A Semiotic Framework for the Translation of Conceptual Metaphors

Roya Jabarouti
TRANSPOSITIONS BETWEEN VERBAL SEMIOTICS

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1. Introduction

As a ubiquitous feature of communication and a luminous figure of speech, metaphor maintains a pivotal role in both language and literature. A metaphorical concept can contain multiple layers of simultaneous meanings, some of which can be semi-/universal, but many remain bound to their contextual culture. Thus, metaphor can be viewed as the common challenge to both translators and scholars of translation studies. As Newmark (1988, p. 104) truly declares, translating metaphor is “the most important problem” of the translation.

Despite the apparent distinctions in the disciplines, the terms translation and metaphor share similar etymological intention of transferring or caring across two distinctive domains.1 However, a great body of literature in translation studies has been devoted to discussions on the issue of translatability of metaphorical expressions. Many of these debates were based on a traditional view of metaphor as a figure of speech, until recently when cognitive approaches to metaphor began to enter the realm of Translation Studies. The studies of cognitive linguistic opened a new gate for the translation of metaphors. The pioneers of this new approach, Lakoff and Johnson (1980), distinguished between metaphor as a “concept”

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1. Coming from the Greek origins, meta- refers to “change of place, order, condition or nature” and pheirein means “to bear/carry”. In Latin, translatatus is the passive participle of transferre, which means “to transfer” (Shuttleworth 2014, p. 53).
and metaphor as an “expression”. Moreover, by assigning a cognitive function to conceptual metaphors, they illustrated the underlying cultural basis of any metaphorical conceptualization. These scholars attempted to identify the role of “cultural models” in shaping and defining conceptual metaphors. These scholars have directed much of their attention to the role of body in human cognition and conceptualization of his life experiences, as well as in defining and reflecting cultural specifications (Johnson 1987, Lakoff & Johnson 1990).

Still, translatability of metaphor has maintained its position as the main topic of scholarly debates. While some scholars insist on faithfulness to the denotative and connotative meanings of a metaphor in the source language, others have found it near to impossible. They argue that, especially in the case of cultural-bound metaphors, the loss of some culture specific information seems inevitable. Furthermore, metaphors are seldom used as isolated units within a literary text. Instead, they are commonly used as elements deeply infused with other textual elements, hence, involved in a dynamic process of meaning creation. In the end, it is still the responsibility of the translators to assess individual situations, and to apply the best procedure to interpret and transfer the key ideas and elements. Although the emergence of semiotic in translation studies has proved to be promising, only few of the theories have been studied in detail or even applied by translators. Moreover, much of the focus has remained on the first generation of semiotics while recently newer ideas have been developed to illustrate the task of translation.

I will start this study with an overview of the central issues faced by translators and scholars of Translation Studies. On the basis of some of the previous approaches, I will discuss the problems specific to the translation of metaphors. The last section of this paper is primarily devoted to the presentation and analysis of the semiotic approach proposed for the translation of conceptual metaphors. This approach is mainly based on the cultural semiotics of Lotman (1990), and the semiotic theories of Eco (2003) and Tarasti (2000). However, I will largely benefit from the metaphor theory of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), and draw examples from the conceptual metaphors of body parts. I have limited my examples to the conceptualization of the Persian term del, corresponding to heart in English. However, my intention is the further illustration of the approach, as a full semiotic study of this concept would be within the scope of an independent research.

2. Key Concepts

Although the practice of translating has existed since centuries ago, it was only in the second half of the present century when scholars developed an independent discipline named “Translation Studies”. The concept was used to refer to a systematic study of
the product, rather than the process of translation, the discussions surrounding the problems that arise during this process, the possibility and authenticity of translation, as well as the role of translator and the fate of culture. Translation Studies borrows many of its concepts from such discipline as sociolinguistics, communication studies, psycholinguistics, pragmatics, comparative literature, cultural studies and recently semiotics. It also offers a multiplicity of theories and frameworks, each applying a specific angle and terminology to focus on a specific aspect of translation (Schäffner 2004).

In the conventional usage of the term “translation,” much of the stress was placed on the syntactical understanding of the languages involved in translation. It is not surprising that from such a strict perspective, translators maintained a much lower status than the original writer of the text. It is only recently that translation is being perceived as a creative attempt of its own difficulties and dignity. The studies of linguistics in the early 1960s led to significant advancements in critical methodology and further stabilized the status of Translation Studies. Cognitive linguistics argued that linguistic structures are not autonomous and that language is applied to convey the meaning perceived by our cognitive faculties. As a result, figures of speech were not merely literal expressions, but a means of conceptualizing the reality (Arduini 2014, p. 42). These advancements shifted the status of Translation from a secondary activity to “one of the most difficult tasks that a writer can take upon himself” (Quirk 1974).

The issues of equivalence and cultural untranslatability were first addressed by J.C. Catford’s short studies in 1965. Since then, scholars have been experimenting with new ideas in such related areas as linguistics, literary history, semiotics and aesthetics. However, as Bassnett (2013) asserts, we must not forget that the main goal of this discipline is the “practical application”. In Lefevere’s (1978) words, the main purpose of Translation Studies is to “produce a comprehensive theory which can also be used as a guideline for the production of translations”. In what follows, I will discuss the central issues that need to be considered in the process of translation.

André Alphons Lefevere’s Translating Poetry: Seven Strategies and a Blueprint (1975) and Susan Bassnett’s Translation studies (1980). It was about the same time that post–generative American linguists (See for example the work of Ronald Wayne Langacker 1972 and Charles Fillmore 1975) brought a Cognitive approach into their studies of language (Arduini 2014, pp. 41-42).

3. According to Bassnett (2013, p. 16), this development was initiated by the work of some Russian linguist in 1920s and followed by the work of Prague Linguistic Circle. The work of Vološinov on Marxism and philosophy, the semiotics of Mukařovský, and the theories of Levý and Jakobson set up new criteria for the establishment a theory of translation.

4. This includes the work of scholars in the Netherlands, Israel, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, the German Democratic Republic and the United States. Moreover, the work of Italian and Soviet semioticians, developments in grammatology and narratology, advances in the study of bilingualism and multilingualism and child language-learning can all be utilized within Translation Studies (Ibid.).
2.1. Transposition of Signs

According to Jakobson (1959), translation in any type involves the interpretation of verbal signs from one sign system into another. In his further discussion on “Interlingual translation,” i.e., between the source and target language system, Jakobson (1959) refers to “equivalence” as the common problem of all translation types. In his opinion, the equivalence or sameness of meaning cannot be achieved even between the synonymous units of a language. Hence, for full interpretation, the translator normally needs to resort to a combination of code units. Thus, all poetic art is “technically untranslatable”. In fact, the translator can only hope to provide a “creative transposition,” either interlingually or intralingually.

Interlingual translation, thus, can be viewed as an act of “intersemiotic transposition,” i.e. the transposition of signs from one sign system into another. From this perspective, translation is no longer limited to the transposition of “meaning” contained in a language sign; instead, it demands a combination of “extra-linguistic” values and norms determined by cultural system. What Sapir (1956) refers to as the “language habits”, of any community is a major concern in cultural semiotics. Translator’s competence of extra-linguistic aspects of any text are, thus, no less significant than her linguistic competence. I will leave the further discussion on this topic to the section related to “the role and fate of culture” in this paper. Interlingual translation is viewed as a process in which the signs (linguistic and/or extra-linguistic) of one language system are decoded by the translator, and then recoded again into the signs of the target language. In semiotics of Ludskanov (1975), this transposition is referred to as a semiotic transformation:

Semiotic transformations (Ts) are the replacements of the signs encoding a message by signs of another code, preserving (so far as possible in the face of entropy) invariant information with respect to a given system of reference. (Ludskanov 1975, p. 156)

2.2. Evaluating the Equivalence

There still remains the issue of evaluating the final product of translation. According to Bassnett (2013), “it is pointless, therefore, to argue for a definitive translation, since translation is intimately tied up with the context in which it is made”. But this issue becomes more problematic when translating metaphors, allusions and idioms from one language into another. Literal translation in such occasion would even seem meaningless for the readers of the target language. With respect to the translatability of metaphors, Dagut (1976) states that “since a metaphor in the SL is, by definition, a new piece of performance, a semantic novelty, it can clearly have no existing ‘equivalence’ in the TL: what is unique can have no counterpart”.

Equivalence, as discussed before, is one of the most controversial issues in Translation Studies. Influenced by postmodern theories, some of the scholars argue that the meaning in the text is only “arbitrary,” and thus, reject the idea of
equivalence or sameness at the outset.\textsuperscript{5} Popovič (1975) distinguishes four types of equivalence: (1) Linguistic equivalence, i.e. word for word, (2) Paradigmatic equivalence, i.e. elements of grammar, (3) Stylistic equivalence, or “functional” equivalence, and (4) Textual equivalence, i.e. equivalence of form and shape. Although this classification proves useful at the beginning, it does not offer any tool for specifying the type and level of the equivalence required. Neubert (1967, pp. 451-456) views the issue of equivalence as belonging to the category of semiotic, consisting of a syntactic, semantic and pragmatic components, in a hierarchical order. Overall, as Bassnett (2013, p. 35) asserts, equivalence is the final product of a number of procedures: “the relation between signs themselves, the relationship between signs and what they stand for, and the relationship between signs, what they stand for those who use them”. Moreover, these procedures need to be assessed in relation to the “cultural—temporal context” in which they are applied.

2.3. Untranslatability

While Catford (1965) distinguishes between linguistic and cultural untranslatability, Popovič (1976) describes untranslatability without separating language from culture. Instead, he identifies two situations from which untranslatability may result: (1) When the absence of connotative and denotative meanings in the target language leads to an inadequate replacement of the linguistic elements in “structural”, “linear”, “functional” or “semantic” terms. (2) When the target language is not able to express the relation between the original “creative subject” and its linguistic expression.

However, Mounin (1963) maintains that instead of stressing on untranslatability itself, scholars need to look for the possible solutions of this problem. Following linguistics, he says that “translation is a dialectic process that can be accomplished with relative success”. He maintains that it is finally the responsibility of the translator to look for a proper solution to deal with the problems she encounters while translating. According to Mounin (1963), “the translator’s decision as to what constitutes invariant information with respect to a given system of reference is in itself a creative act”. Likewise, Levý (1969) focuses on the role of intuition in translation process:

As in all semiotic processes, translation has its Pragmatic dimension as well. Translation theory tends to be normative, to instruct translators on the OPTIMAL solution; actual translation work, however, is pragmatic; the translator resolves for that one of the possible solutions which promises a maximum of effect with a minimum of effort. That is to say, he intuitively resolves for the so-called MINIMAX STRATEGY (emphasis original). (Levý 1969, p. 156)

\textsuperscript{5} For example, Venuti goes as far as to say that the target text should aim at difference and manifest “a glimpse of a cultural other” to the reader (1995, p. 306).
2.4. *Inter-textuality and Structure*

Various literary structures highlight different features of the language in which they are written. Yet, as Cluysenaar (1976, p. 49) indicates, many translators fail to consider the fact that each literary structure demands a distinctive approach. Literary translators need to be mindful of the fact that any literary text is an independent system that can be best interpreted in relation to its socio-cultural context. Scholes (1974, p. 10) further clarifies this statement by asserting that in a literary work, every single unit, i.e. a word or a sentence, needs to be considered in its relation to the whole system. Moreover, the translator needs to see the whole body of literary works as a system belonging to the larger system of culture.

Likewise, Kristeva (1970) introduces the idea of “intertextuality,” to explain that all texts are linked to one another. Based on this view, “no text can ever be completely free of those texts that precede and surround it”. Furthermore, she views reading as a process of semiosis and notes that every reader is involved in distinct process of “decoding,” which defies the concept of the one “correct” reading. Finally, the translator needs to consider a literary work in relation to the time and place of production. This discussion is further explored by Corti as such:

> Every era produces its own type of signedness, which is made to manifest in social and literary models. As soon as these models are consumed and reality seems to vanish, new signs become needed to recapture reality, and this allows us to assign an information-value to the dynamic structures of literature. So seen, literature is both the condition and the place of artistic communication between senders and addressees or public. (Corti 1978, p. 145)

3. *Translating Metaphors: Some Approaches*

Although metaphors have traditionally been regarded as the decoration of language, the challenges they presented while translation have been the major concern of literary translators. Over time, translation has developed from being a purely linguistic process, towards being text oriented and culture oriented, and finally, a semiotic process. However, the influence of dominant ideologies, transformation of meaning when travelling from one culture to another and finally manipulation of the text have been the main concerns of the Translation scholars. In what follows, I will provide a brief over review of some the most prominent “linguistic” approaches proposed for translating metaphor. In some cases, I will also discuss the appropriateness or inappropriateness of such approaches in relation to the translation of metaphor.
Emerging about half a century ago, linguistic approaches saw translation as an act of transferring meanings. They maintained that a language sign in the SL needs to be substituted with its equivalent target-language sign (see also Catford 1965 and Newmark 1985). According to their view, the translator needs to reproduce the source text as closely as possible in the target text, both in content and structure. Text-based approaches focused on the communicative purposes of translation, and viewed text as a coherent unit belonging to its situational or cultural context. In this approach, the emphasis was mainly placed on the overall meaning, genre and the functions of the text. This approach considered the knowledge and expectation of readers in the target language as its main priority. Equivalence, thus, needed to be determined at the textual level and with respect to the situational and cultural values (see also Neubert and Shreve 1992). Functionalist approaches viewed translation as a purposeful process of interaction between the cultures. From this perspective, the aim of the translator would be to create a target text that serves the specific purpose of target addressees, in the target situation. Equivalence would, thus, be obtained as the result of the appropriateness of the target text for its purpose (Schäffner 2004, p. 1253).

The scholarly debates on metaphor translation usually contrast between different models based on two yardsticks: the issue of translatability, and the strategies they offered for transferring metaphors from the source text into a target text. In many of these approaches, metaphor is viewed as a linguistic phenomenon, referred to as “metaphorical expression” in cognitive linguistics. In these approaches, the ideal occasion would be when a metaphorical expression is transferred intact from the source text to the target text. Nevertheless, they also argue that creating the same metaphorical image in the target text is usually impossible. As a result, many of them set out to offer alternative methods. A good example would be the attempt made by Eugene Nida and Charles Russel Taber in 1969, in *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. Nida and Taber (1969) distinguish between central meaning, literal meaning and figurative meaning of a metaphor, forgetting about its cognitive values. As expected, their proposed solution is either to paraphrase the metaphor or to change it. Broeck (1981) similarly, goes only as far as to “describe” three different possibilities:

1. Translation, i.e., transferring both tenor and vehicle,
2. Substitution, i.e., replacing vehicle form the source language with vehicle in the target language.
3. Paraphrase, i.e., using a non-metaphorical expression instead.

Newmark’s (1988, pp. 106-112) “prescriptive” framework, on the other hand, has been applied by many critics. He identifies the following six categories of metaphors:
1. Dead metaphors, i.e. the denotative leftovers of a metaphor, require the translator to find their culturally dependent counterparts in the target language.

2. Cliché metaphors, which should be removed from informative texts to promote readability.

3. Stock or standard metaphors, which are still active. Idealistically, their translation should produce exactly the same “image” in the target language. They can also be replaced with another well-established metaphor, or a simile to keep the image. They can simply be converted to a sense or reduced to note and explanation, or simply deleted.

4. Adapted metaphors that can be translated by an equivalent adapted metaphor.

5. Original metaphors of the author, which need to be translated literally to preserve author’s message.

6. Recent metaphors, which are based on a specific recent cultural event. They require their closest equivalent in the target culture.

In his suggestion for translating Original metaphor, Newmark’s model neglects the effect of the whole text, and only focuses on the translation of individual metaphorical expressions. Newmark takes a similar approach towards dead metaphors, which as I will discuss in the following sections, still show some attachment to their cultural structure. Hence, some of his suggestions seem to be the result of oversimplification. Furthermore, his model does not present any method for the translation of allusions, metonymies and idiomatic expressions, which, at times, constitute a part or a special type of metaphor. As discussed before, when translating a metaphor, the translator needs to be familiar with extra-linguistic elements (i.e. intertextual and cultural). Moreover, as I will discuss below, she needs to prioritize the multitude of meanings that a metaphor contains. By applying Newmark’s model, the translator risks losing some aspects of the meanings without even recognizing them, just as she may fail to decide on which aspect to transfer or to domesticate. Despite differences in the manner and sophistication, all the above approaches adopt a similar attitude, i.e., not problematizing the issue of “meaning”. In other words, they commonly fail to recognize the cognitive capacity of metaphors; hence, their dependence on cultural realities and personal recognition.

3.1. The Task of Translating Conceptual Metaphors

Since the beginning of time, metaphor has been the familiar topic of scholarly debates in the disciplines of philosophy, linguistic, aesthetic, and psychology. For many authors, including Aristotle, metaphor has generally served as the indication of every rhetorical figure, and the “genius” of all the other species of tropes (Eco 1986, p. 87). Vico (1984, p. 129) goes as far as to declare that of all the other tropes metaphor is the “most luminous and therefore the most necessary and frequent”.
Any debate on metaphor, therefore, entails the consideration of all the complexities in a rhetorical figure. In its most traditional definition, the term metaphor refers to something that is identified in the terms of another, in the way that the first thing receives the connotative and/or denotative meanings generally associated with the second one (Loponen 2006, p. 23). As an ornament of language, however, metaphor does not draw much attention from semiotic scholars; instead, they look for the “cognitive values” of metaphor. Eco (1986, p. 88), for instance, explicitly declares that he, being a semiotic scholar, is interested in “metaphor as an additive, not substitutive, instrument of knowledge”.

As the result of studies made by the scholars of cognitive science (e.g. Lakoff and Johnson 1980) during the past decades, the status of metaphors has been revolutionized. The cognitive view of metaphor has brought new insights into translation studies as well. In their theory of metaphor, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have preserved a key role for metaphors by saying that metaphors not only “describe” our understanding, but they also “define” our real life experience. The new model defines metaphors as the cognitive devices that enable individuals to perceive abstract concepts and meanings in terms of concrete ones. The term metaphor, thus, indicates a “conceptual mapping,” while “metaphorical expression” is only applied to any linguistic expression built upon this conceptualization and mapping (Lakoff and Johnson 1980).

The term “conceptualization,” in general, has been applied to refer to a variety of basic cognitive processes, grounded in the Embodied Theory of meaning. The central idea is that “meaning emerges “from the bottom up”. In other words, “our so-called higher cognitive faculties (e.g., of conceptualization and reasoning) recruits cognitive resources that operate within out sensorimotor experience and our monitoring of our emotions”. Johnson (2008, p. 10) goes as far as to say that “body” and “mind” are not two different things, but rather “aspects of one organic process”. Hence, thoughts, meanings, and languages emerge from the “aesthetic” dimensions of this “embodied activity” (Ibid., p.1).

Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 218) argue that this “sense-making” process is mostly pre-linguistic and non-conscious; hence, stimulating and shaping our future perceptions. They insist on the pervasive presence of “conventional metaphor” in our language and our conceptual system and its function as “a primary vehicle of understanding”. According to Conceptual Thought Theory, there is a metaphorical mapping between concrete experiences and the properties attached to abstract

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6. The argument is mainly based on the implications of Proprioceptive theory, which views human thinking as “a continuous feeling-thinking process that is forever tied to our body’s monitoring of its own state” (Johnson 2008, p. 11). Proprioceptive memory operates within the dimension of the flesh, i.e., muscles and ligaments: we feel the tenseness of muscles, the pull of joints, and the pressure resistance from an accelerating vehicle (Featherstone 2006, p. 23).

7. For instance, based on previous experiences, seeing a hammer stimulates the muscles related to using a hammer, hence, conceptualizing hardness or solidity (Kimmel et al. 2012, p. 1).
concepts. As a result, fundamental areas of our social behavior and cultural models appear to be influenced by our sensorimotor activities, as well as by our perception and categorization of concepts, contributing to the formation of our “conceptual knowledge”. Cultural conceptual models enable individuals to comprehend the type and category of their new experiences, while still no individual conceptualizes his experiences in exactly the same way as any other individual. To sum, our “body-base” understanding of abstract concepts finds its expression in language when we use “metaphorical expression” (Ibid., p. 1999). With this classification of conceptual and linguistic metaphors, then, the question of the translatability of metaphors no longer addresses individual metaphoric expressions. Instead, it compares the conceptual model of the source culture with that of the target culture.

3.2. Cultural Conceptualization of Body Parts

In cognitive linguistics, the language of any cultural group is viewed as the system through which the members of that group convey a great variety of experiences. The diversity of languages, then, is indicative of the fact the speakers of each language conceptualizes their experiences in different ways from one another (Palmer 1996). The conceptualization of experiences in culturally different ways, then, results in the establishment of cultural-based mental models and mapping across concrete and abstract domains, with the final product of cultural specific metaphors.

As discussed before, the sensorimotor system has a vital role in the people perceive and interact with the social world. A person’s perception can be embodied via metaphor and/or stimulation (Kimmel et al. 2012, p. 1). However, concepts are not processed in isolation, but rather are contextually situated. The Embodied Theory looks at the interaction between the organic activities and the changing environment. Cultural conceptualizations, then, can also be considered as “diachronic” phenomena that have been fashioned through different stages of the cultural history of a community. These conceptualizations are also “dynamic” and shared by the community who share the same cultural cognition.

As discussed before, culture independent metaphors present no difficulties for the translator, while cultural-bound metaphors have sometimes proved to be impossible to be brought across directly. This is even truer with metaphors directly build up on the base of cultural norms and conventions. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1990, pp. 61-68), although a large number of basic metaphoric structures are culture independent and semi-/universal, still many others directly reflect their cultural and geographical specifications. This is mainly drawn from the assumption that metaphorical concepts reflect “complex experiential gestalts,” thus, indicating the “the multidimensional structure of the corresponding concrete domain” (Ibid., p. 203). This includes many metaphors based on bodily experiences; for instance, in many cultures ‘heart’ is conceptualized as the seat of emotion, while others use the body organs of ‘liver’ and ‘guts’ for this purpose. Hence, in such a case, if the translator translates ‘heart’ as ‘heart’, she risks losing the connotative meaning
presented in the source text. Still, if she translates ‘liver’ as, for example, ‘heart’ to maintain the connotation, she loses the denotative meaning and may risk changing other intertextual or structural values assigned to term ‘liver’ in the source text.

A large body of such scholarly arguments can be seen under the three main categories of abdominocentrism, cardiocentrism and cerebrocentrism, referring to the conceptualization of abdomen, heart and head (or brain) respectively (Sharifian 2008, p. 3). According to Clarke & O’Malley (1968, p. 21), the origins of cardiocentric view in Persian Literature and culture can be traced back in the ideas of the 11th century AD Persian physician and philosopher, Avicenna and his theory of the four humors. In Persian literature and culture, it is possible to see a correspondence between the metaphorical expressions concerning the term del and the conceptualization of the body organ “heart” in English. However, the spiritual cultural model of Sufism (Islamic mysticism) and the literary norms of the Classical Persian Poetry have equally affected the connotative meanings, norms and values attached to the concept of del. Overall, it is not possible to ignore the foundational state of the conceptualization of body organs in cognitive linguistic and semiotics. As Foolen (2008) maintains, “the observation that the human body is an important source of symbiosis fits in with the more general idea of embodied cognition”. Scholarly debates highlight the role of cultural models in stimulating and channeling the metaphorical conceptualization of body organs, highlighting their significant role in the translation of dependent metaphorical expression across cultures.

4. Towards a Semiotic Approach for Translating Metaphors

It is a good idea to begin with what Eco refers to as the “intention of the text”:

The concept of faithfulness depends on the belief that translation is a form of interpretation and that (even while considering the cultural habits of the presumed readers) translators must aim at rendering, not necessarily the intention of the author [...] but the intention of the text- the intention of the text being the outcome of an interpretative effort on the part of the reader, the critic or the translator(emphasis original). (Eco 2003, p. 5)

For the full understanding of the intention of the text, the translator, as a reader, needs to be culturally competent in the source language. She also needs to have the ability to decode cultural referents implied in metaphorical expressions, and be competent in the culture of the target language. Even then, transferring the intention of the text may not be possible, as many cultural elements remain untranslatable. However, by introducing the concepts of “macro-propositions”

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8. For example, in the Indonesian culture, the concept of liver (hati) is seen as the center of human emotion and intellect, corresponding to the concepts of mind and heart in English (Siahaan 2008, p. 46).
and “micro-propositions”—i.e. the building blocks of which the text is composed of—Eco (2003, pp. 71-73) presents a solution for this problem. He maintains that the translator needs to dismantle the text into its constituent elements, including connotative and stylistic elements. As such, the translator needs to break the text down into several macro-propositions, each describing the central issues of the text. These macro-propositions are what the author intends to illustrate, and together indicate the holistic intention of the text. Micropropositions, on the other hand, refer to individual “text points” or element that together create macro-propositions. Micropropositions, include the sentences that maintain specific values or meanings, and together make up the detailed contents.

Loponen (2006) explains the occasion in which the core “segment” of the text has overlapping micro-propositions, which is because each segment cannot contain several meaning simultaneously. According to him, there are also situations when the translator is not able to translate a text segment without making some changes in its culture specific micro-propositions. This classification of propositions also explains why in some cases the literal translation may directly result in the loss of the intention of the text. For the translation of conceptual metaphors of body parts, as defined above, Eco’s model applies perfectly. Using this method, every aspect the metaphor, can be studied both as propositions in themselves and as parts of propositions”. This method, thus, allows the translator to decode the cultural and textual elements of each conceptual metaphor, and to prioritize them based on their relevance. She can then attempt to keep the reference or domesticate it if it not relevant according to the cultural context of the target text.

4.1. Equivalence, Gain and Loss

According to Eco (2003, pp. 63-73), the differences between cultures and individual interpretations of readers make it impossible to achieve “full equivalence”9 between the source text (S-text) and the target-text (T-text). Similarly, the purpose of the translation cannot be to provide identical meaning and style of expression in the S-text and T-text. Instead, the translator needs to prioritize and select the meanings and elements that need to be carried to the target text. It is sometimes possible that the translator provides some explanations (e.g. in the form of footnotes, endnotes, or inside brackets), to make the target reader familiar with a culture specific meaning or element in the source text. However, this strategy involves the risk of explaining more than what the original text intends to convey. As Eco (Ibid., pp. 43-50) puts it: “perhaps to say more means to say less, because the translator fails to keep an important and meaningful reticence or ambiguity”. In other words, “there are cases in which the loss is so unavoidable that the translator (and the author too) resign themselves to accepting a cut”.

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9. By equivalence Eco (2003, p. 9, p. 30) refers to the identical readings of both the content and the style of expression in the of the source and target texts in their respective cultures.
Eco (*Ibid.*, pp. 71-73) also asserts that in translating a text, the chief responsibility of the translator is to make sure that macro-prepositions will be conveyed, sometimes even at the cost of making radical changes in the micro-propositions. Therefore, the translator needs to distinguish between the decisive micro-proposition and non-relevant micro-proposition, as well as to make sure that relevant micro-propositions will be translated. As he further explains, in case two culture-base micro propositions overlap, the translator needs to translate the one relevant to the target text. In other words, in some cases, the translator may need to drop or change non-relevant micro-proposition. This is what Fawcett (1997, pp. 39-41) refers to as the “cultural adaptation” of a cultural-bound metaphor. Eco (2003, p. 5) maintains that sometimes being “literally unfaithful,” is the only way in which a translator can remain faithful to the source text” (emphasis original).

4.2. Role and Fate of Culture

At the very initial stage of translation process, one must be mindful of the fact that translation is not merely the act of transferring the literal meaning from one linguistic system into another; instead, it involves a great deal of extra-linguistic attempts (Bassnett 2013, p. 22). In fact, any language is the medium of expressing its socio-cultural context. As Sapir asserts (1956, p. 69), an individual’s real life experience is enormously influenced by the ‘language habits’ of the community he belongs to; therefore, each set of language signs stands for a specific life experience, and no two sets of language signs would be similar enough to be considered as indicating a single socio-cultural context. Hence, as Hawkes (1977) maintains, translation can rightly be classified in the semiotic science, which studies “sign systems or structures, sign processes and sign functions”. It is possible to see a correspondence between Sapir’s proposition and Lotman’s (1990) more advanced theory of “modelling system”. Lotman maintains that art and literature are the “secondary modelling systems,” established mainly on the “primary modelling system” of language. Much like Sapir (1956), he declares that “no language can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture; and no culture can exist which does not have at its center, the structure of natural language” (Lotman & Uspensky 1978, pp. 211-232).

Translator’s lack of cultural competence may result in the misunderstanding or even ignoring a micro-proposition, which, in turn, may lead to the translator’s failure in translating a macro-proposition or core issue of the text. If not more, cultural semiotics gives equal attention to the role of specific cultural subsets. As Fawcett (1997, p. 6) explains, different domains of any language attach various connotations to a single concept. These cultural levels are referred to as semiosphere (Lotman 1990, pp. 123-136). As one of the key concepts in cultural semiotic, “semiospheres” are defined as all the texts belonging to a culture or its subset, as well as the rules and convention supervising the creation or interpretation of any
text by the members of that culture (e.g. Classical poetry or traditional music). A
translator with cultural competence can recognize the semiosphere to which the
text belong, and, therefore, can interpret it in the way it needs to be understood by
that semiosphere. As discussed before, Lotman (1990) also maintain that any text is
coded at least according to two sets of rules. The first one is the rules of the “natural
language” in which the text is written. The second set of codes is determined by
the semiosphere to which the text belongs, and defines a specific cultural-linguistic
level at which the text should be written and interpreted. From cultural semiotic
perspective, the translator needs to be competent in this secondary coding system
to interpret and translate the text. However, the problem does not end there, as
a single text may simultaneously belong to multiple semiospheres. Unless the
translator is competent in each of the semiospheres, she will not be able to identify
them (Loponen 2006, p. 21).

The interpretation of text elements in both source and target texts is affected
by the translator’s cultural competence in both the source and target cultures as
well as in the sub-cultural semiospheres within both cultures. Hence, the number
of meanings contained in a single text element can be immense, making it hard
or impossible to transfer all cultural subset specific meanings when translating a
text. Translation is, then, basically based on the translator’s familiarity with the
language and culture of both the source and target text. In any case, however, it is
impossible to create a translated text that is exactly the same as the original text in
meaning and manner.

4.3. Decoding and Encoding, A Semiotic Model

Following the previous discussions by Eco (2003) and Lotman (1990), as
Loponen (2006) asserts, the first step would be to break the text down into its
constructing elements. In many occasions, metaphoric interpretations constitute
micro- and macro-propositions, which are either culture independent, or highly
based on the cultural system. Moreover, these propositions and elements tend to
present multiple levels of meanings when placed within a literary text. Now, each
micro-propositions and textual elements needs to be deconstructed into its most
basic level of meaning. It is only then that the translator can decide which meaning
should be carried to the target text and which should be left or transferred.
According to Loponen (2006, p. 35), each proposition “needs to be divided to at
least the denotative and connotative levels, as well as to the roles they have within
the text and the meaning provided by the referred culture or cultural subset”.

In his existential semiotics, Tarasti (2000, pp. 100-101) proposes a theory
to distinguish between the various levels of meaning that a textual element can
contain. Tarasti’s (2000) theory of subject maintains that each independent subject
can convey four states of “being” simultaneously:
1. Being-in-myself, i.e., the inbuilt characteristics of a textual element independent of its context,
2. Being-for-myself, i.e., the internal properties that can be seen in relation to the context,
3. Being-in-itself, i.e., the norms and limits within which an element can choose to act or perform,
4. Being-for-itself, i.e., those set of values and norms that have been actually applied by the element.

Using this model, Loponen (2006, p. 34), proposes a schema based on which the translator can deconstruct and analyze the elements of a literary text as independent subjects:

1. Denotation or denotative meanings of the element independent of the text. In this case, the literal meaning of the English term heart, as a blood-pumping internal organ belongs to this classification of meaning.
2. Connotation or connotative meanings defining the metaphoric values of the element. See, for example, the conceptualization of heart as a seat of such emotions as love, anger, resentment, anxiety, etc. whereas in Persian literature and culture, both the terms ghalb (literally, the blood-pumping organ) and del (literally, the abdomen) are applied for this purpose.
3. Role in norms, i.e., the values bestowed to the element by cultural norms or by means of alluding to something outside the text. For example, heart can be used to indicate courage or the heart symbol, or as an allusion to a movie or song named Heart.
4. Role in text, i.e., the norms and values that have been realized as the result of the interaction between “heart” and other elements in the text.

In this framework, textual elements are viewed as independent operators or subjects of a literary text. Micro and macro-propositions are invented once these elements interact with each other as well as with other intertextual element. In the following table, I have combined Tarasti’s (2000) existential model with Loponen’s (2006) translation schema to deconstruct the Persian term del into its constituting levels of meaning, when applied in a literary work:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Being-in-myself</th>
<th>Denotation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Translated as “heart, stomach, abdomen, belly, guts, mind, courage, patience, middle” (Aryanpour &amp; Aryanpour 1984) the term del is regarded as one of the most polysemous morphemes in Persian language. Literally, it is more or less similar to the English term abdomen, describing that area of body between the pelvis and chest. The term ghalb, in Persian, corresponds to what the English term heart refers to, i.e., the blood-pumping organ.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Being-for-myself

**Connotation**

Figuratively, however, the term can have a number of connotations:

1. The physical heart, i.e., the blood-pumping organ,
2. Home and shelter for one’s beloved
3. A person with erratic desires and passions
4. The container of such emotions as willingness, satisfaction, anger, fear, anxiety
5. The middle/inner/central part of something
6. Courage (e.g. to have the heart/guts to do sth, to lose heart)
7. The seat of compassion, mercy (e.g. sb with heart)
8. Love, attention, care (e.g. win sb’s hear)
9. A safe and cozy shelter for the beloved
10. Agent for desire and craving
11. Centre of thoughts and memories
12. Centre of personality traits and mood

### Being-in-itself

**Role in Norms**

The conceptualizations of *del*, in Persian literature and language have generally originated from the “cultural models” of the Iranian traditional medicine, classical poetry, and the spiritual belief system of, mainly, Sufism, among others:

- According to the traditional medicine, *del* is seen as the centre of emotions, vs. the intellectuality of *aghl* (mind or brain).
- Spiritually, *del* takes the responsibility of gaining knowledge and wisdom in the journey of life. It is also seen as the site of purification and spiritual love, vs. earthliness of *nafs* (self).
- In classical, and especially modern Persian poetry, *del* can take the seat of love and passion.

### Being-for-itself

**Role in Text**

The conceptualization and interpretation of *del* is highly dependent on the occasion of reading, i.e., formal and academic, spiritual or simply an intimate occasions, the reader and her listener, the text in which it appears, i.e. literary or non-literal, modern or classical, or simply in relation to the surrounding concepts, among others.

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*Fig. 1. Semiotic Model of Decoding the Term “del”*

Loponen (2006) provides the following diagram to present an ideal occasion. In the ideal situation, all the four levels of meaning of a textual element would match in both the source and the target languages. These situations present no problems and the translator would be able to find or create a concept in the target

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10. Manifestations of this conceptualization is abundant in Persian classical poetry, where *del* as a person constantly challenges the poet (see Sharifian 2008, p.166)
language that matches the concept of the source language at all the four levels of
denotation, connotation, role in text and role in norms.

![Fig. 2. Matching meanings (Loponen 2006, p. 40)](https://example.com)

In reality, however, this would not be possible. As explained before, in many
occasions, S-concept and T-concept match at some of the levels of meaning,
presenting the translator with a challenging situation. In these situations, it
would be the responsibility of the translator to decide on the relevance of each
meaning and prioritize between them. To further illustrate this, I will draw on a
few examples from the Persian literary works and every day idiomatic expressions,
where the term del has been applied to conceptualize a variety of connotative and
denotative meanings, as well as cultural and literary norms and values. Examples
have been drawn from Sharifian (2008, pp. 249-259). In many of the idiomatic
expressions of Persian language, the term del is metonymically used to refer a person
(i.e. conceptualization of del as a person). In such cases, if the translator insists on
using the term heart for its denotative equivalence, she ends up creating a phrase or
sentence that is meaningless for the target audience. In translating the term del in
the idiomatic sentence: del o zaboon-esh yeki hast, the literal translation would result
in a sentence as absurd as: her heart is the same as her tongue. As explained in the
table above (Fig. 1), del can connotatively be considered as the seat of feelings and
emotion. Still, the translator’s cultural competence is required. In Persian culture,
it can imply a state of honesty and purification, specially when paired with zaban
(literally, tongue), which is figuratively known to be problematic and vicious. In
Persian culture, del can also connotatively refer to a container for hidden thoughts
and feelings of a person. This connotative meaning is specifically aroused when the
paired body organ zaban (tongue) is reduced to its most fundamental function:
a means of expressing one’s inner thoughts and emotions. By simply translating
the term del to “honest or honesty” the translator has prioritize the connotative
meaning of del and its role in relation to other micro-propositions (i.e. zaban) in
the sentence, remaining faithful to the core meaning of the macro-proposition, the
sentence. Thus, if the original concept is impossible to translate while retaining the
relevant meanings, the translator should replace it with another one containing the
relevant meanings.

The following case is a line of poetry from Eghbal Lahori, the Indo-Persian
poet: “del as zogh-e tapesh del bood likan...... cho yek-dam az taphesh oftad gel shod”.
1. Denotatively, as explained before, *del* can be translated as the blood-pumping organ *heart*.

2. Connotatively, *del* can be seen as a seat of feelings, love, refer to enthusiasm and willingness to live, to love, to gain more knowledge, and to search for truth.

3. In classical Persian poetry, *del* is used to refer to heart figuratively, to indicate quest for knowledge, purification and love of God, etc. or simply the centre of erotic feelings.

4. The translator needs to consider the following elements, to consider the role of *del* in the poem: the personification of *del*, as a zealous person, analogy between *del* and heat for their common feature of beating (i.e. *tapesh*) function, the relationship between *del* and *gel* (earth, mud), i.e. and the connotative meanings of it, i.e., earthliness, lowliness, down, and more importantly, as the bed for corpse, and the fact that indo-persian poets tended to use language metaphorically to convey spiritual meanings, etc.

As such, the translation of the term *del* to *heart*, in this line does not seem problematic. The English term *heart* also presents, similar denotative and connotative meanings, and can similarly be used to indicate spiritually (thought not in exactly the same way as the Persian counterpart *del* does). However, this is only one of the many elements (micropropositions) that the translator needs to recognize and translate.

5. Conclusion

Built upon the major arguments surrounding literary translation, this study aimed at proposing a semiotic framework for the translation of one of the most problematic elements, metaphors. This framework is primarily based upon Lakoff and Johnson’s (1990) cognitive view of metaphor that distinguishes between metaphor as a concept and metaphor as a linguistic expression. The proposition is that, it is possible to see parallel thought in the discussions of cultural conceptualization and embodiment, Eco’s theory of micro-and macro propositions, and Lotman’s (1990) secondary modelling system and semiospheres. It is evident that, much like other disciplines, semiotics does not introduce a single theory to tackle all the translation challenges. Instead, there is a need to recognize and interweave semiotic theories and frameworks to apply in various occasions. A better occasion would be when semiotics is accompanied by another related discipline, to either illustrate a stage of translation process or to study the final product.

Cultural metaphors contain a multitude of simultaneous connotative and denotative meanings, norms and values that are culture based. The proposed model in this study is well suited to the translation of cultural bound conceptualizations of body parts, by facilitating the translators’ task of understanding and interpreting
the conceptual metaphor in the text an in relation to the larger cultural context. This framework helps the translator to prioritize the meanings that need to be transferred or domesticated. However, being based on distinct languages and cultural concepts, the translator should not expect to transfer all the meanings of one text to another. Instead, she needs to distinguish between the related and unrelated micro-proposition, and only remain faithful to meaning of the macro-proposition.

Overall, translation always involves a complex process of re-thinking, re-imaging, re-modelling and re-contextualizing (Gorlée 2004, p. 103). Hence, it would be fair to say that translation inevitably changes the text. In semiotics, any language is the verbal translation of its environment and every text is, in fact, the translation of another text. Based on what has been discussed before, it is the least shocking fact the translation process is highly dependent on the translator’s competence and creativity. The translator needs to be culturally competent in both the source and target language, and be creative in, at least the task of recoding meaning into the signs of the target language and text phase. Bassnett (2013, p. 33) asserts that, “if a dozen translator tackle the same poem, they will produce a dozen different versions”. As such, every work of translation is distinctive: in other words, every text is the unique product of the translator.

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