

# ***Translation at the Crossroad of Rhetorical Troop: Translating Metaphor in the Light of Relevance Theory***

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## **Abstract**

The present study discusses the translation of metaphor as a stylistic element in the light of relevance theory. The data of the study consists of three assorted metaphors that have been used in French and their English translations. These texts have been culled from some published (Achebe (1958) *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and unpublished literary material. The study focuses on the identification and analysis from the perspective of relevance theory of the metaphorical expressions used in the texts and explains the translation procedures resorted to by the translators in renderings such expression. The study also adopts the operational framework of metaphor translation procedures based on the Source Text and target text approach developed by Vinnay and Darbelnet (1995) and Showqi (2014). Although no single theory of translation is capable to analyse the phenomenon of metaphor in translation, the article relies on relevant theory in order to develop a view on the translatability of metaphor in literary texts. The metaphors analysed in this study reveal the thinking pattern of people in the society. It equally provides a step in the right direction to understand the phenomenon of metaphor translation in the light of relevance theory. We do not propose that our theory is the only answer to all the challenges of translation. Despite the usefulness of the theory, the translator's competence and knowledge are equally necessary to faithfully render metaphorical expressions from one language into another.

**Keywords:** metaphor, translation, relevance theory, faithfulness, context.

## **1. Introduction**

Metaphor is regarded as a rhetorical device. It makes comparison between two unlike elements but this comparison is implied rather than stated. It is a condensed simile. Generally, metaphor describes one thing in terms of another. The contemporary study of metaphor from the point of view of cognitive linguistics considers human thought processes

as largely metaphorical and that the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another Lakoff and Johnson (1980:3). Metaphor demonstrates a resemblance between two similar things: the image and the object. The cognitive linguistics defined them as the target domain and the source domain. The constraint that limits the production of metaphor is that there must be a similarity between the two entities compared. If the two entities are not similar in some respects, we cannot metaphorically use one to talk about the other (ibid.:12).

From the pragmatic point of view, metaphor has to do with conceptualising and understanding our surrounding. Thus, metaphoring must account for contextual issues that make up the environment that it tries to conceptualize Omotosho (2014:107). Since metaphoring is an attempt to conceptualize our world through wording, fundamentally, basic awareness of the structure of our environment is required in order to be able to properly represent it. The making of a metaphor is a pragmatic process that engages the mind and sets it in motion to draw from the resources of the environment to paint the picture of a phenomenon. “Metaphoring is a sociolinguistic as well as a psychological process of recreating our world. It is a significant process of explaining how people, despite differences in culture, religion and class are able to communicate across geographical distances and historical periods. It tests the cognitive capability of people and stretches it in order to create space for the new experience that it engenders. It involves constructing and selecting social realities. When these social realities manifest in metaphorical forms, the study of such forms requires a pragmatic approach which would help to unearth them for better understanding. Such an approach would help to determine the content of the reality formed, how it is formed, apprehended, expressed and transformed Omotosho (2014:107). Contrary to the view of Lakoff and Johnson (1980:3) that metaphors structure the actions that we perform. Mey (2001: 308) affirm that it is our activity of living in the world that structures our thoughts and concepts, including the metaphors we use. The conceptual approach to metaphor presupposes that the conceptual system provisionally restructured for the occasion and a new adhoc category is created.

The notion of metaphor as conceptual structure is a particularly valuable linguistic theory of metaphor because it suggests a difference between having a metaphorical mapping of two disparate domains already existing as a unit in one’s conceptual system and the mental act of putting together that same metaphor for the first time Omotosho (2014:108). From the above

discussion, we can deduce that the notion of metaphor gives us a systematic means of structuring conceptual domains by means of metaphor which can be used profitably for the analysis of both literary and non-literary discourse. Metaphoric concepts constitute a new way of thinking; they have power to create a new reality that is meant to re-order the conceptual system (ibid.:108). Metaphor is culture-bound. The metaphor an author uses depicts his life experience and culture. It is not uncommon that speakers of one language find it difficult to understand the metaphors of another language. This is one of the problems of metaphor translation. Metaphor transforms the truth of an experience as the truth of knowledge to an established public world. Hence, those who do not live in the same established community usually have different experience which results in the different conceptual understanding of the meaning of such metaphors. In view of these problems, the translator does not render the source text metaphor word because he probably realises that the most important information should be rendered in a way so as to make the target reader understand the meaning of this metaphor without too much processing efforts by mobilising the different translation strategies to render the metaphor functionally.

## **2. Metaphor, Context Meaning in literary Text**

There are different views on the place of context in meaning relations. This is why some linguists consciously or unconsciously exclude it. It is argued that the meaning of a sentence being ambiguous or anomalous can be ascertained without the knowledge of its context Esimaje (2003:233). All those who speak a language must know the meaning of a sentence before they use it in any meaningful context. Ogden and Richard 1949:11 affirms that knowing that two sentences are similar in meaning means that they can be used in similar contexts and that in setting up abstract relationships between sentences without considering what they refer to, is like describing all the equivalencies in a measuring system without indicating what that system really is. Stating meaning equivalences, is not stating meaning and in fact there is no proof that knowing the meaning of a sentence excludes the context in which it is used (ibid.:11). The significance of context in meaning relation has been established in some works and differentiated from linguistic context, as context of situation. These works are credited to Malinowski (1923:301) and Firth (1957:11) both of whom were concerned with stating meaning in terms of the context in which language is used, even though in different ways. Malinowski (1923:301) argues that living languages must not be treated as dead ones, torn from their context of situation but seen as used by people. Language as used in books is not at all the norm, it represents a far-fetched derivative

function of language, for language of human experience which is perceptual, biological cultural and varies from one culture to another.

Metaphor is the difference between the intended and the stated meaning and the receiver of the message must rely on a set of principles to understand the statement. If for example, at a funeral when someone says “she kicked the bucket” this is a reference to the person in the casket. But while “milking a cow, on another occasion, that same person says “ she kicked the bucket”, the reader must know that the message is prepared to understand the same phrase differently in each situation Freed (2009:23). The difference in comprehension exists in factors external to the utterance itself. This is what Grice (1989:370) refers to cooperative principle, which relies on speaker-listener cooperation in order to bridge or at least reduce the gap between semantic meaning and contextual meaning. Sperber and Wilson (2001:471) describes the functioning of the cooperative principle thus:

When an utterance has several linguistically possible interpretations; the best hypothesis for the hearer to choose is the one that best satisfies the cooperative principle and maxims. Sometimes, in order to explain why a maxim has been (genuinely or apparently) violated, the hearer has to assume that the speaker believes and was trying to communicate more than explicitly said. Such implicitly communicate propositions or implicatures, are widely seen along with presupposition’s illocutionary force) as the main subject matter of pragmatics

The above suggests that metaphor translation is context dependent. This account for the difficulty in the translation of metaphor. According to Barthes (1972:11), to interpret a text is not to give it a more or less free meaning, but on the contrary, to appreciate what plural constitutes it. This is seen in the following example: “Love is a journey. Time is money. Argument is war”. “Eagles do not breed doves” among others. These texts are galaxy of signifiers that can be reversible.

Firth (1957:11) sees context of situation in the same light as grammar, as means of linguistic description whose purpose was a statement of meaning, as one way through which a linguist handles a language. Sperber and Wilson (2001:15) affirm that the context of an utterance is the set of premises used in interpreting an utterance. The context therefore, is a psychological construct, a subset of the hearer’s assumptions about the world. It is these assumptions, rather

than the actual state of the world, that affect the interpretation of an utterance. Gutt (2001:27) makes it clear that context does not refer to some part of the external environment of the communication partners, be it the text preceding or following an utterance, situational circumstances, cultural factors, it rather refers to part of their assumption about the world or cognitive environment. The cognitive environment of a person comprises of a potentially huge amount of very varied information. It includes information that can be perceived in the physical environment, information, including information derived from preceding utterance and that of any cultural knowledge stored there and furthermore information that can be inferred from these two sources (*ibi*:27).

Context is similar to schemata theory in which a person will understand the world based on how he views the world in schemas. Context forms the schemata of the translator's vision of his world and this context is not a complex one, hence it would be of little use to him. Because context plays such an indispensable role in interlanguage communication, it is vital to set up proper context to facilitate functional interlingua communication. As translation is a communication involving two languages and cultures, the identification of textual context is absolutely the first step to a faithful translation interpretation of stylistic element like metaphor in any literary text. For the convenience of the target reader, the translation of metaphor as stylistic innovation should provide the optimal relevance.

### **3. The Relevance Theory**

Relevance theory involves verbal communication not only encoding, transfer and decoding but also crucially involves inference Gutt (2001:41). The basis of inference is our understanding of the world we live in, our cognitive interpretation of the universe. Man's universe can be described in terms of space, physical and psychological dimensions. When engaged in any form of communication, this knowledge of his surrounding will be activated and used as the means to interpret the message of a discourse, whether oral or verbal. Thus, relevance theory highlights the contribution of context, the relationship between context and discourse as well as the interconnection of discourse. Relevance theory expounds the relevant principle in a convincing way from the perspective of human cognition, advocating that man has relevant cognisance in communication. The act of communication is relevance Wu and Xuxihua (2008:3). Such relevance leads the translator to effect functional interlingua inferences from the information of the source text in order to properly understand the sense of the original author of the text. The level of relevance rely so heavily on both contextual and

interpretative competence of the translator. The relevance of a text depends on the objective, the social function and the style and rhetoric flavour of the writer. Generally speaking, literary works whose objective is to entertain are usually rich in content and implication, thus, the relevance is subtle, leaving the reader a lot of room for imagination and inference. This is why literary works are much more complex to render than scientific texts.

In contrast, pragmatic texts, which aim at conveying information with comparatively explicit message tend to provide clear relevance to avoid misleading the target reader. As a result it is not very difficult for the target reader to understand the meaning of the target text. As a general rule, it is however, necessary to provide the optional relevance for the reader regardless of the function and style of the text to facilitate the reader's comprehension Fang (2004:30). We should however note that literary texts that aim at entertaining are usually rich in content and implications, thus, usually the context gives the translator the opportunity for imaginations and inferences. This is why fictional text are highly complex to translate. Context plays a powerful role in accounting in the translation of metaphor. The notion of context entails that translation is being looked at as part of communication Gutt (2001:22). The success of any inter-lingua communication depends on whether the author's intention and the target reader's expectations are met or otherwise. The translator is under obligation to coordinate his intention with the target reader's expectations so that the product of his translation resembles the original text in terms of style and sense. If we ask how the translation should be expressed, the answer is: it should be expressed in such a manner that it yields the intended meaning without putting the target reader into unnecessary processing effort (ibid.:101).

#### **4. Presupposition of the Study**

In the present study which explores the translations of metaphor discourse, the target context is especially important for proper understanding of the metaphorical expressions in the texts. The reason is that when translating metaphors in texts, normally the translators will consider the target reader's reaction within their specific context and in this regard, we will consider context as the source of presuppositions. Similar illustration regarding the relationship between presupposition and context can be found in Givon (1989:135-137), where presupposed information is traced back to the major sub-divisions of context. The major subdivisions of context are open-ended; however, three foci under which specific categories get grouped are "highly stable and well attested in the traditional linguistic literature. First, the

generic focus covers the shared world and culture, and refers to something universal to a great degree and remains the same across different cultures. Ying and Qinnei (2010:57). It comprises on the one hand knowledge and beliefs concerning the real world, and on the other hand people's ways and capacities to make sense of the world. The second covers what can be known about the speech situation, social personal relations between participants including their respective conditions such as status, power, obligations, needs and expectations and goals of communication (ibid.:57). In this study, we will explore the presuppositions behind the ways of handling metaphor in texts with reference to contextual consideration.

### **5. Analysis of metaphor using the relevance theory**

This section is analytical and takes as its starting point, several authentic source language French texts and their English translations. The study focuses on the identification and analysis of metaphorical expressions used in these texts from the perspective of relevance theory expressions used in those texts. Let us consider the following texts:

a. Things fall apart Achebe (1958:1)

Le monde s'effondre . p.1

In (a) text, Achebe derived the title of his novel: *Things Fall Apart* from the poem written by an Irish poet, W.B Yeats "The Second Coming". *Things Fall Apart* is about a clan which once thought like one spoke like one, shared a common awareness and acted like one. The white man came and his coming broke this unity. In the process, many heads rolled; new words, new usages and new applications gained entrance into men's heads and hearts and the old society gradually gave way. The process continues even today. This is why Ohaegbu finally concludes his essay with the following statement on the nature of African literature:

African literature therefore, can be seen as creative writings skilfully done in indigenous African languages or in foreign languages by African nationals or, if one prefers, bona fide citizens of the African continent (regardless of colour), which works spring from African sociocultural background, deal with the problems of the African and offer to the rest of the world African perception of the human condition. [...] Even though its primary audience is the African, non-Africans do and should have access to it. Only those who have profound knowledge of its cultural background and the language of the work should be qualified to undertake its criticism. (12) The question is whether this last statement also holds true for translation and its translators. The analysis of the creative use of European

languages in African literature shows that there are two forms of translation present. The first one is the common translation practice, whereby one language is translated into another language. The second one is the translation without the original, whereby African authors have to translate their thoughts in a different language. The first sense is important for understanding African literature, as the number of translated African works grows exponentially every year. The work of the translator 'enable[s] many people of different cultural backgrounds to know, understand and appreciate African culture' (Gyasi, "Translation" 106). But Gyasi also states that translating African literature can be a struggle. That is why the translator needs more than 'a certain linguistic competence' (Gyasi, "Translation" 106). 'The translator, in addition to his/her linguistic competence, must be able to show proof of certain extra-linguistic abilities that consist in analyzing and interpreting the context in which the African literary text is embedded' (Gyasi, "Translation" 106).

From the above translation, the translator requires the exercise of contextual and socio-cultural judgement to choose the functional equivalent for the target reader with the guidance of relevance theory. Lack of information about the context of the original metaphor does not hinder it from being translated but it will leave the translator with no more than a direct analysis of the metaphor and its subsequent rendering in the target language. Without contextual clues, it is very difficult to establish the relevant ties within the text. This is a reality that the translator has to face due to the dynamic change of language use. The translator here explores feasible modulation procedure of translation to transfer the sense of Achebe into the target language. However, this metaphorical expression is analysed bearing in mind the benefit of a source text's context. Conversely, the context of the text in which the metaphor is found is of utmost relevance to the translator in order to acquire all the information that contributes to the implicit meaning of the metaphor.

The translator shows the role played by relevance theory as an important cognitive theory that helps the translator to determine the relevant target language equivalence in a given context. For the sake of successful communication, the original text builds up the proper schemata in which the speech event in the text can be appropriately interpreted. From the point of view of relevance theory, translation falls naturally under the interpretive use of language: translation is intended to restate in one language what someone else said or writes in another language Gutt (2001:46). Just as a speaker reporting a speech, the translator in his effort of



interpretative use of an utterance or a text should aim at faithfulness. The only difference between an intra-lingual quoting or reporting and a translation is that the source text and the target text belong to the different languages (ibid.:46). No doubt, the translation of this metaphor challenges the patience and intelligence of the translator. As demonstrated above, the translation in the target language fulfils the need of optimal relevance, thus, the translation is faithful to the original metaphor.

#### Text B

Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievement. As a young man of eighteen, he had brought honour to his village by throwing Amalinze the Cat. Achebe (1958:3)

Okonkwo était bien connu a travers les neuf villages et même au delà. Sa réputation reposait sur de solides réussites personnelles. Jeune homme de dix-huit ans. Il avait apporté honneur et gloire a son village en terrassant Amalinze le Chat. Achebe (1958:9).

From text (b), Amalinze was called the Cat because from Umofia to Mbaino, he was unbeaten as a wrestler, not only that his back would never touch the earth during wrestling. From here, the translator has to play the role of an interpreter of the source text in the light of relevance theory in order to provide optimal relevance in his translation and guide his target reader to the intention of the original author. The complexity is locating the word (image) that is accurate in this particular case to provide the optimal relevance and achieve the desired metaphorical effect in the target language. The context sets the image processing, highlighting the direction to correct interpretation, which helps the translator to anchor the text.

#### Text C

Do not play with fire

Il ne faut pas jouer avec le feu

From text (c), the connotative value of the original text reflects that of the target text. This is so because before a metaphor can be interpreted, there must be connotative value shared by both the target and the source language. The linguistic meaning do not play with fire, presupposes that fire burns, causes pains. It equally suggests that you should avoid things or individuals that are harmful and dangerous. From the above text, it is shown that information

derived from studies of relevance theory in relation to translation proves invaluable to validate the choice of the translator in his pursuit of equivalence and faithfulness. In some cases, the source text metaphor is understandable to the translator without the source text as is the case here because the translator is familiar with the metaphor having had exposure to it in various contexts prior to the situation of the original text. The translator's competence to understand and render this metaphor into the target language is born out of the translator's cognitive and linguistic knowledge.

The idea of relevance theory is that translation must deliver the message that is closely equivalent as possible to the original text; however, the goal is to arrive at this outcome by relating the same meaning and message if possible, on the same level of generalization (Freedman (2009:95-96)). From the analysis, we note that presupposition as aroused by generic and situational context in the original text are the same with that of the target text. However, differences in terms of discourse contextual presuppositions or the different characteristics of target language determine what surface structure is used in the translated text. In some instances, metaphor is realised through surface linguistic structure. Some metaphorical expressions in the original text can not be reproduced in the target language and as such, creative strategies in accordance with target linguistic features may be adopted in the target language. In the above example, target reader appreciate the subject "fire" that is being talked about. Readers appreciate the creativity of the translator in the transfer of this metaphor into the target language and culture. We have introduced the notion of presupposition based on the fact the translator works with his presupposition. In order to ensure successful translation of metaphors in literary text, translators create their presuppositions in a way to arouse the target audience's interest and desire.

## **5. Conclusion**

Our analysis of metaphor in literary texts shows that context and meaning contribute to the choice of the translator in the transfer of equivalence into the target language. The analysis of metaphor in the study is grounded in the idea that metaphor is a substitution and functions to improve literal language. In order to guarantee the seamless occurrence of this substitution, similarity must exist between the object compared and the literal expression. This similarity becomes the vehicle for transferring the meaning and message of a particular utterance from one language to another (Freedman 2009:18). The study also reveals the multiple cognitive activities which involve analysis, interpretation, comparison, analogy, inferences, weighing of

possibilities, planning, combining and these processes are interactively united. Considering metaphor as a complex entity, the study helps us to understand its unique characteristics that contribute to its make-up. Although no single theory is capable to explain or analyse the phenomenon of metaphor in translation, the article relies on relevant theory in order to develop a view on the translatability of metaphor in literary texts. Metaphor that are chosen from Achebe's text reveal the thinking pattern of the Igbo socio-cultural society. We do not propose that our theory is the only answer to all the challenges of translation. We believe that it provides a step to understand the phenomenon of metaphor translation in the light of relevance theory. Despite the usefulness of the theory, the translator's competence and knowledge are equally necessary to faithfully render metaphorical text from one language into another.

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