

Translation of Metaphor: The Dilemma of Conceptualisation

ترجمة الاستعارة: معضلة تشكُّل المفهوم

Salah BOUREGBI

Department of English, TRADIL Laboratory, Annaba Badji Mokhtar University,
(ALGERIA), bouregbi.salah@univ-annaba.org

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Abstract:

Any translation is subject to mental processing. In a literary text, this processing is very problematic. Words and expressions that vehicle such transfer do not (re)produce the source faithfully. The received image could be perceived and conceived differently because of language suggestiveness. Undoubtedly, Cognitive Process of thinking is helpful in understanding and actualizing thoughts into words and expressions. But how could it be with metaphor? Is it transferrable? Are we able to reproduce and transfer the same image from the source to the target? Metaphor is shaped and mapped within the culture that produces it, but differences in culture become the clue of the problem. The way to conceptualise and perceive is dialogically related to the degree of differences and similarities of the SLT (Source Language Text) and TLT (Target Language Text).

Keywords: Conceptualisation; Metaphor; Translation; Language Transfer; Cognition

ملخص:

كيف يمكن ترجمة الاستعارة؟ هل هي أصلا قابلة للنقل من لغة الأصل الى لغة الهدف؟ هل هي مماثلة في جميع اللغات؟ هل نحن قادرون على إعادة إنتاج ونقل نفس الصور من لغة المصدر إلى لغة الهدف؟ ألا يكون هذا النقل إنتاج آخر مغاير؟ إن ترجمة الاستعارة تخضع الى سياق معرفي، ثقافي و سيكولوجي للمتلقي. هذا الواقع الترجمي للاستعارة يدعم موقفنا بأن الكلمة ليست هي المعنى و لكن وسيلة تؤدي إلى معاني متعددة تحددها القدرة المعرفية و البيئة الثقافية للمتلقي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المفهومية، الاستعارة، الترجمة، التداخل اللغوي، العرفانية

1. Introduction

Thoughts channelized through metaphor become a real dilemma for both reception in the mother tongue and perception in the target language. Specificities of languages and their suggestiveness make the transfer/translation of metaphor a real dilemma. Utterance, itself, is a kind of translation of thoughts into words, words into expressions and expressions into message(s). But whatever is done, no word ever gives the right thought and image of what we want to say: it gives more/less than what we want or expect. That is, language is suggestive, and its suggestiveness makes it indirect and open to many interpretations. The thinking process and memory operations have little efficiency because meaning processing is beyond mechanical transfer and thinking. Undoubtedly, the process of thinking is necessary in understanding, receiving, producing and actualizing thoughts into words and expressions. But how could it be with metaphor? Is it transferrable? Is it permissible in all languages? If we remove metaphor from its original context and cognitive environment, can we get the same semantic transfer, or have we to lose something of the original to make it fit the target? Reception and perception are two operations useful for meaning transmission and production. The fulcrum of all these is, no doubt, the mind: it perceives meaning in relation with the way it receives thoughts through words. But do these words reproduce exactly what is in the source language? Or do they transform the message into another production, which can deviate from its source due to the context or/and cognitive environment?

Variety in culture is richness, but this richness becomes problematic when it comes to translation and transfer. Metaphor is shaped and mapped within the culture that produces it; but differences in culture become the cause of such problem. Haidee Kruger and Jan-Louis Kruger (2017) maintain that: “Translation studies depend on the notion of translation effects—conceived either as effects on an (often idealized) individual reader or effects on a society more broadly”(p.72). Cognitive environment contributes potentially to the translation of metaphor in the TLT(Target Language Text). Its modulation depends on the way the reader makes it on the basis of what he has as culture of the target language. In the words of Jaits Toshika Saeka (2009): “Intention can be formed through a translator’s personal thought on the original text.... Intention can also reflect the social expectation of the translator’s role in a certain communicative situation” (p.230).

Language is dressed up with metaphors. Its images encode thoughts and ideas that are tied up with/to the cognitive environment and linguistic bases of the language. And so, translating is a process of transferring to the target language what the source intends to communicate. Fang Wang (2013) states that: “Given the cognitive quality of metaphor as well as the nature of translation, translation of metaphors is taken as a cognition-oriented process, in which the human brain unravels and delivers the

cognitive information of the source metaphor” (p. 2327). The paper, thus, focuses essentially on the cognitive conceptualisation of metaphor and its reception and perception in the target language, through translation.

2. Cognition

Cognition is a process of acquiring knowledge and meaning via the use of mind, experiences of senses and linguistic environment. It is the mind that processes language data and takes “as input and on the basis of their linguistic properties assigns to them formulae that ‘mean’ or ‘represent’ something of the semantic representations” (Gutt, 2014, p. 25). But the meaning we get from senses and mental processes is not ever-fixed. Furthermore, what the linguistic expressions do give as meaning is not what the expression conveys or communicates. That is to say, what we utter and read is not necessarily what this linguistic composition/structure wants to say. In the words of Gutt: “The way in which audiences get from semantic representations to propositional forms crucially involves the use of *context*” (p. 26). In the same vein, Hanna Risku (2013) maintains that: “The repetition of situations creates relative (individual and cultural) stability, but meaning is nonetheless in a constant process of change” (p. 3). Words could conceive many meanings due to intentions and contexts, the same as in painting. One palette could produce a variety of colours through intentional and contextual matching. Meaning in painting exceeds its colour design, and so is the text. Its meaning exceeds the words they produce it.

2.1 Cognition and Translation

Every word is identical to itself and does not, in most situations, hold the same meaning of any other word, except when it deviates and gets a new meaning suggested by the context. In the domain of translation, frequently, words that exist in two different languages do not hold the same meaning, except some common international words (probably coined for the sake of internationalisation), as ‘sugar,’ ‘sucre,’ ‘سكر,’ *şeker*, etc... This is what we call false friends: though words could have the same script and orthography, they do not share the same equivalence. But according to Moritz Schaefer (2017), translation could be possible through two ways: “Either via shared representations (horizontal translation) or via representations regarding propositional content (vertical translation). In order to arrive at the ‘sense of the message,’ a certain amount of information is necessary, while establishing links between items in the two languages can happen at all levels and early in the process” (p. 18).

Meanings are not ready made and stored within the brain of the individual and where the mind has only to generate them. Meaning reproduction is a mapping of thoughts and images within a cognitive conception suggested by the mental operation processing. Haidee and Jan-Louis Kruger (2017) state that:

Meaning is not stored in our brains in the form of static mental representations, but emerges dynamically by the interaction of brain, body, and environment, and consequently it does not focus on translators' isolated black boxes, but takes into account how translators' interactions with tools and artifacts and with other participants in the translation process shape their behavior and outcomes. (p. 83)

So, meaning negotiation is dialogically related to the intellect and the cognitive environment of both the source and the target languages.

Translation process is not mechanical residing in the association of one word from the source to another in the target. This process is beyond words and expressions. It is a meaning creation through the use of the mind, which stores innumerable data for such aim and through negotiation. To partake of this negotiation, the translator is in need of some strategies and choices, besides the cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The latter influence his thinking, understanding and competence to transfer correctly the meaning from the source to the target. (Risku, 2013, p. 1) In other words, the translator is supposed to "look behind the observable processes and, when doing so, refers to certain cognitive scientific concepts or approaches as a framework (which can thus be confirmed or disapproved)" (p.1).

But how can we confirm the meaning or disapprove it? What parameters do we use and suggest for us the right meaning of the transferred words and expressions? How and where does meaning locate? The text holds contexts. Thus, our understanding is dialogically related to what we have as thoughts and what we get as interpretation of the text we read and try to apprehend. Reading strategy is the gateway for interpretation and the manner we want to understand the text. Thus, our mind is directed to map a meaning related to this strategy. So, translation is not specifically a linguistic matter; it is, rather, a conceptualization based on the mind, which tries to receive and perceive it through its cognitive environmental bases. This is what Mikokaj Deckert (2017) calls conventionalisation. Deckert writes: "Conventionalisation is then differentiated from entrenchment, with the former being a property of a community and the latter being individualised, i.e. a matter of particular language users....The former being social and the later being psychological, they deal with different types of entities and are influenced by different forces"(p.123). But is conventionalization the only parameter for meaning generation? Can individualization/entrenchment be really excluded? Is language suggestiveness social or individual, or both? Is Metaphor conventional, or does it exceed any convention and falls within individual conceptualization?

3. Metaphor

Metaphor, according to *Oxford English Dictionary* (2018), is “a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable” (Metaphor). Conventionally speaking, metaphor is a figure of speech aesthetically used in the rhetoric structure of language. It is beyond common literary use and understood through cultural environment and intention of the utterance. In other words, it is the semantic deviation of the word/expression.

Metaphor is, for most people, a device of poetic imagination and ornamental aspect of speech that is used for some artistic and rhetorical purpose. Moreover, it is typically viewed as characteristic of language alone, a matter of words rather than thought or action. (Burmakovaa, 2014, p. 727) But regardless of this traditional definition, metaphor is very significant because it is related to the conceptualization of the world.

Metaphor has a cognitive function. It is, according to Annette Sjørup (2013), “necessary for us to be able to grasp and relate to abstract concepts in the world around us. [Metaphor is regarded] as adding a new layer of meaning to the concepts they refer to and have been found to be more common than generally expected”(p. 9). In the same context, Ruhan Guçlu (2017) maintains that: “Metaphors cast light upon the process of conceptualisation between two different domains: the source domain (the conceptual domain drawn upon to create metaphorical expressions) and the target domain (the conceptual domain to be described by the metaphor)”(p. 222). That is to say, metaphor is not limited to its lexical structure, but, rather, it is bound to cultural environment and can be understood and translated through the mind. The latter tries to process it after its reception, and then produces it through (re)conceptualisation. In other words, metaphor extends its cultural environment and expresses the perception of the world through a conceptual system and mind processing. It shapes how we think and behave and re/construct our utterances. (Fan, et al., 2017, p.1720)

Being cognitive, metaphor is related more to conceptualisation, which depends on the way language and thought are presented through utterances and, subsequently, to the reception and perception of messages. Goran Schmidt (2012), when introducing the theory of conceptual metaphor, claims that scholars of cognitive linguistics have shown/proved that: “There is no objective or absolute truth, rather the human experience and understanding play the central role in our interpretation of meaning: primarily on the basis of linguistic evidence”(p.31). In other words, Schmidt wants to tell us that the linguistic constituents or expressions reveal for us the metaphorical conception. They are a means for the conceptualisation, but not themselves conceptualization. They evoke metaphor, but not in themselves metaphors. That is, “The way we talk reveals the way we think” (p.33).

3.1 Metaphor and Translation

Metaphor is semantically bound to culture and the cognitive environment of language. Given such specificity, its transfer from one language to another, through equivalence seems to be problematic. The message of SLT should be transferred ‘faithfully’ to TLT and understood by the target audience. That is, the foreign reader is supposed to understand and comprehend the intention of the message in the SLT—not a new message that distorts the original. But if the constituents of the source metaphor do not have any lexical as well as cultural equivalence, here lays the matter. How can the translator help it? Can he search for another metaphor in the target that looks similar but holds different ingredients of its constitution?

Frequently, we think of metaphor as linguistic as well as cultural differences of languages. For Schmidt (2012): “Most of the terminology used is that of semantic theories, going as far back as Richards (1936): ‘image’ or ‘vehicle’ for conventional referent, ‘object’ or ‘topic’ for actual referent, ‘sense’, ‘ground’ or ‘tenor’ for similarities, i.e., analogies between them”(p11). But being subject to cognitive mechanism and processing, metaphor has been defined as a conceptual phenomenon, which is shaped by cultural knowledge and perceptual production more than linguistic variations and lexis from and to which we transfer. “Sometimes even small differences in the expression of a metaphor can point to much larger differences in culture”(p.12). Having such differences in modes of expressions and cultural environment, this disparity brings into question the possibility of the translatability of metaphor. That is, there is a problem in its mental conception and perception in the target language. Kevin P. Guzzo and Monica Naranjo (2010) maintain that:

The translation of metaphor has been treated as a part of the more general problem of ‘*untranslatability*.’ This association has two principal causes, the metaphor is considered “*indirect*” and therefore more difficult to understand and interpret. Also, the relationship between the two concepts, or domains, from which the metaphor gets its meaning is rooted in the shared cultural values of a particular society. This quality proves of particular difficulty for the translator because the meaning of the lexical constituents cannot be predicted from its referential meaning. (p.13)

So, the difficulty of translation of metaphor is not really in its equivalence: what is intriguing is that the lexical equivalence found in the target could not have the same signification, and the referent could not hold the same meaning and the same

conceptualisation of the words or/and expressions. For example, ‘owl’ in Arabic is a sign of pessimism and bad fate, whereas in Greek, and Christian world in general, it is the sign of wisdom. Guzzo and Naranjo (2010) state that:

The translator should not only identify the metaphor in context and its meaning, but furthermore realize a contextualized interpretation of the intentionality and the conceptual cohesion behind the phenomenon to recreate the discourse in the target language and culture that has the same linguistic and extra-linguistic characteristics as in the source language and culture. (p.22)

4. Metaphor and Cognition

Metaphor is the conceptualisation of our world through words and expressions. It is mapped with a structure that produces what we perceive through the processing of our mind. But structure is, in no way the meaning of the locution or the utterance. Understanding or conceiving a message is dialogically related to the processing of the mind of the reader or the listener. Being different in mental procession, even though we have the same cognitive environments, understanding differs from one individual to another. Guzzo and Naranjo (2010) point out that:

Within this perspective metaphors are not only a stylistic resource used to embellish a discourse, they become essential elements in the process of understanding, creating, and categorizing reality. The cognitive theory states that the majority of meanings are metaphorical and the adequate interpretation is reached by conceptualization, instead of reinterpretation. (p 17)

In other words, metaphor does not signify the sum of terms and expressions that compose it; it, rather, evokes a meaning conceived through its mapping by the mind process and cognitive environment. In the words of Jasmina Hanic and Tanja Pavlovi (2016): “The cognitive view of metaphor takes it not as a rhetorical by-product of objective thinking, but as the basis of the human conceptual system. Metaphors may be expressed in language accurately, for human thought processes are fundamentally metaphorical” (p.59).

Suggestiveness of language evokes a myriad meanings related to the way we perceive it. Our perception of metaphor is fundamentally cultural and

psychological.”[It] is not a distorted literal thought, but is a basic scheme by which human experience and the outside world are conceptualized”(p.59). In other words, conceptual metaphor is independent from the linguistic structure that composes it. The structure is a basis of a conception but not the conception itself. Conception is a sum of elements that make harmony and unity and form an image, a map.

5. Metaphor, Cognition and the Dilemma of Translation

Metaphor resists to translation due to its conceptualisation, which is beyond linguistic structure that composes it. That is, it is a product of ideas and thoughts—a mapped image. The cognitive process becomes, thus, a relevant tool to be used to suggest a solution and, subsequently, a translation. Mental processing of transfer of metaphor tries to establish a link between the linguistic aspects and the historical as well as cultural environments of both the source and the target languages. This cognitive processing attempts to find an adequate mapping, or at least an alternative, to the source language in the target. Hanic and Pavlovi (2016) point out that: “The awareness of conceptual metaphorical mapping systems used in the source and target languages (SL and TL respectively), when triggered by cognitive linguistics input, results in translator providing either the equivalent linguistic means to codify the mapping in the target text (TT) or finding alternative conceptual domains that are equivalent to those in the source text (ST)”(p.91). In the same vein, Ahlam Ahmed Othman(2017) maintains that:

Since different cultures conceptualize the world in varying ways, metaphors are culture-specific. The cognitive approach defines metaphor as a means to understand one domain of experience (the target domain) in terms of another (the source domain). The translatability of metaphor is an issue of conceptual systems rather than individual linguistic expressions in source and target languages. (p 14)

In the translation of metaphor, linguistic structure should be distinguished from signification and meaning processing. Linguistic structure (grammar and linguistic components) contributes in the formation of the meaning, but they cannot determine it; it is the contextual information that generates it through assessment and suggestion. Freeda Catherine Wilson (2009) states that:

Linguistic meaning must be carefully distinguished from other types of meaning, for the linguistic signification of a form does not refer to anything outside of the language itself, as does

referential, or emotive meaning, but rather to the meaningful relationships which exist within the language. On the other hand, linguistic meaning is similar to referential and emotive meanings, for all types of meaning are derived essentially from the signaling of a relationship.” (p.5)

Wilson suggests that, in order to have a feasible production of metaphor, there are three premises that are of prime importance in translation: “1) Metaphors contain meanings, 2) Metaphors are a form of pragmatics, and 3) We think in metaphors. Each of these premises has a certain degree of merit, yet no single premise can be taken in complete isolation. A view of metaphor which will work best for the translator includes certain aspects of each of these premises”(p. 8). She extends further claiming that: “Meaning differs from message in that meanings are a component of messages, while messages are generally comprised of an essence that surpasses meaning, including, but not limited to, the implied meanings, linguistic meaning, connotations and metaphor(s) derived from context” (p.9).

6. Illustrative Discussion

Language is affected by culture and the community that uses it. The conception of the world, in any community, is related to the attitudes, culture and the cognitive environment. Though disparity in culture and cognitive environment do exist in languages that have the same origins, the worst is to be found in distant languages, which have no direct link, or no link at all, in culture, attitudes and manners of thinking. Subsequently, such disparity becomes a major problem when translation comes into work. People do not think in the same manner due to differences in culture and tradition. Even in languages that have, nearly the same cultural environment, people do not conceive and think in the same way. Ali R. Al-Hasnawi (2007) gives for us two plausible concrete examples that show such difficulty, which affects the problem of transfer. He says: if you say "a man has a '*big head*'" in English, it means 'he is arrogant,' whereas in Italian 'he is clever.'" (Al-Hasnawi). The only way here, according to Hasnawi, is to look for cognitive equivalence. Though we lose its real effect, mainly in its common contextual link, we, nonetheless, keep something of the meaning and what the author wants to communicate. Probably, the degree of loss could not affect the overall meaning. So, the role of culture is very crucial in signification and conceptualisation of metaphor in the target language.

The translator, who knows both cultures, should generate cognitively the transfer of metaphor from the SL to the TL. In other words, he should re-conceptualise and remap and render the metaphor, even though he does not find the equivalence. Gutt (2014) claims that: “If the information in question stems from the encyclopedic entry of a concept that appears in the semantic representation, then it is part of the context and so

would fall outside the scope of a translation concerned with the preservation of communicative clues. It would be the responsibility of the audience to familiarize themselves with such information”(p.143). In the words of Peter Gardenfors (2007): “The meaning of an expression is something out there *in the world*. In technical terms, a *semantics* for a language is defined as a mapping from the syntactic structures to things in the world. [But there is no explanation of how] a person can *grasp* the meanings of different words”(p. 57).

Another example, suggested by J Toshioka Saeka (2009), illustrates how linguistic expressions are metaphorical and the conceptualisation could be common in all languages. He gives us two sentences: ‘Life is a journey.’ and ‘Death is sleep.’ In these two examples, Saeka shows that there is a difference between conventional and unconventional metaphors. The former is related to daily reasoning of abstract concepts. The latter is constructed by the writer/speaker, who introduces new conceptualisation of a metaphor, which could be particular and specific. The reader could not understand it, unless he manages to decode and conceptualise it through the writer’s intentionality. (p.232) In other words, the writer can use new conceptions or what is called self-metaphorisation. The interpretation of unconventional metaphorical expression needs the analysis of the concrete and the abstract altogether in order to understand their insinuation and, subsequently, the meaning they reveal.

Hasan Said Ghazala (2012) gives us another example that illustrates well the metaphorical conceptualisation of the world and the difficulty to find equivalence to it.

*‘*This room is an oven*’. This metaphor could be “conceptualized as ‘an enclosed heated compartment / an extremely hot place’ which is the vehicle for the metaphorical transfer.” (p.60). But this metaphor suggests more than one meaning and understanding. Such multiplicity in meaning makes translation and transfer of metaphor into another language very problematic: which one do we to accept? He gives us five meaning variations of the same sentence:

1-*This room is boiling.*

2-*It is an oven. It is really hell in here.*

3-*I mean it is burning here.*

4-*It is unbearable here.*

5-*It goes to blazes.*

So, it is noticeable that there is no literality in metaphor translation and transfer. Furthermore, the problem does not reside in equivalence, but, rather, in culture and the manner people use language. In other words, the absence of cultural equivalence could force the translator either to modify or paraphrase the constituents of the metaphor of the source language. In the words of Yi-chen Chen (2017):

By comprehending and analyzing the semantic motivations underpinning metaphors, a metaphor can be transferred to another language in another culture. A metaphor which has a different cognitive domain from the target language equivalent expression results in more delay and greater uncertainty in the translation process, due to the difficulty in finding an appropriate conceptual mapping and cognitive domain in the target language. (p.32)

Khalid Mansoor (2017) has pointed out other difficulties in the translation of metaphor between Arabic and English. He gives us the following examples:

1- يتبنى طريقا واضحا

The sentence literally means: “He is on the right way.” The English metaphorical meaning is “To keep a straight path.”

2- يزرع الفتنة

The sentence means: “he gossips,” while in English is “To sow division between them.”

3- القرار بين يديه

The sentence literally means “They have right to decide now.” In English, it could be translated metaphorically as “The ball is in their court now” (p.159).

In'am Nadjim Jaber (2008) has given some cases of metaphor that create ambiguity if the translator is not cognitively aware of the cultural environment and language use in the SL and TL. Her cases are from English and Arabic:

1- “Cold shoulder”: ترحيب بارد — كتف بارد

2- “Start from scratch”: البداية من نقطة الصفر --- الخدش من البداية

3- “Rule of thumb”: قاعدة عملية --- قاعدة الابهام

4- “Blood is thicker than water”: القرابة مصدر إسناد --- الدم أثخن من الماء

5- “Dog days”: (p.9) أيام كلب: أشد أيام الحرارة

7. Conclusion

For any translation of metaphor, the translator is obliged to know the socio-cultural basis of the target language so that he could process cognitively the representation of this metaphor. But if the cultural bases of the source and of the target do not meet, and if absences are found and no possibility of conceptualising it, what can we do? Sometimes, in a literary text, metaphor is beyond any cultural manifestation: what seems to be culture of a society is no more a culture of society, since the artist transfers, through deviation, its common meaning into an uncommon one. And here, it is for the reader/translator to guess through interpretation in order to reach the aim of the artist. In other words, the more the cultures of the Source Language and the Target Language are similar, the more the translator job becomes easier and the transfer manageable. The more they converge, the more the transfer fails.

The translator should keep in mind that knowing more than one language is not the only good way to translate, but he should consider any language and its specificity and the context of metaphor within the literary text: one word could be different in meaning in different contexts in the same language because of the intentionality of the writer, who never means what he says and the meaning you get from your understanding could, in no way, be the only cognitive operation that could generate this meaning. That is, metaphor is not only restricted to rhetoric; it has become a means where the artist conceives his perception of the world: the macrocosmic in general and the microcosmic in particular. So, the translator should be trained and have theoretical basis of literary criticism so that he could 'reach' the perception of the world and the way it is conceived in the text.

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