"Something Is Rotten" in Translations of Hamlet: A Comparative Study of Transference of Sickness Imagery in Two Translations of Hamlet

Zahra Jafari[1+], Helen Ouliaei Nia[2]

[1] University of Isfahan

[2] University of Isfahan

Abstract. Iterative use of imagery in a work of literature is often a way of expressing a theme or concept and this is the case in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* where continuous images create a recurring theme of disease, decay and death. The present study focuses on two translations of *Hamlet* in Persian and in doing so the paper examines the strategies adopted by Persian translators to render one of the most problematic areas in translation; i.e. metaphor, to see how successful the translators have been in preserving the sickness imagery of the mentioned play. The theoretical part is based on Newmark's (1988) proposed model for translation of metaphor and the material used are two translations of *Hamlet* by Pazargadi (2003) and Farzad (2008, first published in 1958). The findings indicate that the frequency of a specific procedure is not necessarily correlated with its efficacy as in the case of procedure No.5 of the study and it is a poor choice for transmission of imagery since the conversion to sense itself ruins the aesthetic value that an image injects into a text. It was also found that the images of the source text have not been fully preserved in the translations due to cultural, linguistic, social and historical differences of the languages under study.

Keywords: Hamlet, Imagery, Metaphor, Translation Strategies, Theme

1. Introduction

Ezra Pound has probably made the most widely used definition of image: "an image is that which represents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time," a "unification of disparate ideas" (Rene Wellek & Austin Warren, 1973:187). Imagery plays a significant role in poetry. Poets take part in the world and give readers impressions of what they experience mainly through images in poetry. I.A.Richards (2001:109) believes that "the sensory qualities of images, their vivacity, and clearness do not bear any constant relation to their effects. Images differing in these aspects may have closely similar consequences. What gives an image efficacy is less its vividness as an image as its character as a mental event peculiarly committed with sensation." Discussing imagery, Shkolovsky (1925:16-17 narrating Potebnya) says "since the purpose of imagery is to remind us, by approximation, of those meaning for which the image stands, and since, apart from this, imagery is unnecessary for thought, we must be more familiar with the image than what it clarifies" and else "without imagery there is no art"–"art is thinking in images."

In translation of poetry there will always be aspects (if not significant ones) that will be missing, as languages do not have the same phonology, syntactic structures, vocabulary, literary history, prosody or poetics. For Dante (1265-1321), "all poetry is untranslatable" (cited in Brower, 1966:271) and Yves Bonnefoy says "you can translate by simply declaring one poem the translation of another" (in Schulte and Biguenet, 1992:186). Theorists like Fitzgerald (1878) say "...the live Dog is better than the dead Lion (cited in Brower 1966, p.277), believing in freedom in translation. Some like Nabokov (1955:83) believe that "the clumsiest of literal translation is a thousand times more useful than the prettiest paraphrase" believing that it is impossible to create a translation of a poem that within it holds the recognizable original; in other words, it

---

[+] Corresponding author.
E-mail address: zahra.jafari84@gmail.com.

is only possible to render the content into prose. Others, like Jakobson (1956) believe that in the case of poetry only creative transposition is possible.

The choices made by the translators such as the decision whether to retain stylistic features of the source language text has become all the more crucial in the case of literary translation requiring the translator be not only competent at the manipulation of languages, but also familiar with the source and target culture at the same time.

2. Methodology

Newmark (1988:104-113) believes that while the central problem of translation is the overall choice of a translation method for a text, the most important particular problem is the translation of metaphor and by metaphor he means any figurative language. He further goes on to propose seven procedures for translation of metaphor which will be used as the theoretical framework of this study and are as follows:

1. Reproducing the same image in the TL 2.Replacing the image in the SL with a standard TL image 3.Translation of metaphor by simile 4.Translation of metaphor by simile plus sense 5.Conversion of metaphor to sense 6.Same metaphor combined with sense 7.Deletion

This study will focus on metaphor as the master trope of the figurative language as Aristotle considers it a sign of genius to be a master of metaphor "since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilarities" (Poetics 1459).

The researchers have explored the extent of transference of sickness imagery and its effect on the product of translation, i.e. the translated text. Among Shakespeare's plays, *Hamlet* has been particularly well-known for its dominant sickness imagery since Caroline Spurgeon's work *Shakespeare's imagery and what it tells us* in 1935. This study does not aim at exhaustive treatment of all sickness metaphors in *Hamlet*; therefore, a selection of 30 cases of sickness imagery was analyzed. The cases have been chosen from both physical sickness imagery and mental imagery, which seem most problematic. Since this study attempts at investigating the degree of reproduction of images and the total effect on the translated text from an aesthetic point of view, any mistranslation have been overlooked and special attention was given to the convergence of the images of sickness in two translations of *Hamlet*. All quotations of the original work are from Jenkins's edition of *Hamlet* (1982). In investigation of the disease imagery of the metaphors the following books were used mainly: Schmidt (1971), Onions (1980), Hibbard (1987), Clemen (1977), Charney (1988) and Jenkins (1982). The translations selected for investigation are by Farzad (2008, first published in 1958) and Pazargadi (2003). The reason for choosing these renderings was twofold. The first reason was because of the time lapse between the two translations (45 years) and the second one was because these renderings are considered the best available translations of *Hamlet*.

3. Results and Discussion

The analysis of the discussed 30 cases provide us with the following tables in which Translaor.1 stands for Farzad and Translator.2 stands for Pazargadi :

Table 1. Number and percentage of applied strategies

Type of Strategy	Translator. 1		Translator. 2	
	No. of Cases	Percentage	No. of Cases	Percentage
1. Same Metaphor	4	13.3%	7	23.4%
2. Standard TL Metaphor	2	6.6%	2	6.6%
3. Simile	1	3.4%	1	3.4%
4. Simile + sense	1	3.4%	1	3.4%
5. Conversion to sense	17	56.6%	16	53.2%
6. Deletion	1	3.4%	1	3.4%
7. Metaphor + sense	4	13.3%	2	6.6%
Total	30	100	30	100

As table 1 indicates, both translators are similar in their application of the procedures: both have translated a metaphor by a simile, replaced two metaphors with a standard TL metaphor, and they have both translated one case by procedure No.4. Also, both have omitted 1 original metaphor in their translations. However, Pazargadi has managed to reproduce 7 cases of the same original metaphor into TL while this number stands at 4 for Farzad. He has transferred 17 cases of sickness imagery into sense, whereas Pazargadi has transferred 16 cases by procedure No.5. As can be seen, procedure No.5 has the highest percentage of application by the translators: 56.6% for Farzad and 53.2% for Pazargadi.

Table 2. Number of cases and examples of both types of metaphor

	No. of Cases	No. of example
Physical Metaphors	21	1,3,4,6,7,9,11,13,17,18,19,20,21,22,23,24,25,27,28,29,30
Mental Metaphors	9	2,5,8,10,12,14,15,16,26
Total	30	30

Since 21 out of 30 cases chosen for analysis in this study were Physical Metaphors and the remaining 9 were Mental Metaphors the number of examples in which theses metaphors appear are given in Table 2.

Table 3. Number and percentage of transference of each type of metaphor

		No. of Cases	No. of Transferred Images	Percentage of Transferred Images
Translator 1	*Physical Metaphor*	21	11	52.3%
	Mental Metaphor	9	2	22.2%
Translator 2	*Physical Metaphor*	21	13	61.9%
	Mental Metaphor	9	4	44.4%

Table 3 shows the number and percentage of transferred images of mental metaphors and physical metaphors by both translators. Here, Pazargadi seems to be more successful in transference of both kinds of metaphors since the percentage of transference of mental metaphors and physical metaphors are 44.4% and 61.9 % for him respectively; while these stand at a 22.2% of mental metaphors and 52.3% of physical metaphors for Farzad.

Table 4. Number and percentage of both transferred and lost images

	No. of Transferred Images	Percentage of Transference	No. of Lost Images	Percentage of Lost Images
Translator.1	13	43.4%	17	56.6%
Translator.2	17	56.6%	13	43.4%

Table.4 is indicative of total number and percentage of transferred images for each of the translators in translation of the text in total, and on the whole Pazargadi comes out as the more successful translator in transference of sickness imagery by 56.6% against Farzad with 43.4% of transference of images in his translation.

Table 5. Number and percentage of transferred cases with No.5 strategy

	No. of Cases Translated with Procedure No.5	No. of Cases with Transferred Images	Percentage of Transference
Translator.1	17	3	17.6%
Translator.2	16	4	25%

Finally, the last table (No.5) shows the percentage of transferred images in translation of both translators using procedure No.5 (conversion to sense) as the favourite procedure of both translators, applied to more than half of all the cases for both translators. The result of 17.6% of transference of imagery for Farzad and

25% of transference for Pazargadi indicates that although this procedure may succeed in carrying over the sense of the original metaphor into TL, it is a poor choice for transmission of imagery on the whole.

4. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine the extent of success of two Persian translators in preserving sickness imagery of *Hamlet* in their translations of the mentioned play. The main focus of the paper was to analyze the translators' application of Newmark's strategies used for translating metaphors and in doing so 30 cases of sickness metaphors were discussed.

The cases that have been discussed in this study demonstrate the use of language in presenting and advancing the themes and embodying the meanings of the play. In this regard, Shakespeare's choices of imagery must be carefully considered by translators.

Iterative imagery, i.e. the repetition of an idea in images used in a play, is a marked characteristic of Shakespeare's. There are certain functions whereby imagery helps to amplify the nature of events, characterization and the processes of thought, which might else not be that subtle because of the rapidity and compression of the dramatic form (Ellis-Fermer, 1980). According to Ellis-Fermer (1980) without the support of functional imagery, there is danger of thinness of character and lack of passionate significance in spite of richness of event. There is thus "an artistic economy in imagery hardly to be equaled by that of any other kind of verbal expression" (p.82). At times, Shakespeare has lent enhanced expression to the feeling of the character concerned; at other times, has given the audience a hint towards understanding what is still to come, or has provided a counterpoint to one of the central themes of the play by means of imagery (Clemen, 1966).

There is a simple but persistent running image throughout Hamlet and that is the image of sickness. In *Hamlet*, this image is closely connected with the central theme, and adds to and illuminates that theme. As Scragg (1988) notes, images of disease pervade the dramatic language to suggest not only the corruption of one individual but degeneration of an entire throne. Character is also defined, in part at least, by the figurative language that the speaker employs or others in relation to him use (Scragg, 1988). Imagery gives aid to the significant revelation of character. The characters reveal themselves by their choice of subjects in which they image their thought and also by the relation between subject and theme (Ellis-Fermer, 1980). In this play, it is Hamlet who creates the most significant images that are "paler and less pregnant in the speech of other characters." (Clemen, 1966:106).

The result of the analysis show that both translators in question resorted substantially to similar procedures. However, these procedures suggest that differences exist textually in the SL and TL. This is due to the rhetorical and cultural differences between the two languages. Further, similarity was mainly noticed in lexical use and text structure of both Persian translations. This analysis of the translation of metaphors in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has shown that translating sickness metaphors from this play requires a lot of knowledge about metaphor ─ sickness imagery in general ─ and their translation problems on the part of the translators. On the whole, the usage of different strategies in translation of metaphors in literary translation illustrates the diverse ways of treatment of this peculiar and difficult part of language. However, imagery of *Hamlet* expresses the uniqueness and richness of Shakespeare's language and, therefore, the strategies for their translation need careful consideration and the translators need deep knowledge of the source and target languages and cultures.

It may be for the reason of reducing the communicative load that expressions and novel metaphors are at times translated more explicitly than the original. The translators' rendering of "blister" (No.19) into "داغ فاحشگی" (mark of prostitution) and "داغ بدکاری" (mark of wickedness) is more explicit and direct than the original. Likewise, Farzad's rendering of "unweeded garden" (No.2) is another example of explicit rendering. The concept of sickness of body and soul; though a commonplace to the English and Persian readers, has not encouraged the translators to convey the sickness imagery in their translations and this has been left out in parts in examples No.14 and No.15. Another gap in accurate understanding of melancholy metaphors in the text is due to the absence of knowledge about the condition of this disease in Elizabethan era in these examples. The lack of a folk theory of disease in Persian language has led to the loss of the imagery in

translations as in examples No.27. In other respects, the metaphors of "like the owner of a foul disease to keep it from divulging, let it feed even on the pith of Life" (No.22), "diseases desperate grown, by desperate appliance are relieved, or not at all" (No.23) and "The potent poison quite o'er-crows my spirit" (No.30) cohere with their Persian equivalents; enabling the metaphors to function since they are easily understood without being marred by cultural barriers. The metaphor of "sickness as war" appears to be problematic in transference as in examples No.4 and No.14, and has been forgone in favour of sense in the translations. Other metaphors in the text that have met resistance in translation are mental metaphors of sickness as a pregnant woman, as a mother-bird and as a contagious disease of plants in examples No.10, No.16, and No.15 respectively. Different semantic association of a word which exists in different social and historical circumstance ("plague" in example No.13 and "pestilent" in No.25) and non-existence of a custom in the TL ("blister" in example No.19) have posed another constraint in carrying over the image. The non-existence of a word ("sickli'd over" in example No.12) in Persian language has affected the translators' choices to the extent of losing the image. Finally, images with vivid description of physical disease have failed to meet luck in translation as "leperous distilment" in example No.6, "eruption" in example No.1, and "pursy" in example No.21.

5. References

[1]   Alexander Schmidt, *Shakespeare Lexicon and Quotation Dictionary*, 3rded. New York: Dover Publication, 1971 (first published in 1902)

[2]   Aristotle, *Rhetoric and Poetics*. Tr. by W. Rhys Roberts and Ingram Bywater. New York: the Modern Library, 1984 (first published in 1954)

[3]   Caroline.F. Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935

[4]   C. T. Onions, *A Shakespeare Glossary*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarend Press, 1980

[5]   Ewan Fernie, *Shame in Shakespeare*. London & New York : Routledge, 2005 (first published in 2002)

[6]   I. A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism*. London: Routledge, 2001

[7]   Leah Scragg, *Discovering Shakespeare's meaning* . London: Houndmills, 1988

[8]   Maurice Charney, *Hamlet and His Fiction*. London & New York: Routledge, 1988

[9]   Morris Palmer Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: A collection of the proverbs found in English literature and the dictionaries of the period* ,ed. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1950

[10] Peter Newmark, *A Textbook of Translation*. London: Prentice Hall, 1988

[11] R. A. Brower, *On translation* (Ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966

[12] R. Schulte, & J. Biguenet, *Theories of translation: An anthology of essays from Dryden to Derrida*, (Eds.). Chicago: University of Chicago:1992

[13] Rene Wellek, & Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*, Eds. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1973

[14] Roman Jakobson, "The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles," in *Modern Theory of Criticism: A Reader*, D. Lodge, ed. London & New York: Longman, 1988

[15] The Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991

[16] Una Ellis-Fermer, *Shakespeare's drama*. New York: Methuen, 1980

[17] Victor Shkolovsky (1925). "Art as a Technique," in *Modern Theory of Criticism: A Reader*, D. Lodge, ed. London & New York: Longman, 1988

[18] Vladimir Nabokov, "Problems of Translation: 'Onegin' in English", in *The Translation Studies Reader*, Venuti, ed. London & New York: Routledge, 2000

[19] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. By G. R. Hibbard. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987

[20] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. By Harold Jenkins. London: Routledge, 1982

[21] Wolfgang H Clemen, *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery*. London: Methuen 1966 (first published in 1957)