Research Paper

English Translation of Persian Metaphors in Iranian Political News Discourse: A Relevance Theory Approach

Fariba Alibabaei[1]
[1]M.A. Department of English, Shahreza Branch, Islamic Azad University, Shahreza, Ira
f_alibabaei@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study aimed to examine the English rendering of Iranian political news, focusing on the translation of metaphorical expressions. The dataset under study comprised 43 Persian political news stories and their English translations. To extract metaphorical expressions, the researchers exploited the conceptual metaphor theory proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) as the model of the study. Then, relevance theory proposed by Gutt (2000) was utilized to see which type of translation, namely, direct or indirect, was used more frequently by the English translators to transfer the Persian authors' intentions. The degree to which the translators managed to achieve optimal relevance, considering the cultural, social, and political differences of the original and target audiences, was also checked. The obtained results revealed that the translators used direct translation most frequently to translate Iranian political news successfully. As for the observance of optimal relevance in the selected translation chunks, it was revealed that a more comprehensive study of political news discourse could possibly provide adequate evidence.

Keywords: *Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Direct translation, Indirect translation, Relevance Theory*

Introduction

Metaphors are widely employed by politicians when they have to deal with abstract concepts in ways that won't bore people too much. Nobody seems to deny that metaphors ease persuasion and that the rhetorical effects can be very powerful. Metaphors create new meaning, rather than simply transporting meaning, and by doing so, metaphors can disguise and possibly change thinking. Typically, it is assumed that concrete entities are easier to think about and discuss than abstract ones. Thus, it is common to find concrete images in political discourse, such

as a Strong American Economy in which 'Economy' is not a concrete entity, but an abstract model for thinking about a very large quantity of financial data, including rates of inflation, and patterns of employment and spending. Thus, the use of metaphor in political discourse gives the discourse emotive power and is useful in the construction of ideology. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) believe that "the conceptual system of human beings is metaphorical." They state that "metaphors are not merely linguistic instruments. They actually permeate perception, thought and behavior. Metaphors are pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought, and action as well. They do not only shape our view of life in the present but set up the expectations that determine what life will be for us in the future" (p.13).

Background of the Study

As one of the most important features of language and thought, t h e metaphor has always been meticulously studied. For so many years, the reflection on the nature and function of metaphor was simply restricted to the fact that metaphor is basically a rhetorical device. Aristotle regarded metaphor as a literary ornament, and metaphors were believed to be used as a stylistic device in literature by merely poets and writers in order to leave the kind of literary effects they wish to. In the mid-twentieth century, the idea of metaphor underwent a drastic change. Metaphor is nowadays considered as a cognitive device which is not merely used for rhetorical purposes. A cognitive approach to metaphor was first distinguished by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). In their book; *Metaphors We Live by*, they made it clear that our conceptual system, which governs our mind, is fundamentally metaphoric in nature. In their book, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*, Lakoff and Turner (2009) state that because metaphor is a primary tool for understanding our world and ourselves, entering into an engagement with powerful poetic metaphors is struggling in an important way with what it means to have a human life.

The school of cognitive metaphor analysis which Lakoff and Johnson founded has produced abundant evidence to the effect that "metaphors play a central role in the construction of social and political reality" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). From the cognitive viewpoint, what is most important about metaphors is its conceptual nature rather than its linguistic form. Lakoff and Johnson, in their book, *Philosophy in the Flesh: the Embodied Mind & its Challenge to Western Thought Philosophy in the Flesh* (1999), claim that metaphorical thought, in the form of cross-domain mappings, is primary, while metaphorical language is secondary. This claim is highly related to the study of political discourse and thus, the researchers in the present study have rightly applied conceptual metaphor theory to investigate metaphors in political news translation.

As for Relevance Theory and metaphor, according to Li (2019), Relevance Theory proposed by Sperber and Wilson in 1986, is an important theory of cognitive pragmatics, which explains the process of generation, understanding, and translation of metaphor from a new perspective, and expands the previous theory of metaphor translation. He adds, due to its guiding role in metaphor understanding and translation, Relevance Theory is increasingly used in the study of metaphor translation.

Relevance Theory and Translation

To begin with, Sperber and Wilson (1986) put forward their prominent Relevance Theory from the cognitive point of view. Then, Gutt (2000) applied this theory to the translation phenomenon and developed the renowned relevance-theoretic translation approach, although Relevance Theory has not originally had anything to do with translation. In his book, *Translation*

and Relevance: Cognition and Context, Gut presented the translation interpretation and provided a fresh recognition of it (Yanchun, 1999).

In Gutt's (2000) viewpoint, translation is a singular form of communication, including three parts: original author, translator, and target language reader. Thus, it should follow the general rule of communication, i.e., Relevance Theory. Thinking this way, in the framework of Relevance Theory, translation is a process of ostensive-inferential communication since it involves two languages and cultures, the author, translator, and reader. This process constitutes two aspects of communication: intercultural and intralingual communication which, when blended with the involvement of a translator, make the situation more complex (Keenan, 1994).

According to Gutt (2000), the translator must make inference based on the ostensive behavior of the original author and, derive the utmost contextual effect on the one hand, and then transfer his understanding of the author's intentions to the target text reader on the other hand, creating the same contextual effect. To create the most accurate contextual effect, the translator should balance the intentions of the original author with the cognitive environment of the target text reader. This is the only way to produce the best possible relevance between the translation and context.

Gutt's (2000) crucial goal lies in the most favorable relevance of translation to the source language text as well as the target cultural context. In fact, as a communicator, the translator has to equal the source text intentions with the target text reader's expectations. Also, the inferential nature of translation requires the translator to use his inferential abilities to make contextual assumptions and get the optimal relevance in translation.

Finally, according to the principles of the Relevance Theory, translation is a dynamic process in which the idea of 'best translation' is impossible. Thus, the translator is required to use various appropriate techniques and methods based on the translation purposes, the text type and the specific contexts in order to approach the most favorable rendition. At the same time, the methods the translator uses in different contexts should correspond with the optimal relevance to achieve adequate contextual effects on the target text reader.

Research Question

The main objective of this study was to see whether translators of Persian political news have applied direct or indirect strategies for translating metaphors based on the Relevance Theory approach. To this purpose, the researchers tried to address the following research question:

RQ. Which type of translation (direct or indirect) is more frequently used in rendering Persian political news metaphors into the English language based on Relevance Theory?

Method

Materials

Forty three Persian political news stories, covering Iran's domestic and foreign affairs, were randomly selected from such news agencies as Fars, Tabnaak and Mehr, together with their English translations by American news agencies, that is, Washington Post and Fox News, as the materials to be descriptively analyzed in the present study.

Procedures

To achieve the purpose of study, a step-by-step procedure was followed; that is, first, the needed data were collected from the sources stated above. Second, the selected pieces and their English equivalents were carefully studied. Third, based on Lakeoff and Johnson's (1980)

definition of conceptual metaphor, i.e. ''the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.'', the source and the target texts were compared to detect the cases where metaphorical expressions had been translated. Fourth, the identified metaphors and their equivalents were categorized and tabulated as the source text, the target text, metaphor, and the translation type. Fifth, Gutt's Relevance Theory (2000) was checked to discover which type of translation (direct or indirect) had been used in the English rendition for each metaphor. Finally, descriptive statistics were run to find the answer to the research question.

Results and Discussion

Based on Gutt's principles of Relevance Theory (2000) as well as Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) definition of conceptual metaphor, the present study tried to identify and categorize different types of translation of political news. The following table presents the details of the analysis of metaphorical expressions in both the source and the target texts.

Table 1
Translation Types Used in the Translation of Political News Metaphors

No.	Persian Text	English Text	Metaphor	Type of the Translation
1	ما می گوییم تبعیض نباشد. اگر تبعیض نباشد و قانون اجرا شود.	**We accept no discrimination.** If there would be no discrimination, well, we could see the rule of law.	Difference Is bad.	Direct
2	آمریکا به دنبال آن است که عراق **تحت سلطه** قرار بگیرد و افراد گوش به فرمانش حاکم باشند.	The U.S is seeking an Iraq **under its hegemony** and ruled by its stooges.	Being subject to control is down.	Direct
3	حضرت آیت‌الله خامنه‌ای، همه مسلمانان را به یاری مظلومان فلسطین فراخواندند و تأکید کردند: جهان اسلام با **کنار گذاشتن اختلافات**، از همه توان خود برای تأمین نیازهای مردم غزه استفاده کند.	Ali Khamenei this week called on the Muslim Nation to **set aside differences** and unite against Israel.	Difference is bad.	Direct
4	آمریکایی ها تلاش می کنند قضایای عراق را **یک جنگ مذهبی قلمداد بکنند.**	American authorities are trying to **portray this as a sectarian war**.	Argument is work of art.	Indirect
5	مصادره ی اموال یک موسسه خیریه **اعتبار نظام قضایی آمریکا را زیر سوال می‌برد.**	Confiscation of the properties of an independent charity organization **raises doubts** about the credibility of U.S justice	Raise is up.	Indirect
6	ایشان افزودند: البته در زمینه ادامه مذاکرات هسته ای ، منع نمی‌کنیم و کاری که دکتر ظریف ظریف و دوستانشان شروع کردند و تا	We do not ban the continuation of nuclear talks and the job that Dr. Zarif and his friends	Progress Is movement forward.	Direct

	دنبال **امروز هم خوب پیش رفتند** می‌شود اما این، یک تجربه ذیقیمت دیگر برای همه بود که متوجه شویم نشست و برخاست و حرف زدن با آمریکایی‌ها، مطلقاً تأثیری در کم کردن دشمنی آنها ندارد و بدون فایده است.	began and have **moved forward properly**.		
7	بلکه نظام سلطه با استفاده **از پس مانده های رژیم صدام** بعنوان مهره های اصلی و عناصر تکفیری متعصب به عنوان پیاده نظام تلاش برای برهم زدن ثبات و آرامش عراق و تهدید تمامیت ارضی این کشور دارد.	It is indeed the same old hegemonic order using **leftovers of the Saddam** (**Hussein) regime** as **its** key pieces, and the Takfiri dogmatic elements as foot.	low status is down	Direct
8	من فکر می‌کنم سران تمام کشورها باید به منافع ملی خود فکر کنند **و نباید تحت تاثیر گروه‌های فشار قرار گیرند.**	I believe the leaders in all countries could think in their national interests and that they should not be **under the influence of (interest) groups.**	Being subject to control is down.	Direct
9	ایران یک کشور بانفوذ در منطقه است می تواند در مقابله با تروریست ها ی داعش کمک بکند... اما **این یک خیابان دو طرفه است**. شما یک چیزی می دهید و یک چیزی می گیرید.	Iran is a very influential country in the region and can help fight against the ISIL terrorists… but **it is a two-way street**. You give something; you take something.	Negotiation is a street	Direct
10	**دموکراسی یک کالای صادراتی نیست** که از غرب به شرق تجارت شود.	**Democracy is not an export product** and cannot be Transplanted from abroad.	Ideas are products.	Direct
11	روحانی: اصولا همه کشورهای جهان باید در این مسئله (سوریه) **دست به دست هم بدهند.**	Basically, all the countries in the world should **cooperate closely** regarding the Syrian issue.	Relationship Is proximity	Indirect
12	در مقابله‌ی با جمهوری اسلامی، شما می‌بینید آمریکا و کشورهای استعمارگر اروپایی دُور هم جمع شدند و از همه‌ی نیرویشان استفاده کردند که در قضیّه‌ی هسته‌ای، **جمهوری اسلامی را به زانو دربیاورند؛** نتوانستند به زانو دربیاورند و نخواهند توانست.	("In the nuclear issue, America and colonial European countries got together and did their best **to bring the Islamic Republic to its knees,** but they could not do so — and they will not never be able to do so,")	Failure is Down.	Direct

13	رییس جمهور اضافه کرد: اگر آمریکا با حسن نیت براساس احترام متقابل از موضع برابر و بدون دستور کار پنهانی برخورد کند **راه برای تعامل باز خواهد بود**	With the United States, Rouhani said he wants goodwill and good intentions "without any secret agenda." If they use that approach, he said, **"the way for interaction will be open."**	Interaction Is a path.	Direct
14	**ایجاد زمینه برای مداخله مجدّد** بیگانگان در منطقه	**Create fertile ground for the further intervention** of foreign forces in our region	Intervention is plant.	Direct
15	کشوری که ان پی تی را پذیرفته، همه فعالیت هایش **زیر نظارت آژانس بین المللی** است.	A country that assigned the NPT and all of whose activities are **under the supervision of the IAEA.**	Being Subject to control is down.	Direct
16	من تاریخ دان نیستم. من یک سیاستمدار هستم. اما انچه مهم است اینکه **ملت های منطقه و جهان به هم نزدیک بشوند** و بتوانند جلوی ظلم و تجاوز را بگیرند.	I'm not a historian. I'm a politician. What is important for us is that the people, the nations in our region **should get closer to one another** so that they could prevent aggression and brutality	Relationship Is proximity	Direct
17	حسن روحانی ، از ایالات متحده خواست **ترس های خود درباره اینکه ایران در پی ساخت سلاح هسته ای است را کنار بگذارد** و تأکید کرد که در حال حاضر، هم ایران و هم آمریکا باید بر موضوع مبارزه با داعش تمرکز کنند.	Rouhani says US should **move past nuclear fears**, focus on extremism.	Change is development	Direct
18	دکتر روحاني گفت: اميدواريم با اراده كشورهاي مذاكره كننده دستيابي به توافق جامع محقق شود زیرا هيچ راهي براي حل و فصل مسئله **جز تفاهم وجود ندارد**	I hope we can reach a comprehensive deal with the strong will of all parties involved because there is no other way to resolve this issue but **reaching a common understanding.**	Common understanding is a is a referable object.	Direct
19	حسن روحانی در واشنگتن پست توشت :**سیاست های بین الملل دیگر یک بازی جمع صفر نیست** بلکه یک عرصه چند بعدی است که همکاری و رقابت اغلب اوقات به صورت همزمان رخ می دهد.	Hassan Rouhani wrote in The Washington post that: " **International politics is no longer a zero-sum game** but a multi-dimensional arena where cooperation and competition often occur simultaneously.	Activity is a game.	Direct
20	رهبران جهان می بایست **تهدیدات را تبدیل به فرصت ها بکنند**	World leaders are expected **to lead in turning threats into opportunities**	Change is good	Direct

21	روحانی در ادامه نشست خبری گفت: **زمان باقی مانده** برای توافق کوتاه است و پیشرفت هایی که در روزهای گذشته ما مشاهده کرده ایم بسیار بسیار کند بود است	The **remaining time** for reaching an agreement is extremely short," Rouhani said. The progress that has been witnessed in the last two days has been extremely slow.	Time is a resource	Direct
22	**باید حرکت سریع تر باشد** و با توجه **به** واقعیت ها بتوانیم این توافق را به نتیجه برسانیم	We must have a **more-fast pace to move forward.**	Progress is movement forward.	Direct
23	دولت همواره خود را **قیم مردم تلقی نمی‌کند**	The government has never thought of **looking down on the people.**	Low status is down.	Indirect
24	روحانی گفت **این توافق می تواند پایه خوبی برای اعتماد دو طرف باشد**	Rouhani said **a nuclear deal can be a solid foundation for mutual trust-building**	Reliability is solidity	Direct
25	در سخنرانی اول سال هم گفتم که من **به مذاکره خوشبین نیستم و به جایی نمیرسد ولی مخالفتی هم ندارم**	I'm not **optimistic about the nuclear talks but not opposed to them either."** They would "lead nowhere," he predicted then.	Talk is war	Direct
26	همه **باید دست به دست** هم دهیم و از طریق دیپلماسی فاجعه را در سوریه متوقف کنیم	**Hand-in-hand** all of us should use diplomacy in order to stop this catastrophe in Syria.	Relationship is proximity	Direct
27	روحانی گفت : مذاکرات با پشتوانه قاطبه مردم انجام می شود **و همه مسئولان عالیرتبه نظام** از جمله مقام معظم رهبری با این مذاکره موافق هستند.	But Rouhani said there is solid popular **and high-level political support in Iran** for the talks after more than a decade of impasse.	Importance is high.	Direct
28	ما آنقدر **شهامت داریم** که انچه اعتقاد داریم را به صراحت بیان کنیم.	**We have sufficient courage** to express what we believe in frankly and clearly.	Courage is Viewed as a quantifiable object.	Direct
29	**ما نظارت بین المللی بر فعالیت هایمان** را قبول کرده ایم	We have accepted the international **supervision over those activities.**	Control is above	Direct
30	وزیر امور خارجه کشورمان در این نامه تاکید کرد: همانگونه که در این مذاکرات **در مقابل مطالبات نامشروع و تحقیرآمیز ایستادگی کرده** و آن را قاطعانه رد میکنیم. من اطمینان دارم که توافق جامع کاملا در دسترس می باشد	I am confident that a comprehensive agreement is within reach," he Wrote, according to the Mehr news agency. "**But we will firmly resist any humiliating illegitimate demands."**	Argument is a war.	Direct

31	روحانی : من **تجربه کافی** درمذاکرات خارجی و از جمله مذاکرات هسته ای دارم.	I have **sufficient experience** in foreign negotiations, including nuclear negotiations.	Experience is viewed as a quantifiable Object.	Direct
32	رهبر انقلاب اسلامی، **اظهارات مقامات آمریکایی** در خصوص مبارزه با داعش را **پوچ، توخالی و جهتدار** خواندند.	**American request was hollow and self-serving**	Request as a referable object.	Direct
33	ا در واقع **دنبال باخت ـ باخت** نیستیم . مادنبال **برد ـ برد** هستیم و چراما دنبال منافع همه ملت ها نباشیم	we do not want to see **a lose-lose game**. We are looking for a **win-win game.**	Activity is game.	Direct
34	علی رغم **گذشته تاریک** نباید نسبت به اینده نا امید باشیم راه همواره برای اینده وجود دارد	But regarding the **dark events** of the past, we should not be, we should not lose hope regarding the future.	Evil is dark	Direct
35	روحانی با هشدار به برخی از کشورهای اسلامی که از تروریستها حمایت میکنند، تصریح کرد: به همه کشورهای اسلامی و همه آنهایی که متأسفانه با پول و دلار نفتی خود به تروریستها کمک میکنند توصیه و تأکید میکنیم که بدانید **فردا نوبت شماست** و فکر نکنید این وحشیها را تنها به جان دیگران انداختهاید	We emphatically tell those Islamic states and all others funding terrorists with their petrodollars that these terrorist savages you have set on other people's lives **will come to haunt you**," IRNA quoted Rouhani as saying on Sunday.	Human is animal	Direct
36	روحانی: مقصودم این است که **ایران مانند همه کشورها است**	Well, **we want to be the same as the others.**	Similarity is good.	Indirect
37	انبیسی همچنین به نقل از آقای روحانی نوشت: «این نامه میتواند **گامی کوچک و ظریف برای آیندهای بسیار پراهمیت باشد.** من فکر میکنم سران تمام کشورها باید به منافع ملی خود فکر کنند و نباید تحت تاثیر گروههای فشار قرار گیرند. امیدوارم در آینده شاهد چنین فضایی باشیم	**"It could be subtle and tiny steps for a very important future,"**	Future is a journey	Direct
38	خانم افخم در این رابطه گفت: «اخبار منتشره به نقل از وزیر امور خارجه در برخی خبرگزاریها مبنی بر همکاری ایران با آمریکا در عراق در ازای رفع تحریمهای ایران در شورای امنیت، صحیح نیست و چنین موضوعی طرح نشده و **اخبار منتشره در این زمینه بی اساس است.**	Such reports are not true, and the **report on this issue is baseless**," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Marzieh Afkham said.	Report is a Building.	Direct

39	ملت ما در این مذاکرات موفق و پیروز بوده و به پیروزی نهایی خواهد رسید. هیچ تردیدی ندارم برای برای توفیق این راه. **حالا امروز یا فردا به توافق خواهیم رسید.**	I am certain that **we will reach the final accord**, if not today, then tomorrow," said an optimistic-sounding Rouhani.	Deal as a referable Object.	Direct
40	مذاکره هسته ای یک چیز بیشتر نیاز ندارد و آن اراده سیاسی طرف مقابل برای حل و فصل نهایی مسئله است . ازطرف ما این اراده به صورت کامل وجود دارد و اگرطرف مقابل اراده سیاسی داشته باشند موضوع هسته ای بسیار ساده است و در زمانی نه چندان طولانی **به حل و فصل نهایی خواهد رسید.**	the Iranian nuclear issue is a very simple **matter and can be settled** in a short period of time	Known is down	Direct
41	سازو کار تبادل پیام بین دو کشور **از کانال های دیپلماتیک** جاری انجام می شود.	The mechanism for exchanging these letters is through **diplomatic channels.**	diplomacy is a referable object.	Direct
42	اگر در قدم های اولیه حسن نیت ببینیم اعتماد متقابل ببینیم امریکا از موضع برابر حرف بزند **می تواند بسیاری از مسائل در دستور مذاکرات قرار بگیرد.**	If in the first steps we see goodwill and good intention, mutual confidence and trust, and If we see that the Americans are talking from respectful positions, a lot of things **could be put in the agenda.**	Agenda is viewed as a container.	Direct
43	روحانی: دولت در برنامه هسته ای کاملا قدرتمندانه وارد می شود. دارای اختیارات کامل هست؛ دولت من مذاکرات هسته ای را به وزارت خارجه واگذار کرده است اما مشکل از طرف ما نخواهد بود. ما اراده سیاسی کامل را برای **حل این مساله** خواهیم داشت.	The problem won't be from our side," the Iranian president said. "We have sufficient political latitude to **solve this problem."**	Problem is a solid object.	Direct

According to the strategy categorization in the above-detailed Table, out of 43 metaphors, just 5 cases were translated indirectly, and the rest were translated directly. So, it was revealed clearly that the direct type was the most frequently used. Table 2 below shows the frequency and percentage of translation types in connection with rendering political news metaphors.

Table 2
Frequency and Percentage of Translation Types in Political News Metaphors

Type of translation	Frequency	Percentage
Direct translation	38	88.37
Indirect translation	5	11.62
Total	43	100

Concluding Remarks

Based on the results shown in the above Table, the following conclusions can be drawn. Translators of Persian political news have mostly used 'a direct translation strategy' to transfer metaphorical concepts to English. It is to be noted that in this study, the focus was merely on conceptual metaphors. To portray a complete assessment of all aspects of political news in translation, an exhaustive study of this discourse type is required.

Considering all dimensions of political discourse, it cannot be unquestionably claimed that any translation has a complete interpretive similitude to the original text, no matter how hard the translator tries to be faithful since such translation tasks naturally dictate non-occurrence between the original intentions of the source text writer and the translator' impressions. It is, in fact, crystal clear that the purposes of an Iranian political writer or speaker might differ drastically from the reflections of an English translator, especially when the written or spoken discourse in the news concerns Iranian-American relationship, keeping in mind the long-lasting conflicts between the two countries concerning different political issues and the interests of each country thereof.

References

Gutt, E.-A. (2000). Translation and relevance: Cognition and context, Manchester: St. In: Jerome Publishing.

Keenan, J. P. (1994). *How Master Mou removes our doubts: A reader-response study and translation of the Mou-tzu Li-huo lun*: SUNY Press.

Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). Metaphors we live by (University.). In: of Chicago Press, Chicago, USA.

Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M. (1999). *Philosophy in the flesh: The embodied mind and its challenge to western thought*. New York: Basic books.

Lakoff, G., & Turner, M. (2009). *More than cool reason: A field guide to poetic metaphor*: University of Chicago press.

Li, X. (2019). Research on Metaphor Translation from the Perspective of Relevance Theory. *International Linguistics, Education and Literature Conference,* 193-196.

Sperber, D., & Wilson, D. (1986). *Relevance: Communication and cognition* (Vol. 142): Harvard University Press Cambridge, MA.

Yanchun, Z. (1999). Explanatory Power of Relevance Theory to Translation [J]. *Modern Foreign Language, 3*, 273.