

An Evaluation of Metaphor in Three English Quranic Translations

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Abstract

This study investigates one of the most important problems in translation which is the translation of metaphor. It focuses on the translation of Quranic metaphors into English. It hypothesizes that translators of the Holy Quran fail to render these metaphors accurately. It begins with some theoretical considerations related to the definition and types of metaphors. Moreover, it surveys the different views adopted regarding the possibility of translating metaphor as well as the procedures followed. Further, it discusses some Quranic metaphors and their translations. The translations cited and discussed involve Shakir's, Ali's, and Picthall's. The study ends up with a number of conclusions.

1. Metaphor: Some Theoretical Considerations

The word metaphor derives from the Greek word 'metaphora' in which 'meta' means over and 'phora' means to carry. A metaphor is a figure of speech that is meant to be used and understood in an indirect, non-literal way. It aims at achieving a kind of resemblance between two objects without stating the similarity in full terms or using 'as' or 'like' (Busman, 1996:744).

Newmark (1988:105) defines a metaphor as *"the figurative word used, which may be one-word, or extended over any stretch of language from a collocation to the whole text."* He (1981:85) emphasizes the importance of metaphor and suggests that the comparison carried by a metaphor is based on a scientific procedure *"Metaphor is, in fact, based on a scientific procedure of resemblance between two phenomena, i.e. objects or processes."* He (1988:105) offers and defines the terms that are involved in this procedure which are: image, object, and sense. He (ibid) hypothesizes that an image refers to *"the picture conjured up by the metaphor, which may be universal, cultural or individual"*, an object to *"what is described or qualified by the metaphor"* and a sense to *"the literal meaning of the metaphor, the resemblance of the semantic area overlapping an object and image."*

Metaphors are of different types. The first distinction is drawn between live and dead metaphors. Fowler (1926:348) adopts this distinction and states that live metaphors *"are offered and accepted with consciousness of their nature as substitutes for their*

literal equivalence.” He (ibid) postulates that a metaphor is called dead “*when the speaker and hearer have ceased to be aware that the word used is literal.*” Black (1962:25) agrees that metaphors are either live or dead .He (ibid) declares that a live metaphor is a metaphor which is new or has become part of everyday linguistic usage, and that a dead metaphor refers to an expression that we no longer regard as metaphorical.

Newmark (1988:106-112) proposes the same types of metaphor but underlines the need to distinguish live metaphors into sub-types. The types of metaphor according to Newmark are:

1. Dead Metaphors: they are called dead because they are not felt by language users who use them unconsciously as ordinary or direct. Newmark (ibid: 106) suggests that these metaphors refer to “*metaphors where one is hardly conscious of the image, and frequently relate to universal terms of space and time, the main parts of the body, general ecological features and the main human activities.*” For example: foot of the page (ذيل) \leg of the chair (رجل الكرسي)\الصفحة

2. Cliché Metaphors: These types are mostly informal but they are popular, well-known and used daily and frequently. Newmark (ibid: 107) anticipates that these metaphors refer to “*metaphors that perhaps temporarily outlived their usefulness, that are saved as a substitute for clear thought, often emotively, but without corresponding to the facts of the matter.*” For example: He is one foot in the grave (هو رجل في الدنيا و رجل في القبر).

3. Stock or Standard Metaphors: These metaphors are the most formal and established types used in standard language. Newmark (ibid: 108) regards this type as “*an established metaphor which, in an informal context, is an efficient and concise method of conveying a physical and \or mental situation both referentially and pragmatically.*” For example: His wife wears the trousers (زوجته تسيطر عليه).

4. Adaptive Metaphors: This type of metaphor is an adapted stock metaphor by a speaker or writer into a new context (ibid). For example: He holds all the cards (هو يمسك كل) (الاوراق).

5. Recent Metaphors: It is a newly coined metaphor which refers to the use of a word or term that has been in use for a short time (ibid: 111-112).For example: ‘ head hunting’ (تصفية الخصوم)

6. Original Metaphors: This type of metaphor is , as Newmark(ibid:112-113) clarifies, “*created or quoted by the SL writer ...which contains the core of an important writer’s message, his personality , and his comment of life.*” For example: ‘ in the white lamb days’(في ايام الوداعة البيضاء)

Dickins (1998:261) also accepts that metaphors are of two types: dead and live. He (ibid) comments that dead metaphors *“are the kinds of things which are recognizably metaphorical, but which are included as senses of words in dictionaries.”* He(ibid:262) adds that *“By contrast , live metaphors may be similarly crudely characterized as the kind of things which are recognizably metaphorical, but which are not included as senses of words in dictionaries.”*

Unconvinced with the live-dead metaphor classification, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) suggest their own typology. They classify metaphors into two types: linguistic and conceptual. They heavily emphasize the importance of the latter because it is related to human thinking. They (ibid: 3) postulate that *“Metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and we relate to other people.”*

After this simple revision of the definition and types of metaphors, it is time to go further to a more complicated topic which is the translation of metaphor to which the next section is devoted.

2. The Translation of Metaphor

Generally speaking, there is a long-term disagreement among scholars concerning the translatability of metaphor. There are three conflicting views each of which has its own justifications. The first view, adopted by Darbeinet and Vinay, refuses the possibility of translating metaphor. The second view, represented by Kloefer and Reiss, underlines the need to translate metaphor throughout the use of word –for- word translation. The third view, encouraged by Newmark, postulates that there are certain metaphors which are translatable and, at the same time, there others which are untranslatable (Brevik, 2008). Below are some of these opinions.

Nida (1964:159) denies the untranslatability of any text including metaphorical ones. He offers two approaches to be followed by translators. The first approach is formal equivalence (correspondence) which refers to literal translation because it emphasizes both the content and form of the message and makes the reader as if he is in the source language context. His second approach is dynamic (functional) equivalence, i.e. sense for sense, which can be used if the first approach fails. He (ibid) declares that dynamic equivalence *“aims at complete awareness of expression ,and tries to relate the receptor to modes of behavior relevant within the context of his own culture; it does not insist that he understand the cultural patterns of the source-language context in order to comprehend the message.”*

Dagut (1976:28) admits, to certain extent, the possibility of translating metaphor but refers to the role of culture in hardening the task of the translator: *“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”*. Snell-Hornby (1995:41) also accepts the translatability of metaphor and emphasizes the role

of culture as well as the temporal and spatial distance that separates the cultural background of source text and target audience in the process of translation.

To solve any problem facing translators when translating metaphors, Newmark (1988:106) and Dickins (2003:155-158) suggest a number of strategies. These are:

1. To reproduce the same image in the TL.
2. To replace the image in the SL with a standard TL image that does not clash with the TL culture.
3. To translate a metaphor into a simile retaining the image.
4. To translate a metaphor into a simile plus sense or metaphor plus sense.
5. To convert a metaphor into sense.
6. To delete the SL metaphor at all if it is redundant or has no particular purpose.

3. The Translation of Quranic Metaphors: Discussion

To check the validity of the hypothesis stated, a number of Quranic metaphors are chosen. This does not mean that they are the only metaphors found, on the contrary, there are too many metaphors and to discuss the translation of each one needs a lot of time and space. The study focuses on a number of cases in which a comparison is carried out among three well-known English Quranic translations: Mohammad Habib Shakir's, Yusuf Ali's, and Marmduke Picthall's. To evaluate each of these translations, i.e. whether it is successful or not, and to what degree, the discussion is divided into sub-sections in terms of the point(s) raised and emphasized.

1. Allah (ta'ala) says:

"ومن الناس من يعبد الله على حرف فإن أصابه خير اطمأن به وأن أصابته فتنة انقلب على وجهه خسر الدنيا و
الآخرة ذلك هو الخسران المبين (الحج: ١١)"

حرف

is a metaphor in this verse which refers to someone who has certain stand, case or situation. It is a common metaphor which is used in Arabic and has an antonym which is سبيعين حرف which means of different stands, cases, or situations.

حرف is different from جرف which is also used elsewhere in the Quran. Notice the three translations of this verse and see how the translators mistranslate the metaphor mentioned by using the second (جرف) instead of the first(حرف):

Shakir: *“And among men is he who serves Allah [standing] on the verge, so that if good befalls him he is satisfied therewith, but if a trial afflict him he turns back headlong; he loses this world as well as the hereafter; that is a manifest loss.”*

Ali : *“There are among men some who serve Allah, as it were, on the verge: if good befalls them, they are, therewith, well content; but if a trial comes to them, they turn on their faces: they lose both this world and the Hereafter: that is loss for all to see!”*

Picthall: *“And among mankind is he who worshippeth Allah upon a narrow marge so that if good befalleth him he is content therewith, but if a trial befalleth him, he falleth away utterly. He loseth both the world and the Hereafter. That is the sheer loss.”*

It can be recognized that no one of these translations is acceptable because Shakir and Ali use ‘on the verge’ and Picthall uses ‘a narrow marge’ as alternatives. The Acceptable rendering would be:

“And among men is he who serves Allah on a firm stand , so that if good befalls him he is satisfied therewith, but if a trial afflict him he turns his back to be with the disbelievers ; he loses this world as well as the hereafter; that is a manifest loss.”

2. Allah (ta’ala) says:

"فَأَيْنَمَا تُولُوا فَتَمَّ وَجْهَ اللَّهِ (البقرة: ١١٥)"

وجه الله here is a metaphor because Allah has no physical dimension that may be

recognized into parts . Have a look on its translations:

Shakir: *“And Allah’s is the East and the West, therefore, whither you turn, thither is Allah’s purpose.”*

Ali : *“To Allah belong the east and the West: Whithersoever ye turn, there is the presence of Allah.”*

Picthall: *“Unto Allah belong the East and the West, and whithersoever ye turn, there is Allah’s Countenance.”*

All of the three translators avoid translating this metaphor literally. They translate the sense, i.e. the idea that Allah is everywhere. They use different renderings. Shakir uses

‘Allah’s purpose’, Ali uses ‘the presence of Allah’, and Picthall uses ‘Allah’s Countenance’. For one reason or another, they do not use, for example, Allah’s Face.

The translators contradict themselves in a similar situation:

"يد الله فوق ايديهم(الفتح: ١٥)"

Where يد الله is translated literally into “the Hand of Allah\God” by the translators:

Shakir: “*The Hand of Allah is above their hands*”

Ali : “*The Hand of God is over their hands*”

Picthall: “*The Hand of Allah is above their hands*”

This duality in the treatment of approximately the same metaphor (parts of the body) shows that they do not have a fixed strategy and this generates certain misunderstanding and confusion to the reader which makes him search better alternatives.

3. Allah (ta’ala) says:

"ختم الله على قلوبهم وعلى سمعهم وعلى ابصارهم غشاوة (البقرة: ٧)"

In this verse, the verb ختم is used metaphorically. Examine its translations:

Shakir: “Allah has set a seal upon their hearts and upon their hearing and there is a covering over their eyes,”

Ali: “Allah hath set a seal on their hearts and on their hearing, and on their eyes is a veil;”

Picthall: “Allah hath sealed their hearing and their hearts, and on their eyes there is a covering”

It can be noticed that both Shakir and Ali prefer to translate this verb into ‘set a seal (V+NP)’ while Picthall translates it into ‘sealed (V)’. If a comparison is carried between these two, it can be touched that the latter is more acceptable than the first. Set a seal literally refers to:

(وضع ختما)

While sealed refers to: (ختم)

So there is no need to use alternatives if the closest rendering exists. This means that

Picthall's is the successful translation and it is preferred to Shakir's and Ali's and has to be chosen as a standard translation of the metaphor mentioned.

A similar example which shows the translators' disagreement exists in:

"وأخفظ لهما جناح الذل من الرحمة (الاسراء: ٢٤)"

Where the human being here is treated as if 'he' is a bird that has to lower 'his' wing as a sign of kindness. This verse is translated into:

Shakir: "And make yourself submissively gentle to them with compassion."

Ali : "And, out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility."

Picthall: "And lower unto them the wing of submission through mercy."

It is clear that both Ali and Picthall translate the metaphor (lower...the wing) literally preserving the same SL metaphor while Shakir translates the sense, i.e. translates a metaphor into non-metaphor. Shakir, here, is criticized because he abandons the literal translation of the metaphor with no justification. His translation would be more successful if it follows the same procedure of the original. This means that Ali's and Picthall's are adequate renderings and preferred to be used as standard translations of this metaphor.

4 .Allah (ta'ala) says:

"وقيل يا ارض ابلي ماءك و ياسماء اقلعي وغيض الماء وقضي الامر(هود: ٤٤)"

In this translation, all the three translations agree to translate literally the metaphorical verb

ابلي

into the English verb swallow up\down:

Shakir: "And it was said: O earth, swallow down your water, and O cloud, clear away; and the water was made to abate and the affair was decided."

Ali : "Then the word went forth: "O earth! Swallow up thy water, and O sky! Withhold (thy rain)!" and the water abated, and the matter was ended."

Picthall: *“And it was said: O earth! Swallow thy water and, O sky! Be cleared of clouds! And the water was made to subside. And the commandment was fulfilled.”*

This means that each of these translations can be treated as a standard one because the translators use the same procedure and the same verb to convey the metaphor found.

4. Conclusions

The conclusions that the study arrive at involve the following:

1. Although there are numerous attempts to translate Quranic metaphors, no one of these translations fully succeed to be a perfect rendering of the original. Each of which has its own shortcomings that could not be ignored. They might succeed in certain situations, and this could not be underestimated, but, at the same time, there are intolerable mistakes.
2. There are no fixed procedures that Quranic translators follow and can further help in predicting their treatment of next metaphors because sometimes, for example, to convey the same idea that has been handled before, the translator uses another lexical item and/or grammatical structure. This leads to generate certain misunderstanding and confusion to the reader.
3. It is believed that some of the mistakes that translators fall in are attached to their dependence on others translations and not on the original text when they want to translate; therefore, there attempts seem to be the same and this is so clear when they all fail to convey a particular metaphor following the same procedure.
4. There is an urgent need to adopt a new version of the translation of Quranic metaphors that takes into consideration past failures with a clear and systematic strategy.

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تقييم للمجاز في ثلاث ترجمات قرآنية الى اللغة الانجليزية

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المدرس: جاسم خليفة سلطان

الملخص

تسلط الدراسة الحالية الضوء على احدى اهم مشكلات الترجمة الا وهي ترجمة المجاز القرآني الى اللغة الانجليزية.تفترض الدراسة ان مترجمي المجاز القرآني يفشلون في ترجمته بصورة صحيحة. تبدأ الدراسة بتعريف المجاز و ذكر انواعه المختلفة.تنتقل بعد ذلك الى ذكر وجهات النظر التي تتناول امكانية او عدم امكانية ترجمة المجاز.يتم بعد ذلك ذكر عدد من المجازات القرآنية ومناقشة و مقارنة ثلاث ترجمات تشمل ترجمة كل من محمد حبيب شاكر و ترجمة يوسف علي و ترجمة مارمادوك بكتال.تختم الدراسة بذكر مجموعة من الاستنتاجات.