

A Contrastive Analysis of the Use of Metaphors in Arabic and English Political Discourse: Feature Articles as a Case in Point

Ahmad Assiri¹, Yousef Sahari², Hashim Asiri³

¹King Abdul-Aziz University, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Saudi Arabia

²Bisha University, Faculty of Sciences and Arts in Belgarn., Saudi Arabia

³King Khalid University, Faculty of Languages and Translation, Saudi Arabia

Abstract: *Without exception, the use of metaphors is a common issue in various disciplines including literature, linguistics, social studies, political science, and translation studies. Metaphors have attracted so much interest, thanks to the effective role they can play in communicating messages. This study situates itself in the fields of both translation of metaphors and political arena. It tackles the use of metaphors in political feature articles translated from English into Arabic, an area that has markedly been under-researched to the best of my knowledge. Therefore, the notable presence of the purposeful use of metaphors in feature articles as well as the ways in which metaphors are tackled when such texts are translated from English into Arabic have motivated this research in its attempt to fill a gap in this field by investigating the use of metaphors in political feature articles translated from English into Arabic.*

Keywords: Metaphor; Arabic Language; Contrastive Analysis; Political Discourse; Translation

1. Introduction

Metaphor, as an important type of figurative language, has received increasing attention in various knowledge domains over the past sixty years, thereby suggesting that the subject is inexhaustible, as author in [1] confirms. Metaphor has been studied in linguistics, rhetoric, psychology, philosophy, epistemology, political science, and of course translation, among others.

Nowhere is the use of metaphor more poignant and pervading than in political discourse, while media houses provide the platform for the propagation of political discourse and its messages. The close relationship between politics and the media has been called into question for quite some time now. As author in [2] observed, “for years, politically involved members of the community have been convinced that their newspapers often contain propaganda rather than news”. Furthermore, as author in [3] observes, the question of how public speakers attempt to persuade their listeners has informed much of modern political analysis, in spreading propaganda and influencing opinion through the media. Much of the analysis has focused on the use of metaphor to achieve that, with recent publications on political discourse dedicated to this figure of speech (see author [4] and authors [5] and [6]).

2. Methodology

The published materials (articles and books) with a particular reference to the concept of metaphor were searched in the literature of linguistics and translation studies. With the aim of identifying relevant articles to be included for this critical review, a search of three main scholarly repositories, namely Oxford Scholarly Editions, Google Scholar, and ProQuest/Literature Online was carried out using metaphor as the main search enquiry. Twenty-nine relevant resources were identified and selected to be

included in this review, with the aim to extrapolate the concept of metaphor and its applications within translation studies. As the focus of this review on the application of metaphors within Arabic language, it was necessary to conduct a further search on this theoretical concept with regards to available peer-reviewed Arabic social sciences periodical journals and publications. The inclusion criterion was based on examining the titles, along with abstracts within the selected articles and books (Figure 1).

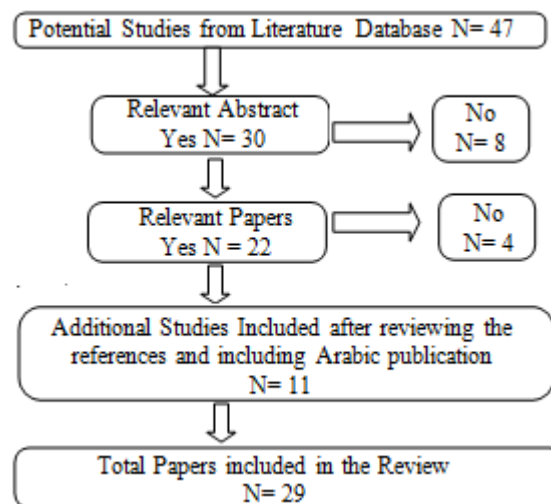


Figure 1: Process of selection of articles to be included in the review

3. Results and Discussions

Linguists and translation researchers have been fascinated with the principle of figurative language since it is inseparably linked to core aspects of translation, including definition, theory, and practice. The review of published materials has revealed that scholars have stipulated influential theories to define the concept of figurative language particularly metaphor and its usage across different

languages and on different contexts. The following section is devoted for the discussion of metaphor as manifested within Arabic and English language.

3.1 The Concept of Metaphor From lexicographical perspectives

The translation of the English word “metaphor” into Arabic is a source of controversy. Many bilingual dictionaries and English-Arabic literary glossaries provide different views concerning the definition and translation of the concept. Some define metaphor as ‘الاستخدام المجازي في مقابل الاستخدام الحقيقي للكلمة’: ‘the figurative use of words and expressions against the unreal meaning’. Others differentiate between two terms: ‘المجاز والاستعارة’: “trope” and “metaphor”. For instance, authors [7] translated metaphor as ‘المجاز، الاستعارة’, considering perhaps this word as another word for “trope”, which they translated in the same dictionary as ‘المجاز: كلمة أو ’: ‘a trope is a figurative word or expression’. When they translated the Arabic word ‘استعارة’: ‘metaphor’ in the Arabic section, they chose the word ‘metaphor’ as an English equivalent. Moreover, authors [8], author [9], author [10]; author [11] adopted the Arabic word ‘الاستعارة’ as an equivalent for metaphor. Therefore, the English word “metaphor” will be used henceforth as the appropriate equivalent for the Arabic term ‘الاستعارة’: ‘Istaàra’.

3.2 Metaphor in English literature

Non-Arab rhetoricians and linguists have comprehensively tackled the concept of metaphor. In the English language, for instance, one can find many different and complex definitions for metaphor. According to author [12] in the Longman New Universal Dictionary, metaphor is “a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is applied to another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them”. Such a definition considers the notion of borrowing a word or phrase (for another’s sake) to affirm the relationship between two unrelated ideas or objects. Author [13] asserts that metaphor happens when a unit of discourse refers unconventionally to a process, concept or object. This definition of metaphor, which seeks to broaden the scope of metaphor, is based on the fuzzy premise of “unconventional” use of discourse, which is also problematic as it does not define the nature of such “unconventional” use.

Other definitions in various sources and dictionaries have almost the same view in considering a broad sense of similarity in metaphor even though these definitions neglect how the metaphor is structured. For instance, according to author [14], a metaphor is “a figure of speech in which a term or phrase is applied to something to which is not literally applicable in order to suggest a resemblance”.

With regard to classification, “many linguists have tried to classify metaphors and confine them to a certain number [of types]” author [15]. Among those linguists is author [16] who offered seven types: dead, cliché, stock, cultural, adopted, recent, and original metaphors. However, following author [17], it may not be easy today to clearly differentiate between dead and cliché metaphors, for instance. Author

[18] offers another classification scheme where he distinguishes four types of metaphor: (a) humanising, (b) animistic, (c) abstract, and (d) synesthetic. Following author [19], these types lack “clear cut boundaries between these proposed types” even though they consider a variety of aspects including the structure and nature of the borrowed concept and usage. For more insights on metaphor types, see author [15], where he includes various metaphor types that consider a variety of aspects from which metaphors can be looked at.

3.3 Metaphor in Arabic Literature

Metaphor has been of concern among Arab linguists and rhetoricians in both pre-Islamic and post-Islamic eras. Not surprisingly, the early study of rhetoric can be traced back to the 8th century, when ancient Arab scholars started publishing in various Arabic disciplines, including syntax, phonics, prosody, and rhetoric. Rhetoric, then, was not an independent discipline until Abu-Obaidah Māmar bin Al-Muthanna dictated¹ a book in the 8th century entitled ‘مجاز القرآن’: literally *The Trope of the Holy Qurān*. This key book tried to distinguish between the metaphoric and non-metaphoric use of expressions in the Holy Qurān [20]. Thereafter, many publications have addressed various aspects of rhetoric as a dependent discipline, such as ‘البيان والتبيين’: ‘The Eloquence and Demonstration’ by Al-Jahiz, the founder of rhetorical studies. In this book, edited by author [21], Al-Jahiz identified metaphor ‘الاستعارة’: ‘Isti’aara’ as “the borrowing of one aspect of a word and attributing it to another”.

Undeniably, ‘أسرار البلاغة’: literally ‘*The Secrets of Rhetoric*’, is another key publication in the field, written by Imam Abdul-Qahir Al-Jerjany, one of the most prominent rhetorical studies from the 11th century, edited by author [22]. Al-Jerjany defines metaphor as “borrowing the attribute of one aspect and attributing it to something else, in order to imply the characteristics of that aspect to the other aspect”.

Although these ancient Arab rhetoricians widely addressed the concept of metaphor, ambiguity remains, for none of them distinguished metaphor from other similar rhetorical devices that are also based on similarity between two different objects. However, Al-Sakkaki, a well-known Arab rhetorician of the 12th century, dedicated the third chapter of his pioneering work entitled ‘مفتاح العلوم’, literally *The Key of Knowledge/ Sciences*, edited by author [23], to rhetoric and semantics. He offered, perhaps, the most panoramic view of metaphors when he pointed out that metaphor can be recognised in utterance or writing “where you mention one of the entities involved in simile while intending the other, claiming that the similised entity has become the one similised-to, and providing a proof that by asserting the similised entity one of the prominent features of the similised-to entity”.

¹ The early form of publications in the Arab world was known as ‘كتب الأملی’: ‘dictated publications’, where scholars taught orally while their students wrote down what they said.

Ancient Arab rhetoricians addressed two major types of metaphor, explicit and implicit, based on the absence of topic or image, respectively. An example of the explicit metaphor is ‘رأيت أسداً’: ‘I saw a lion’ where ‘المشبه: إنسان’: ‘the topic: human’ is removed while ‘المشبه به: الأسد’: ‘the image: lion’ is presented. An example of the implicit metaphor is ‘تعضنا الأيام بنابها’: ‘days bite us with fangs’, where the image, the human or predator, is omitted although offering a sign of the removed item: ‘bite’ and ‘fangs’.

Metaphor definitions provided by ancient Arab linguists and rhetoricians focus on the broad sense of the phenomenon as a rhetorical tool that carries meanings beyond the literal sense. For example, the definitions offered by Abu-Obaidah Māmar bin Al-Muthanna, Al-Jahiz, and Al-Jerjany intertwine many rhetorical tools as they apply to simile, metonymy, trope, and so on. However, it seems that Al-Sakkaki takes into account the variations between these concepts and, as a result, offers a peculiar definition that distinguishes metaphor from other types of figurative speeches. Due to such complexity in defining this phenomenon, the word ‘metaphor’ is henceforth deemed to be an equivalent of the Arabic term ‘الاستعارة’ but with the limits suggested above by Al-Sakkaki.

3.4 Feature Articles

Feature articles are a prominent category in the media that one finds in periodical publications such as newspapers and magazines [24]. The existence of feature articles is rooted in the birth of newspapers as an integral component of press activity, which began in 1622 in the English-speaking world and 1880 in the Arab world. They address a variety of daily life affairs, such as social, political, sporty and commercial issues, and provide a detailed and analytical view of what has happened or is expected to happen in a well-structured manner. Feature articles render newspapers and magazines informative, and effectively provide “something more than a dry account of the events of the day” [25].

One could reasonably claim that feature articles always target a certain audience. Those who write for the public tend to use ordinary language to make their writings accessible, whereas authors writing to elites rely on a higher register. Writers are thus required to vary their language depending on the target audience.

Political feature articles are usually written with different classes of readers and issues in mind. Broadly speaking, feature articles can be persuasive, informative, supportive, instigative, critical, delighting or mocking. Interestingly, it is worth noting that either printed or online newspapers, the normal home of feature articles, have tended to limit themselves to one field, such as policy, economy, sport, culture, religion or social issues. Consequently, such specialty has often ended up with some Arab governments imposing censorship over those who dare write on political issues.

4. The employment of metaphor in feature articles

Not only is metaphor a tool that writers strive to use when writing creatively, it is also a vital part of our thinking system. According to authors [26], “much of our ordinary conceptual system and the bulk of our everyday conventional language are structured and understood primarily in metaphorical terms”. Therefore, creative writers naturally rely on such a tool as metaphor to express their ideas effectively in any issue they address. “[Metaphors] also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details”.

Considering the significant presence of metaphor in different situations, let us recall the following example discussed regularly amongst social activists and writers.

Family is construction. الأسرة بيت / بناء

Family is conceptualised here as a home/construction that consists of many fundamental or secondary components. When writers tackle different issues relevant to family matters, they draw many pictures related to this metaphorical expression, such as the following:

Divorce makes a family collapse. يؤدي الطلاق لانهايار الأسرة

The husband and wife are the two pillars of the family. الزوج والزوجة هما ركننا الأسرة

Marriage house/marriage nest. بيت الزوجية / عش الزوجية

Children are an adornment of the home. الأطفال زينة الدار

Therefore, the metaphoric expressions employed here are ways in which people think and tackle such an issue, and this is what is meant by a “conduit metaphor” when Reddy referred to it in authors [27]: “ideas are objects, linguistic expressions are containers, and communication is about sending objects through those containers”. The next two sub-sections will illustrate, with further detail, that the purpose of employing metaphors in feature articles is either aesthetical or ideological.

5. The aesthetic value of using metaphor in feature articles

The systematic ubiquity of metaphor, as acknowledged above, demands a far deeper reflection on the value it offers when employed in feature articles. Metaphor is a strong and effective rhetorical tool used in the writing of feature articles for various purposes. For the purpose of elaborating the aesthetic value of this instrument, the examples below indicates how mindless obedience and contradictory stances may end by bringing up the image of a trap which attracts birds but end up dramatically. The metaphoric expression ‘شرك وشبائك الديكتاتورية’: ‘the dictatorship’s mantrap and snare’ used to portray such a case stands out, partly because it represents the consequences of a dubious political dependency where today’s proponents could be tomorrow’s

victims. Hence, one may confirm that the use of this metaphoric expression helps the writer draw a clear image of the tragic consequences when people mindlessly follow wrongful politicians.

A metaphor can also be used to show the relevance of something, say an event, for the purpose of creating contrast. This is possible because metaphors possess the ability to exaggerate and emphasise events [28] and [29]. Seemingly well-aware of such a capacity in the metaphor, consider the following example that describes the invitation extended by the British PM to three allegedly rulers a hat-trick of despotic guests. This metaphoric expression drives the point clearly as scoring three goals by the same player is deemed to be an outstanding achievement. The author draws this image to describe the big efforts the PM put to hospitalise three despotic politicians.

6. Conclusion

The preceding review has established that there is consensus among researchers in various fields and disciplines that metaphor plays a critical role in political discourse. It helps shape and communicate the political message or debate in poignant and vivid ways that ordinary language cannot easily do. The review has also shown that the discussion of metaphor occupies a large space in the political discourse debate and language communication in general. A cognitive function of metaphor helps build a metaphor-based conceptual system of meaning that aids in thinking and understanding of abstract concepts and ideas that cannot be readily or easily expressed in ordinary language. In translation, metaphor remains a major concern in translation studies, irrespective of the translation approach adopted — be it traditional, prescriptive, dynamic, functional or cognitive. In understanding political metaphor, Critical Discourse Analysis and Contrastive Analysis can be useful tools for both the analysis of metaphors in their original environments and assessment of their translations into other languages. Whether original or translated, political metaphors continue to effect change in people's perception of political issues.

References

- [1] Black E. Metaphor, simile and cognition in Golding's *The Inheritors*. *Language and Literature*. 1993 Jan;2(1):37-48.
- [2] Rosenbloom H. *Politics and the Media*. Scribe Publications; 1978.
- [3] Ponton D. *Meaning politics: A manual of political discourse analysis*. Seattle, WA: Amazon; 2016.
- [4] Musolff A. *Metaphor and political discourse. Analogical Reasoning in Debates about Europe*. Basingstoke. 2004;14.
- [5] Carver T, Pikalo J, editors. *Political language and metaphor: Interpreting and changing the world*. Routledge; 2008 Mar 4.
- [6] Charteris-Black, J, Wang J. (2014). *Analysing political speeches: Rhetoric, discourse and metaphor*. *Journal of Language and Politics*. 2018 Jan 1;17(3):447-9.
- [7] Ba'labakkī M. *Al-Maurid: A Modern English-Arabic Dictionary*. Dar al-ilm Lilmalayin; 1971.
- [8] Wehba M, Al-Muhandis K. *Dictionary for Language and literature*. Bayrūt: Lebanon Library; 1984.
- [9] Fathi I. *Dictionary for Literary Terms*. Sfax: Al-Arabyiah; 1986.
- [10] Ghazala HS. *A dictionary of stylistics and rhetoric english-arabic*; 2000.
- [11] Ghazala H. *Al-Jamiè Fi Ttarjamah*; 2006
- [12] Procter P, editor. *Longman new universal dictionary*. Longman; 1982.
- [13] Goatly A. *The language of metaphors*. Routledge; 2011. <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/feature+article>
- [14] Definition of metaphor | Dictionary.com [Internet]. www.dictionary.com. 2016 [cited 26 December 2016]. Available from: <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/metaphor?s=t>
- [15] Yaseen AH. *The commonest types of metaphor in English*. *Journal Of Al-Frahedis Arts*. 2013;3(15):52-69.
- [16] Newmark P. *A textbook of translation*. New York: Prentice hall; 1988.
- [17] Ghazala H. *Literary translation: a literary stylistics-based perspective*. 2014. p. 1-29.
- [18] Leech G. *Semantics*. 2nd ed. London: Penguin; 1985.
- [19] Ereksoussi ZM. *The translation of Qur'an metaphors: Procedures and examples*. *Journal of Languages and Literatures, Umm Al-Qurma University*. 2014;13: 49-99.
- [20] Ubeyde E. *Mamer el-Müsenna et-Teymi, Mecazu'l-Kur'an, nsr. M. Fuat Sezgin, Kahire*. 1988.
- [21] Jāhiz AA. *Al-Bayān wa al-tabyīn*. 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn. Beyrouth, Dār al-Jīl. 2003.
- [22] Shakir M . *Asrār al -balāghah by Al -Jerjani*. Bayrūt: Maktabat Al-'Aşrīyah; 2002.
- [23] Zarzour N. *Miftah Al-Uloum by Al-Sakkaki*. Bayrūt: Dar El-Kutub El- Elmyiah; 1987.
- [24] Feature article [Internet]. [TheFreeDictionary.com](http://www.thefreedictionary.com/feature+article). 2019 [cited 26 December 2019]. Available from: <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/feature+article>
- [25] Conboy M. *The language of newspapers: Socio-historical perspectives*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing; 2010.
- [26] Lakoff G, Johnson M. *Conceptual metaphor in everyday language*. *The journal of Philosophy*. 1980 Aug 1;77(8):453-86.
- [27] Lakoff G, Johnson M. *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago press; 2008 Dec 19.
- [28] Ortony A, Andrew O, editors. *Metaphor and thought*. Cambridge University Press; 1993 Nov 26.
- [29] Newman SJ. *Aristotle's Definition of Rhetoric in the Rhetoric: The Metaphors and their Message*. *Written Communication*. 2001 Jan;18(1):3-25.