep the issue that "it is difference, not sameness or transparency or equality, which inscribed in the operation of translation" (Hermans, 1998: 61). As the discipline of translation develops, the scholar's focus has shifted from linguistics to contextual and cultural factors which really were the reasons behind the difficulties occur in the operation of translating metaphors.

It is fair to say that ST metaphors cannot always be preserved because the image accompanied to those metaphors is unknown in the TL. As a result of that, scholars have suggested alternative procedures to solve the problem. For instance, Van Den Broeck has suggested three possible procedures to translate metaphors:

- Translation (transfer of both SL tenor and SL vehicle into TL).
- Substitution (replacement of SL vehicle by a different TL vehicle with more or less the same tenor)
- Paraphrase (rendering a SL metaphor by a non-metaphorical expression in TL).

(Van den Broeck 1981:77)

Nida suggested that a translator may substitute figurative language by non-figurative language in the case that two languages do not share the same semantic structure.

“..because of lack of close correspondence in figurative expressions, it may be necessary to translate some figurative expressions in the source language by non-figurative phrases in target language”

(Nida 1993:124)

Peter Newmark suggested many procedures to translate metaphors:

- Reproducing the same image in the TL.
- Replacing the image in the SL with a standard TL image which does not clash with TL culture
- Translating metaphor by simile, retaining the image, which could modify the shock of the metaphor
- Translating metaphor (or simile) by simile plus sense (or occasionally a metaphor plus sense
- Converting metaphor to sense. This procedure is recommended when the TL image is too broad in sense or not appropriate to the register. However, emotive aspects may get lost.
- Deletion, if the metaphor is redundant.
- Using the same metaphor combined with sense, in order to enforce the image.

(Newmark 1981: 87-91)

Larson, on the other hand, suggests five procedure of translating metaphors, those procedures are very similar to those of Newmark. Here are the procedures:

- The metaphor may be kept if the receptor language permits.
- A metaphor may be translated as a simile.
- A metaphor of the receptor language which has the same meaning may be substituted.
- The metaphor might be kept and the meaning explained.
- The meaning of the metaphor might be translated without the metaphorical imagery.

(Larson 1998: 279)

In order to adopt the right and most appropriate procedure in the process of translation metaphors, the translator has to pay attention to the aspects of the source text analysis.

The translator has to analyse the text type, the register, the readership in terms of level of communication, and the intention of the text. This analysis should be applied on both texts to reach to an accurate conclusion on what procedure is the most suitable to translate a metaphor.

Methodology

As far as linguistics is concerned, I intend to explore the function of metaphors and how they function. It is crucial to understand why authors use metaphors and how using these metaphors could help delivering the message of the addresser to the addressees. Understanding metaphors will help translators to choose the most appropriate procedures for translating metaphors particularly the non-lexicalised metaphors. In other words, translators have to conceive the metaphor as native speakers of SL do. By doing so, translators would be able to understand what is meant by the metaphor and then they could find an appropriate procedure to translate that metaphor.

In order to analyse what procedures are appropriate to translate English metaphors into Arabic in political texts, I will adopt procedures suggested by Newmark and Larson. Newmark is the leading scholar in addressing the issue of translating metaphors. I will be matching Newmark's and Larson's procedures with the procedures that applied by the translators who translated the articles of the material investigated to find out what procedures are applied the most.

I will be using Newmark's classification of metaphors which are: dead metaphor, cliché metaphor, stock metaphor, adopted metaphor, recent metaphor and original metaphor.

The hypothesis I am trying to prove in this research is that English metaphors are often translated into Arabic in political texts by using non-metaphorical language (paraphrasing) if the image of English metaphors do not exist in Arabic.

Methods of Research

I will be using illustrations from authentic source and target texts (English and Arabic in the field of politics) to show how translators handled metaphorical expressions. I chose some authentic texts (English) and translation of these texts in Arabic in a bid to investigate as many metaphors as possible to reach an answer to my research question. I followed three steps to carry out my investigation;

First, I searched for articles in Arabic newspapers and websites of news agencies to find Arabic articles translated from English newspaper or news agencies websites. I was able to identify articles that are translated from English by observing the name of the source from which the articles were translated. In news agencies websites, they usually mention the name of the source if the article was taken from other agency or source and not published by the agency itself. By observing the name of source, I managed to look for the original text.

Secondly, once I identified the source of the English article, I started to search that article in the internet. Once I found the article, I cross-checked it against the Arabic article to find out whether the Arabic article is a translation of the English article I found or not.

Finally, once I ensured that Arabic text is a translation of the English text, I examined both texts to identify the metaphorical expressions to be investigated. Newmark pointed out that "Whenever you meet a sentence that is grammatical but does not appear to make sense, you have to test its apparently nonsensical element for metaphorical meaning" (1988:106). Based on what Newmark stated, I looked for a group of lexical units in the ST whose literal meaning does not really make sense. Once I identified a metaphor in the ST, I analysed it to discover (1) how it was structured (2) the problem that ST metaphor poses in the process of translation. For the purpose of the study, I investigated some metaphors in detail and gathered many cases of metaphors in a table. Due to the word count, I was not able to investigate the metaphors gathered in the table and I had to briefly mentioned what procedure used by translators to translate these metaphors from English into Arabic in political texts.

Bibliography

- Beard, Adrians. (2000) *The language of politics*. London: Routledge.
Dagut, Menachem, 1976. Can 'metaphor' be translated? *Babel* 22, 21–33.
Dagut, M.-B. (1976). "Can Metaphor be translated?" *Babel*
Graber, D. (1993). *Political communication: Scope, progress, promise*. In A. W. Finifter (Ed.),
Hermans, Theo, 1998. *Translation and normativity*. *Current Issues in Language and Society*

Larson, M.(1998). *Meaning-based Translation: a guide to cross –language equivalence.* Lanham Md: University Press of America.

Newmark, Peter, 1981. *Approaches to Translation.* Pergamon Press, Oxford.

Nida, Eugene, A. *Language, culture and Translating,* (Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 1993)

Oxford Dictionary 2006

Van den Broeck, Raymond, 1981. *The limits of translatability exemplified by metaphor translation.* Poetics today

